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Registration No.:

Course Code: 968

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Semester: Autumn 2026

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ALLAMA IQBAL OPEN UNIVERSITY, ISLAMABAD

Course: Public Relations (968) • Level: MSc/BS

Semester: Autumn 2026

Assignment No. 2 (Units 5–9)

Total Marks: 100 • Pass Marks: 40/50

SOLVED ASSIGNMENT GUIDE

(For Study & Reference)

Note: This guide is prepared for study and reference purposes. Students are advised to read the relevant units of the course book, understand the concepts, and write the assignment in their own words. Copying this guide word for word is not recommended.

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Question 1: Planning and Executing a Public Relations Campaign (20 Marks)

Describe the step-by-step process of planning and executing a PR campaign.

Introduction

A public relations campaign is a coordinated set of communication activities, conducted over a defined period, to achieve a specific objective with a specific public. It differs from routine PR, which is continuous, in having a beginning, an end and a measurable target: to raise awareness of a new service from twenty to sixty percent in six months, to secure five thousand registrations, to restore confidence after a crisis. Because a campaign spends money and

commits the organisation's reputation, it cannot be improvised. Practitioners follow a disciplined sequence commonly summarised in models such as RACE — Research, Action (planning), Communication, Evaluation — and expanded in detailed planning frameworks.

This answer describes the process step by step: defining the problem, researching the situation and the publics, setting objectives, identifying and segmenting audiences, formulating strategy and messages, selecting channels and tactics, preparing the budget and timetable, executing and coordinating the campaign, and finally evaluating it. Each step depends on the one before; a brilliant message fails if research misread the audience, and heavy publicity is wasted if the objective was never stated in measurable form.

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Step 1: Defining the Problem and Researching the Situation

Every campaign begins with a problem or opportunity stated precisely. 'Our image is bad' is not a workable definition; 'parents in our district believe our school is unsafe, and enrolment of girls has fallen fifteen percent in two years' is. The practitioner establishes, from records and preliminary inquiry, what is happening, whom it affects and why it matters to the organisation. Vague problem definition is the most common cause of campaign failure, because every later decision inherits the vagueness.

Research then builds the factual base. Situation analysis examines the organisation's strengths, weaknesses and environment; audience research discovers what the target publics know, believe and feel, and which media they actually use; and communication audits review what the organisation has said before and how it was received. Methods range from surveys and focus groups to media content analysis and informal interviews. Research for a Pakistani

vaccination campaign, for example, might reveal that mothers trust lady health workers but distrust television advertisements — a single finding that redirects the entire channel plan. Spending ten percent of a budget on research routinely saves the other ninety from being aimed at the wrong people with the wrong message.

Step 2: Setting Objectives and Identifying the Publics

Objectives convert the problem into targets. Professional objectives are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound, and they are written at three levels: output objectives (what will be produced and placed), outtake objectives (what audiences will know or believe) and outcome objectives (what audiences will do). 'Hold twelve community meetings and place forty news stories' is an output; 'raise correct knowledge of the registration procedure to seventy percent' is an outtake; 'register five thousand new voters by December' is an outcome. A campaign judged only on outputs may report success while nothing in the real world changed.

Simultaneously the practitioner identifies and segments the publics: all groups affected by the issue, ranked by importance and influence. Primary publics are those whose behaviour decides success; secondary publics influence the primary ones; internal publics must be informed first. For each segment the campaign records demographics, media habits, trusted voices and current attitudes. A health campaign may need separate treatments for mothers, fathers who control household decisions, and religious leaders whose endorsement legitimises both. Segmentation is what turns 'the general public' — which no real campaign can address — into audiences that can actually be reached and persuaded.

Step 3: Strategy, Messages and Creative Design

Strategy is the campaign's central idea: the overall approach by which objectives will be achieved with these audiences. It may be informational (the public simply lacks facts), persuasive (facts are known but attitudes resist), or behavioural (attitudes are favourable but action needs a trigger, reminder or facilitation). The strategy is expressed in key messages — the few statements every product of the campaign will carry, framed in the audience's language and self-interest rather than the organisation's pride. A water conservation campaign's message is not 'the authority is doing excellent work' but 'every bucket saved today is water for your children in May'.

