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## **Are you proud of being a PR professional? Public relations from the students' perspective**

### **KEY WORDS**

public relations, ethics, education, perception, professionalism, PR professional

### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this paper is to analyse students' approaches to the public relations profession, their attitudes to ethics and professionalism in PR, as well as their opinion about Polish PR industry and organizations. The study was conducted among the undergraduate and graduate students of the Public Relations and Media Marketing specialization of Journalism and Communication Studies (Institute of Journalism, University of Warsaw). The research shows the students' attitudes to public relations and forms the ground for discussing Polish PR industry and education.

Launching the research into students' perception of public relations was motivated by the courses taught by the author at the Institute of Journalism (IJ) of the University of Warsaw, or more precisely the questions posed during them (both by students and the instructor). What public relations actually is? What does it do? What is its image? Why is PR so often presented in bad light? Why have the students chosen this discipline? What do they expect? What can the University give them? How can the programmes be improved? They all boil down to one question – admittedly quite journalistic and subjective – are you proud of being a PR professional? It should be explained that we understand being proud as identifying with one's current (or future) profession, a sense of belonging to a professional group, as well as the willingness to make efforts to improve this profession and scientific discipline. Therefore, students – young professionals, one step from entering the demanding work market – seemed to be the best research group available. It is worth stressing that the Institute of Journalism (IJ) is one of several scientific centres in Poland that conduct first-cycle programmes in public relations and the only one to offer a second-cycle programme in it<sup>1</sup>.

Yet another stimulus to carry out research on students' perception of PR were the experiences of the author, who had been working for several years preparing and adapting study curricula for the Public Relations and Media Marketing specialization (Pol. *Public Relations i Marketing Medialny – PRiMM*), cooperated with professional organizations and

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<sup>1</sup> State for the period of the research, i.e., the academic year 2013–2014.

recognised PR specialists. The aim of such a cooperation is to gain experienced and valuable lecturers, to adapt the content of practical courses to the current needs of the students, as well as the change of the profile of studies according to the changing requirements of the market. The author has developed the National Qualification Framework for the PRiMM Specialization and collaborated with the Polish Public Relations Consultancies Association (PPRCA) on developing qualifications for the profession of PR specialist. Thus acquired knowledge and experience made it possible to properly approach to the analysed issue and develop a long-term research programme including students of both public relations and journalism.

The author attempted to investigate how students of the field perceive public relations. There were three main areas of interest: 1) students' approaches to the profession of public relations specialist, 2) students' attitudes to ethics in public relations – and thus professionalism, and 3) students' opinion about the Polish PR industry and organizations. The conclusions of the performed study reveal not only the attitude of students towards the profession, industry, and ethics of public relations but also give rise to a discussion about the state of PR industry and education in Poland.

### **Description of the study**

The study included students of the Public Relations and Media Marketing specialization, offered by the Institute of Journalism of the University of Warsaw within the studies of Journalism and Social Communication<sup>2</sup>. Students of all study modes were enrolled (full-time, afternoon, and extramural<sup>3</sup>). They were recruited from three years of bachelor degree (first-cycle) and master degree (second-cycle) studies. The total student population of these courses numbered 450 persons, 277 of whom took part in the survey.

The survey was carried out via a questionnaire, using a paper sheet to be filled by the participants containing 27 questions (including 2 open questions, 3 where participants could add their own suggestions, and 3 involving ordering of traits), plus 4 demographic questions. The survey was anonymous with the demographic part used to aggregate data on sex, cycle, mode, and year of studies of participants, as well as their work in public relations. Since 216 properly filled questionnaires were gathered, with assumed 95% confidence, the maximum error can be estimated at about 4.8%. The questions were divided into 3 topic categories: 1)

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<sup>2</sup> Concerns the academic year 2013–2014.

<sup>3</sup> The extramural mode of studies at the Institute of Journalism are available only to first-cycle students, including the Public Relations and Media Marketing specialization.

perception of the PR profession, 2) attitude to professional ethics, and 3) perception of professional organizations. The survey was conducted at the turn of April 2014 at the University of Warsaw.

The results of the diagnosis were presented at the conference “Ethical dilemmas in public relations and journalism” (Pol. *Dylematy etyczne w public relations i dziennikarstwie*), which took place at the Institute of Journalism of the University of Warsaw on 10 April 2014. The conference was organized by the Department of Public Relations and Media Marketing of IJ, in collaboration with the Polish Communication Association (PCA; Pol. *Polskie Towarzystwo Komunikacji Społecznej – PTKS*), under the patronage of PPRCA and the professional website PRoto.pl.

### **Characteristics of the studied group**

A significant majority of surveyed students<sup>4</sup> were women (77%), which – noticeably – has been characteristic of all groups of PRiMM specialization in the recent years. Full-time students made up 49% of all respondents. The remainder were students of part-time programmes, 33% of afternoon and 18% of extramural students. The majority of the surveyed are first-cycle students (68%), mainly of the 2nd and 3rd year (28% and 27% respectively), which comprises almost 47% of all first-cycle students of PRiMM specialization. More than 50% of the population of second-cycle students of this specialization were surveyed too. A minority of the respondents (35%) worked or interned at a public relations institution at the time of the survey. Among those working, full-time mode students prevailed (55.3%); groups of 25% and 19.7%, respectively, of afternoon and extramural students were professionally active. Research shows that the percentage distribution of working first- and second-cycle students is 44:32. While the correlation coefficient between professional activity and mode of studies equals 0.87 for first-cycle students, suggesting it is very high, it equals 1 for second-cycle students, resulting in complete correlation. The characteristics of the investigated group of students is found in Chart 1.

### **Perception of PR as a job**

As mentioned above, the survey was divided into three parts by topic. The first involved the way the students who are soon going to practice the profession of public relations specialists perceive it. The conducted analysis indicates that a vast majority (81%) perceives public

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<sup>4</sup> Only properly filled questionnaires were taken into consideration.

relations positively, of whom 32.9% definitely, and 48.1% rather positively. A negative opinion on public relations was declared by only 6.1% of respondents. If these data are compared with the results of how public relations are perceived by the society, the students mostly realize its negative social image (61.6% in total), whereas 31.4% believe that PR gets good press (Chart 2). When asked how the negative social perception of PR could be changed, they decided the society should be educated about the essence, mechanisms, and tasks of public relations (47.2%). Moreover, the participants believe that improving the ethical standards of the industry as well as clear and effective separation of PR from marketing and advertising (13.9% and 6.5%, respectively) may contribute to changing the image of PR.

The respondents stated that the profession of public relations specialist is needed (95.8%), interesting (89.8%), fashionable (88.9%), demanding (83.3%), fit for the future (80.6%), and, to a lesser extent, satisfying (67.6%). They also said that it was a difficult occupation (75.5%), undervalued (68%), and definitely stressful (79.2%). This is also confirmed by the responses to the questions about the positive and negative facets of the PR specialist profession. The most often listed advantages included creativity (71.8%), contact with people (59.3%), diversity (49.1%), and development opportunities (37%). Whereas among its greatest disadvantages the participants listed stress (71.3%), uncertainty of employment (47.2%), negative image of the profession (42.6%), and flexible working hours (38%).

