



# Opportunities for Environmental PR in Uzbekistan: Formation, Methods and Problems

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**Abstract:** The article describes the concept of environmental PR and the factors of its occurrence, the development of environmental PR abroad and in Uzbekistan, its possibilities and prospects in the formation of the ecological image of the Republic of Uzbekistan. All over the world, environmental crises arising under the influence of the anthropogenic factor bring multimillion-dollar damage to nature. But the PR service of industrial enterprises and environmental organizations using modern PR methods, it helps to calm the reader for a while. The concept of environmental PR is new for Uzbekistan. Environmental PR as the main direction of public relations has not been studied in Uzbekistan. The study is being conducted for the first time in the country. The main goal is to show the place and role of environmental PR in the formation of the country's environmental image, to point out the shortcomings of PR services of organizations and enterprises. In recent years, ecological disasters due to the fault of industrial enterprises and corruption have become more frequent in Uzbekistan. But the PR services of enterprises and environmental organizations, due to the lack of knowledge and skills in working with the media and the population at the proper level, could not get out of the crisis situation. The article provides an analysis of some such examples. The main mistakes of PR services of enterprises and environmental organizations of Uzbekistan are indicated. The article uses the methods of historical analysis, content analysis, comparative analysis.

**Keywords:** Environmental PR, Mass Media, Flora, Fauna, Problem, Environmental Crisis, Public Relations

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## 1. Introduction

Relevance of the topic. The ecological state of the Republic of Uzbekistan is of extreme concern. Soil, air and water are polluted. To preserve the natural environment and solve environmental problems, the level of ecological culture of the whole society plays an important role. Environmental PR plays an important role in this direction. To promote the environmental policy of Uzbekistan, to draw attention to environmental problems, implement environmental programs, search for sponsors and benefactors, environmental organizations use the means and methods of public relations (PR).

Environmental PR is an activity aimed at creating favorable and mutually beneficial relationships between environmental organizations and their target audiences. Environmental PR is sometimes referred to as "Green PR".

The target audience of environmental PR is the population,

government agencies, businesses, sponsors. However, until now, the essence of environmental PR has not been properly reflected in journalism, there is no sufficient scientific and methodological support, there are no works that consider environmental PR as a factor in the formation of the country's environmental image. The presence of a contradiction between the need for environmental PR and the lack of its necessary and sufficient scientific and methodological support determined the relevance of the article.

The purpose of the study is to develop recommendations for the formation of environmental PR as a factor in the formation of the country's environmental image.

Achieving this goal required solving the following tasks:

1. Clarify the concept of "environmental PR".
2. Identify features of environmental PR.
3. Assess the role of environmental PR in the formation of the country's environmental image.

4. Develop recommendations on the formation of an environmental PR system in government organizations.

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study was the works of Edward Bernays, Zaitsev A. V., Kaminskaya T. L., Kosimova N., Black, Sam, Balamut T. V., Ron Bousso devoted to environmental PR abroad.

In addition to the works of these authors, the study used legislative acts of the Republic of Uzbekistan, media materials. In the process of research, such methods of scientific knowledge as systemic, historical, logical, sociological, statistical, methods of analysis and synthesis, comparison, observation were used.

## 2. Methods

The study was carried out by analyzing the existing literature on environmental PR, substantiating the analysis of historical facts and modern achievements in environmental PR, its types.

## 3. Discussion

Today, environmental PR is manifested in all aspects of life, it is directly related to eco-journalism, ecological products, eco-education, eco-fashion, etc. Until recent years, ecological problems were of interest only to a narrow circle of specialists, such as biologists, zoologists, and botanists, who study the influence of mankind on flora and fauna. For the first time, the concept of environmental PR was used by Edward Bernays in 1928, according to his opinion, "public relations consultant has a great role in ensuring environmental protection in production. It is necessary to be able to work with both modern mass media and group forms of society in order to convey ideas to public consciousness [1]. Grunig and Hunt (1984) defined environmental PR as the practice of managing the dissemination of information between an individual or organization (such as a business, government agency, or non-profit organization) and the public [2]. McCamy (1940) defined the public sphere, and according to him, environmental PR is a direct or indirect relationship between citizens and the state apparatus. In 1982, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), a professional trade association, defined public relations as "Environmental PR helps an organization and its public fit together". [3] Environmental PR, or what is now known as "green PR", is a public relations direction that actually became relevant in the 1960s, when environmental concerns began to intensify. In the 1960s and 1980s, man-made and environmental journalistic materials were widely published in the world mass media for the first time. The rise of important environmental problems in the mass media and the increase of public awareness in this regard led to the formation of the environmental policy of the states [4].

