Public Relations & the Media:

A New Influence in 'Agenda-Setting' and Content

by

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BA, Dip. Journ, MPRIA

A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts (MA) by research, School of Literature and Journalism, Faculty of Arts, Deakin University

March, 1993
I certify that the thesis entitled **PUBLIC RELATIONS AND THE MEDIA - A NEW INFLUENCE IN AGENDA-SETTING AND CONTENT**

and submitted for the degree of **MASTER OF ARTS BY RESEARCH**

is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed ............................................................

Date .............................................................
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**NUMBER OF JOURNALISTS SURVEYED: 417**

**Response rate:** 34.29
PROJECT OUTLINE

(Revised)

MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE (Humanities)

in the field of Journalism & Media Studies
( Public Relations)

Jim R. Macnamara

Supervisor: John Hurst
Senior Lecturer Journalism Studies
Deakin University
16 December, 1991
BACKGROUND

The role and effects of the mass media - press, radio, TV and, to a lesser extent, books and cinema - and the influence that the media have in our society, have been studied by many academics and practitioners.

A number of studies of the mass media have criticised modern media structure and practices, including Humphrey McQueen's "Australia's Media Monopolies" and Stuart Hall and others in "The Manufacture of News: Deviance, Social Problems and the Mass Media".

Media bias and prevailing methods of operation are most frequently associated with and attributed to:

- media ownership;
- journalist training and backgrounds (learning by hegemony);
- ideological factors (e.g. political leaning of editors); and
- advertising.

Ownership

Monopoly ownership of the mass media, for instance, continues to be a problem in Australia and in a number of countries. Studies of media ownership point to the major networks and newspapers owned by Rupert Murdoch (News Limited) or Kerry Packer (Australian Consolidated Press), and regional networks such as Rural Press Limited.

However, while the concentration of major media in a few hands is of concern, there are two aspects of monopoly ownership which need to be considered:

a. To maintain that the ownership of various media directly and significantly affects its content on a regular basis is to presume that Rupert Murdoch, Kerry Packer and other media proprietors take an on-going personal interest in the editorial content of their respective media investments. Proponents of such theories imagine Rupert Murdoch standing on the fourth floor of News Limited in Sydney instructing journalists on how to write their stories, or employing editors who carry out his wishes.

In reality, direct intervention may occur, but this is likely only at major events, such as elections - i.e. for a few weeks every three or four years. Closer study shows that, for most of the time, the major 'media barons' are businessmen who look upon their media investments as profit-making ventures and seldom interfere so long as they are making profits. In many cases, their 'empires' are so vast that it is impractical for them to take a direct involvement in the editorial of all their media.

This theory also assumes that editorial is the proprietor's main interest. In reality, it often is not. Commercial media operate as diversified businesses. For instance, one of the major issues in which Rupert Murdoch involved himself in the late 1970s and 1980s was the introduction of Lotto and bingo games to his publications. These gambling features were responsible for more circulation and revenue growth than any page one story.
While editors have to be philosophically compatible with their employers to gain and hold their job, to suggest that editors merely do their employer's bidding is a largely unsupportable claim and an affront to senior journalists' sense of independence and professional integrity.

b. While there are a number of major media monopolies in Australia among established press, radio and TV, there is a 'new wave' of other media entering mass communication. These include small independent newspapers, magazines (Australia has the highest magazine consumption in the world), newsletters, as well as a range of other 'new media'. New technologies such as desktop publishing, which has dramatically reduced production costs of printed publications, have spawned a whole new spectrum of media which reach millions of consumers every day.

For instance, the Margaret Gee Media Guide, an authoritative directory of media in Australia, lists more than 2,700 media outlets, including over 200 newsletters. Many of these are fully independently owned.

**Hegemony Among Journalists**

Until the 1970s and early 1980s, journalists were predominantly trained by cadetships (on-the-job training) where they were indoctrinated into the style of their employer, editor or other journalists. Critics rightly point out that journalists who entered the media often with only high school education were susceptible to the influence of their employers and colleagues. The result was a perpetuation of prevailing thinking and standards.

Today journalists are selected by media organisations from a diverse range of disciplines and backgrounds, often with university degrees in economics, law, computer science, etc.. The cadetship system has largely disappeared, replaced by a graduate recruitment system.

Also, technological advancements with computers and communications have meant that many journalists now work from home or from other external locations and, therefore, are not working in the day to day operating environment of the media newsroom.

**Ideological Factors**

Ideological factors inevitably have some influence on media content and mass communication in society. Clearly, the opinions and attitudes of journalists and editors, as well as other contributors to the media, help shape articles, headlines and influence story selection.
But it will be argued in this thesis that the dynamics of media production, the diversity of journalists' backgrounds and the plurality of media giving consumers a choice and variety of editorial viewpoints, indicate that **there is not a cohesive ideological framework working within the mass media.**

**Advertising**
Advertising has been extensively studied and its role in commercial mass media has been well documented. While the need to attract advertisers is seen to influence commercial media proprietors, there is no conclusive data to show that editors publish favourable stories in return for advertising. In fact, there are numerous reported instances of editors refusing to publish editorial suggested by an advertiser and interviews with managing directors of Australia's 'top 10' public relations consultancies indicate that this is the case more than the contrary.

Most mass media today maintain rigid boundaries between their editorial and advertising departments. Journalists react angrily to suggestions that they should write a story about a client who has placed advertising.

There have been recent steps to allow the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) and even the ABC to consider broadcasting advertising which suggests that government believes that the interests of national broadcasting will not be impaired by commercial advertising.

Importantly, advertising is clearly identified by its layout and positioning in the media, so the consumer is warned that he or she is about to receive a sponsored message. Advertising is immediately visible - unlike many of the other influences on the mass media and on the information consumers receive.

However, a new development involving editorially-formatted information being placed as advertising (i.e. in bought space and run unedited), called _advertorial_, will be examined in this study.

**CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCES ON THE MEDIA**

This study will seek to show that these factors, on their own, do not adequately describe the range of influences on mass communication today.

It will argue that some perceived influences have waned in significance or been affected by changes in the mass media, while a number of new influences have emerged - some subtle and highly sophisticated - which shape mass communication in society today.

One of these is the practice of _public relations_ which has grown from a small band of press agents who organised gimmicks and stunts to get their clients into the media, to a $300 million a year business in Australia, according to official estimates.

Public relations and its effects have been inadequately studied. A comparatively new profession (modern PR theory developed in the late 1940s), most studies of public relations are vocationally orientated, focusing on practical 'how to' issues. There has been little analysis of public relations in a social context, examining its role and effects in shaping society and in influencing the mass media.
Major texts used in university courses on public relations, such as "The Australian Public Relations Manual" by Candy Tymson and Bill Sherman, or my own books, "Public Relations Handbook" and "The Australian Marketing & Promotion Handbook", are designed specifically to teach entrants to public relations and promotion the techniques and methodologies used.

"Social theorists have tended to neglect ... the rapid proliferation of institutions of mass communication and the growth of networks of transmission...", according to John Thompson in "Ideology and Modern Culture" (1990).

Journalism text books seldom mention public relations. When they do, it is usually only a brief section. The focus of most journalism studies is similarly vocational, and there are added factors which lead journalists and editors to deny the influence of public relations which will be discussed later.

Major marketing texts such as "Marketing in Australia" (Kotler et al), which is the most-prescribed text in marketing courses in Australia, makes scant mention of public relations, further demonstrating that the practice is not well understood and not clearly defined despite its widening use.

Media analyses by academics such as Humphrey McQueen, Stuart Hall and others do not refer at any point to the influence on the mass media by public relations. Most analytical studies of the mass media to date focused on internal relationships and operations within the media.

Michael Tracy, in his 1978 book, "The Production of Political Television", commented: "Research on the role which institutions external to broadcasting play in making of content is, in an academic sense, much less thorough than that which has specifically looked at the internal operation of broadcasting."

Tracy continued: "The whole question of this interaction between an external environment of political and commercial institutions and the internal program-making processes need detailed examination."

"Fortune" magazine has observed in the United States: "The daily tonnage output of propaganda and publicity ... has become an important force in American life. Nearly half of the contents of the best newspapers is derived from publicity releases; nearly all the content of the lesser papers ... are directly or indirectly the work of PR departments."

This comment was made in 1949!

What is the situation now? The public relations profession was in its infancy then.

Preliminary studies which I have conducted suggest that 30-70 per cent of the editorial content of some media originate from an external institution and their publication or broadcast is largely determined by the influence of sources external to the media. Much of this published and broadcast information represents the views of companies, organisations or interest groups which are trying to promote various issues or views.
An objective study of this has been difficult because:

a. Editors and journalists, for professional reasons, will not readily admit to or talk about using ‘handouts’ as they call information from PR sources. Such practice is frowned upon by the Australian Journalists' Association and is denied ardently by journalists. (Sometimes journalists even by-line public relations releases and have them published under their own name.)

b. PR companies and leading publicists, on the other hand, do not want to divulge trade secrets so they don’t boast of their success. More often they are happy to play the media’s game. Embarrassing a journalist or editor would only cut off an important contact and outlet for publicity.

It is important to gain a better understanding of how the mass media operate today and how information is distributed to consumers. This research will open this potentially controversial subject with a fresh perspective.

Leading US journalist, Bill Moyers said in an analysis of the media entitled, "The Image Makers": "... in a world where the rich and powerful can hire more and better persuaders, who has the last word?"

Alex Carey, senior lecturer in psychology at the University of NSW, has commented in relation to the right of freedom of speech: "In the US, democratic rights which began as rights of individuals only - rights conceived for the protection of individual persons only - have been extended to corporations and other wealthy and powerful interest groups. When extended from individual persons to corporations regarded as legal persons, these rights allow corporations to use their multi-million dollar voices as they choose."

Carey notes that these 'corporate bodies' have massive corporate treasuries to propagate their views. They are avid users of professional public relations.
What Carey and Moyers raise is a growing inequity in access to mass communication channels - not only the traditional mass media, but new communication 'channels' controlled and sometimes created by the communicators who use them.

This is not an inequity born of the monopolisation of ownership of the media, or of the capitalistic structure of the commercial media on which Marxist media critics focus attention. Nor is it an inequity stemming from the ideological perspectives of journalists, or their training systems. Nor can advertising be blamed for this inequity. It is a new and major influence on mass communication in our society which has not been clearly recognised or studied.

However, it is important to recognise that the influence of the public relations field on the media may not be all bad. Effective public relations professionals often have the access and time to research information on important topics which the media would not have otherwise. For instance, stories on skin cancer which have been widely published in the media as part of a campaign to reduce over-exposure to the sun, were largely developed from statistics and information provided by the Cancer Council through its public relations department. In the rush of daily media production, journalists often do not have the time to research stories and dig up interesting background. They often rely on public relations sources.

In some circumstances, it can be argued that public relations plays an important role in social processes. In some texts, PR has been described as "creating understanding" and "mobilising consent" which are key elements in creating and maintaining a society and fundamental in a democracy.

The aim of this study is not to make value judgements on the influence of the public relations field or other influences on the mass media, but to analyse them so that a better understanding can be gained of some of the external influences on the media and how they affect and shape mass communication in the 1990s.

Given that public relations today includes various direct 'channels' of communication (such as corporate newsletters and magazines, corporate videos, sponsorships, etc.), as well as distribution of information through the mass media, it has become a major 'institution of mass communication' and warrants closer study.

**OUTLINE OF THE STUDY**

In this study, I propose to research both qualitatively and quantitatively the influence of public relations on the mass media and directly on consumers through various mass communication techniques used.

The major steps of the study will be:
1. Definition of the media and public relations

To provide a base on which to examine various aspects of the media and public relations, it will firstly be necessary to briefly examine what constitutes the mass media today and to define public relations.

This will examine the definitions of the media and PR from various text books and professional organisations (e.g. Public Relations Institute of Australia and International Public Relations Association) and assess the adequacy of these definitions.

Changes or additions to definitions will be suggested where inadequacies or anomalies are found.

2. The social context in which the media and public relations operate

The economic, social and political environment has changed substantially since the 'social responsibility theory' of the press, the model on which most modern media in Western democracies are based, was developed ("Four Theories of the Press", Fred Siebert).

Consumers today live in a period of change and an ever more intensive Information Age. Before making any assessment of the mass media and public relations, it is important to understand the social context in which mass communication occurs.

This section of the study will examine a number of influences and issues including:

- **Globalisation** with more information supplied from international wire services, affiliated programs (e.g. CNN) and increased international marketing and corporate communication campaigns;

- **Economic pressures** on the media leading to lower staff levels, smaller travel budgets and, therefore, possibly making the media less scrutinising of contributed information and more susceptible to PR messages. Also severe economic pressures lead to an increase in escapism in media content;

- **Social changes** such as:
  - multi-culturalism;
  - the growth of special interest & pressure groups which aggressively promote their interests using advanced PR techniques through the media and directly;
- the end of the 'decade of greed' (1980s) highlighted by corporate excesses, replaced by what Hugh MacKay calls the 'age of anxiety' and 'redefinition' in the 1990s. Social research by MacKay and others forecasts an emerging society in which regrouping ('retribalisation') and a refocusing on ethics, morality and values is a major pursuit. In rediscovering values and identity, people want more information, rather than escapism and entertainment, according to MacKay;

- The ever-intensifying information age in which mass communication is reaching new levels of intensity with electronic communications and new media used by the media, marketers and corporate communicators.

3. Techniques and practices used in public relations

To assess the effects of various influences on the media and the public, it is necessary to understand the range of techniques and practices involved in public relations and other forms of mass communication today.

The media and consumers are today targeted by a range of strategies far more sophisticated than the simple advertisements and press releases of the past. Techniques have evolved often in response to social changes referred to in the preceding section.

This study will introduce and explain the concept of macro communication which describes the expanding sphere of mass communication which surrounds consumers today and in which public relations and other 'institutions of mass communication' function.

Diagram 1 provides a simple overview of the wide range of communication techniques and 'channels' which operate in a typical mass communication campaign in the 1990s. Following the widely accepted analogy of macro-economics, macro communication looks at the 'big picture' of communication, considering specific (micro) elements and evaluating them and their relationship with each other as part of a total communication environment.

Marketers and other users of public relations and advertising seek to integrate various mass communication techniques to present a consistent, uniform message to the public in order to influence opinion or behaviour.

Marketers, organisations and even governments are finding ways of communicating with the public through a whole range of public relations techniques as well as through advertising. Non-advertising techniques include:
- Information literature (brochures, pamphlets, annual reports, 'White Papers', etc.);
- Direct marketing (including direct mail);
- Corporate publishing (commercially sponsored newsletters, magazines, reports and even books);
• Corporate videos;
• Sponsorships (e.g. the tobacco companies have effectively got around a ban on advertising by using this method);
• Hosted seminars, conferences and symposia;
• 'Advertorial' (special features or supplements placed to look like editorial, but bought as advertising space with copy supplied for printing unedited);
• Electronic information services (e.g. Telecom Discovery and CompuServe).

As a tool for 'social engineering', macro communication is far more powerful than a series of unco-ordinated, heterogenous elements of mass communication, and far more pervasive than press, radio and TV messages.

As public relations is not a single technique, but a multi-disciplined field employing a range of techniques to build 'relations with the public', the macro communication model also serves to help explain the nature of modern public relations.

Some of these techniques, such as sponsored magazines or newsletters, are not distinguishable from independent commercial publications - i.e. they become de facto elements of the mass media. Others, such as direct mail (part of direct marketing), go directly into the home without the need to even turn on a switch, so they are more intrusive than press, radio or television.

These new communication techniques comprise part of the mass communication environment in the 1990s, but are not identified or addressed in most if not all current studies of the media and mass communication.
4. A quantitative and qualitative research study to measure the effects of public relations on the media and on consumers directly

This section comprises the major part of this research project. It will involve three research components as follows:

**Press Release Tracking Study (PRTS)**
A sample of news releases and PR-prepared articles will be identified and distributed to a selection of media over a six months period. Following distribution, media monitoring will be used to track the number of publications and broadcast stations which use the material.

As I own and operate my own public relations firm with a range of clients, I have access to track a wide sample of PR releases. I also can arrange for colleagues in other PR firms to provide me with copies of press releases issued for their clients. Media monitoring will utilise an independent national service such as Neville Jeffress Pidler or Media Monitors.

This research will help identify the total usage of public relations materials. For instance, in preliminary studies, one news release issued was published in more than 25 major newspapers. In several, the news release was published unchanged. In one, it was even by-lined by one of the media's reporters.

This will seek to show the impact (often invisible) of public relations on the media in a broad sense and the reliance by the media, in some cases, on public relations information. However, this research on its own will not identify the proportion of information within particular media which is sourced from or based on PR information.

**Media Content Analysis (MCA)**
As a second element of this research, a 'press box' will be obtained using a co-operative journalist to gain access to copies of all news releases and PR materials issued in a selected market or markets. All media coverage will then be monitored in those markets for a period of 3-4 months to try to assess the percentage of published and broadcast articles based on PR material.
Recognising that the mass media comprise numerous 'vertical market' or specialist media as well as the major national newspapers and networks, and that the proportion of PR material used is likely to vary, it is proposed to conduct a Media Content Analysis in two segments of the mass media:

a. **National newspapers;**

b. A specialist segment or market (e.g. the computer industry as this is a clearly defined sector with a well-structured media and a major flow of news and information).

This quantitative research will help identify the proportion of major mass media news and information that is sourced from or based on public relations 'hand-outs'. This research will be extremely difficult and, as far as I know, has not been previously undertaken in Australia. However, it will focus attention on an important influence on the mass media and on mass communication today.

To supplement this quantitative research and identify media content originating from or based on PR sources other than written press releases - i.e. from verbal 'leaks' or briefings, interviews and exclusives arranged by PR professionals or phone calls to 'contacts' in the media - *qualitative research* will be conducted through interviews with journalists who cover major issues to seek to identify the origin of or major influences on various stories.

While not all journalists will be co-operative in this, my level of contacts in the media will provide the opportunity for a selection of major news stories to be traced backwards in this way to further determine the influence of public relations.

Together, these two research elements will provide a new insight into influences on the mass media.

**Case Studies of Direct PR Campaigns**

While the first two elements of research focus on the influence of public relations on the mass media (press, radio, TV, etc.), it is also important to recognise the direct mass communication techniques that have been created and used in public relations, some of which were identified in the *macro communication* model.

To demonstrate the direct mass communication influence of public relations, I propose in this third phase to research a series of case studies of major PR campaigns to identify the techniques used and the results achieved.

Case studies will be selected from a range of public and private organisations and from national and local level campaigns.
For instance the following types of case studies are those under consideration. Even though the final selection of case studies may change during the course of research, these can be taken as indicative of case study research proposed:

- The campaign to prevent the closure of Royal Sydney Hospital;
- Launch of the Federal Government Office of Labor Market Adjustment (OLMA) program to assist the restructuring of industry and re-employment of workers in restructured industries (1991-92);
- The campaign against computer software piracy conducted by the Business Software Association of Australia (1989-92);
- The take-over of Bundaberg Sugar by Tate & Lyle (1990);
- The launch and introduction of Windows computing by Microsoft.

These case studies will particularly focus on identifying the communication techniques which were most responsible for reaching the public and which were regarded as most effective by the user organisations.

**BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY**

This research will have major interest and benefit for:

- Public relations professionals as it will provide much-needed objective research to aid understanding of modern PR methodologies and techniques;
- Marketing and advertising professionals as *macro communication* provides a model for overviewing and integrating various elements of mass communication, including public relations techniques as well as promotions, direct marketing and advertising;
- Academics studying the media, mass communication and public relations;
- Journalists, editors and media proprietors;
- Professional bodies such as the Public Relations Institute of Australia and the Australian Marketing Institute;
- Governments responsible for planning and policy-making in relation to the media and communications.

Ultimately, the expanded view of mass communication described in this study is important to all media consumers as it introduces a broader view of the mass media and how mass communication occurs in society today.

*****
1. Do you regularly issue material or provide information to the media for publication or broadcast? (Delete whichever is not applicable)

YES/NO

2. Tick the types of material or forms of communication with the media most issued (more than one may be indicated).

- News releases
- Media briefings (group)
- One-on-one briefings
- News conferences
- Media tours (e.g. visits to facilities)
- Feature articles (by-lined or non)
- Supplement articles
- Other (indicate)

................................................................................................................................

3. Do you monitor coverage in the media quantitatively?

YES/NO

4. If so, in what way (e.g. press clippings, monitoring services)? (Please indicate whether carried out internally, or by an independent agency)

................................................................................................................................

5. Do you monitor media coverage qualitatively? (E.g. do you conduct research to test results such as attitude change, message acceptance?)

YES/NO

6. If so, by what means or methodology? (Please specify)

................................................................................................................................

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7. What other forms of evaluation of public relations materials do you use? List.
8. Do you have case studies of the media using news releases 'word for word' or publishing/broadcasting stories predominantly based on information issued by a public relations source?

YES/NO

9. Can you provide examples for use? (E.g. an original news release and press clippings of the material used verbatim or a story based primarily on the release)

YES/NO

10. Can the examples be used, if necessary, as an appendix to this research?

YES/NO

Any general comments you would like to make about public relations as a profession or public relations practitioners?

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OPTIONAL

NAME: .........................................................................................................................

POSITION: ....................................................................................................................
COMPANY: ..................................................................................................................

PHONE NO. (......) ........................................................................................................

(Note that providing your name is optional and your name or company name will not be used without permission.)
SURVEY

JOURNALISTS

1. Do you receive information and/or materials from public relations sources? 
   (Tick appropriate box)

   Very frequently
   Quite frequently
   Occasionally
   Seldom
   Never

2. What types of communications do you mostly receive from PR sources? (Rank 1-6 in order of frequency with 1 being most common)

   News releases/press releases
   Invitations to attend events
   Phone calls initiated by the PR person to provide information
   Responses to my phone calls for information
   Requests for interviews of their spokesperson/visitor etc.
   By-lined articles submitted for publication

3. Indicate the approximate total number of communications of all type you receive from public relations sources PER WEEK. (Communications to include news releases, invitations, phone calls, messages, etc.)

   1-5
   6-10
   11-20
   21-30
   31-50
   51-100

4. Where you do obtain communications from public relations sources, indicate the response which most closely matches the degree to which you base your story on PR communications provided.

   I often use PR material in full
   I sometimes use PR material in full
   I extract useful quotes or facts from PR material and rewrite it
   I use little from PR material
   I use no PR material

5. Indicate the description which most closely matches your opinion of public relations practitioners generally (i.e. PR practitioners as a whole, not any one individual)
6. Do you know any public relations practitioners personally? Indicate the number of PR practitioners you know personally on a work basis.

   None
   1-3
   4-6
   7-10
   More than 10

7. Based on your personal experience, indicate the description which most closely matches your opinion of PR practitioners you know?

   Very useful/helpful in providing new information
   Very useful/helpful in checking or verifying information
   (but I do not rely on them for original information)
   Occasionally useful in obtaining information
   A nuisance or disruption to my work
   I don't deal with/take notice of them at all

8. Indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statement

   Public relations practitioners are mostly ethical information disseminators working in the public interest as well as the interest of their client or employer.