Creative design translates messages into forms: a slogan, a visual identity, characters or ambassadors, stories and testimonials. The design must be pre-tested on a small sample of the real audience before full production, because practitioners consistently overestimate how their material will be understood. Pre-testing catches the poster whose picture conveys the opposite meaning, the slogan with an unfortunate double sense in a regional language and the video too long for its platform. This step also fixes the campaign theme under which all tactics will be recognised as one effort.

Step 4: Channels, Tactics, Budget and Timetable

Tactics are the concrete activities: press conferences and releases, talk-show appearances, community meetings, school sessions, exhibitions, rallies, SMS and WhatsApp broadcasts, short videos, dramas, posters, mosque and market announcements, open days and special events. Channels are chosen by audience habit, not by the practitioner's convenience — radio and

interpersonal contact for rural audiences, television and social media for urban youth, print for opinion leaders. Each tactic is matched to the objective it serves and the segment it reaches, and earned, owned, paid and shared media are combined deliberately.

Two management documents complete the planning. The budget costs every item — production, media buying where used, travel, venue, printing, research and evaluation, plus a contingency of about ten percent — and is approved before execution begins. The timetable or activity chart assigns each task an owner and a date, sequences dependent activities (material must be printed before the launch, spokespeople trained before interviews) and sets monitoring checkpoints. A campaign without a written budget and calendar is not a plan but an intention, and it will dissolve at the first unexpected expense or delay.

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Step 5: Execution and Coordination

Execution is the visible phase: materials are produced to quality, events are held, media are served, spokespeople appear and field teams work their territories. The campaign usually opens with a launch event designed to concentrate attention, followed by a sustained rhythm of activities that keeps the theme alive without exhausting the audience. Coordination is the practitioner's main burden at this stage: headquarters, regional offices, partner NGOs, government departments and media must tell the same story at the same time, and the internal public must hear everything before outsiders do.

Good execution includes continuous monitoring and mid-course correction. A small control unit tracks coverage, attendance, helpline calls and social media response against the timetable, reports weekly, and adjusts: a meeting format nobody attends is replaced, a message being

mocked online is withdrawn and repaired, an unexpected controversy is answered the same day from the facts file. The practitioner also maintains a complete record — copies of everything produced and published — which evaluation and organisational memory will later require. Flexibility within the plan, not blind adherence to it, is the mark of professional execution.

Step 6: Evaluation and Reporting

When the campaign period ends, evaluation compares results with the objectives written at Step 2. Outputs are counted (stories placed, meetings held, material distributed), outtakes are surveyed (did awareness and attitudes move, and by how much), and outcomes are verified (registrations, vaccinations, sales, votes, complaints reduced). Honest evaluation also documents what failed and why, and calculates cost-effectiveness — cost per person reached, per attitude changed, per action taken — so management can judge whether the investment was sound.

The final report presents findings, evidence and recommendations, and its lessons feed the research base of the next campaign, closing the management cycle. Evaluation is the step most often skipped, because it can expose failure; but a profession that does not measure itself cannot improve or defend its budgets. In mature organisations the evaluation of one campaign is formally the first document read at the problem-definition stage of the next.

Conclusion

To conclude, a PR campaign is planned and executed through a strict sequence: define the problem, research the situation and the publics, set measurable objectives, segment audiences,

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build strategy and tested messages, choose tactics and channels, fix budget and timetable, execute with coordination and monitoring, and evaluate against objectives. The sequence is the difference between public relations as management and publicity as noise. Campaigns in Pakistan that follow it — in health, education, electoral awareness and corporate launches — achieve traceable results; those that begin with a press conference and end with a clipping file achieve only the appearance of work.

Table 1: The PR campaign process at a glance

Step	Main activity	Key output
1. Problem definition	State the issue precisely from records and inquiry	Written problem statement
2. Research	Situation, audience and communication audit	Research report and audience profiles
3. Objectives and publics	Set output, outtake and outcome targets; segment publics	Measurable objectives; public segments
4. Strategy and messages	Choose approach; frame and pre-test key messages	Strategy note; tested message set
5. Tactics, budget, timetable	Select channels and activities; cost and schedule them	Activity plan, budget, calendar
6. Execution	Produce, launch, coordinate, monitor, correct	Campaign activities and coverage record
7. Evaluation	Compare outputs, outtakes and outcomes with objectives	Evaluation report and lessons

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Question 2: "Persuasion is the Key to Success in Public Relations" — A Debate (20 Marks)

"Persuasion is the key to success in public relations". What do you understand by this statement? Debate.

