

Social media

[Media](#), [Social Media](#)



The impact of newsroom changes and the rise of social media on the practice of media relations * Timothy E. Bajkiewicz, , , * Jeffrey J. Krausb, * Soo Yeon Hongc * a Broadcast Journalism, School of Mass Communications, Virginia Commonwealth University, 901 W. Main Street, Room 1149D, Richmond, VA 23284-2034, United States * b Public Relations, Virginia Community College System, United States * c Public Relations, School of Mass Communications, Virginia Commonwealth University, United States * <http://dx.doi.org.proxy1.lib.umanitoba.ca/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.05.001>, How to Cite or Link Using DOI * Permissions & Reprints Abstract Recent changes in American media have resulted in direct impacts on the work of PR professionals, from newsroom reductions in traditional media outlets to the rise of social media. This study examines changes in the media relations dynamic with qualitative, in-depth interviews from 12 PR professionals in a medium, eastern U. S. city. Findings include PR professionals doing less traditional media relations, mostly attributable to downsized newsrooms, and frustration with the resulting dearth of institutional knowledge, influx of young, inexperienced reporters, and shallow stories. While participants see opportunities to inject unfiltered messages in media, overall they value reporter relationships and using social media in communication with them and in their job. Although new media are seen as one more task on an already very full PR plate, participants acknowledge their importance and growing relevance. Overall, PR professionals see their and the industry's future including both traditional and new media. Highlights – Traditional media changes and rise of social media are affecting PR media relations. – Qualitative analysis of 12 PR practitioner interviews in medium northeast U.

S. city. â-º Downsized newsrooms have PR professionals doing less traditional media relations. â-º Reporter relationships still valued; using social media to communicate with them. â-º PR future is mix of traditional and social media. Keywords * Media relations; * Social media; * New media; * Journalists; * Qualitative; * Interviews; * Newsrooms

1. Introduction As go media so go media relations, widely viewed as critical for communicating important messages to various publics (Motion & Weaver, 2005) with information subsidies that meet journalists' and organizations' needs (Turk, 1985). As social media's star has risen — almost half of American adults used a social networking site in 2009 (Smith, 2009) — America's traditional news' star has plummeted, with a 43% newspaper ad revenue drop since 2006 and \$1.6 billion in lost reporting and editing due to cutbacks (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010). Shrinking newsrooms and pressure to publish online immediately have led to what Davies (2008) termed “churnalism:” Journalists vetting less and aggregating more. Media relations ties between PR practitioners and journalists have changed little for the past 23 years (Supa & Zoch, 2009), suggesting viable and valuable relationships. New, especially social, media have enhanced PR practice; however, PR practitioners rate traditional media as more accurate, credible, and ethical than social media or blogs (Wright & Hinson, 2010), providing support for continued PR/journalism relationships. This study qualitatively investigates PR practitioners' perceptions regarding their media relations efforts with journalists considering (a) cutbacks in traditional newsrooms and (b) social media tools, aspects which published research have not addressed to date.

2. Method Qualitative, in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 PR

professionals (equally from profit, non-profit, and government) in summer 2009 in a medium-sized, eastern U. S. city with one daily newspaper, several weeklies, and five TV network affiliates that have all experienced typical newsroom cutbacks. Eight females and four males participated; professional experience ranged from one to 20 years; seven have 10 or more years. Each in-person or telephone interview lasted about 45 min. Transcription resulted in 120 pages of single-spaced text. Analysis followed an exploratory grounded-theory, inductive approach.