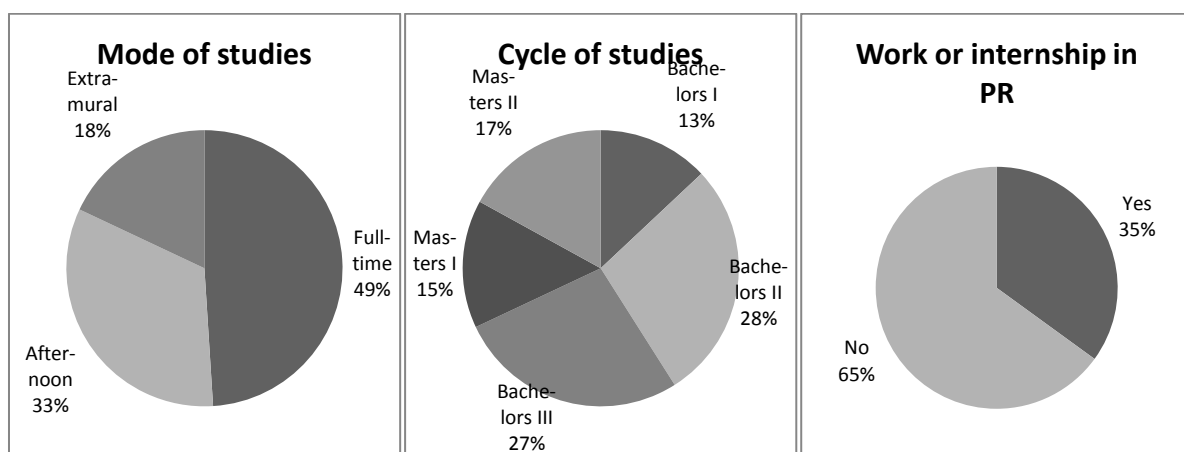


Chart 1: Characteristics of the studied group

Source: own research

Respondents were also asked about their associations with public relations. According to 85.6% of them, the PR specialist profession is associated with communication, 77.8% link it

with marketing, 67.1% with journalism, and respectively 65.3% and 64.4% with management and advertising. It should be noted that students properly identify the field they are studying, associating it mostly with the processes of communication, while finding the insufficient connection between PR and marketing dissatisfactory. High percentages of marketing and advertising connotations reflect the common opinion that PR is a kind of marketing activities and a form of advertising<sup>5</sup>. These results are also confirmed by the replies of the respondents to the question about their associations with the term public relations. Among a large number of their own answers, the greatest part belonged to associations with communication (33.3%). It was followed by image management (20.8%) and broadly understood relations (13.9%) with the environment, media, and interpersonal relations.

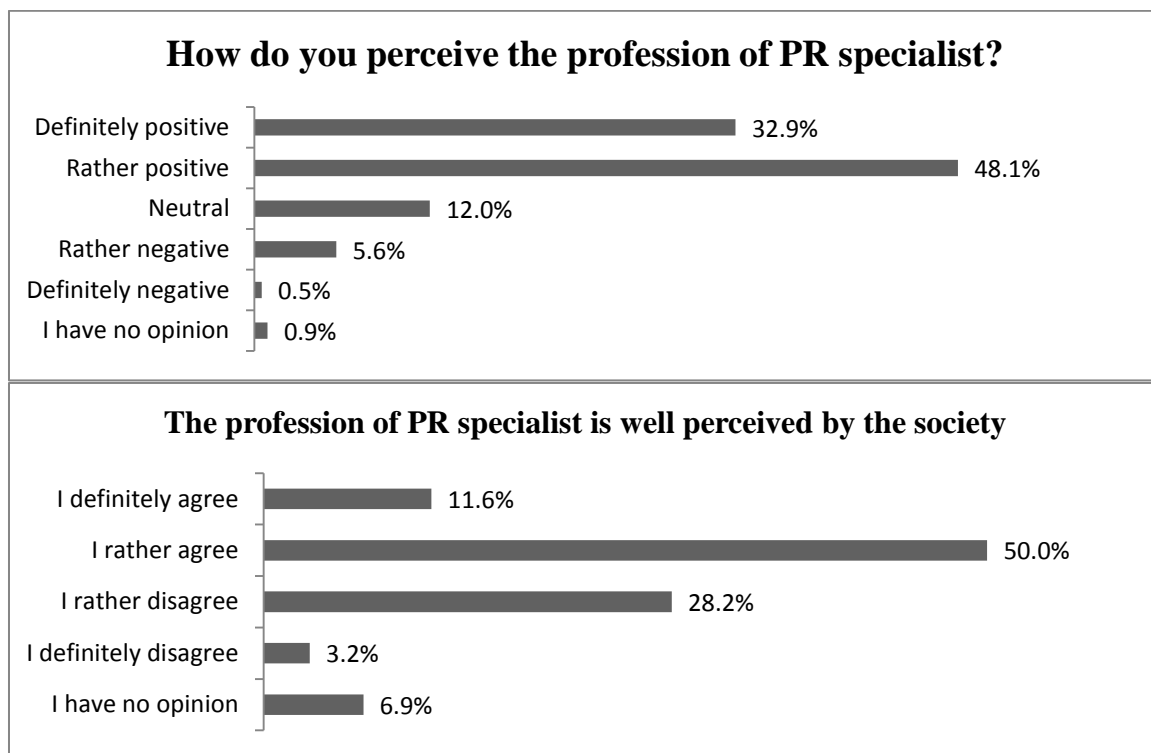


Chart 2: Perception of public relations by the respondents

Source: own research

Respondents asked about the main traits of a PR specialist mainly indicated communication skills (44.4%). A significantly smaller group thinks that intelligence (21.3%),

<sup>5</sup> Cf. B. Rozwadowska, *Public relations. Teoria, praktyka, perspektywy* [Public relations: Theory, practice, perspectives], Warszawa 2002, p. 61–75; J. Olędzki, *Preambuła o public relations między służbą organizacji I społeczeństwem* [preamble on public relations between the service to organization and to society], in: *Public relations we współczesnym świecie: między służbą organizacji i społeczeństwem* [Public relations in the modern world], ed. By idem, Warszawa 2011, p. 12–14; K. Wojcik, *Public relations. Wiarygodny dialog z otoczeniem* [Public relations: Believable dialogue with the environment], Warszawa 2009, p. 168–184.

professionalism (19.9%), and openness (9.3%) are important in that profession. It is worth to remark that only 1.4% considered good manners, empathy, and kindness as important, and only 0.9% picked neatness. This distribution of indications is also supported by the replies to the question about the skills required in PR. Again, communication skills were indicated the most often (44.4%), 17.6% considered creativity as an important skill, and 12% each of the ability to resolve problems and resistance to stress. What is worth noting, efficient writing skills (considered by many authors as a key ability)<sup>6</sup> was important for merely 6.5% of respondents. It was followed by education (4.6%) and flexibility (0.5%), so frequently adduced in CVs and cover letters. Quite surprising is the low percentage of respondents' answers concerning knowledge of foreign languages as necessary in PR. This feature, frequently stressed in recruitment processes, was considered as significant by only 0.9% of respondents (Chart 3).

The above answers are quite interesting in the context of questions about PR education. According to 88.9% of respondents, the profession of PR specialist requires constant education, while 9.3% of them believe the opposite. A little more than half of the students (53.7%) claim that this profession requires special vocational education. The opinions on this matter are somewhat divided, as 41.2% is of a different opinion (Chart 4).