   Strongly Agree
   Agree
   Don't Know
   Disagree
   Strongly Disagree
9. Indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statement:

*Public relations is mostly hype distributed by propagandists and approaches seeking favours for their clients and employers.*

Strongly Agree
Agree
Don't Know
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

10. Indicate what types of public relations communications are most useful to you and most used by you. *(Rank 1-6 in order of priority, with 1 being the most important)*

Quotes by company or organisation spokespersons
Facts
Background
Leads on stories
Interviews
None
Other (Please specify) .................................................................
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................................................................................................

Any general comments you would like to make about public relations as a profession or public relations practitioners?
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**OPTIONAL**
READING LIST


SUMMARY

This study seeks to show that the growing practice of public relations, which has been studied predominantly from a practical, vocational perspective to date, is one of the major contemporary influences on the mass media.

This research examines how this occurs and explores the effects of public relations in the 'agenda-setting' role of the media, and the influence of PR on media content.

A number of practical difficulties are recognised in this study - such as the tendency of the media to deny external influences on their selection of stories and their content, the proprietary and 'trade secrets' nature of many PR practices, and the difficulty of tracking many subtle and hidden forms of PR. While constraining, these barriers are at least partly penetrated in this study which is based on surveys of 417 journalists in a wide cross-section of the media and more than 300 public relations practitioners, supported by empirical evidence gained from tracking more than 150 news releases and analysis of resulting media usage.

In examining this area, this study exposes and highlights a major lack of objective research in both the planning and evaluation of public relations communication. This makes the task of examining the influence of public relations on the media all the more difficult, as much of the existing evidence of PR effects is anecdotal and, often, unreliable.

The lack of research in PR poses a major challenge to the public relations field as evidence cited shows that the use of research at both a basic and applied level will be vital to public relations becoming an accepted and legitimate profession and an understood practice within management and the community.

The findings of this study have major implications for editors and journalists, for public relations practitioners, for academics involved in communication and media studies programs, for media policy-makers, and for society generally as media 'consumers'.
CHAPTER 1.

Introduction

Mass media occupy an important place in most contemporary societies. This is widely accepted and is not debated in this text.

For instance, the United States saw it desirable to enshrine freedom of the press in its Constitution and recognises the media as a key part of the political process ('The Fourth Estate'). The media in most democratic countries including Australia have wide roles and responsibilities afforded by either Constitution or convention.

As well as playing a role in political and social processes, the media in many societies are also key communication channels for business and commerce, carrying both information and advertising vital to marketing.

In developing and some newly industrialised countries (NICs), the media play a different although equally important role, often being a tool for education, galvanising support on major issues (such as health programs) and developing social cohesion. *Four Theories of the Press* by Fred Siebert et al describes the differing but equally important media roles in various countries and political systems.  

At a practical level, the mass media are a major part of people's lives. In a revealing recent study, leading Australian social researcher, Hugh Mackay, found:

> Australians now use the mass media in such an integral and routine way that media content often appears to 'program' its audience ... the media give shape and structure to Australians' days and nights.

Mackay adds:

> The mass media turn out to play such a dominant role in the lives of some Australians that they become almost invisible - being ever-present, and being a constant source of reference, they are treated rather like the air we breathe or the taps we turn on and off.  

Over the past few decades, media analysts and social scientists have extensively studied the role of the media in society, the influences that shape media messages, and the impact of mass media communication. Since Marshall McLuhan coined the phrase "the medium is the message", academics and media practitioners have tried to

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identify and understand the complex and often hotly debated factors which influence media selection and presentation of messages.

**Contemporary Influences on the Media**

Marxist ideology and its advocates such as Humphrey McQueen hold that **media ownership** is a primary cause of media bias and a principal influence on media content. ³

McQueen, and other Marxist media analysts, claim that media proprietors such as Rupert Murdoch and Kerry Packer directly control the news gathering and reporting operations of their respective empires, and that capitalist ideologies and practices of proprietors are a primary influence on media reporting. He implies an organised, orchestrated strategy within the media based on economic and class principles and alleges: "The media try to divide and demoralise the working class because a confident, united working class is one of the last things that the capitalists want to face." ⁴

While there is evidence to support McQueen's thesis in some cases, his view is politically extreme and simplistic given the size and diversity of media 'empires', the number of absentee owners, and some studies which show that more journalists are politically "left" than those who are "right". ⁵

A national survey of Australian journalists conducted by the Journalism Department of the University of Queensland in 1992 found a clear bias towards Labor and the "Left" of politics with 37 per cent of 1,068 respondents declaring their support for Labor re-election, compared to 29 per cent declaring support for election of a Liberal Government. Asked to describe their political leaning, four per cent said "far to the left" and 35 per cent said "a little to the left", with just two per cent declaring themselves "far to the right" and 14 per cent "a little to the right". ⁶

"Media criticism in Australia has tended to focus on the role of proprietors ... This obsession with the (grossly exaggerated) power of media proprietors distracts attention from those areas in the media where real influence exists ....," Gerard Henderson, Executive Director of the Sydney Institute, says. ⁷

There are a number of other views of the source of media influence which attract varying degrees of support.

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³ Humphrey McQueen, Australia's Media Monopolies, Widescope, 1977, et al.
⁴ ibid, p. 43.
⁶ ibid.
Also with its roots in Marxist and anti-capitalist ideology is the view that *advertising* is a major influence on the mass media today. McQueen comments that "...most evening and Sunday papers are printed on the back of advertisements" and he alleges that "...the commercial mass media are advertisements which carry news, features and entertainment in order to capture audiences for the advertisers."  

Another view, contrasting proprietor control, is that the personal *ideological and political leanings of editors and journalists* influence media content and mass communication in society. This view, which sees "structured ideological biases" determining selection of news by the mass media, lies at the heart of the Mass Manipulative Model of the media.  

Clearly the attitudes and opinions of journalists and editors help shape articles, headlines and influence, at least to some extent, the selection process of which stories are covered, and this line of thinking has given rise to 'gatekeeper' studies of the media.

A further view is that journalists, who over the years have been trained primarily on the job, learn from each other and their employers, absorbing and following a passed-down set of ideas and ideals on what is news. This view sees *osmosis and hegemony among journalists* as a powerful force in influencing the selection and presentation of messages in the media. The cadetship system of training reporters certainly has resulted in many journalists learning by osmosis and being indoctrinated into standard views of what constitutes news and how stories should be covered.

Trevor Barr in *Reflections of Reality - The Media in Australia*, says: "Media staff come to internalise the values of their organisation and tend to be conditioned by its news preconceptions and prejudices. Journalists get to know what they can't write and they quickly learn how they are expected to operate."  

All of these views provide important thinking on the operations of the mass media. However, these influences do not adequately describe the range of influences on the mass media today, and the effects of some are open to question.

Journalists are now recruited from a range of sources, not just the cadetship system, thereby reducing the effects of learning by osmosis and hegemony. The diversity of journalists' backgrounds and the plurality of media - Australia has the highest per capita population of magazines in the world - give consumers a choice and variety of editorial viewpoints, suggesting that there is no cohesive ideological framework working within the mass media.

While advertising is a characteristic of commercial mass media, the editorial and advertising departments of most major media operate quite separately. And, this view

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does not explain the source of influence on non-commercial media such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, public broadcasting radio stations, or the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) which, for most of its history, has not carried advertising.

Media analyses by academics such as Humphrey McQueen, Stuart Hall and others do not refer at any point to the influence on the mass media by public relations. Most analytical studies of the mass media to date have focused on internal relationships and operations within the media.

Michael Tracey, in his 1978 thesis, *The Production of Political Television*, commented:

> Research on the role which institutions external to broadcasting play in making of content is, in an academic sense, much less thorough than that which has specifically looked at the internal operation of broadcasting. \(^{11}\)

Tracey concluded in his research, "Programmes always get a large amount of PR material" and commented: \(^{12}\)

> The whole question of this interaction between an external environment of political and commercial institutions and the internal program-making processes need detailed examination. \(^{13}\)

"Social theorists have tended to neglect ... the rapid proliferation of institutions of mass communication and the growth of networks of transmission...", John Thompson says in *Ideology and Modern Culture*. \(^{14}\)

The tenet that will be examined in this study is that one of these 'institutions of mass communication' and 'networks of transmission' external to the media which exerts a major influence on the media is the rapidly growing field of public relations.

Controversial American academic, Naom Chomsky, has advanced views critical of the mass media, pointing to significant external influences which set public agendas and influence information communicated to the public. The central point of Chomsky's media thesis is that a genuine democracy requires free access to ideas and information. But he says that governments have fallen into the hands of elites. "Elite


\(^{12}\) ibid, p. 126.

\(^{13}\) ibid, p. 139.

practice met the arrival of mass democracy with manufactured consent of the electorate, manufactured through organs of opinion and entertainment ...". 15

Public relations and its effects have been inadequately studied in an objective academic sense. A comparatively new profession (modern PR theory developed in the late 1940s), most studies of public relations are vocationally orientated, focusing on practical 'how to' issues. There has been comparatively little objective analysis of public relations in a social context, examining its role and effects in influencing the mass media and shaping society.

Major texts used in university courses on public relations, such as the numerous books written by Frank Jefkins, The Australian Public Relations Manual by Candy Tymson and Bill Sherman, or this researcher's own books, Public Relations Handbook and The Australian Marketing & Promotion Handbook, are designed specifically to teach entrants to public relations and management the techniques and methodologies used.

In vocational public relations texts and literature, media influence is often assumed, or based on PR practitioners' own subjective claims and anecdotal evidence.

Major marketing texts such as Marketing in Australia (Kotler et al), which is the most widely used text in marketing courses in Australia, refer to promoting products and services through media publicity, but give few details of public relations, further demonstrating that the practice is not well understood and not clearly defined despite its widening use.

Journalism text books seldom discuss public relations in any detail. When they do refer to PR, it is usually only a brief section. The focus of most journalism studies is similarly vocational, and there are added factors which lead journalists and editors to deny the influence of public relations which will be discussed later.

A study of public relations and the media in this context touches on and is relevant to one of the most vexed issues in media studies over the years. A debate has raged over several decades on whether or not the media sets the agenda of public discussion and thinking. A detailed debate of agenda-setting is not within the scope of this paper, but it is relevant to note that recent research does not support original hypotheses for media agenda-setting which held that the mass media acted in an organised and predominant way to set the agenda of public discussion and thinking.

"Most agenda-setting researchers would agree there is no grand agenda-setting theory," Warwick Blood comments in a recent review of agenda-setting theory. 16

Differential media treatment is but one factor among many that determines the salience of issues, according to Ebring et al. 17

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This is not to say that the media have no effect in determining agendas for public consideration. Gurevitch et al moved away from original agenda-setting theory to a concept which they felt should be more properly labelled agenda-framing. Blood takes this line of thinking further and suggests that the true position is more one of agenda-priming. In other words, the media does not tell us what to think, but tell us what to think about.  

But, "Who sets the media agenda?", Blood asks.

Blood says the original McCombs agenda-setting concept, which essentially implied that the media acted unilaterally to set the agenda of public issues, ignores crucial relationships between the media and a society's centres of political and social power.

Gurevitch et al contend that they have rescued agenda-setting research from the classical effects tradition and relocated it within an examination of "media-political institutional relationships".  

In the same line, Penman says media agenda-setting, agenda-framing or agenda-priming needs to be viewed "within the framework of various active parties (politicians, news institutions and the audience) reciprocally influencing each other, with more or less resources to do so".  

"Research needs to explore the nature of these relationships...", Blood comments.

This suggests a study of public relations in a new light. Working on behalf of business, government and politicians, public relations practitioners are sources or agents for large amounts of information sent to the mass media every day, and communicated with people through a variety of other means.

Sociologists Kurt and Gladys Lang argue that the media 'build' an agenda rather than set it. They make the important point: "Issues never really become issues unless news sources say something, and unless journalists report what they say. News sources and journalists, in other words, interact to build media agendas..." 


19. ibid, p. 12.


Very often, these 'news sources' that say something are public relations practitioners - or spokespersons talking through or guided by a public relations department or firm. Public relations can be demonstrated to be one of the 'institutions' in the external environment and an agent of the 'centres of political and social power' which interact with and influence the media.

The following chapters explore the practices of public relations and the interaction between PR and the media in detail.
CHAPTER 2.

Defining Public Relations

Within modern societies with their pluralism of competing interests and increasing public education and awareness, there is regular interaction between various groups and individuals in the consensus-forming process.

Public relations, in its broadest and simplest sense, is the interface between groups in society. This interface occurs between clubs or associations and their members, between organisations and the community, between governments and electors, between companies and their shareholders, and between organisations and other organisations.

The title 'public relations' is an accurate description - albeit frequently misinterpreted and over-simplified. PR is the relations between a public body (public company, organisation or government) and its publics.

More specifically, the modern professional practice of public relations is the management of relations between a public body and its publics. 'Public relations' is used today not only as a description of the relationships that exist, but as a prescription for the practice of working through planned programs to improve relations with key groups.

Grunig's Four Models of Public Relations

Public relations has evolved since the practice first emerged in the 1920s. James Grunig identifies four models of public relations describing the major types of PR practice carried out, and these provide a useful framework against which to formulate definitions as different descriptions of public relations apply to different types of PR practice as identified by Grunig.

Public relations had its origin in press agentry - the propaganda tactics that evolved in the United States in the 1920s through to the 1940s. Since then, PR has evolved in various forms to be used by most public companies, as well as by almost every major government department, organisation, charity and even churches, and is continuing to evolve.

Grunig's four models of public relations as summarised in Table 1. 22

   TABLE 1.
## FOUR MODELS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Models</th>
<th>PRESS AGENTRY/ PUBLICITY</th>
<th>PUBLIC INFORMATION</th>
<th>TWO-WAY ASYMMETRIC</th>
<th>TWO-WAY SYMMETRIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Propaganda</td>
<td>Dissemination of information</td>
<td>Scientific persuasion</td>
<td>Mutual understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of Communication</td>
<td>One-way, truth not essential</td>
<td>One-way, truth important</td>
<td>Two-way imbalanced</td>
<td>Two-way balanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Little, press clippings</td>
<td>Little - readability tests, readership surveys attitudes</td>
<td>Feedback, formative, evaluation of</td>
<td>Formative, evaluation of understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical figures</td>
<td>PT Barnum</td>
<td>Ivy Lee</td>
<td>Edward Bernays</td>
<td>Bernays, educators, professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where practised today</td>
<td>Sports, theatre, product promotion</td>
<td>Government, non-profit orgs, structured coys</td>
<td>Competitive business</td>
<td>Regulated business modern flat structure coys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated % of market</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first two models utilise one-way communication and their objective is orientation of target audiences to the organisation. In these models, the underlying concept is that the organisation need not change its attitudes, values or actions; the public relations task is to gain compliance from the public.

Conversely, the two more recent models involve two-way communication between an organisation and its publics and mutual adaptation. Communication scientists coined the term co-orientation for this two-way, mutual adaptation. In the Two-Way Asymmetric Model, co-orientation occurs, but the organisation's goals and needs retain primacy.

The Two-Way Symmetric Model of public relations stands in stark contrast to earlier propaganda-based models and proposes equal effort at co-orientation between an organisation and its publics. In this model, PR rises to a higher, more ethical plane, proponents argue. Critics argue that it is not 'real world' as few organisations are prepared to change to fit their environment. Most employ public relations to manipulate public attitudes in their favour.

Grunig acknowledged in 1989 that "few organisations practice the two-way Symmetric Model because their worldview of public relations does not include that model and they seldom have public relations personnel with the expertise to practice it".  

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This is also confirmed in one of the leading text books used by PR practitioners, Cutlip and Center's *Effective Public Relations* which says:

> Presenting all sides of an issue and providing an objective, balanced appraisal of the merits of conflicting views is a responsibility of the media, not the practitioners.  

Nevertheless, public relations is evolving down the path from one-way, manipulative communication designed to coerce public attitudes, to *co-orientation* where an organisation is brought into harmony with its publics through mutual exchange and change.

Priscilla Murphy of Drexel University, in an paper entitled 'Limits of Symmetry' published in the *Public Relations Research Annual (Volume 3)* in 1991, pointed out that most of those who strongly advocate symmetric communication admit that it is extremely rare in actual practice. However, Murphy goes on to propose a middle ground based on game theory. Rather than a zero-sum game which one-way communication models are, Murphy proposes a definition of public relations as a mixed motive game to help reconcile the divergent symmetric versus asymmetric models. She sees PR as "a sliding scale of co-operation and competition in which organisational needs must of necessity be balanced against constituents' needs, but never lose their primacy". 

In simple terms, Murphy's mixed motive game positions public relations on a sliding scale of activity somewhere between pure conflict and pure symmetry.

Developing an understanding of what public relations does clearly depends on the model being studied. All four models exist in the marketplace today to a greater or lesser extent in various countries. However, the Press Agentry Model is now rarely practised. According to Grunig, around 70 per cent of PR is based on either the Public Information Model or the Two-Way Asymmetric Model, with a steadily growing adoption of the Two-Way Symmetric Model.

**Public Relations Definitions**

The World Assembly of Public Relations Associations has developed the following definition of public relations (sometimes called the Mexican Statement because it was agreed on at the World Assembly conference in Mexico City in 1978):

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25 Priscilla Murphy, "Limits of Symmetry", Public Relations Research Annual, Volume 3, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991, p. 120.

26 ibid, p. 125.
Public relations practice is the art of social science in analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisation leaders, and implementing planned programs of action which will serve both the organisation and public interest.  

This definition points out four key elements of public relations - analysing communication needs, advising management, planning communication programs and then implementing those programs.

Also, this statement notes that professional public relations today seeks to develop programs of action which serve both the organisation and the public interest, clearly reflecting Grunig's more advanced Asymmetric and Symmetric Models of PR. Most texts on public relations point out that the professional practice of public relations that has developed does not condone distributing misleading or inaccurate information, or putting a positive face on unscrupulous, unethical or unworthy organisations and activities which are contrary to the public interest.

A definition used by the Institute of Public Relations in Britain and the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) describes public relations as:

... the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its public.  

This definition also emphasises the importance of planning, and points out that public relations aims to create 'mutual understanding'.

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28 "Public Relations". Pamphlet of Public Relations Institute of Australia.
A leading American industry publication, "Public Relations News" says:

Public relations is the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organisation with the public interest and plans and executes a program to earn public understanding and acceptance.  

Well-known British public relations teacher and author, Frank Jefkins, in several of his books including Public Relations Techniques and Public Relations (Third Edition), describes public relations in the following way:

Public relations consists of all forms of communication outwards and inwards between an organisation and its publics for the purpose of achieving specific objectives concerning mutual understanding.  

Frank Jefkins' definition also emphasises that public relations is concerned with establishing understanding, and points out that PR involves a range of communication strategies (not a single strategy) which should be related to objectives.

There is no one agreed definition of public relations. Perhaps that is why PR is often confused and misunderstood. But each definition contributes some useful information about public relations. The key elements gleaned from these descriptions are that public relations is a multi-disciplined field of communication and relationship-building concerned with creating public understanding, planned to achieve specific objectives.

The Public Relations Institute of Australia makes the observation: "that in a modern democracy every organisation from the national government to the corner store survives ultimately only by public consent". Public consent cannot exist in a communication vacuum.

In democratic societies, decisions are made ultimately by the public. Even those decisions made by governments seemingly against popular opinion are ratified or rejected by the public at election time, and governments - indeed all elected officials - remain sensitive to public opinion.

Public relations is aimed at creating informed public opinion which is a cornerstone of modern society.  

The "Theory of Public Relations" published by the Public Relations Institute of Australia comments that, "no organisation can bestow upon itself a good reputation nor tap a reservoir of public goodwill on demand. Goodwill has to be earned, cultivated and safeguarded".

Public relations is this process of earning, cultivating and safeguarding public goodwill. Governments are not prone to legislating or acting in favour of

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31 "Public Relations". Pamphlet of Public Relations Institute of Australia.
organisations or companies that they see as lacking support for their policies and activities. An organisation that is, and is seen to be, active, responsible and having general public support stands at a much greater advantage. The same organisation also finds a better response from other organisations, the media, local authorities, the general community and its members.

In a sense, organisations, companies, departments and even governments have public relations whether they want to or not. Organisations and groups are formed to represent a particular profession or section of society with common interests. Representation involves presenting the ideas and policies of the group and reporting back to members the results of these representative actions. In other words, representation is about communicating. Representation without communication is merely putting in an appearance.

Therefore, in general terms, the concept of 'taking a low profile' is not realistic as a public policy for a representative organisation. Even though a low profile may be sought for short periods, such as during a controversy, by 'hiding its light under a bushel', a representative organisation is denying its constituency true representation.

Similarly, business cannot avoid public relations. Public companies must maintain good relations with their shareholders. But they also have to communicate effectively with government, with various regulatory bodies, with employees, and so on. Even private companies face a range of groups that affect or take an interest in their affairs, such as customers, potential investors and the media.

Government departments and various government agencies need to keep the public informed about their activities. Major programs such as public transport, education, housing, health, export promotion, tourism development or environmental policies are viewed by the public and opinions are formed about them - either good or bad - depending on their merits and on the degree to which they are understood.

Governments have become major users of public relations. Some critics argue that PR can be used for the distribution of misinformation by governments and business. This aspect of public relations will be examined later in this study.

Notwithstanding potential negative implications, public relations has grown strongly during the past decade and is set to be an even more important part of management in the 1990s due to factors such as increasing public education, the growing impact and pervasiveness of mass media, and the growth of consumer consciousness.

People today not only want to know more about organisations and companies and their decision-making, but they often demand to know more. Boards of companies have had to recognise in recent years that attempting to bulldoze new policies through, ignoring public attitudes, is a recipe for disaster. A company that attempts to go ahead without public consultation on a major industrial development near a residential area will soon find itself at a standstill with resident protests, government inquiries, union black bans, and possibly months of hold-ups costing the company millions of dollars.

Many organisations ranging from community associations to multi-national companies feel that they often do not receive a fair hearing and may even be ignored by the major media and social and political institutions. Without an ability to
communicate effectively, groups in the community can become effectively
disenfranchised.

A knowledge of how the media operate, whom to deal with, how to present
information and an understanding of other communication techniques such as
information literature, special events, video, employee communication programs and
government relations are essential skills for CEOs, organisation leaders and
department heads today. Executives who do not have these skills frequently hire them
in the form of public relations specialists.

An important element of achieving 'mutual understanding' and a key ingredient of the
modern models of public relations is two-way communication. As defined by the
Two-Way Asymmetric and Two-Way Symmetric Models, public relations is not one-
way dialogue which advertising mostly is. Public relations is aimed - not just at
making a sale or transmitting information - but at building relationships.

As part of this, professional public relations advisers not only help an organisation or
company package and send out information. They frequently are involved in
counselling management on public attitudes, expectations, concerns and needs. They
bring valuable, objective advice and information into the company or organisation.
Public relations is about listening and relating to members of the public, not just
talking to them.

Public relations today also frequently has to involve actions rather than just words.
For instance, companies seeking to show they are good 'corporate citizens' often
sponsor community activities or programs. A company concerned about its
environmental image will not be successful if it just says it is environmentally
friendly and responsible. A public relations program could be built around the
company doing something constructive for the environment - such as establishing a
park, cleaning up a river, restoring a building or helping replant a forest. If a
company's products or services are below standard, a fundamental part of public
relations is taking actions to improve the quality of the products or services to meet
public expectations and demand.