Introduction

The statement claims that the success of public relations is decided by persuasion — by the practitioner's ability to change what people think, feel and do in favour of the organisation he serves. The words must be understood precisely. Persuasion is communication intended to influence attitudes and behaviour by argument, appeal and presentation, while leaving the audience formally free to decide. It differs from information, which merely supplies facts; from coercion, which removes choice by force; and from manipulation or propaganda in the bad sense, which influences by deception. The statement therefore asserts that facts alone do not succeed: the public must be won over.

The debate is genuine because excellent authorities stand on both sides. The dominant modern model of PR, the two-way symmetrical model associated with James Grunig, holds that the highest form of practice is dialogue and mutual adjustment, not one-sided persuasion; yet the daily reality of campaigns, advocacy and marketing communication is unmistakably persuasive. This answer presents the strongest case for the statement, then the strongest case against it, and concludes with a balanced judgment.

The Case for the Statement: Attitudes Decide Behaviour

The case for begins with the purpose of PR itself. Organisations do not communicate for amusement; a health department wants children vaccinated, a university wants students enrolled, a company wants its licence to operate renewed by public consent, a charity wants donations. Every one of these outcomes is a behaviour, and behaviour follows attitude. Information that leaves attitudes untouched has therefore failed at the only test that matters. A public that knows the facts about a dam but believes the project is a conspiracy will still blockade the site; persuasion, not more information, is what the situation lacks and what success requires.

Secondly, the practitioner works in a competitive marketplace of messages. Every public is courted simultaneously by rivals, critics, rumour and entertainment, all of them persuasive. In this environment the organisation that merely states facts unilaterally disarms: its opponents frame those facts, attach emotions to them and carry the audience. Persuasive skill — knowing the audience's values, ordering arguments, choosing credible messengers, using story and symbol, answering objections — is the practitioner's distinctive professional competence, the thing he is paid for beyond what a clerk issuing notifications can do. Historically the discipline was born in persuasion: Edward Bernays, a founding figure, defined the practitioner frankly as an advocate engineering consent for his client's case, and the entire fields of political, developmental and marketing PR are built on deliberate attitude change.

The Case for (continued): Persuasion as the Campaign Test

The campaign evidence supports the claim. Attitude-change research shows that awareness campaigns routinely achieve high recall with near-zero behaviour change until persuasive elements are added: a trusted local endorser, an appeal to parental duty, a visible norm that neighbours are complying, an answer to the specific fear. Polio communication in Pakistan improved acceptance not when more facts were broadcast but when persuasion was redesigned around researched objections. Similarly, in a crisis the organisation survives not by releasing the fullest chronology but by persuading publics, in the first hours, that it is honest, concerned and competent — an achievement of framing, tone and messenger as much as of fact.

Even internal PR confirms the point: management does not merely inform employees of a restructuring; it must persuade them that the change is necessary and fair, or resistance will quietly defeat it. On this side of the debate, then, persuasion is not one tool among many but the very mechanism by which PR converts communication into organisational success, and a practitioner who cannot persuade is a technician, not a professional.

The Case Against: Trust, Dialogue and the Limits of Persuasion

The opposing case begins with a distinction between winning an argument and keeping a relationship. PR's asset is long-term trust, and trust is destroyed by the very techniques short-term persuasion rewards: selective facts, emotional pressure, exaggerated promises. A public persuaded today by card stacking feels deceived tomorrow when reality arrives, and thereafter discounts everything the organisation says. Modern publics, armed with social media, verify

claims instantly and punish manipulation publicly. What is called persuasive success is thus frequently a loan taken against credibility, repaid with interest at the next crisis.

Secondly, the two-way symmetrical model argues that the most effective PR changes the organisation as well as the public. Many conflicts persist not because the public misunderstands the organisation but because the organisation's policy is genuinely harmful or unfair; in such cases persuasion is both unethical and futile, and the practitioner's true service is to persuade his own management to adjust. Dialogue, negotiation and mutual understanding produce durable agreement, whereas one-way persuasion produces compliance that evaporates when pressure lifts. Thirdly, persuasion has hard limits: deeply rooted religious, ethnic and economic interests resist the cleverest campaign, and behaviour often follows incentives and services rather than messages — people use a hospital when it has a doctor, not when its posters improve. Finally there is the ethical objection: a profession that defines success as getting its way with publics slides toward propaganda. The codes of IPRA and PRSA bind the practitioner to truth and to the public interest, subordinating persuasion to honesty; success redefined as trust, reputation and mutually beneficial relationships is both a higher and a more defensible standard.

