

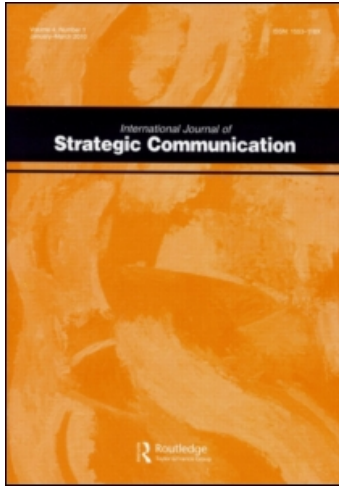
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Factors Underlying Organizations' Successful Press Release Publication in Newspapers: Additional PR Elements for the Evolving “Press Agency” and “Public Information” Models

Michal Seletzky^a; Sam Lehman-Wilzig^a

^a Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel

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Factors Underlying Organizations' Successful Press Release Publication in Newspapers: Additional PR Elements for the Evolving "Press Agency" and "Public Information" Models

Michal Seletzky and Sam Lehman-Wilzig

Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel

This study tests 71 PR elements and tools regarding publishing success of 373 press releases in light of PR's two major, unidirectional models: *press agency* and *public information*. Thirteen PR agencies and 12 subject areas were analyzed. A formula was developed to pinpoint the successful PR elements in 575 published news items emanating from these press releases. The main elements underlying publication success were importance of the item, its novelty and its practical usefulness; text composition and timely transfer to the journalist; and original source of the item. Overall, the public information model had the higher average success rate. The study's ramifications for organizations' overall communication strategy are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Over the previous decades many studies have researched the two main public relations models that are based on unidirectional communication: *press agency* (PA) and *public information* (PI). However, no study has attempted to develop a large array of possible factors behind successful publication of press releases in each of these models and specifically which factors are more significant in each model. This article will attempt to fill that lacuna. Although the study's research focus is on specific tactics of PR agencies, this is of obvious interest to corporate and nonprofit organizations as well, as they have to decide whether to pursue their communication strategy through an external agency or in-house. In other words, if strategic communication entails an organization's interaction with various audiences such as media, consumers, and potential investors (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, Van Ruler, Vercic, & Sriramesh, 2007), then the decision as to whether to hire a professional agent, i.e., PR agency, must be based on an understanding of what that agency's sociodemographic elements and professional work processes best serve the organization's purpose. This nexus is discussed here as well.

First, we present a survey of the theoretical literature and provide some background regarding Israel's journalism and public relations evolution. Finally, we then share a quantitative analysis

of 373 press releases and their subsequent publication as 575 news items in three newspapers under study.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

PR Models: Press Agency and Public Information

The literature on PR models¹ has focused on their characteristics and the differences between them. Grunig & Hunt (1984) describe the main goal of the PA model as getting positive media coverage for the organization or personality, usually in sports, cinema, products and politics. The PI model's goal is to disseminate information, with these PR practitioners acting as "journalists" distributing objective facts through the mass media. The common denominator of these two models is that they are unidirectional, i.e., the information flows from the organization to the public without feedback and they are asymmetrical – attempting to change the public's attitude or behavior through propaganda (PA) or supporting information (PI) regarding the organization itself (p. 8).

Many studies have looked at several aspects of these models, especially which models are found in what organizations.² Grunig (1989), Tanner (1999), Habbersett (1983) and Pollack (1984) discovered that PA is most popular among businesses whereas PI is more prevalent among government agencies. Most recently, fundraisers for public Black colleges were found to prefer the PI model (Tindall, 2007).

Grunig and Grunig (1992) used studies by Pollack (1984), Fabiszak (1985) and McMillan (1984) to analyze correlations between PR models and several independent variables, namely, PR techniques;³ the functions of the PR practitioner at the head of the organization's PR department (communications manager; communications technician; communications coordinator; media liaison); his/her level of higher education; upper management's understanding and support of PR; and organizational structure. Their findings revealed, respectively, that the PI model is positively correlated with the techniques for preparing magazines, newsletters and other publications, although negatively correlated with informal contacts with the public. Regarding nonprofit associations and organizations the PA model was correlated with other techniques such as promoting professional exhibitions and performances. These researchers come to the overall conclusion that several positive correlations support the validity of the major PR models, but that many PR techniques are not related to any specific model.

¹There are two other models in PR: "Two-way asymmetrical model" and "Two-way symmetrical model" in which the public plays a significant part (Guadino, Fritch, & Haynes, 1989). We have chosen to concentrate on the two one-way models and not all four for the following reasons: a. this is the first time that success is being analyzed within the models paradigm; b. the study takes into account a very large number of variables and we did not wish to overload the exposition; c. PA and PI are still the two dominant models in practice.

²The studies surveyed here focus on the PR activities within organizations as almost all the research based on the four PR models studied the practitioners within the companies/organizations (i.e., spokespersons) and very few have dealt with external PR firms, a lacuna that the present study is designed to fill.

³16 techniques from Grunig's original list (1984) included: writing press releases; preparing ads, magazines and newsletters; formal and informal relations with journalists; speechwriting; press conferences.

Three organizational-structural variables were also found to be important factors in the PR model employed: complexity (how many highly educated, expert PR employees are necessary to carry out functions); central management (the limited number of managers making key decisions); and workers stratification (PR employees at different organizational levels). Complex organizations did not use asymmetric models (PA and two-way asymmetric); centralized ones used one-way models while two-way models were found among decentralized organizations; and stratified organizations did not use the two-way symmetric model.

On the microlevel of individual PR practitioners a strong correlation was found between the job of either communications manager or communications technician and the four models. In most cases, the practitioners tended to act as the latter type, leading to Kelleher's conclusion (2001) that organizations with communications managers tend to abide by the two-way models. Such a job function entails keeping track of the general, external environment, seeking feedback and participating in management's strategic decision-making. Conversely, in the one-way models PR practitioners are mostly involved in the technical tasks of creating and transmitting information, with little regard to feedback – a conclusion supported by Reagan, Sumner and Hill (1989) who discovered a clear difference between two-way jobs (problem management) and one-way tasks (sending press releases). As a corollary of all this, PR employees using either the one-way models of PA or PI models were able to succeed even if they only had a journalism background or no formal PR education at all.