In some cases, under a Two-Way Asymmetric or Two-Way Symmetric Model,
ethical public relations counsellors may even advise management to consider
changing policies or strategies, or withdrawing a product, where they see these to be
in conflict with the public interest.

However, it is safe to say that most observers of public relations, including the media,
do not see or necessarily accept this 'public interest' role. The media, and possibly the
public, are more familiar with the Press Agentry and Public Information Models of
public relations.

PR professionals point out that it is this higher level, strategic relationship-building
that modern, professional public relations is concerned with - not the superficial,
frivolous activities and gloss that are sometimes erroneously referred to as 'PR'. But,
public relations struggles to shake off an image of, at best, harmless long lunches and
social activities and, at worst, miscommunication and deception.
Public Relations Terminology

One of the characteristics of the public relations field which contributes to its blurred and sometimes confused image is that a wide range of terminology is used to describe specific functions within the general sphere of public relations and to refer to various sub-sets and sub-disciplines.

As well as the term 'public relations', other terms frequently used include *publicity, press relations, media relations, public information, public affairs, corporate affairs, corporate relations, corporate image, community relations* and *lobbying* or *government relations*.

A public relations program usually embraces many different types of activities. For instance, an important occasion could be promoted by:

- Organising a special event such as an 'open day', display, exhibition or conference to mark the occasion (event management);
- Publicising the event in the media (publicity);
- Producing an information kit containing details of the event, the history of your organisation, etc. (public information);
- Inviting the public to attend (community relations);
- Inviting the relevant Minister or senior government officials to the event (government relations or 'lobbying').

Media relations, publicity, public information, community relations, and so on, are specific functions or sub-sets of the field generally referred to as public relations.

Sometimes titles such as *public affairs* are used to try to differentiate and define a separate field of activity. Public affairs is often used to describe communication that focuses specifically on government and government agencies, as distinct from communication with the media, the community, etc.. However, many public relations executives are also involved in communication with government, and public affairs executives frequently communicate with the media, produce public information materials, and so on.

Some PR people go to inordinate lengths to show that public affairs or corporate affairs are different to public relations. Arguments over nomenclature are generally more to do with practitioners trying to escape the negative implications of the term 'public relations' rather than any meaningful difference between the strategies.

A US study of more than 250 American companies and organisations showed the following use of titles for their respective professional communicators: 32

| Public relations | 151 |

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| Public affairs | 46 |
| Public information (or Office of Information) | 33 |
| Communications | 24 |
| Public relations/public affairs | 19 |
| Public relations and advertising | 14 |
| Community relations | 12 |

This study, and general usage in Australia, shows that *public relations* is the overwhelmingly most popular term for this field of communication.

**Target Publics or Audiences**

In public relations planning, the term, 'publics' rather than the singular is frequently used. Specific publics 'targeted' in public relations are referred to as **target publics** or **target audiences**.

The environment in which businesses, organisations and governments operate in the 1990s is comprised of a diverse range of groups which influence and sometimes intervene in their operations, marketing or in policy-making.

It is not only a company's customers or an organisation's members who determine its success. There is a wide range of other groups which affect operations in some way.

**The Macro Environment**

Today, groups such as regulatory bodies, consumer associations, religious organisations, pressure groups such as environmentalists, employees, trade unions, and key third-party 'influencers' need to be identified and addressed in corporate and marketing communication - not just an organisation's customers.

These groups which have an interest in a company's or organisation's activities, even though they have no direct financial involvement, are often referred to as *'stakeholders'*.

They hold a moral or philosophical stake and can, at times, be quite vocal and influential.

These groups or 'stakeholders' comprise what marketing academic, Phillip Kotler, terms as an organisation's macro environment. 33

Ron Pearson says:

That a prudently managed organisation takes into account its environment - other organisations, groups and individuals who have a stake in how the organisation behaves - is thus arguably not a matter of logical or nomic necessity. Rather it can be

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argued that it is a strategic imperative linked to organisational survival and associated with a number of historical forces - social, political and technological. 34

The *macro environment* of an organisation can be graphically illustrated using the simple metaphor of a pie chart in which the client organisation stands at the centre surrounded by an environment made up of various groups or 'target publics'. (See Diagram 1.) 35

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Communication is required with each key group or 'public' in an organisation's *macro environment*. This task is allocated to a number of departments or agencies in most companies and organisations.

Advertising is effective in reaching some groups such as customers. But advertising is generally not effective in influencing groups such as government, consumer organisations or employees. This is where a public relations department or firm is often called in.

**Macro Communication**

One way of looking at and understanding the diverse and integrated 'mix' of communication disciplines and strategies used in business and the public sector today is the concept of *macro communication*.

*Macro communication* is an expression of an organisation's total communication with its *macro environment*. This can also be represented by a pie chart which helps explain the multi-disciplined nature of public relations and how PR fits alongside advertising, direct marketing and other types of marketing communication.

Diagram 2 provides an illustration of the *macro communication* 'mix' for a hypothetical organisation. ³⁶

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³⁶ ibid, p. 43.
In the same way that macro-economics looks at the broad picture of the economy rather than isolated segments ad hoc, *macro communication* describes the total communication environment of a particular company or organisation. The organisation may not wish or need to use all the communication strategies available, but marketers and corporate communicators today recognise that they exist and seek to use them in a co-ordinated way to achieve *integrated* marketing and corporate communication.

As can be seen in this model, apart from advertising, direct marketing and sales promotion, *macro communication* comprises a range of communication strategies which are generally grouped under the heading of public relations, including:

- Media publicity releases and backgrounders;
- Special feature articles, supplements and editorial inserts;
- News conferences;
- Brochures, booklets and other forms of literature;
- Annual reports and special reports;
- Newsletters;
- Circulars and bulletins (either internal or external);
- Audio-visual programs;
- Videos;
- Seminars;
- Conferences and conventions;
- Tours and visits;
- Open days;
- School project or information material;
• Information stands at exhibitions, trade shows or special public shows (eg a motor show, a technology exhibition, or home show);
• Direct contact with government (at various levels);
• Submissions, reports and position papers;
• Policy documents (eg Discussion Papers on particular issues);
• Special events (eg a demonstration);
• Books (eg a company history).

Public relations can communicate with audiences or 'publics' in an increasingly diverse and creative range of ways. These models summarise a strategic approach to planning public relations program used today and the wide scope of communication activities - or 'media' - which are used.

**Public Relations & the Media**

While it is important to understand the breadth and scope of public relations and that modern PR involves many direct non-media communication techniques (such as newsletters, corporate videos, seminars, etc), placing editorial information in the media remains a key function of public relations.

As shown in Table 1, only about 15 per cent of the PR profession is engaged under a Two-Way Symmetric Model. Most PR practitioners work in a Public Information Model or Two-Way Asymmetric Model (ie unbalanced with more communication outwards than mutual relationship-building). In these types of structures and working environments, in particular, distributing information through the mass media is a major part of PR.

Objective study of the extent of PR influence on the media has been difficult because:

1. Editors and journalists, for professional reasons, will not readily admit to or talk about using 'handouts' as they call information from PR sources. Such practice is frowned upon by the Australian Journalists' Association and is denied ardently by many journalists;

2. PR companies and leading publicists, on the other hand, usually do not want to divulge 'trade secrets' so they do not boast of their success. More often they are happy to play the media’s game. Embarrassing a journalist or editor would only cut off an important contact and outlet for publicity.

Thus, system transparency could be dysfunctional for the system.

However, given the importance of the role played by the mass media in society and growth of the public relations field, it is important to gain a better understanding of how the mass media operate today and how information is gathered, selected and disseminated to the public. This study takes an in-depth look at the media and its relationship with one of the fast-growing institutions in its external environment - the public relations profession.
CHAPTER 3.

Media Views on the Role & Influence of Public Relations

Journalists' Attitudes Towards PR

The media exhibit negative and dismissive attitudes towards public relations in most public discussions. To ask some editors and journalists about public relations is to gain the impression that PR has no impact on the media at all - other than perhaps being a nuisance to reporters in performing their work.

Grunig and Hunt comment: "To listen to journalists and public relations practitioners talk about each other is to get the impression that the field of media relations is a battleground. Journalists feel besieged by hordes of press agents and publicists - 'flacks', as they call PR people - who dump unwanted press releases on their desks and push self-serving stories that have little news value." 37

A 1975 investigation by Aronoff of journalists' attitudes towards public relations practitioners found generally negative attitudes, and revealed that journalists and PR practitioners differed widely in their views of each other. For instance, most PR practitioners disagreed with the statement, "PR practitioners try to deceive journalists by attaching too much importance to unimportant events". In contrast, almost all journalists agreed with this statement. 38

A study of Texas journalists and public relations practitioners in 1975 showed how wide the gap is between the two in understanding the inter-relationship between the media and the media relations side of PR. The Texas study found:

- 89 per cent of PR practitioners surveyed saw public relations and the press as partners, compared to only 59 per cent of journalists who thought this way;

- **78 per cent of journalists surveyed believed public relations had cluttered channels of communication with pseudo-events and phoney phrases**, compared to 42 per cent of public relations people who agreed with this;

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• **82 per cent of journalists said PR people obstruct reporters from seeing people they should be seeing,** contrasted to 38 per cent of PR practitioners who thought this;

• **84 per cent of journalists said PR material was usually publicity disguised as news,** compared to 29 per cent of PR practitioners who subscribed to this view. 39

A major conference of business leaders and editors of America's leading newspapers and networks to discuss "The Media and Business" sponsored by the Ford Foundation in 1977, brought into public debate the misunderstanding, misconceptions and distrust that often exists between the media and the public relations.

One senior editor told the conference:

> I think business has got a long way to go in dealing with the press, despite enormous efforts to develop public relations systems ... We don't have easy access. On most stories, we work through the public relations department to start out, but in an enormous number of the major corporations in America, we do not have easy access to the people in charge. We are either blocked by the public relations department or blocked by the lawyers. 40

Journalists complained to the conference that reporters and editors "can be captives of pseudo-events staged for their benefit".

On the other hand, business leaders attacked the media as unfair, negative and biased, and claimed that journalists do not apply the same standards to their own actions as they do to those of others. One business spokesperson, Walter Wriston, Chairman of Citibank, said:

> Let one scientist resign and say that nuclear power is a lethal accident waiting to happen, and he is awarded the front page with pictures. He has unlimited interviews on television. The massive achievement of hundreds and hundreds of scientists and the comfort of millions of citizens who enjoy the products of nuclear power go for nothing. 41

An American Management Association sponsored study carried out by David Finn, a leading PR counsellor in 1981, also revealed a high level of misconception and distrust between business and media. Finn found that most journalists (60 per cent) "feel business executives are defensive and don't give reporters a chance to question them", and the same proportion also feel that "business people are not honest with their own PR departments. Meanwhile, 73 per cent of business executives "believe reporters don't accurately research their topics" and 63 per cent said "reporters play on public emotion" and are inaccurate because of 'sloppiness". 42

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41 ibid, p. xii.

Grunig reports that: "There have been several studies comparing the professional and news values of public relations practitioners and journalists. These studies consistently show that public relations practitioners and journalists have similar professional values and that they make similar news judgements. But the studies also show that journalists strongly believe that the public relations practitioners do not have professional values, do not have news values similar to journalists, and do not have equal occupational status." 43

Kopenhaver, Martinson and Ryan in their 1984 co-orientation studies of journalist/public relations values reported there were often actual shared values, but each side thinks the other has antithetical values and this convergence of expectations feeds traditional antagonism. 44

Some reports indicate that the hostility between the media and PR is eroding or is over-stated. A 1979 University of Minnesota study and 1984 research by Brody found fairly high levels of mutual respect and that journalists think most PR practitioners do a good job. 45

Nevertheless, there is substantial evidence that suspicion, lack of understanding and, at times, strongly antagonistic attitudes continue between journalists and PR practitioners. In a recent review of the relationship between the media and public relations in Public Relations Quarterly, Joel Pomerantz concluded that "Some media people harbor casual, dismissive, disdainful attitudes towards public relations professionals". 46

In his 1979 Foundation Lecture to the Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education in the US, Scott Cutlip of the University of Georgia School of Journalism and a pioneer public relations educator, referred to "cluttered, choked channels of communication with the debris of pseudo-events which serve the interest of neither the sponsor nor the public" as one of three 'minuses' of public relations. 47

It is significant that Cutlip also listed three 'pluses' of public relations and these will be discussed later.


In 1982, in a highly controversial backlash against public relations, the influential *Washington Post* declared itself off limits to all public relations people. In an article entitled "Post Stabs PR in the Flack", *Advertising Age* reported a memo written by editorial page editor, Meg Greenfield to executive editor, Benjamin Bradlee. Ms Greenfield wrote:

> Why should we be in their campaign plans as something 'deliverable' by their various agents who can 'reach' us? We don't want any of that damn crowd around here, and if people want to get to us they need only know two things: It's easy as pie, so long as they don't come in (or send their manuscripts in or make their request) via a flack firm. We have adopted a rule of simply refusing to deal with these people - period.

John Hohenberg, a professor at the leading Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and administrator of the Pulitzer Prizes for many years says:

> A powerful and ever-growing public relations apparatus filters much of today's news flow before it ever reaches the reporter. Sometimes, in sophisticated and expert hands, this process speeds up the flow of the news and increases its volume. When propagandists, amateurs and bunglers take over the public relations machinery, however, it can be a handicap to the gathering of news and a menace to democratic government.

Coincidentally, PR also does not have a good name with its own employers it seems. *A Wall Street Journal* Gallup survey taken in 1980 found that only 15 per cent of 282 heads of big business firms rated the performance of public relations specialists as "very good", compared to 45 per cent for accountants and 39 per cent for lawyers.

In Australia, some of the nation's leading marketing writers and editors have gone on record a number of times criticising public relations.

The editor of *Marketing* magazine, Michael Kiely, says in an editorial headed "They wheedle and whine and write crap":

> The general standard of the PR industry is poor and some of its practices need to be scrutinised. Every journalist and editor will tell you they are bombarded with junk press releases and calls. Junk because they are irrelevant and couldn't possibly be useful because the media outlet concerned doesn't deal in that type of information.

Former advertising agency head and now author and marketing writer, Bryce Courtenay, says:

> Public relations still seems to me to be a business of too many carelessly written 'brag and boast' releases scattered like confetti by a willing post office in the hope that the PR

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48 Advertising Age, April 26, 1982, pp. 3 & 74.


company's clipping service will return one or two paragraphs from somewhere, anywhere, to attach as justification to the client's invoice. 52

Neil Shoebridge, a columnist for Business Review Weekly and regular writer on marketing comments:

Public relations attracts more than its fair share of fly-by-nighters, former journalists or promotions people who rent an office, a phone, a fax machine and secretary and launch themselves as a public relations company. 53

Unfortunately for the public relations profession, the media are frequently able to point to examples to substantiate their claims of ineffectiveness, propaganda masquerading as news and "puffery". The following comment and example comes from PC Week, a leading publication in the computer industry.

Perhaps the most poorly written press releases of our age arrived across the desk of a certain Editor at PC Week recently. Shock and disgust soon turned to mirth as the Editor, who wishes to remain nameless, read several of the quotes included within the 'press release from hell'.

The first two paragraphs and the penultimate quote follow (complete with author errors):

"The winner of the Microsoft Communiqué Black Label 'Capture the Capri' competition, Mr Sean Gillespie, 25, of Bondi Junction, was absolutely stunned when told he was the new owner of a brilliant white Ford Capri Mk II courtesy of Microsoft Australia and City Ford.

"I couldn't believe it", said an excited Sean after the presentation on Thursday 11 April, 1991. "It was totally unbelievable. I'm in awe. I still don't believe it. They keys haven't left my side!" he stammered.

Mr Peter Greening, Marketing Manager of City Ford, was just as enthusiastic. "We were delighted. Sean was so excited, especially as he currently drives a Ford Laser and was intending to buy a Capri later this year," Peter said. "When we came back from Sean's test drive, top down of course, his new convertible was parked in front of him and his eyes just lit up. He was impressed with the performance and handling and couldn't get over the loads of great features Capri Mk II offers. no wonder he was blown away."

Research conducted by Professor Bill Baxter of the University of Oklahoma found that nine out of 10 news releases sent to US daily newspapers from business, industry and organisations never see print.

Managers at 123 daily newspapers reported using only 9.2 per cent of all news releases received from public relations sources.

54 Media release, 16 April, 1991, issued by Frontline Marketing Services Pty Ltd, for Microsoft Pty Ltd, Sydney.
"Too many PR people don't know the difference between news and advertising," said one editor. "It looks like the copy was written to impress bosses and not necessarily for print."  

Frank Jefkins says:

... newspapers are inundated with material from their own staff, news agencies, special correspondents and contributors, plus PR sources. Much of this can appear only on certain pages, in particular features or columns or on special days. As a result, a great deal of what they receive has to be discarded. Most of the material from PR sources is unpublishable, mainly because it is of interest and value only to the sender.

Journalists commonly see entry by a colleague to the public relations field as 'defection' and as an abdication of ethics and standards. The following comment by a columnist in Motor magazine illustrate common journalist attitudes towards PR:

... Paul decided the time had come to ditch the respect of the industry and to pass up the enormous power of being able to make or break new cars and get motor industry chiefs to the stage where the veins pop out the side of their necks ... and take the big bucks on offer in PR. The upside of Gover selling his soul is that now he has to be nice to all the journos, especially those he doesn't like.

Nothing perhaps illustrates the image problem and the dilemma facing the public relations profession clearer than a book entitled Sultans of Sleaze - Public Relations and the Media. In this book, published in 1989 in Canada, author, Joyce Nelson, says:

...contrary to the popular conception that we live in an open society made more so by advances in information and communication technology, the opposite is, in fact, true. Misinformation and disinformation provided by gatekeeper public relations professionals more accurately describe the situation.

But, as we saw earlier, it is not in the media's interest to admit to publishing large amounts of PR material or relying on PR people for information. Research which simply asks editors and journalists if they use PR material, or what they think of PR, is unlikely to receive a positive response. So such studies produce questionable results.

Also, despite the protestations from many in the media that public relations practitioners are more of a hindrance than a help, the PR profession is growing rapidly. Public relations expenditure is increasing, and the number of people employed in public relations and the number of PR firms in many developed and developing countries is increasing.


The Commercial Economic Advisory Service of Australia estimated that in 1990, 'below the line' promotion which includes public relations, exceeded $4 billion for the first time, compared with advertising which declined to $5 billion in the same year. 59

A survey based on Yellow Pages listings estimated that there were 243 public relations consultancy firms Melbourne in 1992, compared with 118 in 1980, and just 79 listed in 1970. The same survey estimated that there were 738 PR firms in the three major Australian capitals - Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane - compared to around half that number a decade ago. 60

Growth in PR is predicted to continue. Based on a study of US Census data, Department of Labor statistics, organisations directories and occupational research, Professor Robert Kendall projects "phenomenal" growth for the PR field. He predicts that by the end of the century, public relations will account for one million jobs in the US. This represents more than a tripling of the number of PR jobs in the next 15 years. 61

To some extent, this employment growth in the public relations profession may be accommodated in the other non-media related areas of public relations identified in Chapter Two. But media relations and publicity generation remain key priorities in most PR campaigns. Employers would be unlikely to spend money on media relations and publicity departments or consultancies without some evidence of results.

Despite protestations, the media do use public relations information. An extensive survey carried out as part of this study found inconsistency between what journalists said and what they did, and press release tracking studies outlined in Chapter Five found further examples to indicate that the media's reliance on public relations is much greater than what is generally believed.

Some editors are prepared to acknowledge use of public relations material. One editor of a trade publication recently stated in an editorial:

Let me assure you, much of what we carry in the news and product pages does come from press releases, and after severe editing we give you the salient points. Reseller isn't meant as a light read - it's meant as a tool to help you work better and more profitably, and for most of you, that means knowing about new products and services, so no apology for running the contact details. 62

But the extent to which public relations influences the media, and the variety of ways in which this occurs, are difficult to determine from the rhetoric that emanates from both sides and from a certain amount of folklore among the media concerning public

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relations. It has to be borne in mind, for instance, that the media's collective experience of public relations is primarily with the Press Agentry and Public Information Models, with comparatively less exposure to modern Two-Way Asymmetric and Two-Way Symmetric Models.

Given the importance of understanding how the media determine their agendas and how they source information and ideas which are, in turn, mass communicated to set or influence the public agenda, further research in this area is highly warranted.

Survey of Australian Journalists on PR

To further understand current media attitudes towards public relations and gain a perspective of how senior level journalists and editors use or don't use PR material, a survey was conducted among a substantial sample of Australian journalists and editors nationally in May-June, 1992.

METHODOLOGY:

A total of 417 journalists and editors in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Canberra and a number of regional centres, were surveyed with a printed questionnaire using a mixture of closed-end multiple choice questions and open-end questions which sought spontaneous comment.

The mailed questionnaire was preceded by a covering letter explaining that the survey was for academic research and that honest responses would be appreciated. This was done because it was felt that journalists would be more inclined to be honest if they knew the survey was for academic research, compared to a survey by a business organisation or PR company.

Also, confidentiality was guaranteed and provision of the respondent's name was optional to encourage frankness. However, more than 50 per cent of journalists and editors surveyed were prepared to give their names.

A purposive sample was selected from a range of industries and sections of the media to gain a representative result. The list was drawn from a national media database (The Margaret Gee Media Guide) and included news editors in national press, radio and television, finance and business journalists, trade press (computers and travel), and rural and regional press.

The sample was constructed this way to gain a cross-section of the various types of media with a mix of national and local, city and country, daily and weekly, print and broadcast, news and specialist, technical and general.

A total of 143 responses were received - a response rate of 34 per cent.

A copy of the questionnaire is attached in APPENDIX A.

The survey found that the media receives a high incidence of communications from public relations sources. In the survey, 86 per cent of journalists reported "Very Frequent" contact from PR people. A further 9.8 per cent reported "Quite
Frequent" contact, and only 4.2 per cent said they received information from PR people "Seldom". No journalist reported "Never" receiving communications from a PR person.

More than 74 per cent of journalists reported receiving more than 20 PR communications per week. Over 20 per cent received 31-50 communications per week, and almost **35 per cent reported 51-100 communications per week** (up to 20 per day).

The most common type of communications received from public relations sources was overwhelmingly "News Releases". More than ninety-nine per cent of journalists responding (142 out of 143 respondents) rated news releases as the most common PR communication received, compared to invitations to events (24 per cent) and phone calls (12 per cent).

The most relevant and important findings of the survey related to how much PR material journalists used (or claimed they used) and their attitudes towards PR.

Only 3.15 per cent of journalists surveyed said they used no public relations material sent to them.

Some 26 per cent said they "Use Little" PR material, leaving **70 per cent of journalists who admitted they used PR material** at least to some extent.

More than 50 per cent of journalists said they "Extract Quotes" from PR material. But, perhaps the most significant point was that more than **20 per cent of journalists responding said they often or sometimes used PR material "In Full"**.

This finding was further tested and confirmed by questions asking journalists to describe public relations against a five-point multiple choice scale of:

1. "Very useful/helpful in providing new information";
2. "Very useful/helpful in checking or verifying information";
3. "Occasionally useful in obtaining information";
4. "A nuisance or disruption to my work"; or
5. "I don't deal with/take notice of them at all".

