

PR and the Media: Friends or Foes?

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Abstract

As the media landscape continues to change at a rapid pace, the demands on both media and PR people, as well as how they interact with each other is in constant flux. Many of us understand the delicate balance of the public relations/media relationship, but the vast majority of the population sees public relations and the media operating in tandem, not independently. This study aims to describe media practitioners' perceptions of public relations, to diagnose sources of tension as seen from the media perspective, and to suggest strategies public relations practitioners could implement to improve the relationship. In doing so, this paper attempts to provide theoretical foundations for claims about the influence of media on organisations in a public relations context. It does this through the perspective of strategic public relations' concerns about establishing and maintaining organizational legitimacy, a core determinant of organisation success in organizational theory. The purpose of this paper is to describe media perceptions of public relations and to explore the reasons behind their incestuous relationship with a view to identifying what public relations practitioners can do to improve the perceptions and build a better working relationship given the key nature of the public relations-media relationship.

Keywords: *p r, media, practitioners, organizational theory, relationship*

Introduction

For decades, academics and public relations pros have pondered questions around the definition of media and PR. They've examined how PR practitioners influence media frames and public interpretation. They've even looked at the encoding and decoding of meaning by the media, PR practitioners. Is it an eternal love-hate relationship, fuelled by mutual dependency and devoid of trust or is the relationship more symbiotic but also ambivalent if not hostile based on shared power? Are media and PR two sides of the same information/promotion coin facilitating the flow and mediation of information to the publics ? What do the relations between the PR industry and the media look like? Are they traditional media-source or pressure group relations from the PR side? What is the outcome of these relations and how do they affect journalism and news selection?

To deny that there's a whole lot of coziness going on between games media and PR is akin to sticking one's head into the sand. Much has been written about the media – public relations relationship. Cameron et al. (1997) reported at least 150 such studies in the US alone since 1960. They divided public relations source-reporter studies into two major categories. Mutual assessments examine media and PR perceptions of each other (Aronoff, 1975; Jeffers, 1977; Kopenhaver et al., 1984; Sallot, 1990). Studies of power dynamics, examine the bases of power in the relationship and how these produce variations in PR- media relationships (French and Raven, 1959; Robinson, 1977; Newsom, 1983; Kaniss, 1991; Berkowitz, 1993). Mutual assessment studies have shown that media have a low view of public relations source credibility,

of the status of public relations as a profession (especially compared to their view of their own value), and of the value of PR to society. They have shown that journalists commonly rate public relations practitioners lower in status than themselves whereas public relations practitioners tend to rate themselves closer to equal with journalists. Practitioners ignore interdisciplinarity at their peril, as is now evident in the widespread ignorance of PR and lobbying as legitimate professions that need to be understood and accommodated within the media ecology. Public relations now have been around for almost 100 years and would not be knocking on death's door anytime soon. Put simply, public relations are the practice of managing communication between a particular organization and its publics. Any given organization has a number of publics. Whether it is by communicating with prospects, customers, media, investors, the government, or even internally with employees, PR is something that businesses will always need.

Conversely, the media need public relations for story leads, background information and access to sources. Yet, this symbiotic relationship is problematic and when the media labels public relations as “spin doctoring”, “stonewalling” or frames it as a “battle” or a “disaster” or as “an insidious influence” these inflammatory metaphors denigrate the profession in the minds of the public. DeLorme and Fedler (2003, p. 99) has provided a historical framework for understanding why “journalists seem to treat public relations and its practitioners with contempt”. They identify six interrelated factors that contribute to the origins, persistence and contradictions surrounding the hostility. These factors are: the hunger for publicity which drives approaches to the media; the use of flattery, bribery and exaggeration; the use of stunts to attract attention; the seeking of free advertising; the pressure journalists experience due to poor working conditions; and the reluctant acknowledgement that journalists often end up in the public relations profession because of the attraction of higher pay and greater job opportunities. There are a number of contradictions inherent in the relationship. Journalists are generally reluctant to acknowledge the contribution public relations makes to their news content, but actually use significant amounts of public relations content (Turk, 1986; Zawawi, 2000; Lewis et al., 2008). Lewis et al. (2008, p. 27) argue that, “reliance on public relations and news agency copy has been promoted by the need for a relatively stable community of journalists to meet an expansive requirement for news in order to maintain newspapers' profitability in the context of declining circulations and revenues”. Journalists reject stunts as fake news but sub-editors like the photo opportunities they produce (Motion and Weaver, 2004). Journalists want information yet resent those who provide it to them. Journalists condemn public relations but many end up in the profession. Journalists complain about the quality of press releases and a recent study concluded that journalists are profoundly conflicted about the value of public relations “often holding two dissonant views and expressing them passionately” (Tilley and Hollings, 2008).

Rather like troubled marriage partners at an initial counseling session, both parties wanted the other to change. The points of tension ranged from differences in attitude, philosophical approach, and definitions of what constituted professional behaviour, and conflicting practical realities. Though Pincus et al. (1993) confirms a thawing in the relationship but there was evidence of change in the relationship towards greater collaboration and understanding. They concluded that changes were being introduced by the growing demand for information among readers (which is outstripping journalistic resources); and by public relations practitioners using more sophisticated targeting and more symmetrical relationships with media contacts. Public relations-media relationships also struggle over knowledge creation. “PR practitioners are in the business of creating particular knowledge and identity positions which

then influence the types of social relationships that are possible within and outside that discourse” (Weaver et al., 2006). Media practitioners are also in the business of creating knowledge and identity positions. Some media practitioners are very committed to their role as the fourth estate acting in the interests of society by providing access to information. As noted earlier some public relations practitioners are also committed to acting with a social conscience. Others are more committed to the commercial interests of their clients (Berkowitz, 1993). In an interesting twist however, (Motion and Weaver, 2004) found that public relations sources will be more successful at getting their material published in the media if their material is aligned with the commercial values of media organisations.

Media relations are the most common function of public relations and an important aspect of positive campaigns; consequently, it is generally considered to be essential to public relations (Supa, 2008). As White & Park (2010) explained, media relations efforts are the “tip of the public relations iceberg the most visible part” (Para. 28). Public relations campaigns often center on media relations and the interaction of practitioners and journalists, because the media can garner the most attention and create the largest effects for an organization. The core of the public relations profession is media relations, and most campaigns hinge on their success (Desiere & Sha, 2007). Media relations are vital to public relations because of the importance of the media in our modern society. Grabowski (1992) explains that “You must have a medium through which to deliver your message. And you must know how to employ that medium. It is the one essential element in any serious public relations program” (p. 37). Practitioners utilize journalists through all mediums to propagate their messages. Thoughtful planning and well-crafted tactics are crucial in media relations (Howard, 1988).