Two other variables are related to both the macrolevels and microlevels of analysis: collective social culture and the essence of PR. Regarding the first, Vasquez and Taylor (1999) found that American PR practitioners continue to work within the one-way model, even when their organizations do not demand or expect this. On the other hand, PR people with collective values such as cooperation, dialogue, mutual aid and contribution to the firm's success, tend to act on the two-way model. Their study's conclusions suggest that American PR professionals wish to improve their relations and communication with their audiences but do not have the appropriate training and encouragement for this.

PR models have become popular in research on other developed as well as developing countries with varying cultures (Grunig, 2001), in some cases expanding the list. One study on Bosnia, for example, found the most popular models among PR practitioners to be, respectively, the cultural interpreter model, the PA model, and the personal influence model (Kent & Taylor, 2007). Kim and Hon (1998) found that in South Korea the PA and PI models are more prevalent, despite the professionals' aspiring to the two-way models. Shin (in Park, 2001) concurs, arguing that Korean PR professionals have to change their basic strategies and move from PA to two-way models. This will not be simple, as Jo and Kim (2004) suggest, for while South Korean PR workers consider monetary gifts to be problematic and even unethical, they still believe in the power of maintaining personal relations with journalists. A study of Nigerian PR, as compared to the United States and Canada, also found a tendency towards the PA and PI models (Pratt & Ugboajah, 1985).

The models approach is obviously quite popular among PR researchers because it seems to fit the experience of many PR practitioners and overall practice in the field. Moreover, they enable the researcher to differentiate between typical and traditional PR behavior and more modern practice, providing the tools to explain various modes of practice (Grunig, 2001).

It should be emphasized as well that none of the studies heretofore undertaken have tried to analyze the relationship between organizations' success in the publication of PR releases overall,

and in the PA and PI models respectively. The present research study is designed to do just that, thus expanding our understanding of the models – not just from the standpoint of the factors underlying practice, but also the factors behind each model's success (or failure).

Factors Underlying the Successful Publication of Press Releases in Newspapers

The press release is a printed news announcement with a focused message, disseminated (through email, mail, messenger, fax, etc.) simultaneously to all or some news editorial departments and/or journalists dealing with the specific subject area (Limor & Mann, 1997).

Several studies have pinpointed a number of factors influencing press release publication success. Morton (1986) found that there is a better chance of success in weekly magazines and semi-weekly papers than in dailies. Turk (1986) and Covesenyano (1998) found that newsworthiness criteria were critical, whereas Ashley (1968), Aronoff (1976) and Baxter (1981) focused on local elements as decisive. Indeed, Minnis and Pratt (1995) found that lack of local relevance was the cause for rejection 72% of the time.

Other studies found that personally useful news is another success factor. Morton (1986) checked 408 PR releases sent to 191 Oklahoma papers and found that more news you can use items were published than any other category, notwithstanding publication frequency of the papers. Morton and Warren (1992) had similar results: useful news was the most widespread and successful news criterion (40%), far better than any other category.

Additional elements found to be important: immediacy, i.e. sending the item as quickly as possible (Elfenbein, 1993; Grunig & Hunt, 1994); writing style, i.e., clear and correct usage, short sentences (Walters, Walters & Starr, 1994; Limor & Mann, 1997; Covesenyano, 1997; Bollinger, 1999); target, i.e., reaching the appropriate journalists and editors; the reputation of the PR agency and status of the PR writer (Walters & Walters, 1992; Sofer, 2000). Regarding target, Morton (1995) noted that the PR writer has to take into account demographic variables regarding the editors/journalists: gender; age; and professional factors, e.g., editors look for conflicting stories; or PR practitioners try to stay away from elements of conflict in their PR release. Still other success factors have been found to be the extent to which the source is (or is connected to) a respectable institution (Goodell, 1975), size of newspaper readership (Stone & Morrison, 1976), quality of previous PR materials sent by the practitioner (Dunwoody & Ryan, 1983) and their trustworthiness (Gans, 1979).

A recent study (Anderson & Lawrey, 2007) found that additional factors contributing to PR practitioner success in shaping news content are organizational resources; the organizations' prominence in the community; and the extent of the topic's complexity. In other words, a powerful organization (rich in resources, highly profitable, and with a staff located within the newspaper's distribution area) especially one with a high income readership can provide the paper with abundant useful and effective information. This is more relevant when the organization's workers are skilled in forging good relations with the local journalists. In addition, PR practitioners who specialize in such areas as medicine, science, engineering, and finance tend to have greater influence because the journalists usually will not have the requisite education and knowledge in such complex fields. Moreover, continued newspaper cutbacks prevent the training or hiring of reporters with the necessary skills and knowledge, thus reinforcing the PR practitioners' influence over daily newspaper content.

Several studies looked at differences of success according to subject matter. Walker (1991), for example, found that in consumerism (especially fast food) 96% of all press releases or PR-initiated material are published in one form or another, in politics 98%, in opinion pieces 92% and in fashion 72%. From the opposite side of the desk, newspaper editors estimated that 90% of all published health news items, 75% of entertainment items and 60% of lifestyle items emanated from PR activity. Nelkin (1995) found that science journalists depend heavily on PR releases, while Covesenyo's study (1998) of soft news sources in Israeli papers found 94% to have originated in PR releases.

It is not surprising that some studies have found a combinatory effect regarding some of these elements. For example, PR items that combine local/community newswiness (new news), immediacy, and number of relevant topic areas, will have more elements of the PR release published in the paper (Latane, 1981; Bollinger, 2001).

One major factor is more subjective than objective: the personal and professional relationship between the PR practitioner and the journalist (Walters & Walters, 1992). As Jefkins noted earlier (1986), PR agencies now tend to hire talented professional staff having relevant higher education and who understand that they are judged on news sense and trustworthiness. Such PR agencies enjoy the benefit of greater influence on newspaper content (Best, 1986). Notwithstanding the personal aspect, Toth and Cline (1991) and O'Neil (2002) found that there is no difference in influence between male and female PR practitioners; based on this the present study hypothesized that PR worker gender (within PR agencies and not external organizations with PR employees) will not be a factor in PR release publication success.