The concept of "greenwashing" was introduced by the American environmentalist Jay Westervelt in the 1980s. The hotel where the scientist once stayed had signs encouraging guests to use towels more than once to save the environment.

Westervelt was skeptical of this call and suspected that the intention of the hotel management to lower the price of washing towels was hidden under the eco-friendly slogans. In hotels, sheets and towels are washed really often without reason.

The concept of "Green PR" or "Eco PR" in the sense of "speaking in terms of environmental protection" first appeared in world politics in the 1970s. Initially, builders in Australia and New Zealand refused to build buildings on historical and natural landmarks. The first major political force to use the word "green" in an environmental context was the Green Party in Germany in 1979. In 2011, Jay Westervelt, the "father" of Greenwashing, condemned the widespread use of "green" slogans and measures by corporations. Westervelt said that while the meaning of environmental protection is often used for marketing purposes, many business representatives think only of profit and do nothing to protect the environment [5].

The history of green PR began in the 70s and 80s of the 20th centuries with the issue of overuse of natural resources and environmental pollution by large corporations. The first "green" campaign was carried out by environmental organizations Greenpeace International, WSPA, World Wide Fund for Nature, in which measures were taken against air pollution as a result of industrial development and the disappearance of some species of animals and plants [6]. They were supported not only by the public, but also by large multinational corporations such as Walmart, Volkswagen, and General Motors, as well as small organizations such as the Dutch brand singer American Apparel, which was perceived as a business development idea. Of course, it is true that the life of any society depends on its ecological environment. Such promotion of the idea of nature conservation and the formation of corporate social responsibility served the purpose of green PR - increasing brand awareness and improving the image of the organization. Today, the ideology of green PR is based on the concept of social responsibility of business, and is also a voluntary business activity aimed at the development of society in social, economic and ecological aspects. This work should be related to the main activity of the organization and it should be actively announced to the public.

Today, the negative impact of man on nature, especially the risk of almost extinction of nature as a result of the production process, reducing the environmental damage caused by all production enterprises, organizations and institutions, gaining prestige in the international community, "transition to the green economy" and their consumers, in order to gain the respect of the audience, enterprises, organizations, and institutions began to use ecological PR methods in forming their "ecological image". In his work "PR: International Practice", Sam Black, speaking about the relationship between ecology and PR, refers to the research of Bruce Harrison, the head of the public relations agency "E Bruce Harrison Company, Inc", which was active in the field of environmental management in the chemical industry in the 1960s, and comes to the following conclusions [7]:

- 1) today, the heads of enterprises and companies around

the world rightfully consider environmental protection to be one of the most important serious issues. They are trying to find a balance between the need to protect nature, industrial development and the ability to be competitive;

- 2) "Green Movement" is redefining public relations. The activity of PR companies in the field of environmental problems is a characteristic feature of today, politicians and businessmen should be reckoned with;
- 3) everyone is concerned about environmental problems. Different groups of respondents consider environmental issues as the most important. In the US, three-quarters of the population agree with environmentalists, and most Americans do not trust businesses to protect their interests in this area.

Russian scientist V. Gerasimov, defining environmental PR, notes that "Environmental PR is an activity aimed at establishing comfortable, mutually beneficial relations between environmental organizations and their target audience." Based on the definitions given above, we have developed a definition of environmental PR with different interpretations.

These are environmental PR:

- 1) a set of activities on environmental protection;
- 2) a set of actions organized in order to remind each person of the unique gift of nature, as well as the responsibility to preserve the priceless heritage for future generations;
- 3) the direction of science aimed at preventing today's most global problem;
- 4) gratitude, a science direction that remembers the role and place of every creature in the world;
- 5) a scientific direction that promotes the consumption of natural products and a healthy lifestyle in general, serving to prevent the emergence of new, mixed diseases;
- 6) movement of advocates to pay attention to crisis situations behind development;
- 7) the type of activity that brings the organization closer to the public;
- 8) a direction aimed at environmental protection in the field of public relations.

In general, environmental PR is a type of activity that promotes environmental protection. Also, in our opinion, environmental PR is directly related to the concept of environmental image.

Ecological image is a stable system of ideas formed in society about how the company's activities affect the environment, the ecological purity of the products it produces, and how seriously it treats environmental legislation [8].

From the second half of the 20th century, official scientists and even large international organizations began to emphasize that the development of this technology is not only harmful to the planet Earth, but also to the entire existence, the change in nature's gifts. In order to solve these global problems, the Environmental PR Network was created in the field of public relations and environmental protection.