Public relations is a concept that includes the functions and practices from management and media to communication and psychology, and which draws on as many theories (Fawkes, 2008, p.5). Several researchers have attempted to describe the essence of public relations with a simple definition –a few with better success than others. However, the objective of the PR function is not to promote an organization for popularity or approval, but to ensure that the public has an honest and accurate view of organization (Fawkes, 2008, p.5). Media relations, on the other hand, is a form of public relations and defined as a specialist area of corporate communication (Cornelissen, 2011, pp. 143-162). Public relations, including the field of media relations, have become a significant and powerful industry especially during the recent years. The influence of the PR industry nowadays appears in various ways and places in the daily life. According to Larsson (2009, p. 132), today’s PR activities may involve anything from traditional press conferences and press releases to various more or less successful long-term agenda-setting related activities. Public relations, through its focus on media relations and relationship building, are an integral part of the civil society function. Civil society organizations need to reach various publics with information and to create links between like-minded groups. Public relations in general and media relations in particular, can help civil society organizations speak to and listen to relevant publics. Although media relations are only one of many important functions of public

relations, it is traditionally the one often associated with the practice. Media relations have a central role within the practice of public relations because the media are the “gatekeepers controlling the information that flows to other publics in a social system.” (James E. Grunig & Todd Hunt; 1984) The media relations role is a traditional role for practitioners because it functions to “maintain media contacts, place news releases, and figure out what the media will find newsworthy about their organizations (David M. Dozier, Larissa A. Grunig and James E , 1995)

Although most discussions of media relations are focused on pragmatic relationships with the media, some scholars and practitioners have questioned what public relations would be like without the media relations function? Grunig, arguing for a symmetrical communication relationship between organizations and publics, suggested that “the better public relations becomes, the less public relations practitioners will need the media.”(James E Grunig, 1990). Likewise, Hallahan suggested that new technology may actually cut the media out of the public relations oops (Kirk Hallahan, 1994). But unlike Grunig, Hallahan viewed this diminished relationship between organizations and the media as a negative outcome because “a loss of public reliance upon and confidence in the mass media could be devastating for public relations, journalism, and for society-at-large.”(Ibid, p 19). Indeed, veteran public relations practitioner E. W. Brody warned that as traditional broadcasting becomes “narrowcasting,” mediated messages will become less important.(E W Brody, 1989). Thus, in the future more focus on “interpersonal, behavioral and environmental communication becomes logical extensions of public relations practice.” (Ibid). These views are thought provoking, but still in the minority and media relations continues to be an important function of public relations practice and research.

One way to understand the variations of media relations in emerging democracies throughout the world is to examine nations in different stages of media development. Botan noted that international public relations has “an exciting future and there is a need to study and redefine our understanding of the social role of public relations.”(Carl Botan, 1993). Likewise, Taylor and Kent argued that to learn more about international public relations, it is important not only to explore the similarities between the practices of public relations in the United States and other nations, but also to examine the differences (Maureen Taylor and Michael L Kent, 1999). The same is true for understanding media development. Gaunt has reported that the news media in nations around the world can be quite different. (Philip Gaunt, 1992). Because training, personal experiences, social systems, and objectives will all influence journalists’ selection and processing of information, the best way to gauge media relations is to look at both sides of the media relationship—the organizations that seek to work with the media to communicate their positions and the media representatives who serve as gatekeepers of organizational messages

By any measure, the growth of the public relations profession over the past decade has been astonishing. Public relations firms not only proliferate but also reach a size and scope undreamed of in the 1980s. Membership in established and new professional societies and trade associations spirals upward. And, most important, virtually every kind of institution, for-profit and not-for-profit alike recognizes the need for dialogue with the groups of people who can and will influence its future. This growth, evolution and maturation of public relations is sure to continue. Elements are in place for impressive incremental growth and change in the next

century: the spread of democratic institutions around the world; the growing importance of communicating with internal as well as external publics; the veritable explosion of one-to-one communication and the technology to implement it; and the steady advance of the public relations body of knowledge, especially analysis of public awareness and change in attitudes and behavior.

Public relations plays an integral role in assisting the organisation to monitor and interpret its social environment and in advising management on establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships for long term organisational success (Cutlip et al., 2000). Notions of two way symmetrical communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig & Grunig, 1992) demonstrate a reciprocal relationship between organisations and environments. This differs to asymmetrical views of public relations in which organisations attempt to influence the environment (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The notion of reciprocal relationship and influence can be considered ecological (Everett, 2001) in terms of the mutual adaptation of organisations and environments within which organizational success is determined.

Studies of the relation between the PR industry and the news media show that PR actors and journalists often establish close relations in order to fulfill a mutual need (Davis 2002, see also, e.g., Allern 1997; Wien & Lund 2001). The situation is similar to what research has shown about the relation between the media and institutional representatives such as politicians and government leaders (see, e.g. Tunstall 1970; Gans 1979; Ericson et al. 1987; Cook 1989; Larsson 1998). However, new media have changed many of the dynamics of the relationship between public relations and traditional mass media (print and broadcast media). This trend is bound to continue over the next decades and has a direct bearing on the work of public relations practitioners. When new media technologies were just taking a foothold in the mid-1990s, Pavlik (1996) stated that “journalists, public relations practitioners, and advertisers all use new technology to increase their work efficiency and speed, as well as reduce cost” (p. 6). This relationship is ever more significant in the current media rich environment of the 21st century. Silverstone (1999) suggested, “we should be thinking about media as a process, as a process of mediation” (p. 13). Livingstone (2008) noted that in the context of the Internet, instead of “audiences,” researchers conceptualize and observe “users,” whereas “audience” research is reframed into studying and critiquing media literacy. Reber and Kim (2006) analyzed the use of web sites by activist groups for media relations activities and found that most activist groups they studied did not use the web sites effectively for building relationships with mass media persons. For example, although these web sites had interactive features for members of the public, their press rooms were not equally well-equipped to render the same, if not a higher, level of interactivity with journalists.

Public Relations and Media Relations

Don't Confuse Media Relations with Public Relations because connecting with the media is important but connecting with the public is vital! In the Internet era, this distinction is crucial. Even before the Internet era, there was a nuanced difference between public relations and media relations. Media relations specifically involve building strong relationships with writers, producers, reporters, and editors who are in a position to cover your company. A PR practitioner who is trusted and respected by those media folks can pick up the phone and always get a

hearing—and often get a story for their client. The definition of media relations is generally focused on three elements: the mass media, PR practitioners and journalists. Supa and Zoch (2009) define it as “the systematic (Kendall, 1996) planned (Lesley, 1991), purposeful (Miller, 1984) and mutually beneficially relationship (Guth and Marsh, 2003) between journalists in the mass media and the public relations practitioners. Its goal is to, establish trust and understanding and respect between the two groups (Lattimore, et. al, 2004.) Media relations is said to be centered around the symbiotic relationship between a PR practitioner and the media most often being described as a journalist, but also, reporter, editor, producer and writer. The majority of the terms used for ‘media’ are those which uphold a position of power and, ultimately, could be labeled as gatekeepers in the information supply chain. For example: “Media relations involve managing relationships with the media – all the writers, editors and producers who contribute to and control what appears in the print, broadcast and online media” (Tench and Yeomans, 2006: 312).

Although the practice of media relations has been coined and defined in many different ways and with many different corresponding media ‘players’, literature always concludes that media relations is about mutually beneficial relationships. There has been little academic literature which encompasses a wider definition of media, one which could define the broadened scope of what it means to be a publisher in the world of social media and subsequently, what that means for media relations practice. Literature suggests that there is a significant interest from PR practitioners in understanding how media relations are practiced, whether it is a strategic exploration of “why” or a tactical approach of “how to.” Supa and Zoch (2009) suggest that in media relations literature it would be easier to explain what not to do, as opposed to best methods of practice since there is not one definitive answer or a “one size fits all” strategy. Therefore, for the most effective media relations, practitioners should always keep abreast of their external environment, keep the public interest in mind at all times and, most importantly, keep the changing roles of the media and the media landscape under close observation.