A final category of factors is professional-technical: the means of disseminating PR releases and communicating with the journalists. E-mail has become the most important means ("Reporters Prefer . . .", 1999; Garrison, 2004) due to its speed, low cost, flexibility, security and ease of use (Reavy, 2001). Nevertheless, older means have not been abandoned, especially face-to-face contact (Hill & White, 2000; Duke, 2002). Cantelmo (2001) reported on a media poll in which journalists listed their preferred means of receiving information (including PR releases) that was not urgent or unsolicited: regular mail (90%), fax (60%), e-mail (30%). This supports the contention of Ledingham and Bruning (1998) that an effective PR/journalist relationship must be based on a variety of communication modes and not just e-mail.

Moreover, the technical means employed tend to be culturally based. Shin and Cameron (2002) found that Korean PR personnel, as opposed to American, still highly value the traditional means of source-journalist interaction (telephone and fax) and have lower motivation to use new technologies for this purpose. However, a year later, these researchers found that Korean PR practitioners viewed online means as effective, ethical and professional, whereas the journalists still preferred offline means due to their suspicion of printed, organization PR materials and their preference for personal, informal methods (Shin & Cameron, 2003).

To sum up, there have been quite a number of studies investigating various factors underlying the publication success of PR releases. However, individually each focused on only one or at best a very small number of factors; to the best of our knowledge, none have attempted to determine in one overall study most of the factors underlying PR release success that have been mentioned and analyzed in the literature – a comprehensiveness that is the main purpose of the present study. Moreover, this article will attempt for the first time to analyze the entire issue based on a comparison of the two dominant PR models. A final contribution will be the addition of two PR subject areas not studied until now: automotive and ecology/environment.

Israel's Daily Press

As this study is based on an examination of Israel's three main dailies, the following brief background is offered.

Israel's newspaper map has undergone several profound changes in the country's 60-plus-year history. Most palpable is the virtual disappearance of the dozen or so party newspapers that were an integral part of the media scene during the early decades (Barness, 1961). Their demise was a function of two social trends: sharp increase in socio-economic living standards and higher education that brought forth different audience needs and demands to which the party papers conceptually were not able to adapt (Lowenstein in Ben-Ami, 1988); the party papers' lack of financial wherewithal to introduce new printing technologies that would offer a higher quality, modern look (Caspi & Limor, 1992). Their place was taken up by the independent papers whose readership share continued to grow.

Significant change also occurred within this latter group as well. First, they all became morning papers as a result of *Khadashot* ["News"], a brash newspaper that first appeared in 1984 (Caspi & Limor, 1992); its initial popularity also forced the other three into modernizing their style and look (*Khadashot* folded in the early 1990s). Second, the former leading paper *Ma'ariv* ["Evening"] lost its primacy to *Yediot Ahkronot* ["Latest News"] sometime in the 1970s; the latter continues to hold approximately half of the nation's entire daily readership (Limor & Mann, 1997; TGI Survey, June 2004–June 2005, July–December, 2008, July–December 2009). Third, the introduction of cable TV in 1990 and then commercial television in 1993 reduced newspaper advertising revenue and also pushed the papers into making significant changes in substance (less space devoted to op-ed commentary and more to useful information), writing style (shorter articles) and design (greater use of color and larger headlines, more space devoted to visuals) (Limor & Mann, 1997; Seletzky, 1998).

These changes transformed *Yediot Ahkronot* and *Ma'ariv* into clear exemplars of popular papers as distinguished from *Ha'aretz* (which actually increased its background analysis and commentary at the expense of hard news). Nevertheless, despite the former papers' tabloid format (except for the Friday paper, equivalent to Sunday editions elsewhere), they are different from many other popular papers in the world in that the main news pages do not focus on crime, sex and celebrities but rather on real, hard news. In addition, while offering a plethora of visuals and bold colors, they also produce serious literary supplements and other respectable cultural coverage, something not found among most of the world's more sensationalist tabloids (Limor & Mann, 1997).

For the purposes of our study these changes are important in that (as will be explained below) the present study includes the "magnitude" of PR communiqué publication, as expressed in use of color, size, placement and accompanying visuals.

Journalists' Information Sources

A newspaper has several sources of news: its own journalists; news agencies; other print and electronic media, locally and internationally; information provided by the public, private organizations and governmental institutions. Most of these transmit information to the newspaper through press releases or other forms of announcement (Limor & Mann, 1997).

Many journalism and public relations researchers (e.g., Wilcox & Nolte, 1995; Walters & Walters, 1992; Morton, 1996) have shown that the press release emanating from a PR agency or a spokesperson is the most common form of information document arriving at the journalist's desk (Conarroe & Conarroe). Other studies have estimated that between 25% and 50% (and at times above 80%) of news items originate in some form of public relations (Lee & Solomon, 1990; Stauber & Rampton, 1995; Curtin & Rhodenbough, 2001).

It has also been found that in Israel a very high percentage (94%) of soft news originates in press releases (Covesenyano, 1998). The factors behind the increase of press release use include greater cognizance on the part of organizations and individuals regarding the importance of public relations; reduction in the number of journalists due to financial constraints, and concomitant willingness to publish "prepared" news; the growth of new areas that interest the general public (ecology, culture, economics); growing "give and take" relationship between PR professionals and journalists (Seletzky, 2007); new technologies (e-mail, cell phone) offering an improved news delivery infrastructure between sources and journalists, enabling the latter to obtain more information in less time (Reich, 2007, 2009). It also bears noting that Israel is a relatively small country geographically (the size of New Jersey) and in population (under 8 million), with a high level of general sociability, so that the relevant journalists quickly get to know all their PR counterparts and vice versa; as a result, their professional interaction tends to be relatively smooth.

The Development of PR in Israel

The origins of public relations in Israel can be found in the first Zionist institutions of the early 20th century: the Jewish Agency and the Jewish National Fund. Beginning in the British Mandate period (1918) and continuing after the state's establishment in 1948, these two central organizations constituted the formative source of generations of PR professionals, through their use of propaganda, "hasbarah" (the generally used term for "providing public information," especially in an international context), and public relations activities (Toledano, 2006).

Whereas in the 1950s public relations practitioners were concentrated in the public sector, i.e., mainly government-related spokespersons, from the late 1960s onwards businesses began to hire PR agencies to maintain their image. A more significant change occurred in the 1980s and 1990s mainly due to the increasing democratization of Israeli society, the rise in the number of mass media, a sharp increase in PR firms and opening of PR departments within advertising agencies, the growing privatization of the Israeli economy, the influx of overseas multinationals into the Israeli economy, greater local free-market competition, deregulation, and the increase in standard of living with concomitant demand for better service. As a result of all these, PR became an integral part of every private firm's and government institution's management structure (Tzafir, 2000).

