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Objective of APPRJ
The Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal publishes original papers on public relations and related areas. The Journal encourages papers in research, theory, professional practice, comment, case studies and book reviews.

Manuscript submissions
Papers must be submitted in triplicate; three hard copies (two blind and one with personal referencing). Style must follow the APA documentation style and language must be non-sexist. The outcome of the ‘blind review’ will be available within 60 days.

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Editorial

Of the five papers in this final edition of the APPRJ for 2011 four have been drawn from the refereed section of the 2011 the Academic Forum at PR Directions conference held in Sydney in November.

Not surprisingly social media is front and centre for both public relations academic and professionals and the papers refereed for the 2011 PRIA conference reflect the prominence of this current phenomenon. Sutherland’s paper is a quantitative demographic approach to Facebook and its uses among PR students. Her results clearly define a division between the types of information used in the teaching environment and those in the more social setting of Facebook. It is research that cannot be ignored by teaching academics who wish to be part of the social media era.

Another paper with a strong quantitative analysis is Robson and James’ study of social media use by regional PR practitioners. While their findings conclude that there is still a trial and error approach to the technology it may not be practitioner hesitancy but in some cases more of organisational (or client) ignorance or reluctance. Macnamara’s paper complements the findings of Robson and James but on a broader scale. He concludes that PR and corporate communication practitioners have a strong interest in social media but qualifies this because of inconsistent implementation of social media governance and management policies.

Howell and Taylor examine social media usage in a crisis management environment and find that to engage target publics’ trust the networks must be in place before crisis occurs.

The final paper in this volume is also concerned with crisis management. Salavatian and Gharagozlo have developed a hypothetical model for mass media in pre-crisis management. They have dubbed it a butterfly model due to its shape. The authors hope practitioners will apply the model in practice and this will demonstrate its capacity and validity.

The Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal acknowledges and is grateful for the significant contribution of Dr Gwyneth Howell, University of Western Sydney, Australia as guest editor of this edition.

Volume 13 No 1 (2012) of the APPRJ is fortunate to have Dr Chris Galloway of Swinburne University, Australia as guest editor. Volume 13 No 2 will include papers from the following World Public Relations Forum. Details of the Forum are included in this editorial.

WORLD PUBLIC RELATIONS FORUM

18-20 November 2012
Melbourne, Australia

Theme: Communication Without Borders

In 2012, the Public Relations Institute of Australia will host the 7th World Public Relations Forum in Melbourne from 18 to 20 November. The forum includes a full-day academic colloquium, and two-day conference program. The forum will bring together thought leaders, industry experts, researchers, educators, and delegates from around the world.

The conference aims to examine, explore and reflect on the impact of globalization on our profession within the context of rapid changes. As global communities merge and media systems converge, the boundaries within which we communicate are blurring and disappearing. The shifts in economic and political power present new challenges and opportunities for public relations and communication practitioners and scholars. Global issues such as climate change, health, food security, poverty reduction and transitioning democracies offer our discipline a much larger template in which to work. Stakeholders and audiences are not easily defined as they become more mobile, more media-savvy and multicultural. Moreover, audiences are active ‘produsers’ of media messages in a world interconnected by advancing technologies.

It is within this context that we ask how organisations and individual practitioners respond to this new world without borders? How will universities prepare future practitioners for this shifting template? How do we connect and meaningfully engage with cultures that may otherwise be unfamiliar? Will English continue to be the lingua franca of the profession? How will public relations be positioned with advertising, marketing, public diplomacy and strategic communication? To what extent should the practice move from a ‘command and control’ to an ‘inform and influence’ model of communication? Will ethics and corporate social responsibility drive organisations to maintain their social license to operate? What is the role of public relations in society, and in engendering social change?

Academics and practitioners are invited to submit 500-word abstracts that address these questions or others that relate to the main conference theme. There is also an opportunity to submit 1500-word extended abstracts for consideration in published conference proceedings. Also, a special issue of the Asia-Pacific Public Relations Journal will publish selected papers from this conference. An international panel of scholars will review the submissions.

Selected abstracts will be considered for presentation in the academic colloquium and the two-day conference. Please indicate if you have a preference.
Utilising Facebook to create an online community for PR students

Karen E Sutherland
Monash University

Abstract

Facebook allows public relations educators to engage with students in a space where many are already connected. This paper is the beginning of a wider PhD research project analysing Facebook as a public relations educational tool. It explores whether the Monash PR Community on Facebook meets its objective of engaging with public relations students. It evaluates page usage metrics and student survey results to investigate the effectiveness of strategies employed to connect with, and maintain momentum when interacting with students; as well as what prompts students or prevents them from uploading their own contributions.

Keywords: Facebook, Social media, Public Relations education, Two-way symmetrical communication

Introduction

Social networking, and Facebook in particular, has transformed the way that people interact online. The main feature of this communication platform is its ability for users to maintain existing relationships and foster new ones (Sheldon, 2008). The interface differs from other social networking sites because it offers a suite of networking tools within the one location such as instant chat, email, a newsfeed and photo and video sharing that encourages users to stay on the site to interact with ‘friends’. Since its inception in 2004, Facebook has attracted more than 500 million active users, with half visiting the site on a daily basis (Facebook, 2011). The technology that underpins Facebook was developed by four Harvard University students to build connections with and interact with peers in their residential college. Initially, the program was exclusively for college students who were required to provide their college email address before being granted access (Acquisti & Gross 2006). However, this restriction was lifted in September 2006 so that anyone could join (Facebook, 2011). Keeping in mind that this technology was originally developed for college students by college students, through the analysis of page metrics and student survey results, this paper will investigate the validity of academic staff using Facebook as an
educational and engagement tool to create an online academic community for public relations university students.

**Student usage of Facebook**

In the United States, the 18-24 age demographic remains the largest Facebook user group (25%) with the 25-34 year segment a close second (24%) (Gonzalez, 2011). University students are voracious users of Social Networking Sites (SNS). Mori (2007) found that 95% of British undergraduate students were regular users of SNS and Facebook use is included in this trend. As early as 2005, Schulz reported that 85% of college students in the United States were using Facebook on a regular basis. In a survey conducted by Sheldon (2008) 93% of college students had a Facebook account. More recently, Madge, Meek, Wellens and Hooley (2009:147) found that “84% of students agreed or strongly agreed that Facebook is part of my everyday routine.”

An extensive list of researchers in the field (Madge, Meek, Wellens & Hooley 2009, McMillian & Morrison 2006, Hargittai 2007, Kim & Yun 2007, Lange 2007, Leander & McKim 2003 and Tufekci 2008) have suggested that internet use, in particular Web 2.0 programs, has become ingrained in the daily routines of this age group. Knowledge of internet use grew with this cohort alongside its knowledge of language and numbers and this familiarity with technology has resulted in a lack of fear and openness to experimentation and exploration (Mason 2007).

**Facebook as an academic tool**

Facebook is also extremely popular with organisations that use the medium to engage, build and maintain relationships with target publics. Waters, Burnett, Lamm and Lucas (2009) wrote that more than 4000 organisations registered within two weeks of Facebook opening up its registration process in 2006. With so many public relations practitioners using Facebook as part of their organisation’s communication channel mix, the benefits of including it in the curriculum of a public relations degree are clear. By encouraging students to finesse their skills on this SNS, they may be better equipped as practitioners upon graduation. Furthermore, public relations educators can provide a solid example of how an organisation (the university) should interact with its target publics (students) by using Facebook as part of the curriculum.

With strong evidence confirming the high consumption rates of internet and Facebook use among undergraduate students, again it seems a logical step for educators to leverage this technology for academic purposes. One of the arguments supporting this notion has been raised by Ophus and Abbitt (2009) and Sheldon (2008) who state that students are already heavily engaged in SNS such as Facebook so it makes sense to engage with them in their chosen environment rather than attempting to lure them to a different location. Munñoz and Towner (2009), Mathews (2006) and Selwyn (2007) highlighted SNS’ or Facebook’s popularity with students and its collaborative and interactive features such as its ability for users to post comments, share content and chat in real time. This ability for Facebook to facilitate interactivity and open dialogue between public relations educators and students could be an example, as Macnamara (2010) reports, of the two-way symmetrical communication model in action, an essential component of Excellence Theory, a general theory explaining public relations as a strategic management function (Grunig & Grunig 2008). Two-way symmetrical communication as described by Grunig and Hunt (1984) “uses communication to negotiate with publics, resolve conflict, and promote mutual understanding and respect as described between the organization and its public(s)”. If Facebook facilitates this communications model, using the site in this way may prove to be a valuable lesson for PR students, who will not only be provided with a real working example of how these core public relations theories function, they will also have the opportunity to master them through practical application during their participation with the site.

While there is a lack of extensive research to date into Facebook’s success as an educational tool, especially in public relations education, the limited research findings available have been mixed. For example, Kirschen and Karpinski (2010) reported that student Facebook users had a lower grade point average and spent less time studying than non-Facebook users. The findings regarding student attitudes about Facebook being used as part of their tertiary education have also been varied. Ophus and Abbitt (2009), Hewitt and Forte (2006), and DeSchryver, Mishra, Koehler and Francis (2009) found that students were positive and comfortable about using Facebook for educational purposes. DeSchryver et al (2009:6) commented that the students in their study “…found it to be a very useful and productive educational tool.” However, in other studies student attitudes were extremely negative. Madge, Meek, Wellens and Hooley (2009:149) found that 43% of students surveyed believed that, “Facebook was a SNS, not a tool for academic work.” Ophus and Abbitt (2009), Hewitt and Forte (2006) and Madge et al (2009) reported significant numbers of students would find it unacceptable for an educator to contact them on Facebook for academic, administrative or pastoral matters. These students may view this as inappropriate conduct on behalf of the educator; akin to crossing the line from the student and academic staff member relationship to something more personal. Similarly, Cain (2008:3) found that privacy was a concern for students when interacting with educators on SNS as they may develop “...unfair perceptions of students in a social environment.” Clearly, these students see a clear divide between social networking and education.

Uses and gratifications theory, often employed to explain media consumption habits through the exploration of personal payoffs that drive motivations behind media use (Ruggerio, 2000), may offer an alternative explanation for such resistance by students to their academic and social worlds.
interacting on Facebook. With academic and social in the same location, students may not be able to use the site as a “diversion” from their offline educational obligations such as studying and assessments tasks (McQuail, Blumler & Brown, 1972). Instead, students may be reminded of their academic responsibilities on their newsfeeds, amid their ‘friends’ activities, whenever their lecturer posts content or messages them. While a steady stream on social postings may remain, even one post from their lecturer would disallow them from using Facebook as the total diversion from study like the students in the Kirschener and Karpinski (2010) study had. Therefore, with both the potential benefits and barriers in mind, this paper investigates whether it is possible to effectively create and maintain a community for public relations students on Facebook and the ingredients that assist in doing so.

Background
Monash University has a total of 434 full-time or part-time students enrolled in its public relations discipline across two campuses and distance education program (Monash University, 2011). While students in particular units can communicate with their peers, tutors and lecturers online using Blackboard (virtual classroom software that provides a Messageboard where students can interact by posting information), it restricts access to only the students in that unit and does not provide an opportunity to foster a wider community. Due to this, an online space did not exist where Monash public relations students from all stages of their degrees could interact with each other and with academic staff from their discipline. The discipline had undergone many changes (in both location and staffing) over the past few years and student feedback suggested a feelings disengagement and displacement. Facebook’s popularity with students, its increased use in the public relations industry and its functionality positioned it as the most logical tool to re-engage with students and hopefully provide them with a sense of belonging and community.

A page or a group? Open or restricted access?
After considering the pros and cons associated with Facebook organisational pages and groups, it was decided that a page would better suit the purposes for interaction with students. An Admin (person who has Administrative rights) must be ‘friends’ with someone before they can invite them to join and interact in a group. This would force educators (as Admins) to be Facebook ‘friends’ with students, which may have had the capacity to inflame student concerns regarding privacy as highlighted by Cain (2008). However, a page allows any Facebook user to interact with it and by ‘liking’ it (via a button a user clicks on to show their support of a page), by which posts are transmitted to a student’s newsfeed to keep them informed about what is happening on the community page. Allowing students full access to post information on the page seemed the most effective way to understand the benefits and drawbacks of two way symmetrical communication. However, both Admins (the author and a colleague) check the page regularly and adjusted site settings to receive email alerts when a post is uploaded to ensure inappropriate content does not appear.

Method
The page was created on May 12 2011. On July 29 2011, once populated with content, The Monash PR Community was promoted on Blackboard sites across the discipline, on the Monash University Facebook page, the Monash University Twitter feed and in the researcher’s email signature. A range of public relations-related content (employment opportunities, community news, events etc) in various formats (status updates, articles, images, video etc) corresponding to the survey questions continued to be posted at approximately once every two to three days over a three month period from May 20, 2011 to August 20, 2011. Facebook provides page Admins with an extensive range of data, called ‘Insights’, in terms of its users (demographics and activity frequency) and their interactions (‘likes’ comments etc) with the page. Data analysis from this three month period has helped to determine the most successful strategies for engaging with students.

On August 14, 2011, a link to an online survey (a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) was posted on the page. The survey included twelve questions about attitudes to Facebook and content preferences for fans of the Monash PR Community. In the days following, the survey was again promoted using the same methods employed to promote the Facebook originally, with the author’s email signature excluded.

Survey data analysis along with page usage metrics have provided the basis for the conclusions reached in this paper.

Results

User demographics
Figure 1 demonstrates that the page attracted 213 page ‘likes’ between 20 May, 2011 and 20 August, 2011.

The results from Figure 1 are a similar reflection of the gender make up of the undergraduate student cohort enrolled in the public relations discipline at Monash University (2011), which comprises of 299 females (82%) and 66 males (18%). Furthermore, 97% of survey respondents were also female, which again reinforces the dominance of female users in this group.
Table 1 reflects the dates when the Monash PR Community page received the most 'likes' and what generated this initial engagement with the page.

