Meeting the media: Toward an interpersonal relationship theory between the public relations practitioner and the journalist

Jeremy Langett, Lynchburg College, Virginia, USA

Abstract

The relationship between journalist and public relations professional is of vital importance to organisations seeking credibility through publication of their newsworthy stories in third-party media outlets. While general public relations practices emphasise tactical execution as central to receiving publication of organisational news in both traditional and new/digital media, this article focuses on the interpersonal discourse between journalist and public relations professional that facilitates media relations activities. Through analysis of a dialogic, social and behaviourist perspective of media relations discourse, the journalist–public relations relationship is theorised as a relational dialectic imbued with tensions requiring negotiation for mutual benefit between the professionals. Acceptance of the ongoing interplay of interpersonal dynamics between public relations practitioner and journalist discontinues the perception of a one-sided, objective understanding of dialogue and opens the possibilities of the conversation as multidimensional. Public relations practitioners understanding an interpersonal relationship theory with the media will be better equipped to facilitate relationship-building initiatives characteristic of the practice.

Introduction

Public relations may be identified as a strategic communication function that facilitates and fosters relationships between an organisation and its wide range of publics (Baker 2000; McElreath 1997). Although contemporary public relations practitioners are afforded a variety of communication vehicles to deliver organisational messages, the acceptance and interpretation of these messages is left to a targeted – yet sceptical – public that has suffered from an ongoing attention crisis and an unscrupulous corporate climate. Lacking credibility and a genuine authenticity, messages imposed by organisations are considered by consumers as "one-sided" and "often misleading" (Ries & Ries, 2002, p. 11). Organisations seeking to affirm their validity within public perception must rely on third-party endorsements through media publications that can share the organisational narrative with an audience. The implementation of an organisation's narrative published in media, however, presents an uncertain and intriguing relational dialectic between organisation and media publication.

Grounded in Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) interpersonal relations perspective, the dialectic unfolds into a multi-dimensional meeting between an organisation's public relations practitioner and the media journalist. This article identifies the interpersonal dynamics present within the meeting between public relations practitioner and journalist for the purposes of exploring relationship cultivation. Central to the cotemporary public relations practice, relationship cultivation is approached through a dialogic, social, and behaviourist lens to develop an interpersonal theory between public relations practitioners and journalists.

The centrality of media relations to the public relations practice

The identification, development and pitching of organisational stories to media outlets has been germane to the public relations discipline since Grunig and Hunt (1984) described "press agentry" as one of four models of public

relations (p. 29). Initially conceived as a "one-way flow of communication propagandist in nature" (Tilson and Venkateswaran 2006, p. 113), Grunig and Hunt's conception of press agentry serves a strategic organisational agenda that ultimately achieves a desired effect on its publics. This practice is reflective of Guth and Marsh's (2005) understanding of public relations as 'targeted communication' or Bahri's (2010) larger conception of strategic communication as an "approach [that] includes agreeing measurable communication objectives, evidence-based design and a cyclical process for planning, implementation and evaluation" (p. 1065).

Grunig (1993) further categorised the cultivation of media relationships as a "micro (or individual) level task of PR", which refers to the everyday responsibilities of public relations programmes to become an effective communication tactic for organisations. While initial micro-level public relations research focused primarily on persuasion and media effects, Grunig argues that contemporary public relations effectiveness is most notably of "symmetrical dialogue" between an organisation and its various publics (p. 165). The idea of establishing a symmetrical dialogue has filtered into a variety of contemporary academic and trade journals addressing strategic communication initiatives ranging from media relations to crisis communication (Dimitriu 2012; Domke 2000; Men & Tsai 2012).

In addition to traditional media avenues, symmetrical dialogue has become a primary focus in new and digital media platforms that assist to liberate the communication environment (Eyrich, Padman & Sweetser 2008; Smith 2011; Wright & Hinson 2008). Journalistic boundaries – once fashioned by editorial boards, subscriptions and a one-to-many communication channel – are now ruptured by social networking and citizen reporting. Seeking credibility within the Information Age, journalists are encouraged to "acknowledge that they are no longer gatekeepers…but need to listen, ask questions and be genuinely open to what our readers,

listeners, and watchers tell us is important" (Skoler 2009, p. 39). Proffering the benefits of a two-way symmetrical dialogue, Feighery (2011) cites Grunig's (2009) argument that social media are well-suited to facilitating the goals of two-way symmetrical communication: listening, learning, sustaining dialogue, cultivating relationships, and being socially responsible. By utilising public venues for self-criticism, Hass (2006) contends that journalists indicate a capability for self-improvement and earn trust among audiences inclined to criticise perceptually sub-par reporting (Hass, 2006).