In addition, one can discern a greater level of PR professionalism in several spheres: some PR agencies began specializing in specific areas (consumer affairs, hi-tech) and types of work, e.g. building relationships with journalists, lobbying, crisis management (Shiffman, 2004); integrating PR functions within a comprehensive marketing campaign (Bloch, 2004; Tzoref, 2005); development of an ethics code, initiated by the Israeli Association of Public Relations and Spokesmanship (Toledano, 2006; Tzafir, 2000); and working relationships between local PR firms and leading overseas counterparts (Trivax, 2004).

Nevertheless, notwithstanding these major changes over the past few decades, Israeli PR still does not require any special training or academic background for entering practitioners. As a result, the entrance level is rather low, professional standards are not the best, and ethical standards are not adhered to as a general rule – all hurting the field's level of professionalism and image. In large part, this stems from Israel's lack of higher education programs in PR specifically. Although the country has witnessed a veritable explosion of general mass communication programs in its five liberal arts universities and dozens of colleges over the past two decades, as of 2010 there is no Israeli academic program concentrating specifically on Public Relations, there are very few Israeli lecturers trained academically in PR, and until now only one PhD dissertation on a PR topic has been successfully completed in an Israeli university (by one of the present authors: Seletzky, 2007).

RESEARCH DESIGN

Variables

Independent variables. Five general factors were identified as influencing successful publication of press releases:

1. Source;⁴
2. Techniques used in transmitting the item to the press;
3. News item content;
4. Composition and timely transmission;
5. Type of organization reported.

We chose these five general categories because of the large number of subvariables within each one of them, i.e., those subvariables with a common denominator were combined to make the analysis manageable.

In the end, nine discrete variables were created:

1. *professional*: professional experience of PR practitioner or manager; seniority and reputation of PR agency; clear writing style; timely transmission of the press release, i.e., within the journalist's deadline.

⁴Source of press release: 1 and 2. PR agency manager's/employee's years of experience; 3 and 4. PR agency's experience/reputation; 5 and 6. PR agency manager/employee's gender; 7 and 8. PR agency manager/employee's educational level; 9–12. Relationship of PR agency manager/employee with editor/journalist; 13–16. Mutual trust between PR agency manager/employee and editor/journalist. Means employed in transmission of press release: Technical means: 17 - phone; 18 - fax; 19 - beeper; 20 - letter/ messenger; 21 - other; Online means: 22 - email; 23 - online chat; 24 - other; Interpersonal means: 25 - face-to-face; 26 - eating out; 27 - connections; 28 - pressure/repeated reminders; 29 - threats/demand to speak with editor; 30 - followup; 31 - other; News content means: 32 - exclusive information/scoop; 33 - other; Associated means: 34 - adding photo; 35 - adding transparencies; 36 - product samples; 37 - other; Incentive / additional means: 38 - overseas trip for journalist; 39 - local hotel accommodation; 40 - journalist choosing any product; 41 - other; Other means (not mention above): 42 - other. Contents of press release: 43 - importance; 44 - novelty; 45- usefulness (for the readers). Composition & timeliness: 46 - clarity of text; 47 - submission before deadline. Type of organization covered: 48 - Commercial; 49 - Governmental; 50 - Nonprofit, public.

2. *sociodemographic*: gender of PR practitioner or agency manager; their educational level.
3. *interpersonal*: relationship between PR practitioner/manager and the journalist or editor; methods of transmitting the press release: face-to-face, working meals, personal connections; personal pressure/urging, e.g., threat or demand to speak to the editor, followups.
4. *traditional-technical*: telephone, fax, beeper, messenger/package, regular mail.
5. *online-technical*: sending press releases by email, online chat/IM communication to answer journalist's questions.
6. *associated (pictures, etc.)*: pictures, graphs, figures, illustrations, slides, samples.
7. *news content*: exclusive information, importance of announcement, its novelty and usefulness (reader service).
8. *organizational*: commercial, government, nonprofit.
9. *incentive*: e.g., free overseas trip for the journalist to cover the story, hotel lodging, and/or product.⁵

Dependent variables. Two main success-related outcomes were used:

1. The wording of the press release contents included in the published news article (totally rewritten by the journalist; under 50% original text; around 50%; above 50%; [almost identical]).
- 2–6. The news article's impact, based on five subvariables: page; length; immediacy; accompanying photo; BW/color.

We initially considered adding a seventh subvariable: positive/negative, i.e., whether the positively worded press release was published in negative fashion. However, in a pretest, and again during the study itself, it was found that none of the PR releases underwent an "attitude switch" in publication, so that this subvariable was not included.

Ten Israeli PR agency managers and 26 journalists/editors rated these dependent variables for their relative importance. Each of these two groups respectively agreed almost unanimously on the order of preference of the following dependent variables. In order not to unduly complicate the analysis and discussion, the statistical analysis was based on the ranking list of the PR managers. The results in descending order are: 1. publication as news item; 2. prominent place; 3. item length; 4. immediacy of publication; 5. accompanying picture; 6. specific wording; and, 7. BW/color.

Each analyzed press release received a score based on the dependent subvariables:

A. *Page Placement*:

Weekday supplements: front page (2 pts.); other pgs. (1 pt.)

Weekday interior sections: f.p. (4 pts.); other pgs. (3 pts.)

Weekend supplements: f.p. (6 pts.); other pgs. (5 pts.)

Main news section: weekend (wkd) and weekday (wkdy) – f.p. (wkd: 12 points; wkdy: 9 pts.); pages 2–5 (wkd: 11 pts.; wkdy: 8 pts.); other pages (wkd: 10 pts.; wkdy: 7 pts.)

⁵One additional category was offered: "miscellaneous," where the PR practitioners and journalists/editors could list additional factors based on their experience. Very few of these were suggested by the respondents, suggesting that the nine categories and their respective subvariables are sufficiently comprehensive.

B. Item Size:

Up to 1/4 page: 1 pt.; 1/4 - 1/2 page: 3 pts.; above 1/2 page – full page: 5 pts.;
above a full page: 8 pts.