Table 1: New 'likes'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>No. of 'likes'</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29 July, 2011</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>The following post and a link to the Monash PR Community Facebook page was uploaded to the official Monash University Facebook page. This post was also fed through to the Monash University website homepage (<a href="http://www.monash.edu">www.monash.edu</a>) “So who’s interested in PR? Join the Monash PR community by liking this page <a href="http://ow.ly/5Q0HB">http://ow.ly/5Q0HB</a>. It’s where public relations students (past and present) and Monash academics share, post and chat on all things PR-related.” This post received 17 'likes' on the Monash University Facebook page, which drove traffic to the Monash PR Community page and prompted the greatest number of unique page views (87).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 August, 2011</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>An announcement with a link to the Facebook page encouraging students to ‘like’ it was posted on the Blackboard sites for two units/subjects that form part of the PR major which allowed exposure to 250 students in total. This action also prompted the second greatest number of unique page views (38).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 May, 2011</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>An action was not initiated by the researcher on this date to prompt this response – the third greatest influx of ‘likes’. It may have occurred organically with a user’s friends ‘liking’ the page after seeing their action on their newsfeed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 details how many people were referred to the page from external sites and what those external sites were.

Table 2: External sites referring users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Externally referred users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50 muso.monash.edu.au (Blackboard)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 monash.edu.au (Feed from Monash University Facebook page)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 twitter.com (Monash University Twitter feed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 ow.ly (Shortened URL from Monash University Facebook page)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 google.com.au</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 monash.edu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 longurl.org (Shortened URL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 mobile.twitter.com</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 illustrates how users interacted with the page. In the time specified there were 39, 464 Post views and 149 instances of feedback in response to posts.

Figure 3 details the page posts that generated the most likes, what they were and when they occurred, which shows that simple comments generated by the Admins were the most ‘liked’. Table 4 illustrates the posts that generated the most comment interaction with users. These figures also include Admin comments and represents the level of dialogue between Admins and Users.
### Table 3: Most ‘liked’ posts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>No of ‘likes’</th>
<th>Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 August, 2011</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Admin wall post: “Monash PR Lecturer, Karen Sutherland, has been elected to sit on the Public Relations Institute of Australia Victorian Division Council. Go Monash!!!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 July, 2011</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Admin wall post: “First day back for Semester 2. Who’s psyched?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 May, 2011</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Admin wall post: “Well done PR students. You made it through Semester 1! Good luck with your upcoming exams:)”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4: Posts generating the most comment interactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>No of comments</th>
<th>Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 August, 2011</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Admin wall post: “Are there any Berwick PR students keen to show off their skills at Open Day this Saturday for a few hours? I need two people. There’s a $50 voucher in it for you.” Comments: Users asked questions about the task and how they could be involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 August, 2011</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Admin wall post: “We really need your opinion! Let’s make Monash PR Community a killer PR resource!” Monash PR Community Facebook survey, Arts, Monash University <a href="http://www.arts.monash.edu.au">www.arts.monash.edu.au</a> Comments: Some comments were prompted by the users being unable to access the survey for a short time and indicating when they could access it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 June, 2011</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Admin wall post: “Those of you who completed PR Internship this semester, do you have any advice for people doing it in semester 2?” Comments: Users asked questions and offered advice about completing the PR Internship unit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Wall posts by students

- In the three month period there were seven wall posts made by users:
  - Four were made by the same user and included links to videos about topical PR ethics issues and articles with tips for PR students close to graduation.
  - One was made by Left-Right Think Tank regarding an employment opportunity.
  - Another user linked to a humorous marketing article.
  - One was a question about an internship opportunity that was removed due to an overwhelming response.

### Survey results

This survey did not offer respondents any incentive to participate apart from providing their input so that improvements could be made to the page. Only 23 people completed the survey and included both fans and non-fans. The survey sample was comprised of the following:

- 87% female, 3% male, ages ranged between 19 and 41 years of age.
- 91% ‘Liked’ the page, 9% did not.
- 43% found out about the page because their friend ‘Liked’ it, 30% saw it on the Monash University Facebook page and 13% saw it on Blackboard.

Tables 5 - 11 detail the questions from the survey and their top three responses. All questions had space for respondents to leave comments, however only three were received and are included in these results.

### Table 5

| Greatest percentages of respondents ‘Liked’ the page for the following reasons |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 87%                             | To be able to interact with academics and Monash PR students on Facebook |
| 87%                             | Because they used it regularly to socialise and also wanted to use it to learn more about PR |
| 83%                             | They thought it was a great idea and wanted to support it |

Greatest percentages of respondents ‘Liked’ the page for the following reasons: 87% To be able to interact with academics and Monash PR students on Facebook; 87% Because they used it regularly to socialise and also wanted to use it to learn more about PR; 83% They thought it was a great idea and wanted to support it.
Utilising Facebook to create an online community for PR students

Discussion

Generating ‘Likes’

Results from this research suggest that an effective way of generating initial engagement between students and a Facebook page is through an online learning space such as Blackboard (Table II). By inviting students to ‘like’ a page in this environment, a public relations educator is providing their endorsement and encouragement within the confines of an online classroom setting. This endorsement may reassure a student that the educator is sharing something of value with them. Alternatively, a student may feel more obliged to follow an educator’s request than if the same request was made by a peer. Further investigation could be helpful to ascertain student attitudes on this issue.

Additionally, promoting a Facebook page on the homepage of a high profile organisation is also an extremely effective way of attracting initial page ‘likes’. By promoting the Monash PR Community on the wall of the Monash University Facebook page, it highlighted the page to its supporters (30,563 ‘likes’) (Table II). This post was fed to the homepage of the Monash University website, which received 6,270,847 (Monash University, 2011) visits throughout the same period in which this study was conducted, providing it with maximum online exposure and endorsement within its parent organisation.

User Activity

Results suggest that the greatest proportions of visitors are active only on a monthly basis. This metric includes “The number of people who have interacted with or viewed the page and its posts and includes interactions from fans and non-fans.” (Facebook, 2011). This figure suggests that many users are not visiting the page daily or even weekly, but only when they see something that interests them on their newsfeed or when a friend interacts with the page. While this is different to previously quoted statistics on the prevalence of daily Facebook visits by users, it does correspond to the survey results where 43% of respondents found out about the page because their friend ‘liked’ it. This research may result in the Admins being able to make frequent posts more frequently with information that is of greater relevance to users, prompting greater rates of page interaction.

A Community built on ‘Likes’ and Comments

Surprisingly, the page posts most ‘liked’ and commented on by fans were simple messages constructed by the Admins rather than links to external public relations-related content, such as articles or websites. This is further confirmed by the survey results where 82% of respondents answered that they would be “most likely to interact with posts by the Admin” (Table IX). This suggests an attraction by users to messages customised around issues and events originating from those involved directly with the Monash PR Community. Evidence of this

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They did not know about it</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They did not want to receive too many posts on the newsfeed</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I don’t really like PR all that much.’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top three topics respondents wanted content posted about</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment opportunities</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events for PR Students</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry news</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I would love to read anything, but I think employment opportunities being a final year student) would be extremely helpful.’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content format that would most prompt interaction</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Posts by the page’s Admin</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links to articles</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Rarely watch videos as it is hard to do in the library or if you don’t want to use headphones as it interrupts others.’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content topic that would prompt the most interaction</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment opportunities</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry news</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events for PR Students</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The top three reasons that would motivate respondents to contribute content to the page</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They need a question answered</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They want to share some valuable information with the community</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They believe Facebook is better when everyone contributes</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The top three reasons that would prevent respondents from contributing to the page</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They don’t have the time</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They don’t have anything interesting to say</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m concerned that my post won’t be good enough or I’ll make a mistake</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
was the comment that received the most ‘likes’ (Table I). This post announced the researcher’s appointment to the PRIA Vic Division Council. The response it generated could suggest that users who ‘liked’ the post were pleased by positive news about someone in their ‘community’. It may also suggest that users felt reassured that an educator from their chosen degree is in touch with the public relations industry and its professional body within Australia. The number of ‘likes’ may be confirmation that users felt validated by this news. Thus, the post may be viewed as a positive reflection on the user through their association with the ‘community’.

Posts with the greatest number of comments occurred when there was a dialogue between the users and Admins. Most commonly, the Admin posed a question and the users responded. The post attracting the most comments offered a monetary reward for two students who volunteered to assist at a promotional event (Table IV). The question was posed in a way that positioned the event as a development opportunity. Although, the monetary and experiential incentives must be taken into account, the enquiries and offers of assistance that ensued helped to reinforce the cooperative culture already existing on the page. Furthermore, this helpful culture was evident again when the Admin posted the link to the survey being discussed in this paper, and users were unable to access it briefly. Some users assisted with this process through comments which also carried through to their completion of the survey. This post also attracted the second greatest number of comments (Table IV).

Finally, this sense of cooperation was further demonstrated when the Admin initiated a discussion between post and pre-PR interns to pose questions, share experiences and advice (Table IV). This discussion generated the third greatest number of comments and provided some valuable information to students who were feeling nervous about their impending leap into the public relations industry. Possibly using the word ‘community’ in the page title assisted in setting the expectations of students from the outset. To date, negative or inappropriate comments have not appeared on the page suggesting that users want to contribute positively to the ‘community’. Survey results analysing users’ motivation to contribute again confirm an attitude of cooperation in both seeking from and sharing information with other users. However, anecdotally students informed the researcher that this is because educators would see the inappropriate comment and who posted it, possibly resulting in disciplinary action.

Three fans regularly post their own content on the page. However, this content is less likely to attract ‘likes’ and comments from other users unless an Admin interacts with the post in some way. This could suggest that a user’s post needs to be validated by an Admin before other users feel confident enough to make a statement about it in front of the rest of the community. Again, this is reflected in the survey results, where lack of confidence is identified as a major reason preventing respondents from contributing to the page (Table XI).

An alternative reason for this occurrence may be that particular users want to be seen positively by the Admins (both educators in their degree) and therefore will only interact with content on the page when they know that they will definitely be seen by them. Hence, they wait until the Admins share their opinions via a comment or a ‘like’ before they respond in a similar way; practising their own form of public relations.

Content
Survey results indicate that users are most interested in learning about employment opportunities, events for PR students and industry news. This suggests that users are keen to network and learn about current developments in the industry in order to secure employment in the field upon graduation. The increased rate of interaction generated in the discussion about internships reinforces these findings. One survey respondent wrote,

“I would love to read anything, but I think employment opportunities (being a final year student) would be extremely helpful.”

Therefore, rather than using the page for course-related content discussion which would more appropriately occur on Blackboard or Moodle, the page is used more as a meeting place to exchange news, views, experiences and for more practical purposes such as to find employment. This finding is a compromise between the previous research results whereby students were resistant to interacting with academics on Facebook while others found it to be a useful educational tool. In this case, students are keen to interact with academic staff, but the content must remain practical, relevant and non-academic.

Limitations and further research
Ethical compliance prevented direct contact with students via email, which may have significantly limited the number of potential page ‘likes’ and survey sample size. Invitations to ‘like’ the page and complete the survey placed on Blackboard (and the survey also on Facebook), relied on students visiting these websites to read the announcements. An email may have been more effective as the information would be delivered directly to each student. However, this method would also rely on students logging into their email accounts, definitely not an infallible approach. Invitations could not be sent to students via Facebook without the author being ‘friends’ with them first, therefore, the organic nature of Facebook could not be harnessed in the initial stages of the page’s existence. While some survey results reinforced the page usage metrics provided by Facebook, the survey sample represented just over 10% of the total number of page fans, hence, further research with a larger sample of page fans is recommended.

Additionally, more in-depth research is advised into the influence educators as Admins have on students’ motivation to firstly ‘like’ the page and
then interact with the page. Would students have ‘liked’ the page if created by a peer or did they feel obliged to because an academic staff member invited them to? Uncovering the motivation behind why some users do not interact with the page or wait for an Admin to endorse another user’s post by interacting with it, would provide some insight into whether it is a lack of confidence, a desire to be noticed (or remain inconspicuous) or something else preventing them from responding independently. Finally, research concentrating on the PR student cohort that opted not to ‘like’ the page may provide valuable information on the attitudes and motivations preventing them from doing so. Also exploring what other Facebook pages this group ‘likes’ (especially PR-related ones) would assist in developing and implementing strategies to better engage with this group.

Conclusion

The results from this research suggest two main findings. Firstly, while a Facebook page can facilitate the interaction and engagement between public relations university students and public relations educators, there is a clear division between the types of information discussed in an online classroom such as Blackboard and the topics of most interest to students on Facebook. Facebook tends to be less academic and more practical in nature, with students responding most to information about employment opportunities and other community-related news. Secondly, Admins (in this case PR educators) play a vital role in maintaining and increasing levels of engagement and interaction within the community. For a PR community on Facebook to be a success, Admins must regularly post relevant content, generate discussion and participate in that discussion.

However, as this research is the beginning of a more extensive PhD research project into the validity of Facebook as an educational tool for public relations students, a number of questions remain that require investigation and will guide the next part of the study:

1. What are the barriers preventing some students from engaging with the page and/or its content?
2. What influence do academic staff have on levels of engagement with the page?
3. Does Facebook use as part of the curriculum assist or undermine graduate attributes of public relations students?
4. Would an online PR community on Facebook support or replace a corresponding offline group?

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Utilising Facebook to create an online community for PR students


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Trialling PR2.0: an exploratory study of the non-capital city practitioner’s social media use

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Abstract

This exploratory study examined how public relations practitioners based outside capital cities are using social media. Forty-eight practitioners based in one of Australia’s largest non-capital city regions were surveyed in 2010. It was found that these practitioners are trialling how social media can be used to achieve public relations objectives. Practitioners are more likely to be using social media in their personal lives and for their own professional development, than for their organisation or clients. However, this research indicates practitioners who use social media outside of work will progress to using social media for public relations purposes. Further, these practitioners and their organisations are resource-challenged and risk-averse when it comes to using social media to engage with their publics. Further research is needed to ascertain the implications of these findings for public relations practice and education.