In describing public relations people generally, 35 per cent of journalists and editors rated PR as "Very useful/helpful" for providing new information or for checking or verifying information. **Only 4.2 per cent of journalists described PR people generally as a "Nuisance or disruption to their work"** (although among these some held strong views). Less than one per cent of journalists said they did not deal with PR people at all.

When journalists and editors were asked to rate public relations people they knew personally, the rating increased significantly. **Fifty-five per cent rated PR people they knew as "Very useful/helpful" in providing new information or for checking or verifying information**. More than 40 per cent rated them as "Occasionally useful" and only 2.5 per cent said PR people they knew were a "Nuisance or disruption to their work".
The survey found that most journalists and editors knew quite a few public relations people personally. More than 30 per cent knew 10 or more PR practitioners; 18 per cent knew seven to 10 and 24 per cent knew four to six. Only 24 per cent knew three or less, and only 3.5 per cent of journalists knew no PR people at all.

One of the most interesting areas of the survey was the rating provided when journalists were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with two statements.

Statement A was: "Public relations practitioners are mostly ethical information disseminators working in the public interest as well as the interest of their client or employer."

Statement B was: "Public relations is mostly hype and gloss distributed by propagandists, and approaches seeking favours for their clients and employers."

Forty-two per cent of journalists "Strongly Agreed" or "Agreed" with statement A (that PR practitioners were mostly ethical information disseminators working in the public's as well as their client's interest). However, 48 per cent either "Strongly Disagreed" or "Disagreed", with the balance indicating "Don't Know".

Among those who disagreed with this statement, most indicated in comments that they did not concur with the words "in the public interest". Public relations is seen by journalists as highly biased information in favour of their clients or employers, even though the Two-way Symmetric Model of PR espouses mutual understanding and balanced effects. This result indicates that the Two-Way Symmetric Model of public relations is not yet understood or accepted in the media.

In relation to statement B, 56 per cent "Strongly Agreed" or "Agreed" that PR is hype and gloss and seeking favours, while only 35 per cent of journalists "Strongly Disagreed" or "Disagreed".

This indicates a generally low opinion of public relations practitioners held by journalists and editors. However, in this also lies an interesting paradox. While a majority (56 per cent) indicated agreement with an extremely negative description of public relations, the same survey found that most journalists know quite a few PR people and that 55 per cent rate PR practitioners as "Very useful or helpful" in providing new information or checking and verifying information, and a further 40 per cent say they are "Occasionally useful".

An even more revealing indication of the complex nature of the relationship between the media and public relations were the responses by journalists to a question to find the types of PR communications which are most useful to them and most used by them.

Journalists ranked the following as the most useful types of public relations communications:

1. "Facts" (by a large majority);
2. "Background";
3. "Leads on stories";
4. "Quotes from spokespersons";
5. "Interviews";
6. "None";
7. "Other".

In other words, journalists who overwhelmingly said public relations was hype and
gloss and that PR practitioners were propagandists who couldn't be trusted to provide
news, at the same time admit to relying on public relations sources for facts for
stories - even more than leads, interviews or quotes from spokespersons.

Respondents to the survey were asked to rank the type of PR communications most
useful from one to seven and, on a weighted scale, "Facts" were ranked first by 50 per
cent of journalists.

Another significant finding of the survey was that journalists who rated public
relations practitioners most negatively (eg those who said that they used little or no
PR material) were, in most cases, those who knew the fewest public relations people
personally.

Those who knew a higher number of public relations practitioners personally had
higher opinions of them and public relations generally. This indicates that media
attitudes towards public relations are, at least in part, based on and heresay and not
borne out in personal experiences.

This confirms several studies referred to by Grunig who says: "... journalists, when
asked to rate public relations people they know and public relations people in general,
consistently believe the practitioners they know are more ethical and professional
than practitioners in general. This would suggest that journalists do regularly work
with ethical PR people...". 63

There was also evidence of significant differences between types of media in their
attitude towards public relations and use of PR communications. In some fields, such
as finance and business, journalists openly admitted that they depended on public
relations for facts and information about company takeovers, business plans, merger
talks, and so on. Also, in highly technical areas such as computers, journalists
referred to a reliance on company public relations executives or consultants to
provide product specifications, technical facts, explanations of new technologies, and
so on.

Conversely, in areas such as travel, public relations people were often described as a
"nuisance". One well-known editor who writes for a leading newspaper on both
computers and travel, Gareth Powell, drew out the comparison: "As a Travel Editor, I
find them (PR people) a total nuisance. As Computer Editor - essential."

Comments provided by Australian journalists and editors who responded to this
survey revealed strongly-held negative attitudes towards public relations. Typical
comments included:

63 James E. Grunig, and Todd Hunt, Managing Public Relations, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc.,
1984, p. 69.
Public relations is hype and doesn't need to be dressed up as being in the public interest to justify itself. It's justified because it works - mostly for the client, sometimes also for the media. I work in the computer media where the quality of press releases is laughable. I'd say the ratio of professionals to empty hypesters in this sector is about 50:50.

Seventy-five per cent of them can't write to save themselves. Fifty per cent of the ones I deal with often deal with a number of different industries, but lack an understanding of any of them. Many fail to appreciate the meaning of the word 'deadline'. All in all, I'm not overly impressed with the vast majority who lend credence to the term, 'PR people are failed journalists'.

And this one:

There should be a law against PR material in the form of advertising posing as news.

Some leading journalists gave frank, positive comments about public relations. One producer of a leading national TV program said:

Most PRs I know personally are useful to me. They have taken the time to gauge my needs and respect that general approaches are a waste of time. Alternatively, I have taken the time to understand their roles and to respect their relationships with their clients.

The producer of a top-rating Sydney radio program said:

I have been very impressed in my dealings with public relations practitioners over the past ten years. I have found them to be very reliable, helpful and efficient....

In summary, what the survey seems to be saying is that the media generally do not have a very high opinion of PR people and their work, but many rely significantly on public relations nevertheless. More than half of all journalists responding acknowledged PR as "Very useful or helpful" in providing new information or verifying information, which indicates usage of PR material by these journalists.

Most journalists and editors have a high level of contact with public relations - an average of around 10 contacts a day - and many admit to using a significant amount of public relations material, either in full or part.

The fact that journalists rate PR people they know personally much more positively than PR generally indicates that some of the negative attitudes of the media towards PR are based on folklore and popular perception which is partly inaccurate. Nevertheless, the fact that journalists provide negative comments of even PR people they know indicates that public relations still has a long way to go to become a profession with recognised standards and acceptance.

In the eyes of the media - if not with clients - public relations is still a profession fighting for legitimacy.

A detailed summary of the findings of this journalists' survey is attached in APPENDIX A.
CHAPTER 4.

Public Relations Practitioners' Views on the Role & Influence of Public Relations

Having investigated in some detail the media's perspective of public relations, an understanding of the relationship between the media and public relations also requires a close examination of PR practitioners' perspective of the media and their role in influencing the media.

Leading UK public relations teacher and author, Frank Jefkins, says:

Increasingly, editors rely on PR practitioners for news, pictures, interviews, ideas for feature articles or written articles. Journalists will accept invitations to attend press events to obtain news. They will also contact PR consultants and PR managers or press officers when they want information.

Since the news is often to do with commercial or non-commercial organisations of every sort, this liaison between journalists and PR practitioners is an important facet of news gathering which is mutually beneficial. 64

A 1977 survey of business and financial editors by the Hill & Knowlton public relations firm showed that these editors considered public relations people to be their most important source of information. 65

A number of attempts have been made to specifically measure the degree of influence PR exerts on the media in terms of the percentage of published or broadcast information originating from PR sources.

A series of studies of news media in Milwaukee in 1963 and 1975 indicated relatively high usage of public relations material by the media. Those studies showed around 45 per cent of the news items in newspapers and around 15 per cent of the news items on radio and television originated in one way or another with public relations sources. 66

Sigal classified the sources of 1,146 stories in the Washington Post and New York Times and found that around 75 per cent of the stories resulted from what he called information processing. Fifty-eight per cent of the stories came from such routine

66 ibid, p. 225.
sources as official proceedings, press releases, or press conferences. Another 16 per cent came from informal sources such as briefings, leaks, meetings, or conventions. (Most of these sources are PR-related.)

Only 26 per cent resulted from the active seeking of information, or what Sigal called 'enterprise reporting', from interviews or the reporter's own analysis. 67

In a 1975 study, Craig Aronoff reported a substantial minority (40 per cent) of journalists felt that "public relations practitioners are necessary to the production of the daily newspaper as we know it". Nearly half (48 per cent) found that "public relations practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete, and timely news." 68

Professor David Sachsman carried out a study in 1976 that revealed more than half of all environmental stories in the San Francisco area were based on press releases, most frequently those of governmental agencies. 69

Dundoody and Ryan report from a 1983 study that PR people play a vital role in the reporting of science. 70

According to Grunig, "it is common knowledge that most community newspapers could not exist - and definitely could not cover their communities adequately - without the help of public relations people." 71

Turk refers to this phenomenon as providing journalists with "information subsidies". 72

Otis Baskin and Craig Aronoff, in a chapter on media relations in their text, Public Relations: The Profession and the Practice comment:

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

Communication between certain public relations practitioners and journalists is massive. Some public relations offices send out news releases daily. Additionally, personal contact and communication may be initiated by either party.

70 S. Dunwoody, and M. Ryan, "Public Information Persons as Mediators Between Scientists and Journalists", Journalism Quarterly 60 (4), 1983, pp. 647-656.
In some instances, public relations practitioners provide more useful information to specific media than do the journalists those media employ. 73

"Some public relations people boast publicly about stories they have placed, which does not endear them to the media", Pomerantz notes in a recent article in Public Relations Quarterly. 74

Public relations is also used extensively in politics. Pavlik outlines how "in the era of political image making, public relations has played a major role in many election campaigns". He instances the 1984 US Presidential election which cost $100 million, much of which was spent on public relations. 75

There appears to be a lack of Australian studies in this area, although public relations executives surveyed in this study frequently referred to the frequent and widespread publication of PR material in the media as "common knowledge". This is further discussed in a report of surveys among Australian PR executives later.

There are significant difficulties in attempting to show and quantify in a rigorous academic sense the impact of public relations on the media. These difficulties arise for three key reasons. Firstly, there are **professional imperatives** as outlined earlier which lead to journalists obfuscating and often refusing to divulge the source of their information (even to the extent of going to prison to protect sources in some cases). Also, professional pride often leads journalists to describe another source for a story or claim enterprise reporting rather than admit to using PR material. In the same vein, public relations practitioners often operate within a cosy relationship with certain media which they do not wish to jeopardise through exposure. Furthermore, many PRs regard their media contacts and their methods as proprietary.

Secondly, there are **practical difficulties** in conclusively establishing the source or sources of various stories in the media. A story may be sourced by enterprise reporting as referred to by Sigal, involving desk research, interviews and analysis undertaken by the journalist. Alternatively, media stories may be sourced from official reports or transcripts of meetings such as council minutes, Hansard (reports from Parliament), reports of inquiries, or research papers such as Government 'White Papers'. Is the release of such reports and information official duty or public relations? The line between standard business or official practice and public relations is blurred at times.

Furthermore, the task of identifying sources of or influences on the content of media stories is made more difficult because journalists may source information for a story from a number of public relations activities, some of which are harder to track than others. For instance, journalists may obtain information or be influenced from one, several or all of the following:


• **Printed statements** offered for publication containing quotes and/or facts (ie press/media/news releases);
• **Background papers** such as reports or minutes from which journalists can glean information;
• **Interviews** and **briefings** by spokespersons of companies or organisations;
• **Telephone discussions**;
• **Events** (such as product launches, seminars or conferences);
• **Visits or tours** of facilities or areas arranged by companies and organisations - including overseas trips offered by some companies;
• '**Leads**' (introductions to other sources, tip-offs or suggestions of issues or angles for follow up);
• **Leaks**;
• **Evaluation products** (products given to journalists to try);
• **Photographs**;
• **Videos**;
• **Entertainment**.

Printed materials issued to the media are relatively easy to track as copies of news releases issued can be obtained and then matched to published or broadcast information in the media for the corresponding period. However, many of the other methods of PR communication with the media, such as telephone conversations, are difficult or impossible to identify and monitor.

There is also the added complication that information sent to the media in a news release may be obtained by journalists coincidentally through other sources. Identifying or apportioning the responsible source or sources and content influence of a story is well nigh impossible in such circumstances. Some stories also may have multiple sources and influences on content.

These two factors together pose limitations for content analysis of the media on a broad scale. Identifying the source of stories in the media accurately and conclusively across a wide spectrum of media coverage is a daunting task with many opportunities for misinformation or distortion to skew results.

A third key difficulty faced in attempting to measure the impact of public relations on the media is a **serious lack of objective evaluation research within public relations**. This will be discussed in detail later, but the scant evaluation research used in the PR field makes the task of identifying the influence of public relations precarious and time-consuming.

One way to gain an understanding of the influence of public relations on the media, or lack thereof, is to examine the practices and output of public relations practitioners, and then track a sample of traceable PR communications to determine actual results that are achieved. Results obtained can then be compared to claims by PR practitioners and journalists.

This methodology will not produce a comprehensive picture of the impact of public relations on the media as it does not measure the total impact of the range of PR communications used, particularly those which are difficult or impossible to trace. However, while this provides a more narrow view than content analysis, this methodology gains in accuracy and, if research is undertaken across a number of
fields or sectors (e.g., business and finance, environment, travel, computers, rural and agriculture, etc.), conclusions can be drawn concerning the relationship between public relations and the media in these sectors.

Public relations practitioners are employed in 'in-house' positions within companies and organisations and in public relations consultancy firms. To ensure that representative data on PR practices was obtained, and to identify any significant differences between in-house and consultancy PR practices, two surveys were conducted as part of this study.

Survey of In-House PR Executives

A survey of 311 public relations executives working in in-house PR positions in Sydney and Melbourne found an overwhelming lack of objective evaluation of their work, but unstinting confidence of significant results in placing stories in the media favourable to their clients or employers.

**METHODODOLOGY:**

A detailed mail questionnaire was sent to 311 members of the Public Relations Institute of Australia (189 members of the PRIA in New South Wales, predominantly in Sydney, and 122 members of the PRIA in Victoria, predominantly in Melbourne) involved in in-house PR positions, with a covering letter to seek their support for the survey.

Names were obtained from the membership list of the PRIA (NSW) and PRIA (Victoria) with consultancy members deleted as a survey of PR consultancies was undertaken separately. (See APPENDIX C.)

In Victoria, support was gained from the President of the PRIA (Victoria) and the covering letter referred to this to encourage Victorian PRIA member response. In NSW, the researcher is a member of the PRIA (NSW), and therefore reasonable response was anticipated.

Sixty-seven (67) completed responses were received - a 22 per cent response rate. As the survey was conducted in November-December, 1992, the approaching Christmas holidays (Summer vacation in Australia) may have impacted on the response rate. Nevertheless, this was considered a sufficient response on which to draw conclusions.

To test the validity of claims made, executives surveyed were asked if they could provide examples of media usage of PR material cited.

Twelve respondents provided evidential material. Others indicated that such evidence was available upon request - although many were reluctant to make the material public.

A copy of the public relations practitioners survey questionnaire is attached in APPENDIX B.

Of the 67 in-house PR practitioners who responded to the survey, 56 (84 per cent) said they "regularly issued material to the media".
The 'top 10' ranking of PR communications most used were:

1. News releases .......................... 74 per cent
2. One-on-one briefings of journalists ...... 25 per cent
3. Feature articles .......................... 14 per cent
4. Supplement articles ..................... 12 per cent
5. Media briefings .......................... 12 per cent
6. News conferences ........................ 8 per cent
7. Media tours .............................. 6 per cent
8. Newsletters .............................. 5 per cent
9. Handling media inquiries (responding to requests) .... 5 per cent
10. Special events (eg launches) ............ 1.5 per cent

Telephone calls were not included in the survey as preliminary interviews with PR practitioners in developing the research questionnaire indicated that they would easily be one of the most common forms of communication with the media (confirmed by the survey of journalists), but that telephone calls were made for a variety of reasons which were often part of another communication strategy (eg a call to invite a journalist to a news conference or event). Separately listing telephone calls could result in double-counting of media communications. "Handling Media Inquiries" which is often done by telephone was included as a separate heading.

**Diagram 3.**

*Diagram 3 graphically illustrates the overwhelming dominance of the press release (also called the news release or media release because not all media are press) in public relations communication.*
Fifty-seven per cent of PR practitioners responding said they had experience of "media using PR supplied material/information word for word, or publishing/broadcasting stories predominantly based on information issued by a PR source", and almost half (49 per cent) said they could provide evidence of this.

Interestingly, however, when asked if they were prepared to provide such examples for reference in this research, only 36 per cent said "Yes". This may indicate exaggeration or lack of hard evidence to support such claims, although no firm conclusion can be drawn from this.

This research among PR practitioners exposed a major lack of objective evaluation techniques. Three questions were asked in relation to measuring result of PR activities. The first two related to media coverage, and the third related to evaluation of other public relations communications (ie newsletters, corporate image programs, community relations programs, employee communication, etc):

a. Do you monitor media coverage quantitatively (eg press clippings)?

b. Do you monitor media coverage qualitatively (eg content analysis or research to measure results such as audience message acceptance, attitude change, etc)?

c. What other types of evaluation of PR do you use?

Respondents were asked to specify the research methodologies employed in each area, both to gain an insight into how PR practitioners go about evaluating results of their work and to test the validity of claims of various levels of results.

Press clippings were the most common form of quantitative evaluation carried out (used by 90 per cent of respondents). However, raw clippings only were collected in most cases. Forty-two per cent claimed to carry out some form of qualitative evaluation of media coverage, but when asked to specify the methodology used, most responses were sketchy.

Only two practitioners (3 per cent) indicated that they carried out media content analysis. Some 55 per cent said they carried out no qualitative evaluation of media coverage. They simply counted press clippings. As Walker and others note, "collection of data is only the beginning of research". 76

Without analysis, press clippings indicate the 'strike rate' - the number of mentions in the press - but they do not indicate whether the coverage was positive, negative or neutral, whether it occurred in a influential publication or a small trade journal, what page the story appeared on, and what percentage of the story pertained to the client organisation. PR practitioners are known to include all clippings with even the briefest mention of their employers or clients in reports.

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When asked to list the methodology used for measuring results of PR communications overall (media and other target audiences), 34 per cent of respondents said "None".

Of those who responded positively, only nine out of 67 PR practitioners described any form of independent objective research (13 per cent). The most common methodologies listed for evaluating public relations by in-house PR practitioners were:

1. Informal feedback 15 per cent
2. Self-administered questionnaires 14 per cent
3. Independent objective research 13 per cent
4. Media responsiveness/coverage 10 per cent
5. Sales/inquiry rates 5 per cent
6. Market research 5 per cent

This is not to argue that only independently carried out formal research has any validity in planning and evaluating public relations programs. However, even though a seeming majority of PR practitioners indicated that they carried out research to evaluate the results of their communication, most simply collected press clippings and/or relied on informal feedback, sketchily-described self-administered questionnaires which by their nature involve subjectivity, and secondary data such as sales or inquiry rates and borrowed market research.
Only two in-house PR practitioners who responded carried out a formal "Communication Audit", and only one professed conducting "Readership Surveys".

One respondent to the survey listed "quantity of distribution" as a methodology for qualitatively measuring PR communications.

Apparently the long lunch is still alive and well with some PR practitioners. One commented:

Modern-day journalists would die - both professionally and physically (from starvation) - without PRs.

The same practitioner also listed "Self, subjectively" under methodology used for monitoring media coverage qualitatively. Perhaps not surprisingly, the practitioner giving this response did not provide his/her name.

Others wrote: "personal assessment" and "personal observation" for methods of evaluating PR communication.

Another comment which reflects the fragile and often antagonistic relationship between PR practitioners and journalists was:

PR people make the media-world turn. I'd like to know how many stories appear (either on TV, radio or press) through the preparation of a media release or call from a PR person to a journo? I'd say many. I think PR people are 100 times more professional, active and on the ball than the average journo.

The person giving the above comment included, under methodologies used for evaluating PR communications overall, "General word of mouth".

There was a strong tendency evident among some practitioners to want to keep PR techniques secret. One commented:

I think the least said, the better - as a general rule for everyone in public relations.

Not only did many PR practitioners responding to the survey not use research. Many failed to see its relevance or importance, viewing the assumptions and premises on which they based their practices as self-evident truths.

When asked for evidence of media using PR-supplied material, one respondent wrote indignantly:

Frequent, particularly in local press. Not sure of your point here, as this is widely known and accepted.
Yet another questioned the professionalism of the researcher in conducting the survey, commenting:

It says very little about your professionalism to … select a self-serving subject which may endanger the relationship held by other PR professionals with their media contacts. I intend bringing this issue to the notice of Deakin University and the PRIA.

The same respondent listed no form of evaluation of either media coverage or public relations overall and refused to give examples of PR work published, claiming "that would breach confidentiality between us and journalists". It is puzzling how this conclusion about published information could be drawn.

A summary of the findings of this survey is attached in APPENDIX B.

Survey of PR Consultants

A survey of 50 leading public relations consultancy firms in Sydney conducted in May-June, 1992 found that 100 per cent of PR firms responding said they could show cases of the media using news releases "word for word” or publishing or broadcasting stories "predominantly based on information issued by a public relations source".

METHODOLOGY:

The survey was conducted by a detailed mail questionnaire sent to the principal of 50 consultancy firms after a preliminary telephone contact to seek the consultancy's agreement to participate in the survey.

Twenty-two responses were received which was a 44 per cent response rate.

To test the validity of claims made, the firms surveyed were asked if they could provide examples of media usage of PR material. Some respondents even wrote comments such as "Could we ever" to this question.

A number provided material. Others indicated that such evidence was available upon request - although many were reluctant to make the material public.

A copy of the public relations consultancies survey questionnaire is attached in APPENDIX C.
The most common communications with the media used by public relations consultants were:

1. News releases: 100 per cent
2. One-on-one media briefings: 77 per cent
3. Feature articles: 68 per cent
4. Supplement articles: 68 per cent
5. News conferences: 64 per cent
6. Media briefings: 45 per cent
7. Media tours and visits to facilities: 45 per cent
8. Special events (e.g., launches): 27 per cent
9. Handling media inquiries: 9 per cent
10. Newsletters: 5 per cent

Telephone calls were again excluded from the survey to be consistent with the survey of in-house PR practitioners.

This survey of PR consultancies further confirmed the serious lack of objective evaluation techniques. From the 22 companies which responded, 20 (95 per cent) said they monitored media coverage quantitatively. As was the case with in-house PR practitioners, press clipping services were the most common form of quantitative evaluation.

However, again only raw clippings were collected in most cases. Only one respondent firm indicated that it used a database to store, manipulate and retrieve information about media coverage.
One leading consultancy in Sydney explained its use of a system of measuring column centimetres of press coverage and radio and television air time, and then multiplying the total space and time by the corresponding casual advertising rate.

"Advertising space is then multiplied by a factor of four for the credibility inherent in editorial (ie written by a journalist, which is more credible than an advertisement)," the consultancy stated. No substantiation of this claim was provided.