C. Publication Immediacy:

Above 2 weeks: 1 pt.; 8–14 days: 3 pts.; within a week: 5 pts.

D. Visual Accompaniment:

Just text item: 1 pt.

Photo/ graph/table/illustration (not connected to the client or competition) plus text item: 2 pts.

Photo/ graph/table/illustration plus caption (no body text item): 3 pts.

Photo/ graph/table/illustration (connected to the client) plus text item: 5 pts.

Other combinations (e.g. each non-client photo: 1/2 pt.; each client photo: 1 pt.): up to 9 pts.

E. B/W or Color:

B/W photo/graph etc.: 1/2 pt.; color: 1 pt.; other (each b/w: 1/2 pt.; each color: 1 pt.)

F. Original Press Release Wording:

All new text in journalist's version (based on original idea in press release): 1/2 pt.

Less than 50% from the press release; the rest being the journalist's original wording: 1 pt.

Approx. half press release and half original wording: 1.5 pts.

More than half of item's text identical to press release: 2 pts.

News item (almost) identical to press release: 3 pts.

Maximum "success" (relevant to the research hypotheses presented next) was scored when the press release was published in the paper in a prominent place, at length, immediately, with accompanying photo (if sent) in color, and with most of the original text.

Research Sample

Thirteen Israeli PR agencies were surveyed, categorized by three PR models: four representing PA with commercial clients (automotive, consumer, micro-economic, and food); five representing PI with nonprofit or governmental clients (welfare, culture, environment, and agriculture); and four hybrid agencies, which served as a control group regarding type of clients that combined PA with commercial clients (aviation and telecommunication) and PI with nonprofit or governmental clients (environment, literature/general publishing).

It bears noting that although we could have categorized the PR releases, in each agency, according to either of the two models, we chose to add another parameter: subject area of coverage. The purpose is test which area has a greater level of newspaper publication success, including a few that have never been studied heretofore (automotive; environment). The purpose of testing the hybrid model was to neutralize the effect of organizational type's influence on press release newspaper publication success (the hybrid model included four subject areas, of which three were different from those in the PA and PI models, and one — environment — was tested on a different agency).

Israeli press releases consecutively sent over a six month period were collected from the chosen PR agencies: 133 PA, 103 PI, and 137 combined PA / PI for a total of 373. Their publication as news items was checked in Israel's three main dailies: two popular, Yediot Ahronot and Maariv, and one elite, Haaretz.

This article concentrates on the comparison between the two dominant PR models, and leaves comparative results between types of newspaper for another venue. The hybrid model used as a research control was not included in the hypotheses that follow, but its findings will be presented in that section.

Research Hypotheses

This study has five hypotheses, each based on an independent variable. To determine which is most influential, we performed stepwise regression; one-way analysis of variance; multiple comparison analysis; and Duncan discrete choice analysis.⁶

These hypotheses are based on interviews conducted with journalists and editors, as well as on the literature (Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, 1973; Best, 1986; Morton & Warren, 1992; Morton, 1992; Walters & Walters, 1992; Capps, 1993; Walters, Walters & Starr, 1994; Batelman, 1995; Wilcox & Nolte, 1995; Wilkins, 1997; Covesenyano, 1998; Shin & Cameron, 2002; O'Neil, 2002).

H1: The source of a news release will have an impact on its publication

I. *Professional and interpersonal factors*

H1a: The stronger the news source's professional factors [professional experience, experience and agency's reputation as determined by the journalists and editors in their respective area/s of coverage], the greater the success in publishing the press releases despite the PR model used.

H1b: The stronger the news source's interpersonal factors [personal contacts and mutual trust], the greater the success in publishing the press releases, equally in both models.

II. *Sociodemographic factors*

H1c: The greater the relevant education (journalism or communications) of the PR agency's manager or worker, the greater the success in publishing the press releases, regardless of the PR model used.

H1d: In both models, there will be no difference in the connection between the gender of the PR manager or worker and the success rate in having the newspaper publish the PR releases.

H2: Means for transmitting press releases will affect the success of their publication.

III. *Technical, online, interpersonal, accompanying, exclusive, news content and other means*

H2a: The greater the number of technical means the PR agency uses simultaneously for transmission, the greater the publication success rate – despite the PR model used.

H2b: The more PR agencies, journalists and editors prefer to use traditional means [phone, fax] rather than online means [e-mail], the greater the publication success rate – despite the PR model used.

⁶It was not possible to perform a statistical analysis comparing Pearson correlation coefficients (the values listed in parentheses), rendering significance. Moreover, several of the visual differences do not look significant. However, as the rankings between the two PR models were consistent throughout, it is most probable that the overall ranking difference is significant, i.e., the connection between publication success and PI is greater than that of PA.

H3: Importance of press releases, their currency and usefulness will affect the success of their publication.

IV. *News factors*

H3a: The greater the press release's news importance, currency and usefulness, the more success it will have in being published – despite the PR model used.

H4: Text clarity of the press releases and timely transmission to the journalist will affect the success of their publication

V. *Professional factors*

H4a: The clearer the text and the faster it is sent to the journalist (within the deadline), the more success it will have in being published – despite the PR model used.

H5: Press releases' type of organization will affect the success of their publication

VI. *Organizational factors*

H5a: Press releases for nonprofit/government organizations within the PI model will have greater publication success than commercial organizations under the PA model.

METHODS

Quantitative Content Analysis of Press Releases

For each one of the 373 press releases and regarding each of the three newspapers, the PR agency person in charge of the specific item was asked to fill out a form listing: (a) which of 26 means (including "other") were used to transmit the release; (b) which of 22 subvariables (factors)⁷ influenced successful publication; or, (c) were responsible for lack of publication (mirror image of the same 22 subvariables). The huge number of press releases prevented the excessively busy journalists from filling out the time-consuming forms, so that only the PR agency professionals' responses formed the basis of the final independent variable categories listed earlier.

Quantitative Content Analysis of Published Newspaper Items

Each of the 575 news items appearing in the three newspapers were compared to the 373 news releases, based on the six dependent variable success elements listed earlier.