Keywords: social media, public relations, social media policy, practice, education

Introduction

The world in which we communicate is rapidly changing. Contemporary internet technology, or what is commonly called Web 2.0, has made it viable to communicate with individuals, groups and organisations via social media platforms, such as blogs, Facebook and Twitter. The range of potential applications for these new technologies, high participation rates, rapid uptake of the tools by journalists and an abundance of media coverage, have combined to put social media firmly on the public relations industry’s agenda. Many are now suggesting it is imperative for public relations practitioners to understand and use social media to effectively communicate with their publics in this changing environment (e.g. Alfonso & de Valbuena, 2006; Breakenridge, 2008; Toledano, 2010). However, academic research on the relationship between social media
and public relations is still in its infancy. To date, much of the research has been undertaken in the United States, with large public relations agencies and corporations with sizeable communications departments (Eyrie, Padman, & Sweetser, 2008; Lariscy, Avery, Sweetser, & Howes, 2009; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Wright & Hinson, 2010).

In an Australian context, 89% of the population goes online every day and the internet is the preferred method of communicating with friends, family and others (The Nielsen Company, 2010a), making social media a major area of interest for Australian public relations practitioners. Academic research is beginning to explore social media use by Australian practitioners (de Bussy & Wolf, 2009; Fursdon & James, 2010; Macnamara, 2010a, 2010b) and initial findings suggest they are having similar experiences and facing similar challenges as their international counterparts. Both Macnamara (2010b) and Herger and Howell (2007) have called for more empirical research into how social media is being used by practitioners and organisations in Australia. This paper attempts to address this gap by investigating the use of social media by practitioners based in the Lower Hunter Region in New South Wales, Australia. We explored what social media practitioners were using in their personal and work lives and sought to identify what, if any, barriers were prohibiting them from incorporating social media into their public relations practice.

Very little research has focused on practitioners outside of metropolitan areas, and with approximately 10,000 people working in a public relations capacity in Australia (Public Relations Institute of Australia [PRIA], 2009), it would be reasonable to suggest a significant percentage of practitioners operate outside of a capital city. Although the Lower Hunter Region is Australia’s sixth largest urban centre (NSW Department of Planning, 2010), anecdotal evidence suggests it has far fewer public relations practitioners than its nearby state capital, Sydney. The PRIA Registered Consultancy Group has no members from the Lower Hunter (2010). Despite 72% of individuals and 85% of businesses having broadband access in the Hunter Region (Hunter Valley Research Foundation, 2009), there was little discussion of social media within the local industry and even less evidence of implementation at the commencement of this research study in early 2009. It is equally important to attempt to understand how public relations practitioners in non-capital city areas are utilising social media tools as these technologies are further breaking down the geographic and temporal barriers of communication. They have the potential to impact on the way public relations practitioners conduct their practice, no matter where they are located.

Literature Review

What is social media?

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) in the United Kingdom has one of the most succinct definitions of social media, defining it as a:

term given to websites and online tools which allow users to interact with each other in some way - by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests...Social media involves the building of communities or networks, encouraging participation and engagement. (CIPR, 2006)

To date, most academic research has defined social media by a list of platforms considered as part of the research project rather than by giving a definition (Avidar, 2009; Eyrie et al., 2008; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Wright & Hinson, 2009a, 2009b, 2010). Based on a review of the terminology used in the public relations academic and trade literature, this research used the term social media to cover: blogs, RSS (Really Simple Syndication), virtual worlds, podcasting and vodcasting, video sharing sites, photo sharing sites, wikis, social networking sites, business networking sites, social bookmarking, location-based services and microblogging services. Each of these platforms meets the CIPR definition.

Social media is having a considerable impact on the way people communicate, with popular social media platforms growing exponentially. Facebook (2011) now has more than 750 million active users worldwide, of which 50% log on each day, and microblogging platform, Twitter, grew by 1400% in 2009 and its users are now sending 50 million tweets every day (Mashable, 2010). Australians are one of the biggest users of social media, spending over seven hours per month using social media platforms (The Nielsen Company, 2010c), with 89.6% of internet users accessing a social media site in February 2010 (comScore, 2010).

How social media is affecting public relations

Social media is altering how public relations practitioners communicate and build relationships with the media and their publics. Journalists are increasingly turning towards new technologies such as blogs, Twitter, RSS feeds and podcasts for leads, sources and story ideas (Hallett, 2008). Reports have highlighted 72% of journalists read blogs, 59% subscribe to RSS feeds and 39% listen to podcasts (Arketi Group, 2007); practitioners who can effectively utilise these tools may increase their chances of engaging with a journalist. Further, social media is decreasing the profession’s reliance on traditional media by providing a cost-effective, immediate channel to communicate directly with publics (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Wright & Hinson, 2010). Mainstream mass media consumption is declining (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2007; Pew Research Center, 2008, December 23), while time spent on social media sites grows (The Nielsen Company, 2010c). In the United States the internet has
now surpassed all other media sources, except television, as people’s preferred outlet for news (Pew Research Center, 2008, December 23). In addition, 86% of Australian internet users look online for opinions and information about products, services and brands (The Nielsen Company, 2010b), suggesting that while the relatively new social media environment can be daunting for some public relations practitioners, it is imperative that they engage with this new communication environment.

A number of recent studies have looked at the general adoption of social media by public relations practitioners and they suggest that public relations practitioners are starting to embrace social media. Wright and Hinson (2009a, 2009b, 2010) have conducted one of the few longitudinal studies in this area and their 2010 survey found that 96% of practitioners are devoting some work time to social media, up from 93% in 2009 (Wright & Hinson, 2009a). Lariscy, Avery, Sweetser & Howes (2009) found 76% of Fortune 500 and Fortune 1000 companies surveyed had adopted at least one social media tool, with blogs, photo-sharing, video-sharing and podcasting being the most popular tools. In a similar study, Burson-Marsteller (2010) established 70% of Fortune 100 global companies were using at least one social media platform; however, only 20% were using all four tools investigated in the study: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and blogging.

Outside of the United States, social media adoption research has also begun to take place. Avidar (2009) surveyed 45 Israeli public relations practitioners and found 78% had used at least one social media element in a campaign. The top three tools were blogs, social networks and forums. Research by Kitchen and Panopoulos (2010) indicated women lagged behind men in Greece when it came to “e-PR adoption” (p. 225), and younger, less experienced practitioners were more likely to adopt online tools. Their results also suggested practitioners should trial new technologies before adopting them for public relations purposes (Kitchen & Panopoulos, 2010). Fitch (2009), in one of the very few qualitative studies in this area, found that in Singapore social media specialists employed in public relations agencies had no public relations training, and were hired due to a lack of appropriately skilled public relations practitioners.

In an Australian context, de Bussy & Wolf (2009) found that practitioners are aware of social media and the platforms available but social media seemed to be a “low priority” in practice (de Bussy & Wolf, 2009, p. 379). A more recent study found Australian practitioners claimed both themselves and their management were highly knowledgeable about social media (Macnamara, 2010b). These studies led us to our first research question:

**RQ1.** To what extent do non-capital city public relations practitioners utilise social media both outside of their work and to achieve public relations objectives

The literature suggests that one way practitioners can educate themselves about the social media environment is to begin participating in the social media space prior to planning or launching any social media campaigns (Kitchen & Panopoulos, 2010; Westcott, 2007). This participation can be on a personal level, such as catching up with existing friends and family online; or on a professional level, such as networking with colleagues, staying up-to-date with the industry and establishing thought leadership through offering opinion and comment. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many public relations practitioners and academics (the authors included) are predominately utilising social media on these two levels. Springston (2001) calls this a “parasocial” use of the internet, “whereby practitioners use the internet to maintain contact with other public relations professionals” (p. 614). In Xifra and Huertas’s (2008) study of public relations blogs they found 77.6% of the blogs analysed were personal: written by public relations practitioners but not in an organisational capacity. They found the main purpose of these blogs was professional development and they allowed practitioners to become familiar with the techniques of blogging. Therefore we proposed a research question related to the relationship between social media usage types:

**RQ2.** Is there a relationship between the personal and professional use of social media?

All indications are that social media technologies can benefit public relations practitioners, but the literature suggests practitioners and organisations that are unprepared for social media are likely to face a number of barriers. Constraining factors such as lack of familiarity with the social media space, fear of the technology, insufficient staffing and financial resources, lack of technical know-how and IT resources, regulatory concerns and internal policies, information overload, fear of loss of control of information, fear of the requirement for transparency, a risk-averse corporate culture, lack of planning and preparation, and lack of time and commitment needed to monitor and participate have been prominent in the academic and trade literature (e.g. Alfonso & de Valbuena, 2006; Charland, 2007; de Bussy & Wolf, 2009; Lariscy et al., 2009; Macnamara, 2010b; PRWeek, 2010; Weber Shandwick, 2009; Zerfass, Sandhu, & Young, 2007). These complexities underpin the third, and final, research question:

**RQ3.** What are the barriers or constraints, if any, limiting Lower Hunter public relations practitioners from using social media to achieve public relations objectives

**Methodology**

Using an online survey, this study sought to understand how Lower Hunter public relations practitioners were using social media in both their personal and professional lives. As no accurate list of the entire population existed and there was no PRIA chapter in this region, a convenience sample was used based on
a local industry group’s email list. Snowball sampling was also used, whereby respondents were encouraged to share the survey link with their colleagues and peers via email or social media.

In May 2010 an email was sent out by the industry group inviting practitioners to complete the SurveyMonkey-hosted survey. A reminder email was sent four weeks later. Each respondent could only complete the survey once (based on their IP address). Each practitioner’s eligibility to be part of the study was determined using three criteria. Firstly, practitioners had to be located in the region studied. Secondly, public relations practitioners were defined by their practice: to be eligible practitioners had to undertake at least one of Tymson, Lazar and Lazar’s (2006) common public relations roles as part of their regular work. Finally, practitioners had to be working to be included in the sample, they could not be unemployed or an undergraduate student.

The survey primarily featured closed questions about attitudes towards, and experience with, social media. As recommended by Wrenn, Stevens & Loudon (2001), the instrument was custom developed to ensure the research objectives could be answered. Two versions of the survey were created: one for in-house practitioners, and one for agency and sole practitioners that asked about both their organisation and their clients. The survey was pilot tested by three practitioners who were outside of the sampling frame to ensure participants comprehended the questions as planned. From the pilot, a number of small changes were made to the terminology used in the final survey instrument. To measure social media use, a six-point scale was developed where 1 = never and 6 = very frequently (daily or more). Respondents were asked how frequently they consumed and created content for each social media platform. The question was asked three times, once each for their personal use, professional development use and their use to achieve public relations objectives. The barriers and constraints to social media use for public relations purposes were measured using a four-point scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 4 = strongly agree. Respondents were asked the degree to which they agreed with 14 commonly identified barriers derived from the literature. Descriptive and inferential statistical tests were undertaken to determine the sample’s knowledge of and experience with social media. Despite likert scales being commonly treated as interval level data in public relations, this study analysed individual likert scales as ordinal level data, as recommended by Howell (2010) and Wrenn, Stevens & Loudon (2001), to avoid using inappropriate statistical tests.

Forty-eight practitioners submitted valid surveys: 37 responses from the email invite and 11 from social media. As the exact number of potential respondents in the sample is unknown, a response rate cannot be determined. Of those who provided their demographic details (n=37), 70% were female, 65% were over 30 years of age and on average, they had nine years of experience.

Results

Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis was used to answer the research questions. Respondents had a strong awareness of social media platforms, all having used at least one social media platform at some point in time. Outside of their work, approximately one-third of practitioners were active users of social media platforms, scoring over 45 on the 15-item social media use summary variable. Eighty-six percent of practitioners had used social media to achieve public relations objectives at some point in time; however, only five respondents were active users of social media for public relations purposes. Social networking sites, video-sharing sites and reading blogs were the most popular social media activities for all purposes.

The survey found a significant mediating relationship between personal use, professional development use and using social media to achieve public relations objectives. The relationship suggests that practitioners who use social media personally are likely to move towards using it professionally as their usage grows, and this higher professional development use will then, in turn, translate into using social media to achieve public relations objectives. Although personal use alone can predict public relations use, the relationship between professional development and public relations is stronger, suggesting practitioners who use social media for their professional development are more likely to embrace active use of social media platforms to achieve their public relations objectives.

Practitioners indicated both internal and external barriers were preventing them from engaging with social media to achieve public relations objectives; however, external constraints relating to the organisation outranked the practitioners’ own internal constraints. Factor analysis revealed that three components were underlying the 14-item barrier question. These were internal and external resources, two-way symmetrical communication and organisational culture. It was also found that male practitioners, practitioners over 30 years of age and more experienced practitioners had significantly higher social media usage and also identified less barriers preventing them from engaging with social media at work.

The findings are explored in more detail below.

RQ1. To what extent do non-capital city public relations practitioners utilise social media both outside of their work and to achieve public relations objectives?

