A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP: MEASURING THE PERCEPTIONS OF
JOURNALISTS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS’
WORKING RELATIONSHIP

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
San Diego State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Communication

by
Betsy Christine Galchutt
Summer 2014
SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

The Undersigned Faculty Committee Approves the
Thesis of Betsy Christine Galchutt

A Special Relationship: Measuring the Perceptions of Journalists and Public
Relations Practitioners’ Working Relationship

Amy Schmitz Weiss, Chair
School of Journalism and Media Studies

Hongmei Shen
School of Journalism and Media Studies

Esther Rothblum
Department of Women’s Studies

5/16/14
Approval Date
DEDICATION

To my loving mom and dad, for encouraging me in more ways than I thought were humanly possible. Thank you for taking this incredible journey with me—your love, guidance, and support were with me every step of the way. I love you.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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by

Betsy Christine Galchutt

Master of Arts in Communication
San Diego State University, 2014

Journalists and public relations practitioners share a history of mutual antagonism, as identified in previous research that has explored the deep-seated roots of distrust and negative stereotyping. This study examines the working relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners through the lens of gatekeeping. San Diego local news was selected as a representative sample. The study evaluates San Diego journalists and public relations practitioners’ perceptions of their work together as well as their communication and interaction. Based on an online survey conducted of 104 San Diego media practitioners, findings showed that both groups differ in their perceptions of their working relationship and their communication and interaction. Although perceptions were not entirely negative in nature, journalists remain conflicted about the work of public relations practitioners. Findings of the study suggest that journalists play an intermediary role in the gatekeeping process, and that the current gatekeeping model may need to evolve to match the changing needs and demands of digital journalism.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would have not been possible without the help and support of many people. First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Amy Schmitz Weiss, for your unending supply of guidance and patience. You pushed me to dig deep in myself and to pull out the very best work possible. I am a better student, leader, and researcher because of it.

I would also like thank my other committee members, Dr. Hongmei Shen and Dr. Esther Rothblum, for their insight and thoroughness in reviewing my work. Thank you, Dr. Shen, for making sure that every “i” was dotted and every “t” crossed. Your introduction to quantitative research has been the backbone of my research. Thank you, Dr. Rothblum, for initiating me into the wonderful world of qualitative research. Although I went down a different path with this thesis, I so appreciate everything I learned from you and know that it has further fleshed out my research skills.

My deepest thanks to David Hollingsworth, for the support you continue to provide, even as the chaos wanes. Your sweet words, late night fast food runs, and keen insight into my processes have propelled me forward over and over again. Thank you for always being my something warm to come home to. I love you more than I can say.

For my brother, Andrew Galchutt, thank you for always standing by me in this wild adventure that has been my life as a grad student. Your late night phone calls always cheered me up, and it has been thrilling to watch you succeed in your own media program. I am so proud of you and all the hard work you’ve put into this chapter of your life. I love you.

I would also like to thank one of my best and dearest friends, Sarah Willer, for your friendship, advice, and support throughout this process. It has meant the world to me, and without a doubt you have been my closest ally since the beginning. Thank you, little honey badger.

For Beth Bollinger, grad student extraordinaire, thank you for your willingness to help and share your knowledge. Your passion for learning has inspired me countless times, and your friendship has been invaluable to me. Thank you, dear friend.
Thank you Jan and Tom Bernstorff for your love and support, and for never wavering in your encouragement. I can’t thank you enough for coming out to San Diego to celebrate this huge milestone with me, and it would not have been the same without you there. I admire the importance you have always placed on education, and thank you for instilling that value into me as well. I love you both.

Thank you to Sarah Meghan Lee for taking the time out of a busy Friday afternoon (and with kids in tow!) to spend some hours with me in the PSFA computer lab. I would not have arrived at my analysis without your excellent introduction and I so am thankful for your time and dedication.

For Dr. Rebecca Coates Nee, thank you for your instruction these past two years, both as a professor and as a mentor. I don’t know how you manage all that you do, but I am amazed by the work you create and the passion you have for it. Thank you for your kindness, your patience, and willingness to go the extra mile to help your students.

To Dmitri Diakov and Alexa Mokalis, thanks to you both for your friendship and support throughout this journey that has been our graduate program. I have learned from you both in more ways than I can count, and I would not be where I am without you two. Thank you both.

I would also like to thank my ASUB family for their patience and understanding, and for always giving me the time I needed to put my schoolwork first. You are the hardest working bunch of people I know, and I admire each and every single one of you for your unique talents and achievements. Thank you especially to Daphney Bitanga and Yevy Kopeleva, for your enthusiasm and positivity. To Jackie Tellez and Marin Morales, thank you both for always making me laugh and for seeing me through my highs and lows.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents, Mark and Bobbie Galchutt, for, well, everything. This is for you.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Journalists and public relations practitioners both play important, integral roles in the highly media-saturated world of today. While their participation in this world often overlaps, both groups occupy different functions with frequently opposing agendas. The distinct nature of their respective roles are often at odds, and despite this seemingly incongruous relationship, those employed within the two professions regularly work together to accomplish the separate missions of their corresponding organizations and affiliations.

Journalists are, essentially, responsible for discovering, crafting, and reporting the news, which is then disseminated to the general public for their own analysis. The very construction of news has an undeniable effect on the finished product that is delivered to audiences, in addition to the ways it is then interpreted, evaluated, and consumed. News production can vary by newsroom, but newsroom culture and is established by the day-to-day norms, values, and routines of its staff (Deuze, 2008; Singer, 2013). Innovation within the newsroom is determined not only by news products, but also by the technology involved in its creation and employees’ experiences with it. The construction of news and the newsroom community that creates it are joint ventures in the finalized news products that are distributed to the public. Newsroom employees’ resources, interactions, and experiences all combine to create the news products we receive today, and it is those influences that contribute to not only how news stories are made, but also how they are shared and consumed (Schmitz Weiss & Domingo, 2010).

According to Deuze (2008), both media work and journalism occupy varying institutions across specific media. As working conditions for journalists have changed as a result of convergence technologies, corporate interests, organizational downsizing and layoffs, newsroom culture has evolved to embrace new innovations, and as such, new norms in reporting. Perhaps the greatest innovation in the production and distribution of news is the advent of the Internet, which can enable an almost instantaneous transmission of information from news reporter to news consumer (Klinenberg, 2005). With this push toward greater
efficiency, and the added bonus of cost-cutting, journalists are now seeking out more news that is available online. However, this tendency to rely on available information online can lead to faulty reporting and can cost journalists their jobs. The reputation of news organizations can also be at stake due to the easy susceptibility of Internet misinformation. To maintain integrity without cutting corners is no easy feat, and journalists must be up to task in order to evolve with modern newsroom demands while still staying true to needs and values of their audience (Klinenberg, 2005).

Oftentimes, journalists utilize other information subsidies, such as public relations practitioners, to provide them with content for potential news stories. (Larsson, 2009). While current working conditions faced by journalists can contribute to this kind of dependence, the journalist-public relations practitioner partnership is by no means a new practice. Journalists and public relations practitioners have worked together for decades in a mutual effort to share their stories with the public (Gandy, 1982). It is the job the public relations practitioner to use their media relations savvy to promote their clients’ agendas in ways that maximizes exposure in a clearly calculated but positive light. Public relations practitioners, too, have a great stake the construction of news and how it can impact their clients and customers, be they corporate, non-profit, or private entities. Publicity may be the goal, but unlike the old adage, not all publicity is good publicity. It is the job of the public relations practitioner to procure and establish positive relationships with their media partners to maintain the smooth veneer of even their roughest clients’ personas. Through networking, building relationships, and by creating opportune activities that are often pre-packaged news products, public relations practitioners spread “information, persuasion and opinions to the public on behalf of their clients” (Larsson, 2009, p. 131).

Despite the mutual reliance and dependence on one another to fulfill the relative missions of their jobs, a reputation of antagonism, misunderstanding, and condescension permeates the journalist-public relations practitioner partnership (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003). This relationship has been evaluated by countless researchers in various contexts and its origins have not always been entirely known. According to DeLorme and Fedler (2003), prior research identified the end of World War I as a kick-off point for the rivalry, back when “journalists feared that publicists’ efforts to obtain free publicity would reduce newspapers’ advertising revenue” (p. 100). Further research by DeLorme and Fedler (2003) identified
“journalism’s early insiders” (p. 103) and found origins of the antagonism that dated back to the early 1800s. While the public relations industry was not entirely established until the 1900s, public figures such as P.T. Barnum mastered the art of “ballyhoo” and hired publicists to promote his ventures and to cut down on advertising costs. Barnum went on to teach such tricks of the trade to eager politicians, businessmen, and educators, and by the 1880s, publicists were promoting larger and more diverse enterprises such as “hotels, professional sports, railroads, and steamboat lines” (p. 103).

With these early developments, journalists often welcomed tip-offs from their friends in the growing public relations industry, as reporters were often underpaid and overworked. However, as the relationship and respective fields evolved, mutual disdain and discomfort set in, and eventually, the partnership became known for its tinges of misunderstanding, rivalry, and hostility (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003). Journalists began to tire of public relations practitioners’ dishonest publicity-seeking methods, which often included bribes in the form of cash and gifts (p. 105). Similarly, public relations practitioners felt that journalists were hypocritical cheaters (p. 109).