Despite the changing and dynamic media landscape, communication scholarship continues to observe value in cultivating relationships with reporters and journalists for the purposes of press agentry benefits. Cunningham (2010) avoids prioritising traditional or new media channels for information delivery but does differentiate the two models as requiring separate strategies for effective communication. The traditional media strategy perceives audiences as consumers of a monologic message while audiences of new media strategy are perceived as "prosumers", as they both consume and produce messages that are further broadcast into social networks (Cunningham 2010, p. 111). While at first glance communicators may believe new media are "compromising the efficacy of the message", Cunningham (2011) suggests that "strategic communicators, in reality, never controlled the messages…print and broadcast media outlets and other 'mediators' have always interpreted and reframed messages for media consumers" (p. 111).

Although sea changes in the current news industry portend enormous challenges for media conglomerates across the globe, the wealth of information channels provide audiences – including strategic public relations practitioners – with an increased opportunity to engage, interact and pitch one another stories for publication. Whether the venue of publication is online, in print, mediated or simply re-presented, the underlying interpersonal theory grounding media relations may uncover opportunities for effective story pitching and reception in a media-agnostic

environment, leading to an enhanced credibility of an organisational narrative.

Dialogue and public relations

Waters, Tindall and Morton (2010) assert that "the activities of media relations, including pitching content to reporters, are staples of the public relations industry" (242). The focus of media relations – interactions between public relations practitioner and journalist – has resulted into a discussion of traditional and new media strategies seeking to inform the public about an organisational campaign or objective (Howard & Matthews 2006). While each variety of interaction between public relations practitioner and journalist may be analysed through a technological or mediated lens, the interpersonal relationship grounded in dialogue is of essential importance to a basic understanding of the public relations practitioner–journalist dialectic.

Although much public relations research focused on dialogue is influenced by Grunig and Hunt's (1984) two-way symmetrical model, Stoker and Tusinkski (2006) challenge the supremacy of this paradigm as the penultimate approach to dialogic public relations. Cautioning that two-way symmetrical discourse often leads to "quid-pro-quo" relationships, Stoker and Tusinkski champion a "distribution" model that "ignores merit and treats all receivers justly and without bias" (p. 162). Echoing the warning of overreliance on a two-way symmetrical dialogue model, Pieczka (1997) pronounces Grunig and Hunt's model as "utopian" and Van der Meiden (1993) suggests that the two-way model requires organisations to forfeit objectives that help them survive in a competitive market.

The idea of public relations as a dialogic practice may seem self-evident due to its relationship-building and interactive activities, however Kent and Taylor (2002) acknowledge that the term "dialogue" is omnipresent within public relations literature and used with little clarity (p. 24). Rather, the overarching idea of "interpersonal relationships" is seen as influencing the outcome over media relations efforts (Shin &

Cameron 2003; Yoon 2005; Waters, Tindall & Morton 2010). Given the obscurity of defining dialogue in a modern context, an academic investigation of this concept may be approached in communication philosophy and integrated into a larger public relations context.

Philosophical conceptions of dialogue in communication research have been defined through several traditions that are recognised and accepted by the discipline's premier scholars. Martin Buber (1970) conceives of dialogue as a form of human meeting that maintains the potential to enlarge and enhance the other person. Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of dialogue may be summarised as "a cultural form of human knowing" while Hans Georg Gadamer's conception of dialogue specifies a "textual understanding and interpretation" (as cited in Cissna & Anderson, 1990, pp. 125-127). While each conceptualisation of dialogue merits a scholarly investigation, Buber's account of the dialogic idea resonates within the context of interpersonal communication and is salient to a public relations practitioner and journalist professional dialectic. Initiated before words may even be spoken, Buber asserts his understanding of dialogue through the following quotation:

> There is a genuine dialogue – no matter whether silent or spoken – where each of the participants really has in mind the other…and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them. (1970, p. 19)

Buber posits two modalities of human relationships that further his conceptualisation of dialogue: the "I-Thou" and the "I-It," which describe scenarios of conversational discourse – the former modality referring to discussion between human beings, while the latter referring to a conversation between a depersonalised self and a dehumanised other (Kaplan, 1998, p. 35).