The respondents had a strong awareness of social media platforms, with 100% (n=48) aware of at least seven platforms and 27.1% aware of all 12 platforms included in the survey instrument. With such high levels of awareness amongst respondents, it was not surprising to find that all practitioners surveyed had used at least one social media platform, with practitioners on average having used seven platforms (SD=3.225).
For the purpose of this study, those scoring over 45 on the 15-item social media use summary variables were counted as active users. While all practitioners (n=47) had used at least one social media tool for personal use, only 31.9% of practitioners surveyed could be described as active social media users. One practitioner had not used any social media tools for professional development reasons (n=45), and 33.3% of practitioners had actively used social media for their professional development. Most practitioners surveyed (86%; n=43) had used social media to achieve public relations objectives at some point in time; however, only five respondents were active users of social media for public relations purposes. The most popular social media activities for personal, professional development and public relations purposes are shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Personal usea</th>
<th>Professional development useb</th>
<th>Public relations usec</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>**No. of cases</td>
<td>% of sample</td>
<td>No. of cases</td>
<td>% of sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logging into/creating content for social networking sites</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>74.5%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching video content online</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>72.3%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading blogs</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>55.3%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logging into/creating content for business networking sites</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microblogging</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to podcasts</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using RSS</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing blogs</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uploading images to photo-sharing sites (not including Facebook)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social bookmarking</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producing video content for online</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking in with location-based services</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording podcasts</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating/contributing to wikis</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in virtual worlds</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Regular activity is defined as undertaking the activity at least once a month

a N = 47; b N=45; c N=43

An independent samples t test showed that, on average, males (M=8.73, SD=3.259, n=11) used 2.3 more social media platforms than females (M=6.38, SD=3.008, n=26), t(35)=2.114, p=.042, two-tailed. Mann-Whitney U tests
indicated male practitioners had higher usage levels of social media to achieve public relations objectives (Mean Rank = 24.55, N = 11) than female participants (Mean Rank = 16.65, N = 26), U = 82, p = .043. Mann-Whitney U tests also indicated male practitioners used significantly more social media when it came to both personal and professional development use.

Somewhat unexpectedly, when considering young people are perceived as power users of social media (The Nielsen Company 2010c), the usage level of social media tools for public relations purposes of practitioners under the age of 30 (Mean Rank = 12.5, N = 13) was significantly lower than that of the practitioners over the age of 30 (Mean Rank = 22.52, N = 24), U = 71.5, p = .006. A Mann-Whitney U test also indicated practitioners under 30 used significantly less social media when it came to their professional development. Additionally, there was a moderate correlation indicating more experienced practitioners were likely to use more social media tools, more frequently $r_s = .51$, $p < .05$, two-tailed, $N = 37$. This was also the case with their professional development use, although to a slightly lesser extent ($r_s = .42$).

RQ2. Is there a relationship between the personal and professional use of social media?

A stepwise multiple regression was used to test if personal use and professional development use was a predictor of social media use. The results are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2: PASW output for stepwise multiple regression using personal social media use and personal development social media use as a predictor of public relations social media use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>9.887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PersSMUse</td>
<td>.583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>8.489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PersSMUse</td>
<td>-.196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PDSMUse</td>
<td>.633</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model 1 uses personal use as the sole predictor. Model 2 has added professional development use as a predictor. When professional development use was added to personal use, which was clearly significant when used alone to predict public relations use, personal use is no longer significant ($t = -1.13$, $p = .262$). The evidence indicated that professional development use is serving a mediating role between personal use and public relations use. Because the regression coefficient for the direct path from personal use to public relations use is not significant, the main influence of personal use is through its mediating relationship with professional development use (Howell, 2010). This relationship is illustrated further in Figure 1.

RQ3. What are the barriers or constraints, if any, limiting Lower Hunter public relations practitioners from using social media to achieve public relations objectives?

External barriers relating to the organisation and the resources they provide—the practitioner—time, staff and budget—were ranked higher than any of the practitioner’s own internal barriers. Only two practitioners (n=37) agreed that they feared the technology associated with social media, and six said their unfamiliarity with social media was preventing them from using it for public relations purposes.

To investigate the underlying structure of the 14-item question assessing the barriers to social media use for public relations practitioners, the data collected was subjected to principal axis factoring with varimax rotation. Three factors (with Eigenvalues exceeding 1) were identified as underlying the 14-item question. The first factor measures internal and external resources, the second factor measures two-way symmetrical communication, and the third factor measures organisational culture. In total, these factors accounted for around 58% of the variance in the survey data. Table 3 shows which questions loaded onto each of these factors. While Social media is not relevant to my clients’ target publics may seem an anomaly to load onto Factor 1, it may suggest that the practitioner does not have sufficient knowledge resources about social media to be able to determine if social media is, in fact, relevant to their target publics.
TABLE 3: Varimax rotated factor structure of the 14-item barriers to social media use facing public relations practitioners question, Lower Hunter, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor 1*</th>
<th>Factor 2†</th>
<th>Factor 3‡</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I lack technical know-how and IT resources when it comes to social media</td>
<td>0.830</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am fearful of the technology associated with social media</td>
<td>0.791</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have insufficient financial resources to use social media</td>
<td>0.767</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I fear the loss of control over information with social media</td>
<td>0.691</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information overload prevents me from engaging in social media</td>
<td>0.656</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am unfamiliar with the social media space</td>
<td>0.531</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media is not relevant to my target publics</td>
<td>0.455</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have insufficient staffing resources to use social media</td>
<td>0.451</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am fearful of the requirement for transparency in social media</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.877</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I fear criticism or negative feedback from social media</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.754</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My employer has a risk-averse corporate culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My clients tend to be risk-averse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Variance:</td>
<td>25.86%</td>
<td>18.46%</td>
<td>14.10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

* “Internal and external resources”
† “Two-way symmetrical communication”
‡ “Organisational culture”

The items I don’t have enough time to monitor and participate in social media and My organisation hasn’t planned or prepared for social media each loaded on to two factors and were removed from any further analysis.

A Mann-Whitney U test indicated males identified with significantly fewer barriers (Mean Rank = 10.27, N = 11) than female practitioners (Mean Rank = 22.12, n=25), U = 47, p = .001 (exact sig.). Males (M = 11.36, SD = 3.139, N = 11) were also significantly less likely to report internal and external resources as a barrier than females (M = 15.54, SD = 3.409, N = 26), t (35) = 3.482, p = .001, two-tailed. A Mann-Whitney U test also indicated practitioners under the age of 30 identified with significantly more barriers (Mean Rank = 24.85, N = 13) than those over 30 (Mean Rank = 14.91, N = 23), U = 67, p = .006 (exact sig.). There was no relationship between any type of social media use and Factor 3, organisational culture. However, those who reported organisational culture as a barrier to use were moderately, more likely to report they were fearful of two-way symmetrical communication (Spearman’s Rho, r = .43, p = .007, N = 37).

Discussion

The major theme of these findings is that Lower Hunter public relations practitioners are trialling social media for public relations purposes. Part of this trial process involves familiarising oneself with social media platforms and this is often done through personal use. Practitioners are more actively using social media for personal reasons and professional development. However, any social media activity is a positive step as the results indicate a mediating relationship exists between the different types of use. Practitioners who use social media in their personal lives and/or for their professional development are likely to gain the necessary knowledge and confidence to use these platforms in their public relations work. For the evidence suggests that their trial behaviour may be because practitioners feel their organisation’s management or culture is hindering them from using social media to help achieve organisational objectives. Practitioners may feel that by ‘testing out’ social media in their own lives or on a small scale they will develop the skills and confidence to address external constraints.

Relationship between usage type

Practitioners are using social media for more than just leisure and personal socialisation; they are using the same tools to cultivate their professional networks, know-how and image (Agarwal & Mital, 2009). The mediating relationship found in this study provides empirical support for a “natural evolution of adoption” (Porter, Sweetser, Chung, & Kim, 2007, p. 94), whereby practitioners start by using social media for their own personal purposes—socialising, sharing photos, and seeking information—progressing to utilising social media for their professional development: establishing a personal brand online and building their network of like-minded professionals. Finally, they begin to trial social media to achieve their organisations’ (or clients’) public relations objectives. No other literature has been found that empirically tests...
this relationship, suggesting this study is the first to quantify the relationship between personal, professional development and public relations use of social media.

This has implications for both the public relations profession and public relations education. Firstly, organisations with IT policies that prevent the use of social media at work may be doing themselves a disservice. While not necessarily suggesting organisations give their employees unrestricted, unmonitored access to social media sites, the relationship between the different types of usage implies that organisations would at least benefit from giving their public relations department (and perhaps others) access. Additionally, organisations that encourage employees to establish a professional presence online and use social media “parasocial[ly]” (Springston, 2001, p. 614) are likely to benefit from this relationship.

This finding also has implications for education. Public relations educators who include practical course units on using social media, and/or require social media components in assessment items, are likely to produce students who are more equipped to deal with using social media professionally upon their entrance into the workforce. Again, encouraging students to establish an online personal brand through blogging, tweeting or creating profiles is likely to ensure students feel more prepared to use social media for public relations purposes.

How social media use compares to others

When considering using social media to achieve public relations objectives, 86% of Lower Hunter practitioners had used at least one social media platform. This puts them on par with similar studies in Australia and internationally, as shown in Table 4. Without conducting further research in the adoption rates of practitioners in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Canberra, Perth, Hobart, Adelaide or Darwin, it is difficult to compare how Lower Hunter practitioners compare to their counterparts in Australian capital cities. However, after conducting this exploratory study it appears reasonable to suggest practitioners in the Lower Hunter have similar social media adoption rates as other practitioners in the country. Moreover, the tools being used regularly by Lower Hunter practitioners are similar to those employed by other practitioners from around the world, as shown in Table 5. This implies that practitioners in the Lower Hunter have a similar knowledge of the popularity and relevance of social media platforms as their global counterparts.

Notably, males, practitioners over the age of 30, and those with more public relations experience had higher usage levels of social media for public relations purposes. Such results are consistent with other social media studies in the discipline (Eyrich et al., 2008; Porter et al., 2007). In 2001, Porter, Sallot, Cameron & Shamp found that female practitioners were using less online technology than male practitioners (p. 183), while a year earlier Kearney, Feldman and Scavo (2000) found a positive age/tenure innovation adoption relationship in local government. However, Sallot, Porter and Alzuru (2004) found that after a relatively short period of time “age, gender or tenure differences in web use [were] near non-existent” (p. 275). This suggests the gender, age and tenure differences in this study will in time become insignificant, as social media use becomes more prevalent in the industry. In the meantime though, these results have implications for public relations educators. These findings corroborate research that shows younger, less experienced practitioners, such as graduates, feel underprepared to work with these new communication platforms (Gower & Reber, 2006), implying that public relations educators need to reconsider their approach to teaching social media.

### Table 4: Public relations practitioner social media adoption rates across recent empirical studies, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Studies</th>
<th>Percentage of sample</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macnamara {, 2010 #259}</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtis et al. {, 2010 #136}</td>
<td>98.7%</td>
<td>409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wright and Hinson {, 2010 #185}</td>
<td>96.0%</td>
<td>557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRWeek {, 2010 #194}</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weber Shandwick {, 2009 #195}</td>
<td>88.0%</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This study</td>
<td>86.0%</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burson-Marsteller {, 2010 #188}</td>
<td>79.0%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avidar {, 2009 #116}</td>
<td>78.0%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lariscy et al. {, 2009 #189}</td>
<td>76.0%</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a no differentiation between personal and public relations use*
TABLE 5: Top social media platforms used by public relations practitioners across recent empirical studies, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Studies</th>
<th>Top 3 tools (in order)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This study</td>
<td>blogs, video-sharing sites, social networking sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macnamara (2010 #259)</td>
<td>business networking sites, social networking sites, video-sharing sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lariscy et al. (2009 #189)</td>
<td>blogs, photo-sharing sites, video-sharing sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillin (2008 #124)</td>
<td>blogs, video-sharing sites, social networking sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burson-Marsteller (2010 #188)</td>
<td>microblogging, social networking sites, video-sharing sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avidar (2009 #116)</td>
<td>blogs, social networking sites, forums</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All platforms or activities mentioned have been aligned to the terminology used in this study for comparison purposes.

**Constraining factors**

The perception amongst Lower Hunter practitioners was that their organisation and the resources available prevented them from engaging with social media, more so than their own unfamiliarity or fear of the technology. Participants cited management’s lack of understanding and familiarity, organisational culture, fear of two-way communication and staffing resources as the biggest factors constraining their adoption of social media to achieve their public relations objectives. This may suggest why there was a lack of adoption of social media for public relations purposes. If the practitioner does not have the support of the dominant coalition, due to lack of understanding or fear of opening themselves up to two-way communication, social media is unlikely to be implemented at a strategic level (James, 2007). In the early 2000s, Porter and Sallot (2003) found that websites were low priority for management and it appears that now social media is facing the same challenge. If the dominant coalition are unfamiliar with social media and have a risk-averse culture they are unlikely to allocate adequate, if any, financial and staffing resources to social media, and it is improbable that they will advocate for the inclusion of social media in strategic planning.

Nevertheless, given that public relations is commonly defined as a management function (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994; PRIA 2009), and Tymson, Lazar and Lazar (2006) state a key public relations role is advising management on strategies and policy issues, one could suggest that it was the public relations practitioner’s responsibility to educate management in the emergent areas. The failure of Lower Hunter practitioners to show management the relevance of new technologies suggests that Lower Hunter practitioners may not be part of their organisation’s dominant coalition, nor are they empowered to be a strategic decision-maker. Further research needs to be conducted to find out why this may be the case, but it may be possible that their organisations do not believe Lower Hunter practitioners have the necessary experience to be part of the dominant coalition, or that the organisation does not view public relations as an necessary element of a successful dominant coalition. Diga and Kelleher (2009) found a relationship between social media and a practitioner’s power within the organisation, supporting earlier research by Porter and Sallot (2005) and Anderson and Reagan (1992) that suggested adopting new technologies could assist public relations practitioners with moving into the dominant coalition. This gives more evidence of the benefit practitioners can gain by trialling social media on a small scale within their organisations. This trial may not only assist them in convincing their management of social media’s value, but also increase their power within the organisation.

Practitioners themselves were also fearful of two-way communication channels, which suggests they are unlikely to approach management with regards to social media, if their own department fears the loss of control of information. Lower Hunter practitioners are not alone in these fears; de Bussy and Wolf (2009) found 15% of practitioners feared criticism or negative feedback from social media, while Zerfass, Sandhu and Young (2007) found that practitioners were concerned about responding to comments and feedback. Macnamara suggests practitioners should be “abandoning the control paradigm” (2010a, p. 8), but without education and training to develop new digital skills they are unlikely to do so (Barnes, 2007; Springston, 2001). Practitioners need to develop digital skills and experience with two-way communication, otherwise they are unlikely to effectively implement social media in their organisations (Bell, 2008, August 18; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Zerfass et al., 2007). However, this may not be enough. Those who reported organisational culture as a barrier were also more likely to report they were fearful of two-way communication. This could indicate some practitioners become enculturated into a risk-averse environment and feel they are unable to change or introduce any degree of risk, despite thinking the organisation could do better.