⁷Factors underlying successful publication of press releases: (1) professional experience and (2) academic education of PR agency manager, and (3) and (4) of PR agency practitioner; (5) PR agency years of experience; (6) PR agency manager's personal connections with the journalist and (7) with the editor; (8) PR agency practitioner's connections with the journalist and (9) with the editor; (10) mutual trust between PR agency manager and journalist, and (11) with editor; (12) mutual trust between PR agency practitioner and journalist, and (13) with editor; (14) PR agency reputation; (15) gender of PR agency manager and (16) practitioner; (17) important announcement; (18) updated/recent announcement; (19) announcement useful to the reader; (20) timely transmission to the journalist; (21) clearly written announcement; (22) other.

Scoring the Independent Variables' Degree of Success

The above second stage involved only the published items. However, to fully score publication success, press releases that were not published had to be accounted for as well. To that end, a special mathematical formula was developed with two parameters: 1. quantity (for each press release, how many items were published?); 2. magnitude (based on the six dependent variables' overall average score). In addition, four PR agency managers were asked to rate the relative importance of quantity versus magnitude (quality); the consensus opinion was 1/3 for quantity and 2/3 for magnitude. The final "publication success" formula not only enabled us to combine both parameters but also to compute how many press releases were and were not published, and of the former, how many times (in the three papers) – in each of the two PR models:

$$\text{Success} = [(\text{mean quantity}: 2.4364407) / 2.0546228 + 2 * (\text{mean magnitude}: 14.5909186) / 3.2880845] / 3$$

Note: Standard deviation – quantity: 2.0546228; magnitude: 3.2880845

FINDINGS

A preliminary note: in each of the following hypotheses findings we combined the subvariables in order to ensure that the analysis would not be overly complex and cumbersome. In all cases, the statistical results of the respective subvariables in each hypothesis were very similar, which enabled us to perform such a findings combination.

Only one part of H1 was supported. The relationship between the professional factors (experience of the PR professional; PR agency seniority; PR agency reputation), were statistically significant — strong for PI ($p < .001$; $r = .75$), moderate for PA ($p < .001$, $r = .51$), and also moderate for the hybrid model (once again: commercial, governmental and nonprofit) ($p < .001$; $r = .52$).

The relationship between the interpersonal factors (relations; mutual trust) were statistically significant — strong for PI ($p < .001$; $r = .70$), moderate for PA ($p < .001$; $r = .52$), and the weakest for the hybrid model ($p < .001$, $r = .40$).

Sociodemographically, educational level of the PR practitioner was significantly correlated to successful publication in the PI ($P < .001$; Pearson: 0.59) and hybrid models ($P < .003$; Pearson: 0.31), but not with PA. On the other hand, in all three models no significant correlation was found between the gender of the PR professional (agency manager or worker) and successful publication.

Regarding H2a, as expected, the simultaneous use of various transmission techniques (*offline*, *online*, etc.) was significantly correlated with increased publication success in each of the two models, but not in equal measure as hypothesized: PA ($P < .021$) had a stronger correlation (0.36) than PI ($P < .002$; 0.20). Here too the hybrid model scored midway between the other two ($P < .009$; 0.28).

The findings of H2b almost unequivocally did not support the hypothesis. The PI model displayed a significant *negative* correlation between use of traditional-technical means and successful publication ($p < .008$; $r = -.33$), but exhibited a significant *positive* correlation

TABLE 1
Organizational Factors: Average Mean of Success by Topic

<i>Area of Coverage</i>	<i>Type of Organization</i>	<i>Number of Press Releases</i>	<i>Success Score</i>	<i>Success Level</i>
Culture	Government	49	10	Maximum
Literature	Government	18	8.5	High
Environment	Government	29	6.5	Partial success
Welfare	Nonprofit	24	6.5	Partial success
Microeconomics	Commercial	21	6	Partial success
Consumerism	Commercial	28	5.5	Low success
Aviation	Commercial	22	4	Low success
Macroeconomics	Commercial	46	4	Low success
Food industry	Commercial	49	3.5	Lack of success
Telecommunications	Commercial	29	3	Lack of success
Automotive	Commercial	35	3	Lack of success
Agriculture	Nonprofit	23	0	Total failure

between online means and successful publication ($p < .004$; $r = .34$) — and not both positively correlated as hypothesized. Conversely, the PA model had no significant correlation at all for either traditional or online means. The hybrid model did show a significant correlation ($P < .015$) but only for online means (0.21).

Regarding H3, news content factors (item importance; novelty; usefulness — again, as chosen among all the variables by the PR office managers/account executives themselves for each and every PR release) were found to be positively correlated to success ($P < .001$), but unexpectedly not with the same strength in the two models — stronger in PI (0.78) than in PA (0.64). Here too the hybrid model (same significance) emerged in the middle (0.68).

H4 also presented a mixed picture. On the one hand, the professional factors clarity of PR message and timely transmission to the journalist were found to be significant ($P < .001$) but not in equal measure between the PI model (0.79) and the PA model (0.57). The hybrid model also registered significance ($P < .001$) regarding these professional sub-variables, but as might be expected, stronger than the above PA coefficients and weaker than those of PI.

The last hypothesis, H5, was almost completely supported: press releases regarding nonprofit and governmental organizations had greater publishing success than commercial firms, other than one nonprofit exception — agriculture (zero success) (see Table 1).

When looked at from the models perspective, PI ($N = 103$ press releases; 6.5 score) had a clear advantage over PA ($N = 137$; 4.0), with the hybrid model scoring in between ($N = 33$; 5.0) as could be expected. Precisely the same result was attained when testing for the variables' overall explanatory power (r^2) within each model: PI (0.77); hybrid (0.53); PA (0.49). By social science standards these are quite strong results, suggesting that the present study has successfully tested for most of the possible factors underlying press release publication success. In descending order of importance, these factors are: 1. news item's importance, novelty and usefulness; 2. writing style, and timely transmission (before deadline); 3. the source (except for educational level in the PA model, and gender; see Table 2).