The dyad between public relations practitioner and journalist may result in what Kaplan (1998) describes as an "instructional learning machine", which is defined as "the transmission of information and of certain

3

skills" (p. 36). As opposed to an "educational learning machine", defined as "human growth that can only take place when humans are interacting with one another", instructional learning is a depersonalised process that may be accomplished by synthetic mechanisms (Kaplan 1998, p. 36). Accordingly, public relations practice recognised as "instructional" rather than "educational" will seemingly neglect what Curtin (1999) describes as an integral facet of the successful public relations practice: "cultivating and maintaining personal relationships" (p. 12). In the rapid world of public relations, Kaplan (1998) argues the cultivation of personal relationships is askew to modern patterns of socialisation, as individuals today have "contacts, connections and clients" more often than "friendships" (p. 38). However the degree of interpersonal relationship – characterised either by Buber's level of modality or Kaplan's instructional/educational learning – raises ethical questions of a dialogic public relations.

Ethical boundaries of dialogic public relations

Although the idea of cultivating relationships between public relations practitioner and journalist leads to a successful communicative discourse between the two professionals, constructing a friendship between the public relations and journalism communities from a modern understanding crosses ethical boundaries necessary for objectivity to remain primary within the news industry. Prone to favouritism, ethical considerations of friendship are necessary to ensure journalism "serves the public good" and not the interests of a friend's representative organisation (Curtin, 1999, p. 12). Publication of organisational information that is not considered newsworthy is a breach of journalism's mission and code of ethics set forth by the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) (www.spj.org/ethics.asp). Interpersonally, an emergent friendship between public relations practitioner and journalist is subjected to the rules "defined by the society in which the

interaction takes place or by the individuals in a given relationship" (Cushman, 1977, p. 227). Viewed from this perspective, a pattern may emerge that standardises the degree of relational closeness between public relations practitioner and journalist, allowing rules to govern the social engagements between the communicators.

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) advances a code of ethics for public relations practitioners that guide social interactions with journalists and other audiences, intending to universalise what is considered "ethical" public relations practice (http://www.prsa.org). Despite its well-intentioned guidance, the PRSA Code of Ethics maintains a Western bias impractical for cross-cultural public relations practitioner – journalist dyads. Chia (2009) contends that in cases of intercultural public relations practice, varying levels of media influence and distinct cultural values shape what may be perceived as an effective approach to communication initiatives. Rather than simply "knowing other cultures' rituals, languages, social norms and values" (Chia, 2009, p. 41), effective intercultural public relations should focus on what Banks (2000) refers to as the "situational context of a learning exchange" (as cited in Chia, 2009, p. 41). Cognisant of how "cultural identity permeates the communication process" (Sha, 2006, p. 46), situational contexts such as discourse between a public relations practitioner and journalist are subject to a host of political, legal and cultural considerations unique to the dyad and the environment in which the interaction is occurring. Chia (2009) suggests a means to learn these considerations through the formation of cultural cohort groups that share members' understanding of public relations in situational contexts. While frameworks of varied cultural public relations practices are developed for the public relations classroom, insights gathered from the exercise may begin discussions of ethical guidelines for the cultures represented.

In addition to navigating codes of ethics within the public relations – journalist dialectic, Stoker and Tusinski (2006) address the ethical tension apparent in a symmetrical dialogue

approach to the point of favouring "dissemination" or "distribution" approaches between public relations and journalist (p. 156). Arguing that dialogic approaches to public relations uncover moral cracks and contradictions, prioritise reciprocity and limit freedom and diversity, Stoker and Tusinski acknowledge the value of difference in a public relations–journalist dyad as a means to recognise the integrity of a source (p. 158). Alternatively, the authors argue for a model of "reconciliation", which allows the public relations practitioner and journalist to "overcome difference without resorting to persuasion or dialogue" (Stoker & Tusinski 2006, p. 166).

The reconciliation model of public relations provides assurance of an uncompromised public relations and journalistic practice and accounts for the instances of possible conflict of interest between the parties. However, with studies suggesting that more than 60% of news content is derived from public relations materials (Sallot & Johnson 2006), these conflicts of interest or difference are resolved in some manner consistent with Kaplan's (1998) idea of mutuality, defined as "we do something together that neither of us can do separately" (p. 39). Uncovering the resolution of difference within the public relations–journalist dyad calls for an exploration of social perspectives that may offer insight into these interpersonal scenarios. Specifically, compliance-gaining, social systems and polyvocality each maintain implications for mutuality between public relations practitioner and journalist.