**Conclusion**

In summary, this research found that Lower Hunter practitioners are trialling social media platforms to see if they will be effective for their organisation. Practitioners are recognising the uptake of social media by their publics and want to get involved. However, they may not have the resources, knowledge, power or organisational support to incorporate social media as part of their ongoing public relations strategy. They are trialling the platforms to determine if, and how, they could use them in to achieve their organisation’s (or client’s) objectives in the future.
Perhaps the most important conclusion that can be drawn from this research is that a “natural evolution of adoption” (Porter et al., 2007, p. 94) exists. This study appears to be the first to quantify the relationship between personal, professional development, and public relations use of social media in that practitioners who use social media personally are likely to also adopt social media for their professional development and this higher professional development use will then, in turn, translate into using social media for public relations work. A second, and related, conclusion is that practitioners are more likely to adopt social media for public relations purposes if their organisation encourages, or provides the flexibility for, them to research new technologies and learn by doing.

This study suffers from a number of methodological limitations and these limitations suggest avenues for further research. Firstly, because of both the relatively small sample size and the use of non-probability sampling techniques, the findings cannot be extended to the wider population of reference. Further research that explored the experiences of both capital city and non-capital city practitioners would be of value to the discipline. Secondly, while quantitative research is useful for deriving a general description of a phenomenon, it is unable to provide researchers with an understanding of individual motivations and subjective experiences (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Qualitative research investigating how and why practitioners are using social media would build on the findings in this paper and create a more complete set of knowledgeable about practitioners’ social media use. In addition, as one of only a few studies providing data on social media usage by Australian public relations practitioners, more research needs to be undertaken in an Australian context.

This paper confirms that Lower Hunter public relations practitioners are having similar experiences, and are facing similar barriers to adoption, as their global counterparts. This research could assist public relations practitioners, their employers, and educators in furthering their understanding of how social media is impacting on public relations, and how they can encourage effective adoption of social media for public relations purposes.

References


Social media governance: Gaps, risks and opportunities in PR and reputation management

Jim Macnamara
University of Technology Sydney

An emerging issue identified in recent European public relations and organisational communication research is governance in relation to social media use – a multi-faceted concept that includes policies and guidelines for employee use of social media, monitoring, and training of staff allowed or even encouraged to discuss work-related issues online. Social media governance foregrounds understanding that social media are public, not private, spaces and highlights the risks to organisations of inappropriate social media comment and content distributed by employees. Pioneering research in this area in Europe in 2010 found that most organisations do not have clear employee policies and guidelines in place, and a majority do not monitor social media despite enormous growth in their use – thus, leaving organisations exposed to significant security, reputational and even legal risks. With PR and corporate communication practitioners identifying themselves as the function primarily responsible for social media in most organisations, governance is an issue with significant practical implications, as well as being an important issue for engagement among scholars and educators. This paper reports findings of a 2011 quantitative and qualitative study of social media use in Australasian private and public sector organisations compared with regional and international data to identify a key future direction and priority in public relations and reputation management. The findings point to a significant risk exposure requiring management, as well as opportunities to improve and expand public relations and corporate and organisational communication practice.

Keywords: Social media, public relations, reputation, governance, risk.

Introduction

The use of social media is being widely cited as enabling of, if not transformative for, public relations as it is conceptualised in Excellence theory in which two-way interaction is key (L. Grunig, J. Grunig & Dozier, 2002) and contemporary relational and dialogic models (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Kent & Taylor, 2002;
Ledingham, 2006). For instance, in New Media and Public Relations, Vince Hazelon, Jill Harrison-Rexrode and William Kennan claim that public relations is “undergoing a revolution” (2008, p. 91). Deidre Breakenridge (2008) has argued that, in the era of Web 2.0, public relations has evolved to “PR 2.0”. In the foreword to Breakenridge’s book, Brian Solis (2008) stated: “Welcome to what just may be the greatest evolution in the history of PR” (para. 1). He claimed that with the shift from PR to PR 2.0 “monologue has given way to dialogue” (para. 19). In the title of their 2009 book, Breakenridge and Solis (2009) claim that Web 2.0 is “putting the public back in public relations”.

Some scholars are more cautious in their assessment of the impact of social media and point to lack of research in this still-emerging field. For instance, in analysing the use of blogs in public relations, Michael Kent (2008) noted that there is “very little scholarly research in communication or public relations about blogging” (p. 34). Australian researchers Karl Herger and Gwyneth Howell (2007) concluded more broadly that “from a public relations perspective, there has been limited investigation and understanding into the nature of cyberspace as a communications medium” (p. 93). A 2009 study by Donald Wright and Michelle Hinson in the US claimed to be the “the world’s first extensive examination of how social media are being implemented in public relations” (Wright & Hinson, 2009, p. 1). This and other studies suggest that public relations is at an early stage in adopting interactive Web 2.0-based media referred to as social media. Wright and Hinson concluded that “meaningful gaps exist when measuring differences between what is happening and what should be happening in terms of ... social media” (p.19).

In two of very few qualitative studies of social media use in public relations, Kate Fitch interviewed 10 practitioners in Singapore and Malaysia in 2006 (Fitch, 2009a) and undertook a follow-up study in 2009 based on interviews with three social media practitioners employed by multinational public relations consultancy firms in Singapore (Fitch, 2009b). In her first study, Fitch reported one practitioner saying that “the internet is the Wild West, right, anything goes. There are no rules”. Emphasising the unregulated and largely unmanaged practices of social media use, another said “we’re really writing the rule book as it is. There are no rule books, no textbooks to learn from” (2009a, p. 5).

As recently as mid-2011, international consultancy firm KPMG drew a similar conclusion from a study of social media use by business, saying: “the bottom line is that it’s just new for everybody ... there are no rules, there’s a lot of trial and error, there’s a lot of testing, a lot of learning, and then applying it” (KPMG, 2011, p. 4).

One of the reasons for uncertainty and some confusion surrounding practices in social media is that they are social spaces that traverse both the private sphere (Chartier, 1989; Hansson, 2007; Papacharissi, 2010) and the public sphere (Habermas, 1989, 2006) which have been viewed as fundamental divisions in Western social, political and economic thinking (Gal, 2005). Increasingly, scholars challenge the separation of a private sphere (individuality, personal relations and home life) and the public sphere of society (communities, politics and work). For instance, Dena Goodman (1992) says that “the public sphere articulated by Habermas is a dimension of the private sphere delineated by Chartier and his collaborators” and she concludes that “the false opposition between them can be collapsed” (p. 2). Contemporary scholars further argue that globalisation, network society (Castells, 1996, 2000) and the open nature of and widespread use of the internet have put paid to any sustainable separation between private and public spheres – although Sonia Livingstone (2005) notes that public and private mean different things in different contexts and forms of privacy can exist on the internet. Nevertheless, in her 2011 analysis of relationships and voice, Leslie Baxter proposes a “reworking” of “the false binary of public/private” (2011, p. 8) and such a reworking aids understanding of the overlapping activities in employees’ use of social media.

A second reason for uncertainty and nascent strategies in relation to social media is the widespread recognition of blogs, microblogging sites, social networks and photo and video sharing internet sites as “new media” (Lister, et al., 2009; Flew, 2008; Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2002, 2005). While this author has challenged the concept of ‘new media’ as a useful and durable description (Macnamara, 2010), these media constitute relatively recent and quite substantial changes in the mediaspace that governments and organisations are still adapting to and learning to use.

**Literature on social media governance**

In this emergent social media environment, a very limited amount of research has been conducted into social media governance, defined by Stephen Fink and Ansgar Zerfass (2010, p. 5) and Zerfass, Fink and Linke (2011, p. 3) as “a formal or informal regulatory framework for the actions of members of the organisation in the social web” (p. 5). More specifically, drawing on extensive social science literature on governance (e.g. Van Kersbergen & Van Waarden, 2004), Fink and Zerfass identified social media governance as involving strategies, guidelines for staff, monitoring tools, and a range of support to inform and guide social media use including training (p. 49). In the European Communication Monitor 2011 produced by the European Association of Communication Directors (EACD) and the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA), Zerfass, Verhoeven, Tench, Moreno and Verčič (2011) refined and confirmed their description of social media governance as comprising:

- Social media guidelines for communicating in blogs, Twitter, etc;
- Tools for monitoring stakeholder communication on the social web;
These key elements, as well as the following identification of the role of policies, were used for identifying social media governance in this study.

A study by Jana Hrdinová, Natalie Helbig and Catherine Stollar Peters (2010) for the Center for Technology in Government at the University at Albany, SUNY, reported in relation to social media use in government:

- Developing a social media policy can be an important first step for those government agencies considering using social media and can ultimately serve as a key enabler for responsibly and effectively leveraging social media tools. Yet, many governments are struggling with what such a policy should encompass and convey. Not surprisingly, given the emergent nature of social media, relatively few US governments actually have a formalised set of policies to guide their own efforts, as well as for others to draw on or learn from (p. 2).

Hrdinová et al. (2010) differentiated between social media policies and guidelines, describing them as follows:

- In general, guidelines provide advice on how to best use social media tools to achieve a desired result, such as eliciting citizen engagement or providing suggestions for creating interesting content. Policies, on the other hand, represent official positions that govern the use of social media by employees in government agencies, such as detailing what constitutes acceptable use or outlining official processes for gaining access to social media sites (p. 3).

These researchers found a mixture of ‘policies’ and ‘guidelines’ used by the 32 government communication professionals who they interviewed. Of 26 documents reviewed, they reported 10 were official social media policies and 12 were social media guidelines, with four being a mixture of both. Based on this definition and experience, policies and guidelines can be seen as inter-related and both should be considered as part of governance.

The Brand Science Institute in Germany reported in 2010 that only 11 per cent of companies had social media policies or guidelines in place. Furthermore, 76 per cent do not moderate social media projects accurately, if at all, and 86 per cent “do not have a clue how to handle a social media backlash” such as that suffered by Nestlé over its use of palm oil which resulted in a social media campaign that rebranded its Kit-Kat chocolate bars as “Killer Kat” (Brand Science Institute, 2010).

A similar situation in relation to governance was found by Fink and Zerfass (2010) in their survey of 1,007 companies, government institutions and non-profit organisations in Germany. They found that 90 per cent or organisations had no explicit regulatory framework or governance in place (p. 6). From a follow-up survey involving more than 2,000 PR and corporate communication practitioners across Europe, Zerfass, Tench, Verhoeven, Verčič, & Moreno (2010) reported in European Communication Monitor 2010 that less than 30 per cent of organisations had social media guidelines, just 28 per cent had tools for monitoring social media, and only 20 per cent had training programs for staff in using social media (p. 79).

Social media governance is an important issue worthy of study, as lack of governance in relation to employees’ use of social media exposes organisations to significant risks including:

- Release of confidential information or trade secrets;
- Public embarrassment through employees commenting inappropriately online or engaging with inappropriate content (e.g. ‘flaming’, denigrating others, racist or sexist language, cyberbullying, pornography, etc);
- Reputation damage through any of the above;
- Legal actions for defamation or damages (ISACA 2010, p. 7; Zerfass, Fink & Linke, 2010, p. 6).

There are signs of improvement in social media governance. Research by Zerfass et al. (2011) published in the European Communication Monitor 2011 found that 40 per cent of PR professionals report the existence of social media policies and/or guidelines in their organisations and around 33 per cent have tools for monitoring social media. However, despite this apparent increase in governance compared with previous studies, it still means that around 60 per cent of organisations admit having no guidelines or policies in place and two-thirds of organisations do not monitor what is said about them and their interests in social media. Zerfass et al. (2011) concluded that “overall, governance structures for social media are still underdeveloped and can be seen to be missing from most communication departments across Europe” (p. 91).

Broadly in line with the findings of Wright and Hinson (2009) in the US, Zerfass et al. (2010) and Zerfass et al. (2011) found that social networks, microblogging sites, video sharing sites and blogs were the main types of social media used and Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were the leading social media sites. The Fink and Zerfass (2010) and Zerfass et al. (2010) European studies also found that PR/corporate communication is the function or unit primarily responsible for social media in organisations – albeit based on self-reporting by this cohort of practitioners.

But what is the situation in Australia and Asia Pacific countries? While no scholarly research could be found on this topic in Australasia, a 2011 KPMG study reported that 42 per cent of Australian businesses are using social media and identified that, looking ahead, “defining policies to control/manage social media use” was the most highly rated priority in businesses, cited by more than
of Business Communicators (IABC) in Australia by gaining permission to access the membership lists of these organisations. An invitation to participate and the link to the online survey, along with reminders, were sent by e-mail and e-newsletters exclusively to members of these professional bodies which maintained the integrity of the sample to a high degree.

**Methods**

The survey used a structured questionnaire with 25 closed-end questions, seven of which had an option for open-end comments, and one fully open-end question, administered through SurveyMonkey Professional edition.

The survey yielded 221 responses by the close-off date (31 August), a response rate of just five per cent. This was somewhat disappointing, but as many practitioners are not yet actively involved in or competent with social media as demonstrated in this and other research, this response rate is perhaps not surprising. While not having high statistical reliability, the survey nonetheless provides useful insights into the views and practices of PR practitioners in the Australasian region.

Respondents were distributed across government (30.8 per cent), corporate (28.5 per cent), consultancy (21.7 per cent) and non-government organisation (19 per cent) sectors and also across age groups – albeit most were aged 25–35 (40.7 per cent) or 36–45 (30.3 per cent), with 19 per cent aged 46–55, 13 per cent over 55 and just 4.1 per cent under 25.