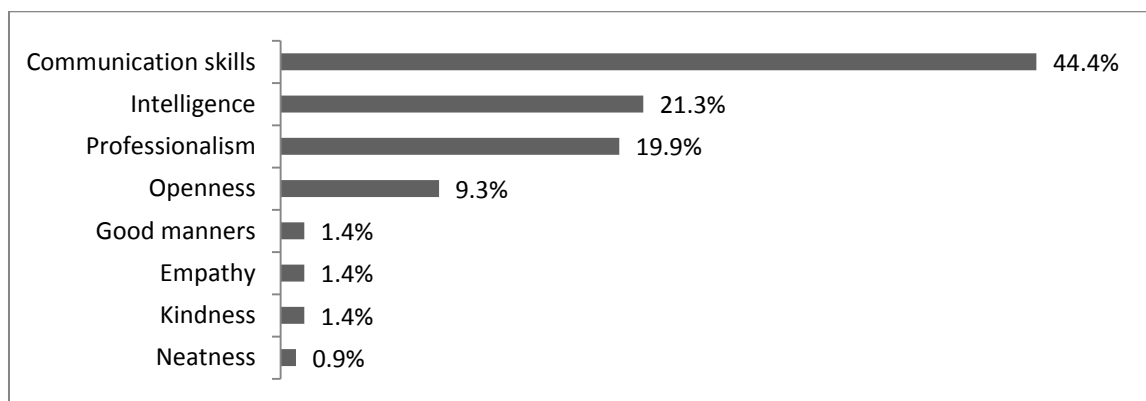


Chart 3: Importance of the traits of PR professional as a job

Source: own research

<sup>6</sup> Cf. A. Adamus-Matuszyńska, *Wstęp do praktyki public relations* [Introduction to the practice of public relations], Katowice 2012, p. 71–73; F.P. Seitel, *Public relations w praktyce* [Public relations in practice], Warszawa 2003, p. 273–294; K. Wojcik, *Public relations...*, op. cit., p. 529–533.

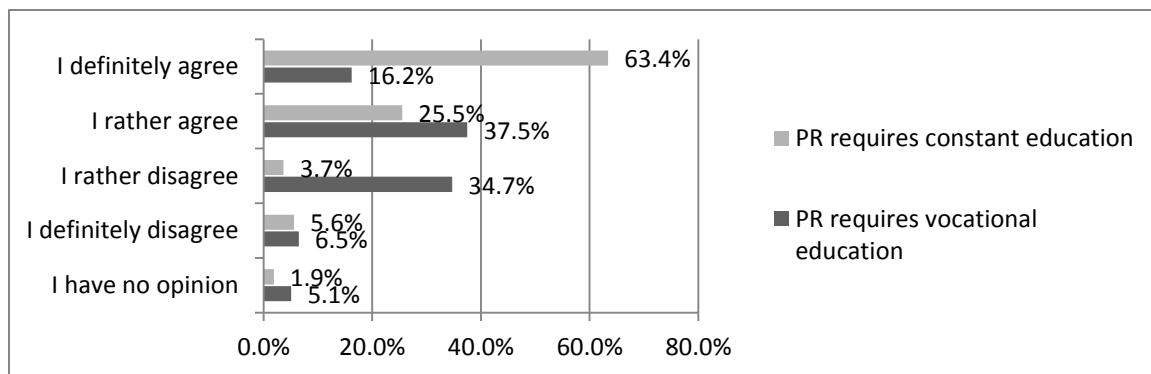


Chart 4: Opinions on continuous and vocational training in public relations

Source: own research

It is worth noting a small prevalence of students finishing their studies (both first- and second-cycle) among those who appreciate vocational education: 55.2% v. 51.1%. It follows from the presented data that the correlation between stages of education and recognizing the importance of proper education equals 1, which may be considered as complete convergence.

The respondents also had to relate to the question of PR specialists' gender. As the survey results have shown, a dominant majority (92.6%) considers it as insignificant, while 4.2% prefer women (compared to 3.2% preferring men). Among the backers of women, women themselves slightly prevail, whereas for a small majority of males, their gender fares better in the profession. For the majority of women (77.5%) the question of gender is insignificant.

Students were also asked if they would choose studies in public relations again. A positive answer was given by 69.5% of the surveyed, the opposite by 22.2%. Among those who declared choosing the PR specialization again, 69.8% are first-cycle students, and 30.2% are second-cycle students. A larger percentage of students with negative attitude was noted among bachelor students (56.3%) than master students (43.8%) as well. Moreover, the respondents were asked if they would recommend their studies to others. According to their replies, 39.7% of students would recommend the field they were studying. Students of both cycles show similar levels of satisfaction (39.9% v. 39.3%). It should be stressed that a large group of respondents had no opinion on recommending PR studies to others (38.2%), and only 22.1% would be against doing so. Detailed analysis of the answers to the question on recommendation reveals that the surveyed students would recommend their studies in the following order: to an acquaintance (46.3%), a stranger (45.4%), and to a friend (38.9%). They would rather discourage family members from enrolling (31.5%). Many respondents (between 36.6 and 40.3%) do not know to whom they would recommend their studies or not

(Chart 5). The presented data show that a greater percentage of students would choose PR studies again then recommend them to others. It may be worth considering what manifests this way: perhaps it is fear of growing competition on the job market.

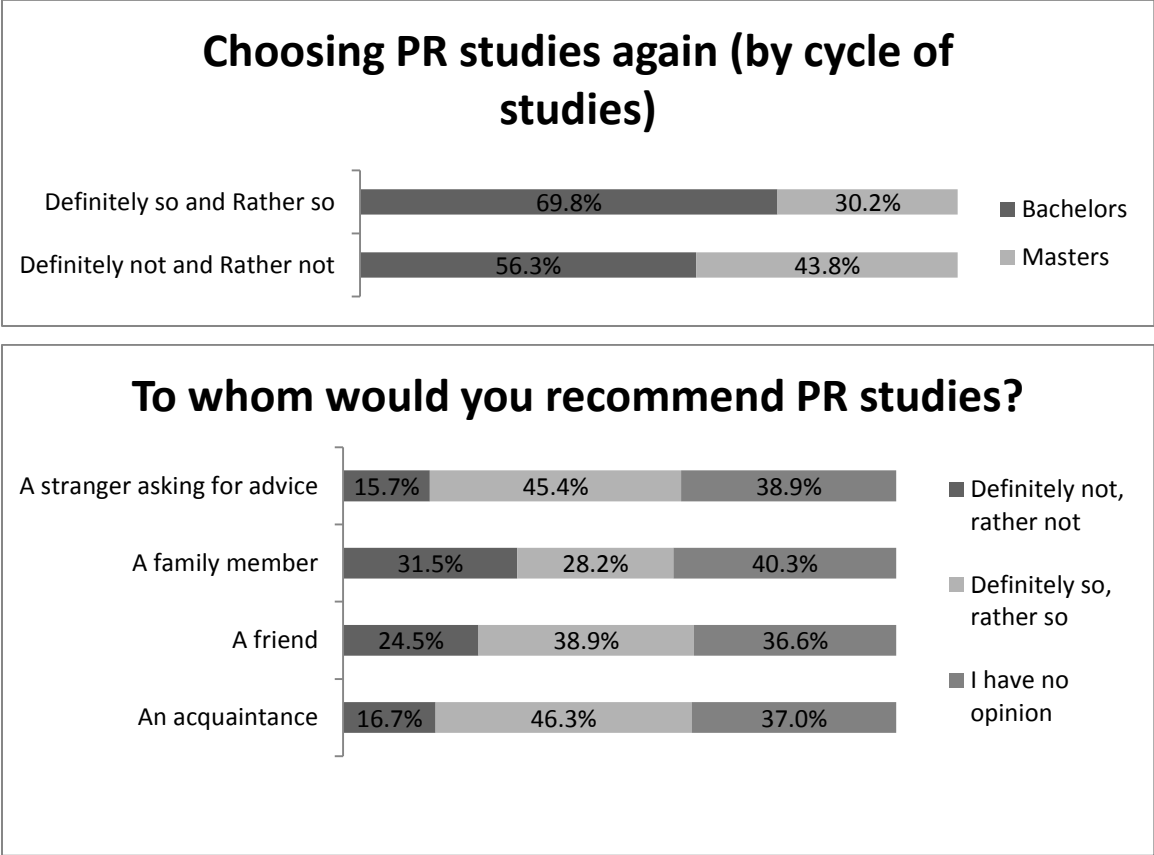


Chart 5: Would you choose PR studies again and to whom would you recommend them?

