

---

# **Legislators' reliance on mass media as information sources: Implications for symmetrical communication between public information officers, public relations practitioners and policymakers**

---

**Judith M. White, The University of New Mexico**

**Matt Willis, Syracuse University**

**Rachel A. Stohr, University of Nebraska**

---

## **Abstract**

*The election of U.S. President Obama thrust healthcare reform onto the legislative agenda and sent public information officers and public relations practitioners scrambling to more effectively influence legislators in order to benefit employers and clients. In previous studies, legislators placed mass media last on lists of sources preferred for informing policymaking decisions. This study replicates and extends previous research, filling a 20-year gap and focusing exclusively on healthcare policy information sources preferred by New Mexico legislators.*

*An Internet survey indicated legislators preferred to get healthcare decision-making information first from expert colleagues, second from constituents. Mass media ranked at the bottom of their lists of preferred sources, although legislators did not entirely discount media usefulness. Respondents also felt while media can help build consensus, they usually promote adversarial relationships between lawmakers and their publics. Synthesis of results suggests that those seeking to influence legislators should divide their efforts more evenly between authoring journalist information subsidies and building personal relationships with legislators they seek to influence.<sup>i</sup>*

## **Introduction**

Public information officers (PIOs) and public relations practitioners (PRPs) traditionally view media relations activities, such as providing news releases and other information subsidies to journalists, as staple

tactics for building audience relationships (Bauer & Bucchi, 2007; Calamai, 2008; Gandy, 1982). However, research suggests shifting to strategic communication models grounded in situational and excellence theories may be more effective in transmitting messages to target publics (Brownson et al., 2011; Grunig, 2006; Park & Rhee, 2010). Further, such theories, combined with empirical research, indicate that traditional media may not constitute preferred channels for information transfer between particular organisations and their stakeholders. Such research implies a need for PIOs and PRPs to focus their energy on less media-centric communication tactics, including embracing more interactive channels, such as web-based social media, along with older tactics, such as personal contacts (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009; Macnamara, 2010).

State legislators constitute important stakeholders for policy issues. Reaching state legislators involves understanding source and media preferences. The election of U.S. President Barack Obama forced healthcare reform onto the public agenda and caused PIOs/PRPs to grapple with affecting policy debates. Legislators, on the other hand, must negotiate to achieve majorities; to do so, they seek information from developed policy networks embedded in institutional interests, defying conceptualisations of policymaking as linear or incremental (Hirasuna & Hansen, 2009). Legislators use mass media to access job-related information, but such media use may reflect individual attitudes toward media, such as viewing media either as adversaries or

as consensus agents (Kral, 2003; Riffe, 1988, 1990). Legislators, for example, consult local media for information about particular legislative issues, but many of them believe news stories contain inaccuracies and partisan slants (Kral, 2003). Research indicates that media and legislators share complex relationships (Dyer & Nayman, 1977; Fico, 1984; Fogarty & Wolak, 2009). Thus, it becomes important that PIOs and PRPs understand information-seeking preferences and predispositions of legislators when attempting to craft media-use strategies: “Taking a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach when delivering information to policy makers may be less effective than communicating information [based on policymaker preferences and attitudes]” (Brownson et al., 2011, p. 8).

Policy subject matter also influences legislators’ source/media preferences. For example, legislators’ use of institutional research about policy issues depends on such factors as information volume, clarity, format, delivery and relevance to legislation considered (Kirst, 2000; Sorian & Baugh, 2002). Swamped by large numbers of research reports and daunted by their length, legislators want bullet-points and charts (Sorian & Baugh, 2002). Legislators focus on research shortcomings and react only to those reports which are timely with regard to legislative agenda; such focus reflects disconnects with scientists and policy researchers who “dumb down” reports and spend extended periods working on “long-term solutions to systemic problems that do not seem pertinent to the ‘issue of the month’” (Sorian & Baugh, 2002 p. 272). Core public relations principles, including audience targeting and use of preferred delivery methods, seem especially relevant to reaching legislators with research (Kirst, 2000; Sorian & Baugh, 2002). With healthcare policy topping legislative agenda, studying legislators’ information sources and delivery preferences should be a research priority. However, while there are numerous studies of legislators’ media use as it informs policymaking in general, no studies were

uncovered specifically linking legislator access to healthcare policy information and source/media use. Thus, this study sought both to replicate relevant aspects of previous studies and to extend research to focus on information preferences for current healthcare policy decision-making.