In its second stage, this study sought to (a) test the claims of PR practitioners obtained as self-reporting in the survey and (b) identify and explore the views of leaders and ‘experts’ in social media. This involved depth interviews with a purposive sample of 12 social media specialists in Australia (9), Singapore (1) and Hong Kong (2). For the purposes of this study, social media specialists were defined as practitioners employed specifically in social/digital media management roles within organisations and specialist consultants in social/digital media. Interviewees included the heads of digital media for several leading companies and several well-known and respected social media consultants.

**Data analysis**

Descriptive statistical analysis of survey data was undertaken to produce data tables and charts reporting responses to each question. Interview transcripts were produced from digital recordings and analysed using two levels of coding – *in vivo* (or open coding) to categorise comments into main themes and topics and then *pattern* or *axial* coding to identify predominant views (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Punch, 1998, p. 205). The predominant views of specialists were compared with the generalised views of practitioners as part of validating findings and used to gain deeper insights into current methods of social media use, management and governance.
Key findings

A number of findings with important implications for senior management as well as PR and corporate communication practitioners emerge from this study. Key findings of quantitative and qualitative analysis are reported together and integrated, as they complement to provide an understanding of how social media use is undertaken and managed – or not managed – in organisations.

Main types of social media used by organisations

The types of social media most used in Australasia are highly consistent with the US and Europe. As Wright and Hinson (2009) and Zerfass et al. (2011) reported, organisations mostly use social networks (72.9 per cent); microblogging (55.2 per cent); video sharing sites (51.1 per cent); blogs (47.5 per cent); photo sharing sites (23.5 per cent); and wikis (20.4 per cent). A much smaller number use podcasting and only a very small proportion use virtual worlds or vodcasting. Under ‘other’, a number reported use of applications such as Yammer, Slideshare and “internally created knowledge management platforms”.

The specific social media and networks most used are shown in Table 1. This usage is also very consistent with practices in the US and Europe. Other sites not listed in the ‘top five’ which are shown in the table included Flickr, LinkedIn, Yammer and Google Maps. Also, a number of respondents reported offering interactive social media, networks and communities within their own proprietary Web sites and intranets.

Table 1. Social media and networks most used by organisations (n = 221).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social media/network</th>
<th>% of Organisations Using</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>73.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>54.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>52.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate/organisation blog</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podcasting (eg. of speeches)</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responsibility for organisational social media strategy and management

Like Fink and Zerfass (2010) and Zerfass et al. (2010), this study found that PR/corporate communication practitioners claim to be primarily responsible for social media in organisations. In Australasia, 57.9 per cent of PR and corporate communication practitioners say they take the lead in advising on, planning, and managing social media in their organisation, compared with just 14 per cent who say marketing staff perform these roles, 6.3 per cent who identify IT/Web managers as responsible, and 5.9 per cent who say specialist digital media departments or agencies are mainly responsible for social media.

However, this finding is contrary to that of a study by Jeremiah Owyang (2010) who reported that 41 per cent of social media programs are managed by marketing and 30 per cent by corporate communication (pp. 14, 16). It is also inconsistent with the findings of a study of corporate blogs by Tom Kelleher (2009) who reported that blogging is “distributed” and performed “by a wide range of people representing an organisation” who “do not think of themselves as public relations people” (p. 185). Another 2009 study reported that PR practitioners mostly use blogs for personal reasons and deploy blogs as a professional communication medium at low levels (Porter, Sweetser & Chung, 2009).

There are two possible explanations for this variation. It may be overstatement in the self-reporting by PR/corporate communication practitioners responding to the online surveys. Owyang’s study was based on a mixed methodology involving interviews with 51 social media strategists and analysis of job descriptions, as well as 140 responses to an online survey of “enterprise-class social strategists” (Owyang, 2010, p. 4). Therefore, it relied less of self-reporting and could, on this basis, be more reliable. On the other hand, Owyang’s study focussed on US companies. The findings of this research and European studies may signal significant regional differences between the US with a heavy focus on social media for marketing and Europe and Australasia with a PR and communication focus. Irrespective, good news for PR and corporate communication practitioners is that Owyang also found only six per cent of organisations are turning to a separate department or unit to manage social media (p. 14), although he pointed to the rise of “social strategists” as a new kind of specialist in organisations (p. 4).

Social media specialists interviewed in Australasia also draw a distinction between day-to-day tactical and operational practices of social media use and developing and implementing a social media strategy. Several of those interviewed stated that few organisations have a strategic approach to social media with clear objectives, integration with other media and communication activities, and evaluation of results. This view is supported by the relatively low levels of organisational knowledge about social media reported next (see Table 2) and the lack of monitoring and media analysis reported under ‘Social media governance in organisations’ (see Table 5).

In the 2011 study of social media use in Germany, Fink, Zerfass and Linke reported that “two-thirds of surveyed organisations have social media communication strategies”. However, they noted that most of these (43.8 per cent) focus only on individual platforms. “Only two in ten organisations have strategies that are related to the entire organisation” (Fink, Zerfass & Linke, 2011, p. 6).
Social media knowledge and expertise in organisations

Three-quarters of PR/corporate communication practitioners (74.2 per cent) claim to have ‘intermediate’ or ‘advanced’ knowledge of social media. In contrast, only 14.5 per cent describe themselves as a novice/beginner, while 11.3 per cent leave social media to others in their organisation.

Just over one quarter of senior management (26.2 per cent) reportedly has ‘intermediate’ or ‘advanced’ knowledge of social media, compared with 27.1 per cent of senior managers who are novices/beginners and almost 15 per cent who “don’t know anything” or “don’t have a clue”, according to PR/corporate communication practitioners. On the positive side, practitioners believe that 31.7 per cent of senior managers, while leaving social media to others currently, are willing to learn.

Table 2. Organisations’ approaches to social media policies and guidelines (n = 221).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Knowledge</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>PR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novice / beginner</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know anything / don’t have a clue</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave it to others, but willing to learn</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PR/corporate communication practitioners claim that they are engaged extensively in making recommendations, monitoring, giving advice, producing content and analysing social media, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The role of PR/corporate communication practitioners in relation to social media (n = 221).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of PR/corporate communication</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making recommendations to senior management</td>
<td>75.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring social media</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving advice on social media</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing and distributing social media content</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysing social media content</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing guidelines on social media use</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing guidelines on social media use</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising and/or conducting social media training</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, other findings of this survey and interviews with social media specialists suggest that a number of these claims are over-stated. For instance, the lack of social media strategies cited previously, a lack of policies and guidelines on social media use by employees (see Table 4), a lack of monitoring of social media mentions of the organisation (see Table 5), and the lack of training and support provided to staff engaged in social media in most organisations (see Figure 1) are inconsistent with the knowledge and role claims of PR/corporate communication practitioners. The following findings related to the central focus of this study indicate that those who claim to be primarily responsible for social media in organisations are not addressing a number of key management requirements.

Social media governance in organisations

More than half the organisations surveyed (51.5 per cent) allow only a few approved individuals to comment about the organisation and work-related issues in social media (e.g. organisation bloggers). A further 10.9 per cent authorise only specialist social/digital media consultants to comment and 6.9 per cent of organisations allow only senior management to comment in social media on behalf of the organisation. While, on one hand, this is somewhat restrictive, it means that almost half of the organisations studied (49.5 per cent) permit either everyone or most employees to discuss the organisation and work-related issues in social media. This makes governance all the more important for those organisations, but this study found governance lacking or very limited in most organisations.

An overwhelming majority of Australasian organisations (72.9 per cent) believe that “broad guidelines should be provided” to employees on social media use at work, including key dos and don’ts and, beyond that, organisations should trust their staff. A further 10 per cent believe that “common sense will prevail”, while 3.2 per cent believe that organisations should let staff do as they wish with no guidelines or controls. Overall, only 14 per cent or organisations believe that “strict controls should be placed on who can comment” about work matters in social media.

This indicates a quite open attitude towards social media use in most organisations which is commended by those who advocate Web 2.0 as an open participatory environment (e.g. Jenkins, 2006). However, a lack of any substantial governance framework leaves organisations exposed to significant risks as identified by Zerfass, Fink and Linke (2010) and the Information Systems Audit and Control Association (ISACA, 2011). Social media specialists interviewed support an open policy, but all argue that this must be backed by a strong governance structure comprised of guidelines, training, and monitoring at a minimum. Some go further and recommend provision of editing services for organisation staff who have specialist expertise but may need help with communication (e.g. engineers, scientists, software programmers, etc).

There are some distinct differences between countries and between private and public sector organisations. While the small number of responses...
from some countries did not allow statistical comparison, survey and interview data indicated that Singaporean and Hong Kong organisations are stricter in guiding or controlling employees’ social media use, while Australian and New Zealand organisations are more liberal and, in some cases, laissez faire. As could be expected, government departments and agencies generally have stricter policies and controls on social media use than private sector organisations. These are increasingly included in Public Service or Civil Service policies.

Most organisations allow employees to use social media for personal use during working hours, “with common sense to apply” (44.8 per cent). A further 15 per cent allow personal use of social media during lunch time and breaks. However, 22.2 per cent or organisations have a total ban on personal social media use at work. How this is monitored or enforced is unclear, however. Few organisations were willing to talk about whether they monitor employees’ online behaviour and, as reported later, many organisations do not monitor social media at all.

Examination of the types and forms of policies and guidelines informing social media use in organisations reveals that more than a third (34.8 per cent) of Australasian organisations have specific social media policies and/or guidelines. However, in turn this means that almost two-thirds of organisations do not have specific policies or guidelines. This accords with recent European research findings – for example, Zerfass et al. (2011) found that 40 per cent of PR professionals report the existence of social media policies and/or guidelines in their organisations. Despite an apparent increase in governance compared with previous studies, this still means that around 60 per cent of European organisations admit having no guidelines or policies in place – only slightly better than the situation in Australasia.

Of particular concern, according to social media specialists interviewed, is that almost 23 per cent of organisations have no social media policy or guidelines at all and a further 19 per cent rely on verbal instructions to staff or occasional management memos and e-mails. Such an open, unregulated approach is foolhardy in the view of most social media specialists interviewed.

Furthermore, risk is exacerbated because more than two-thirds (67 per cent) of organisations do not provide any training for staff using social media, only 23.1 per cent provide technical support and only 6.8 per cent provide editing services. This lack of management and a governance framework is starkly illustrated in Figure 1 which shows that almost half of all organisations provide none of the governance support recommended in the literature – training, editing services, or technical support to assist staff in using social media appropriately.

**Monitoring of social media, another important element of social media governance identified by Zerfass et al. (2011) is also only patchily undertaken in most organisations. As shown in Table 5, almost half of all organisations (46.7 per cent) either do not monitor social media mentions related to them or their products or services at all, or monitor only in an ad hoc or occasional way. Only 20 per cent of organisations monitor all relevant mentions in social media. This is broadly similar to the European finding that only 33 per cent of organisations have tools for monitoring social media (Zerfass et al., 2011) and indicates that many organisations are unaware of what is being said about them and their products or services in social media by employees or others.**
Table 5. How organisations monitor social media (n = 221).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monitoring of social media</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monitors in an ad hoc or occasional way</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitors all mentions in a selection of social media</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitors all mentions in all social media</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not monitor social media at all</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitors only specific issues in social media</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be argued that, in addition to monitoring of social media, content analysis also should be undertaken to identify the issues and topics being discussed, sources quoted, and the tone of content—that is, whether it is positive or negative for the organisation. Quick identification of negative social media content seems an obvious part of environmental scanning, issue management and reputation management—core areas of public relations and corporate communication practice. However, this study found that 36 per cent or organisations do not analyse social media content at all and a further 22.4 per cent conduct quantitative analysis only focussed on volume of mentions, visit, views, and other statistical metrics. Thus, almost 60 per cent of organisations do not know whether negative comments are being made about them or their activities online.

All social media specialists interviewed support an open rather than a restrictive approach to staff use of social media and many call for organisations to proactively develop staff as “ambassadors” and even “evangelists” for their organisations. They argue that the spontaneously expressed views of staff are usually far more authentic and credible than organisational communication distributed through centrally-controlled departments such as public relations and corporate communication. However, social media specialists recommend clear guidelines, thorough training, comprehensive monitoring, and sometimes editing services to situate social media communication within a governance and management framework.

“Loss of control over messages and image building” was cited as the major risk and challenge in using social media, nominated by 57.9 per cent of practitioners, followed by the difficulty of meeting response time expectations (43.4 per cent) and wasted staff time spent on social media (34.4 per cent). This is consistent with the findings of Fink and Zerfass (2010) in Germany where 66.2 per cent of practitioners rated the greatest risk as “difficulties to control the communication process” and 64.1 per cent cited meeting response time expectations (p. 18). Interestingly, “breaches of security or confidentiality” was rated as a major risk by only 30.3 per cent of Australasian practitioners and very few identified other risks such as reputational damage arising from inappropriate online content or behaviour.

Social media specialists interviewed were unanimous in the view that, not only could social media not be controlled, but that corporate and organisational communication have never been controllable—a view also expressed in public relations literature by Jim Grunig (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 2010) and Johanna Fawkes and Anne Gregory (2000, p. 122) who have critiqued the “illusion of control” that deludes many PR practitioners as well as senior management.

PR and corporate communication practitioners surveyed cited their main reasons for using social media at work as “[they provide] another channel for marketing and promotion” (82.2 per cent), followed by “two-way engagement with key stakeholders/citizens” (70.3 per cent). Only 40.6 per cent said they use interactive social media for research and listening and just 20.3 per cent use social media for collaboration.

Conclusions

It can be concluded from this analysis that PR and corporate communication practitioners have a strong interest in social media and most private and public sector organisations now use social media for work-related purposes. PR and corporate communication practitioners see themselves as increasingly knowledgeable about social media and primarily responsible for social media in their organisation.

However, there are inconsistencies between the claims of PR/corporate communication practitioners and the views of social media specialists—and the latter are supported by empirical findings of this study. Despite the knowledge and role claims of PR and corporate communication practitioners, there is a lack of management and governance in most organisations in relation to social media use by employees. Specifically, almost two-thirds of organisations do not have policies or guidelines to inform staff, very few provide training or support to staff, and almost half carry out no or little monitoring of social media.