Balanced Judgment

Weighing both sides, the statement is substantially true as a description of practice but incomplete as a philosophy of the profession. It is true that PR which does not move attitudes and behaviour achieves nothing measurable, that persuasion is the practitioner's core skill, and

that in campaigns, advocacy, development and crisis work success is counted in minds changed. The examiner's statement correctly rejects the naive view that issuing information is enough.

But persuasion is the key only when it is ethical, evidence-based and two-way: persuasion that listens first, answers honestly, admits the organisation's faults and accepts that sometimes the organisation, not the public, must change. Persuasion of that kind is indistinguishable from good communication itself. The most accurate verdict is therefore a qualified agreement: persuasion is the key to success in public relations, provided it is practised as honest advocacy within a relationship of trust — for the moment persuasion becomes manipulation, it stops being public relations and becomes propaganda, and its successes begin, reliably, to destroy the reputation they were meant to build.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, the debate turns on what 'success' means. If success is the immediate objective — the vote won, the product accepted, the policy supported — persuasion is indeed the key, because none of these follows from information alone. If success is the durable goodwill on which an organisation's future depends, persuasion must share the keyring with research, truthfulness, dialogue and organisational reform. The mature practitioner holds both truths together: he masters the art of persuasion more thoroughly than anyone, and he disciplines it with ethics and listening, knowing that in public relations the longest-lasting persuasion is the kind the audience never feels was practised upon it.

Question 3: Textual and Audio-Visual Allied Material for PR Activities (20 Marks)

Explain what kind of textual and audio-visual allied material is prepared for PR activities.

Introduction

Allied material is the supporting communication product through which PR messages actually reach their publics. A campaign may be well researched and well planned, but the public never meets a plan; it meets a press release, a brochure, a documentary, a jingle, an exhibition panel or a social media clip. The quality of this material — its accuracy, clarity, design and suitability for its medium — therefore decides whether strategy becomes effect. Practitioners divide allied material into textual (written and printed) material and audio-visual material, with exhibitions, events and digital products drawing on both.

This answer describes the principal kinds of textual material — press releases and handouts, press kits, brochures and leaflets, house journals and newsletters, annual reports, booklets and backgrounders, speeches, posters and advertisements prepared under PR direction — and the principal audio-visual kinds — radio and television programmes and spots, documentaries and films, audio recordings and jingles, photography, slides and presentations, and today's dominant form, short digital video and social media content. For each, the purpose and the standards of preparation are explained.

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Textual Material 1: Press Material and Publications for Media

The press release or handout is the basic textual unit of PR: a concise, factual, news-styled account of an event, decision or achievement, written so that a busy newsroom can use it with minimal editing, complete with headline, dateline, the essential facts in descending order of importance, a quotation and contact details. Allied to it are the press note and rejoinder (which corrects published error), the backgrounder (a factual brief on an organisation or issue supplied for reference), the feature article written for placement, and the press kit — a folder combining release, backgrounder, photographs, profiles and data, distributed at launches and conferences so every journalist leaves with the complete, correct story.

Publications for direct distribution form the second family. Brochures and leaflets present a service, scheme or institution briefly and attractively for counters, exhibitions and mailings. Booklets and handbooks carry detailed guidance — admission rules, health instructions, farmers' guidance — for publics who must act on the information. House journals and newsletters serve internal publics and stakeholders with organisational news in a friendly format. The annual report is the most formal textual product, combining audited facts with narrative and photography to account for a year of performance to shareholders, regulators or donors. In every case the standards are the same: verified facts, plain language matched to the reader, Urdu or regional language versions where the public needs them, and design that serves reading rather than decorating over it.

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Textual Material 2: Speeches, Display Text and Digital Writing

Speech writing is a specialised textual duty: the practitioner drafts addresses, talking points and welcome speeches for executives and ministers, matching the speaker's style, the occasion and the policy line, and preparing answers to expected questions. Display text — posters, banners, hoardings, exhibition panels, wall charts and stickers — is writing under extreme compression: a health poster may have six words and one image to move a passer-by, so every word is tested as carefully as a headline. PR-supervised institutional advertising and advertorials also belong here, since their copy is drafted to communication, not purely sales, objectives.