Source: own research

The following part of the questionnaire contained the key question of the study: “Are you proud of being a PR professional?” (Chart 6). The collected data show that 65.8% gave positive replies (20.4% of which were definitely positive and 45.4% rather positive). Only 6.9% of the surveyed did not share this view, while a large group (27.3%) had no opinion. Of those proud of belonging to the professional group of PR specialists, 67.6% are first-cycle students, and 32.4% are second-cycle students. Students about to finish their studies comprise 24% and 52.2% of the former and the latter group, respectively. Among those who finish studies, of both cycles, respondents showing pride of being PR specialists are a majority (49%), while the group lacking it is much smaller, only 8.3%. What is interesting, though, is the percentage of those without any opinion on this, reaching 42.7%. Whereas among those working or interning in the profession, as much as 77.6% are proud of it.



### Attitude to PR and professional ethics

In the second part, the respondents were asked to consider the issue of PR ethics, so often discussed by scholars<sup>7</sup> and present in public discourse<sup>8</sup>. Properly conducted and responsible public relations includes following ethical guidelines adopted in professional codes<sup>9</sup>, and is a fundamental mark of professional activities. Professionalization of public relations activities should be understood as an appropriate attitude to performed tasks, taking one's own skills and capabilities into account, respect to other parties, etc. Professionalism in PR requires a combination of three major components: proper professional knowledge, personal and professional skills, and observing ethical and moral rules<sup>10</sup>.

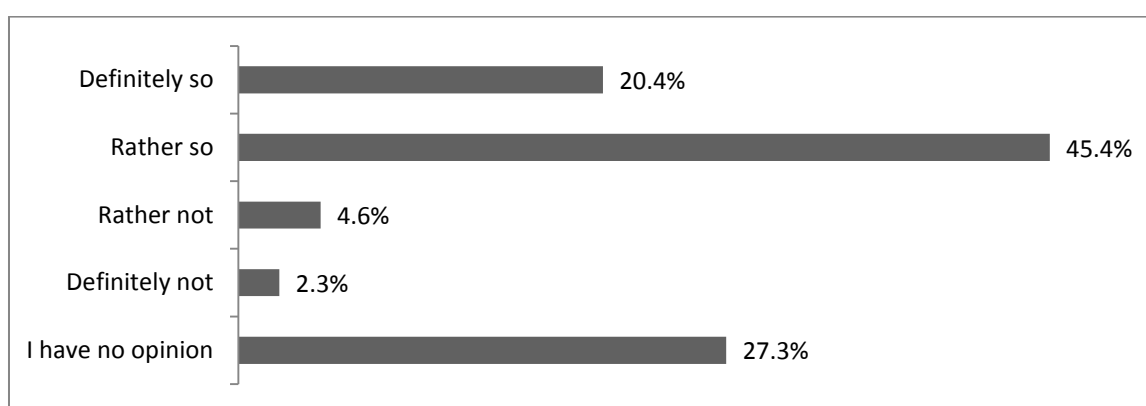


Chart 6: Are you proud of being a PR professional?

Source: own research

Asked to order the traits of professionalism in PR, the respondents decided that reliability of information was the most important (29.6%). Less important traits were truthfulness (17.6%), high quality (13.9%), and adapting the communication to target groups (13.4%). The gap between the first two traits is of particular interest: it seems that the respondents do not fully identify truthfulness with reliability or high quality. It is also worth adding that such seemingly important features of properly conducted PR activities as strategic

<sup>7</sup> Cf. J. Olędzki, *Etyka w polskim public relations. Refleksje badawcze* [Ethics in Polish public relations: Researcher's reflections], Warszawa 2009, p. 35–40; E. Hope, *Etyka w zawodzie specjalistów public relations* [Ethics in the PR specialist profession], Warszawa 2013, p. 22–27, 30 ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Should PR specialists act ethically? – competition results*, <http://www.proto.pl/archiwum/info?itemId=127265>; *REPR: łączenie pracy dziennikarskiej i PR-owskiej jest wątpliwe etycznie* [REPR: combining the work in journalism and PR is ethically dubious], <http://www.proto.pl/archiwum/info?itemId=127873>; A. Piwek, *Drużyna Pierścienia, czyli etyka w PR* [Fellowship of the Ring, or PR ethics], <http://www.proto.pl/archiwum/info?itemId=131695>; Ł. Przybysz, *Przybysz: PR-owski znaczy pozytywny* [Przybysz: PR means positive], <http://www.proto.pl/archiwum/info?itemId=132439> [accessed: 30 Jul 2014].

<sup>9</sup> Ethical Code of the Polish PR Association (Pol. *Kodeks Etyki Polskiego Stowarzyszenia Public Relations*), 26 June 1996; PPRCA Code of Best Practices, April 2004.

<sup>10</sup> E. Hope, *Etyka w zawodzie...*, op. cit., p. 49.

planning skills or timeliness received low percentages of answers (10.6% and 4.2%, respectively) (Chart 7).

These results should be compared with the replies about the influence of ethics on PR professionalism. In the opinion of the majority (90.8%), observing the rules of PR ethics results in professional performance in tasks. Only 6.5% of respondents disagree with it. Therefore, one can conclude that students show high awareness of the necessity and justification of observing ethical norms in professional practice and consider their effects on professional attitude to work as significant. Moreover, they identify such rules with reliability and truthfulness, on which ethical conduct is based. It can thus be assumed that there is a full correlation between the perception of ethics and professionalism of PR activities among the students in the field.

Subsequently, students were asked about the role of professional ethical codes and their attitudes to them. More than half of the surveyed (52.3%) state that they contribute to the ethical standards of the industry. For 44.4% they promote professional and responsible behaviour, and for 37.5% they serve the regulatory function in the industry. In turn, 35.2% view the professional codes currently in force with criticism, believing they do not fulfil the tasks imposed on them, including the above as well as shaping the moral base of professional circles (the function was selected by 29.2% of respondents). It is encouraging that a decisive majority (84.7%) declare following the rules found in the ethical codes binding for the Polish PR industry (30.1% of which indicated it decidedly). The motives of 4.7% of the surveyed are interesting who declare non-compliance with ethical codes, as well as the doubts expressed by 10.6% of those who have no opinion on the matter (Chart 8).