In justifying this method of evaluation, the PR consultancy claimed: "The credibility factor of four is conservative. In the USA, a sliding scale ranging from 1-60 is used depending on position, number of product mentions and other specific variables."

PR consultancies were asked in the survey to indicate what qualitative forms of evaluation they used to monitor the results of media relations and publicity material distribution. Twelve companies (55 per cent) said they evaluated media coverage qualitatively, but only two (9 per cent) were able to nominate a formal or independent research methodology used for this. A further three companies (14 per cent) said they used "Self-administered questionnaires", but the respondents had no research training and little detail was provided on the questionnaires.

When asked how they evaluated media coverage apart from press clippings and electronic media monitoring, only one company listed using Media Content Analysis. Even then, this was based on "consultant review".

Other methods of evaluating media coverage were reported as:

- Discussions with journalists;
- Trade publication inquiry rate;
- Installation of a toll-free 008 number (but no details were provided of its purpose or how it operated).

Similarly, when asked to list forms of research and evaluation used for other types of public relations, PR consultancies surveyed gave little evidence of objective or 'scientific' approaches to their work. Evaluation methodologies listed included:

- Attitude research (but no details of how or what type);
- Reader surveys of magazines or newsletters;
- Client surveys and industry surveys (secondary data);
- Inquiry card returns;
- Coupon replies;
- Number of inquiries;
- Client sales results;
- Share price movements;
- Community participation rates in events;
- Random discussions with journalists;
- Feedback;
- Professional judgement;
- Client feelings;
- Word of mouth.
While the first three of these may be considered objective and valid forms of evaluation, many of the other so-called activities do not meet Broom and Dozier's description of research as "the controlled, objective and systematic gathering of information for the purposes of describing and understanding". 77

This poor level of or non-existent evaluation research among major public relations practitioners no doubt contributes to the unprofessional image of public relations and its struggle for legitimacy within management.

Analysed against the same criteria as the in-house PR practitioners survey, the most common methodologies of evaluating results by PR consultants were:

1. Media responsiveness/coverage 36 per cent
2. Sales and inquiry rates 27 per cent
3. Informal feedback 23 per cent
4. Self-administered questionnaires 14 per cent
5. Readership surveys 14 per cent
6. Superior/client satisfaction 9 per cent
7. Personal/professional judgement 9 per cent
8. Market research 9 per cent
9. Achievement of objectives 5 per cent
10. Independent objective research 5 per cent

A summary of the findings of this survey of PR consultancy firms is attached in APPENDIX C.

The findings of these surveys of in-house and consultancy PR practitioners are supported by research carried out by Gael Walker of the University of Technology Sydney from 1990 to 1992. Walker studied the planning and evaluation research methods described in submissions entered in the Public Relations Institute of Australia Golden Target Awards from 1988 to 1992.

In a pilot project to determine the types of research claimed to be used by practitioners, she examined 124 PR campaigns in the 1990 competition. This revealed that 51 of these campaigns had no comment at all in the mandatory research section of the submissions. "... the majority of campaigns referred to research and evaluation in vague and sketchy terms," Walker reported. 78

A study by Walker of 177 submissions in the PRIA's Golden Target Awards in 1991 and 1992 showed similar reliance on responses such as sales or inquiry rates, attendance at functions, and media coverage - although "this rarely included any analysis of the significance of the coverage, simply its extent". 79

While Walker acknowledges that Golden Target Award entries do not constitute a representative sample of PR communications, her sample was wide and this work can

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79 ibid, p. 7.
be assumed to be among the best of what is being done by PR practitioners - both in-
house and consultant - given that it was entered for award consideration. Therefore,
this analysis provides a useful window on prevailing standards and practices among
PR practitioners.

Walker's research found the following types of evaluation research used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>1992</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response (membership/sales attendance/inquiries)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media coverage</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback (employee, govt/business/etc)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey (formal &amp; informal)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives achieved</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anecdotal evidence</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager's comments</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No evaluation mentioned</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. of comments</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The predominant reliance on sales/inquiry rates, media coverage and feedback found
by Walker closely parallels the results of research conducted in this study.

Walker instances one glaring case of lack of effective evaluation where a PR
campaign with a budget of $300,000 was based on unsubstantiated "incredible
demand" that had been received from target audiences and the statement that the
concept "seemed effective" because it used positive reinforcement and "is colourful,
fun and memorable and creates an impact where a more hard-hitting promotion may
not". 80

**Differences Between In-House & Consultancy PR Practices**

There was general consistency among in-house and consultancy practitioners in both
the types of communications used and the methods (or lack) of evaluation employed.

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80 ibid, p. 6.
For instance, after news releases which, along with telephone calls, are the most common form of PR communication with the media, both in-house and consultancy PR practitioners used one-on-one briefings of journalists as their second most popular media communication.

All PR practitioners relied heavily on written communication with the media, using news releases, feature articles and supplement articles as three of the most common types of communication.

However, consultancies reported a higher relative usage of one-on-one briefings, feature and supplement articles, and special events such as launches and news conferences, compared to in-house PR practitioners who relied more on printed news releases.

There was a greater use of external press clipping agencies among PR consultancies. Fifty-four per cent of in-house PR practitioners used external press clipping agencies, with 46 per cent monitoring press coverage internally, whereas 68 per cent of PR consultancies used external press clipping agencies with only 32 per cent monitoring press coverage internally. This can most probably be explained by the commercial realities of consultancy firms which operate on an hourly charge basis ($80 - $250 per hour) which makes it more cost effective to sub-contract press clippings to a specialist agency such as Neville Jeffress Pidler.

Among other evaluation methodologies used, in-house practitioners relied more on questionnaires. Also, in-house practitioners used more independent objective research than consultancies (13 per cent versus less than five per cent). This lower use of independent research by consultancies is perhaps explained by prevailing commercial imperatives where consultancies are usually contracted on fixed retainers. The nature of remuneration incentivises consultancies against commissioning outside research as funding for this has to come out of the consultancy's budget. While this should not be an excuse, it appears to be a commercial reality.

Similarly, 10 per cent of consultancies listed "Superior/client satisfaction" (keeping the client happy) as a main form of evaluating effectiveness, no doubt again reflecting the economic pressures of client-consultancy relationships.

Consultancies focused predominantly on media coverage as the most common form of evaluating results (36 per cent), although in-house PR practitioners also ranked media coverage/responsiveness (such as positive journalist attitudes and feedback) third among evaluation methodologies.

Although all practitioners used "Sales/inquiry rates" (eg increasing sales corresponding with the period of publicity, return of coupons, inquiries for information, etc) for evaluating the success or otherwise of PR communications, consultancies relied on this method more heavily. Also, consultancies used market research more often than in-house PR practitioners. These factors together suggest a greater focus on marketing among consultancies, compared to a focus on public affairs, corporate image and employee communication among in-house practitioners. This is more an observation than a firm conclusion, however. More research would be needed to confirm such trends.
While in-house PR practitioners were reluctant to provide examples of media usage of their material on a regular basis, PR consultancies showed no such reticence with 73 per cent saying they could provide examples and 64 per cent giving permission for samples provided to be used in this research.

**Evaluating the Effects of Public Relations**

One of the major obstacles identified in this study is the lack of applied research in the area of evaluation or public relations. Lack of objective evaluation of PR communications is part of a widespread lack of research generally in PR, both at the pure (basic) and applied level.

In "Managing Public Relations", James Grunig and Todd Hunt, comment:

> The majority of practitioners ... still prefer to 'fly by the seat of their pants' and use intuition rather than intellectual procedures to solve public relations problems. 81

A Syracuse University study conducted by Judy Van Slyke, a public relations educator, compared public relations to Jerome Ravetz's 'model of an immature and ineffective science' and concluded that public relations fits the model. 82

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82 Ibid, p. 77.
Marvin Olasky from the University of Texas asks bluntly: "Why have public relations practitioners generally been depicted as low-life liars?" and gives a number of reasons. 83

Olasky and others point to several contributors to the generally low esteem in which public relations is held, including lack of training among some PR practitioners, poor performance by a few unethical and unprofessional individuals or firms, an image of hucksters carried over from the early press agent days, and a false impression created by sales and hostessing jobs which are too often erroneously called public relations.

But Marvin Olasky refers to this rationale as "the doctrine of selective depravity, otherwise known as 'Don't blame us, it's them - the immoral outsiders who cause trouble'". He says: "... blaming the periphery does not come to grips with the corruption that can be found at the center of the public relations trade. Nor does it explain why public relations' progress over the past 30 years has been so small that the apologies offered now are virtual repetitions of those made then". 84

A key contributor to the image problem of public relations is the lack of objective, research methodology for evaluating PR programs which exists even within major consultancies and large PR departments. James Grunig says: "Although considerable lip service is paid to the importance of program evaluation in public relations, the rhetorical line is much more enthusiastic than actual utilisation". 85

Grunig adds: "I have begun to feel more and more like a fundamentalist minister railing against sin; the difference being that I have railed for evaluation in public relations practice. Just as everyone is against sin, so most public relations people I talk to are for evaluation. People keep on sinning ... and PR people continue not to do evaluation research". 86

A study by Dr Lloyd Kirban in 1983 among Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) members in the Chicago chapter found that more than half the practitioners expressed a "fear of being measured". 87


84 ibid.

85 James Grunig, "Basic research provides knowledge that makes evaluation possible", Public Relations Quarterly, 28, 1983, pp. 28-32.

86 ibid, pp. 28-32.

87 ibid, p. 65.
Professor James Bissland found in a 1986 study of public relations that while the amount of evaluation has increased, the quality of research has been slow to improve.  

A 1988 national study conducted by Ketchum Public Relations in the US confirmed this. The Ketchum study conducted by Dr Walter Lindenmann among 945 US practitioners concluded that "most public relations research was casual and informal, rather than scientific and precise" and that "most public relations research today is done by individuals trained in public relations rather than by individuals trained as researchers". While the Ketchum study found that 54 per cent of the 253 respondents to the survey strongly agreed that PR research for evaluation and measurement would grow during the 1990s, nine out of 10 practitioners surveyed felt that PR research needs to become more sophisticated than has been the case up to now.  

The public relations field has talked about evaluation for most of the past decade and this is further evidenced in the surveys conducted for this research. But few if any practitioners have really come to grips with evaluation and employed rigorous, objective methods of evaluation on a regular basis. Pavlik comments that measuring the effectiveness of PR has proved almost as elusive as finding the Holy Grail.  

In Australia, marketing writer, Neil Shoebridge, said in his column in Business Review Weekly in April, 1989: "For public relations to be widely accepted as a serious marketing tool, it needs to develop new ways to prove its worth and make its actions accountable... Pointing to a pile of press clippings is not enough."  

Greater use of objective evaluation research can earn credibility and respect for public relations which it so desperately seeks. The following quote by James A. Koten, then Vice-President for Corporate Communications at Illinois Bell, sums up the situation:

To be influential, you have to be at the decision table and be part of corporate governance. You can be there if the things you are doing are supported by facts. That is where the public relations person has generally been weak and why, in most organisations, public relations functions at a lower level. The idea is to be where the decisions are made in order to impact the future of the company. To do so, you have to be like the lawyer or financial officer, the personnel officer or operations person. You have to have hard data.

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91 Neil Shoebridge, column in BRW Magazine, April, 1989.
Professor David Dozier of San Diego State University says: "The power-control perspective suggests that public relations program research is a tool - a weapon perhaps - in the political struggle to demonstrate the impact of public relations programs and to contribute to decision-making by knowing "what is going on out there". Success in this struggle means greater financial and personnel resources for the public relations unit and greater power over decisions of the dominant coalition".  

Dominant coalition theory developed by professors of industrial administration, Johannes Pennings and Paul Goodman, at the University of Pittsburgh, provides an effective model for seeing why public relations is often remote from the centre of decision-making and policy-making in organisations.  

A 1985 survey of Public Relations Society of America and International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) members in the US and Canada showed that scanning research is positively associated with participation in management decision-making and membership in the dominant coalition".  

In their 1979 and 1985 surveys of 208 Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) members, Professors Glen Broom and David Dozier also found that increases in overall evaluation research activities were associated with increased participation in management decision-making.  

This strongly suggests that greater use of research will be the PR field's ticket to gain entry to the 'dominant coalition' which decides policy and makes major decisions in companies and organisations and for gaining greater respect and public acceptance.

While it is not the primary focus of this study, there are six key barriers or challenges to developing and using effective evaluation research in public relations which appear to have blocked the way for the best part of 50 years and which need to be addressed.

1. Understanding Research

The first is that public relations executives need to acquire far greater understanding of research to be able to function in the organisational environment of the 1990s. At a pure or basic research level, public relations needs to build its body of theory and knowledge. There are, at the core of public relations, fundamental questions over the nature of PR and what it does in society. The Edward Bernays paradigm outlined in his influential 1920s book, Crystallising Public Opinion and expanded in his classic 1955 PR text, The Engineering of Consent, on which most public relations thinking is


94 James E. Grunig, and Todd Hunt, Managing Public Relations, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1984, p. 120.

95 David M. Dozier, op. cit., p. 19.

based, is under challenge from new approaches such as Co-orientation Theory and the Two-Way Symmetric Model of public relations developed by Grunig.

The Bernays paradigm defines public relations as a form of persuasive communication which bends public thinking to that of an organisation - a concept that some, such as Marvin Olasky, say has destructive practical applications, and continued use of which will speed up PR's descent into disrepute. 97

There is a strong argument that the whole theoretical basis of public relations needs to be questioned and reviewed with further pure or basic research.

At an applied level, public relations academics and practitioners need to greatly expand efforts in both strategic and evaluative research. Public relations evaluation research is much more than monitoring press clippings.

Most PR practitioners have only a basic understanding of Otto Lerbinger's four basic types of PR research: environmental monitoring (or scanning), public relations audits, communications audits, and social audits. Many use the terms interchangeably and incorrectly and many have little knowledge of survey design, questionnaire construction, sampling, or basic statistics and are, therefore, hamstrung in their ability to plan and manage research functions.

As well as gaining greater knowledge of research, public relations practitioners need to make an attitudinal shift from the view that research is a one-off activity at the front end and at the back end of programs to an understanding that research is an on-going integral process.

Marston provided the RACE formula for public relations which identified the stages of research, action, communication and evaluation. Cutlip and Center provided their own formula based on this which they expressed in their widely used text, "Effective Public Relations", as fact-finding planning, communication and evaluation. 98

Borrowing from systems theory, Richard Carter coined the term 'behavioural molecule' for a model that describes how people make decisions about what to do. The segments of a behavioural molecule continue endlessly in a chain reaction. In the context of a 'behavioural molecule', Grunig describes the elements of public relations as detect, construct, define, select, confirm, behave, detect. The process of detecting, constructing, defining, selecting, confirming, behaving (which, in systems language, means producing outputs) and detecting, continues ad infinitum. 99

Craig Aronoff and Otis Baskin echo this same view in their text on public relations research. They say: "... evaluation is not the final stage of the public relations process.


99 ibid, pp. 104-108.
In actual practice, evaluation is frequently the beginning of a new effort. The research function overlaps the planning, action and evaluation functions. It is an interdependent process that, once set in motion, has no beginning or end." 100

2. Setting Objectives

The second major barrier to be overcome in order to evaluate public relations programs is to write realistic, measurable objectives in the first instance. This sounds obvious. But most public relations programs have vague, imprecise, and often unmeasurable objectives.

PR programs frequently have as their stated objectives broad, non-specific aims and philosophical statements such as:

- To generate goodwill;
- To create wide support for XYZ organisation;
- To increase sales of ABC Corporation's widgets.

These objectives are open to wide interpretation. What is the definition of goodwill and what will be measured as manifestations of goodwill? What is meant by support? Is attitudinal or behavioural support required? What constitutes wide support - 20 per cent, 50 per cent, 90 per cent? By how much do sales have to be increased? How will the specific results of PR activity be separated from the effects of other corporate and marketing communication? Within what time frame will results be expected? Without specific, unambiguous objectives, evaluation of a public relations program is impossible.

Leading academics point to lack of clear objectives as one of the major stumbling blocks to evaluation of public relations. Grunig refers to "the typical set of ill-defined, unreasonable, and unmeasurable communication effects that public relations people generally state as their objectives". 101

Pavlik comments: "PR campaigns, unlike their advertising counterparts, have been plagued by vague, ambiguous objectives". 102

With vague or overly broad objectives, it may be impossible to evaluate the effects of PR activity. This point is also closely related to the next barrier to measuring results from public relations.

3. Understanding Communication Theory

To set realistic, achievable objectives and deliver public relations advice and programs that work, public relations practitioners need to have at least a rudimentary


understanding of communication theory. Assumptions about what communication can achieve lead to misguided and wildly exaggerated claims in PR plans which make the task of evaluation a nightmare.

Pavlik makes the sobering comment: "... much of what PR efforts traditionally have been designed to achieve may be unrealistic". ¹⁰³

A review of communication theory is not appropriate to this study, but some of the key developments are noted as they directly impact on how PR programs are structured and, therefore, on how they can be evaluated.

Communication theory has evolved from the classic Information Processing Model which identified a source, message, channel and receiver. As Flay and a number of others point out, the Information Processing Model generally assumes that changes in knowledge and beliefs will automatically lead to changes in attitudes, which will automatically lead to changes in behaviour. ¹⁰⁴

This line of thinking about the effects of communication was reflected in the evolution of the 'Domino Model' of communication and the 'Hierarchy of Effects' model which saw awareness, comprehension, conviction and action as a series of stairsteps of communication. Another variation of the 'Hierarchy of Effects' model used extensively in advertising for many years termed the steps awareness, interest, desire and action.

These theories assumed a simple progression from cognitive (thinking or becoming aware) to affective (evaluating or forming an attitude) to conative (acting).

However, a growing amount of research questions these basic assumptions and these models. The influential work of social psychologist, Dr Leon Festinger, in the late 1950s challenged the Information Processing Model and the general 'Domino Model' of communication effects. Festinger's 'Theory of Cognitive Dissonance' stated that attitudes could be changed if they were juxtaposed with a dissonant attitude but, importantly, dissonance theory held that receivers accepted only messages that were consonant with their attitudes and actively resisted messages which were dissonant.

The view of communication as all powerful was also challenged by broadcaster, Joseph Klapper in 1960 whose mass media research led to his "law of minimal consequences" and turned traditional thinking about the 'power of the Press' and communication effects on its head. ¹⁰⁵

Festinger's Theory of Cognitive Dissonance and Klapper's seminal work contributed to a significant change from a view of communication as all-powerful to a minimal effects view of communication. This has been built on by further modern research

¹⁰³ ibid, p. 119.
such as **Hedging and Wedging Theory** developed by Professors Keith Stamm and James Grunig which has major implications for public relations.  

Frequently public relations program objectives propose to change negative attitudes to positive attitudes. But, according to Stamm's Hedging and Wedging Theory, when a person with a firmly held (wedged) view is faced with a contrary view, he or she will, at best, hedge. Hedging is defined by Stamm and Grunig as a cognitive strategy in which a person holds two or more conflicting views at the same time. Thus, it may be improbable or impossible for attitudes to be changed diametrically from negative to positive - or vice versa. Attitudes can be moved from wedging to hedging, or hedging to wedging, but not wedging to wedging. And yet, public relations programs propose to do this every day.

This only skims the surface of important communication research and theory-building which are vital to developing professionalism in public relations. Another significant contribution to modern public relations is Grunig's **Situational Theory of communication**. In contrast to the simplistic Domino Theory, Situational Theory of communication holds that the relationship between knowledge (awareness), attitudes and behaviour is contingent on a number of situational factors.

Grunig lists four key situational factors: (1) the level of problem recognition; (2) the level of constraint recognition (does the person see the issue or problem as within their control or ability to do something); (3) the presence of a referent criterion (a prior experience or prior knowledge); and (4) level of involvement.  

This research does not mean to imply that communication has no effect. But it does indicate that it is dangerous to make assumptions about communication outcomes, and a greater understanding of communication theory is desirable among PR practitioners.

Results of communication will not always be behavioural. The outcomes of communication may be cognitive (simply getting people to think about something), attitudinal (form an opinion), or behavioural. Public relations executives should note that results are less likely the further one moves out along the axis from cognition to behaviour. If overly optimistic objectives are set, evaluation of public relations will be a difficult and frequently disappointing experience.

An understanding of Grunig's **Four Models of Public Relations** depicting the evolving types of PR practice are also important to a study of evaluation, as different objectives pertain to each and therefore different evaluation strategies are required for each model of public relations.

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108 ibid, p. 22.
Clearly, the type or model of public relations being employed has a major bearing on evaluation of results as totally different outcomes occur in each of the Four Models of Public Relations. A better knowledge of communication and public relations theory will help PR practitioners know what outcomes are realistic and lead to programs which have a high probability of results.

4. The Multi-Disciplined Nature of PR

Another of the major challenges in evaluating public relations is the multi-disciplined nature of PR as described in Chapter Two. Because public relations functions as part of management as well as part of marketing, it seeks to address a wide range of target audiences and develop relationships with a wide range of groups extending far beyond an organisation's customers. These publics may include shareholders, employees, government, business partners, retailers, and so on.

Evaluation across the broad spectrum of multi-disciplined PR communications - such as media publicity, publications, video and audio-visual programs, employee communication programs, community relations activities, etc - presents a major challenge to practitioners.

5. The Multi-Step Communication Process

As well as the multi-disciplined nature of public relations, a further challenge in developing a workable system of evaluation is the fact that communication is a multi-stepped process. It involves gathering information, deciding on a medium, designing the communication, distributing it, and, finally, the target audience receiving and interpreting the information. Which stage do you evaluate? Do you evaluate only the final phase of publics receiving information? If you do that, how do you know whether other steps earlier in the process have been carried out effectively?

Some of the work done in PR evaluation recognises the multi-stepped nature of PR programs. For instance, Cutlip, Center and Broom in their widely used PR text, *Effective Public Relations*, provide a model showing the levels and criteria for evaluating public relations programs arranged as a series of steps. They categorise these steps into three phases - preparation, implementation and impact. 109

Hill & Knowlton's research subsidiary, Group Attitudes Corporation, now renamed Strategic Information Research Corporation, recommends a matrix for planning public relations programs which is broken into three stages - planning, monitoring and evaluation - with research conducted during each stage. Burson Marsteller also has developed its Audience Impact & Diagnostics (AID) program to apply greater use of research to PR programs.

These approaches are starting to move in the direction of a practical, workable solution to evaluation. But still PR practitioners lack a clear description of how to evaluate PR programs. A major stumbling block has been that many PR practitioners have looked for one magic formula for evaluating public relations programs. The fact

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is there is no single methodology or formula. Evaluation has to be done **continually, at every step of the communication process, using a variety of research techniques.**

6. **Cost**

These complexities and challenges in developing and implementing evaluation have led to PR practitioners, both in consultancies and departments, ruling out evaluation on the basis of cost. "My organisation just won't pay for evaluation", is a common response to why evaluation of public relations is not carried out.

However, cost cannot continue to be used as a barrier to PR evaluation. PR practitioners have hid behind the excuse of lack of budget for evaluation to the detriment of themselves and their field.

Borrowing from each of the models and studies done to date, a **Macro Model of PR Evaluation** can be produced which attempts to pull together the key points of all that has been learned so far and provides a template for planning evaluation of a public relations program that can meet most needs and most budgets.