PIOs/PRPs need to understand information-seeking preferences of policymakers in order to craft effective message strategies and delivery tactics (Brownson et al., 2011). The current investigation suggests directions for PIOs/PRPs to build effective relationships with policymakers and influence decisions about state healthcare law.

## Background

PIOs/PRPs target publics about specific issues using strategies and tactics grounded in such constructs as situational theory, excellence theory, and agenda setting. On the other hand, ways in which legislators choose sources to inform healthcare policy decisions can be explained by constructs such as adaptive structuration and may be influenced by their individual characteristics.

*Theories impacting public relations information subsidies and relationship building*  
**Situational theory** posits that PIOs and PRPs target publics based on their active or passive communication as they progress through issue comprehension stages of problem recognition, involvement level, and constraint recognition (Grunig, 1989; Grunig, 1997; Grunig & Hunt, 1984):

Problem recognition is the extent to which individuals perceive that a situation has consequence for them, detect a problem in the situation, and begin to think about ways to solve the problem. Constraint recognition represents the extent to which individuals perceive obstacles, or barriers, in a situation that limit their freedom to plan their own behavior. Involvement is the extent to which an issue, problem, or situation has personal relevance to an individual (Werder, 2006, p. 3).

Empirical studies have validated the ability of the three issue stages of situational theory to predict communication activity levels among segmented publics; demographic characteristics of individual members of a public also have been found to contribute to such predictive ability (Hamilton, 1992). Goal-driven public relations communication strategies and tactics have been shown to be effective in influencing individual problem recognition and involvement behaviours (Werder, 2006).

Since every issue encompasses a number of different audiences of stakeholders, successful issue management consists largely of constructing specific messages targeted to each individual stakeholder group, using the sources and the media preferred by each group to get those messages across (Smith, 2007; Webster, Phelan & Lichy, 2006). Situational theory also has been combined with principles of symbolic convergence theory to design effective messages (Vasquez, 1993).

Application of the principles of situational theory to PIO/PRP communication with legislators suggests that practitioners need to understand ways legislator demographics, specific policy issues, individual progress through stages of issue comprehension, and preferences for message delivery influence legislator responses to public relations efforts. Such understanding should facilitate the design and communication of effective messages and potentially better enable practitioners to influence policymaking.

**Excellence theory** posits effective organisations solve stakeholders' problems and satisfy their goals, as well as the organisation's own. The principles of excellence theory dictate that an organisation perform an environmental scan to identify relevant publics, then communicate symmetrically with such publics to build high quality long-lasting relationships with them (Grunig, 2008; Kim & Grunig, 2011). Such public relations practice remains dynamic, inclusive, culturally relevant, and technologically innovative (Grunig & Grunig, 2010; Kim & Grunig, 20011; Sha, 2006).

Excellence theory critics call it overly idealistic or accuse it of neglecting the feminisation of public relations and the diversity of postmodern society (Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Hotlzhausen, 2000; Mackey, 2000; Toth, 2001). However, Grunig counters that in realistic settings, diverse groups protect and enhance their interests best through symmetrical practice, ensuring benefits to organisations and stakeholders (Mackey, 2006). Rhetorical approaches to public relations practice stress symmetrical models (Heath, 2000), and feminist values orient public relations strategists toward two-way models (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2000). Thus, excellence theory remains a valid lens for analysing PIO/PRP practice.