Research on current trends in the journalist-public relations practitioner relationship has been mixed. While some studies have pointed to progress in the partnership, others continue to perpetuate the negative connotations of the relationship. This has been studied not only in academia but has also been reported in professional magazines of the trade, such as the Columbia Journalism Review and the American Journalism Review. Reporting on the current “second age of PR,” Sullivan (2011) of the Columbia Journalism Review noted that “without the filter provided by journalists, it is hard to divide facts from slant,” in regards to information obtained from public relations practitioners. Neijens and Smit (2006) found that while public perception of practitioners has improved and that the public relations industry is viewed as offering an undeniably valuable service, journalists were still less inclined to view their counterparts as such. Recent studies paint journalists as being the greater antagonists within the relationship and for being more prejudiced toward the work of public relations practitioners (White & Hobsbawm, 2007). However, in an oft-cited study by Turk (1986), it was found that journalists are more likely to use the information provided to them by public relations practitioners than they are to discard of it. Other research has found that while the working relationship may be tense, the two groups often share the same news values, as
many have defected from one profession to the other and may have also learned about their respective fields in the same academic program (Shaw & White, 2004). By evaluating the findings of previous research, this study will move forward and build upon prior examinations of the relationship in order to determine how journalists and public relations practitioners perceive their current relationship.

The goals then of this study are to evaluate the perceptions that journalists and public relations practitioners maintain of one another, in the context of their working relationship in San Diego, California. The study also seeks to examine if information obtained from public relations practitioners is more likely to be perceived by journalists as inaccurate, untruthful, or biased. It is the objective of the researcher to identify how often public relations practitioners are in contact with journalists and the frequency with which they work together. Additionally, this research examines attitudinal beliefs and assumptions by both groups in relation to their reputations and working relationships in the context of news making. Because both groups contribute to the processes of news making, both professions can posit themselves in the role of gatekeeper, and as such, this research will use the theoretical framework of gatekeeping to ground its findings.

Gatekeeping can account for how news stories are developed, reported, and subsequently distributed to the general public (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). The gatekeeping model features multiple players and processes that all uniquely contribute to the creation of news. This study aims to evaluate how both journalists and public relations practitioners fit into the current gatekeeping model and the roles of each group therein. This study also seeks to determine how the gatekeeping model and the functions of its key players continue to evolve to adapt to digital developments within the newsroom. By examining the current practices that contribute to the creation of news stories, the researcher seeks to identify not only how journalists and public relations practitioners perceive their relationship, but also how their respective roles contribute to the overall process of gatekeeping.

Furthermore, this study aims to shed a light on how negative stereotyping and mutual antagonism can impact the working relationship of today’s journalists and public relations practitioners, and subsequently, the quality of work they produce. By evaluating journalists and public relations practitioners’ communication and interaction, it is the goal of researcher
to identify similarities and differences in the two groups’ perceptions, and to determine how those similarities and differences affect the respective jobs and duties of each group.

To assess these perceptions amongst the journalist and public relations practitioner population in San Diego, participants were recruited by representatives of three different media-related professional societies where participants identified as members. Specifically, the San Diego/Imperial Counties chapter of the Public Relations Society of America, the San Diego professional chapter of the Society for Professional Journalists, and the San Diego Press Club were chosen as representative samples to survey for this study. The researcher also individually recruited participants, based upon their employment at either a San Diego-based news organization or public relations agency. The goal of this study is to hold a mirror up to the historical framework that characterizes the working relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists to determine if those evaluations and criticisms are still relevant today.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The journalist-public relations practitioner partnership has been a source of scholarly research for decades, examining how the two groups work together to accomplish their distinct yet similar agendas. Much of this research has focused on the nature of the relationship—particularly, the antagonism that has characterized the partnership since its inception (Ryan & Martinson, 1984). Research has spanned countless contexts, settings, and demographics to examine not only the roots of this antagonism, but to also determine why this perceived hostility continues throughout the years, despite innovations in media relations and reporting technologies (Deuze, 2008). Current literature identifies the conflict over credibility as a recurring theme, in addition to other characteristics that permeate the partnership—namely distrust, stereotyping, and misunderstanding (Callison, 2001; DeLorme & Fedler, 2003). Despite the frequent overlap in work within the two professions, the working relationship is often tense and personified by concerns over professional ethics (Shaw & White, 2004). The role of the general public also often features into the journalist-public relations practitioner power dynamic, as the two groups’ competing agendas depend on the interest of a captive audience (Callison, 2001). The notion of gatekeeping, too, plays a part in determining which group is the true conduit of information from news source to news consumer, as well as the many other forces that contribute to the development of news products that we receive today (Deuze, 2008; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

While much of the existing literature examines perceptions of negativity within the relationship, prior research has not fully addressed how journalists and public relations practitioners actually work together. Though the two groups seem to share perceptions of hostility and distrust, it is worth noting that journalists and public relations practitioners have worked together since the inception of the public relations industry (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003). It would seem, then, that despite any perceptions of antagonism, the antagonism itself has not been enough to entirely tarnish a relationship that has seen its share of changes and developments over the course of a century.
**HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

In 2003, DeLorme and Fedler (2003) researched the journalist-public relations relationship in an effort to understand its historical context. Their research into this relationship, so frequently characterized by “contempt” (p. 99), sought to examine the background of mutual disdain and distrust inherent to the partnership. It was determined that much of the tension inherent to the relationship has its origins in World War I, when journalists feared that the free publicity sought by public relations practitioners would reduce advertising revenue for newspapers (Lucarelli, 1983). Dismissed by journalists as “flackery,” the public relations industry felt similar antagonism toward journalists, whom they believed sensationalized the more negative elements of a news story in order to increase newspaper sales (Stegall & Sanders, 1986).

In their own research that analyzed a cross-section of autobiographies, biographies, and magazine articles written by and about pioneering journalists, DeLorme and Fedler (2003) identified six different factors that negatively affected journalists’ perceptions of the emerging public relations industry. Specifically, those factors were: a general hunger for publicity; the situational context of publicity’s origins; methods of early PR practitioners; criticisms toward the PR industry; journalists’ own problems; and finally, the ultimate fate that awaited journalists (p. 103). The hunger for publicity, in particular, was cited as being a jumping-off point for early public relations practitioners, as they quickly realized the labored detail in which Americans wished to have their lives documented in daily newspapers (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003). In particular, actors, authors, and politicians were noted for being the most-fame seeking (Congdon, 1880). It was also reported that newspaper offices often fell prey to publicity stunts performed by lobbyists and other publicity hounds (Congdon, 1880; Hartt, 1915), further fueling the demands of a publicity-seeking American public.

Although it is difficult to identify the exact date in which public relations became an officially recognized industry, researchers often cite circumstances surrounding World War I as an onset for the profession (Alexander & Hanson, 2001). During this time, many large corporations worked as monopolies and did not particularly care about public perception. As reporters began to investigate corporate activities, executives realized the necessity for official spokespersons. Citing the importance of honest and effective representation, corporate executives sought professional counsel in the form of emerging public relations
practitioners, who had often deflected from prior careers in journalism (Cooper, 1928). Though the general public often viewed the early profession with skepticism, the cultural and political climate of World War I did little to quell the growing need for propaganda to boost wartime morale (Blythe, 1923; Cooper, 1926; Lewis, 1927). The profession flourished, and eventually organizations of all kinds had publicists both representing and defending their interests (Blythe, 1923).

As the public relations industry grew, its practitioners sought to not only represent their clients but also themselves. The journalist-public relations practitioner relationship soured, and much of the negative perceptions and stereotypes that exist today found their origins during this critical period of budding media relations (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Shaw & White, 2004). That these negative undertones still color the relationship today is particularly indicative of the internalized hostility that pervades the relationship. As current research continues to report on the dynamic, it would seem that not much has been done between the two groups to better harmonize the nature of the partnership.

Though journalists and public relations practitioners must work together to accomplish separate missions, the potential for problems and miscommunication can be heightened due to existing preconceptions about each group and the work they do in their respective professions.

**Perceptions and Stereotypes**

Previous research has examined attitudes and beliefs maintained by both groups in order to evaluate their connection. In addition to DeLorme & Fedler’s (2003) historical analysis, the surveying of representative samples has been a common methodology to ascertain perceptions (Kopenhaver, Martinson, & Ryan, 1984; Sallot, Steinfatt, & Salwen, 1998; Shaw & White, 2004). Participant observation and content analyses have also been conducted in attempts to gain better insight into the relationship (Berkowitz & Adams, 1990; Cutlip, 1989). This canon of research has sought to analyze the basis of negative perceptions and to determine how recurring themes contribute to their persistence. It is these recurring themes that have come to define the working relationship and that must be further examined as practices in media relations evolve.
According to Shaw and White (2004), much of the complexity within this relationship is a result of negative stereotyping, and that journalists often view public relations practitioners as publicity-hungry nuisances available “for hire” (pp. 493-494). Similarly, Stegall and Sanders (1986) found that journalists tend to believe that public relations practitioners lack personal integrity, demonstrating “lower ethical conduct” and “less honorable intentions” than themselves (p. 347). Public relations practitioners have a comparably disenchanted view of journalists and have largely maintained that view since the origins of the partnership (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003). Perceived as “self-righteous” (p. 100) and having a narrow perspective, journalists are seen as uninformed about the field of public relations and the varied roles of its practitioners.

Adversarial attitudes toward public relations practitioners exist outside of the journalist-public relations practitioner context as well. A study conducted by Callison (2001) found that the general public is less inclined to trust public relations practitioners, reinforcing older attitudes that challenged the public relations industry during its inception (Blythe, 1923; Cooper, 1926; Lewis, 1927). Callison cited competence and trustworthiness as two major factors that contribute to the general public’s disbelief in the public relations industry’s credibility. According to Callison (2001), “competence is regarded as reflecting the expertise of a source in the area of communication” and “trustworthiness, the second component of source credibility, is reflected in an audience’s belief in the integrity of a source” (p. 220). In the study, Callison surveyed a sample of elementary and high school teachers in order to determine if public relations practitioners and their organizational affiliations were rated more negatively in regards to credibility than other information sources. The results concluded that participants viewed public relations practitioners as more dishonest and less trustworthy than the other sources. Despite this, the research also found that participants did not necessary view companies that use public relations practitioners as spokespersons to be inherently dishonest—rather, the results pointed to public relations practitioners themselves as having particularly dubious intentions.