The Macro Model of PR Evaluation, explained in detail elsewhere, presents a PR program or project as a pyramid, rising from a broad base of inputs such as information and planning to a peak where the objective is achieved or a problem solved. Each activity which forms a step in the communication is very specifically identified so that evaluation can be considered for that activity.  

The model needs to be customised for each type of program or PR project (eg newsletter, event, etc.). But the basic steps remain similar. It recognises the activities at the base of the pyramid as **inputs.** Input evaluation includes an examination of the adequacy of information, the appropriateness of the medium, the appropriateness of the message content (ie will the audience understand it), and the quality of message presentation (its physical appeal). The model then identifies **outputs** which are communications produced such as newsletters, news releases, brochures or events. Finally, it identifies an escalating range of **results** which may occur from those outputs at the peak of the pyramid.

The separation of outputs and results is an important feature of the model. PR practitioners frequently confuse the two. The production of a newsletter or an annual report is not a result. The various activities or media produced are simply outputs. While outputs can be evaluated in terms of quality standards, readability and whether they met time and budget targets, this level of evaluation gives no indication as to whether a communication effect has been achieved.

The third important aspect of the Macro Model of PR Evaluation is that alongside these activities or steps, a list of possible evaluation methodologies appropriate to each activity is provided. This is not necessarily an exhaustive list, but it indicates the range of evaluation methodologies available to the PR practitioner. Rather than a

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single magic formula, PR practitioners have at their disposal what Dozier calls a "cluster of technologies" for evaluation. 111

In summary, the Macro Model of Evaluation for PR programs has a number of important features which make it effective:

1. It recognises communication as a multi-step process and proposes evaluation of every step of the communication process;

2. It evaluates inputs, outputs and results; and

3. It utilises a range of evaluation methodologies from basic to advanced with a corresponding time and dollar cost.

The Macro Model presents a 'menu' of available evaluation research methodologies for selection and use to suit different circumstances and different budgets.

Advanced methodologies higher up the menu are more objective and more 'scientific' than basic methodologies, and rigorous, objective evaluation methodologies are highly recommended wherever possible. It needs to be recognised that some of the basic methodologies, on their own, will not provide reliable evaluation. However, a combination of a number of basic tests at an input and output level may be sufficient in some cases to give reasonable confidence of success. Diligent evaluation at an early stage can at least substantially reduce the chances of failure.

The Macro Model or PR Evaluation is a practical, applied research approach as it recommends the highest level of evaluation, but recognises that this will not always be feasible. By identifying a 'menu' of evaluation

methodologies at the PR practitioner's disposal, some evaluation is possible in every PR program. With this approach, there is no excuse for no evaluation of PR in any program.

For instance, some of the evaluation methodologies available such as readability tests like Gunning's Fog Index, the Flesh Formula, the Dale-Chall method, Cloze Procedure or Signalled Stopping Techniques are very simple and can be self-administered by practitioners with a little training and minimal cost.  

This 'menu' or 'cluster of technologies' for evaluation shows where techniques such as media monitoring fit. Press clippings are a way of monitoring the number of messages placed in the media. But they give no indication of how many are read, whether the messages are understood, or whether any knowledge or attitude effect is caused. So press clippings, while useful, perform a limited role.

The Macro Model of PR Evaluation also shows where hotly debated forms of evaluation such as awards fit. Awards are not an objective method of evaluating results of communication. However, they are not to be dismissed either. Awards usually evaluate aspects such as physical design or quality and this has a place in a total evaluation program - albeit only at an input or output evaluation level.

The Macro Model of PR Evaluation, summarised in Diagram 7, presents a practical model for planning and managing evaluation of public relations.

This evaluation model applies both closed system evaluation and open system evaluation. As outlined by Otis Baskin and Craig Aronoff, closed system evaluation focuses on the messages and events planned in a public relations campaign and their effects on intended publics. Closed system evaluation relies on pre-testing messages and media and then comparing these to post-test results to see if activities achieved the planned effects.

Open system evaluation recognises that factors outside the control of the public relations program influence results and, as the name suggests, looks at wider considerations. Open system evaluation considers public relations in overall organisational effectiveness.

The area of PR evaluation of particular interest to this study is Media Content Analysis which has been developed to provide a more objective and comprehensive way of evaluating media coverage than simply collecting press clippings and calculating their equivalent advertising value.

**Media Content Analysis - A Tool for PR Evaluation**

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There are significant imperfections in a press clippings approach to media monitoring as an evaluation methodology. For instance:

- An organisation can have extensive media coverage, but much of it may be negative or neutral at best;

- Voluminous press clippings may be presented, but the client may only occupy a small percentage of the stories clipped. As Aronoff and others point out, "volume is not equal to results";

- After a few months, clippings become a mountain of paper with no easy information retrieval or analysis method. Senior management does not read piles of press clippings in detail if at all.

Media coverage and comment is a vast under-utilised body of data in most organisations. John Naisbitt demonstrated in his popular book, "Megatrends" that media content analysis can provide valuable insights into what is likely to be on the public agenda in the future. ¹¹⁴

Rather than simply clipping media coverage and presenting the raw data to a client or employer, Media Content Analysis establishes a database into which various information is entered. Usually, the full content of stories is not entered, although with CD-ROM technology, large amounts of data can be stored in electronic form for fast retrieval. Utilising relational database technology, Media Content Analysis can record key information about media coverage such as:

- Title of the story;
- The media it appeared in;
- Date;
- The organisation or client to which it pertained;
- The issue or topic;
- The author;
- The type of media (international, national, financial, trade, etc.);
- Length (in paragraphs or words);
- The position of the story in the media;
- The percentage of the story related to the organisation; and
- A quality rating (positive, negative or neutral).

The latter three criteria need to be recorded with an objectively determined rating, such as a 1-10 numeric score or a percentage, based on pre-determined criteria, to allow for historical trending and comparative analysis later.

By setting up a relational database with this kind of information and maintaining it over 12 months or more, a PR practitioner can search and manipulate vital information about what messages are being communicated through the media. Media Content Analysis can be used to:

• Track PR material usage;
• Analyse how many stories occurred in each medium and identify the most positive media;
• Identify which journalists are covering what issues to allow more specific targeting;
• Instantly break down coverage by trade press, national media, business media, etc;
• Instantly break down coverage by issue;
• Carry out competitor analyses (what competitors are saying and doing and what people are saying about them);
• Produce trend lines of positive, negative and neutral coverage over time to objectively show if the quality of coverage is improving or declining.

Armed with this kind of information, the PR practitioner can take his or her place in the boardroom and present interesting, valuable information to assist organisational decision-making and policy formulation. With some of these findings, such as competitor analyses and trend lines of media coverage, turned into charts or graphs, facts can be communicated clearly and simply in the language of senior management.

Increased usage of more scientific forms of evaluation will also help assess the influence of public relations on the media as more information on the 'quality' of coverage (positive, negative or neutral), positioning (page number or position in a bulletin or program), and the status of the media (national, state, trade, suburban or regional), will provide specific statistical data on the communication of messages to audiences rather than nominal 'strike rates' and impressive-looking but meaningless piles of clippings.

The development and widespread use of improved methods of evaluation is one of the major challenges facing PR practitioners.

An example of a computer-based system of Media Content Analysis that has been developed is CARMA - Computer Aided Research and Media Analysis, founded in the UK and now operating in Europe and the United States. The CARMA system boasts a large and growing list of clients, including leading international corporations such as American Express, IBM, Hewlett-Packard, Olivetti, Philip Morris, Procter & Gamble, Sony Corporation, Merck & Company, ICI, Ford of Europe, and governments including the European Economic Community and the Federal Government of Canada.115

Other commercially marketed Media Content Analysis systems are InfoPress's IMPACT in the UK; PR Acumen, a service which operates in the UK and Europe and is offered in Australia by Precision Media; and Corporate Impacts in Australia.

However, computer-based Media Content Analysis is still in its relative infancy and, as shown in the surveys of PR practitioners reported in this chapter, no responding

Australian PR firm or in-house PR department used computer-based Media Content Analysis at the time of this study.

It also needs to be said that reliable, accurate tracking systems such as CARMA and IMPACT, make many journalists and editors nervous. Such systems remove the subjectivity of PR practitioners’ claims and provide comprehensive and inarguable evidence of media usage of PR material in place of anecdotal evidence. The increasing usage of objective Media Content Analysis will be an interesting development to watch from the perspective of both the PR field and the media.
Chapter 5.

An Empirical Study of Media Usage of PR Material

A number of studies have been undertaken to attempt to measure the specific usage rate of PR communications by the media as discussed in Chapter Four.

Some of these surveys are dated, however, (Sigal, 1973; Aronoff, 1975; Sachsman, 1976; and Hill & Knowlton, 1977), and findings are often contradictory. For instance, political scientist, Norman Luttbeg carried out a study in 1983 which directly contradicted Aronoff's 1976 report of high media usage of local PR releases. Luttbeg conducted a systematic content analysis of 100 newspapers selected randomly from Editor and Publisher's listing of all American dailies and, based on an analysis of 1980-81 data, he found no bias for stories closer to home. Luttbeg concluded that "proximity (coming from a local source) does not assure newsworthiness".  

Using content analysis, Stocking also found in a 1985 study that, under certain circumstances, PR activities have no effect on media visibility of an organisation, independent of the news value of the organisation.

Press Release Tracking Study

To test conflicting claims by the media and PR practitioners and examine this vexed issue in a contemporary Australian setting, a third phase of this research was devoted to tracking a series of PR communications to objectively measure their use or non-use by the media.

The methodology used in this study was as follows:

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**METHODODOLOGY:**

In this research, **150 press/media releases** from 27 different companies, organisations, in-house PR departments and consultancies were obtained in original form and their usage by the media monitored during a 12 month period, 1 January - 30 December, 1992.

Results were tracked using an independent national media monitoring agency (Neville Jeffress Pidler/Media Monitors) and usage was analysed from supplied press clippings (tear sheets).

The sample of agencies and releases selected was not random as this research depended on a high degree of co-operation from PR communicators (ie non-supportive PR practitioners and consultancies did not provide releases for tracking, and co-operating practitioners could be expected to have provided their best examples only, deleting failures from the sample provided).

However, the objective was to show how the media use PR material in various circumstances, not to make a total analysis of media content.

This approach was adopted as inclusion of releases from co-operating practitioners and organisations ensured that this study covered a wide range of industries, sectors and fields, rather than being focused in one or a few organisations where findings may not be indicative of media usage of PR material generally.

To maintain some degree of objectivity and gain results which were reasonably representative, press releases and clippings supplied by practitioners co-operating in this study (selective) were complemented with a systematic 12 months study of **ALL press releases issued by three organisations** - Microsoft Pty Ltd, Commonwealth Industrial Gases (CIG) Specialty Gases Division, and the National Insurance Brokers Association of Australia (NIBA).

The latter study included press releases which gained low media usage as well as those which were widely used (in fact, some zero result releases were included).

In addition, as part of this tracking study, examples of some other PR communications (eg a news conference) were also tracked.

**NOTE:**
The provisions of the Copyright Act, 1968, in relation to photocopying newspaper and magazine articles, were strictly adhered to and only copies of articles for genuine research and study were made.
Companies and organisations from which press releases were included in the sample included Advance Bank and National Australia Financial Management (finance); Australian Casualty & Life, Norwich Union Life and the National Insurance Brokers Association of Australia (insurance); Ford (automotive); Boral, Commonwealth Industrial Gases and the Gas and Fuel Corporation (industrial); United Parcel Service (transport); CMPS&F (engineering); Sony Australia (consumer electronics); Lindemans (wine); The NSW Department of Education, Victoria University of Technology, Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE and Kinross Wolaroi School (education); Latrobe Hospital, Austin Hospital, Heidelberg and the Office of the Ageing (health); and five computer companies/organisations, Compaq Computer Australia, Microsoft, SynOptics, Symantec and the Business Software Association of Australia.

This afforded a wide sample of industries, sectors, fields and types of media. Therefore, the results provide a wide cross section of evidence on how the media use PR material and what influence PR communication has on media coverage.

Following the lengthy process of collecting data in this study, two phases of analysis were carried out.

1. Firstly, the 'strike rate' of press releases was measured (the number of times press releases were used either in whole or in part). This provided a quantitative measurement of press release usage which, in itself, gives a useful insight into media usage of PR material.

   But a quantitative analysis does not indicate whether usage of PR material was positive, negative or neutral, whether it was rewritten substantially, or to what extent it was balanced by story content from other sources. For this reason, a second type of analysis was conducted.

2. Content analysis was carried out on media stories identified as being based at least in part on press releases to provide a qualitative measurement of the extent of influence that PR material had in presentation of stories. In particular, content analysis examined the proportion of press releases used verbatim, those used in part, and the proportion that PR-supplied material occupied in stories.

Table 3 provides a summary of the results of press releases tracked during the tracking period (1 January - 30 December, 1992).

Table 4 provides a summary of the results of press releases tracked outside of the tracking period. These were supplied by PR consultancies from their files, or gained from preliminary research leading up to this study. (See Tables 3 & 4 at the end of this chapter.)

A number of key findings emerged from the first stage of this analysis:

**Key Findings:**

- A total of approximately 2,500 press articles and electronic media transcripts were supplied by Neville Jeffress Pidler/Media Monitors on the subjects covered in the 150 press releases tracked. These were scanned and compared to originals of press releases. Only those press clippings and
transcripts which were either verbatim copies of, or which contained information and/or comments from, press releases were used in this study. Stories which referred to a company or organisation included in the survey, or related to the topic of a news release, but which did not contain either direct quotes from or at least some information from tracked press releases were deleted.

- The 150 press releases tracked yielded a total of **768 stories in the media** which could be described as wholly or partly based on press releases.

- This indicated an **average media usage rate of 5.12 times** for each press release.

- This also indicated that **more than 30 per cent of media stories on the topics monitored were based on PR press releases** at least to some extent (768 stories using PR content = 30.72 per cent of 2,500 total). Conversely, it could be concluded that around 70 per cent of coverage of the companies, organisations and issues tracked, was not based on press releases. This does not necessarily mean, however, that this coverage was not influenced by public relations. This study specifically examined the usage of press releases. Media coverage also could have been influenced by PR information provided in telephone calls, attendance at PR events, interviews arranged by PR staff, etc.

- Of the 768 stories in the media deduced to be based wholly or partly on press releases, **360 (47 per cent) were published in trade or specialist press**. This could be expected to be relatively high, especially as a number of specialist fields such as computers were included in the survey. Stories on topics such as computer software, hardware and networking technologies are mostly published in the specialist computer trade press.

- However, **245 stories (32 per cent) were published in national, State or metropolitan capital city media**. This indicates that PR influence is not restricted to the more lowly trade press or specialist journals.

- Only **7.5 per cent of the stories were in suburban newspapers**.

- And **13.5 per cent were in regional and country media**.

The latter statistics confirm that the survey was not 'loaded' with a high proportion of stories used in suburban and regional media. PR press release usage in national, State and metropolitan media was considerable and almost as high as the use of PR material in specialist and trade media.

- Only nine press releases out of the 150 tracked (1.2 per cent) **were not used at all by the media**.

- A number of the press releases tracked were targeted at a particular area or intended for one publication only. For instance, a press release, "Natural gas for Portland" issued by the Victorian Gas and Fuel Corporation, could only be expected to be published in Portland. Also, some press releases in the survey were customised several times to particular audiences, such as "Adelaide
property owners confused about flood insurance”. This was targeted at and relevant only to Adelaide media. The same release was re-issued in Victoria with the heading, "Victorian property owners confused about flood insurance”. Therefore, the actual usage rate of general distribution press releases could be deduced to be higher than the 5.12 overall average usage rate shown in this study. Exempting press releases prepared for one publication only and press releases issued to specific localities from this sample, indicated an average usage rate of around seven times for each general distribution press release.

- Some general distribution press releases received low media coverage. This could be a result of wrong targeting by the PR practitioner, timing (eg not meeting deadlines), the pressure on PR practitioners by employers or clients to put out press releases which are not newsworthy, or media 'gatekeepers' intercepting and rejecting PR material. However, the proportion of press releases used only once or not at all was extremely low - less than 10 per cent.

- On the other hand, some press releases received very wide coverage. The highest usage found in the survey was a press kit issued by PR consultancy, Blackie McDonald Pty Ltd, on behalf of Lindeman Wines which led to stories in 69 publications. This included only seven trade media. The press release, or a story based partly or largely on it, appeared in 30 national, State and metropolitan media and 22 suburban newspapers. An accompanying photograph was used in many of the publications.

A press release announcing major price cuts on its range of personal computers issued by Compaq Computer Australia through PR consultancy, MACRO Communication Pty Ltd, was published in 36 newspapers, comprising 18 trade media, 17 national, State and metropolitan publications and one regional newspaper, with most of the comment and pricing details in the press release used verbatim.

Also, when Compaq announced its new line of printers, the story appeared in 27 media. This story provides a good example of the difficulty of accurately determining coverage occurring as a direct result of a press release, as the announcement of Compaq's new printer range was made through a press release and a media briefing and product demonstration at the same time. Some journalists used the press release. Others wrote their own comments, but these were based on the briefing and demonstration which also was a public relations activity organised by the same PR consultancy which wrote the press release.

In such instances, this study concludes that public relations was a primary influence on the media story, as without the press release and media briefing organised by the PR consultancy, media coverage would have had to rely totally on wire stories from overseas. The overseas wire services stories were, in turn, based on a media briefing and press release issued by Compaq Computer Corporation in Houston, Texas.

Some samples of media stories based either verbatim or heavily on press releases are provided in APPENDIX D.
These samples, and the full breakdown of press release tracking in Tables 3 and 4, show that it is not only major product launches and 'glamour' issues such as wine and PC price cuts which gain media coverage. A press release from Boral Cyclone on plain wire was used practically unedited in 15 newspapers around Australia. The launch of the Seniors Card by the Office of the Ageing within the New South Wales Department of Health and Community Services was published in 19 publications, including five national/metropolitan media. A press release issued by the National Insurance Brokers Association of Australia (NIBA) warning of insurance risks from vacant properties was used in 12 newspapers. (See APPENDIX D.)

In the second stage of this press release tracking study, content analysis was used to compare media stories to the original of press releases distributed to the media on the same subject or issue to determine the extent to which individual media stories relied on or used press release information. The 'strike rate' reported in this first part of this chapter provides a measurement of press release usage overall (ie in how many instances a press releases was used at least in part). However, usage of a press release may constitute only a small proportion of a story - or it may constitute the main part of a story. Press release content may be used unchanged - or it may be rewritten extensively, even containing negative or contradictory comment. Content analysis was used to gain a further insight into media press release usage behaviours.

Content analysis used in this part of the press release tracking study was limited to a manually administered process based on scanning the 768 media articles which included press release information or quotes and comparing the content of media articles to the content of the original press release on the relevant issue.

Two criteria were analysed:

1. **Length** - based on a paragraph count to determine the proportion of each story occupied by the relevant press release; and

2. **Similarity** - based on a key paragraph comparison of the first five paragraphs of the relevant press release and each story (based on a safe assumption that the main points of a press release would be contained in the first five paragraphs).

This was considered sufficient to answer the specific question of 'how much did press releases comprise the stories in which they were used'? Further more sophisticated content analysis would be necessary to draw wider conclusions.

**Key Findings:**

- **Two PR-prepared feature articles tracked were published by the media with a by-line** for the PR practitioner or an author from the client organisation.

- **Approximately 20 per cent of press releases tracked were used verbatim** (word for word), or with only minor grammatical changes by the media.

- **Another 30 per cent of press releases comprised more than 50 per cent of media stories analysed** and, therefore, could be concluded to be the primary
influence in media selection of the story in the first instance, and on content in the second instance.

- There was **a higher incidence of verbatim usage of press releases among specialist/trade, suburban and regional media** than among national, State and metropolitan media. While press releases were also highly used in national, State and metropolitan media, they were more frequently edited, rewritten or paraphrased in these media.

- **In 50 per cent of media articles using press release information, the press release comprised less than half of the story content** - the balance being enterprise reporting or commentary by the journalist, quotations from other sources, or discussion of another topic (eg when a press release was incorporated into a feature dealing with several issues).
MAIN FINDINGS OF PRESS RELEASE TRACKING STUDY

DIAGRAM 8.
QUANTITATIV

2,500
The majority of longer news and feature articles, where press release content was used with information from other sources of information or comment, occurred in the major national, State and metropolitan media, especially those identified as the 'quality press'.

The 'quality press' are generally defined as those media with a commitment to independent reporting and journalistic excellence, supported by the necessary resources. An extensive survey conducted by the University of Queensland Journalism Department in 1992 among 1,068 journalists found the following ranking of Australia's highest quality newspapers.

The same survey also found the 'quality electronic media' to include the ABC's news and current affairs shows, especially "Four Corners" and "The 7.30 Report", followed by Channel 9's "A Current Affair".
However, even among the quality media, usage of or reliance on press releases was evident, as was other forms of public relations influence as discussed later in this chapter.

Notwithstanding the acknowledged limitations of the methodology used in this study, these findings are quite significant and, given the wide range of sectors and media included in the study, can be seen to provide a reasonably representative and reliable view of media usage of PR material.
Other PR Influences on Media Agendas & Content

Even though press releases are the most common form of PR communication with the media, there is also significant evidence that public relations influences the media in other ways as discussed in earlier chapters.

1. **News Conferences**
   One example of a public relations communication directed at the media other than press releases is the news conference. Companies, organisations or government bodies call news conferences to announce major initiatives, release reports, launch products, refute allegations, and so on.

   An example of a news conference which attracted widespread media coverage is provided in APPENDIX E - a National Farmers' Federation briefing to a national press conference in Canberra on the state of the drought in 1982.

   This news conference was organised after the economics and political lobbying staff of the NFF became frustrated that the Federal Government did not seem to be aware of the magnitude of the drought and its effects on the rural sector and the economy nationally. Knowing that the media like to report numbers and facts, rather than generalities, the public relations department of the NFF organised a news conference at which the Federation's economists released an estimate of the cost of the drought.

   A briefing, supported by slides and diagrams of the worst affected areas, saw the NFF's cost estimate of $7,500 million and a call for Government relief, make headlines in every major newspaper in Australia. (See APPENDIX E.)

   It is unlikely that a simple news release would have achieved this amount of coverage, and it is extremely doubtful that the media would have reported this issue without this PR activity. But a well-organised news conference in which the Federation's economist presented a verbal briefing to the media, proved to be a very effective tool in bringing the drought on to the national agenda.

   News conferences are used extensively by PR practitioners to announce major news, launch products or raise issues for public debate.

2. **Supplements**
   Another way in which public relations messages influence and sometimes even enter the media unedited is through supplements. These are special sections of newspapers and magazines which are set aside for a special topic such as a review of a particular industry or sector (e.g. a special report on insurance, mining or the hotel industry), a major event such as the opening of a new shopping centre, a profile on a particular company or organisation, or an issue of interest such as 'Business in Asia'.