The social perspective: Compliance-gaining, social systems and polyvocality

The resolution between public relations practitioner–journalist agendas in a time of difference – as illustrated by Stoker & Tusinkis' (2006) reconciliation model – may be investigated through a social perspective. Leeds-Hurwitz (1992) describes the social as "events occurring between people in interaction", which explain the dynamic processes often unexplored in moments of interpersonal meeting (p. 6). Temporally

situated, a "social reality" is constructed from human interactions and not from any predetermined "set of facts existing to human activity" (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1992, pp. 6-7). As a public relations practitioner seeks compliance from a journalist to publish information pertaining to the public relations practitioner's represented organisation, an "unfurnished, ongoing dialogue in which a polyphony of voices struggle" transpires between the two individuals and exemplifies Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) concept of relating (p. 4). Characteristic of media relations, the journalist is presented with a "both/and quality" (Baxter & Montgomery, p. 4) of interaction with a public relations practitioner, which suggests the simultaneous needs of journalistic autonomy for breaking news and interdependence with public relations practitioners for effectively satisfying reporting assignments.

A journalist's selective use of public relations materials in one scenario and individual investigative reporting without public relations materials in another exemplifies Monge's (1977) social systems description as not having "a fixed, required structure but rather fluid, changing structures" representative of the interpersonal interactions within media relations (p. 21). Potentially influenced by occupational rhetoric, a need to fulfil the "both/and" (Baxter & Montgomery 1996, p. 4) quality of relating, or submitting to a dialectical tension present within the social perspective, journalists granting compliance to the publication of a public relations practitioner's organisational information is viewed from the social perspective as a natural result from the communal processes that constitute dialogic interaction.

As dialogue is initiated between public relations practitioner and journalist, the purpose of the communication may be reflected through the "art of the ask", the activity of requesting from the other (Simmel, 1999, p. 202). Consistent with social graces, Simmel posits that askers who incorporate statements such as "how are you?" have significant effects when seeking verbal compliance (p. 202). In accordance with politeness theory, the results of

Simmel's study reemphasises the idea of "positive face" as shown when others respect, like and approve of us (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 75). Although ancillary to the news agenda, the journalist revealing a positive face in response to a public relations practitioner's verbal politeness maintains a willingness to keep alive the public relations practitioner–journalist dyad for the possibility of compliance, as indicated by Simmel's findings.

In addition to the verbal art of asking, research concerning compliance-gaining effectiveness in relation to communicator image provides recommendations for public relations practitioners meeting face-to-face with journalists. Parrish-Sprowl, Carveth and Senk's (1994) study of sales effectiveness relates to the public relations practitioner and journalist dialectic in regards to the end-goal of gaining compliance, paralleling sales with the activity of securing coverage in a targeted media outlet (Laermer, 2003, xiv). Parrish-Sprowl et al.'s (1994) exploration of communication for sales effectiveness discovered that a "relaxed communicator style successfully predicted a strong communicator image", which positively affects compliance-gaining in the form of a sale (p. 306). Reflected in popular media relations texts such as *Full frontal PR: Getting people talking about you, your business or your product*, public relations practitioners meeting journalists to pitch an organisational story may assume a strong communicator image will positively affect compliance-gaining from a social perspective. While a competent journalistic focus should supersede public relations practitioner personality dispositions, professional courtesy grounded in politeness and interpersonal confidence during the pitch support public relations practitioner–journalist discourse and poise the relationship for potential compliance.

In contrast to studies revealing compliance-gaining strategies, Ifert (1998) provides an outline of characteristics displayed by individuals making requests that have a negative effect on gaining compliance.

Considered as obstacles, Ifert (1998) concludes the following ideas potentially impede compliance and are interpersonally detrimental to a transactional relationship: possession; imposition; inappropriateness; postponement; recalcitrance and a lack of incentive (p. 131). Examples of these obstacles presented within a public relations practitioner–journalist context may include a journalist's personal possessiveness of a media publication outlet; an overly imposing story pitch from a public relations practitioner; ill-timed or inappropriate organisational information; a delayed publication of information that renders once-newsworthy information irrelevant; an overall mistrust of the public relations community and a lack of personal or professional reward for a journalist's acceptance of public relations material. These examples – each ubiquitous within the public relations–journalism professional dialectic – demonstrates the difficulty of gaining compliance when facing interpersonal obstacles. Alternative to the social perspective, behaviourist approaches undergirding the public relations practitioner–journalist dialectic may provide additional insights into relationship cultivation.