The findings of Callison’s study (2001) reinforce an earlier point referenced by journalism’s early insiders—namely, that the general public does not trust public relations practitioners (Cooper, 1928). Facing the scrutiny of investigative reporters, corporations looked to the creation of a new entity to better manage their external relations with the press.
The emergence of the public relations industry and its practitioners deflected the gaze of inquisitive reporters and a skeptical general public and instead transposed it onto an industry solely designed to better manage conflict. It is the context that enabled the creation of the profession, as well as the propagandizing sociopolitical climate of World War, that can be viewed as the toxic source of journalist-public relations practitioner antagonism.

**DEPENDENCE AND DISTRUST**

Despite these deeply rooted “adversarial” beliefs (Stegall & Sanders, 1986, p. 341), journalists and public relations practitioners must forge a way to work together to accomplish the separate goals of their organizations. Sallot et al. (1998) found that both journalists and public relations practitioners hold similar news values and that both professions mostly agree that the field of public relations has an undeniable effect on the news (p. 366). However, opposition arises in the respective missions of journalists and public relations practitioners. While public relations practitioners serve the interests of their clients and special interest groups, journalists pride themselves on informing the public and satisfying the public’s “right to know” (p. 366). Essentially, the two roles represent opposite sides of the same coin, where the job of the journalist is to report the truth, and the job the public relations practitioner is, quite often, to sell a product or push an agenda. The innate conflict within this dynamic, which features “mutual dependence and mutual distrust” (White & Hobsbawm, 2007, p. 283), is all the more compelling when considering how frequently the two fields overlap to work together.

Turk (1986) conducted a content analysis to determine how frequently news releases distributed by six different state agencies in Louisiana were used for stories in daily newspapers. In the results, Turk found that 51% of the news releases were used by the newspapers, which resulted in 48% of all stories written about the state agencies originating from the agencies themselves (p. 25). Despite the potency of suspicion and distrust that can tinge the journalist-public relations practitioner relationship, it appears that journalists’ sources, such as public relations practitioners, “do have some influence on the media’s agenda and its construction of reality” (p. 26).

After scrutinizing previous research studies conducted in the United States (Aronoff, 1975; Ryan & Martinson, 1984; Sallot et al., 1998; Stegall & Sanders, 1986). Neijens and
Smit (2006) surveyed Dutch journalists and public relations practitioners to evaluate the two groups’ “roles, methods, relationship, and quality of media reporting” (p. 239). In their results, they found that both groups had differing perceptions of the other, but that they were not entirely negative in nature. Thus, the researchers inferred that the relationship is no longer an antagonistic one, and that their study “gives further support for the conclusion that the situation [between journalists and public relations practitioners] has changed and mature professional relations have replaced animosity” (p. 239). It would seem that the relationship is not only complex and dynamic, but also capable of progress and evolution in regards to how the two groups have come to view each other. Despite the rocky start to the partnership, public relations practitioners and journalists have at least come to view one another as occupying essential roles in media relations. With frequently opposing agendas, both groups acknowledge their dependence on the other in order to fulfill their respective job duties. As innovations in media work continue to emerge and evolve (Deuze, 2008), today’s journalists and public relations practitioners must continue to work together to negotiate the demands of their jobs and answer to an increasingly involved audience. Oftentimes, this partnership features heavily in the larger framework of gatekeeping.

**Gatekeeping**

The journalist-public relations practitioner partnership and its subsequent ability to construct reality can posit both groups in the role of gatekeeper. White and Hobsbawm (2007) have found that “journalists hate access being restricted or denied for almost any reason whilst public relations practitioners increasingly resent the unelected power wielded by media,” and that often, both groups work to shut the other out as gatekeeper (p. 284).

Gatekeeping can be defined as “the process of culling and crafting of countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people each day, and it is the center of the media’s role in modern public life” (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 1). Lewin (1947) first used gatekeeping as a metaphor for a mother deciding which foods would ultimately end up on her family’s dinner table, but over time, the theory has grown and been applied to mass communication and media studies (Bass, 1969; Chibnall, 1977; Gandy, 1982; Gieber, 1956; McNelly, 1959; Westley & MacLean, 1957; White, 1950).
In 1950, the gatekeeping model was officially applied to news making. White (1950) examined why certain stories make the news and others do not. The editor that White spoke with explained that some stories do not make the news because they are not newsworthy enough, while others do not make it simply because of similar coverage from competing news organizations. Additionally, the editor said he rejected certain news stories due to his own personal preference. In an effort to safeguard against personal bias and to attain greater readership, the editor used his own judgment to determine the newsworthiness of stories, thus originating a starting point for the theory of gatekeeping in media studies.

In 1956, Gieber found the process to be much more mechanical, and that editors often purposefully safeguard against incorporating their own personal values into their work when he examined various wire copies of 16 different telegraph editors. Gieber (1956) ultimately found that a news organization’s routines outweighed “individual worker’s characteristics” because the newsroom’s organizational structure ranked higher than any sort of employee subjectivity. Specifically, the number of news items, the length of the news items, and newsroom time constraints were viewed as more important an integral to the news making process than the opinions of employees (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). This notion, that it is the technical processes that feature heavily in determining what eventually becomes the news, supplements White’s (1950) research that posits the individual in the role of the gatekeeper, and suggests that gatekeeping is a much more complex and layered process than previously explored.

However, despite Gieber’s findings, the idea of the individual as gatekeeper resurfaced in 1969, albeit slightly modified to incorporate new findings. Instead of focusing on any specific individual personality traits or characteristics, Bass (1969) looked at an individual’s job within a news organization. Bass found that the first type of gatekeepers were news gatherers (writers, reporters, etc.) who take information from various channels and turn it into copy. The second type were news processors (editors, copyreaders, etc.) who then modify and transmit the stories to audiences (Bass, 1969, p. 72). According to Shoemaker and Vos (2009), these decisions by both levels of gatekeepers are based first on personal criteria and secondly on organizational criteria. Ultimately, these gatekeepers’ “judgments are formed not only by their personal experiences but also by their professional and organizational lives” (Bass, 1969, p. 72). These findings introduce gatekeeping as a
sequential process that relies heavily on the contributions of different newsroom employees and their respective skillsets. However, unlike White’s (1950) original findings that incorporate personal bias and judgment into the gatekeeping model, Bass suggests that it is one’s professional role that specifically determines which items become news stories.

Several years later, Chibnall (1977) found that reporters rarely use their own “direct experience” in reporting a news story and largely depend on their sources. Chibnall believed that by the time a story reached an editor, the major gatekeeping decisions had already been established because news is largely constructed from “raw materials” (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 19). According to Chibnall, events take place, are experienced by witnesses, and are then fashioned into accounts. Gradually, these accounts become news stories for a specific audience. Chibnall (1977) believed that “at every stage selection and processing has taken place” (p. 7), thus suggesting that despite the more mechanical gatekeeping processes that happen within the newsroom, a potential news item becomes newsworthy at the decision of the reporter. Although newsroom processes may enhance the way a news story is constructed or shared, true gatekeeping occurs at a basic level, when the reporter decides which story leads are worthy of investigation.

In 1982, Gandy further reiterated Chibnall’s (1977) argument by pointing out the role of the public relations industry in the gatekeeping model. Because the public relations industry is able to transmit press releases to news organizations, they too factor into the gatekeeping model in determining which material is covered in the media. In these cases, “much of the gathering and processing has occurred before the item comes to the attention of the journalist/gatekeeper” and that public relations practitioners often act as “information subsidies” due to the convenience and accessibility for journalists (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 20). As such, public relations practitioners also have a role in the gatekeeping process in trying to help shape media content. As public relations practitioners create and make this information available to journalists, it is up to the journalist and their organization to determine the newsworthiness of the content. In this development, gatekeeping occurs at two levels: at first when the public relations practitioner provides the information, and secondly when the journalist decides whether or not to cover the material. That this development involves the cooperation of an entirely separate industry, such as public relations, is telling in
the ways that the news industry has evolved to accommodate new advancements in the gatekeeping model.

THE GATEKEEPING MODEL OF TODAY

While all of these processes have contributed to the gatekeeping model of the past, the theoretical framework is still most appropriate for examining the journalist-public relations practitioner relationship of today. Recent developments in digital journalism have had an undeniable effect on the way news stories are created, shared, and consumed (Boczkowski, 2004). The availability and prevalence of online news, in addition to newer formats, such as blogs and social media networks, have become integral components for news organizations (Singer, 2013). The unbridled nature of the Internet allows for greater transparency and interactivity between news creator and consumer, and within the last decade, consumers have become “users” on account of their own contributions to news making. Users are able to provide original content on new platforms, thus breaking down barriers that reinforced prior notions of the gatekeeping model (Singer, 2013). The previously established “gates” of gatekeeping now exist in a new capacity, opened, in effort to better encourage user participation (Boczkowski, 2004).

Participatory journalism, which can be defined as “newswork at the hands of professionals and amateurs, of journalists and citizens (Deuze, Bruns, & Neuberger, 2007, p. 323), has also contributed to the newer, opened gatekeeping model we know today, where users and media professionals work together to share resources and to determine newsworthiness. As noted by Deuze (2003), some news websites allow for content contribution in discussion forums, whereas other news websites have completely enabled users as contributors. Although context plays a large role in determining users’ interactivity, today’s journalists can feel challenged—threatened, even—by this latest development in gatekeeping (Chung, 2007). Therefore, in an age of open media with more participants involved in gatekeeping than ever before, the gatekeeping model must continue to be evaluated as a way to separate the worthy content from the unworthy (Singer, 2013). Gatekeeping is an exercise of control, and newsrooms and their employees are the ultimate deciders in determining which content becomes available to consumers (Boczkowski, 2004). While public relations practitioners and users alike can pitch ideas and share content with
newsroom employees, it is the job of the newsroom employees to craft and distribute the news. In the age of digital journalism, where communication between public relations practitioner and journalist can be both instantaneous and continuous, it is important to determine if today’s journalists have become mere gatewatchers, publicizing—rather than reporting—information alongside their public relations counterparts (Bruns, 2005).