Role of PR Professionals in the Media

The role of the PR professional has changed dramatically in the past two years and now it is not *quid pro quo*. Today, the role of the PR professional is to pitch a story in terms of how the news might suit the reader’s interests. Because mass media (including social media) offers a generic, overarching platform; PR professionals are searching for industry-specific niches within media and social networking avenues. As described by Hitchins (2008, p.206), the creation of news is one of the most important roles of the public relations industry. PR professionals offer stories and ideas for the media and thus make working in many cases easier for journalists, as well. Today, however, merely reacting to the media’s requests is seldom enough but PR professionals also have to adopt a proactive role with journalists to create media coverage (Hitchins, 2008, p. 217)

The lack of awareness of the role and function of a PR professional often leads journalists to make egregious errors of judgment in the crucial function of evaluating sources and information. The more professional and thorough the PR job the less suspecting/sceptical a journalist is of the information purveyed, essentially because he/she is unaware of what goes on

to produce the seemingly comprehensive and perfect 'handout'. Even though today's PR may involve any media relations activities from traditional press releases to various online activities, the effectiveness of all communication depends on understanding the factors influencing the message receivers', i.e. journalists', behavior and attitudes. Therefore, as Arora (2007, p. 383) argues, it is crucial to consider the different variables of a message that influence the receivers' attitudes and opinions. This involves the concept of framing, which may be defined as the study of selection and importance of certain aspects of messages by exploring images, stereotypes, metaphors, actors and messages (Matthes, 2009, p. 349).

Traditional and social media both have roles in public relations. It's important to understand those roles and learn how to use them in your public relations efforts. The issue of framing and its implications may be considered important in all communication and persuasion. Therefore, message framing is also an important topic affecting the relationship between PR professionals and journalists. For social media, for instance, the message has to be framed differently from stage one. As Fernando (2011, p. 12) argues, for social media the message has to be multimedia-rich and conversational, and the content has to be modified for different audiences. Thereby, in order to have an effect on journalists and to get them write a news story, PR professionals have to frame their messages in a way most effective for each case in question. However, several researchers agree on the fact that the main focus of public relations should not be in framing a shiny portrait of an organization at any cost. Instead, it is widely agreed that providing journalists with honest, reliable and quotable information is likely to result in lucrative relations (Gurton, 1998, p. 155).

Because of their role in generating media coverage, PR professionals are sometimes thought of as disingenuous, deceitful, hucksterish flacks trying simultaneously to pull the wool over the eyes of their clients and the public at large. That's inaccurate. Most journalists; however, believe that they have the responsibility to communicate the right information, which is why some of them resist any efforts of those who seek to affect them. As Jempson (2005, p. 268) points out, these perceptions represent the prejudiced views that some journalists still throw at the public relations industry. Some journalists still dislike PR professionals but realize that they need them (Gurton, 1998, p. 183). Even though many of the previous communication studies have indicated that journalists prefer information from sources whom they perceive as having no obvious self-serving economic purpose, public relations materials have still been considered offering more utility for journalists than any other sources of information (Curtin & Rhodenbaugh pp.179-180). Thereby, if an open and trusting relationship between journalists and PR professionals can be achieved, it is likely to be valuable and productive for both parties.

Difference between Media and Public Relations

There is little doubt as to why there is confusion between the two. Any more, it's likely that most organizations that practice one also practice the other. The bottom line in any media relations or public relations campaign is creating effective compelling stories. For a campaign to work it's important to define the story, develop written material that tells that story, understand the target market, and find the media that communicates with that market and present that story in a compelling manner that meets the media's needs. Though there may not be any official definition

for either one of these fields, there are some generally accepted differences between media and public relations. The jobs are so similar that many firms may hire one individual to fill both roles, depending on the size of the company. These media and public relations professionals help the company by not only dealing with the news media, but also projecting a consistent image of the company to the public in a way that is consistent with the desires of the company.

The main difference between media and public relations is that the term media relations are more limited. While public relations may include dealing with the media to some degree, media relations are a specialty. Therefore, those in strictly media relations positions will spend their time fielding calls from the media, identifying and "spinning" relevant news items, as well as writing press releases in an effort to keep the media informed about what is happening at the company. Depending on the desire of the company for free publicity, this could be a very busy position.

In fact, the demands of the media can be such a specialized field that some companies focus exclusively on this type of work. These media relations companies work with clients to get their names out and generate positive publicity. If a crisis or negative event does hit the company, these companies can also help by providing the media with a place to go where they know they can find the correct information. Thus, it helps the client by providing a centralized source that is not contradictory.

A public relations professional will do more than just deal with the media. In fact, a public relations person may not deal with media at all if the company decides to split its media and public relations segments into separate entities. In such a case, a public relations person may be responsible for outreach and serve as a liaison at special events, help plan those events, and even write a company newsletter so that employees can stay informed about what is happening.

No matter how the line is drawn between media and public relations, these jobs require a great deal of skill in mass communication. Professionals in these positions often must anticipate what information will be in demand, and know how to access it quickly. Further, they must do so in a way that does not make the company look bad. Most individuals in these fields hold at least a Bachelor's degree in communications or journalism. Some likely have experience working in the journalism field, either in print or broadcast media.

The Relationship between Organizations and the Media

The relationship between media and the organizations they cover has changed dramatically in the last few decades, and has witnessed a huge expansion of news coverage focusing on different types of organizations and their activities. In parallel, organizations have increased their investment in PR and other media oriented forms of communication. The expansion and increased importance of the media and its working practices and preferences has become an institutional force, alongside other societal developments such as globalization, marketization, individualization and scientification. The media has become central for shaping the environment in which organizations operate. This complex relationship remains relatively under-researched, especially with respect to the complexity and diversity of interests permeating contemporary business organizations. The main argument in this book relates to the notion of mediatization of contemporary organizations - that is to say the media must be understood not only as important

in covering and scrutinizing individual organizations, industry or markets but also as a key influence on the actions of organizations, thereby shaping the entire landscape in which the organizations operate. What such a perspective provides is the accentuation of the interplay between organizations and different parts of the society as embedded in the media and its logic.

The role of media relations remains dominant in the public relations text book tradition (Cutlip et al., 2000; Johnston & Zawawi, 2003; Newsom et al., 2000; Seitel, 2001; Wilson, 1997) at the same time as the emphasis on activities such as strategic management advice, issues, and crisis management has become more important within the domain of public relations. Mass media is conceptualised as a communication channel for organisational use in achieving goals of publicity, social action, impression management, and for influencing public opinion. These asymmetrical communication activities made possible through the use of mass media can be useful for attempts to influence the social environment but do not address the relationship between organisations and the media within adjustment and adaptation perspectives of strategic public relations (Cutlip et al., 2000; Grunig & Grunig, 1992)

Relationship between PR and Organisational Theory

Public relations research suffers from a lack of theoretical grounding. Researchers and teachers of public relations have instead focused on the professional development of the field. While this professional focus has paid dividends for practitioners of public relations, it has had a stifling effect on public relations research and theory building. For the last three decades, researchers have demonstrated increased interest in the public perceptions of organizations, including such concepts as credibility, reputation, identity, and image. One problem for the research in this area is that many, if not all of these concepts have, at one time or another, been treated synonymously. Of course there are similarities among the concepts, and there are interdependencies as well. However, there are key differences between the concepts that must be understood if research and theory in the area is to move forward. Recently, Grunig and Hung (2002) and other public relations scholars have identified relationships as the critical value that public relations produces for an organization whereas practicing professionals have embraced reputation as the critical concept showing the value of the communication function. Public relations scholars argue that neither a single brand image nor a composite reputation image accounts for differences in the nature and strength of relationships among various stakeholder groups. Instead, the marketing-oriented reputation index assumes that reputation indicators for marketing publics (customers, suppliers, shareholders, etc.) somehow apply as well to all other stakeholders.