The behaviourist perspective: Routine order and prescriptive approaches

While the social perspective engenders interpersonal relations between journalist and public relations practitioner as a dynamic interplay of polyvocal contradictions serving as a potential source for compliance, causal variables described through a behaviourist perspective attempt to explain compliance with predetermined notions of order, stability, and routine based upon findings from scientific inquiries (Bochner, 1992, p. 29). Further developed into theories and subsequently marketplace-appropriate strategies, the behaviourist perspective assumes "specific findings should accumulate into empirical generalisations" (Chaffee & Berger, 1996, p. 106). These generalisations provide a basis for explaining the compliance-gaining effectiveness of public relations practitioners with their journalist counterparts, described in popular public relations trade journals and web blogs.

6

Public relations trade journals and web blogs that offer information for effective media relations initiatives assume a relationship standard between journalist and public relations practitioner, often at the expense of recognising the polyvocality present during a dynamic social interchange. However, the ordered and prescriptive format of these public relations resources may help to advance guidelines of proper story pitching and shape future media relations protocols in an ever-changing media environment. A brief review of three contemporary media relations recommendation platforms may be beneficial to understanding the behaviourist perspective of the interpersonal dialectic between public relations practitioner and journalist.

The Good Pitch Blog (2011) recommends six fundamental principles for pitching media public relations materials, including: openness and transparency; respect; bravery; access and navigation; timing; and collective action. (http://www.thegoodpitch.com). A mix between personal characteristics and professional tips, the list is applicable for traditional and online media as well as abstract enough for universal application. In similar list fashion, Barone (2010) offers advice for organisations seeking media coverage by encouraging communicators to know their targeted news outlets, understand the mind of the reporter, value freshness, speak their [news outlet] language, find reporters on social media and know when to get in touch (http://smallbiztrends.com). Unlike *The Good Pitch Blog*, Barone's advice requires precise action rather than peppering a variety of personal characteristics into the public relations pitch. A third behaviourist-driven model of effective media relations describes a recipe for securing media coverage by suggesting to first take time to develop relationships with reporters, show appreciation with follow-up contact, maintain a confident and conversational personality, and disseminate topic-focused information (Schaumleffel 2006). The recommendations reflect some personality characteristics and also some professional best practices, leaving the reader with an armoury of tips and advice

for purported effective media relations activity.

Behaviourist perspectives of the interpersonal meeting between public relations practitioner and journalist offer a scaffolding of best-practice recommendations that may (or may not) resonate with the historical moment of the public relations pitch. Secondly, tips and strategies such as knowing the targeted outlets (Barone 2010) and developing relationships with reporters (Schaumleffel 2006) encompass multiple theoretical considerations that are steamrolled into one recommendation. Thirdly, a larger review of research related to media pitching reveals a plethora of suggested actions, tips and anti-advice that appear in a variety of publications both online and in traditional form; some of which contradict one another in appropriate media relations actions. With this consideration in mind, an interpersonal theory between public relations practitioner and journalist will fare best to expand beyond the popular behaviourist perspective and acknowledge additional traditions. However, recurring themes within behaviourist literature may be identified as primary to the public relations–journalist relationship and further expounded upon. Three such themes include content relevance, interpersonal trust and communicative skill.

Content relevance, interpersonal trust and communicative skill

Primary to the public relations practitioner–journalist dialectic is the sharing of news that is of strategic interest to the public relations practitioner and of audience interest to the journalist. The importance of content relevance – information pitched from the public relations practitioner that aligns with the agenda of the news publication and its audience – is central to effective media relations in both the traditional and digital environment (Barone 2010; Cotton 2011; Schaumleffel 2006; Smith, 2011). Not only does relevant news content drive the interaction between public relations practitioner and journalist, it also shifts attention away from the relationship dynamic of the interlocutors and toward the content itself. Despite the prevalence of any disagreeable personality quirks or unprofessional mannerisms, the relationship between public relations

practitioner and journalist is crystallised with a news story that serves both public relations and journalist ends.