Journalists and public relations practitioners both play their parts in crafting and assembling information for potential news stories. As such, they both contribute to the gatekeeping model of today in regards to shaping news content. Although previous studies have examined rivalry and distrust between journalists and public relations practitioners, researchers have also pointed to the inherent dependence within the relationship (White & Hobsbawn, 2007). In their work, both separate and together, journalists and public relations practitioners contribute to the larger mission of sharing information with the general public, and in turn, their particular audiences. Furthermore, in order to accomplish this mission, journalists and public relations practitioners must communicate with one another, and as a result, both their working relationship and the news products that develop may also be affected by the two groups' communication and interaction.

Thus, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do San Diego-based journalists and public relations practitioners perceive their working relationship to create local news?

RQ2: How do San Diego-based journalists and public relations practitioners perceive each other's communication and interaction?

Although previous literature has identified themes and characteristics within the relationship, this study seeks to examine the specific practices and processes that lead to perceptions within the two groups. Additionally, San Diego was selected as a representative sample of the journalist and public relations practitioner population for its vast media market and diverse range of local news coverage within various formats. Similarly, San Diego features many sectors within the public relations industry, including corporate, government, education, and nonprofit sectors. Together, both San Diego-based news organizations and public relations agencies combine to create a robust, skilled sample of media professionals.

The significance and ultimate goal of this study is to identify the current roles of journalists and public relations practitioners in relation to their work together. This study aims to identify how news is created, as well as the major players involved, through the lens
of gatekeeping in the digital age. While journalists have upheld an almost heroic reputation in regards to uncovering the truth at any cost, particularly in a murky post-Watergate political climate (Schudson, 2004), the public opinion of public relations practitioners is often less than flattering. Perceived as “company mouthpieces” (Callison, 2001, p. 371), previous research has found that audiences view public relations practitioners as limited by their organizational affiliation and are often untruthful as a result (p. 371). This study aims to investigate those claims in order to determine accuracy in reporting, in the context of the journalist and public relations practitioner partnership.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

To inform the two research questions posed, journalists and public relations practitioners working within San Diego were surveyed (see Appendix for the full list of survey statements). A survey was the best method for the research because it facilitated the collection of data from two professional groups that would have been too large and broad to directly observe (Babbie, 2010). According to Babbie, “a carefully selected probability sample in combination with a standardized questionnaire offers the possibility of making refined descriptive assertions about a student body, a city, a nation, or any large population” (2010, p. 287). Because the purpose of this research is to assess the relationship between journalists and public relations, information obtained from individuals employed with the two fields was necessary to determine perceptions within the groups. Self-administered online surveys, in particular, are helpful in reaching a demographically representative population due to respondents’ comfort and familiarity with using the Internet and World Wide Web (Babbie, 2010). Distributing the survey online also enabled the research to reach a wide variety of participants in a time-sensitive manner and ultimately increased the number of participants.

SURVEY DESIGN

According to Dillman (2000), creator of the Tailored Design Method of surveying, subjects are more likely to participate in a survey if they have a clear understanding of its purpose. Participants must believe that they are taking part in a social exchange, where rewards for participating must outweigh any costs. Additionally, participants must believe that the study is ultimately beneficial in nature. Because this survey aimed to examine working practices of both journalists and public relations practitioners, only subjects who work within those fields were surveyed. These subjects were able to provide their own perceptions of how their working relationships apply to their own roles and the effect those relationships can have on the work they create.
In order to accomplish the goals of this study, it was crucial to identify research methods that benefitted both subjects and researcher. To accomplish this, the online survey was created for participants to access via survey link. The link enabled the subjects to respond to the survey with relative ease. The survey was conducted online to allow participants complete access to the questions at their leisure, provided that they had a steady Internet connection. Online surveys have become increasingly popular over the last two decades as familiarity with computers has grown exponentially (Babbie, 2010; Dillman, 2000). In one sitting, subjects are able to receive the link to the survey, respond to the questions therein, and submit their responses with minor, if any, discomfort or hassle placed upon them. Ultimately, one of the goals of this survey was to evaluate respondents in ways that maximized convenience, comfort, and ease.

In addition to the straightforward approach of self-administered online surveys, these surveys can also better reduce and account for survey error. According to Dillman (2000), “the ability to estimate with considerable precision the percentage of a population that has a particular attribute by obtaining data from only a small fraction of the total population is what distinguishes surveys from all other research methods” (p. 9). Because this study examined San Diego as a representative sample, only subjects that identified as either a journalist or a public relations practitioner within San Diego were surveyed. If a subject did not select either response, the only remaining response (“neither”) would then direct them out of the survey and disqualify them as a participant.

Information was presented in a clear and concise manner in order to increase subjects’ likeliness to respond. Surveys that “appear shorter and easy to fill out lessen the perceived costs of responding” (Dillman, 2000, p. 18). Similarly, the questions were categorized in order to present the information in a linear and organized progression to attract the subjects’ responses (Dillman, Sinclair, & Clark, 1993). The information presented on the survey’s pages was conveyed neatly and plainly to better direct participants. A progress bar was included as a “navigational guide” to help subjects determine their status in the survey as they reached completion (Dillman, 2000, p. 24).
SUBJECTS AND RECRUITMENT

In order to have a demonstrative survey sample within San Diego, representatives from three San Diego-based professional media societies were contacted to help distribute the survey to their respective societies’ members. The San Diego/Imperial Counties chapter of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) was selected to represent working public relations practitioners, and the San Diego professional chapter of the Society for Professional Journalists (SPJ) was chosen to represent the journalist population. A third professional organization, the San Diego Press Club, was selected for its unique blend of members, where both journalists and public relations practitioners participate as members. These organizations were chosen to represent the population of media professionals in San Diego due to their varied mix of professionals who occupy a diverse range of positions pertaining to both journalism and public relations industries. The recruitment of subjects through these three professional organizations was a beneficial way to ascertain perceptions within the sample, as all groups claim to advocate for professional growth and education while also promoting the importance of integrity and high ethical standards.

Subjects were recruited to take the survey via representatives of their organizations, and the survey link was shared with participants through different means, including via email, social networking sites, and word of mouth. Local chapter members of SPJ were emailed the link through a listserv, whereas local chapter members of PRSA were informed of the survey through a closed page on the professional social networking site, LinkedIn. Representatives of the San Diego Press Club distributed the survey link to members through their e-newsletter, The Foghorn. These participants were alerted that their participation in the survey was completely voluntary and that it would not affect their membership or involvement within their organization. The researcher did not interact directly with these participants unless a participant initiated contact.

Subjects were also recruited by the researcher via email. The researcher contacted staff members of both San Diego-based news organizations and public relations agencies in order to increase survey participation. Information used to contact individuals was obtained from news organizations’ and public relations agencies’ websites that publicly displayed employees’ email addresses. News organizations were chosen to reflect a variety of news coverage in multiple formats, including web, television, radio, and multimedia. This was
done to ascertain perceptions amongst a variety of journalists of different skills and backgrounds. Similarly, the researcher recruited participants from a wide range of public relations agencies based on the firms’ diverse clientele, with clients that specialize in hospitality, healthcare, non-profit, public affairs, boutique, and luxury lifestyle. Public relations agencies were also chosen based on their specialty and variety of services, including online marketing, crisis management, brand strategy, and social media outreach.

All participants were alerted that their participation in the survey was completely voluntary and that it would not affect their membership or involvement within their organization or workplace. The researcher provided contact information in the form of an email address and a phone number within the study’s consent form for participants that had any questions or concerns.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE SIZE

Approximately 750 participants were recruited for this study and a total of 117 participants completed the survey, with a response rate of 16%. Of those participants, approximately 600 were recruited by their professional organization and 150 were recruited by the researcher. However, a recruitment duplication effort is likely due to repeated sample units within the same sample (Dillman, 2000). For example, members of the San Diego Press Club may also be members of the San Diego/Imperial Counties chapter of the Public Relations Society of America as well as the San Diego professional chapter of the Society for Professional Journalists. Similarly, because some participants were recruited by representatives within their organizations, and contact information was not released to the researcher, those participants may have also been recruited by the primary investigator. Furthermore, frequencies in participants’ responses vary because not all survey items required responses.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Questions within the survey’s pages were broken down and categorized into three different groups in order to guide of subjects and to provide directional cues. The categories were entitled assessing perceptions of public relations practitioners, journalists and public relations practitioners as partners in gatekeeping, and demographics. Participants were notified of their rights as research subjects and were informed that they could opt out of the
survey at any time, as regulated by the Institutional Review Board at San Diego State University.

If subjects agreed to the statement of consent, they moved forward in the survey. If they chose not to continue based on the statement of consent, they were directed out and disqualified as a participant. If a participant agreed and chose to continue, two additional screening questions were included to determine if they were at least 18 years of age and if they identified as either a journalist public relations practitioner. Based on participants’ responses to the identifying role question, they were routed to separate questions to determine their level of communication with the other group. After responding to those questions, both groups were directed to the same set of questions to evaluate their perceptions of the journalist-public relations practitioner working relationship.

**QUESTION WORDING**

Measurement error was reduced in this study by including brief and closed-ended questions with ordered response categories. This allowed subjects to respond to a singular idea, “unencumbered by thoughts of alternative or competing ideas” (Dillman, 2000, p. 44). Additionally, the research sought to examine multiple attitudinal responses. To account for this, the survey featured a six-point Likert scale that included measures from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The inclusion of “neither agree nor disagree” and “no opinion” enabled subjects “to report being neutral on the issue, but also allow[ed] for having no opinion at all” (Dillman, 2000, p. 60). Additionally, the wording of these choices was designed to make all options as clear as possible to minimize the potential for confusion.