TABLE 2
Correlation* Between Category of Variable and Success, by PR Model

<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>PI Model</i>	<i>PA Model</i>	<i>Hybrid Model</i>
Importance, novelty, and usefulness	0.77684	0.63783	0.67581
Text style and timely transmission	0.78833	0.56594	0.70117
Source characteristics	0.70787	0.53694	0.46236

* $p < .001$ for all results.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As the term implies, PR agencies are *agents* for others – they have no independent, substantive agenda of their own (other than doing the most professional job possible so that their client continues to employ them and perhaps even recommends their work to others). Thus, the findings and lessons of this study are as germane to organizations that employ PR agencies as they are to the PR professionals themselves, journalists and news readers. If the latter two groups constitute (at least part of) the audience of organizational strategic communication (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, Van Ruler, Vercic & Sriramesh, 2007), then the PR agencies are the “servants” of the organizations towards that goal, of course with all the autonomy that hiring professionals entails.

As such, factors such as experience and professional reputation of the practitioner/agency are critical. In turn, these enable the subtle use of interpersonal relations (“give and take”) between the PR professional and the journalist to contribute to successful publication. Experience also explains the greater success rate of professionally (i.e., journalistically) written items, not to mention proper timing in transmission (before the news deadline) and deciding the medium/media of publication. Finally, an understanding of what constitutes newsworthiness – intrinsically as well as its usefulness for the reader – is critical for successful publication.

In this context it is worthwhile noting the protest of Davies (2008), who claims that for many decades editors and reporters did use newsworthiness values in deciding which PR releases to publish. However, he argued, more recently such journalistic judgment has eroded in favor of stories and perspectives that serve others’ economic and/or political interests. Many of these are provided by organizational PR releases reporting on pseudo-events initiated by the PR practitioners. The accompanying photos further increase their success rate in this regard.

Davies (2008) finds further fault with PR organization of pseudo-groups that from time to time send “news items” to the media as if these are actually something noteworthy.⁸ These can be accompanied by pseudo-experts providing pseudo-proofs (through pseudo-evidence, e.g. poll data, and other forms of “research”) even though they have no expertise regarding the issues at hand. These are sent off on Sunday to fill the paper’s usual Monday news vacuum. The most

⁸For example, when in the 1950s the tobacco companies first came under public attack because of the cancer connection to smoking, they hired the PR firm Hill & Knowlton that set up two separate organizations: “The Council for Tobacco Research” and the “Tobacco Institute”. Their role was to defend the sale of tobacco through research and raise doubts as to the cancer/smoking connection.

common gimmick is to run an internet poll with a free cell phone or weekend hotel as a prize—and then the results are shaped into a “news story” to further the organization’s interests.

Similarly, for political clients a poll can be created, and then only the “positive” (for the client) results are offered in the press release. This can even be accompanied by fictitious quotes. In extreme cases, the political organization can manufacture a “pseudo-war” by creating “real news” based on a false premise. One example is the late 1990s American attack on a Sudanese pharmaceutical plant, claiming that it was manufacturing dangerous chemicals, in order to divert public attention from the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Given the seriousness of Davies’ accusations/revelations, future research with PR practitioners and journalists is called for in several free press countries, especially regarding pseudo-news, pseudo-events, and/or pseudo-evidence.

The “problem of time” and its ancillary consequences are also worthy of mention in this regard. In today’s hyper-fast news environment, even the serious journalist simply does not have the time to rewrite or even to fact-check press releases because getting out the story as quickly as possible has become a critical condition for journalistic success. The recent severe budgetary and staffing cutbacks among newspapers around the world only add to the remaining journalists’ time pressures, enabling PR practitioners with their own agenda to step in and “help” the beleaguered journalists.

These two phenomena explain several of our findings. First, interpersonal relations and trust between PR practitioner and journalist enable the latter to publish the PR product of the former with confidence regarding its general veracity and without much extra effort. It also constitutes the main reason why well-written PR releases correlate highly with publication success – the less the journalist has to do with the document, the greater chance of finding its way into the paper. Third, it explains why online techniques have a positive correlation with successful publication and offline have a negative connection – the faster the material arrives and the less retyping that has to be done (fax and paper demand retyping; digital transmission does not), the greater chance of publication. Fourth and finally, the centrality of speed probably explains in large measure the lack of correlation between gender and (in most cases) education on the one hand, and successful publication on the other. Journalists no longer care who you are or where you come from. As long as you can get the job done (in this case, providing worthwhile news material in very timely fashion), that’s all that counts when the journalists are stressed for on-time news production.

Still, the main general finding of this study is the large difference in publication success between the PI and PA models, with the former having a clear advantage. One reason is that PI-oriented PR agencies tend to have fewer clients than their PA counterparts, enabling them to widen the array of techniques and means of dissemination for each press release. Second, focusing on a few clients and topics leads to a better understanding of the specific subject area, and concomitantly more easily comprehensible PR releases on the subject. In order to differentiate between these two independent variables, future studies should be carried out controlling for number of clients or topic areas, to ascertain whether PI agencies are intrinsically more successful or whether their success is an artifact of fewer clients and/or fields.

Another reason for PI success, in turn requiring a second caveat that also demands further study, is the fact that the present PI findings are mostly a function of the culture subject area (Table 1). Newspapers have several permanent culture sections (books, theater, cinema, music, etc.) that obviously need constant PR input to fill up the news hole. Future studies might wish to neutralize this central topic area to see whether PI success holds without culture-related material.

A third factor behind PI model publication success is the type of organization. Whereas PA deals mainly with commercial firms, PI concentrates on civic-minded nonprofit organizations as well as government institutions. In most (not all) cases, these are perceived as having a greater impact on people's lives and society in general, so that journalists tend to publish more information regarding them than about their commercial counterparts. The findings here exhibited one exception to the rule that actually proves the rule. Agricultural press releases had no success, most probably because unlike education, crime, and other central social issues, agriculture is not normally perceived as important or particularly relevant to people's lives (barring major drought or other agricultural disaster). In the modern post-industrial and information age society, only 2–3% of the workforce deals with agriculture – as opposed to approximately 20% in manufacturing and the rest in services and information.

A possible fourth reason for PI's relative success is the fact that journalists and editors alike might feel that commercial companies (PA model) have enough money to pay for advertising their message whereas nonprofits especially (less so, government agencies) cannot afford to spend financial resources on publishing paid-for announcements. Thus, news practitioners may be more solicitous of nonprofit press releases whereas they may even feel (subconsciously, if not consciously) that affording too much free space to for-profit companies would undercut the financial base of their own newspaper.