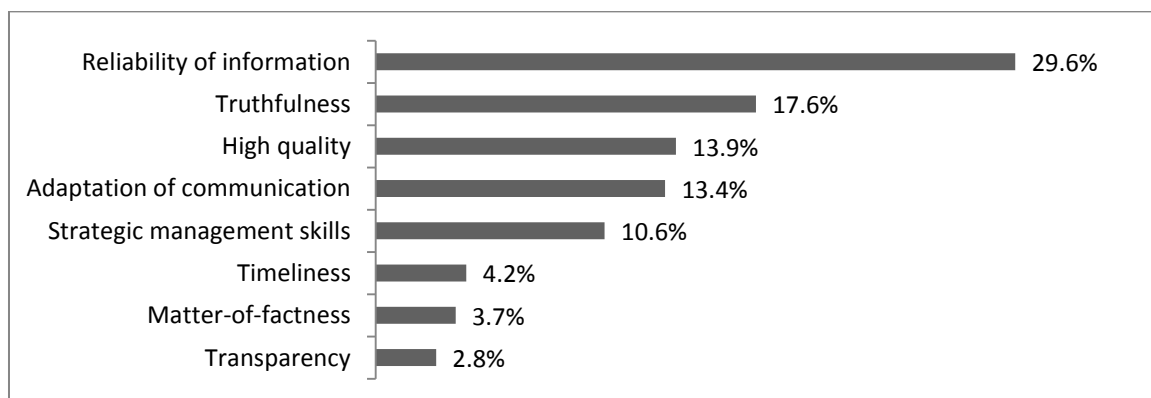


Chart 7: Traits of professionalism in public relations

Source: own research

The respondents see the need to apply ethical norms in public relations. Therefore, the question about the ethics of Polish PR industry had to be asked to conclude this part. The surveyed students are very critical about the activities of Polish PR specialists: more than half (50.5%) consider them unethical. Only 22.2% of the surveyed think that the PR industry in Poland follows the rules of professional ethics (it is worth noting that there were no decisive answers here). It also seems significant that 27.3% of respondents cannot answer the questions about PR ethics in Poland; they either have no opinion or prefer not to know (or say) what is going on in their industry (Chart 9).

**Perception of public relations and professional organizations in Poland.**

The third part of the survey ties directly to the previous one and regards the perception of public relations in Poland, in a broader scope than ethics. The respondents were asked to relate to the issue of evaluating the activities of the industry as well as organizations meant to associate PR consultancies, specialists, and scholars, and thus spread the best standards, conduct the dialogue, and educate about PR.

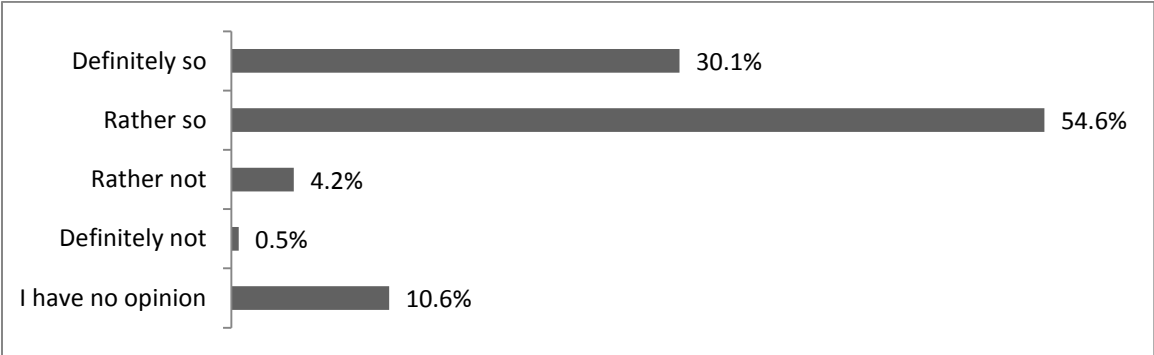


Chart 8: Following the rules of PR ethics in professional practice

Source: own research

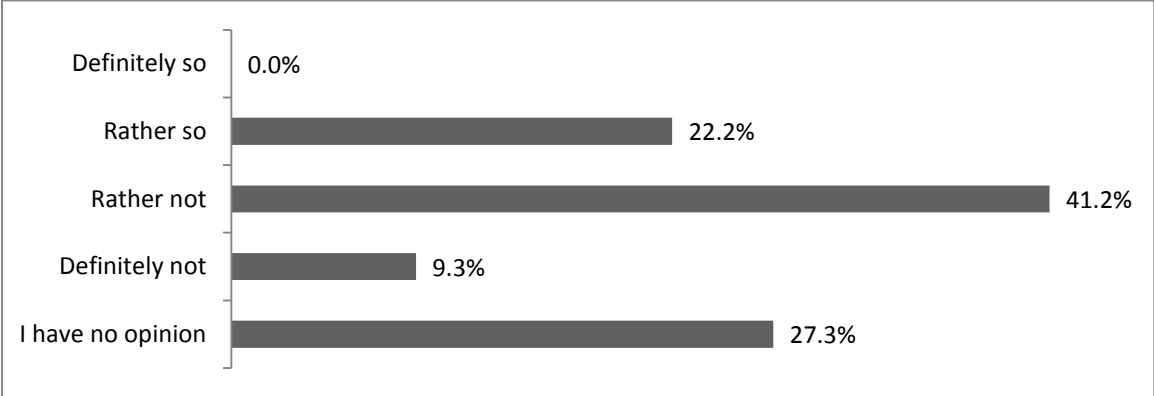


Chart 9: Is Polish PR industry ethical?

Source: own research

Similar to the ethical question, PR in Poland does not score too well in the eyes of future PR specialists. Even though only 17.1% of respondents have negative connotations about it, only a little less than a quarter of them see it positively (24.5% – and only 1.4% decisively positively). More than a half (51.9%) are of a neutral opinion about the Polish PR industry, which may indicate insufficient information about its activities, as well as following one's subjective feelings. To support this, it is necessary to quote the opinions of the surveyed who work (or intern) in PR. The largest percentage (48.7%) express a neutral opinion about the Polish PR industry, whereas 27.6% of the working students think positively of it, and 19.7% negatively. While 4% of them, in spite of contact with professional practice, have no opinion (or refuse to share it) about the sector where they work. It is, however, a small percentage of respondents.

It seems, that the respondents find excuses for the industry in which they work (or will work) in their evaluation of Polish PR. When asked to compare it to foreign PR, however, they show much more criticism. Here, the American models of public relations<sup>11</sup> seem unmatched to them and – one may risk to say it – such they might dream of.

The students evaluated the Polish public relations industry negatively in comparison with the foreign ones (47.2%); 22.2% see the Polish PR practices as neutral and 13.4% as positive. As many as 17.1% of respondents, mostly working in the industry, have no opinion. It is worth noting that the majority (75.7%) of those who negatively evaluated the Polish industry before, now persisted in their opinion. Whereas the very large group who previously spoke about Polish PR activities in neutral terms, now considered them as positive (52.7%). The comparison in the perception of Polish and foreign PR industry can be found in Chart 10.

This leads thus to the conclusion that a large part of the surveyed is unable to critically evaluate the Polish market of public relations, even though they already operate on it or are going to do so soon. It may be a result of insufficient information about the activities and the essence of public relations by entities and organizations operating in Poland, as well as indicate the need to verify the content of directional education. Perhaps a closer cooperation between professional organizations and education institutions might improve the awareness of future PR specialists.

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<sup>11</sup> The Polish school of public relations usually refers to American and Canadian best practices. The USA has been the cradle of public relations. A number of significant publications have come out there, and the professional organizations operating in the US are considered as the best by professionals. For these reasons, among other things, the American tradition of PR is the natural point of reference for the PR industry and education in Poland; Cf. J. Olędzki, *Preambuła o public relations...* op. cit., p. 7–20.