The interest in organizational, or corporate credibility has increased dramatically in recent years because of exposed unethical practices, organizational crises, and the increased role of the media as organizational watchdog. Corporate credibility, “the perceived expertise and trustworthiness of the firm,” is defined as “the extent to which consumers feel that the firm has the knowledge or ability to fulfill its claims and whether the firm can be trusted to tell the truth or not” (Newell & Goldsmith, 1997, p. 235). Grunig and Hung (2002) see the value of a strong

organizational reputation not as a direct correlate with financial performance but, instead, more indirectly through the quality of the relationships that organizations maintain with different publics or stakeholder groups. This interpretation is in line with a now well-developed line of public relations scholarship positing that public relations principally the management of relationships between organizations and publics. (Bruning and Ledingham, 1999; Hon and Grunig, 1999) Hon and Grunig's (1999) normative theory of organization-public relations (OPR) holds that the quality of the relationships between organizations and their stakeholders can be envisioned along a continuum of exchange and communal relationships with the latter almost always being the preferred or normative condition. Communal relationships, these theorists believe, are bottom-up ones between organizations and constituencies whereas exchange relationships are more top-down beginning and ending with organizational goals and business strategies. In communal relationships, both parties provide benefits to the other because they are concerned for the welfare of the other or accept their mutual interdependence. Public relations practitioners must, say Hon and Grunig (1999), convince management that it also needs communal relations with publics such as employees, the community opinion leaders, government regulators, media, volunteers, donors as well as exchange relationships with paying customers, suppliers, and shareholders.

Organization effectiveness depends on the interaction with the environment. No organization can isolate itself from the environment because it forms an integral part of the system. Theoretically, public relations embraced the notion of the organisational- environmental nexus as a foundation for the discipline. Seminal work by Cutlip, Centre, and Broom (2000) in positioning the theoretical foundations of public relations in an ecological perspective has produced a firm strand of inquiry for the discipline drawing on organisational theory (Grunig & White, 1992). Resource dependency and contingency theories have provided a foundation for important work by Grunig and his colleagues (Grunig, 1992; Grunig & White, 1992; Grunig, Grunig, & Ehling, 1992) in theorising the emerging face of public relations in a strategic context since the 1970s. Reflecting the growing need for organisations to understand, interpret, and strategise options for dealing with an increasingly demanding environment, the need for public relations professionals to be more than publicists and flak merchants also grew. This provided an important step for positioning the public relations function as a role concerned with environmental scanning and organizational adjustment and adaptation (Grunig, 1992), moving it away from conceptualisations as a persuasive, corporate journalistic role (Everett, 2001). However, while the public relations literature suggests that the management function of public relations assists the organisation in adjusting and adapting to ensure fit with the social environment (Baskin et al., 1997; Cutlip et al., 2000; Grunig, 1992; Wilcox et al., 1998), the role of media in this process is not explicit. The link between media and organizational attempts to adjust the environment are prevalent in the asymmetrical models, but there is an absence of discussion of the influence of media on organisations in adjusting to the environment. This is problematic when media is considered an important environmental influence in organisational theory.

During recent years, organizational ecology and the institutional approach to organization (DiMaggio & Powell 1983, Meyer & Rowan 1977, Meyer Scott 1983, Scott 1987a, Zucker 1987) have been two of the more actively researched areas. Whereas they were initially seen as separate theoretical views, a significant recent trend suggests convergence of these ideas, which may be viewed as an exciting research development in organization theory. Ecological perspectives in organisational theory provide a framework for considering the impact of media on organisations. The common focus of these theories is in considering the impact of environments on organisations. They set out to explain the previously unaddressed issues arising from the spate of organisational theories that viewed organisations as tools for manager's control (Hannan & Freeman, 1989). Despite the contingency era's recognition of the relationship between organization and environment, the focus remained on organisational determination over environment. Ecological perspectives move the focus of organisational studies away from short term adjustment and adaptation, to a paradigm of longer term selection and organisational survival (Hannan & Freeman, 1989; Meyer & Scott, 1992b). For public relations practitioners seeking to position the discipline as a strategic management function that would assist in long term organisational success, this provides a perspective for furthering conceptualisations of public relations activity. One way of incorporating these theories into views on public relations is through a central construct of ecological perspectives-legitimacy

Journalists and Public Relations Practitioners Relationship

The relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners has been hotly debated in the field of communication studies. Journalists and public relations people have always had an ambivalent relationship. Simply put, there is mutual dependence, but also mutual caution and that doesn't lead to a trusting atmosphere. 'PRs' are there to block their way to the important people who they really want to talk to. Furthermore, 'PRs' don't really tell the whole truth, they are always out to 'spin' a story to the advantage of their organisation. Consequently if the journalist takes them at their word and writes a story based on the 'PRs' material which turns out to be less than the whole truth, then it's they, the journalist, who feels let down and a fool. Public Relations people on the other hand feel that the press always treats them with suspicion. Public relations staff may try their utmost to provide full information and represent their organisation's case honestly as they see it. They then are profoundly disappointed when the copy they see appears to have twisted what they have said and their openness has been 'used against them.' The result can be an unhelpful circle of insult and withdrawal of co-operation that does not serve either profession or the public well. For example, the Guardian (quoted in Farish 1998) has called public relations the 'latrine of parasitic information' and there are regular pokes at public relations people by the press who appear to delight in trivialising the profession. On the other hand, it is well known that offending journalists can be banned from political press briefings or from access to major celebrities if they don't 'play by the rules' being set by the politicians or the celebrity PR person.

Because the media have enormous power to influence public opinion, it behooves PR professionals to understand how the media operate in different societies if they are to establish a strong working relationship with the media of different regions. Michael Ryan and David L. Martinson (1988) defined this relation in terms of a love/hate type ("love-hate relation"), stating that this configuration had existed ever since the beginnings of PR practice. On the one hand, journalists assign the role of source to PR practitioners, a source that they most frequently do not

check (as regulations of work with traditional sources in information providing journalism require). On the other hand, they do not trust PR practitioners because they think of them as being prone to introducing self-promotion elements inside the messages. The journalists' advantage lies in the fact that they may check the information from parallel sources, but when such sources are not available they entirely depend on PR practitioners. Public Relations practitioners accept the role of information distributors, but at the same time they accuse journalists of publishing incomplete information most frequently, and according to subjective criteria. However, PR practitioners are at one advantage: the competition between press enterprises increases the importance of the news taken over from a press institution; the other ones would take it over so as not to seem less informed. This mechanism offers manifold possibilities of placing the messages and provides certain strategic advantages to PR practitioners. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering that, under the avalanche of messages sent from the numerous existing press offices, the mass media organizations may ignore much of the information disseminated by the PR-ists.

It is a management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organisation with the public interest, and plans and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance. The globalization, technology, and organizational structure have lent increasing importance to the management function of public relations. Practitioners are no longer mere technicians who shape and transmit messages from their organization. They are professionals who shape the relationships an organization has with its various constituencies. Public relations practitioners must possess the communications expertise and social sensitivity necessary to enable organization to adapt to the changing environment. Media relations work or gaining support for your organization through the media is the core component of public relations practice. In fact, the relative importance of media relations works increases because business demands instant communication on a worldwide basis. One major problem that public relations practitioners face is journalists have mixed feelings toward public relations practitioners. Journalists often suspect practitioners of manipulation while depending on them for information. In fact, journalist often see public relations practitioners as spin doctors and see themselves as gatekeepers (Smith, 2008). Public relations practitioners view journalists as an audience, as a medium through which to reach the broader public, and as gatekeepers representing and responding to the publics need to know.