   Supplements appear as editorial. That is, the pages and articles in supplements are laid out in the style, typeface, column arrangement and general appearance of news and feature articles. However, supplements generally contain what is referred to in the trade as 'advertorial'. This word is derived from a combination of advertising and editorial. As this suggests, supplement stories
are more akin to advertising and are either directly written and placed by
advertisers, or written by journalists in favourable terms towards the client in
exchange for advertising. Sometimes the arrangement is 'place an ad and
receive an editorial story free'. In other cases, the pages of a supplement are
purchased outright and then filled with editorial style copy rather than an
advertisement.

Usually, a supplement is separated from the general news and other sections of
the publication by an identifying heading such as "Special Report on ..".
Occasionally, the identification of the supplement includes specific mention
that it is an advertising supplement. But, in most cases, the word 'advertising'
does not appear and, to the average reader, the contents are indistinguishable
from editorial.

Supplements are used by most media, including the quality press such as *The
Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian Financial Review* and *The Australian*.

The Creative Director of the largest advertising agency in Australia, George
Patterson, and well-known author, Bryce Courtenay, echoes the cynicism which
exists towards supplements:

> The newspaper supplement is much loved by editors. It fills the paper with ads
and makes nothing but money in return for printing a dozen re-hashed press
releases and a couple of phoney in-depth articles about an industry or an earth-
shaking event such as a new shopping centre opening.\(^\text{118}\)

The ethics of media supplements, especially when they are 'advertorial'
disguised as editorial, has to be considered to be questionable. PR practitioners
exploit supplements regularly and, as could be expected, do not complain about
the practice. And, as Bryce Courtenay observes, editors (and publishers) make
handsome profits from supplements.

A sample of a supplement published by a leading 'quality' publication, *The
Bulletin with Newsweek*, is provided in [APPENDIX F](#).

3. **Special Events & 'Pseudo Events'**

   As referred to earlier in this study, public relations also influences the media
through special events. These may be events such as conferences, seminars or
exhibitions organised for direct communication with a target audience which
also have news value, or events specifically planned and orchestrated for the
media (often called 'pseudo-events' by critics).

   An example of an event staged and used specifically for capturing media
coverage was a stunt (albeit for a good cause) arranged by computer software
company, Microsoft Pty Ltd to raise funds for charity. A number of Microsoft
executives agreed to have their heads shaved for bets and sponsorships which
were donated to a leading charity's Christmas appeal.

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The media were invited to the head shaving of senior executives of the company, including its Managing Director, and a photograph of the shaved heads of two Microsoft executives was published with a story on page seven of The Daily Telegraph-Mirror in Sydney in its high circulation Saturday edition the next day under the headline: "Charity bet was a shorn thing". The media simply could not resist the unusual angle and visual appeal of the event which was orchestrated by the company's PR staff and consultancy.  

(See APPENDIX G.)

Stunts and pseudo-events are not restricted to the business sector. Environmentalists such as Greenpeace and anti-logging groups, consumer organisations and other pressure groups have become expert in gaining media coverage through carefully planned and staged media events. These range from protesters laying down in front of bulldozers to Greenpeace members sailing inflatable dinghies into the path of nuclear submarines. Such 'events' routinely make the evening television news and newspaper headlines.

Pseudo-events are not a new phenomenon. Daniel Boorstin is believed to have coined the term almost 30 years ago. In his book, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* published in 1964, Boorstin claimed that organisations "create" events everyday that are covered by the media as "news".  

Companies and organisations continue to specifically stage events in more and more sophisticated ways to gain media attention and coverage, and little further analysis of this practice has been carried out since Boorstin first observed the trend. Even the timing of government announcements and the release of important reports are today frequently keyed to media deadlines and carefully orchestrated as a public relations exercise.

4. Corporate Publishing

A further growing example of the influence of public relations on the media is the direct entry of companies and organisations into mass media communication through corporate publishing. Microsoft, already cited as a skilled user of public relations, publishes a magazine, *Communiqué* which, at January, 1993, had a circulation of 80,000 subscribers. This made it the highest circulating magazine in the information technology sector in Australia.

*Communiqué* is owned entirely by Microsoft and all editorial is submitted or approved by the company. In fact, the complete magazine is produced by Microsoft's advertising agency, The Frontline Agency, with editorial input from its PR firm and several freelance writers on the company's payroll.

Similarly, airlines publish magazines for their passengers and often special editions for frequent flyers. BMW publishes a high quality quarterly journal which circulates around the world to BMW owners and motoring buffs. And

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119 "Charity bet was a shorn thing", The Daily Telegraph-Mirror, 19 December, 1992, p. 7.

many banks and other companies produce their own media for direct communication with growing audiences.

Corporate publishing has existed virtually since the invention of the printing press, and has been spurred by new technologies such as desktop publishing which has reduced print production costs and brought professional typesetting within the reach of even small companies and organisations.

Traditionally, corporate publishing has involved company and organisation newsletters and small in-house magazines which were usually clearly differentiated from the main independent media in both style and name. For instance, the Institute of Public Affairs, a right-wing political 'think tank', publishes a magazine called *IPA Review*. While pushing the IPA's views, *IPA Review* is clearly identified as a partisan publication.

However, the evolving trends in corporate publishing cited go beyond what is recognised by readers as a 'house journal' and emulate independent editorial media in style, size and quality of production. Many media consumers would be unable to distinguish a company magazine such as *Communiqué* from independent publications.

Another example of corporate publishing is *Charter* magazine which circulates to 30,000 chartered accountants in Australia. The glossy, high quality magazine is produced entirely by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Australia (ICAA).

Corporate publishing provides companies and organisations with a direct media voice which, if supported by large company and organisation resources, could challenge the voice of independent media.

When PR firms and freelance writers are hired to write editorial stories to the company's or organisation's requirements in high quality directly distributed media, is this simply the exercising of free speech? Or is it an undesirable media development which should be looked at closely by media analysts, journalists and bodies such as the Australian Journalists Association?

5. **Video News Releases**

Another emerging trend in public relations is the offer of video news releases produced by companies or organisations to TV stations for news broadcasts. Many news directors in networks claim to reject PR videos outright. However, in some cases, companies and organisations exploit situations where the media may not have access to footage relevant to stories. For instance, an arms manufacturer can produce a video of new weaponry such as an aircraft under consideration by a government which is still secret and unavailable to the media. In such situations, media reporting on the weaponry have a choice of (1) using the PR-supplied video, (2) using library footage which would in most cases be inappropriate, or (3) running the story without visuals which is rare and tantamount to ratings suicide in television.

Even where media access is available, economic pressures sometimes mean that the cost of shooting a few seconds of video in a remote or difficult to reach
location may preclude networks from covering a story themselves and lead them to relying on supplied footage. For many years, NASA produced video footage of space missions has been broadcast around the world on TV network news.

These and other areas of public relations deserve further study.

From a fledgling beginning among Hollywood press agents, public relations has grown into a sophisticated communication discipline with its tentacles reaching in virtually every corner of the media, as well as directly communicating with target audiences through PR-created media such as 'house magazines' and newsletters (corporate publishing), video, direct mail, special events, sponsorships, and so on.

*(SEE TABLES 3 & 4.)*
CHAPTER 6.

Conclusions

The Influence of Public Relations on Media Content

Claims by some public relations practitioners that they write or supply most of the news published and broadcast by the media, and self-indulgent statements that the media could not do without them, are exaggerated.

However, claims by editors and journalists that they diligently research and report stories objectively, relying primarily on their own initiative, are equally untrue in many instances in today's modern media.

Many media consumers are unknowingly reading press releases every day in both the popular and quality press, obscured behind a veil of complicity between journalists and public relations practitioners. The programs broadcast by the electronic media are also heavily influenced by public relations in a range of ways.

At least 30 per cent of the editorial content of most media - and up to 70 per cent of media content in some small trade, specialist and suburban media - is based substantially or in part on public relations information.

A survey of 417 Australian journalists found that many admit to relying on public relations for the provision of facts, as well as briefings, interviews and background information.

Only 3.15 per cent of journalists surveyed said that they used no public relations material sent to them. A further 26 per cent of journalists said they used "very little" PR material. Seventy per cent of journalists admitted using PR material. More than 50 per cent of journalists said they "extract quotes" from press releases, and 20 per cent said they sometimes or often used PR material "in full".

Press release tracking studies carried out across a number of sectors and a range of media indicate that around 20 per cent of press releases issued by PR practitioners to the media are published or broadcast verbatim. Another 30 per cent are used substantially in the presentation of news stories and feature articles.
The usage of PR material is higher in trade, specialist, suburban and regional media. However, tracking studies of 150 press releases from 27 different companies and organisations showed that PR releases are also used extensively in major national, State and metropolitan media.

**The average press release issued by PR practitioners is used at least five times. Some press releases tracked in this study were used up to 69 times in various media.**

In addition to press releases, public relations practitioners today also use a wide variety of communication techniques and devices to gain media exposure for their clients and employers, and many of these have a significant influence on the media. Other commonly used PR communications include news conferences and media briefings; free tours or products offered to journalists for evaluation; special events ranging from conferences, seminars and exhibitions to specially-staged 'pseudo-events' and publicity stunts for the media's benefit; 'advertorial' supplements; newsletters and 'house magazines' which in some cases compete with independent mass media; and videos screened independently to audiences or offered to TV news programs.

This study has focused on press releases and media relations activities of PR. If regularly occurring results can be shown in one area of PR activity, it can be reasonably assumed that this is the minimum influence of public relations on the media and on the community, as other PR activities not measured would presumably have some impact. The full impact of public relations on the media and on society is, therefore, likely to be far greater than shown in this study.

In fully understanding the influence of public relations, it also needs to be recognised that what is referred to as 'PR' in this study is not always overtly called public relations. Chapter Two included a list of alternative titles for PR, such as public affairs, public information, corporate affairs, and so on. Also, in considering the influence of public relations as defined, information emanating from official departmental channels such as the military, Ministerial Press Secretaries, Government Offices of Information, political parties, media spokespersons for organisations, and so on, should be included. While not specifically called 'public relations', these communication functions are partisan and, collectively, play a very major role in shaping media agendas and content.

An analysis of the national and international news from a major TV network in Sydney on one evening provides the following analysis of the five main news stories:
Channel 9, Sydney: Friday, 22 January, 1993

1. Clinton takes office in Washington
   Based on an official (PR) statement from the White House. No interviews or first hand comment.

2. Zoe Baird steps down as Attorney-General
   Based on an official (PR) statement from a White House aide. In fact, the statement was read by the aide to the media.

3. Iraqi plane 'locks on' to US aircraft in no-fly zone in breach of cease fire
   Based on a statement from the US military issued through official information (PR) channels. No interviews. Library footage of fighter planes taking off and in flight used.

4. Suffering continues in Bosnia
   As far as could be ascertained, this was 'enterprise reporting' by news crews on the spot, demonstrating a high level of courage and commitment.

5. Hewson blamed for fall in Australian dollar
   Based on statements from the Prime Minister's Office and Government information unit. Described as 'political point scoring' by the Opposition. Could be generally described as PR as story originated from the respective media departments of the Government and Opposition with no independent economists or analysts interviewed.

This analysis of a national TV news bulletin shows that three out of the five main stories were directly obtained from a PR source in the broader definition of PR described, and a fourth was largely based on public relations type comments from the Government and Opposition respectively.

When considered in this broad context, public relations can be seen to be an integral part and a very large influence in the collection, selection and presentation of news and information through the media.

There is considerable evidence that editors, journalists, PR practitioners, media critics and academics are turning a blind eye to the influence of public relations on the media and on mass communication generally.

This study has been designed to bring this aspect of the mass media out into the open, and attempt to objectively assess and measure some of the claims and anecdotal evidence presented by PR practitioners and journalists.

This influence of public relations on the media has already been alluded to by a number of academics.

"What the conflict between press and PR hides is the interdependence of the two upon each other ..." Grunig comments. 121

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Similarly, Aronoff concludes: "The relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists is one of mutual dependency."

John Pavlik says:

Journalists and other media practitioners rely on PR sources for information and access to business and other organisations. We could call this relationship a symbiotic one.

This study confirms a high degree of symbiosis and mutual dependency between public relations and the media. Nevertheless, John Hohenberg cautions:

There are some well-intentioned persons in public relations who think of themselves as a part of the staffs of the news media they seek to influence. They believe this so intensely that they fall into the error of thinking of reporters as essentially lazy people, willing to be spoon-fed with information. As the belief of indispensability takes hold in earnest, they begin arguing that the news media could not function if it were not for public relations people.

Some sections of the media depend on PR more than others, and public relations influences the media and society more in some circumstances than others. Interviews and general feedback during this study indicated that PR influence in most prevalent in the following situations:

1. When official comment or information is required such as a Ministerial statement, military report, results of a government inquiry, and so on. The media have little choice but to rely on such sources for information and trust them for accuracy and honesty, although follow-up reporting can further investigate claims made and facts presented;

2. When proprietary information from a company, organisation or department is required for a story (such as company annual reports and financial data, or detailed technical data such as the specifications of a new computer product). This information is often not available without a PR release from the company or organisation concerned;

3. When the media have limited resources such as in small trade press, specialist publications and regional and suburban media;

4. When close personal relationships exist between journalists and PR people - ie when journalists develop trust in PR sources and where ex-journalists work in PR and apply their professionally developed news sense and contacts in the media;


5. When journalists are lazy and cover issues by simply 'cutting and pasting' various PR 'handouts' pertinent to a subject.

Influence of public relations on the media is less evident in the following situations:

1. When journalists and editors work in major quality national and specialist press and programs which have large resources and which pride themselves on analysis and in-depth reporting. Even here, though, journalists often gather leads and information from public relations sources;

2. When investigative journalism is being practised. Investigative journalism, by its nature, usually ignores official sources, and seeks to circumvent the public relations infrastructure of a company, organisation or government, relying on enterprise reporting and non-traditional news gathering techniques;

3. When public relations practitioners have a poor sense of news and lack professional standards, which results in their material being rejected or disregarded by the media.

The Influence of Public Relations in Agenda-Setting

The role of the media in influencing the agenda of issues discussed and considered by a society has long been vigorously debated by academics and media practitioners. A summary of some of this debate was provided in the introduction to this study.

In his influential work on agenda-setting theory in 1977, McCombs pointed out that "heavy media emphasis on an issue or topic can move it into the top ranks of the personal agendas of the audience". 125

Most agenda-setting theory has focused on the traditional mass media - press, radio, television and, to some extent only, cinema. "Media coverage can build awareness of an issue", Pavlik concurs. He also points out: "Media attention can also influence the priorities that persons place on different existing issues." 126

However, as discussed in the introduction, Warwick Blood asks: "Who sets the media's agenda?"

Grunig acknowledges: "Issues never really become issues unless news sources say something, and unless journalists report what they say. News sources and journalists, in other words, interact to build media agendas ...", Grunig says. 127

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126 ibid, p. 98.
As has been shown in this study, some of the most influential news sources which interact with journalists are public relations practitioners, either distributing information directly, or co-ordinating and choreographing the communication of spokespersons and organisations for which they are employed.

Gurevitch et al, in a major 1986 study, moved agenda-setting research away from the focus on the alleged media-to-audience relationship. Their research "differs from ... the 'classical' McCombs tradition and examines the relative contributions of the news media, political candidates and parties in the shaping of campaign agendas as they evolve during an election". Gurevitch et al found "a degree of packaging and management of the campaign by appointed 'media experts'". 128

However, as has also been shown in this study, public relations practitioners also communicate directly with groups in the community identified as target audiences for campaigns through channels other than the traditional mass media.

Preoccupation with the role of the traditional mass media in agenda-setting - or agenda-framing or agenda-priming as some media analysts prefer to term the process - has obscured some of the real influences involved in mass communication in society.

Pavlik argues: "A growing amount of research suggests that the press agendas may often simply reflect the agendas of other social actors and institutions, especially those with active PR functions." 129

In a new study published in Public Relations Research Annual (Volume 3) in 1991, Van Leuven and Slater concluded that "the public opinion formation process is instigated by organisational communicators". They argue that "public opinion comes into being as a social process. Groups move to form coalitions." 130

Van Leuven and Slater go on to say:

Professional communicators, such as public relations practitioners, seek actively to rally such groups into action. 131

In tracking how issues are brought on to the public agenda, Van Leuven and Slater say:


131 ibid, p. 177.
Communication about emergent public issues typically is confined for some time within an interest group or sponsoring organisation before it moves onto the public stage. The group may be studying the issue, education and rallying its own members, and sizing up allies, opponents, and other publics who stances may not be known. The sponsoring organisation may even be drawing up a full-scale public relations program.

Van Leuven and Slater trace the typical steps that organisations take to bring issues on to the public agenda, involving both media-directed PR communications such as press releases, and other forms of public relations. They comment:

We do not presume that the mass media are the sole or necessarily the principal providers of information about the issue at all points in the process. Instead, organisational communicators direct many controlled messages to particular publics through speeches, newsletters, position papers, and so forth.

These other communication strategies used by public relations practitioners are further influencers of public opinion and play a key role in bringing issues to attention of people and on to the agenda of public debate. The media may play a role in agenda-setting, or agenda-setting may be accomplished by other direct communication strategies.

In both types of agenda-setting, however, public relations plays an influential role. But neither the role of PR in shaping media agendas, nor its role in direct organisational agenda-setting has been fully recognised or studied in any detail.

In assessing the influence of public relations in total, and is role in agenda-setting, agenda-framing or agenda-priming in particular, one has to look beyond the mass media and consider the impact on various target publics of a wide range of PR communications as outlined in Chapter Two.

PR communicates through the media, but also directly to many audiences and plays a behind the scenes role in virtually every company, organisation and government department. In this context, public relations plays a 'push-pull' role in agenda-setting. PR communication can influence media agendas and use media coverage to raise public consciousness about an issue (pull), or it can be used to raise public consciousness within a group and galvanise action which, in turn, gains media coverage and public support (push).

In both contexts, public relations can be seen to exert a considerable influence in setting, framing or priming public agendas and modern public relations should be considered in any study of agenda-setting.

Returning to the media which is the primary subject of this thesis, Diagram 11 provides a summary of traditional views of influence on the media and Diagram 12 presents an illustrative overview (not necessarily in accurate proportion) of modern influences on the media.

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132 ibid, p. 170
133 ibid, p. 168
These diagrammatic overviews explain the shift that needs to be made in thinking about media influence and show that public relations is probably the largest single external influence on the media today, and one of the largest influences in total on media agendas and content.

Public relations as referred to in Diagram 12 includes the range of communication also described as public affairs, public information, corporate affairs, employee communication, etc, and official sources of information such as Ministries of Information, Government Information Offices, military public information units, and so on.
Diagram 11. Traditional sources of media influence:
- Political intervention
- Ideological factors
- Journalists' training
- Media ownership
- Other

Diagram 12. Modern influences on the media:
- Political intervention
- Journalists' training
- Media ownership
- Ideological factors
- Globalisation (e.g., international networks)
- Public relations
- Other
A healthy, independent media must remain one of the key requirements of a democratic society. In this context, the significant influence of public relations on the media warrants close scrutiny.

On the other hand, fundamental principles of democracy include free speech and the right of all individuals and groups to a voice. The media, through increasing sophistication, demanding information presentation requirements, and editorial working environments which are often daunting to outsiders, have, in many cases, moved out of reach of ordinary citizens and organisations.

In coming to a full appreciation of the relationship between public relations and the media, and an understanding of the role of public relations in society generally, the following positive and negative implications need to be carefully weighed.

**Benefits of Public Relations**

While often criticised, and despite the term 'PR' frequently being used as a synonym for false information and hyperbole, the influence of the public relations field on the media is not all bad. Value judgements needs to be made cautiously. Effective public relations practitioners often have the access and time to research information on important topics which the media do not have.

For instance, stories on skin cancer which have been widely published in the media during the late 1980s and early 1990s as part of a campaign to reduce over-exposure to the sun, were largely developed from statistics and information provided by the Cancer Council through its public relations department. In the rush of daily media production, journalists often do not have the time to research stories and interesting background. They often rely on public relations sources for this.

The media, and therefore the community, did not understand the seriousness of osteoporosis among women and the importance of calcium in women's diet until the public relations/marketing department of a leading pharmaceutical company launched an awareness campaign to support its calcium-based products which combated osteoporosis. The following media coverage that brought osteoporosis on to the public agenda was also supported by publicity emanating from the Australian Dairy Corporation which distributed information on osteoporosis to help its marketing program for milk and dairy products.

It can be argued from this that public relations plays an important role in social processes as well as in business. In some texts, PR has been described as "creating understanding" and "mobilising consent" which are key elements in creating and maintaining a society.

Early in this study, three minuses of public relations outlined by Cutlip were listed. Cutlip also listed three pluses of PR:

1. Public relations has made organisations more responsive to their publics by **channelling feedback from publics to management** (at least in Asymmetrical and Symmetrical Models);
2. Practitioners serve the public interest by providing an articulate, clear voice in the public forum for every idea, individual, or institution;

3. Practitioners increase the public's knowledge by providing information through the media that the media themselves do not have the manpower nor budget to provide. 134

While not all will agree with these sentiments, the evolving Asymmetrical and Symmetrical Models of public relations practised by ethical PR practitioners do provide increasingly for counsel and advice to management which, on occasions, leads to greater responsiveness to the communities (environments) in which organisations operate.

The limitation to this benefit is a lack of professionalism within public relations, and therefore a lack of management acceptance of PR in many circumstances. As noted in this study, public relations is rarely a member of the dominant coalition of management. If public relations practitioners are able to improve their professionalism, and therefore their standing, there will be further opportunities for PR to serve as a conduit of two-way communication between interdependent groups in society. Asymmetrical and symmetrical communication achieves the true meaning of public relations, fostering relationships rather than simply distributing information.

There is also considerable evidence that public relations practitioners and the techniques they develop help individuals and organisations gain a voice within the competitive environment of the 'Information Age'.

This researcher's first book was a practical 'how to' handbook on public relations especially written for clubs and associations. The handbook sold more than 2,000 copies in its first few months after publication in 1983 due to a demand from small organisations to find ways of 'getting their message across'. 135

Many individuals who are not in positions of influence or power, and many small organisations such as community groups, are often disenfranchised by lack of access to the mass media which has become increasingly sophisticated and intimidating to non-media people.

The public relations field has grown largely because of the remoteness of the majority of the mass media from business, industry and communities (suburban and community newspapers and public access radio being possible exceptions). Without knowing the correct channels for communicating with the media (and often having personal contacts), the preferred format for presenting media information, details of deadlines, and being versed in journalism styles of writing, most individuals and organisations have little opportunity for their information to be mass communicated by the media. Most editors and journalists are very unforgiving and intolerant of information that is not presented in their preferred style. Iola Mathews who wrote


How to Use the Media in Australia as a practical handbook for would-be publicists, warns:

Most media executives and reporters are abrupt on the phone. This is not because they are more unfriendly than other people, but because they are under pressure and there is nothing more annoying than a constantly ringing phone when you are trying to work on a story. 136

Mathews warned organisations and companies that they had to know how to approach media to have any chance of success in gaining publicity.

PR practitioners, who often include former journalists, fill this gap in expertise and provide a service to increase access for many groups to the media.

The third benefit referred to by Cutlip, which already has been alluded to earlier, is particularly relevant to small regional and rural media and various specialist and trade media. These media are usually operated by small staffs - often they are one person operations - and do not have the resources to research and write stories on the full range of issues, events, products and activities of interest to their audiences. PR practitioners frequently provide the only way that many issues can be covered.