In fact, Waters et al. (2010) argue that a role reversal of media relations has transpired given the increasing popularity of Help-A-Reporter-Out (HARO, see http://www.helpareporter.com/), the online platform and email list that enables journalists to offer information requests to a social network group. Networks – composed of general audiences and public relations practitioners – attempt to catch media placements by responding to journalist enquiries (Waters et al. 2010, p. 249). In this information exchange context, content relevance, and not interpersonal attributes, drives the relationship between public relations practitioner and journalist.

While HARO provides a faceless, content-driven exchange of information with a capacity to alter the traditional media pitch, it also marginalises the opportunity for trust-building, a second key theme pervasive in media relations literature. Dan Goldberg, health reporter for the *Statesville Record & Landmark*, asserts that the number-one item his publication looks for on public relations material is contact information so that sources can be vetted (as cited in in Schaumleffel, 2006 p. 57). Although anonymity may assist in objective exchange of information on platforms such as HARO, cultivating a relationship requires a responsiveness that agrees to participate in dialogue, leading the public relations practitioner and journalist into a relational dialectic. Unaccountable sources, an unwillingness to engage in follow-up discussions, or an overreliance on mediating platforms reduce the possibility of trust-building within the public relations practitioner–journalist dialectic and eliminate the potential for sustaining mutually beneficial relationships.

The development of trust between public relations practitioner and journalist may also be facilitated through a mutual understanding of the level of communicative skill required for an effective public relations practitioner–journalist relationship. Given what Feldman

(1961) describes as a long-standing tension between public relations practitioner and journalist due to the "self-serving" nature of public relations work, a minimal level of communication competence is necessary to earn respect between the two vocations (p. 36). In response to this feature of the public relations practitioner – journalist relationship, Wakefield (1987) observed that "PR employers put more emphasis on knowledge and skill in interpersonal communication, copywriting, and proofreading than they place on knowledge and skill of news release writing" (p. 9). With a proficiency in journalistic and interpersonal communication, public relations practitioners are poised to meet the expectations of journalists and subsequently earn credibility and trust as valued resources in the news-gathering enterprise.

Curtin (1999) asserts that while public relations practitioner and journalist skill sets are similar, the two professions maintain motivations that are "diametrically opposed – journalists are committed to serving the public interest whereas public relations practitioners serve corporate profit goals" (p. 65). Although the adversarial dynamic between public relations and journalist practice may appear discouraging, Curtin (1999) argues that public relations practitioners who cultivate a good relationship with journalists will be more likely to see their organisation's information materials utilised than those who do not develop a relationship (p. 66). Such relationships can be initiated through the appearance of a public relations practitioner's journalistic skill, the presentation of relevant story ideas rather than pre-packaged materials, and the relinquishing of control over what is published (Curtin, 1999, p. 67).

Forging a public relations practitioner–journalist interpersonal relationship theory
Despite the multitude of analytical findings and recommendations that suggest a certain interpersonal discourse will result in compliance-gaining within the public relations practitioner–journalist dialectic, the discursive event is embedded within a particular historical moment. As each communicative moment is unique, public relations practitioner–journalist

relations must operate from a "public background set of assumptions [that] reach out to one another using behaviors that are civil and keep the conversation going in the midst of difference" (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 76). Maintaining what Arnett and Arneson (1999) refer to as a "minimal common ground between interpersonal communicators" (p. 76) allows the public relations practitioner–journalist dialectic to continue even after a potential story idea is unutilised by the media. Although public relations practitioners may view this situation as unproductive for their organisation's public relations initiatives, the public ground shared between public relations practitioner and journalist allows future interaction between the two professionals and an opportunity to exchange information with each other once again.

Over time, interpersonal interactions imbued with an ethic of care between public relations practitioner and journalist yields trust. Consistent with the work of Nel Noddings (1992), continual trustworthy interpersonal experiences shape an attitude of caring, deepening the relationship (as cited in Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 241). As public relations practitioners and journalists grow their relationships through an ethic of care, the public ground of dialogic civility widens to encompass additional commonalities originally found only within the private sphere of discourse, and subsequently personalises the relationship. Operating within the bounds of ethical appropriateness, the personal relationship between public relations practitioner and journalist is valued for trustworthy interactions that generate productive news story ideas that are mutually beneficial for both professionals.