Fifth and finally, corporate economic issues tend to be more complex and in need of in-depth investigation than those of public, nonprofit organizations – and the former as a rule do not interest the general public except in cases of corruption, economic crisis or environmental problems.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has looked at the research question from several new perspectives: PR agency professionals instead of in-house PR employees within organizations wishing to publicize themselves; comparison between the two dominant PR models (PI and PA) and a control hybrid model; statistical analysis of a large number of variables of different types (source of PR release, interpersonal relations with journalists, traditional-technical and new-technical means of transmission, substantive newsworthiness of content, type of organization as main subject of news item, clarity of writing and transmission timeliness); a special mathematical formula based on quantity and magnitude of items to determine degree of publication success; inclusion of two subject areas – automotive and environment – that have not been tested previously.

The bottom line conclusion is that the degree of publication success of press releases is dependent on the model used (PI is superior), and that there exists a hierarchy of success variables: the strongest can be grouped around news substance (importance, novelty and usefulness); the next level of influence revolves around journalistic elements (writing and deadline), and the weakest but still significant are source-related (PR agency) characteristics. These overall conclusions are highly relevant to the question that every relatively large scale organization has to grapple with: to do its PR in-house or outsource to a PR agency. We shall leave aside here the monetary question of which option is less expensive and focus on the substantive elements involved.

If *news substance* is the most important overall variable, then the question of agency vs. in-house is less critical than one might have thought. The first and foremost PR consideration

for the organization is to produce news of substance – not something that either an in-house PR department or an external PR agency can generate by themselves. Nevertheless, the fact that *journalistic* elements as well as some *PR agency practices/techniques and demographics* were found to be significant, does suggest that organizations have some homework to do when it comes to the specific PR agency hiring decision.

What remains open to future research is the question of whether the same PR agency success variables found here are also germane to in-house PR departments. On the surface, this may seem self-evident but there are a few other elements that might influence PR work differently. For example, journalists might perceive in-house press releases as less reliable or useful than PR agency communiqués. Conversely, in-house PR information could be seen as more well-informed, as the in-house PR workers have greater long-standing experience with the field, compared to many PR agency professionals who tend to be more subject-area “generalists.” Moreover, in-house PR professionals might have greater access to inside information and upper level management, thereby lending greater weight to their public relations information. Finally, there might be differences in the comparison between external vs. in-house PR, depending on whether each employs a PI or PA approach.

Any such future research should also add a few more variables in order to attempt approaching 100% explanatory power: size of the PR firm’s client (i.e., the client organization); PR practitioners’ previous experience in journalism; possible connection between cross-ownership of news media and publication success, especially regarding for-profit institutions; and given the suggestive comments regarding the “problem of time”, one could also test staff size of the newspaper (or any medium) as another variable. Future studies could also focus on Audio News Releases (primarily for radio and the internet) and Video News Releases (for TV and the internet), i.e., to determine whether the results herein are relevant to successful publication in nontextual media as well.

This brings us to the next point – future studies could attempt to analyze overall publication success from the perspective of the journalists themselves, despite the logistical difficulties in trying to get busy news people to take the time and fill out detailed questionnaires etc. Do they view publication success variables in similar fashion to PR professionals? Might there be differences of perspective between journalists dealing with soft news (consumerism; culture)⁹ and hard news (economics; corporate crisis vis-à-vis consumers; etc.), or between online versus traditional news journalists?

The present study is based on one country: Israel. It is thus exploratory but one cannot generalize the findings and conclusions here until similar studies are undertaken in other countries with somewhat different PR and/or journalistic cultures and practices. Indeed, the Israeli newspapers analyzed here are all national; it needs to be seen whether the same variables hold true for local/municipal/regional media as well.

Finally, and perhaps most important, with the increasing use of the two more advanced PR models – two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical – the time is probably ripe for carrying out a study similar to the present one, but this time comparing all four models together or at least the last two. Here too the nature of the client organization and its corporate/organizational

⁹Although it is true that not every “consumer” or “cultural” news item can be classified as “soft news,” e.g., mass poisoning due to a poorly manufactured drug or food, or death of a major cultural personality, in almost all such cases this type of news is not initiated by the PR practitioner and when the PR releases make their way into the news, it is already within the “hard news” framework set by the journalists.

culture is critical – whether open or secretive – and this too may have a differential expression in depending on whether its strategic PR is performed in-house or through an external PR agency.

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APPENDIX 1 Summary of Independent Variables

	<i>Subcategories</i>	<i>Independent Variable</i>
Professional Factors	Professional experience of Office* Manager - OM Professional experience of Account Executive - AE Years of experience of the agency Agency's reputation	#1 Press Release Source
<i>Sociodemographic Factors</i>	Gender of OM Gender of AE Academic Education of OM Academic Education of AE	
<i>Interpersonal Factors</i>	Personal relationship of OM with journalist Personal relationship of OM with editor Personal relationship of AE with journalist Personal relationship of AE with editor Mutual trust between OM and journalist Mutual trust between OM and editor Mutual trust between AE and journalist Mutual trust between AE and editor	
<i>Traditional-Technical Factors</i>	Telephone Fax Beeper Messenger/letter	#2 Means Employed When Transmitting the Press Release to the Paper
<i>Online Factors</i>	Email PR release Online forum — additional info online to answer journalist's questions	
<i>Interpersonal Factors</i>	Face-to-face — oral communication Meals - breakfast/lunch Personal connections Pressure/reminders Threats/demand to talk with the editor Follow-up	
<i>Accompanying Factors:</i>	Picture/graph/figure Slides	
<i>Aids</i>	Sample	
<i>Additional Means</i>	Trips abroad Hotel lodging Receiving a product	
<i>News Factor</i>	Scoop/Exclusive	

(Continued)

APPENDIX 1
(Continued)

	<i>Subcategories</i>	<i>Independent Variable</i>
<i>Newsworthiness Factors</i>	Importance of news item Novelty of news item Usefulness (to readers) of news item	#3 Importance, Novelty and Usefulness of the Press Release
<i>Professional Factors</i>	Clarity of writing Meeting journalist's deadline	#4 Clarity of News Writing and Timely Transmission
<i>Organizational Factors</i>	Commercial, for-profit company Governmental institution Nonprofit organization	#5 Type of Organization Covered in Press Release

*This study differentiated between two roles in the PR agency: Account Executive (the PR professional who writes the press release) and Office Manager.