Digital textual material has become indispensable: website copy, blog posts, social media captions and threads, SMS and WhatsApp broadcast texts, email newsletters and frequently-asked-question sheets. Its discipline differs from print — shorter units, searchable headings, immediate call to action, and readiness for public comment and correction — but the practitioner prepares it with the same factual rigour, because a screenshot outlives every deletion. All textual material, finally, passes through editing, proofreading and approval; a wrong date in a release or a misspelled name in a brochure advertises the organisation's carelessness more loudly than its message.

Audio-Visual Material 1: Broadcast and Film Products

Audio-visual material speaks to eye and ear together and is therefore the most persuasive and memorable category, essential in a society where many publics are more comfortable with spoken than written language. For radio, the practitioner prepares talks, interviews, discussions, features, dramas and short spots or jingles. Radio drama in local languages has a

long record in development communication — family planning, agriculture and health serials changed behaviour precisely because audiences bonded with characters. Audio material is cheap to produce, reaches remote areas and accompanies people at work, which print cannot do.

For television and film, PR prepares documentaries and short films on institutions and development themes, video news releases supplied to channels, recorded interviews and messages of leaders, coverage films of events and ceremonies, and short public service spots. A university's five-minute documentary shown at an education expo, or a development agency's film on a completed water scheme screened for donors, does work no booklet can: it shows faces, places and results. Production demands scripts written for the ear and eye together, professional narration, subtitles in Urdu and English where audiences are mixed, and ruthless brevity — the viewer's attention is the scarcest resource in all PR production.

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Audio-Visual Material 2: Photography, Presentation and Digital Video

Photography is the oldest audio-visual ally: press photographs distributed with releases, photo features, exhibition prints, and the maintained photo library from which publications and media requests are served. A single truthful, well-composed photograph of a flood relief camp or a graduating class routinely achieves placement and impact that pages of text cannot. Slides and multimedia presentations support briefings of donors, boards and visiting delegations, combining charts, maps and images into an argument that can be delivered in fifteen minutes. Charts, graphs, models and exhibition displays — the visual furniture of stalls, open days and museums — belong to the same family of prepared visual evidence.

The contemporary culmination of the category is short digital video: reels, clips and explainers made natively for Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and WhatsApp, together with recorded webinars, live-streamed ceremonies and press conferences, podcasts and voice notes for messaging platforms. The practitioner now plans allied material digital-first: the launch is filmed for clips, the speech is cut into quotable segments, the booklet becomes a shareable PDF and infographic. Standards remain constant across the technological change — accuracy, consent of persons filmed, copyright discipline, accessibility through subtitles and translation, and archiving — because allied material is the organisation's public face in permanent, reproducible form.

Principles Governing All Allied Material

Across both categories, sound preparation follows common principles. Material is derived from the campaign's approved messages, never invented at the production desk. It is matched to audience literacy, language and media habits — a pictorial leaflet for low-literacy mothers, a data-rich backgrounder for journalists. It is pre-tested wherever possible. It carries the organisation's identity consistently in logo, colour and tone, so separate products accumulate into one image. It observes law and ethics: no misleading visuals, no unlicensed music or images, no publication of private persons without consent. And it is produced to a budget and schedule integrated with the activity it supports, because a perfect documentary delivered after the exhibition closes is a complete loss.

Conclusion

To conclude, the allied material of public relations comprises a full workshop of products: textual material from the press release, kit and backgrounder through brochures, house journals, annual reports, speeches and digital copy; and audio-visual material from radio drama and television documentary through photography, exhibitions and presentations to short-form digital video. Each kind has its audience, its craft rules and its cost, and the practitioner's competence is shown in choosing and producing the right material for each public. Strategy decides what an organisation should say; allied material is what the public actually receives — and in communication, only what is received exists.

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Question 4: Salient Features of the IPRA and PRSA Codes of Ethics (20 Marks)

Highlight salient features of IPRA and PRSA code of ethics.

Introduction

Every mature profession binds itself with a code of ethics, and public relations — a profession whose raw material is public trust — needs one more than most. Two codes dominate international practice. The International Public Relations Association (IPRA), founded in 1955, adopted its Code of Conduct, rooted in the Code of Athens of 1965 and consolidated in its modern form in 2011, binding members in all countries. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), founded in 1947, maintains a Code of Ethics (revised in its modern form in 2000) for practitioners in the United States, built around six core values and six code provisions. Though written for different memberships, the two codes express the same professional conscience.