Drawing upon excellence theory, scholars, PIOs and PRPs agree the goal of successful public relations is to "build and then enhance on-going or long-term relations with an organization's key constituencies" (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 2; Bruning & Ledingham, 2000; Mackey, 2006). Satisfactory relationships comprise control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment, and exchange vs. communality; the best are mutually beneficial and symmetrical (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Specialised PRPs, including PIOs involved in health-related communication and/or non-profits, should adopt excellence theory's relationship approaches (Hirasuna & Hansen, 2009; Park & Rhee, 2010; Taliasferro & Ruggiano, 2010), combining relationship maintenance with strategic management (McDonald & Hebbani, 2011). For non-profit organisations, relationship management generates added value by building social capital for organisations, stakeholders, and society (Strauss, 2010).

Application of the principles of excellence theory to PIO/PRP communication with legislators suggests that practitioners should devote sufficient time and resources to acquiring a thorough understanding of the legislative environment, then focus on building relationships emphasising symmetrical interactions. Such interactions should employ traditional public relations tools such as information subsidies directed to media but

should not neglect both traditional means of interpersonal interaction and emerging technology facilitating such two-way exchanges.

**Agenda-setting** posits opinion leaders define issues publics should *consider* and media communicate agenda salience (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; McCombs & Shaw, 1976; McQuail, 1994; Swanson, 1988). Framing helps guide *how* the public should think about issues, providing context for opinion formation and discussion (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989; McQuail, 1994). Legislators are both opinion leaders and susceptible to influence by other leaders, often through mass media but also through other channels (Kral, 2003; Riffe, 1988, 1990).

In fact, the process through which legislators receive information and form opinions may be influenced more by constituents, expert colleagues, and fellow committee members than by media. "News media fare poorly in comparison with such sources" (Riffe, 1990, p.323), probably because legislators "do not have a particularly high regard" for the accuracy and objectivity of media reports on important issues (Kral, 2003, p. v). And while the media may attempt to set public agendas (Hays & Glick, 1997) and to craft issue frames, legislators also engage in agenda setting for each other and attempt to frame issues for themselves, their colleagues, the public and the media itself (Bell, 2004; Fico, 1984; Kral, 2003). Thus, legislators seek and receive decision-making information from many sources (Bybee & Comadena, 1984; Sabatier & Whiteman, 1985); media may not be the most important of these (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009; Riffe, 1988, 1990; Yanovitzky, 2002). Thus, empirical studies involving the agenda setting effects of media for legislators should caution PIOs/PRPs to employ public relations techniques in addition to information subsidies in their attempts to influence policymakers.

**Theories impacting legislator sourcing**  
Legislators are influenced regarding their preferences in opinion formation and information sourcing by the process of

**adaptive structuration.** Humans in groups create definitions and roles through actions that guide and restrict subsequent actions (Giddens, 1984). Based on adaptive structuration within legislatures (and resulting beliefs), legislators conduct information sourcing in an organisationally sanctioned manner and perceive media efforts accordingly. The adaptive structuration process in legislatures produces specific environments, affecting perceptions, beliefs and behaviours necessarily different from those of journalists, PIOs and PRPs; actors in this professional scenario may remain unaware of such organisational influences (Lariscy, Avery & Sohn, 2010).

**Demographic characteristics** of individual legislators and the allegiances they may produce also impact policymaking decisions about specific issues, as well as their opinion formation and information source choices. Political party affiliation continues to exert major influence in determining the policy priorities of legislators and predicting their voting patterns (Roberts & Smith, 2003; Wright & Schaffner, 2002). Some researchers posit that sincere articulation of distinctive ideologies by political parties results in the votes of individual legislators paralleling their party's positions (Barrilleaux, Holbrook & Langer, 2002). Research by other scholars, however, demonstrates party affiliation to influence policy decisions no more than one-half the time (Burstein & Linton, 2002).