A basic grasp of media relations work begins with understanding the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners. Journalists who gather and organize information for the media tend to take their responsibilities to society and the story's subject matter very seriously. They conceive of themselves as the public's eyes and ears, being watchdogs over public institutions doing the public's business. They see their jobs as seeking the truth, putting it in perspective, and publishing it so that people can conduct their affairs knowledgeably. To the journalist, a story is a transient element in the ongoing flow of information, whereas the public relations practitioner wants the story to make a lasting impression and to be seen in a positive light. The journalist is more interested in news reports that are accurate, fair, and balanced regardless of whether the organization is seen in a negative or positive light.

Reporters resent anything and anyone they perceive as standing between them and the facts. Anyone who seeks to keep a secret is regarded with deep suspicion. Organizations of all

types invite media scrutiny when they conduct themselves in ways considered less than open. Journalists collectively maintain that they not only have the responsibility to provide information to the public, but also provide feedback from society at large to the administrators of public institutions. As society becomes more complex and institutions have greater impacts on private lives, journalists hold that more thorough reporting and investigating provides necessary checks on possible business, governmental, and organizations' excesses at the expense of the larger society.

Journalists sometimes have difficulty getting the information they need. They claim that highly placed news sources are generally overly insulated, secretive, and sensitive, recognizing neither the public's right to know nor the value of the media's role in exposing questionable practices. Another reason is that most reporters are relatively new to their job assignments that change as often as every 18 months. Public relations practitioners can and do provide them issue background information so the reporters can learn how to ask and locate the right information and to trace the issue's history in a community. Still, working journalists echo some of the complaints registered against them by the institutions they cover. Reporters recognize that they frequently have insufficient education and experience to adequately cover complex issues and institutions. They are frustrated by the lack of time, space, and staff and profit-making requirements needed to do their jobs thoroughly. Even so, public relations practitioners and others who deal with journalists must remember that when reporters ask "nasty" questions, it is not necessarily because they are antagonistic or ignorant; they are just doing what good reporters are supposed to do.

From the public relations practitioner's perspective, the journalist is at once an audience, a medium through which to reach the larger public, and a gatekeeper representing and responding to the public's need to know. Practitioners know that they must facilitate the work of journalists if they expect their organizations to get covered. Because of this dependency, practitioners' selection and presentation of information often conforms more to journalistic standards than to the desires of their superiors in their own organizations. In a sense, both the journalist and the practitioner, in dealing with each other, are caught between the demands of the organizations they represent and the demands of the opposite party. In short, the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists is one of mutual dependency. Public relations practitioners, as boundary spanners, are often caught in the middle between journalistic and other institutions, trying to explain each other to the other. Marketing Weekly News states that many public relations practitioners have been journalists at some point in their career (Scott Public Relations, 2010).

Although journalists like to picture themselves as reluctant to use public relations information, economic considerations force them to do otherwise (Roach, 2009). A news staff capable of ferreting information from every significant organization in a city without the assistance of representatives for those organizations would be prohibitively expensive. Through the efforts of public relations practitioners, the media receive a constant flow of free information. Facts that journalists might not have acquired otherwise become available in packaged form. The reporter or editor, as already noted, can then decide what is newsworthy. Indeed, numerous studies have placed public relations' contribution to total news coverage. In one sense, public

relations practitioners makes the journalist's job much easier, saving time and effort and providing information that might otherwise be unavailable.

There's another side to this issue as well. People criticize the process by which public relations practitioners subsidize media costs and reporters' time by providing new releases and other information to make reporters' jobs easier. The disservice, these critics say, is that many organizations, including social movements, nonprofits, and disadvantaged groups, lack the resources to provide these subsidies. As a result, the media may perpetuate information inequalities in society.

Although much may be said about the art and craft of preparing materials for media consumption, perhaps nothing is so important to successful publicity as the relationships established between public relations practitioners and journalists. When public relations practitioners take the time and make the effort to establish good personal relations with journalist, they are much more likely to attract positive news coverage for their organizations. Good public relations begin with good personal relations. As well, mutual dependency tends to increase when public relations practitioners deal with specialized reporters who cover their industry, when the issues are more complex, and when the reporter is given enough time and space to thoroughly cover the story.

As in all walks in life, it is good for public relations practitioners to get to know the people they work with. Sometimes the direct approach is effective. Call a journalist with whom you know will be working. Introduce yourself. Suggest lunch or coffee. Another approach is to hand-deliver a news release to provide an opportunity for a brief introduction and meeting. Other journalist may not want to be directly approached. With them, an indirect approach is required. Belonging to the local press club, attending meetings of the Society for Professional Journalists, or becoming involved in community activities in which journalists are also involved are ways of getting to know media counterparts. Indeed, journalists are often hired for publicity jobs not only for their writing skills but also for their network of media contacts. Try to get to know your assignment editors.

Once relationships are established, protect and cherish them. Do not squander valuable relationships by using them for small favors or one-shot story placements. Do not ruin a relationship by expecting a reporter to always do what you want. Take no for an answer. Do not insult your relationship with inappropriate gifts because journalists, like other professionals, are sensitive to even the appearance of conflicts of interest. Cultivate your relationships with journalistic colleagues by giving good service. Provide sufficient and timely information, stories, and pictures, when and how they are wanted. Be on-call 24-hours a day to response to reporters' needs and questions. Do not think e-mail contact is an adequate substitute for one-on-one communication with journalists. Nothing will destroy a relationship faster or more completely than an affront to the truth. Accuracy, integrity, openness, and completeness are basis for trust bestowed by journalists. Once trust is broken, it can rarely be regained.

Finally, to ensure good relations with journalist, the practitioner should behave in a professional way. Live up to expectations. Don't play favorites among media. Return phone calls promptly and with respect to deadlines. Don't beg for favors, special coverage, or removal of unfavorable

publicity. If you follow all of these suggestions, “journalists will not treat public relations practitioners like cousins who have fallen from grace (Oakham & Kirby, 2008).”

In closing, media relations and publicity work are essential ingredients of public relations practice. In recent years the whole framework for media relations work has changed based on the growth and multiple uses of the Internet, global communication demands, and proliferating communication channels. The relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners is a difficult one. If practitioners understand the media and the reporter’s role, however, positive relationships can be developed that are beneficial to all.

Mass Media and the Images of Nations

Images of nations have a strong influence on the flow of international capital. The relationship between news media and images of nations is not well researched, for this very reason the following discussion cannot claim to be complete. The main reason for this gap in research can be seen in the often highly sophisticated methods of states to influence world opinion (Kunczik 1997). Images of certain nations, whether right or wrong, seem to be formed, fundamentally, through a very complex communication process involving varied information sources. Walter Lippmann (1922, 181) wrote in *Public Opinion*: “Man . . . is learning to see with his mind vast portions of the world that he could never see, touch, smell, hear, or remember. Gradually he makes for himself a trustworthy picture inside his head of the world beyond his reach.”