3. Findings

3. 1. Media relations and cutbacks in traditional newsrooms

“ Relationship with a reporter” “ I am doing less and less traditional media relations” summarized what everyone said regarding their work with journalists. Despite this change, “ You’re better off having a relationship with a reporter. ” But for some new reporters, “ They don’t seem to have an interest in establishing the relationships. ” “ Siphon” One characterized newsroom changes as turnover, but then said, “ A turnover implies that someone else is being hired. It's almost like a siphon. The reporters are just leaving and no one else is coming in. ” In spite of the traditional PR/journalist adversarial relationship, “ They do seem to recognize that we do give a crap what's happening, not just because it affects our clients but because it affects these people we’ve worked with for a long time. ” “ Losing that institutional knowledge” Losing experienced reporters and their history with a practitioner's organization results in less effective messages. “ It's interesting when we have more institutional knowledge than the reporters to whom we are pitching. ” Another spoke about the effect on overall accountability, “ Being a former journalist, it scares the living daylights out of me.... We’re losing the opportunities for reporters to have

the time and the resources to dig... and to challenge PR people. Is this accurate? Is this right? " " Surface coverage" Fewer reporters with that knowledge have led to shallow client stories. " Without that background and without those contacts, and the information beyond what we provide them, we're seeing a lot less in-depth stories and a lot more surface coverage. " One called the situation a " fine line" for PR people, saying, " It's hard enough to try to sell a story without trying to teach a reporter at the same time, especially when it's not your job. " " Print it verbatim" Fewer, younger reporters pressured to publish immediately (usually online) has created a dream media relations scenario. " So when you send them a press release they almost print it verbatim because these reporters do not have the time to do the digging. " Another said, " If (the reporters) had been on the job a day, it was surprising. They had very little knowledge about (the client), and what elements make a good story. We could feed them anything. " 3. 2.

Media relations and social media tools Using social media with reporters. Several said they communicate with local and national reporters using social media. " I feel like it's more effective. I feel like there's a clearer line of communication. " Before reporters were on social media, " I had almost no interaction with them. " A few said they would stick with traditional communication channels, like email and fax. " As long as that's still working for me, I don't have this huge push right now. " " Unfiltered message" Many said new media lets them skip traditional media relations channels, " As a means of reaching beyond the media, getting our message unfiltered to those folks. " Many also talked about the opportunities. " It's got to not just be a place where you tell your own story but where you can create a

community of people that tell it for you, even better than you do. " " You've got to use it" Participants expressed mixed feelings about integrating more social media into their job. " I like it more than traditional media relations because I am able to interact with that person who used to just be a page view. " However, " It's a full-time job in and of itself.... That stuff has to be maintained. " Another said there is no choice. " It's just a matter of getting into that mindset to remind yourself that you've got to use it. " " Balance" Everyone said PR's future will have a familiar feel. " You have to balance all of these new technologies with traditional media and traditional PR. " They also said that relationship flows both ways. " What may be a social media conversation or viral media story today becomes a traditional media story tomorrow when the press picks it up. " Merging old and new media is considered a necessity. " Before, you relied so much on traditional media. I do think it needs to be merged. I don't think you can have one without the other. " " Rude awakening" Participants said that by sticking with only traditional media relations, " I don't think you are going to be successful. " Another described social media as changing the PR's fundamental nature. "[Those] who think this is a fad or have yet to catch up to it are going to be in for a rude awakening.... Our focus on planning formal communication outreach efforts will be gone. " Another said social media now eclipses traditional media relations efforts. " It is now much less important that the story is in the paper or online and much more important that we are creating other relationships for [clients] that will also get them to what their business goals are. " 4. Discussion and conclusions The downward spiral of traditional news media is unraveling long-standing and mutually beneficial relationships

between PR practitioners and journalists, relationships this research found as valued. However, those relationships' long-term strategic value may no longer be as necessary. The upcoming generations of publics do not place the same value on traditional media and instead are comfortable with online news and social media. It will take decades, but as media morph into the post-legacy phase, media relations, as we understand it, could cease to exist. In the meantime, social media have found a welcome home with PR and media relations. Technology's timesaving is good for both parties. Journalists have always been a special public for practitioners, and now communicating with them is easier than ever and takes on a richer dimension. While posting online to a journalist will never replace personal contact, online media relations conversations occur on multiple levels that go beyond press release information, including personal comments and online references. PR professionals must include media relations as part of their online strategy and continue strong relationships with relevant journalists, including keeping an eye on the health of news outlets' parent companies. Besides "friending" the local reporter, practitioners should also look for synergies with that news organization's online and social media strategy. Media relations may now reflect the 21st century, but relationship building and solid information remain trade standards.