To create relevant questions, Shaw and White’s 2004 study that evaluated public journalism and relations educators’ perceptions of media relations was examined as a model. Shaw and White’s (2004) study measured the nature of the journalist-public relations practitioner relationship within an educational context. Their results analyzed responses from both groups separately. To parallel that modality, this survey utilized skip logic and page logic in several questions in order to distinguish the journalists from the public relations practitioners. Particularly, Shaw and White’s (2004) study featured several survey statements that measured how journalism and public relations educators view media relations, as well as their perceptions regarding journalism and public relations academic programs. Both groups
of educators were also asked their perceptions of public relations as a profession. Specifically, educators were asked about public relations practitioners’ code of ethics, trustworthiness, recognition from the general public, obligations to clients, and quality of character. Regarding both journalists and public relations practitioners, educators were asked about perceptions of an adversarial relationship, the cultivation of information, and journalists’ dependence on public relations practitioners. For this study, perceptions regarding public relations practitioners’ ethics, recognition from the general public, and quality of character were not evaluated. Furthermore, perceptions concerning journalism and public relations academic programs were not measured, as they fell outside the scope of this study. The statements of this survey were revised and adapted to fit the goals of the study and did not feature Shaw and White’s (2004) statements verbatim. Factor analysis and Cronbach’s alpha were run to test for reliability before using such measures in the study.

The first category of this survey, assessing perceptions of public relations practitioners, addressed $RQ1$ and was found to be reliable ($\alpha = .73$). This set of survey statements sought to evaluate the working relationship of journalists and public relations practitioners and public relations practitioners’ legitimacy as newsgatherers. This set also measured the perceptions of both journalists and public relations practitioners, in regards to the latter’s role as news sources for journalists. Specifically, these questions asked both groups of professionals about the reliability and truthfulness of information obtained from public relations practitioners in order to identify the perceptions of individuals working within the two groups.

The following category, journalists and public relations practitioners as partners as gatekeepers, addressed $RQ2$ was found to be reliable ($\alpha = .78$) as well. This category asked subjects about their communication and interaction with one another, as well as their newsgathering strategies, the cultivation of information for potential news stories, and the existing partnership between the two groups.

Lastly, several demographic questions were included at the end of the survey. Participants were asked about their gender, age, length of time working in the field, and length of time in which they have been working in San Diego. These questions were asked in order to determine basic demographic information within the two samples.
ANALYSIS

Survey data was collected via SurveyMonkey and responses were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. The survey’s variables were classified into two categories to correspond to the two research questions. Descriptive statistics were run to determine the means of characteristics within the sample, including participants’ gender, age, and work experience. A cross-tabulation was done on two variables pertaining to RQ2 that measured interaction between the two groups. Specifically, these variables measured the frequency with which journalists and public relations practitioners interact with one another, as well as the type of interaction, with regard to communication via email, phone call, text message, and/or social media. These variables did not feature Likert scale statements. The cross-tabulation allowed for a side-by-side comparison of frequencies between the two groups to better inform perceptions regarding RQ2.

To further differentiate the two groups’ responses within the survey, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was done to compare means amongst the two groups’ Likert scale responses for variables related to RQ1 and RQ2. According to Babbie (2010), the ANOVA is a method of analysis “in which cases under study are combined into groups representing an independent variable, and the extent to which the groups differ from one another is analyzed in terms of some dependent variable” (p. 493). In this research, participants’ classification as either a journalist or public relations practitioner served as the independent variable and the survey’s Likert scale statements were dependent variables. Likert scale statements pertaining to RQ1 measured perceptions of journalists and public relations practitioners’ adversarial relationship, both historically and present-day, as well as negative stereotypes and trustworthiness between the two groups. These statements also measured perceptions of public relations practitioners’ obligation to their clients, in addition to the potential for untruthfulness, inaccuracy, and bias in information obtained from them. Likert scale statements relating to RQ2 measured communication and interaction between the two groups, particularly perceptions regarding public relations practitioners’ likelihood to initiate contact and journalists’ use of and dependence on information provided by public relations practitioners. Furthermore, these statements measured journalists’ quality of reporting, as well as the partnership between journalists and public relations practitioners in the cultivation of information for new stories. The ANOVA determined statistical
significance (p < .05) between the two samples of journalists and public relations practitioners.

The ANOVA was selected as the best method for bivariate analysis in order to distinguish the two groups’ means and to demonstrate the respective perceptions of both public relations practitioners and journalists, in regards to their working relationship. Additionally, the comparison of means allow for a closer examination of the similarities and contrasts in perceptions amongst the two groups, and can therefore help determine where journalists and public relations practitioners differ in their attitudes and beliefs.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

Of the 104 participants that participated in this study, 31.7% were male and 68.3% were female. According to a current population study by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013), the uneven gender breakdown can in part be attributed to the population of the industry. While women make up a total of 47.2% of media occupations, women, in particular, account for 63.3% of the public relations industry. However, women in news analyst, reporter, or correspondent roles make up 38.5% of the news industry (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). This discrepancy can be attributed to previous research that has found that women are more likely than men to participate in online surveys (Curtin, Presser, & Singer, 2000; Moore & Tarnai, 2002; Singer, Van Hoewyk, & Maher, 2000). Of the 104 participants, 66 identified as journalists and 38 identified as public relations practitioners. The average age range of participants was between 35 to 44 years old with an average of 11 to 15 years of experience in their current field. Participants reported an average of 6 to 10 years of experience in their field in San Diego. For a specific breakdown of sample characteristics, refer to Table 1.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROFESSIONS

RQ1: How do San Diego-based journalists and public relations practitioners perceive their working relationship to create local news?

As shown in Table 2, journalists and public relations practitioners reported different perceptions of each other’s profession. Five of the 9 statements surveyed on profession perceptions were found to have statistical significance (p < 0.05). Journalists found public relations practitioners to be less trustworthy $F(1, 102) = 47.27, p = .001$ and primarily obligated to their clients and organization $F(1, 102) = 10.76, p = .001$. However, journalists were neutral in their perceptions of public relations practitioners’ truthfulness $F(1, 102) = 79.38, p = .001$ and in accuracy in providing information $F(1, 102) = 67.71, p = .001$. 
Table 1. Sample Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Journalists (%)</th>
<th>PR Practitioners (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>89.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Journalists (%)</th>
<th>PR Practitioners (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 – 24 years</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 – 34 years</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 – 44 years</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 – 54 years</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 – 64 years</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 – 74 years</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 years or older</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Time in Current Field</th>
<th>Journalists (%)</th>
<th>PR Practitioners (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 5 years</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – 10 years</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – 15 years</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 – 20 years</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 years or more</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Time in Current Field</th>
<th>Journalists (%)</th>
<th>PR Practitioners (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 5 years</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – 10 years</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – 15 years</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 – 20 years</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 years or more</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Valid Cases) (66) (38)
Table 2. Perceptions of the Working Relationship Between Professions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Journalists</th>
<th>PR Practitioners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>historically, the journalist-PR practitioner relationship has been an adversarial one.</td>
<td>2.48 1.11</td>
<td>2.55 1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the journalist-PR practitioner relationship continues to be adversarial.</td>
<td>2.77 1.16</td>
<td>3.16 1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative stereotypes about PR practitioners permeate the journalist-PR practitioner relationship.</td>
<td>2.30 1.10</td>
<td>2.26 1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative stereotypes about journalists permeate the journalist-PR practitioner partnership.</td>
<td>3.36 1.55</td>
<td>3.16 1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR practitioners are generally not as trustworthy as journalists.*</td>
<td>2.38 1.31</td>
<td>4.11 1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR practitioners’ primary obligation is to their client and organization.*</td>
<td>1.27 0.71</td>
<td>1.84 1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information obtained from PR practitioners is more likely to be untruthful.*</td>
<td>3.06 1.14</td>
<td>4.82 0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information obtained from PR practitioners is more likely to be inaccurate.*</td>
<td>3.02 1.07</td>
<td>4.68 0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information obtained from PR practitioners is more likely to be biased to reflect their client’s agenda.*</td>
<td>1.33 0.51</td>
<td>2.44 0.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Valid Cases) (66) (38)

*Note. Likert scale values ranged from 1-6 (1 – strongly agree to 5 – strongly disagree and 6 – no opinion). Mean values and standard deviation were calculated for each variable within the two groups.

Lastly, the two groups also differed in their perceptions of public relations practitioners’ bias toward their clients $F(1, 102) = 66.28, p = .001$, although journalists “strong agreed” to this statement, whereas public relations practitioners “somewhat agreed”.

Overall, journalists’ responses were more neutral than public relations practitioners, selecting neither agree nor disagree for survey items pertaining to negative stereotypes about journalists ($M = 3.36, SD = 1.55$), as well as the truthfulness ($M = 3.06, SD = 1.14$) and accuracy ($M = 3.02, SD = 1.07$) of information obtained from public relations practitioners. Public relations practitioners, however, were more likely to be selective in their responses.
Specifically, public relations practitioners agreed that information obtained from public relations practitioners is more likely to be biased to reflect their clients’ agenda (M = 2.44, SD = 0.89) and that negative stereotypes about public relations practitioners persist (M = 2.26, SD = 1.18). Public relations practitioners disagreed with the statement that they are less trustworthy than journalists (M = 4.11, SD = 1.09) and that information obtained from public relations practitioners is more likely to be inaccurate (M = 4.68, SD = 0.84) untruthful.

**PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION BETWEEN PROFESSIONS**

RQ2: How do San Diego-based journalists and public relations practitioners perceive each other’s communication and interaction?

To answer RQ2, journalists and public relations practitioners were asked about their communication processes in working with one another.