Legislator gender also influences voting behaviours; female legislators tend to focus on 'women's issues', such as family concerns and access to healthcare (Poggione, 2004; Schwindt-Bayer, 2006; Taylor-Robinson & Heath, 2003). Other studies, however, show that all legislators zealously represent the interests of their constituencies (Swers, 2001). Ethnic/racial identification exerts a similar influence on legislative priorities and voting (Preuhs, 2006). Individual legislators' policy positions and voting behaviour are perhaps best seen as resulting from an intersectionality of party affiliation, gender, and ethnicity (Bratton, 2002; Cammisal & Reingold, 2004; Fraga, Lopez, Martinez-Ebers, & Ramirez, 2006; Simien, 2007).

Women legislators have been found to use email less than their male counterparts for receiving policy information (Cammisal & Reingold, 2004), but little differences have been found in use of mass media based on gender (Kral, 2003; Riffe, 1988, 1990). Similarly, no evidence exists in the literature that legislators' political party affiliation or ethnicity impact their choices of information sources. Thus, PIOs/PRPs may be well advised to seek to understand the impact of particular legislative cultures on the information source preferences of their members, along with influences of party affiliation, gender and ethnicity on policy prioritisation and voting records; understanding these influences may result in more effective public relations strategies and tactics and in greater impacts on legislative decision making.

#### *Applications to reaching state legislators*

State political cultures and levels of legislative professionalism moderate media's agenda-setting effects on policy; however, media may assist state legislators in collecting, assembling, interpreting, and prioritising environmental signals pertinent to particular policy decisions (Tan & Weaver, 2009). Such cultural and professional differences among legislatures influences the extent to which national and state newspapers may affect legislators' agendas; the latter exerts greater influence due to more extensive/intensive local-issue coverage and less local competition (Flowers, Haynes, & Crespin, 2003; Tan & Weaver, 2009). New Mexico's legislature ranks low in studies of professionalism, according to mathematical formulae including legislators' salary and benefits (New Mexico legislators serve as volunteers), time demands of legislative terms (60-90 days), and staff and resources (no staff) (Squire, 1992, 2007) and, perhaps as a result, ranks high in correlation between newspapers' and legislators' agenda (Tan & Weaver, 2009).

Professionalism has increased for U.S. state legislatures, but as New Mexico (NM) demonstrates, increases are not universal (King, 2000). Implications of greater

professionalism are different for *legislators* than for *legislatures*. For legislators, greater professionalism may mean an increased incentive to serve, to focus, and to master legislative skills; greater job satisfaction; enhanced re-election possibility; and reduced opportunities to pursue other employment. For legislatures, however, increased professionalism means longer average tenure for individual members, yielding a more experienced body; increased time for policy development and deliberation; and increased policymaking influence due to tenure and experience (Squire, 2007). However, a legislator's ambition for a prominent public career may best predict willingness to seek information about public opinion (Maestas, 2003).

Ranking media low on lists of preferred sources of legislators suggests gaps in perceptions/efforts among PIOs, PRPs and journalists (Kral, 2003; Park, Len-Rios, Hinnant, 2010; Riffe, 1988, 1990). The use of news subsidies by newspaper health journalists, for example, is influenced more by subsidy topic, their reliance on medical journals, and metropolitan location than by journalists' individual characteristics or concern about target audiences' information sources (Park et al., 2010). Such disconnects impact failures of journalists, PIOs and PRPs to influence legislators' information-sourcing behaviours.

PIOs' and PRPs' attempts to influence both journalists and legislators are hampered by the long-term negative reputation of public relations for deception and manipulation (Holba, 2006). Public relations' negative reputation reflects the supposed duality of communicative action between journalists, motivated by objectivity and professional ethics, and PRPs, serving corporate agenda at odds with the good of the commons (Habermas, 1989; Salter, 2005; White, 2012; White & Wingenbach, 2013). Such a dichotomy of belief and action is reinforced by adaptive structuration within professional organisational cultures (Giddens, 1984).