When designing the survey, a decision was made to include a component checking the knowledge and opinions of students about the organizations active in the Polish PR industry. These considered as most important were PPRCA, Polish PR Association (Pol. *Polskie Stowarzyszenie Public Relations – PSPR*), and the Council of Ethics of Public Relations (Pol. *Rada Etyki Public Relations – REPR*). The formulas and aims of activities differ significantly from one another; however, they all have the activities for PR education in their statutes, which decided of their inclusion in the research project. What is more, each of them aims to improve quality and development of proper professional standards, thus shaping the Polish PR (or at least it should). PPRCA federates 38 PR companies active on the Polish market<sup>12</sup>, PSPR gathers about 200 persons, professionally related to PR, while REPR is an organ evaluating the activities of the industry in terms of following ethical guidelines.

Students showed a critical attitude to the above organizations. According to them, PSPR and PPRCA have the most favourable images (respectively 25.9% and 25% of positive answers). Among the analysed entities, PSPR also had the largest percentage of neutral replies (41.7%) and the least negative ones (7.9%). This, however, may be a result of the respondents being insufficiently informed about the activities of the association, since the largest number of students had no opinion on PSPR as well (24.5%). It should be noted that the remaining organizations are similarly unknown to respondents: 23.6% of them had no opinion about PPRCA and 23.1% about REPR. The PPRCA is perceived in a mostly neutral (38%) and positive way (25%). In turn, 13.4% speak negatively of it, and 26% of them negatively evaluate the activities of the Council of Ethics of PR. This situation is somewhat balanced by positive and neutral voices (22.7% and 28.8%, respectively) yet, in the end, REPR received the worst opinions of all analysed entities (Chart 11). It seems that students are informed about its activities enough to critically evaluate the role it fulfils (or rather should fulfil) on the Polish market<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Data for July 2014, <http://www.zfpr.pl/firma> [accessed: 30 Jul 2014].

<sup>13</sup> By the time this survey was carried out, and even by the time of publication of this paper, the membership of the REPR for the 2014–2016 term had not yet been established.

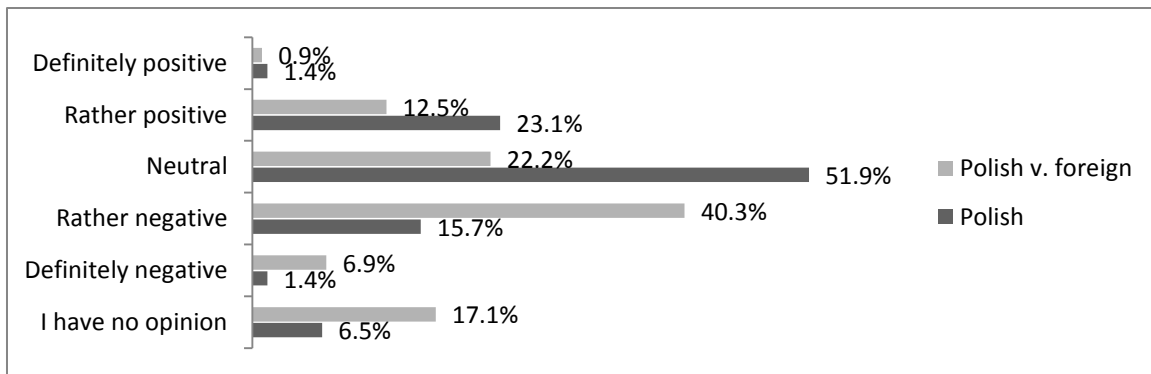


Chart 10: Perception of Polish and foreign PR industry

Source: own research

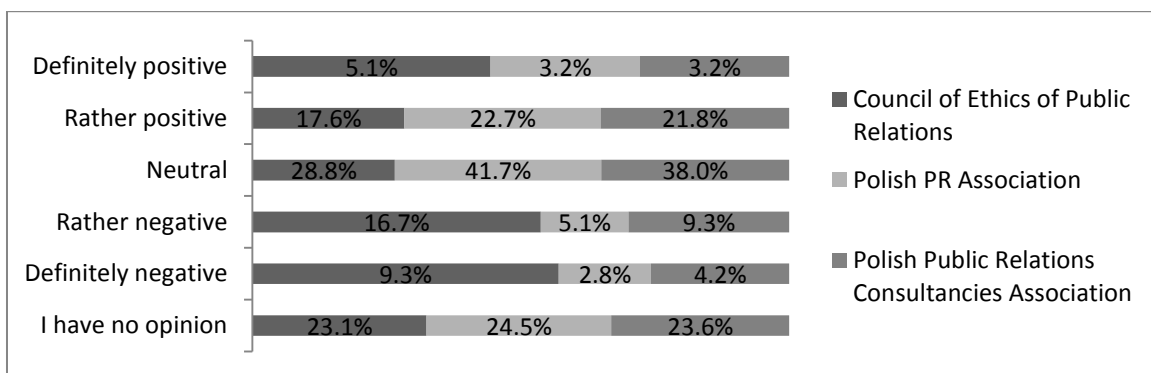


Chart 11: Perception of public relations organizations

Source: own research

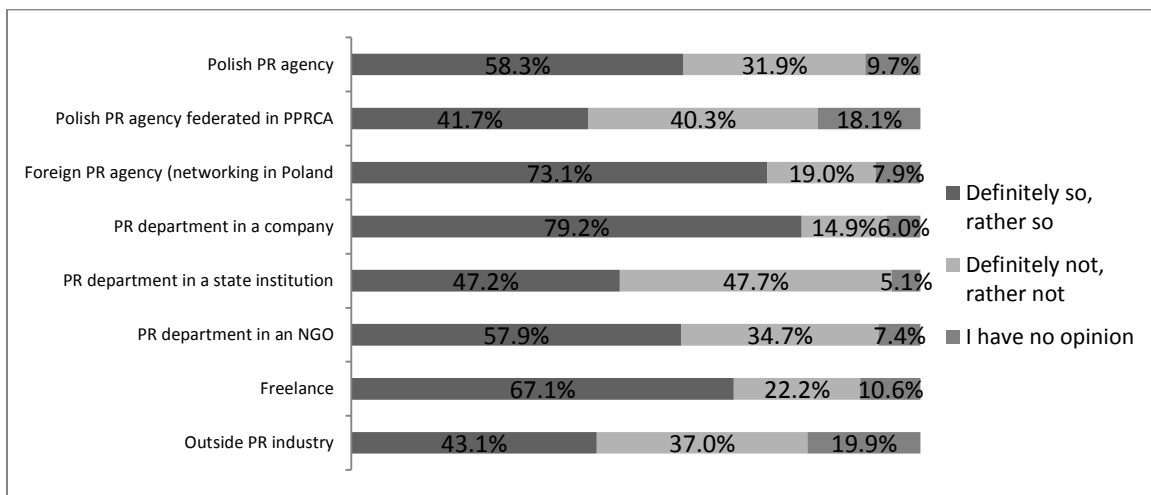


Chart 12: Preferred place of work

Source: own research

One of the greatest controversies in the ethics of public relations is combining the work as a journalist and PR specialist<sup>14</sup>, and transferring between these two professions. As there has been much talk recently about similar transfers<sup>15</sup>, this topic became one of the research problems described here. The attitude of respondents to the journalists who transferred to work in PR may thus be even more surprising: 45.8% of the surveyed had a neutral opinion about them, negative and positive opinions (22.3% and 21.8%, respectively) essentially cancelled each other out, and 10.2% had no opinion at all. It seems that in this case respondents decided that there is nothing wrong in transferring to the side of public relations, and editorial experience may be an asset of a former journalist.