For the nation-state, PR means the planned and continuous distribution of interest-bound information aimed (mostly) at improving the country's image abroad. So, PR for the nation-state comprises persuasive communicative acts, directed at a foreign audience. A famous comment by Lippmann (1922, 81) applies also to the changeability of images: “For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see.” In other words, from the wealth of events and information available, we select what conforms to the already existing image. But Wolfgang Donsbach (1991) published a study on the selective perception of newspaper readers that clearly confirms that the selection rule applies only when positive information is offered; when negative information is offered, both supporters and opponents of a certain position behave almost the same: They heed it. The protective shield of selective perception works against information that might result in a positive change of opinion, but not against information that might produce a negative change of opinion.

Mass media reporting of foreign affairs very often governs what kind of image of a country or a culture predominates. Day-topical media concentrate on short-lived events relevant to a given circle of recipients making locally or ethnocentrically oriented news choices of events, publishable with minimum delay. The widespread neglect of ongoing social processes can be explained by an analogy to perception theory. Such processes occur slowly and almost unnoticeably, functioning as part of the background. They attain attention value only when they turn into unusual events (e.g., hunger to mass dying, tensions between nations to war, social tensions to revolutions or revolts) or when everyday events are summarized in such things as annual reports. The unusual, the deviation from the norm, has particular news value.

International news is selected by criteria similar to those used for national news or local news:

Higher ranking (superpowers) or geographically and/or culturally close states are most likely to be reported on. Economic, alliance, and ideological relations also generate more intensive coverage of another country. Selection is done by universally valid criteria, with particular emphasis on the unusual: disasters, unrest, coups, and so forth. Regionalism is particularly pronounced in all media systems. But negativism (civil war, natural disasters, debt crisis, human rights violations, electoral frauds, etc.) often remains the only important news factor dominating the coverage countries.

Given the structural conditions of the international flow of news, countries with economic and/or political interests in having a positive image in a certain region, including those that are at a disadvantage from the outset because of the standard processes of gathering and selecting information, must mount publicity campaigns.⁹ Although by definition, PR for states is always interest-bound communication, it can, however, offset communication deficits due to the structures of news flow. This form of PR for states, meant primarily to compensate for structural communication deficits, aims mainly to adapt the image to news values by trying to influence mass media reporting. Structural international PR aims at correcting the “false” images previously created by the mass media. Manipulative PR, on the other hand, tries to create a positive image that, in most cases, does not reflect reality, including lying and disinformation.

Several studies have endorsed/proved the power of media that audience communicate in the language used by the channel, they mostly follow the media agenda, respond according to the media reports, and even contemplate on the patterns recommended to them by the media contents. It can be inferred that the media slowly and steadily develop as a force to reckon within the business of shaping, reshaping, building or distorting the images of the nations, communities, religion, caste, colour, creed and different ethnic groups (Mughees-ud-Din, 1997: 1). Recent technological advancement further crystallized the notion wherein millions of people are looking at the world events through the prism of media (Jim & Michael, 1981: 19).

Larson and Rivenburgh (1991) recognized the potency of mass media by linking media coverage with the international images of nations. The media do play a powerful role in influencing how individual countries are perceived globally. Typically, developing nations are stereotyped positively by most media, whereas developing countries are generally negatively portrayed. The findings by Larson and Rivenburgh (1991) are of particular relevance to international public relations practitioners who are often called on by developing countries to change the way they are perceived by the public of developed nations.

Kunczik concluded that many developing countries often view fighting negative media stereotyping as a losing battle, one that they often choose not to wage primarily due to a lack of resources. But other developing nations recognize the need to be heard in the developed world as part of their public diplomacy because they desperately need foreign aid from developed countries and loans from world bodies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank, which requires support from key developed countries such as the United States. Because of the powerful effects that the media have in shaping public opinion nationally and internationally, public relations professionals have given primacy to media relations. To conduct effective media relations, international public relations practitioners need to understand the

nature of media environment in a particular country. Only then can they develop strategies for conducting effective media relations suitable to that environment.

Sriramesh (1999) proposed a framework of three factors (media control, media outreach, and media access) that should help public relations professionals design media relations strategies that are appropriate to different media environments. Adhering to this framework may make it easier for international public relations professionals to maintain effective channels of communication between their client organizations and relevant media around the world. Furthermore, the framework should help researchers study the nexus between the media and effective public relations practices in different countries.

Media Control

As the name suggests, media control refers to the level of editorial freedom in a particular media system. Media control should not be confused with media ownership because in many societies privately owned media are controlled tightly either overt government regulation or covert political manoeuvring. In capitalistic political economies media market forces determine control for the most part. As is often said, a free press is essential for a free society. More broadly, the way the media and communication -- newspapers, magazines, television, radio, the arts, etc. -- is owned, produced and controlled has pervasive consequences for the character of public debate, the attitudes people form towards social issues and social conflicts, and ultimately the possibilities for various kinds of social change to occur in a democracy. The problem of how the mass media is controlled, therefore, is a fundamental problem for a democratic society.

Several empirical studies provide support for the notion that control of the media matters for media content as well as other outcomes. In developed democracies, it is the capitalistic entrepreneur who invests in the media, sustaining media operations principally through sale of advertisements and relying, to a relatively smaller extent, on revenue from subscriptions. There is minimal direct or indirect fiduciary relationship between the government and media organizations in capitalistic systems. The need to sell news as a commodity is naturally strong in such an environment, leading to interesting choices in coverage.

On the contrary, in developing countries, one can often discern media ownership in the hands of political interests as well as the elites of the society. Maintaining the status quo is often paramount for these media moghuls as an incentive to influence media content. The few theocracies of the world provide us examples of the impact of religious interests on media organizations and media content. In most developing countries, the government typically owns the electronic media and often permits private entrepreneurs to own print media.

Debates over the relative importance of ownership and control have traditionally been framed in terms of the significance of a separation between ownership of, and management roles within, media companies to prevent, in Mobbs' (2002) phrase: 'Undue influence over, or bias in, content'. It is important to recognize that media ownership does not necessarily result in media control. In many developing countries, even though the media may be overtly owned by private

interests, they are strictly monitored and controlled through overt and covert means by political or government forces. Sussman (1999) reported that the Freedom House survey had found that “the muzzling of journalists was increasingly accomplished by more subtle, legalistic methods than through violence or outright repression” (p. 1). Government advertisements are a principal method for political rulers to maintain control over media content. Because advertising income forms the bulk of revenue (and, therefore, the basic means of survival) for a large section of private media in many developing countries, this subtle method of control is often very effective. Controlling the supply of the means of production such as newsprint (often imported by the government and sold to media organizations at subsidized costs) is another effective way for governments to maintain their control over privately owned mass media. It is also not uncommon for political rulers of developing nations to own their own media outlets (usually print media) and use them for controlling public opinion with the sole purpose of maintaining the status quo.

Without editorial freedom we cannot displace oligarchy, oligopoly, and restore effective democracy. Today's concentration of media ownership and editorial power brings into sharp focus not only the immense responsibility, but also the freedom and estate of editors - in particular those with audiences in the millions, or even billions. Yet it is major-media owners, and their hand-picked editors, who decide what the vast majority see, hear, and read. Media owners and their editors have become the unelected, and unregulated, keepers of the public trust and molders of the public mind. Editorial freedom is directly proportional to the level of economic development of a country. It is the lack of resources and infrastructure that have limited editorial freedom in developing nations. In their study of the relationship between press freedom and social development in 134 nations, Weaver, Buddenbaum, and Fair (1985) concluded that “the stronger the media are economically, the less likely the government is to control these media” (p. 113). The reality is that, in most developing countries, economic independence is a mirage for most media outlets, which also results in various limitations on editorial freedom. As discussed in chapter 20, the proposal for a New World Information Order from developing countries was derailed primarily on the basis of media economics and concomitant issues pertaining to editorial freedom.