Conclusions

The interpersonal dynamics of the public relations practitioner–journalist dialectic compose a narrative structure that is supported by professionalism, integrity and dialogic civility. In contrast to a relationship based solely on emotional feelings, interpersonal interactions between public

relations practitioners and journalists work toward a productive goal of generating media content that is newsworthy and of public interest. This working relationship – capable of alteration, development and deterioration – is the foundation of the communicative exchange between successful public relations practitioner and journalist discourse.

While journalist compliance to utilise public relations materials within media publications may not be gained each time a practitioner pitches information, the narrative structure built on civility will enable future interaction between public relations practitioners and journalists. Reflecting Arnett and Arneson's (1999) notion of a guiding principle of "relatedness and not isolationism" (p. 241), the narrative structure embraces the tensions, contradictions and agreements of interpersonal discourse within the public relations practitioner–journalist dialectic and continues the conversation between the professionals. Primary to the shaping of a news agenda and essential to achieving third-party credibility for organisational messages, interactions between public relations practitioner and journalist model a productive interpersonal theory that represents not only the process of transmitting organisational information to the mass media, but also offers robust dialogic, social and behaviourist implications. Acceptance of the ongoing interplay of interpersonal dynamics between public relations practitioner and journalist discontinues the perception of a one-sided, objective understanding of this relationship and opens up the possibilities of the discourse as a vibrant interpersonal meeting.

References

Arnett, R. C. & Arneson, P. (1999). *Dialogic civility in a cynical age*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Bahri, P. (2010). Public pharmacovigilance communication: A process calling for evidence-based, objective-driven strategies. *Drug Safety*, *33*(12), 1065-1079.

Baker, S. (2000). *The theoretical ground for public relations practice and ethics: A*

9

Koehnian analysis. Unpublished manuscript, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

Barone. L. (2010). *How to win media coverage as an SMB*. Retrieved from: http://www.smallbiztrends.com.

Baxter, L. A. & Montgomery, B. M. (1996). *Relating: Dialogues and dialectics.* New York: The Guilford Press.

Bochner, A. P. (1992). Perspectives on inquiry II: Theories and stories. *The Handbook of Interpersonal Communication*, *14*, 21-36.

Brown, P. & Levinson, S. (1978). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Buber, M. (1970). *I and Thou*. New York: Scribner.

Chaffee, S. H. & Berger, C. R. (1996). The study of communication as a science. *Communication Overviews*, *15*, 15-19.

Chia, J. (2009). Intercultural interpretations: Making public relations education culturally relevant. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, *6*(1), 40-48.

Cissna, K. N. & Anderson, R. (1990). The contributions of Carl Rogers to a philosophical praxis of dialogue. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, *18*, 125-147.

Cotton, B. (2011). *Ten steps to undertaking a successful blogger outreach programme*. Retrieved from: http://www.edelmandigital.com.

Cunningham, T. (2010). Strategic communication in the new media sphere. *JFQ*, *59*(4), 110-114.

Curtin, P. A. (1999). Reevaluating public relations subsidies: Market-driven journalism and agenda-building theory and practice. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *12*, 53-90.

Cushman, D. P. (1977). The rules perspective as a theoretical basis for the study of human communication. *Communication Quarterly*, *1*, 30-45.

Dimitriu, G. R. (2012). Winning the story war: Strategic communication and the conflict in Afghanistan. *Public Relations Review*, *38*(2), 195-207.

Domke, D. (2000). Strategic elites, the press, and race relations. *Journal of Communication*, *50*, 115-144.

Eyrich, N., Padman, M. L., & Sweetser, K. D. (2008). PR practitioners' use of social media tools and communication technology. *Public Relations Review*, *34*, 412-414.

Feighery, G. (2011). Conversation and credibility: Broadening journalism criticism through public engagement. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, *26*, 158-175.

Feldman, L. (1961). City editor's image of a PR man blurred. *Editor and Publisher*, *22*, 36-37.

Grunig, J. E. (1993). Implications of public relations for other domains of communication. *The Journal of Communication*, *21*, 164-171.

Grunig, J. E. (2009). Paradigms of global public relations in an age of digitalisation. PRism 6(2): http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Praxis/Files/globalPR/GRUNIG.pdf

Grunig J. E. & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Wilson.

Guth, D. & Marsh, C. (2005). *Adventures in public relations: Case studies and critical thinking*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Haas, T. (2006). Mainstream news media self-criticism: A proposal for future research. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *23*, 350-355.

Howard, C. M. & Matthews, W. K. (2006). *On deadline: Managing media relations*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland.