This answer sets out the salient features of each code — IPRA's duties of honesty, integrity, dialogue, transparency, confidentiality, avoidance of conflicts of interest and rejection of deception and improper influence; and PRSA's values of advocacy, honesty, expertise, independence, loyalty and fairness, with its provisions on the free flow of information, competition, disclosure, safeguarding confidences, conflicts of interest and enhancing the profession — and then compares them.

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The IPRA Code: Foundations and Duties to Truth and Dialogue

IPRA's code is distinctive in being grounded explicitly in universal instruments: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Charter. The practitioner members undertake to contribute to channels of communication that let every individual be informed and feel part of the world he lives in. From this foundation flows the first group of duties, concerning truth. Members must observe honesty and integrity, act so as to win and preserve the confidence of those they deal with, and refrain from disseminating false or misleading information, exercising care to avoid doing so even inadvertently. They must not use manipulative methods designed to create subconscious motivations that the individual cannot control — a clause aimed directly at the darker techniques of propaganda.

Dialogue is IPRA's second signature principle: members shall establish communication patterns that encourage listening as well as speaking, respect the rights of parties to state their case and express their opinions, and treat publics not as targets but as participants. This makes the code fundamentally two-way in philosophy, a code for a profession of communication rather than of transmission.

The IPRA Code: Transparency, Confidentiality and Conflicts

Transparency occupies the centre of the IPRA code. Members shall be open about the name of their organisation or client and the interest they represent, shall not create or use front organisations that pretend to serve a cause while actually serving a hidden interest, and shall not obtain information by deceptive or manipulative means. The public is entitled to know who

is speaking to it and why; astroturfing and disguised sponsorship are therefore professional offences, not clever tactics.

Balancing transparency is confidentiality: members shall safeguard the confidences of present, former and prospective clients and employers and shall not use such information for personal advantage or to the client's detriment. On conflicts of interest, members must avoid professional conflicts, disclose any interest that might create one to those concerned, and not represent an interest in conflict with a client's without consent. Two further clauses defend the profession's environment: members shall not engage in practices that corrupt the channels of public communication — in plain terms, bribery of media or officials — and shall not intentionally injure the reputation of another practitioner. They must not subordinate truth to other requirements, give guarantees of results beyond their control, or accept fees secretly tied to undisclosed arrangements. The code is enforced as a condition of membership, giving it the character of an international professional oath.

The PRSA Code: Six Core Values

The PRSA code is constructed differently: it begins from six core values that are meant to guide every decision. Advocacy declares that the practitioner serves the public interest by acting as a responsible advocate for those he represents, providing a voice for ideas and viewpoints in public debate. Honesty requires adherence to the highest standards of accuracy and truth in advancing clients' interests and in communicating with the public. Expertise obliges the member to acquire and use specialised knowledge, build mutual understanding and credibility, and continue professional development. Independence requires objective counsel and

accountability for one's actions, resisting improper pressure from any side. Loyalty demands faithfulness to clients and employers while honouring obligations to the public interest — the code deliberately holds these in tension. Fairness requires dealing fairly with clients, employers, competitors, peers, media and the public, respecting all opinions and the rights of free expression. Together the values announce that loyalty to a client is real but never absolute; it is limited by honesty, fairness and the public interest.

The PRSA Code: Six Provisions in Practice

From the values flow six enforceable provisions. Free flow of information protects and advances honest communication, requiring the member to be truthful, to investigate the accuracy of information from all sources and to correct errors promptly. Competition promotes healthy rivalry within the profession and forbids defaming competitors or using improper means to win or keep business. Disclosure of information is the transparency provision: members must reveal the sponsors of communication, disclose financial interests in organisations they recommend, and avoid deceptive practices including front groups. Safeguarding confidences protects client and employer information, including after the relationship ends. Conflicts of interest must be avoided or, where unavoidable, fully disclosed, and a member must act in the client's interest only with informed consent when such a conflict exists. Enhancing the profession obliges members to strengthen public trust in PR itself, to report unethical practices, and to refrain from using the code maliciously against competitors.

PRSA presents these provisions with practical guidelines and examples of improper conduct, making its code a teaching document as much as a disciplinary one. Its enforcement tradition

has been primarily educational and declaratory — counselling and public commitment rather than expulsion — which critics regard as a weakness, but which has made the code widely used in classrooms and agencies as the standard statement of what ethical practice requires day by day.