Table 3 shows that both journalists and public relations practitioners have differences in perceptions in how they communicate. Public relations practitioners and journalists differed in their perceptions that public relations practitioners are typically first to initiate contact $F(1, 102) = 10.46, p = .001$, with journalists indicating somewhat agree (M = 2.38, SD = 1.12) and public relations practitioners indicating strongly agree (M = 1.74, SD = 0.64). Statistical significance was also found for the statement regarding the use the information provided to journalists by public relations practitioners $F(1, 102) = 9.20, p = .001$, although both journalists (M = 2.77, SD = 1.17) and public relations practitioners (M = 2.11, SD = 0.89) somewhat agreed. Journalists were neutral (M = 3.03, SD = 1.14) in their response to the statement that measured how public relations practitioners have improved the quality of reporting for journalists $F(1, 102) = 38.45, p = .001$, though public relations practitioners strongly agreed (M = 1.66, SD = 0.99). Journalists were also neutral (M = 3.12, SD = 1.28) in regards to their partnership with public relations practitioners in the cultivation of information $F(1, 102) = 47.07, p = .001$, while public relations practitioners strongly agreed with the statement (M = 1.58, SD = 0.68). Similarly, journalists averaged a midrange response between somewhat agree and a neutral (M = 2.50, SD = 1.22) for the statement
Table 3. Perceptions of Communication and Interaction Between Professions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Journalists Mean</th>
<th>Journalists SD</th>
<th>PR Practitioners Mean</th>
<th>PR Practitioners SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PR practitioners are typically first to initiate contact with journalists about a potential news story.*</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists typically use the information provided to them by PR practitioners for new stories.*</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information provided by PR practitioners has improved the quality of reporting for journalists.*</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists depend on information provided by PR practitioners.*</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists and PR practitioners are partners in the cultivation of information for news stories.*</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Valid Cases) (66) (38)

Note. Likert scale values ranged from 1-6 (1 – strongly agree to 5 – strongly disagree and 6 – no opinion). Mean values and standard deviation were calculated for each variable within the two groups.

*p < 0.05 pertaining to their dependence on public relations practitioners (F(1, 102) = 11.76, p = .001, while public relations practitioners again strongly agreed (M = 1.71, SD = 0.96) with the statement.

FREQUENCY OF INTERACTION BETWEEN PROFESSIONS

To further inform RQ2, frequencies were run to evaluate the perceptions of interaction between journalists and public relations practitioners in the context of their working relationship. Most journalists perceived their interaction with public relations practitioners to be daily or once a week whereas the majority of the public relations practitioners reported having daily interaction with journalists, as shown in Table 4.

TYPES OF INTERACTION BETWEEN PROFESSIONS

Journalists and public relations practitioners were also asked about the type of interaction they have with each other, as shown below in Table 5. The most common mode
Table 4. Frequencies of Interaction Between Professions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Journalists (%)</th>
<th>PR Practitioners (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>32.3 (n=23)</td>
<td>52.6 (n=20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than once a week</td>
<td>38.0 (n=27)</td>
<td>29.0 (n=11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About once a week</td>
<td>11.3 (n=8)</td>
<td>10.5 (n=4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two to three times a month</td>
<td>5.6 (n=4)</td>
<td>2.6 (n=1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About once a month</td>
<td>1.4 (n=1)</td>
<td>0.0 (n=0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a year</td>
<td>8.6 (n=6)</td>
<td>5.3 (n=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>2.8 (n=2)</td>
<td>0.0 (n=0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Valid Cases) (71) (38)

Table 5. Types of Interaction Between Professions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Method</th>
<th>Journalists (%)</th>
<th>PR Practitioners (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>100 (n=67)</td>
<td>100 (n=38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Call</td>
<td>68.7 (n=46)</td>
<td>71.1 (n=27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Message</td>
<td>10.5 (n=7)</td>
<td>21.1 (n=8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>17.9 (n=12)</td>
<td>29.0 (n=11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Valid Cases) (67) (38)

Note. Journalists and public relations practitioners were able to select more than one value for this variable.

of interaction amongst both groups was email. Both groups also stated phone calls to be the second most common mode of interaction, with social media as the third most common method of communication and text messages as the least common communication method.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study found that journalists and public relations practitioners have different perceptions of each other’s professions. Several statements related to the value of their work in their corresponding professions were found to have statistical significance, and as a result, it can be inferred that the two groups that were surveyed differ not only in how they view their own work, but also in how they view each other’s work. However, both groups tended to veer toward the same end of the spectrum in their responses and often reflected similar values. Although this particular sample has not been surveyed prior, it is worth noting that predominant perceptions of antagonism were not reported amongst this sample in the study.

RQ1 sought to examine how journalists and public relations practitioners perceive their partnership, evaluating each group’s perceptions regarding the historical context of the journalist-public relations practitioner relationship, as well as current stereotypes that characterize the nature of each profession. RQ1 also examined the quality of newsworthy information obtained from public relations practitioners, as perceived by both groups. It was found that journalists and public relations practitioners significantly differ in their attitudes toward public relations practitioners. Public relations practitioners averaged more positive responses, indicating that they strongly agreed or somewhat agreed, to statements pertaining to their profession, while journalists were not as certain in their responses to the same statements. It can be inferred that public relations practitioners believe in the integrity and necessity of their profession while journalists continue to view public relations practitioners as adversaries. Although public relations practitioners view their own profession as credible and trustworthy, journalists seem to disagree. This discrepancy may be in part attributed to perceptions of negative stereotypes about public relations practitioners, which both groups reported in their responses. As a result, it can also be inferred that both groups perceive a stigma attached to public relations practitioners, which may contribute to both groups’ attitudes regarding the profession. Both groups, however, averaged positive responses, indicating strongly agree or somewhat agree, to statements pertaining to public relations
practitioners’ obligations to their clients and their potential for bias, thus reflecting a mutual understanding of the client-centric role of public relations practitioners in media relations.

Although journalists responded differently to statements pertaining to RQ1 than their public relations counterparts, their responses were not entirely negative in nature and instead point to more impartial perceptions regarding their work together. Journalists were neutral in their perceptions of whether information obtained from public relations practitioners is more likely to be perceived as untruthful or inaccurate. Although journalists perceive information obtained from public relations practitioners to be biased toward clients, journalists seem less concerned with the veracity or legitimacy of information sourced from public relations practitioners. These results reflect previous findings by Shaw and White (2004) who found that journalism educators are more likely to average neutral responses to statements about the work of public relations practitioners, specifically regarding public relations practitioners’ obligations to their clients. Similarly, Neijens and Smit (2006) found that while both professions maintain differing perceptions of each other’s roles, the perceptions were not predominantly negative. The findings of this study, along with previous research by Shaw and White (2004) and Neijens and Smit (2006), suggest developments toward a more harmonious working relationship within this particular sample.

Similar perceptions were found in both journalists and public relations’ practitioners responses to RQ2, which evaluated how the two groups communicate. Both groups agreed that public relations practitioners are typically first to initiate contact, implying that the work of public relations practitioners constitutes a need to utilize media contacts for their clients’ exposure. Journalists, it seems, also have a similar need for the public relations industry, as both groups agreed that journalists typically use information provided to them by public relations practitioners for news stories. Similarly, both groups agreed that journalists depend on public relations practitioners for information, thus suggesting cooperation between the two groups in the aggregation of information for news stories. It is noteworthy, however, that despite this perceived agreement, journalists neutrally responded, indicating neither agree nor disagree, to the statement regarding the two groups’ partnership in the cultivation of news stories. This suggests that journalists remain conflicted about public relations practitioners as subsidies for newsworthy information.
RQ2 identified that both journalists and public relations reported frequent interaction. Journalists indicated that the majority of this interaction occurs more than once a week, whereas public relations practitioners indicated interaction with journalists on a daily basis. Both groups indicated that email is the most common form of communication. Interestingly, both groups also indicated social media as the third most common form of communication, following telephone calls, thus reinforcing the role of emerging developments in digital journalism and how those developments combine to diversify the ways news stories are created, distributed, and consumed. Social media, in particular, has opened new channels for communication between journalist and source, and has also enabled greater transparency between news creators and news consumers, transforming consumers into users and contributors (Grensing-Pophal, 2010).

**DISCUSSION**

Many of these developments in digital journalism have had an undeniable effect on the work of journalists and the news stories they create (Boczkowski, 2004). Particularly, the advent of cable television and the 24 hour news cycle has changed how and when audiences can access their news. More recently, these digital developments are products of computer-based delivery systems, such as the Internet and desktop publishing, which have created new opportunities for sharing news instantaneously (Klinenberg, 2005). Similarly, the Internet has singularly enabled the transmission of stories across various social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, which also can enable news consumers to share news content with each other. Mobile phones and their ability to share information through mobile applications as well as camera and video also constitute a major recent development in digital journalism and in the work of today’s journalists (Perigoe, 2009).

Digital developments have had similar impacts on public relations practitioners and the clients that they serve. Saffer, Sommerfeldt, and Taylor (2013) found that an organization’s Twitter interactivity with the general public contributes to positive relationship building between organization and audience. Research by Paek, Hove, Jung, and Cole (2013) has also explored how online public relations campaigns affect both on and offline communication with the general public. Paek et al. (2013) found that the more frequently an individual interacts with an online campaign, the more frequently they also
participate in offline activities related to the campaign. For public relations practitioners, it would seem then that digital developments not only affect how they share and communicate with their audiences, but also how they influence their audience members’ behavior (Paek et al., 2013).