Also, PR and corporate communication practitioners engaged in social media are, to a significant extent, focussed on the wrong issues—attempts at control and central distribution and response—instead of decentralising communication to organisational ‘ambassadors’ and ‘evangelists’ cultivated and managed within effective governance frameworks and enabled by support such as training. Also, while recognising the unique characteristics and capabilities of interactive social media and networks to engage stakeholders and citizens, most organisational practitioners see social media as a marketing and promotion channel which is most typically used for one-way information transmission. Thus, the unique benefits of Web 2.0-based social media and networks are not being fully realised.

Zerfass et al. (2011) concluded that “overall, governance structures for social media are still underdeveloped and can be seen to be missing from most communication departments across Europe” (p. 91). This study found this also
to be the case in Australasia. Lack of governance, including lack of policies and guidelines informing social media use by employees, lack of training, and lack of monitoring of social media pose significant security, reputational and legal risks to organisations which should be addressed. On a more positive note, the development of social media strategies, policies and guidelines; training of spokespersons and organisational ‘ambassadors’ and ‘evangelists’; monitoring of social media; and evaluation of social media activities are major opportunities for PR and corporate communication practitioners.

Social media specialists who were interviewed identified a number of what they considered to be exemplars and ‘Best Practice’ case studies of social media management and governance and these will be further explored as part of a follow-on study, as they will productively inform scholarship and practice. Also, as part of an international collaboration, it is proposed to expand and repeat the study after an interval to identify changes and trends. Further research will help address this clear gap and opportunity.

References


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Although different crises in societies and the resulting costly damage present various models of crisis management, managing the pre-crisis stage (PCS) has been neglected in the available models. This article examines the role of mass media (MM) as one of the most effective tools for leading public opinion in a crisis, especially in the PCS, and the design of an appropriate model to reflect this. In order to identify the elements and structure of the model, a number of scholars and experts in the area of media and crisis management (CM) were interviewed in-depth and the resulting data were analyzed using grounded theory. The butterfly model of media roles in managing the PCS is the result of this research. Based on this model of PCS management, the media play five roles. These are monitoring, educating, leading public opinion, informing and rallying public support. The Research findings substantiate the vital role of media at the pre-crisis management (PCM) stage, and support the application of the butterfly model to predict, prevent and inform preparedness to act in a crisis.

Keywords: Crisis, Crisis Management (CM), Pre-crisis Management (PCM), Mass Media (MM), Butterfly Model

Introduction

Crisis is an inevitable fact of human existence and mankind has faced a great variety of crises ranging from natural hazards (famine, drought, flood, and earthquake) and communicable diseases to war and pollution. Every crisis results in varying degrees of loss and damage to the environment. The severity of the crisis can be determined by its intensity, frequency, and duration (Binder et al, 1971), all of which may seriously threaten human life, e.g. the outbreak of influenza type A (N1H1) in 2009. Crisis disrupts the order of systems and creates situations that require immediate response. It also causes confusion and shock amongst decision-making institutions. Ad hoc responses, allocation of extraordinary resources and other vital activities are referred to as Crisis Management (CM). Various CM paradigms have been presented by scholars.
study of these models reveals the paucity of research on the CM stage. Adopting a dynamic approach in the PCS instead of avoidance or denial greatly assists prediction, prevention and preparedness, hence reducing damage. A focus on PCS throughout the process of crisis management is thus very important.

The rapid growth of information technology has given the media more powerful ways to control the flow of information and influence the thoughts and emotions of society. This power makes the mass media the most important instrument of crisis management in society, able to help reduce crisis damage by encouraging high levels of preparedness and alertness (Ferrier and Haque, 2003). Likewise, MM can play a paradoxical role likened to a sharp blade, capable of inflicting harm or healing. There is, therefore, an obvious need to propose a model to guide the media in an emergency situation.

The literature review reveals little research on the role of media in crisis management. Despite the different opinions raised on the subject, the lack of comprehensive models to describe the roles of MM in the subject is salient. Given the shortfall, this research has been informed by data gathering through content analyses, conducting in-depth interviews with experts and applying grounded theory (GT) to build an accurate and classified model for expressing the function of MM in pre-crisis management.

**Crisis and Crisis Management**

Although the mean of the word ‘crisis’ seems clear and both the discourse and literature provide a definition, a significant consensus on the concept of crisis seems impossible. In the last fifty years many studies with different research perspectives have been undertaken, but these efforts have complicated the notion even further and have not resulted in any clear definition of the concept.

Therefore, each scholar has provided different meanings of crisis, based on his or her viewpoint. One such viewpoint states that a crisis is an event that causes confusion and wonder and as a result humanity is unable to react effectively or logically and so can not realize its goals (Hermann, 1963). Perrow, however, distinguishes incident from crisis, and considers crisis as a thorough disorder that is in contrast with incident which disrupts the function of the system as a whole, causes many problems and endangers life (Perrow, 1984).

Burnet introduces crisis as a continuum that is initiated by incident, continues with conflict and ends up in a crisis, characterized by a severe state of disorder (Burnet, 1998).

The bill proposed by the Iranian Interior Ministry to establish a crisis management organization in Iran used the following definition:

“circumstances followed by unexpected or uncontrolled natural incidents, man-made events or reactions that cause difficulties and hardships for society, requiring urgent and immediate action in order to be resolved.” (Crisis Management Organization Act, 2007).

Crisis usually involves circumstances so far outside of normalcy that usual managerial patterns will not be effective. Managing crisis is dramatically difficult due to time constraints, limited control and high uncertainty (Burnet, 1998).

As a result CM has emerged as an individual managerial discipline, discussed and reviewed in detail. The concept of CM is similarly defined by different perspectives. The conceptual scope of the term is very expansive and includes any scheme to avoid the crisis, informed research carried out during the crisis and ways in which the crisis is ended and controlled in order to provide and maintain national interests (Tajik, 2001). Clearly, handling crises in societies is one of the most important tasks of government. This explains why crisis management involves public administration (Herzog, 2007).

**Pre-crisis Management (PCM)**

The diverse, complex, ambiguous and multifaceted nature of crisis makes its management a delicate process. Hence, different models have been put forward by experts to simplify the process of crisis management. Different models include disparate actions, although the process of CM can be generally categorized as follows:

- Pre-crisis actions
- Actions during crisis
- Actions after crisis

Understanding of crisis over the last five decades has changed our perception of crisis (Letukas and Barnshaw, 2008) as an exclusive social situation occurring gradually in a specific range instead of an event in an exact place and time (Tierney, 2007). The importance of PCM is highlighted by the change in our understanding of crisis.

The approach of crisis acceptance in CM is more highly regarded than crisis-fighting. Crisis acceptance involves adopting a proactive approach in PCS to anticipate, prevent and prepare for dealing with crisis (Roshandel Arbatani et al, 2009).

Governments, in accordance with their attitude to CM, may be categorized as tranquilizers and protectors. Governments which fall into the category of tranquilizers act after an incident carrying out temporary and contingent activities. In contrast, a proactive or protector government plays its role prior to any incident and concentrates on continuous efforts, precautionary activities and implements policies to manage the crisis (Faghihi, 2003).

In today’s hazardous world, comprehensive preparation at all stages to achieve efficacious CM and the establishment of public confidence are vital (O’Brien 2006). The International Federation of the Red Cross defines preparedness for crisis as:
Media and Crisis

Close observation of any critical event reveals a cast of players on the stage, behind the scenes or in the background of the crisis; playing, in some cases, unintended or unconscious roles. The actors might be people from different sectors of society, trades union, government agencies, international institutions and the media. In any crisis however, the role of media is visible, traceable and analyzable.

Nowadays, people receive information through media and the activities of media in the form of information diffusion, publicity and propaganda. This has transformed the media into the most significant force driving and shaping public opinion. Media power in attracting mass audiences, its role in shaping public opinion in the case of crisis and social, political and international conflicts is undeniable. Although public understanding and response to a crisis are not solely under the control of the media, it does play a very important role in this context (Kazemi, 1988).

Media power is intrinsic (McQuail, 2000). McQuail believes that the media is either purposefully or unintentionally capable of initiating change to a greater or lesser extent. Media can also reduce the impacts of change, reinforce the status quo and maintain stability rather than exposing society to the changes happening at the societal and cultural level. This dual role, however, may both cause crisis or impede it.

Modern information and communication technologies ensure that whenever a crisis occurs the public’s response is conditioned by whether the media sympathizes with crisis activators or opposes them. Media regularly focus on, and extensively cover, crises (Telg and Raulerson, 2000) because of their appeal as news items.

Based on empirical analyses, 25 percent of all print media news coverage is related to natural, political or technological crises (Gans, 1979). Media coverage of crises is often designed to attract audience attention by presenting interesting and appealing pictures accompanied by exciting stories on the crisis context (Epstein, 1973). Media interest in covering crisis is high and in the twenty-first century one of the main criteria used to evaluate a crisis is the amount of attention the media gives to it. The more attention from media, the more likely the crisis is to appear more important and dangerous (Moeller, 2006). This implies the effectiveness of media in shaping public response and attitudes toward different crises (Barnes et al, 2008). Coverage by media is, however, selective and tends to emphasize different priorities depending on preferences and the type of crisis (Birkland, 1997). Even though the media may function appropriately in CM, unequal attention may result in overstating a minor crisis and ignoring a dangerous one (Kitzinger and Reilly, 1997; Glassner, 1999).

Media roles in different stages of CM

Studies have shown that media play vital roles before, after and during a crisis. Its contribution is essential to the effectiveness of CM (Scanlon, 2005). Significant media roles in CM include educating people, notifying risks, collecting and passing on information about damage, alerting government and relief organizations to people’s needs, communicating accurate information to ensure adequate preparedness and, finally, influencing society’s response to the crisis (Cate, 1994). Clearly, media roles in CM vary depending on the technology used and the methods adopted to compile and transform information in different types of media, for example, audio, video and print. Audio-visual media play a leading role at every stage of crisis to rapidly transfer data, while the print media is involved in the later stages of the crisis (Telg and Raulerson, 2000).

Based on the fact that preparation training is remarkably inexpensive before a crisis, culture-based educational roles of the media in PCM are highly significant (Thematic Discussion Paper Cluster 3, 2005). Effective MM can be valuable in public education programs, both to prevent crisis and improve readiness for it (Wenger et al, 1985). Public education about crises is desirable to preserve lives, assets and cultural heritage, etc (Kaklauskas et al, 2009).

Education is involved in the following stages:
1. Recognizing the crisis.
2. Creating preparedness in organizations in charge of dealing with crisis.
3. Teaching methods to deal with crisis (Khojasteh, 2005).

The media can also play a role in monitoring and interpreting the environment by predicting the potential and possible crises in the PCS and then informing authorities and agents (Roshandel Arbatani et al, 2009). What is important in crisis, however, is how the news media is used and how public participation is harnessed. Crises are often driven by rumor and accurate information is essential (Roshandel Arbatani et al, 2009). This suggests that the most important role of MM is notification (Quarantelli, 1991).

Mid-crisis, media is the most powerful and reliable distribution tool for vital and timely notification (Snider, 2006). As well, based on research, people consider that the media is the main resource for notification (Wenger et al, 1980). Public ignorance of a crisis can impair society’s preparedness, so media also has a responsible role in this capacity (O’Brien, 2006). Eddie Frits (Local Broadcasters, 2002) notes:
“Media is the eye, ear and tongue of the society in association with the environment.”

Radio is portable, accessible, fast and easy to use and as a broadcast medium plays a very important role in CM, especially natural disasters (Khojasteh, 2005). The media coverage of crises calls on the public to participate on a local, national and international scale. This participation can take the form of seeking short term aid in developed and developing countries (Cosgrave, 2007).

In the post-crisis stage, instrumental methods such as providing social and emotional support for people, furnishing appropriate analysis along with the necessary education to avoid further crisis, providing entertainment in the form of various news reports and interpretation and promoting active and positive public participation can all be considered as valuable contributions to sound CM by media (Bashir, 2008).

There are three media roles in post CM as determined by experts (IAR):

1. Providing information to strengthen the solidarity of victims
2. Undertaking analysis to identify how responsible institutions can respond most effectively
3. Reducing victim suffering through communication and education

The role of print media is paramount because of its capacity to mitigate the effects of the crisis. The print media has the ability to communicate very detailed or interpretive news sometimes in the form of pamphlets or series of essays (Khojasteh, 2005).

Methodology

Since the purpose of the study is to design an applicable model for MM administration in PCM, acquiring the input of a panel of experts and taking advantage of a qualitative research approach i.e. Grounded Theory (GT), as a general method of comparative analysis to inform the model, is necessary. Using the framework of the GT method, the model is directly derived from data, not from literature review (Danee Fard, 2005). The experience and specialization of CM experts coupled with their practical experience of media management make them theoretically sensitive to the nuances of PCM.

A literature review of media and crisis did not uncover a comprehensive model of the media’s role in CM. This raises the following questions:

- What are the functions of MM in PCS?
- What are main components of the MM role in PCM?
Table 1: Examples of resulting axial code from experts’ opinions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experts’ opinions</th>
<th>Open codes</th>
<th>Axial codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuous precise work on directing public opinion</td>
<td>Public opinion guidance</td>
<td>Direct public opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An active approach to informing</td>
<td>Active informing</td>
<td>Active informing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media is institutional reference in the field of public training</td>
<td>Media education authority</td>
<td>Effective training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immunization by media against crisis</td>
<td>Audience guidance</td>
<td>Preventive education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long term planning for cultural preparation in case of crisis</td>
<td>Program-based culture</td>
<td>Culture training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy in identifying early warnings and signs of crisis</td>
<td>Vigilance in observing developments</td>
<td>Vigilant observation of developments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of areas of public discontent</td>
<td>Monitoring public opinion</td>
<td>Monitoring public opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing relaxation through nonverbal behaviours</td>
<td>Relaxation of public opinion</td>
<td>Creation of a peaceful atmosphere in the society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the grouping stage, axial codes were compared to identify differences. A reference to theoretical research literature was very helpful in grouping at this stage. (See Table 2).