Clearly this raises ethical questions for the Australian Journalists Association and media critics, and the full ramifications of these practices warrant further study. But, faced with the reality of budgets, economic recessions, distance and competitive pressures operating in the media, these trends are increasingly evident and are even encouraged by many editors and media proprietors.

Despite these benefits from public relations, it is going too far to imply that public relations generally performs some kind of public service. Access to mass communication channels provided by PR practitioners is itself limited through the ability or otherwise of individuals and organisations to pay for the not-inexpensive services of professional PR practitioners. Secondly, the advice of Cutlip, Grunig and others that, despite the evolution of a Symmetrical Model of public relations, most PR activity is still concerned with persuasive communication to manipulate public opinion in a particular direction and does not involve balanced, objective discussion, needs to be remembered.

Furthermore, as has been identified in this study, public relations is an unregulated and still under-developed field of communication. Assigning an important communication role in society to public relations should not be undertaken without further development of the practice, monitoring of standards, possibly some form of control, or at least consideration of potential negative outcomes and effects of public relations.

Negatives Factors in Public Relations

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If it is accepted that public relations is an influential tool of communication, then it needs to be recognised that, like all tools, it can have negative effects if it falls into the wrong hands, and if media 'gatekeepers' of information are not diligent, or controls are not put in place.

**In the hands of unethical governments, companies or organisations, PR communication techniques can be used to distribute misinformation, to obfuscate the truth, to provide a 'smokescreen' to cover up failure or under-performance, or to mislead people through hype and hyperbole.**

Misinformation can occur either with the active participation of unscrupulous PR practitioners, or with their acquiescence where they are compliant to unethical employer demands.

The risk of compliance among PR practitioners with unethical or unprofessional standards and the potential for misuse of PR communication techniques is heightened by lack of professionalism within the PR field, lack of standards, and lack of education among practitioners. A Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) survey carried out in 1986 found that only 39.4 per cent of members who responded had a Higher School Certificate. This indicates a high majority - more than 60 per cent of PR practitioners - do not have any tertiary training.

While degree programs have been developed in communication, media and public relations, and the number of PR practitioners becoming tertiary educated is increasing in Australia and most countries, there is still very little post-graduate education provided in the public relations field, and there is a lack of on-going courses for practitioners who require professional upgrade training. This latter type of training is viewed by many as particularly important due to the number of PR practitioners who entered the field from journalism, often with only cadetship training (equivalent to US 'cub' reporter training).

PR practitioners who join the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PIRA) agree to abide by a Code of Ethics. However, many practitioners do not join the PRIA. And, for those who do, there is only very limited legislative or regulatory control over practices. For instance, while the PRIA can de-register a member, it cannot bar any person from entering the PR field, or from calling themselves a public relations practitioner.

**The lack of accountability of public relations should heighten concerns over its influence.** Unlike other counsellors and advisers such as lawyers and accountants who are governed by rigorous admission standards and strict codes of practice, public relations is a relatively free-wheeling occupation characterised by ease of entry, relatively low education standards, lack of widely applied objective evaluation procedures, and lack of controls.

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A University of Minnesota study in 1979 concluded that the tension between the media and public relations may be healthy as it encourages each group to maintain a critical eye on the communication process. However, evidence presented in this study shows that, despite some significant admissions of the influence of public relations on the media, much of what PR practitioners do in relation to the media remains unknown, covert and largely ignored by journalists, PR practitioners and academics. *Journalists and PR practitioners operate within a comfortable paradigm and practitioners on neither side want to 'rock the boat'*. Self-regulation cannot work in an environment of secrecy and poor information and awareness on both sides about the other. Rather, there needs to be action and dialogue by both media and PR practitioners to establish a mature understanding of the issues discussed in this study, so as to avoid potential negative effects which could adversely affect both the media and public relations, as well as society as a whole.

**Implications for the Media**

Editors and journalists need to accept and face up to the reality of public relations. In doing so, media practitioners need to avoid emotional value judgements and detach themselves from old prejudices concerning public relations, and examine PR objectively as one of the key sources of influence on media story selection (agenda-setting) and content.

Those involved in journalism and media studies courses and training also need to develop a far greater understanding of public relations and incorporate objective, informed discussion of public relations into vocational, graduate and post-graduate education of journalists.

Bringing PR 'out into the open' will provide journalists with advice and guidelines in relation to PR, rather than have them grappling with personal conflicts over ethics and propriety versus practical imperatives such as meeting deadlines and satisfying the media's thirst for vast amounts of information.

**Implications for the Public Relations 'Profession'**

The public relations field is at a crossroads in the 1990s. PR practitioners have to move beyond rhetoric about standards and professionalism and develop a solid foundation of basic research to define their practice, and substantially expand the body of applied research in the PR field, especially in evaluation.

The combination of open entry to the public relations field, lack of education and training among practitioners, lack of enforceable standards and the severe lack of

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research and knowledge as discussed in Chapter Four, presents a major challenge to public relations practitioners and their would-be profession.

Indeed, without the acquisition of these characteristics and criteria, especially the adoption of rigorous, enforceable standards, increased knowledge through basic research and objective methods of evaluating practices and results, public relations does not fit most accepted descriptions of a profession.

Increased education and use of research at both a pure or basic and applied level are essential for public relations to be taken seriously in management, and for PR to gain status in the community.

With more objective and widely-applied evaluation, public relations:

• Will move a step closer to becoming a true profession;
• Will conform to Management by Objectives (MBO) principles, Total Quality Management (TQM) and 'Best Practice' techniques to become part of the 'dominant coalition' in management;
• Will provide status and recognition to practitioners; and
• Will see public relations practitioners gain greater budgets and resources to optimise their contribution to organisational effectiveness.

At a more fundamental level, PR practitioners need to decide whether they want modern public relations to remain a field of persuasive communication designed to manipulate public attitudes on behalf of employers or clients, or to reject the Bernays paradigm espoused in his Engineering of Consent as outdated, and evolve further towards Grunig's Two-Way Symmetrical Model of PR communication.

Olasky warns that "... current public relations is the result of a paradigm that has had destructive practical applications." 139

In a Two-Way Symmetric Model, public relations communication could play a key role in creating consensus and harmony among the many divergent and potentially conflicting elements and forces in society. At this level and practised this way, public relations could take on a new perspective and become a key element in the functioning of society.

But this transition would require significant changes within the PR field, both at an organisational and individual level. Such a concept presents a major challenge for the Public Relations Institute of Australia and its equivalents worldwide.

Implications for Academics

In addition to the specific implications for journalism, media studies and public relations education as discussed for each profession, there are also wider implications from this study for academics and society as a whole.

Academics and students in the fields of social science, cultural studies, politics, government, economics and business - and possibly others - study the role of the media. Many also specifically consider agenda-setting theories. Others approach an understanding of the media from a marketing perspective.

Academics in these fields, media analysts, politicians considering legislation in relation to the media, media critics and students should find challenging food for thought in this study.
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**PR CONSULTANCIES SURVEY**

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<td>7</td>
<td>31.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Don't know/no response</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NB: <em>Independent surveys, focus groups, statistical studies, etc.</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NUMBER OF PR CONSULTANCIES SURVEYED: 50**

Response rate: 22 44.00%
## PR CONSULTANCIES SURVEY

### RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of consultancies surveyed:</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of responses:</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**QUANTITATIVE EVALUATION:**

- Number which said they monitored media quantitatively: 20 (95)
- Number which said they used press clipping services: 20 (95)
- Number which said they used other quantitative methodology: 1 (5)

**Research method nominated:**

"Database"

**QUALITATIVE EVALUATION:**

- Number which said they monitored media qualitatively: 14 (70)
- Number which nominated a qualitative methodology: 3 (15)

**Research methodologies nominated:**

- "Media content analysis" (but no details of what basis): 1
- "Discussions with journalists": 1
- "Trade publication inquiry rate": 1
- "008 number" (but no detail of how this works): 1

- Number which said they conducted other forms of research to evaluate public relations: 12 (60)

**Research methodologies nominated:**

- "Attitude research" (but no details of how or what type): 2
- "Reader surveys of magazines produced": 1
- "Client surveys and industry surveys" (implied secondary data): 1
- "Inquiry card returns": 1
- "Coupon replies": 1
- "Number of inquiries": 1
- "Client sales results": 1
- "Share price movements": 1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Community participation rates in events&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Random discussions with journalists&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Feedback&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Professional judgement&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Client feelings&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Word of mouth&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Some listed more than one methodology
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NO</th>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>OPTIONS</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Resp</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do you regularly issue material or provide information?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>84.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>9.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know/no response</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>5.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The types of material/communication most issued to the media</td>
<td>News release</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>73.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Media briefing</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>11.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>One-on-one briefing</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>25.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>News conference</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>8.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Media tour (eg visits to places)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>5.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supplement article</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>11.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other - special events, launch</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other - newsletter</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>4.48</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other - Handling media inquiries</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>4.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Do you monitor media coverage quantitatively?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>89.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>7.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know/no response</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>If so, in what way (eg press clippings?</td>
<td>Press clippings done internally</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>46.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Press clipping service external</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>53.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Electronic media monitoring</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>14.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Do you monitor media coverage qualitatively (eg do you conduct research to test results such as attitude change, message)?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>41.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>56.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know/no response</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>If so, by what means or methodology? Please specify</td>
<td>Formal Media Content Analysis</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>What other forms of evaluation of public relations do you use?</td>
<td>Self-administered questionnaire</td>
<td>9.25</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>13.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Question 6 &amp; 7 responses combined as answers were)</td>
<td>Achievement of objectives</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sales/inquiry rate</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>5.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Informal feedback</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>14.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Media responsiveness/covet</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>10.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Superior satisfaction</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal 'professional' judge</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>5.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>34.33</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other - Market research</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>5.22</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### PR Executives Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't know/no response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you have case studies of media using PR supplied information word for word or publishing/broadcasting stories?</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predominantly based on information issued by a PR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you provide examples for use or reference in this research?</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can the examples be used in this research?</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NB:** *Independent surveys, focus groups, statistical studies, etc.*

**Number of PR Executives Surveyed:** 311  
(response rate: 67%)

(189 PRIA members NSW; 122 PRIA members Victoria)
APPENDIX A.

Survey of
Australian Journalists
APPENDIX B.

Survey of
'In-House' PR Practitioners
APPENDIX C.

Survey of
PR Consultants
APPENDIX D.

Samples of Media Articles
Based on PR Press Releases
APPENDIX E.

Sample News Conference
- National Farmers Federation
APPENDIX F.

Sample Media Supplement
- 'Advertorial'
APPENDIX G.

Sample PR 'media event'
- Microsoft Head Shaving
## News releases
- Total: 74

## One-on-one journalist briefings
- Total: 25

## Feature articles
- Total: 14

## Supplement articles
- Total: 12

## Media briefings
- Total: 12

## News conferences
- Total: 8

## Media tours
- Total: 6

## Newsletters
- Total: 5

## Handling media inquiries
- Total: 5

## Special events
- Total: 1.5

### TOTAL
- Total: 162.5

---

## News releases
- Total: 100

## One-on-one journalist briefings
- Total: 77

## Feature articles
- Total: 68

## Supplement articles
- Total: 68

## Media briefings
- Total: 64

## News conferences
- Total: 45

## Media tours
- Total: 45

## Newsletters
- Total: 27

## Handling media inquiries
- Total: 9

## Special events
- Total: 5

### TOTAL
- Total: 508

---

## Media response/coverage
- Total: 36

## Sales/inquiry rates
- Total: 27

## Informal feedback
- Total: 23

## Self-administered questionnaire
- Total: 14

## Readership surveys
- Total: 14

## Superior/client satisfaction
- Total: 9

## Personal judgement
- Total: 9

## Market research
- Total: 9

## Achievement of objectives
- Total: 5

## Independent objective research
- Total: 5

## Informal feedback
- Total: 15

## Self-administered questionnaire
- Total: 14

## Independent objective research
- Total: 13

## Media response/coverage
- Total: 10

## Sales/inquiry rates
- Total: 5

## Market research
- Total: 5

## Media ownership
- Total: 38

## Journalists’ training
- Total: 22

## Ideological factors
- Total: 18

## Political intervention
- Total: 12

## Other
- Total: 10

### TOTAL
- Total: 100

---

## Public relations
- Total: 38

## Globalisation (eg networks)
- Total: 12

## Ideological factors
- Total: 18
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journalists' training</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media ownership</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political intervention</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sydney Morning Herald</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Age</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Australian</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Financial Review</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courier Mail</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telegraph Mirror</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herald-Sun</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Age</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Independent</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MAIN FINDINGS OF PRESS RELEASE TRACKING STUDY

DIAGRAM 8.
DIAGRAM 9.
MOST FREQUENT COMMUNICATIONS BY IN-HOUSE PR PRACTITIONERS

News releases
Supplement articles
Media tours
Special events
MOST USED METHODS OF EVALUATION BY IN-HOUSE PR PRACTITIONERS

- Informal feedback
- Independent objective research
- Sales/inquiry rates
Most Frequent Communications by PR Consultants

- News releases: 100
- Supplement articles: 80
- Media tours: 60
- Special events: 20
MOST USED METHODS OF EVALUATION BY PR CONSULTANTS

- Media response/coverage
- Self-administered questionnaires
- Personal judgement
- Independent objective research
MAIN FINDINGS OF PRESS RELEASE TRACKING STUDY

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

2,500

768 (30%)

150

National/State/Metro (35%)

Trade/Specialist (47%)

Regional/Country (10.5%)

Suburban (7.5%)

Not used at all by the media (1.2%)

DIAGRAM 8.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF PR RELEASE USAGE

Used Verbatim 20%

Partly Used

Used once or not at all 10%

Mostly Used (At least 50% of story) 30%

DIAGRAM 9.
Thesis Diagram 9E

- Mostly Used
  - (At least 50% of story)
  - 30%

- Mostly Used
  - 20%

- Partly Used
  - 10%

- Used once or not at all
  - 10%
THE BEST NEWSPAPERS IN AUSTRALIA

Survey of 1068 journalists by the University of Queensland Journalism Department, 1992, conducted by Quadrant Research Services, funded by the Australian Research Council.
TRADITIONAL SOURCES OF MEDIA INFLUENCE

- Media ownership
- Journalists' training
- Ideological factors
- Political intervention
- Other
MODERN INFLUENCES ON THE MEDIA

- Globalisation (e.g., international networks)
- Media ownership
- Ideological factors
- Journalists' training
- Public relations
- Other
- Political intervention
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News releases</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-on-one journalist briefing</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feature articles</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplement articles</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media briefings</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News conferences</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media tours</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling media inquiries</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special events</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>162.5</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News releases</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-on-one journalist briefing</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feature articles</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplement articles</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media briefings</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News conferences</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media tours</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling media inquiries</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special events</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>508</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media response/coverage</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales/inquiry rates</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal feedback</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-administered questionnaire</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readership surveys</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior/client satisfaction</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal judgement</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market research</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement of objectives</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent objective research</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**TABLE 3. PRESS RELEASE TRACKING SUMMARY**

*(Press Releases Issued in Tracking Period 1 Jan - 30 Dec, 1992)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Release</th>
<th>Issued by</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Number of Uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Trade &amp; Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAFM prospers despite industry slump</td>
<td>National Australia Financial Management</td>
<td>5/2/92</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boral Cyclone Now Offers Plain Wire</td>
<td>MACRO Communication for Boral Cyclone Rural</td>
<td>19/2/92</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural gas for Portland</td>
<td>Gas &amp; Fuel Corporation</td>
<td>31/3/92</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital gathers injury data</td>
<td>Latrobe Regional Hospital</td>
<td>7/4/92</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advance Bank launches new home loan planner to help customers save ... <em>(consumer version)</em></td>
<td>Blackie McDonald for Advance Bank</td>
<td>15/4/92</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advance Bank launches new home loan planner to help customers save ... <em>(trade version)</em></td>
<td>Blackie McDonald for Advance Bank</td>
<td>15/4/92</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSAA Says Software Prices Fair ... PSA Inquiry</td>
<td>Business Software Association of Australia (BSAA)</td>
<td>28/4/92</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Description</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Keywords</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandma allows children to 'live' their books - in three languages</td>
<td>Blackie McDonald for Dataflow</td>
<td>30/4/92</td>
<td>4 5 0 0 0 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Million Seniors Can Now Apply for Statewide Discounts</td>
<td>Turnbull Fox Phillips for The Office on Ageing</td>
<td>10/5/92</td>
<td>0 5 4 10 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizons Club Resort Issued Contracts $3.1 m</td>
<td>Denis Rutzou PR for Horizons Club Resort</td>
<td>25/5/92</td>
<td>0 0 1 0 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First youth conservation program starts at Northern TAFE</td>
<td>Northern Metro College of TAFE</td>
<td>24/7/92</td>
<td>1 1 1 0 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange scientific wits baffle Bathurst and Blayney</td>
<td>Kinross Wolaroi School</td>
<td>18/8/92</td>
<td>0 0 0 2 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor of rural health appointed</td>
<td>Latrobe Regional Hospital</td>
<td>24/8/92</td>
<td>0 0 0 1 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive shadowing regional conference</td>
<td>Dept of School Education</td>
<td>3/9/92</td>
<td>0 0 1 0 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry crank or music buff</td>
<td>Kinross Wolaroi School</td>
<td>15/9/92</td>
<td>0 0 0 1 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinross Wolaroi students qualify for Aust Chemistry Olympiad</td>
<td>Kinross Wolaroi School</td>
<td>16/9/92</td>
<td>0 0 0 1 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry qualifiers</td>
<td>Kinross Wolaroi School</td>
<td>17/9/92</td>
<td>0 0 0 1 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major business process re-engineering program announced - Norwich &amp; Wang</td>
<td>Norwich Union Life</td>
<td>17/9/92</td>
<td>0 1 0 0 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software industry launched 'Buy IT in Australia' campaign</td>
<td>'Buy IT in Australia Group'</td>
<td>24/9/92</td>
<td>11 4 0 1 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local teachers selected for 'Teachers in Business' program</td>
<td>Dept of School Education</td>
<td>Sep 92</td>
<td>0 1 1 0 2</td>
</tr>
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<td>Community comment invited on</td>
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| Event Description                                                                 | Date       | Category | Quality | Sentiment | Publication | Reader
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------|---------|------------|-------------|---------|
| Sony invests in comprehensive advertising campaign to support new product roll-out | 8/10/92    | 2        | 0       | 0          | MACRO Communication for Sony Australia | 2
| Sony launches one and only pre-Christmas audio promotion                           | 22/10/92   | 1        | 0       | 0          | MACRO Communication for Sony Australia | 1
| Sony launches advertising campaign to support recording media                      | 11/11/92   | 1        | 0       | 0          | MACRO Communication for Sony Australia | 1
| Compaq - new appointment                                                          | 16/3/92    | 1        | 1       | 0          | MACRO Communication for Compaq Computer Australia | 2
| Compaq announces ACL Engineering as third party maintainer                          | 8/4/92     | 4        | 2       | 0          | MACRO Communication for Compaq Computer Australia | 6
| Compaq and Banyan sign development agreement                                       | 9/4/92     | 2        | 0       | 0          | MACRO Communication for Compaq Computer Australia | 2
| Compaq puts RISC on hold - resigns from ACE                                        | 29/4/92    | 7        | 2       | 0          | MACRO Communication for Compaq Computer Australia | 9
| Compaq announces quarterly results                                                 | 29/4/92    | 1        | 1       | 0          | MACRO Communication for Compaq Computer Australia | 2
| Compaq, Microsoft and Analog Devices introduce business audio                      | 29/5/92    | 3        | 1       | 0          | MACRO Communication for Compaq Computer Australia | 4
| Compaq enters a new era of products and pricing                                     | 16/6/92    | 18       | 17      | 0          | MACRO Communication for Compaq Computer Australia | 36
| Compaq signs export and R&D Agreement with Federal Govt                           | 12/8/92    | 3        | 1       | 0          | MACRO Communication for Compaq Computer Australia | 4
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<td>New era in Australian IT research as Microsoft Institute appoints fellows</td>
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<td>Judging panel for ICAA-Microsoft Excel Awards announced</td>
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<td>Microsoft holds world-wide launch of</td>
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<td>Microsoft to raise market profile with major golf sponsorship</td>
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<td>Microsoft introduces Fox Pro 2.5 for Windows and MS DOS</td>
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<td>Microsoft ships the new Microsoft Access relational database system for Microsoft Windows</td>
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<td>Microsoft announces video for Windows</td>
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<td>Microsoft Mail and Schedule + Extensions extend reach for Windows for Workgroups users</td>
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<td>Microsoft relaunches customer service with new benefits</td>
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* Indicates feature article written for one publication only
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<th>Title of Release</th>
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<th>National &amp; Metro Radio</th>
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<td>Symantec offers software to destroy Michaelango virus</td>
<td>Blackie McDonald for Symantec</td>
<td>20/2/92</td>
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<td>Grandma allows children to 'live' their books - in three languages</td>
<td>Blackie McDonald for Dataflow</td>
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<td>Computer buyers warned of pirate software</td>
<td>Business Software Association of Australia</td>
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*The above are electronic media broadcasts of press releases already included under 'press' in Table 3 (i.e., the above are additional uses and are counted in usage, but not as additional press releases)*
## PRESS RELEASE TRACKING SUMMARY

*(Other Press Releases Not in Survey Period)*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Release</th>
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<td>Trade &amp; Specialist</td>
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<td>Jet noise 'thumbs down'</td>
<td>Ashfield Council</td>
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<td>NAFM launches new dividend imputation trust</td>
<td>National Australia Financial Management</td>
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<td>Viruses - a growing threat to business</td>
<td>Blackie McDonald for Symantec</td>
<td>Mar 91</td>
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<td>West Sunshine resident receives Australian post-graduate research award ...</td>
<td>Victoria University of Technology</td>
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<td>St Albans resident receives Australian post-graduate research award ...</td>
<td>Victoria University of Technology</td>
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<td>Mt Macedon receives Australian post-graduate research award ...</td>
<td>Victoria University of Technology</td>
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<td>Superannuation Protects Your Retirement ...</td>
<td>Denis Rutzou PR for Aust. Casualty &amp; Life</td>
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<td>Community service announcement</td>
<td>Austin Hospital, Heidelberg</td>
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<td>Epilepsy milestone for Austin team</td>
<td>Austin Hospital, Heidelberg</td>
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<td>Can Local Police Keep Austin Orderlies in line</td>
<td>Austin Hospital, Heidelberg</td>
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<td>Dual Australian surgical first ...</td>
<td>Austin Hospital, Heidelberg</td>
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<td>Lindeman launches Australia's top white wine export into domestic market</td>
<td>Blackie McDonald for Lindeman Wines</td>
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<td>Viruses - how to avoid the growing threat to businesses</td>
<td>Blackie McDonald for Symantec</td>
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<td>Natural gas popular at Echuca</td>
<td>Gas &amp; Fuel Corporation</td>
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<td>It's super - the layman's guide to superannuation</td>
<td>National Australia Financial Management</td>
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**TOTAL PRESS RELEASES TRACKED = 150**

**360  245  57  105  768**

**AVERAGE USE PER PRESS RELEASE = 5.12**

**47%  32%  7.5%  13.5%  100%**