Media Outreach

Media outreach is one of the most important things you will do to support your own public relations program. While PR encompasses many areas (public speaking, social media, community relations, and crisis communications, to name a few), one of the most significant—and the most well known to any layman—is media outreach, also known as pitching. The mass media – newspapers, magazines, radio stations, TV channels – remains the principal channel of communication to reach the largest number of people, or target audiences. And now increasingly online media – websites, blogs, Face book, Twitter and still others – is being added to the media array that PR utilizes for disseminating key messaging and creating widespread public awareness; primary PR objectives for any brand or company. Pitching is critical to the success of a PR campaign; after all, you are trying to garner media coverage to reach your target audience, and a prosperous media outreach campaign begins with pitching the right contact, not just calling

or emailing at random. Trust me when I say this: the quickest way to irritate any reporter and to potentially blackball yourself from any future coverage is to pitch the wrong contact. It doesn't have to be something as blatantly incorrect as sending a sports reporter a press release on the weather; even simply sending the small business editor a story on international business can lead you astray and irritate people. So before you pitch, you need to take the time to pinpoint the correct contacts by building a media list, which will soon become your new best friend.

The rules of Public Relations have changed, you need to build a compelling story and share it with both traditional and digital media to influence your audience, change options and make an impact on the community. However, it is critical for international public relations professionals to note that, despite the perceived power of the media, these purveyors of information may not provide an effective means for wide dissemination of organizational messages in every country. In fact, in most developing countries, media reach a fairly homogeneous, relatively small segment of the total population because of two principal factors: illiteracy and poverty. A country's high rate of illiteracy seriously inhibits the use of the print media. Consequently, media relations in such environments will be limited in scope to specific groups of urban, educated, fairly affluent, middle-class citizens (the elites of the society). To reach the larger populace effectively, the international public relations consultant will have to think of other media that reach out to these untapped publics. In larger developing nations, the lack of infrastructure constrains timely distribution of print media messages to far-flung places.

Dealing successfully with the news media in the 21st century is more complex and more challenging than it has ever been. When illiteracy hinders the dispersion of information through the print media, the next logical alternative for the international public relations professional would be to use electronic media. However, television sets and radios often prove too expensive for a large section of citizens who have limited resources. Inadequate infrastructure, such as lack of rural electrification, also contributes to limiting access to the electronic media for even wealthier rural residents. Therefore, the efficacy of electronic media for conducting public information or other public relations campaigns is open to question. International public relations professionals must recognize that regardless of the sophistication of the media relations they may practice, the efficacy of these efforts is limited to the segment of the population that the media of a country can reach. However, there are signs of hope for the international public relations practitioner who has to operate in a developing country that has these impediments. Lee (1994) examined the development of mass media in the People's Republic of China since 1949 and found that the country's spurt in economic growth in the 1980s resulted in a sudden increase in television ownership. The author concluded that there seems to be a symbiotic relationship between economic growth and television ownership. He speculated that whereas economic growth has led to increased television ownership, television may also have helped spur economic growth by having unplanned effects such as the creation of demand for products and services, acceleration of electrification in rural areas, and the creation of a diversion keeping people away from "the delicate problems of government and politics" (p. 34).

When local conditions limit the use of Western-style media such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines, what options do international public relations practitioners have in their effort to reach a wider audience in developing societies? In India, for example, many public information campaigns have used folk media such as docudramas, dances, skits, and plays in

rural areas (Sriramesh, 1992). A few multinational companies such as makers of toothpaste have used Indian folk media to publicize their products in rural regions with some efficacy. Similar strategies could be used for effective communication with various publics in traditional cultures in other parts of the world as well.

Pratt and Manheim (1988) critiqued the urban bias that is so characteristic of public communication in most of Africa and other developing regions of the world and called for new communication strategies that empower large, neglected segments of the populace. The authors presented a framework of six integrated agendas for conducting communication campaigns that include the use of traditional, indigenous media. However, it is critical that these traditional media be used judiciously. West and Fair (1993) studied the use of modern, popular, and traditional media in Africa and highlighted the pitfalls of the improper use of indigenous African media (or traditional media) for developmental activities.

Media Access

Although media access and coverage are commonly used interchangeably, Ericson et al. (1989) distinguished access from coverage. By access, they meant “the news space, time, and context to reasonably represent the authority of their office,” whereas coverage entailed “some news space and time but not the context for favourable representations” (p. 5). Access can be considered to have three dimensions—prominence, dominance, and valence. Prominence is an assessment of the quantity of coverage (Sheafer, 2001; Stempel & Culbertson, 1984). Dominance is an assessment of “the stature with which one is viewed by the press as an important source or verifier of information” (Stempel & Culbertson, 1984, p. 676). Finally, valence is an evaluation of how positive or negative the coverage is. Gaining media access is a daunting task with so many organizations vying for publicity from media outlets. The Web is merely the latest medium requiring accessibility. Work has gone on for generations on improving the accessibility of other media of communication and of the physical world. The flip side of media outreach is media access. Whereas media outreach refers to the extent of media saturation in a society, media access denotes the extent to which the various segments of a society can approach the media to disseminate messages they deem important. It is imprudent to assume that public access to the media remains constant across societies. As journalists are arbiters of fate, they should expect that those on the receiving end of their opinions or ideals be cautious. There’s no reason to accept every invitation or grant all media requests. This is not an issue of Freedom of the Press; they can write whatever they want, but no one is obligated to open their arms in welcome.

Organizations (or business/politicians, etc.) offer access to media with the hope, and perhaps even the expectation that media will present a positive narrative. Yet, anyone worth his salt in public relations knows all too well that media access by its very nature presents the possibility of either a good or a bad story. So, if there is choice, why ante-up with media deemed to be biased against your position when there are so many other journalists one can gamble on to better the odds? A savvy international public relations practitioner will recognize that just as an organization’s access to the media is critical, so is the extent to which the media are accessible to the organization’s opponents, principally activists. As described earlier in this chapter, activism

has a profound impact on public relations. L. A. Grunig (1992) stated that although activism contributes to the dynamism of an organization's environment thereby posing threats to its autonomy, activists also provide public relations opportunities to an organization. Organizations are forced to communicate symmetrically when activists use the media to challenge an organization's image in the court of public opinion.

Media access can be said to be general, yet mediated by corporatist structure. The result is that when the media of a society are accessible to individuals or groups with different points of view, the resulting publicity will increase the fluidity of the environment for organizations. The organization then will be forced to use two-way communication for conducting its public relations activities with a variety of publics, rather than focusing on one or two publics. But if various groups that do not conform to the mainstream ideology are not accorded a forum for publicly voicing their agenda, then the extent of pressure on an organization is drastically reduced, calling for minimal sophistication in public relations. Therefore, understanding the extent to which the media are accessible to various activist and other groups in a society helps the international public relations practitioner by providing, among other things, a gauge on the amount of opposition that the environment might pose.