Kaplan, A. (1998). *The conduct of inquiry: Methodology for behavioral science*.Scranton, PA: Chandler Publishing Company.

Kent, M. L. & Taylor, M. (2002). Toward a dialogic theory of public relations, *Public Relations Review*, *28*, 21-37.

Ifert, D. E. (1998). Understanding obstacles preventing compliance: Conceptualization and

10

classification. *Communication Research*, *2*, 131-153.

Laermer, R. (2003). *Full-frontal PR: Getting people to talk about you, your business, or your product*. Princeton, N.J.: Bloomberg Press.

Leeds-Hurwitz, W. (1992). Introducing social approaches. *Communication Theory*, *12*, 3-15.

McElreath, M. (1997). *Managing systematic and ethical public relations campaigns.* (2nd ed.). Dubuque, IA: Brown & Benchmark.

Men, L. R. & Tsai, W. S. (2012). How companies cultivate relationships with publics on social network sites: Evidence from China and the United States. *Public Relations Review*, *38*(5), 723-730.

Monge, P. R. (1977). The systems perspective as a theoretical basis for the study of human communication. *Communication Quarterly*, *27*, 19-29.

Noddings, N. (1992). *The challenge to care in the schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Parrish-Sprowl, J., Carveth, R. & Senk, M. (1994). The effects of

compliance-gaining strategy choice and communicator style on sales success. *Journal of Business Communication*, *4*, 291-310.

Pieczka, M. (1997). Understanding public relations. *Australian Journal of Communication*, *24*(2), 65-79.

Public Relations Society of America. *PRSA code of ethics*. Retrieved from: http://www.prsa.org.

Ries, A. & Ries, L. (2002). *The fall of advertising and the rise of PR*. New York: Harper Collins.

Sallot, L. M. & Johnson, E. (2006). To contact…or not? Investigating journalists' assessments of public relations subsidies and contact preferences. *Public Relations Review*, *32*, 83-86.

Schaumleffel, N. A. (2006). Hungry for media attention. *Journal of Parks & Recreation*, *1*, 55-57.

Sha, B. L. (2006). Cultural identity in the segmentation of publics: An emerging theory of intercultural public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *18*, 45-65.

Shin, J. H. & Cameron, G. T. (2003). Informal relations: A look at personal influence in media relations. *Journal of Communication Management*, *7*, 239-253.

Simmel, L. L. (1999). *The art of the ask: Interpersonal communication in tele-fundraising.* Boston: Boston University.

Skoler, M. (2009). Why the news media became irrelevant – and how social media can help. *Nieman Reports*, *63*(3), 38-40.

Smith, B. G. (2011). Becoming 'quirky' towards an understanding of practitioner and blogger relations in public relations. *Public Relations Journal*, *5*(4), 1-17.

Society of Professional Journalists. *SPJ code of ethics*. Retrieved from: http://www.spj.org/ethics.asp.

Stoker, K. L. & Tusinski, K. A. (2006). Reconsidering public relations' infatuation with dialogue: Why engagement and reconciliation can be more ethical than symmetry and reciprocity. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, *21*(2&3), 156-176.

The Good Pitch Blog. (2011). *Six pitch principles for clients and agencies*. Retrieved from: http://www.thegoodpitch.com

Tilson, D. J. & Venkateswaran, A. (2006). Toward a covenantal model of public relations: Hindu faith communities and devotional-promotional communication. *Journal of Media and Religion*, *5*(2), 111-133.

Van der Meiden, A. (1993). Public relations and "other" modalities of professional communication: Asymmetric presuppositions for a new theoretical discussion. *International Public Relations Review*, *16*(3), 8-11.

Wakefield, G. & Cottone, L. P. (1987). Knowledge and skills required by public

relations employees. *Public Relations Review*, *22*, 24-33.

Waters, R. D., Tindall, N. T. J., & Morton, T. S. (2010). Media catching and the journalist-public relations practitioner relationship: How social media are changing the practice of media relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *22*(3), 241-264.

Wright, D. K & Hinson, M. D. (2008). How blogs and social media are changing public relations and the way it is practiced. *Public Relations Journal*, *2*(2), 1-21.

Yoon, Y. (2005). A scale for measuring media relations efforts. *Public Relations Review*, *31*, 434-436.

Author contact details:

Jeremy Langett, Ph.D
Department of Communication Studies
Lynchburg College
1501 Lakeside Drive
Lynchburg, VA 24501