Comparison and Common Ground

Comparing the two codes, the common ground is far larger than the differences. Both make honesty and accuracy unconditional; both demand disclosure of who is really speaking; both forbid front organisations and deception; both protect client confidences; both regulate conflicts of interest; both reject corrupt influence over media; and both insist that loyalty to an employer ends where duty to the public begins. These shared clauses are effectively the constitution of ethical PR worldwide, and most national associations, and the better agencies in Pakistan, adopt codes modelled on them.

The differences are of structure and emphasis. IPRA's code is an international member's oath, shorter, rooted in human rights instruments and distinguished by its explicit emphasis on dialogue and on not exploiting subconscious manipulation. PRSA's is an American professional code, longer and more operational, organised from values to provisions with worked guidance, and distinguished by its developed treatment of advocacy and competition within a commercial marketplace of practice. A practitioner serving international clients should know both: IPRA tells him what the world's profession swears; PRSA shows him how the oath is applied to Tuesday's press release, fee dispute and undisclosed interest.

Conclusion

To conclude, the salient features of the IPRA and PRSA codes converge on one professional identity: the practitioner as an honest advocate, transparent about interests, guardian of confidences, free of undisclosed conflicts, respectful of dialogue and of the public's right to truthful information. For students in Pakistan, where no domestic code is yet strongly enforced, these two documents supply the working standard. Their deepest lesson is identical: public relations practised without ethics is merely propaganda with a business card, and the credibility these codes protect is not a decoration on the profession — it is the profession.

Table 1: IPRA and PRSA codes compared

Feature	IPRA Code of Conduct	PRSA Code of Ethics
Body / origin	International Public Relations Association (founded 1955); Code of Athens 1965, consolidated 2011	Public Relations Society of America (founded 1947); modern code 2000
Foundation	UN Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights	Six core values: advocacy, honesty, expertise, independence, loyalty, fairness
Structure	Duties of members in short clauses	Values followed by six provisions with guidelines and examples
Signature emphasis	Dialogue, listening, no manipulation of subconscious motivations	Advocacy balanced by public interest; practical guidance on competition and disclosure
Shared ground	Honesty, transparency of sponsorship, no front groups, confidentiality, conflicts disclosed, no corrupt influence on media	Same

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Question 5: Challenges and Opportunities for Public Relations in Pakistan in the Digital Era (20 Marks)

Discuss the challenges and opportunities for Public Relations in Pakistan today, especially with reference to the digital media platforms.

Introduction

Public relations in Pakistan is practising through a transformation as profound as the arrival of television. Within a generation the country has moved from a handful of state-influenced channels and newspapers to hundreds of satellite channels, thousands of digital outlets and tens of millions of social media users for whom Facebook, YouTube, X, Instagram, TikTok and WhatsApp are the primary news environment. Every assumption of the old practice — that an organisation speaks, editors filter and publics listen — has been disturbed. Digital platforms have made every citizen a publisher, every customer a reviewer and every incident a potential national story within the hour.

This changed environment cuts both ways, which is why the question joins challenges with opportunities. The challenges include the collapse of gatekeeping, misinformation and fake news, speed and loss of control, polarisation and abuse, measurement and skills gaps, and a legal and ethical framework still catching up. The opportunities include direct and inexpensive access to publics, two-way engagement, precise targeting and measurement, new space for small organisations and development causes, and the professionalisation of practice itself. Both sides are examined in turn.

Challenge 1: Loss of Control, Speed and Misinformation

The practitioner's first loss is control. A complaint filmed on a phone in a market can be national news before the organisation's own management hears of it; the traditional sequence of inquiry, approval and release has collapsed into minutes. Crisis windows that once lasted a news cycle now last an hour. Organisations in Pakistan — airlines, food brands, banks, hospitals, police departments — repeatedly discover their crises from trending hashtags rather than from internal reporting, and a slow or bureaucratic response is itself converted into evidence of guilt.

Compounding speed is misinformation. Fake news, doctored images, old videos recirculated as new events and coordinated disinformation are now standard features of the information environment, and falsehood is emotionally engineered to travel faster than correction. The practitioner must monitor continuously, verify under pressure and correct without amplifying the falsehood — skills and systems most Pakistani organisations, especially government departments, have not yet built. Closely related is the decline of editorial gatekeeping: the journalist's verification filter that once stood between a PR claim and the public has been bypassed, which liberates the honest practitioner but equally liberates every rumour-monger and hostile campaign.