Today, through the technologies of ecological PR, we need to protect the environment, develop measures to eliminate environmental problems, thereby preserving the health of the population, green nature, clean air for the next generation, and the world of fauna, which has its own place in life with each creature, and most importantly, for the next generation. It is necessary to make the masses feel the responsibility of bringing the climate, land, water, air and soil to their condition.

Conditions for compliance with environmental requirements by the authorities can be a form of extortion and a mask for corruption. However, many of them do not reach the newspaper page because the PR campaign organized by the government has other goals. In addition, politicians actively use environmental programs in the run-up to elections. Today, it is a "shame" to enter the international market without having an ecological image. However, PR campaigns have a number of side effects. Establishing full relations with the public is an independent direction of environmental PR activities, it is a dynamic process, a combination and interaction of a number of components, a specific model or system of managing the general public.

Ways to involve the public and individual citizens in the issues of environmental protection have already been developed by experts, which is having a positive effect. Environmental PR covers almost all activities that affect the perception of environmental problems by the general public and by each individual. Often, this includes speeches of experts from various organizations, their participation in local events related to environmental protection, meetings, conferences, and roundtable discussions where the most pressing problems of the current environmental situation in the country are discussed. In the following years, the involvement of the general public in environmental activities, such as nature conservation days and similar events, actions, became popular. The role of the mass media in determining the directions of interaction between environmental PR and social institutions is significant. Today, there are many newspaper and television materials, including environmental materials, that draw public attention to real environmental problems. As it becomes more and more polluted, people buy products under the label of "environmentally friendly product", so entrepreneurs and manufacturers, a number of foreign companies effectively use labels such as "not tested on animals", "does not destroy the ozone layer", "environmentally friendly" and so on.

In many cases, advertising of protective equipment and so-called "environmentally friendly" products (water, food, personal hygiene products, etc.), devices and indicators mislead or even outright deceive the consumer. At this point, it is very important for the journalist to make inquiries about these labels. Therefore, mass media and PR are interconnected and complement each other. After all, in the field of advertising, it is important to train specialists who can not only offer original ideas in product advertising, but also are responsible for the quality of the products they present. But is this really possible in real life? What can a

public relations person who drew a poster or came up with a targeted slogan, developed a competent PR campaign, say about the threats that can arise from low-quality food, harmful drugs, toxic cosmetics? The situation can be saved only by the work of citizens who take the responsibility of being personally responsible for everything and their lives, like the Little Prince in the book of Antoine Saint-Exupéry. It is carried out by the responsibility of a public relations specialist, an advertising employee, and a journalist. In recent years, "Don't harm nature!" slogan is widely used in environmental PR. Environmental PR was formed after the terrible disasters that occurred in the world due to the fault of mankind. For example, the accident on the Deepwater Horizon platform in the Gulf of Mexico on April 20, 2010. [9]

It is the largest marine disaster in the history of the oil industry. As a result of the explosion, 11 people died and 17 people were injured. On April 22nd, the platform sank and the free release of oil from the well caused one of the largest environmental disasters in human history. According to the US government, 4.9 million barrels (780,000 m<sup>3</sup>) of oil spilled into the sea, damaging the coasts of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida and Texas. As a result, more than 105,000 seabirds, 7,600 turtles and 160,000 baby turtles died. The number of Louisiana dolphins has been reduced by half. In an interview with The Guardian on May 14, Tony Hayward tries to downplay the scale of what happened: "The Gulf of Mexico is a big ocean. The volume of oil and dispersant we pour into it is very small compared to the total volume of water. As the situation developed, this hasty valuation was repeatedly cited in the media as evidence of the company's incompetence [10].

In an interview with Sky News on May 18, Tony Hayward continued to stress that the damage was not significant: "It's impossible to say, we'll do a detailed environmental assessment later, but what we're seeing right now is that the oil that's been spilled is not that big of an impact on the environment." showing"

Having reduced the scope of the risk, the company focused on efforts to eliminate the consequences of the accident. For three months in a row, he continued to broadcast live from the bottom of the sea, showing optimistic "shiny" advertisements. However, over time, attempts to stop the underwater fountain failed. As a result, it damaged the credibility of the company.

2010 was a time when social networks were developing in the US. 7 people from the company's public relations team worked with Internet users' comments about the events. About 60,000 comments were directed to the company's Facebook page and Twitter account through the Deepwater Horizon site. The company also hired Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide to handle social media. The official site of the company has been reworked, Google, Yahoo! and signed an agreement with Bing search engines. According to him, when keywords such as "oil spill", disaster, oil off the coast of Louisiana were entered, the search engines showed users the messages from the company's official website. The PR group was engaged in monitoring the materials published

in the official mass media. For example, any negative comment on CNN is immediately rebutted on the company's Twitter account.