It is interesting to note the scope and influence that these technological advancements have had in contribution to journalists’ partnership with public relations practitioners. This study sought to evaluate the differing perceptions of both journalists and public relations practitioners in regard to their work together, and although each research question found statistically significant differences in the means of the two groups, each group tended to agree or disagree in the same direction, particularly in response to RQ2. It can be inferred then that these perceptions do not seem to differ substantially and can be in part attributed to developments in media relations, perhaps as a result of “cultural and technological convergence” (Deuze, 2008, p. 5), which occurs across varying organizational structures and multimedia formats. Many developments in media relations result from innovations in digital journalism, which contribute to both cultural and technological convergence. Specifically, these convergence processes can be in part attributed to an increase in labor costs and a decrease in profit (Klinenberg, 2005). As revenue for media organizations plummeted, staff members fell prey to layoffs and organizational downsizing. In an effort to repurpose their functions and to better market themselves, media employees have taken on additional roles and responsibilities to become even more flexible and “reskilled to meet demands from several media at once” (Klinenberg, 2005, p. 54). In the wake of media employees sharpening their skillsets and embracing new technologies in the workplace, working practices and relationships have similarly evolved.

In context the of this study, it would seem that both journalists and public relations practitioners perceive themselves as gatekeepers and that both groups believe in their own power and ability to create and shape newsworthy content. Within this sample, both groups somewhat agreed that journalists typically use and depend on information provided by public relations practitioners, suggesting that public relations practitioners serve as an integral conduit of information and as a source of origin for news stories. For these two groups, then, it would also seem that gatekeeping occurs in a two-step process: first, when public relations
practitioners provide specific information to journalists, and again when journalists cull through the information to create news stories.

Though public relations practitioners serve as a source of original information for journalists, it is ultimately the discretion of the journalist to decide which content is newsworthy enough to move forward for public consumption. Of course, a multitude of other factors contribute to the gatekeeping process beyond the role of the journalist, which can include various technologies, editorial processes, newsroom culture, coverage from competing news organizations, and even input from online users (Gieber, 1956; Bass, 1969; Chibnall, 1977; Klinenberg, 2005; Jenkins, 2006; Perigoe, 2009; Singer, 2013). Particularly, in a converged news environment, gatekeeping occurs at nearly every stage of news construction and distribution and can be consciously observed or mechanical in nature (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). In their work together, public relations practitioners and journalists play a part in the gatekeeping process, as both groups in this sample perceive journalists to rely on information provided by public relations practitioners. Although journalists have the ability to use or discard of the information that is provided to them, the public relations practitioner serves as a point of origin for potential news content.

While the findings of this study are not conclusive enough to generalize its results to the entire population of journalists and public relations practitioners, the differing perceptions of both groups within this particular sample are observable. These perceptions are not, however, entirely negative in nature and instead point to a less antagonistic relationship than previously explored in other studies that found the working relationship to be characterized by mistrust, negative stereotypes, and differing perceptions of credibility (Callison, 2001; DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Ryan & Martinson, 1984; Sallot et al., 1998). The findings of this study align with other recent studies conducted by Shaw and White (2004) and Neijens and Smit (2006), which found that “mature professional relations have replaced animosity” (Neijens & Smit, 2006, p. 239). These findings are a result of the two groups’ work together and evolving perceptions regarding the validity of each profession. In Shaw and White’s study (2004), it was perceived by both journalism and public relations educators that the two professions should be taught in the same academic program. Additionally, Shaw and White (2004) believed that previous literature that examined the negative connotations of the
relationship possibly affected the two groups’ perceptions, and that until they were surveyed, the two groups did not realize the extent to which they agreed.

Despite the differing agendas within each profession and public relations practitioners’ primary obligation to their client, public relations practitioners still serve as undeniable contributors to journalists’ news making processes, though journalists remain undecided in regards to their perceptions of the quality of information provided by public relations practitioners. The strongest conclusion of this study may then be that journalists remain conflicted or neutral in their perceptions of public relations practitioners’ many roles among this small sample.

It is worth noting that although this study did not examine perceptions of bias or misinformation within the journalist sample, previous research has examined journalists’ subjectivity in reporting. Several studies have evaluated how language contributes to news consumers’ perceptions and how attitudes and opinions are often shaped as a result (Cooper, 2008; Macrorie, 1956; Kocher & Shaw, 1981; Xiang & Sarvary, 2007). Furthermore, these studies have analyzed reporter bias across various contexts and topics, including, but not limited to, education, the environment, the economy, and perhaps most observable, both international and national politics. While this study did not examine journalists’ potential for bias, it is another important point to consider in assessing perceptions of trustworthiness and accuracy in reporting.

Furthermore, this study did not identify differences in perceptions amongst journalists working in various platforms. For example, a journalist who mostly works in broadcast radio may have a different relationship with public relations practitioners than a journalist who is primarily web-based. Journalists that work with various platforms may have unique experiences and insight in regard to their communication with public relations practitioners. Particularly, in a converged news environment, newsroom employees are skilled in many different areas related to writing, reporting, and producing the news. For that reason, converged newsroom employees may differ significantly in how they work with public relations practitioners, contingent upon the platform. Though this study evaluated journalists of all skillsets and backgrounds, journalists were not specifically asked about their platforms or their experiences with convergence, or how those factors can affect their work with public relations practitioners.
As a result of some of these developments in digital journalism, particularly in the emergence of new delivery systems, today’s journalists find themselves working not only with new technologies but also new entities. Participatory journalism, in particular, has given rise to the involvement of news consumers in the creation of news. Due to a decline in readership for newspapers (Deuze, 2008; Mindich, 2005; Shaker, 2014; Szuminsky, 2012), many news organizations have shifted their content online. News that is available online can foster an interactive relationship with its audience, where audience members become “participants in the processes of gathering, selecting, editing, producing, and communicating news” (Deuze et al., 2007, p. 323). This shift to online formats can also open avenues of communication for public relations practitioners, as previous research has found that public relations practitioners utilize social media for a variety of purposes, including fundraising, volunteer recruitment, relationship management, and media relations (Paek et al., 2013). Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham (2010) found that public relations practitioners have identified the importance of audience engagement for launching campaigns. According to Paek et al. (2013), when public relations practitioners “design and manage a social media campaign, they need to consider the extent to which users will feel engaged by the websites and other vehicles and platforms that carry it” (p. 527). In order for journalists and public relations practitioners to carry out the respective functions of their professions, which can include the creation and distribution of press releases, media kits, and news stories, it is essential to utilize the tools and resources necessary to engage their audiences.

For journalists, the level of involvement by audience members can vary by news organizations and website features. According to Deuze (2003), while some news organizations maintain editorial control over their websites’ content, others publish all content that is submitted. Some news organizations enable registered users to vote or monitor submitted content. Depending on the specific practices of the news organization, some are more inclined to view audience members as contributors for original story ideas. All of these models have been found to be successful within their contexts, and current research continues to identify their respective strengths and limitations (Deuze et al., 2007). Although journalists may feel conflicted regarding public relations practitioners as information subsidies, findings by Deuze et al. (2007) suggest that journalists are more accepting of other information subsidies, such as news consumers. These findings may be a result of a perceived lack of
trust within the journalist-public relationship, as examined in previous studies (Callison, 2001; DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Sallot et al, 1998; Stegall & Sanders, 1986). However, this breakdown of traditional barriers between public relations practitioners, journalists, and users is undeniable and points to major developments in the ways news is created and shared. It is important to note that participatory news is a multi-layered process that requires the input of these distinct entities. According to Neuberger (2006), journalists work as moderators of public discourse and must focus their attention on resolving the disconnect between open access for users and the quality of information obtained by both users and other sources, such as public relations practitioners.

Participatory news culture is based upon established practices of newsroom convergence, where information is instantly transmittable and available across a variety of multimedia platforms. Oftentimes, participatory news stems from news organizations that have a strong interest in public service and local communities and recognize the potential for increased revenue. Specifically, by relying on news users and consumers as original sources of information, news organizations are able to cut staffing and labor costs while simultaneously attracting readership from a previously unengaged audience through interactivity (Deuze et al., 2007). Similarly, while news organizations’ motives may be less than altruistic, the general public may be more inclined to view news organizations as honest and trustworthy as a result of users’ and consumers’ contributions. Although previous research has identified the general public’s perceived lack of trust in public relations practitioners (Callison, 2001), Deuze et al. (2007) argue that that the transformation from news consumer to news user has had a positive effect on that way the general public views journalists. According to Callison (2001), a sense of trust can contribute to “communicator credibility” (p. 220) and may affect not only how the general public views public relations practitioners, but also how journalists perceive public relations practitioners.

As such, the gatekeeping model of today must continue to evolve to adapt to these developments. According to Singer (2013), “journalists have claimed that the cultural understandings informing their occupational function as gatekeepers safeguard the credibility and quality of the content they create” (p. 56). However, as journalists reposition their role as gatekeeper, they have also come to depend on users to determine the newsworthiness of stories, often through online features such as voting and commenting. Just as journalists must
cull through information provided to them by public relations practitioners and other sources, they must also monitor news stories’ user feedback in order to gage public interest. It would seem then that today’s journalists play an intermediate role in the gatekeeping process, evaluating a potential story’s newsworthiness at its inception and again after its publication, in an effort to determine the direction of future news stories. While users play a role in the creation and distribution of news stories, journalists may offer users even more affordances in terms of shaping news content through new digital developments, such as wearable technology and the increased popularity of short-form video. As news organizations strive to increase revenue while decreasing labor costs, the role of the “citizen journalist” (Deuze et al., 2007) may continue to rise to prominence, blurring the lines between organizational-based journalist and freelance journalist.

Additionally, public relations practitioners may find themselves relying more heavily on customer and audience feedback in order to promote their clients’ agendas. In a digital age where information can serve as a form of currency, journalists and public relations practitioners must be up to task to take on new challenges and to predict upcoming trends by analyzing input from their audiences. While the gates of gatekeeping may be gradually opening as a result of both technological and cultural innovations, it would seem, paradoxically, that there are more gatekeepers than ever (Singer, 2013).