New Media and Public Relations Practice

New technologies are being developed and updated continuously and in themselves pose challenges for public relations professionals in terms of keeping abreast of not only what is available but also of what is being planned for release in the future. Galloway (2005) puts forward that conventional techniques of public relations are being undermined by the mobile nature of new media and that this requires public relations practitioners to rethink how they relate to publics. New media technologies have had a revolutionary impact on the field and practice of public relations. New Media, Web 2.0, Rich media, Converged, Digital.... Whichever phrase you choose to use, the topic is a huge one both in terms of the impact it is having on our industry and the importance it will have on the future of public relations professionals, whether they are in-house or working in a consultancy. In my view, new media should be a critical component in all PR campaigns, whether B2B, consumer or political campaigns. Let me explain why. The digital world is: multi-channel, conversational, transparent, integrated, fast-moving, and international. All of these attributes should play to the strengths of the PR industry and put the PR professional centre stage. If we take advantage of this opportunity and play to our strengths, it should push us firmly into the ranks of senior trusted advisors and finally differentiate us from the other creative service disciplines such as advertising. Although a number of research studies have examined the huge impact new communications media are having on the practice of public relations, what is missing is research studying how public relations practitioners actually are using these new media. New technologies are being developed and updated continuously and in themselves pose challenges for public relations professionals in terms of keeping abreast of not only what is available but also of what is being planned for release in the future.

It is also worth mentioning micro-blogging, as it is grabbing more than its fair share of headlines at the moment. Services such as Twitter, Tumblr and Pownce allow users to create blogs of up to approximately 150 characters along with pictures and video. They are displayed

on the blogger's page in real time. The key differentiator for these services is the ability to link to mobile networks so 'followers' of your blog can receive updates by SMS. People can also follow you on a Really Simple Syndication (RSS). While a constant flow of SMS updates may not seem a terribly valuable form of communication, Delta Airlines uses a Twitter account to keep customers up-to-date. And the short format and mobile input means that micro-blogs are proving to be the fastest growing form of communication on the planet.

Another area of practice that new media has changed in the past decade is that of events. People attending events are being exposed to more and more 'bells and whistles' as new media technology gives the wherewithal to create spectacle to an ever increasing number of people. The ubiquitous digital projector and PowerPoint presentation have become baseline requirements for the most basic events, and access to the Internet to enable presenters to integrate online elements is now almost essential. Practitioners working on events may need to manage expectations from their employing organisations, their consumers and stakeholders, including sponsors, that the level of spectacle and gadgetry provided at one event will be replicated or augmented.

It is also worth mentioning micro-blogging, as it is grabbing more than its fair share of headlines at the moment. Services such as Twitter, Tumblr and Pownce allow users to create blogs of up to approximately 150 characters along with pictures and video. They are displayed on the blogger's page in real time. The key differentiator for these services is the ability to link to mobile networks so 'followers' of your blog can receive updates by SMS. People can also follow you on a Really Simple Syndication (RSS). While a constant flow of SMS updates may not seem a terribly valuable form of communication, Delta Airlines uses a Twitter account to keep customers up-to-date. And the short format and mobile input means that micro-blogs are proving to be the fastest growing form of communication on the planet. If new media are to be embraced, public relations practitioners will need more technical skills in areas such as web publishing, new software operation, online security, search engine optimisation, web analytics and web trend analysis software operation. They will need enhanced online information architecture skills and skills related to managing an increasing amount of complex information digitally. Writing for cross-media delivery will continue as a major component of practice but the demands for multimedia elements will bring even more challenges in this area. Since late 2006 there have been several trade press articles on how the media release is beginning to evolve to include multimedia elements. The past several years has seen an increased use of multimedia and interactive content in news releases and leading newswire services are fully equipped to distribute such material (Nowland, 2006).

If new media are to be embraced, public relations practitioners will need more technical skills related to managing an increasing amount of complex information digitally. Writing for cross-media delivery will continue as a major component of practice but the demands for multimedia elements will bring even more challenges in this area. With the trend towards multimedia news releases, the demands to have multimedia elements available for inclusion in such releases will grow. Public relations practitioners will be responsible for either coordinating production, or actually producing this material, and the budgets and skills bases of public relations units may need to be reviewed to accommodate these new demands. This trend may be setting up new expectations for content provision that smaller or non-profit organisations may

not be able to easily meet and this has the potential to diminish the share of voice that less well-funded organisations receive.

The practitioner will need to manage the organisation's expectation that all traditional media will be fully serviced, as has been the case in the past, as well as integrating many aspects of new media. Additional work generated by these expectations may need to be undertaken without additional personnel or budget allocations. Finding time, funds and support for upgrading skills and engaging in professional development experiences may continue to be challenging. Turf wars may develop with other work areas in the organisation such as IT, marketing and sales, customer relations, call centres and others. This is due to these areas seeing a range of advantages, including the advancement of careers and the control of information and technology, in managing communication activities in a new media age. Turf wars can also arise from public relations asserting management responsibility for areas of practice that traditionally may have resided within other areas such as IT. These internal relationships need to be carefully managed as encroachment from management information systems departments can lead public relations practitioners having a lack of control in managing Web sites (Pavlik & Dozier, cited in Porter & Sallott, 2003).

Although engaging the brave new world of new media in public relations can be daunting, most public relations professionals are embracing these opportunities: Rather than lamenting the decline of traditional media's influence, the public relations industry is embracing the new platforms and communities that test their creativity .

Conclusion

In short, Public Relations practitioners pledge their allegiance to their company, whilst media pledge their allegiance to the wider public; both professions attempting to maintain integrity through honesty. Sound like a farce? Both professions must vie for the same audience attention, through either competition or cooperation— namely PR practitioners providing neatly packaged press releases to time-restrained media. Both must conform to an ethical code of conduct and pledge allegiance no matter what, to telling *the truth*. However, whilst it may be argued PR practitioners 'spin facts' in order to shed favourable light upon their company through the effective selection and omission of facts and details, this is always in the sole interest of staying 'onside' with the wider public and avoiding controversy or negative attention. Imposingly, media may seek to expose the controversy of companies in the interest of "*informing citizens and animating democracy*". They attempt to reveal the whole, unbiased and equal truth to the wider public, free from personal or corporate prejudice and opinion. This will not always land journalists in the public's 'good books', however if ever the truth is revealed, society will realise the errors in their judgement, and shamefully regret their ignorance to the facts, and arrogance to the truth. In time they shall realise the innate, ideological, purposeful and essential role *good* journalists hold within a fair, just and equal democratic society.

10 years down the line, as the media landscape evolves, develops and even deteriorates, the position of the PR community as an innovative leader in communications cannot yet be determined .However, today, there is evidence that the media landscape is in fact changing the roles and relationships of current PR practice, and through the inherently social and communal developments online, it forecasts an opportunistic time for the progression of public relations.

It is clear from the literary evidence and research outcome that a heightened knowledge and awareness of the external environment and changing media landscape is even more crucial to successful communications and effective media relations. Specifically, an increased insight and recognition into the role of the audience and the participatory effects of new media to harness conversation and two-way communication is key.

This study has forecasted areas of potential growth for PR professionals. Specifically, if media continues to segment further, opportunities for targeting specific audiences will become more apparent. The new media landscape has given anyone the ability to create channels of communication and conversation without the need of a media intermediary, which suggests an opening for PR to position themselves more prominently as an independent voice. This development could also lead PR practitioners to morph into a more journalistic role in future, though this transformation could appear more beneficial than it actually is since traditional journalism is still favoured by the consumer at present.

As the media landscape evolves, this study predicts the focus of media relations will shift and public relations will be centered around managing a broader range of relationships than specifically media intermediated ones, while still keeping a focus on mutually beneficial relationships. The role of the audience is still a key component to effective media relations and is arguably becoming increasingly more important as the driving focus for media relations. Though new media has opened up doors for direct interaction between the PR community and its target audience, it is still an area that needs to justify its appropriateness in current PR practice. Perhaps in the future, as the media landscape evolves and print media matures, this relationship will become more opportune.

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