Challenge 2: Polarisation, Abuse and Institutional Weakness

Pakistan's digital public sphere is intensely polarised, above all politically. Party-aligned troll networks, hashtag campaigns and abusive pile-ons mean that organisational messages are dragged into political warfare unrelated to their content, spokespersons are personally targeted, and brands calculate the political weather before speaking at all. For government PR

the problem is doubled: official accounts are distrusted by opposition supporters on principle, so the state's factual communication starts with a credibility deficit among large audiences. Women's participation as spokespersons and online professionals attracts particular harassment, narrowing the profession's talent pool.

Institutional weaknesses deepen every one of these challenges. Many organisations still staff PR with untrained appointees, maintain no social listening or rapid response system, forbid their officers from replying online without files moving through hierarchy, and measure digital success by follower counts. The legal environment — cybercrime legislation and its contested application to online speech — creates uncertainty about what may be said and answered. Low digital literacy among senior decision-makers means the people approving budgets often do not use the platforms their publics live on. The challenge, in short, is not the technology but the organisation behind it.

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Opportunity 1: Direct, Affordable and Two-Way Communication

Against these challenges stand opportunities no previous generation of Pakistani practitioners possessed. Digital platforms give every organisation its own media: a district administration, a small charity or a start-up can publish text, photography and film to the whole country at near-zero marginal cost, without persuading a single editor. Organisations that could never buy television time now run credible public information services on Facebook and YouTube. For development communication this is revolutionary: health, education and disaster agencies reach mothers, farmers and students directly, in their languages, on the phones already in their hands.

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Even more valuable is the two-way character of the new media. Comments, messages, polls and live sessions convert the audience from recipient into participant; complaints arrive as free research, questions reveal exactly what the public misunderstands, and satisfied citizens become voluntary ambassadors who share and defend the organisation. A responsive official page that answers citizens' queries has become, for many Pakistanis, their most trusted experience of the state. PR's theoretical ideal — genuine dialogue — is for the first time technically cheap and continuous, for organisations willing to staff it honestly.

Opportunity 2: Targeting, Measurement and New Professional Space

Digital practice also solves two classical weaknesses of PR: targeting and proof. Platforms allow messages to be segmented by city, language, age and interest, so a university can address prospective students in Gilgit and Karachi differently in the same campaign, and a health department can speak to young mothers in Pashto and Sindhi rather than broadcasting one Urdu message to all. Analytics show reach, viewing time, sharing and sentiment in real time, and surveys and conversion data connect communication to outcomes. The practitioner can finally demonstrate value in numbers a finance department respects, which strengthens PR's claim to a seat in management.

Finally, the digital shift is professionalising the field itself. New specialisations — social media management, content strategy, online reputation and crisis monitoring, influencer relations, data analysis — have created careers that did not exist a decade ago, drawn trained young graduates into the industry and forced agencies and departments to value strategy over protocol. Pakistani freelancers and small firms serve foreign clients from Lahore and Karachi,

and Pakistani causes, from flood relief to girls' education, have raised support worldwide through skilled storytelling. The opportunity, in sum, is for PR in Pakistan to skip the stage of press-agentry altogether and build itself directly as a digital, research-based, two-way profession.

The Way Forward

Whether the balance falls on the challenge or the opportunity side depends on choices now being made. Organisations must professionalise: trained staff with delegated authority to respond, social listening and crisis protocols prepared in advance, verified and visually competent content, and ethical rules against fake engagement, purchased followers and planted trends, which always end by destroying the credibility they imitate. Universities must teach digital PR as practice, not as a lecture topic. Regulators must protect factual communication while restraining coordinated deception. Practitioners, for their part, must accept the discipline of the new environment — speed with verification, openness with records kept, engagement without abuse.

Conclusion

To conclude, digital media platforms have made public relations in Pakistan simultaneously harder and more powerful than at any time in its history. The challenges — lost control, speed, misinformation, polarisation, abuse and institutional unreadiness — are real and have already damaged organisations that ignored them. The opportunities — direct affordable publishing, continuous dialogue, precise targeting, honest measurement and a newly professional field — are equally real and are being seized by the organisations communicating best in the country

today. The platform is neutral; the practice decides. Pakistani PR will be defined by whether its practitioners meet the digital age with the ethics and skills of a profession or with the habits of the press-note era it has replaced.

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