Environmental crises often occur in Uzbekistan. But in this case, the PR specialists of the organization do not work enough, as in the USA. For example, on May 1, 2020, thousands of people were injured in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan as a result of the tragedy that occurred in the Sardoba reservoir. Hundreds of domestic animals, countless wild animals and plants died. About 90,000 people were evacuated from dangerous areas in Syrdarya, and more than 31,000 people were forced to leave their homes in Kazakhstan.

Initially, it was said that strong winds and heavy rain caused the dam wall to collapse. Every year in Uzbekistan, floods occur in one or another village or even in cities after rains in the spring. It's true that many people looked at this event with such importance in the beginning. But soon it became clear that the result was extremely sad: the flood was not caused by the wind that did not stop and the rain that did not fall, that 4 people died, 1 person went missing, and that the house itself was not left intact.

The reservoir "Sardoba" was built in the area where the central branch of the Southern Mirzachol canal flows, the construction works started in 2009 and ended in 2017. The purpose of its construction was to provide water for irrigating crops in Syrdarya and Jizzakh regions, and later to build a mini-hydroelectric power plant here. It was reported that the construction of the reservoir "Sardoba" with a water capacity of about 922 million cubic meters was carried out under the leadership of the enterprise "Uztemiryoqlurilishmontaj" under "Uzbekiston temir yollari" JSC. It is not known how much damage the reservoir, which has a water level of 28.8 meters and was built at the cost of 404 million US dollars [11].

Despite the sharp statements in the media and social networks regarding the tragedy, the enterprise "Uztemiryoqlurilishmontaj" under "Uzbekiston temir yollari" JSC, construction of the "Sardoba" reservoir, did not issue a single official statement. In the official statements issued by the government, at first it was pointed out that fish, then foxes and rodents, wind and rain were responsible for the overflowing of the reservoir. Of course, such ridiculous statements and concealment of the guilt of officials mired in corruption have reduced the public's trust in the government.

It should also be noted the industrial production of Uzbekistan, which carries a harmful environment. For example, in October 2021, the State Committee for Ecology and Ecology of the Republic of Uzbekistan revealed the discharge of industrial waste into the Zarafshan River [12]. Life-threatening substances were drained from well 267 of the Navoiyazot enterprise. Zarafshan in the territory of the Karmaninsky district, the excess of the maximum permissible concentrations of nitrogen nitrite - 60 times, ammonium nitrogen - 21 times, nitrogen nitrate - 2.6 times, copper ions - 2.1 times and chlorides - 1.3 times. This leads to massive infection of fish in the river. On October 28, 2021, the

prosecutor's office of the Navoi region opened a criminal case under part 1 of article 196 (environmental pollution) of the Criminal Code of Uzbekistan on the fact of the discharge of hazardous waste from the wells of the Navoiyazot enterprise into the Zarafshan River. Drainage of waste, which led to a massive infection of fish. But in response, the enterprise only stated that the wastewater discharged into the water is an environmentally friendly resource [13]. On February 3, 2023, the news website Podrobno.uz highlighted the problem of tree cutting in the Ugam-Chat National Park in Uzbekistan and the unwillingness of the authorities to change the situation. Stakeholders huge arrests for uncontrolled grazing of large numbers of livestock. As a result, the national park is dying [14]. Unfortunately, the Ministry of Ecology did not respond to media publications and negative blog posts. As a result, readers get the impression that the ministry is inactive. The official telegram channel <https://t.me/ekologuz> was the first to publish the news about the killing of a brown bear listed in the Red Book of Uzbekistan. The brown bear, wandering in one of the villages of the Chirakchi district of the Kashkadarya region, was planned to be immobilized and returned to nature. However, before the arrival of a team of veterinarians from the Tashkent Zoo, local authorities liquidated the animal "for the safety of the population" [15]. Unfortunately, although almost six months have passed since the bear was killed, the perpetrators have not been punished. This increased the negative attitude of the population towards the activities of the Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change.

## 4. Conclusions

In conclusion, it should be noted that when working with the media, PR specialists of the campaign to prevent environmental crises in Uzbekistan make the following mistakes:

- 1) the question of non-disclosure of the source of information;
- 2) lack of monitoring of media materials;
- 3) untimely response to media materials;
- 4) not being honest with the public.

All this leads to an increase in crisis situations, an increase in distrust in the activities of the company and organization.

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