In the end, the respondents were asked to indicate their optimum place of work. They could choose from: a Polish PR agency, a PPRCA-federated Polish agency, foreign network agency operating in Poland, PR department in a company, PR department in a national institution, PR department in an NGO, freelance work, or work outside of PR. The opinion was divided; still, the vast majority indicated a PR department in a company (79.2%) or a foreign networked agency operating in Poland (73.1%). Freelance work is a little less desirable (67.1%), as is work for a Polish agency (58.3%) or in a PR department of an NGO (57.9%). What might be disturbing is the fact that the last place (with the score of 41.7% and the second last number of negative answers) belonged to the agencies federated in PPRCA. According to the respondents, they fare much worse than other agencies on the Polish market, while being less attractive than a PR department in a state institution (47.2%) or abandoning the industry (43.1%) (Chart 12). It is thus important whether the respondents decided that being federated has a negative effect on agencies, or rather that they do not want to be bound by the ethical rules applying to all PPRCA members. Among the working and interning students, 82.9% would like to work in a PR department of an organization, and three quarters in a foreign network agency operating in Poland. Similar preferences are also declared by the students who finish their studies and are about to enter the job market (the final years of the first- and second-cycle studies), respectively 78.1 and 67.7%.

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<sup>14</sup> It is considered unethical by the industry and the codes; cf.: *Igor Janke: praca w agencji i program w TV. Zapewnia, że nie będzie rozmawiał o interesach klientów* [Igor Janke: Consultancy work and TV programme: He assures he will not talk about his clients' business], [http://www.proto.pl/informacje/info?itemId=132339&rob=Igor\\_Janke\\_bedzie\\_jednoczesnie\\_pracowal\\_w\\_agencji\\_PR\\_i\\_prowadzil\\_program\\_w\\_telewizji.\\_#8222;To\\_o\\_czym\\_bede\\_rozmawiac,\\_nie\\_bedzie\\_dotyczac\\_interesow\\_klientow,\\_dla\\_ktorych\\_pracujemy\\_#8221;](http://www.proto.pl/informacje/info?itemId=132339&rob=Igor_Janke_bedzie_jednoczesnie_pracowal_w_agencji_PR_i_prowadzil_program_w_telewizji._#8222;To_o_czym_bede_rozmawiac,_nie_bedzie_dotyczac_interesow_klientow,_dla_ktorych_pracujemy_#8221;Balawajder – PR-owiec i dziennikarz w jednym?) *Balawajder – PR-owiec i dziennikarz w jednym?* [Balawajder – PR specialist and journalist, 2-in-1], <http://www.proto.pl/aktualnosci/balawajder-pr-owiec-i-dziennikarz-w-jednym> [accessed: 30 Jul 2014].

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Nowy rzecznik w Polskim Związku Tenisowym* [New spokesman of Polish Tennis Association], [proto.pl, http://www.proto.pl/archiwum/info?itemId=132942](http://www.proto.pl/archiwum/info?itemId=132942) [accessed: 30 Jul 2014].

The survey ended in the question about the prognosis for the Polish PR industry for the following 5 years (Chart 13). According to 90.3% of respondents it will develop, and according to 68.5% the professionalism of PR activities on the domestic market will increase. In the opinion of 58.3%, the image of Polish PR will improve, even though 44.9% think that it will not become more ethical. According to 40.7% of respondents, PR will take over the tasks of advertising (yet 43.5% believe the opposite), while 47.7% of students think that marketing will not dominate public relations in Poland in the years to come (according to 32.4%, the opposite will happen). It should be noted that 43.5% are convinced that in five years PR in Poland will be dominated by women: it seems to follow from both the results of recruitment to this kind of studies and the query of the staff of Polish agencies. Even though, as has been mentioned before, gender in this profession is not important for the respondents, they would prefer to see women in it (this was the answer given by the vast majority of surveyed women, 77.3%). The statistical data regarding the replies to the question if the Polish PR industry is going to suffer from crisis in the near future, are also interesting. According to 56% of respondents such a situation will not take place, whereas a group of 19.4% were more sceptical. A relatively large percentage of respondents who had no opinion on the above subjects should also be noted – 20% for each subject on average.

### **Conclusions from the study**

1. The survey described above shows that the students of public relations at the Institute of Journalism of UW are relatively well-versed in what PR is and what it requires. It seems that second-cycle students have more knowledge about public relations than their first-cycle colleagues, understand the realities of the field better, navigate more skilfully through the market, and can compare Polish and foreign perspectives with greater accuracy. Those finishing studies are a similar case, showing more knowledge than the students of earlier years. In the opinion of the respondents, the Polish PR industry is stable, develops, and does not fear the threat of marketing or advertising.



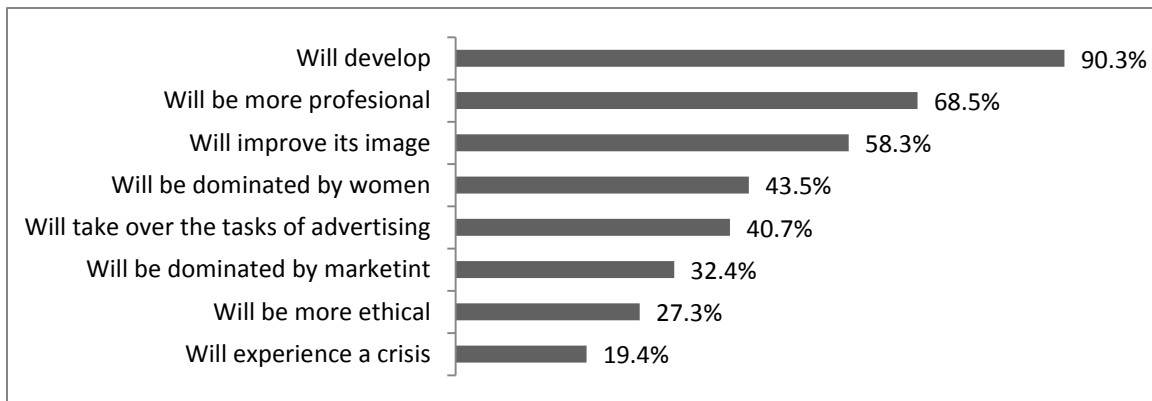


Chart 13: Prognoses for the Polish PR industry in 2014–2019

Source: own research

2. As shown by the detailed analyses of the issues from the questionnaire, 81% of respondents consider the PR specialist profession in a positive way, and 95.8% believe it is needed, whereas 61.6% are aware that the society views their profession negatively. It is perhaps one of the reasons why 47.2% of respondents believe that the society has to be educated to improve the image of the industry. For the vast majority (88.9%) this profession is interesting and requires creativity (71.8%), yet it is also stressful (71.3%). The participants realize that PR specialists need to constantly learn (88.9%), still only a little more than half of them (53.7%) think that practicing this profession requires vocational education (Chart 14).

3. The results of the analysis of the part on ethical issues in public relations are satisfactory. The respondents evaluated the conduct of Polish PR specialists and companies critically and realistically, since they are aware of the importance of ethics for the professionalism of PR activities (90.8%). A vast majority also declare following the principles of professional codes of ethics in their work (84.7%) (Chart 15).