Developments in the gatekeeping model may also contribute how academic programs view the working relationship of journalists and public relations practitioners, as many programs have experienced an increase of curriculum based around media relations (Shaw & White, 2004). Both the academy and the workplace can benefit from the overlap of the two professions, as both journalists and public relations practitioners provide insight not only into their own practices, but also into each other’s practices. By teaching students the specific, distinct tasks of each profession, students will be more equipped and diversified in their skillsets upon entering the workforce. Similarly, in grounding students in mass communication theory that informs both public relations and journalism, students can better understand the historical origins of each profession and how the public relations industry emerged from journalism’s early insiders (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003). Informing students of the practices of both industries can also equip students for mid-career changes, as previous
research has identified the frequency in which journalists deflect to careers in public relations (Fedler, Buhr, & Taylor, 1988).

Previous research has also identified that teaching the two professions in the same academic program can better inform perceptions regarding the work of journalists and public relations practitioners (Shaw & White, 2004). Education is an undeniably valuable tool in decreasing misinformed perceptions, which can help to reduce some of the negative stereotypes reported by public relations practitioners. Instead of relying upon previous literature or anecdotal evidence that outlines the more negative aspects of the journalist-public relations practitioner relationship, students can reach their own conclusions through their experience in a structured, skills-intensive program. As such, future journalists and public relations may experience a more positive and collaborative relationship in their work together.

While these developments in the gatekeeping model are observable in the classroom, implications for the academy are less determined. Although journalists seem to serve as intermediary gatekeepers, evaluating potential news content at its inception and again after its publication, the current gatekeeping model may no longer align with how information is proliferated and disbursed in the Internet age (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Recent research by Barzilai-Nahon (2006, 2008, 2009) has identified a modified version of the classic gatekeeping model to reflect the more complex processes of information dissemination. This “network gatekeeping theory” focuses more on how information proliferates through communities, reflecting an endless loop of information as it passes through various channels. These “communities” incorporate not only the roles of journalists, public relations practitioners, and online users, but also various online entities, including popular websites such as Google and Facebook. Similarly, contributors and moderators of user-generated content sites such as Buzzfeed and Reddit feature into the network gatekeeping theory, as they too play a part in determining how content reaches users.

**LIMITATIONS**

While the results of this study are informative in uncovering the perceptions of the two groups within this particular sample, due to limitations of the study, however, these findings are not generalizable to the entire population and cannot convey the overall
attitudes, beliefs, and workplace culture of journalists and public relations practitioners. The relatively small sample size (n=104), in particular, prohibits generalizability to the larger population of journalists and public relations practitioners outside of this context. Similarly, the number of participants within each group limits the ability to entirely assess perceptions and cross-perceptions amongst journalists (n=67) and public relations practitioners (n=38). The response rate of the sample may also be imprecise due to the likelihood of recruitment duplication efforts. Because some participants were recruited by representatives of their professional organizations and their contact information was not made available to the researcher, it is unknown if the some of the same participants were also recruited by the researcher via email.

Though surveys are an informative method for ascertaining attitudinal beliefs and assumptions (Dillman, 2000), longitudinal studies comprised of in-depth interviews with journalists and public relations practitioners have also been found to be insightful and adept in providing nuanced detail of the relationship (Sallot & Johnson, 2006). However, in an effort to best reach the largest possible sample of journalists and public relations practitioners within this study, surveys were selected the best method to assess perceptions of a diverse range of participants.

Limitations of the study also result from the survey’s design. Because participants were not required to respond to all of the survey questions, numbers in responses are varied. A total of 119 surveys were submitted, only 104 surveys were useable on account of participants’ missing responses. As such, some survey questions have a higher number of responses than others.

**FUTURE RESEARCH**

Despite these limitations, this study points to future areas of research to build upon the current perceptions within the journalist-public relations practitioner relationship. Although journalists somewhat agreed that their relationship with public relations practitioners continues to be adversarial, journalists also indicated that they depend on information from public relations practitioners as news sources. While this study is grounded in the current model of gatekeeping, its findings may point to the need for an advanced gatekeeping model. Within this sample, it was determined that journalists and public
relations practitioners have differing perceptions about their partnership in the cultivation of content for news stories. However, both professions have a vested interest in disseminating news stories to the general public, whether to promote their clients’ agendas or to increase revenue for their organization. Journalists and public relations practitioners can gauge this public interest through a variety of interactive online functions, which necessitates an evolution in the current gatekeeping model. As journalists, public relations practitioners, and users all contribute to the development of news content, it is less discernable who the “true” gatekeepers are. Although previous studies have examined the gatekeeping model at an individual or organizational level (Bass, 1969; Chibnall, 1977; Gieber, 1956; Gandy, 1982; McNelly, 1959; Westley & MacLean, 1957; White, 1950), the technological developments of the Internet age can also feature into the gatekeeping model, which can include the role of search engine optimization filtering systems utilized by Google and popular social networking sites, as researched by Barzilai-Nahon (2006, 2008, 2009).

While the scope of this study is limited to the current perceptions of journalists and public relations practitioners’ working relationship within the context of gatekeeping, future studies may look at how specific subsets of journalists and public relations practitioners work together, particularly in a converged news environment. Hands-on methods, such as ethnography and in-depth interviews, could provide thorough insight into how specific subsets work together in accomplishing the daily tasks of their professions. Although this study evaluated the perceptions of both groups amongst a varied sample of journalists and public relations practitioners, future research may examine how journalists work with public relations practitioners from specific nonprofit, healthcare, or government sectors. Similarly, due to the converged nature of today’s newsroom, journalists often come from diverse backgrounds and specific skillsets. Examining how photojournalists or videojournalists work with public relations practitioners, for example, may differ from how reporters interact with public relations practitioners.

It could also be of interest to conduct a content analysis to determine which kinds of news stories are derived from information originally obtained from public relations practitioners. Though outside the scope of this study, future studies may examine in depth the type of news stories that develop from information sourced from public relations.
practitioners, as well as the specific information that is most frequently discarded by journalists.

Furthermore, this research could build upon the theoretical framework of gatekeeping by examining how the rise of participatory news directly affects journalists, public relations practitioners, and their work together. Journalists could be surveyed about their perceptions regarding how online news consumers have become users and how this contributes to or detracts from their work as journalists. Similarly, public relations practitioners could be surveyed to determine how news users have impacted their work with journalists, particularly in relation to how they share information and promote their clients’ agendas. Additionally, it could be of interest to examine how the three groups perceive not only each other’s roles within news making and the gatekeeping process, but also how they view their own work and the ways it contributes to gatekeeping.

It is worth noting that despite the findings of previous studies (Aronoff, 1975; Callison, 2001; Ryan & Martinson, 1988; Stegall & Sanders, 1986), the journalist-public relations practitioner relationship is ever evolving to match the needs and demands of continuously developing news markets and practices. Academic programs and workplace experience combine to create robust and savvy media professionals, and the gatekeeping model will continue to evolve as both cultural and technological convergences occur and media functions overlap.

Overall, this research provides specific insight into how journalists and public relations practitioners in San Diego, California, work together to develop and shape news content for public consumption. Despite a shared history of mutual antagonism and inherent distrust (Aronoff, 1975; Callison, 2001; DeLorme & Fedler 2003; Ryan & Martinson, 1988; Sallot et al., 1998; Stegall & Sanders, 1986), both journalists and public relations practitioners must continue their work together to meet the competing demands of their respective clients and organizations, while continuing to serve the interest of their audiences. The findings of this study, then, point to a less antagonistic partnership, with the hope that both journalists and public relations practitioners continue to recognize and be recognized for the unique and essential services they provide to the general public.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

SURVEY ITEMS
Are you at least 18 years of age?
- Yes
- No (disqualified as participant)

Please pick your professional role.
- Journalist
- Public Relations Practitioner
- Other (disqualified as participant)

**Assessing Perceptions of Public Relations Practitioners**

Historically, the journalist-public relations practitioner relationship has been an adversarial one.
- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- No opinion

The journalist-public relations practitioner relationship continues to be adversarial.
- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- No opinion

Negative stereotypes about *public relations practitioners* permeate the journalist-public relations practitioner partnership.
- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- No opinion
Negative stereotypes about *journalists* permeate the journalist-public relations practitioner partnership.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- No opinion

Public relations practitioners are generally not as trustworthy as journalists.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- No opinion

Public relations practitioners’ primary obligation is to their client and organization.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- No opinion

Information obtained from public relations practitioners is more likely to be untruthful.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- No opinion

Information obtained from public relations practitioners is more likely to be inaccurate.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
Information obtained from public relations practitioners is more likely to be biased to reflect their client’s agenda.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- No opinion

Journalists and Public Relations Practitioners as Partners in Gatekeeping

Do you interact with public relations practitioners? If so, how often?

- Daily
- More than once a week
- About once a week
- Two to three times a month
- About once a month
- A few times a year
- Not at all

If yes, what form of interaction do you typically have?

- Email
- Phone call
- Text message
- Social media
- Other (please state):

Do you interact with journalists? If so, how often?

- Daily
- More than once a week
- About once a week
- Two to three times a month
- About once a month
- A few times a year
- Not at all
If yes, what form of interaction do you typically have?

- Email
- Phone call
- Text message
- Social media
- Other (please state):

Please provide your thoughts to the following questions on a scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Public relations practitioners are typically first to initiate contact with journalists about a potential news story.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- No opinion

Journalists typically use the information provided to them by public relations practitioners for news stories.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- No opinion

Information provided by public relations practitioners has improved the quality of reporting for journalists.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- No opinion
Journalists depend on information provided by public relations practitioners.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- No opinion

Journalists and public relations practitioners are partners in the cultivation of information for news stories.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- No opinion

**Demographics**

What is your age range?

- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- 65-74 years old
- 75 years or older

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

How many years have you worked in your current field?

- Less than 1 year
- 1 – 5 years
- 6 – 10 years
- 11 – 15 years
- 16 – 20 years
• 20 years or more

How many years have you worked in your current field within San Diego?

• Less than 1 year
• 1 – 5 years
• 6 – 10 years
• 11 – 15 years
• 16 – 20 years
• 20 years or more