Research Findings

The grouping and comparison showed that all the codes could be categorized into two groups:

- Related codes of media functions in the PCM
- Describing codes of essential features to reach an effective CM by MM

Based on the interview analyses by GT, the five functions of MM in PCM are:

1. Environmental monitoring
2. Educating
3. Directing public opinion
4. Notifying
5. Building public solidarity

Moreover, the media requirements for effective CM are categorized as follows:

1. Managerial requirements
2. Workforce requirements
3. Structural requirements
4. Requirements to apply audience based approach

Table 2: General groups, sub-groups and axial codes of Media Management functions in pre-crisis

Final grouping and axial codes are presented in Table 2.
The main purpose of this article is to describe the development of a model of MM function in PCM and to describe how the model was designed based on GT analytical results and literature review. As a result of the literature review, three tasks for CM in PCS were assumed:

- Prediction
- Prevention
- Preparedness

Five functions of media in PCM were identified. The analysis of the findings showed that all five are associated with the media’s three functions in PCS. The analysis further indicated that, although media is involved in accurate observation and monitoring of both ongoing developments and public opinion, it can only focus on crisis prediction. As well, the educational and public opinion directing functions of MM may use different methods of crisis prevention. These may include culture based education and building audience immunity, promoting calm resolve and employing persuasive techniques to influence the audience, both emotionally and intellectually.

MM is capable of playing a very significant and positive role in preparing a given society to deal with a crisis by ensuring the provision of accurate and up to date information as well as creating public solidarity through building trust and enabling mobilization. These functions are classified into three groups, each corresponding to one of the PCM tasks, as in the butterfly model at Figure 1.

As well as media functions and roles in CM, the research pointed to four prerequisites to achieve effective CM. Structural, administrative and media workforce requirements were also added to the model. The media depends on its audience to thrive, so in the end non-oriented requirements were included to emphasize that the ultimate target of all activities is the audience. Due to its shape, the final model was named the butterfly model of the media role in PCM, and is shown at Figure 1.

Table 3: General groups, sub-groups and axial codes of media requirements for effective crisis management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General groups</th>
<th>Sub-Groups</th>
<th>Axial codes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media requirements</td>
<td>Managerial requirements</td>
<td>• CM comprehensive plan</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Coordination with CM</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Effective management</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Decent democracy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Professional, qualified and skilled personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce requirements</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Knowing the media practitioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Organization structured to enable rapid and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>efficient response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural requirements</td>
<td>• Independence of the</td>
<td>• Ongoing training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>practitioners</td>
<td>• Organizational learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Audience analysis</td>
<td>• Knowledge and insight into situation/crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requirements to apply</td>
<td>• Media audience development</td>
<td>• Organization structured to enable rapid and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>audience based approach</td>
<td></td>
<td>efficient response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Audience trust building</td>
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**Butterfly model of the media functions in PCM**

The main purpose of this article is to describe the development of a model of MM function in PCM and to describe how the model was designed based on GT analytical results and literature review. As a result of the literature review, three tasks for CM in PCS were assumed:

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- Prevention
- Preparedness

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**Figure 1: Butterfly model of the media role in PCM**

The butterfly model of the media role in PCM is the first to adopt an active approach in dealing with crisis. This model also serves as a comprehensive template for the media’s role in PCM incorporating detail, subtlety and classifications.
Conclusion

Unstructured and open interviews with media experts and crisis managers provided the data to inform a model for the media’s role in pre-crisis management (PCM). The interviews were coded using grounded theory (GT). The aim of the research was to identify mass media functions and roles in PCM as well as the requirements of effective crisis management (CM). The butterfly model of PCM combines the functions and requirements in association with media roles in PCM, i.e. prediction, prevention and preparedness.

The most important function of the media is to observe and monitor the environment in the prediction stage. The media should identify the environmental changes through intelligent and vigilant observation and monitoring, and, as a result, prediction of crisis should be possible. The media is also able to communicate directly with the affected society in order to gauge public opinion.

In an actual crisis, as well as local media there are many media players trying to influence events who may be considered as rivals and capable of intensifying the effects of the crisis. Hence, media need to be alert to these extrinsic forces and remain aware of other influential factors in order to help crisis managers identify dangerous weaknesses or pressure points as the crisis unfolds.

The second media role in PCS is prevention. The media may assist in CM by providing education and directing public opinion. The difference between directing public opinion and educating that same public pivots on the difference between inductive and persuasive techniques.

When training or educating people where the media will mostly rely on audience’s existing wisdom, an inductive approach can be more useful. When dealing with an audience’s emotions and feelings in order to influence public opinion, however, a persuasive approach is likely to be more effective.

Training undertaken by media in PCS is necessary to help the affected society prevent crisis by immunizing and inoculating against panic as well as generally strengthening that society’s resilience. The media, as a source of indirect education, can improve the efficacy of training by improving its quality, broadening the subject matter, paying more attention to a range of learning styles and using both direct and indirect training methodologies. Directing public opinion also involves promoting, where possible, a less tense, more relaxed situation in the affected society and building a sense of calm through public opinion, however, a persuasive approach is likely to be more effective.

Competent workforce management (HR) involves the judicious use of experts and specialists, recognition of the strengths and weaknesses of staff and ongoing, timely and targeted training. Structural requirements centre on those features of a media organization which enable it to play an effective role in crisis. Some of these include an agile and super flexible organizational structure to support prompt reaction, an independent ethos and a strong organizational learning culture capable of acting on lessons learned from past crises.

The most vital requirement of all, however, is an audience-based approach. Any media action in CM affects audience beliefs and readiness to accept what is being communicated. Any analysis by the media should focus on how best to capture audience attention and build the trust essential to effectively manage the crisis.

Finally, researchers interested in this area are invited to critique the butterfly model and offer suggestions to expand it to include further stages of CM. Applying the model in practice will further demonstrate its capacity to be a true and accurate touchstone for PCM.

References


Herman, C. F. (1963) some consequences of crisis which limit the viability of organizations. Administrative Science Quarterly, 8, 61-82.


Peter Maund

Peter was a well-respected practitioner who held true professional values in every sense of the word. Mauund was described by a contemporary as an “absolute trailblazers in our profession”. – A former Public Relations Officer for the State Electricity Commission of Victoria he went on to work in public relations at the most senior level at BHP. He was a thoughtful contributor to the body of PR knowledge through many publications and conference papers and a long-serving member (1975-2011) of the PRIA.

John Malone

Distinguished national image-maker, John Malone, the man who played a major role in revolutionising the way Australia is projected worldwide, died in Sydney on 25 March, aged 81. He made significant contributions to the Federal government’s public diplomacy activities overseas, its communication policies within Australia and to the profession of public relations.

After a degree in law from Sydney University and a decade in journalism with the Sydney Morning Herald, gaining experience in London, Canberra and New York, John spent nearly 30 years in the Australian Information Service (AIS) – promoting national policies and interests and every aspect of the Australian way of life. He was also a major player in the creation of a mechanism for coordinating domestic government information and advertising.

John also devoted much of his great energy to the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) – particularly after retirement - where a major passion was the development of younger people in the profession. He ran his own PR consultancy but there was also time for golf and community work with his church.

After his news media career, in 1961 John was appointed Press officer, at the Australian Consulate-General in New York, in 1961. In 1963-68 he served as Press Attaché at the Australian Embassy in Washington DC. He quietly established an enviable network of US Government and media connections including in the White House Press Corps.

In 1968 John was posted to Jakarta as public affairs officer where he became a valued member of the embassy’s team, primarily through the close connections he established with members of the media. Although receiving only limited formal training, John worked hard to become comfortable with the Indonesian language, a determination that won him many friends.

After returning home, John was seconded in 1978 as a member of a government Task Force on Departmental Information. The report he co-wrote later became the foundation for a structure to coordinate all federal government information and advertising.

After completing the report, John resumed his position as Assistant Director of AIS, responsible for all its public affairs activities overseas. In 1983, he took over as head of the Information Coordination Branch which had been established largely as a result of the report John and his colleagues had written in 1978. In this senior executive position he took great pains to demonstrate examples of good public affairs activities and structures to government agencies and encouraged them to follow suit.

But he returned to his first love – communicating Australia’s messages overseas – when appointed in 1985 to the top position in AIS (by then known as Promotion Australia – one of many guises over the years for the organisation John had joined in 1963 as the Australian News and Information Bureau). He stayed in that position during the transfer of the organisation into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in 1987. He retired from the public service as Assistant Secretary of the Australian Overseas Information Service (another of its guises) on 10 February 1989 - his 59th birthday.

In a talk to members of the PRIA a few years ago, John said that while he joined the public service with the title ‘journalist’ it was not long before he realized he was now in public relations. During the time he was Press Attaché at the Australian Embassy in Washington, he said, he mixed with professional PR operatives and knew that was the business he was in. As John did in all of his positions, he threw himself wholeheartedly into public relations and read academically into its history and practice – a grounding which held him in good stead later in senior positions in the public service and in the PRIA.

John was national secretary of the PRIA from July 1991 to April 2002 and served as President of the PRIA (ACT) in 1984-86. He was a powerful force in building up the PRIA in Canberra, and later nationally, and encouraging much wider understanding and recognition of professionalism in public relations. He worked tirelessly in setting up the public relations degree course at what is now the University of Canberra and his guiding hand and keen intellect were critical to its success.

In recognition of his outstanding contribution to the PR profession, John was elevated to the PRIA College of Fellows and later made a Life Fellow. Long after retirement, John continued to contribute invaluable counsel to the PRIA, took great interest in the annual Golden Target Awards and mentored many PR members along the way.

Even in his senior positions, John worked both at both the nitty gritty end of public affairs (numerous colleagues he mentored have in recent days reported how he emphasized checking, re-checking and checking again) as well as at the high level strategic end with Ministers and senior officials in foreign governments.
In tributes circulating among former colleagues and friends since his death, the over-riding sentiment has been of John as a man of decency and high ethical values, a mentor and wise counsellor - and that a shining light has gone out in the field of public communications in Australia.

**Book reviews**

**Public relations**

**Theories, practices, critiques**

Jim Macnamara  
Pearson 2012  
Reviewer – Mark Sheehan, Deakin University

Australian public relations practitioners and academics have been fortunate in recent years with the publishing of a number of excellent introductory and specialist texts. This development recognises the growth and maturity of public relations professionally and scholastically. For undergraduate students or early career practitioners recent publications such as Chia and Synott’s *An Introduction to public relations* (2009) or Harrison’s *Strategic public relations* (2011) are required reading.

However, up to this time there has been a noticeable demand for a sophisticated volume – one that appeals to the mid-career manager and the postgraduate student undertaking introductory study in public relations. This void has now been filled with the publication of *Public Relations Theories, practices, critiques* (Pearson 2012) by Professor Jim Macnamara of University of Technology, Sydney.

This text has one of the strongest theoretical entries seen in any modern equivalent. While the main “Parts” are similar in outline to Chia and Synott’s approach what sets this text apart is the intertwining of practice methods, theories, models and a contemporary critique of the same. It is in this critique that the author is to be congratulated, the volume is rewarding for the public relations scholar and professional. The non-American reader will be refreshed by the discussion on the US centric heritage of PR.

Each “Part” is structured with thoughtful layout. The writing style is largely informal and in some instances conversational however where formality is required such as the theoretical discussion, a more scholarly tone is assumed. Part 1 is concerned with foundational understandings: communication problems, theories and models; Part 2 has a practitioner focus on practices, methods and the industry while Part 3 looks at critiques and change.

Practical considerations are capably dealt with also. The author’s publishing in the area of social media is well known in Australian academic circles and he brings his vast knowledge to the fore. Rather than allocating a chapter or topic to social media Macnamara has embedded the phenomenon and its impacts in the context of each part and their inclusive chapters. In taking this
approach the author has also skilfully contextualised the parameters of Web 2.0 for public relations practitioners.

For the teacher each chapter finishes with discussion point and exercises that allow for reflection and activity. Appendices and case studies make this a great resource for academics and provide interesting templates for professionals. It is a handsomely presented volume – with excellent production values.

While its claim to be an Asia-Pacific text is overstated (the highly detailed index includes only one reference for China, Malaysia and Singapore), the comprehensive examination of public relations will provide practitioners and scholars with a solid basis to argue for the future and growth of PR in the region. McNamara has in one volume met many of the varied demands of both scholars and practitioners. To paraphrase a cliché, if you only have one PR book in your library make sure it’s this one!

Public relations

Public relations cases (ninth edition)

Darrell C. Hayes, Jerry Hendrix & Pallavi D. Kumar
Wadsworth 2013
Reviewer – Mark Sheehan, Deakin University

One of the staples of PR academic publishing (first edition was 1988) is Hendrix’s tried and true method of public relations case studies. In layout and style this volume is largely unchanged from previous editions. The first two chapters on PR process and PR in action still contain the ever-useful and long lists of Major Publics, Actions and special events, and Uncontrolled and controlled media.

Of the 33 cases in this edition only two have appeared in prior books (although the blurb states there are only 29 cases!). As always the bulk of the cases are drawn from the Public Relations Society of America’s Silver Anvil contest. Hendrix takes the cases and analyses them through the prism of the ROPE model of public relations planning. This volume includes a new chapter of four case studies on social media. This seems to be acceptable now but surely it will preferably to consider social media as an integrated tactic in the near future once we have “bedded down” its role and impact in the public relations arena.

One wonders now with the growth of so many good local texts that non-US academics would consider recommending Hendrix? Its format is comfortable but with so many culturally attuned publications available this book seems to be out of place and perhaps even out of its time. A further question is also warranted in the use of the ROPE model approach and its applicability in a more sophisticated era of public relations management.

For a teacher it is a useful text that its publishers have well resourced and it is clearly and simply written for the undergraduate student.