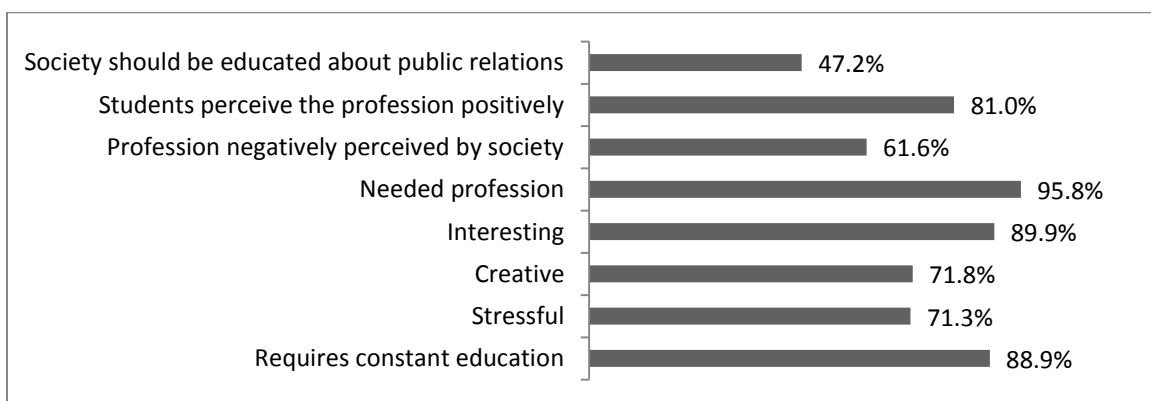


Chart 14: Students' opinions on public relations

Source: own research

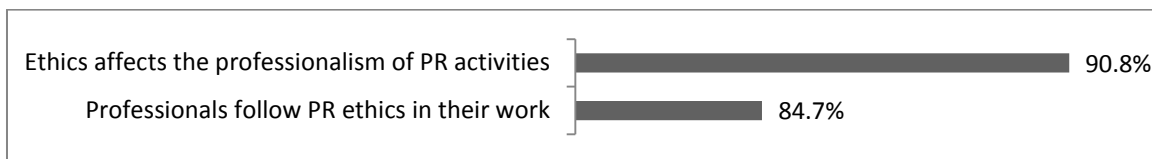


Chart 15: Students' attitude to PR ethics

Source: own research

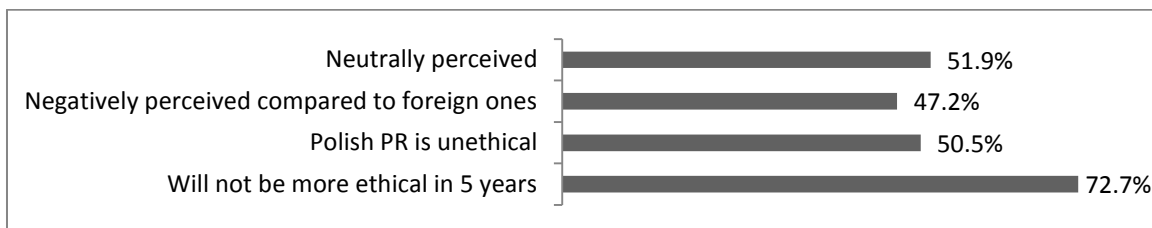


Chart 16: Perception of the Polish PR industry

Source: own research

4. The public relations industry in Poland is seen rather positively by the respondents (51.9%), but fares slightly worse compared to foreign firms (47.2%). What is telling, 50.5% believe Polish PR practices to be unethical, and 72.7% see no chance to improve this situation over the next five years (Chart 16).

5. The respondents perceive the Polish professional organizations in a rather neutral way. In the case of the Polish Public Relations Consultancies Association, 41.7% of respondents share such an opinion. A little fewer respondents see the Polish PR Association in a similar way (38.0%). The Council of Ethics of Public Relations was evaluated lowest – only 28.2% of students had a neutral opinion on it (Chart 17).

6. As it is often pointed out, one purpose of studies – particularly profiled and first-cycle studies, which are practical in nature – is to prepare for entering the job market. The surveyed students of the PRiMM specialization have relatively clearly defined their job preferences. The majority see themselves in a PR department of an organization or in a network agency operating on the Polish market (73.1%), while 67.1% are ready to work freelance (Chart 18).

### Conclusion

The study aimed to find the degree of preparation of future young graduates of PR studies to working in the profession. The plan was to verify their theoretical and practical knowledge of the subject, ability to assess the phenomena, processes, and institutions, as well as the adequacy of the content conveyed during the courses. Since currently the subject of public

relations is often raised in a negative light, it was decided to ask students about their identification with the PR milieu. Being aware of the possible criticism of this slightly unscientific approach, the researcher asked respondents to refer to the question from the title: “Are you proud of being a PR specialist?” It seems that the result of this survey should be considered as inspiring and motivating, and the fact that 65.8% of respondents declare pride from being future PR specialists should be considered a success.

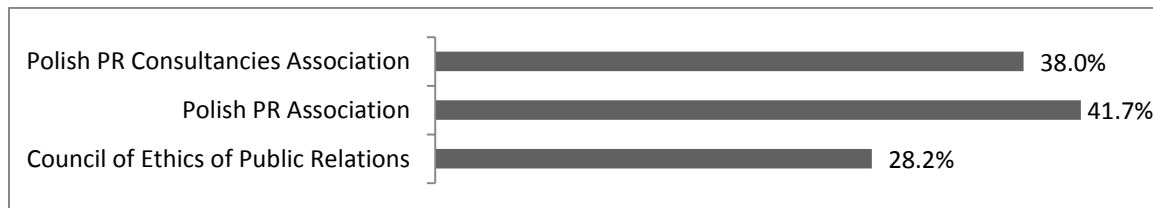


Chart 17: Neutral perception of professional organizations

Source: own research

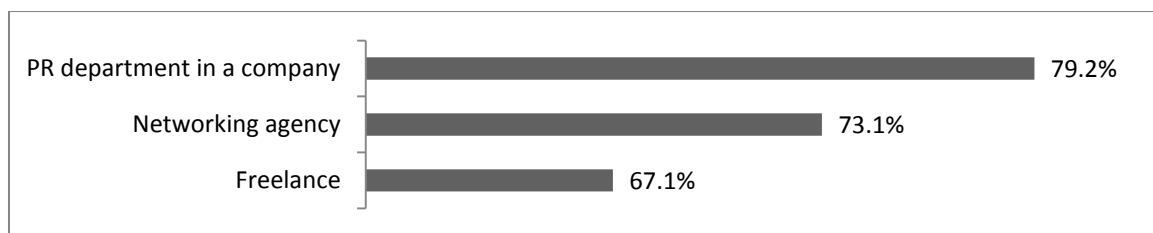


Chart 18: Preferred places of work of public relations students

Source: own research

The analysis of the survey results shows that in terms of growth perspectives of the industry, activities aimed at the improvement of identification with PR should be undertaken. Continuing, it might be worth considering how to decrease the negative perception of the Polish PR industry in the society and how to improve ethics and professionalism, aim to equalize the differences between foreign and domestic practices, mobilize professional organizations to work more efficiently and cooperate to improve the quality of PR practices in Poland. In future, there is a plan to expand the research project to other institutions educating PR specialists and to investigate the general attitude of future journalists to the field and professional group which they are going to collaborate with while working in the media. It seems that this kind of research may contribute to improvement in quality of public relations education as well as – in a long-term perspective – to positively influence the working standards of the industry in Poland.