The dichotomy constructed between PRPs and journalists ignores the information-transfer role of a third professional group, PIOs. PIOs

are communication professionals within government agencies and educational research institutions who disseminate health/science information to facilitate decision-making within the public sphere (White, 2012; White & Wingenbach, 2013). PIOs are neither journalists nor PRPs, although they share educational experiences and occupational goals with journalists and a degree of employer advocacy with PRPs. Nonetheless, journalists and legislators may regard information supplied by PIOs as tainted by advocacy bias, not using it to inform stories or policy decision-making. Such prejudicial action defeats public relations efforts to engage in practice based on excellence theory comprising symmetry, idealistic and critical approaches, and managerial thrust (Grunig & White, 1992).

This study extends investigation of legislators' source and media preferences, most over 20 years old, none focusing on NM. Given aging data and NM's unique history, demographics and economics, study of source and media preferences of its legislators, correlated with attitudes toward media, seems timely.

Previous studies of legislators' information preferences concerned general policy decision-making information, with none focusing on acquisition of information about healthcare policy. Given the relevance of successfully transferring healthcare policy information to decision makers and the absence of this focus in the literature, this study exclusively covers sources and media used by NM legislators to inform healthcare policy decisions, regarding the following research questions:

RQ1. What information sources do NM state legislators prefer for input into healthcare policy decisions?

RQ2. What relationships exist between NM legislators' attitudes toward mass media and choices of healthcare policy information?

RQ3. What relationships exist between NM legislators' demographic/employment characteristics and use of/attitudes toward mass media?

The study also tested the following hypotheses:

H1: NM legislators regarding media as adversarial are unlikely to list media as important sources of healthcare policy information.

H2: NM legislators regarding media as agents of community consensus are more likely to list media as important sources of healthcare policy information.

## Methods

### *Study design, population of interest, and sample*

This study combined an Internet survey with a follow-up mail survey (Dillman's five-iteration method, 2000). Several survey scales measuring legislator attitudes and mass media use replicated studies in other states (Kral, 2003; Riffe, 1988, 1990).

Because the NM legislature has 112 members (70 in the House of Representatives; 42 in the Senate), a census of legislators in the last session was conducted. A census limits generalisability to other NM legislative sessions and to other state legislatures, but produces a comprehensive picture of legislator characteristics, healthcare-policy information sourcing, media use, and attitudes toward media and toward healthcare policy itself.

### *Data collection/analysis and response rate*

Because of a limited response to the Internet survey after five contacts, legislators not completing online surveys were mailed a copy. Legislators still not responding were telephoned and asked to complete the survey online. Despite multiple methods used to boost response rates, only 41% (46/112) of legislators responded (27, House, 38.6%; 19, Senate, 45.2%); however, this response percentage exceeds mean response rates expected for recent online surveys (Grava-Gubins & Scott, 2008; Sheehan, 2001).

All survey data were combined for statistical analysis in SPSS. Identifiers were removed before analysis.

## Results

### *Preferred information sources*

Respondents numbered in order of importance 13 possible information sources

(adapted from Kral, 2003; Riffe, 1988, 1990). Table 1 lists the percentages choosing each source as first or second preference.

**Table 1. Preferred information source for information on healthcare policy issues**

Source choice	Percentage of respondents – first choice	Percentage of respondents – second choice
<b>1. Expert colleagues</b>	34.8%	19.6%
<b>2. Constituents</b>	26.1%	19.6%
<b>3. Legislative staff</b>	10.9%	23.9%
<b>4. Research by universities, etc.</b>	10.9%	13.0%
<b>5. Members of relevant House/Senate committees</b>	8.7%	4.3%
<b>6. Interest groups</b>	6.5%	4.3%
<b>7. Grassroots organisations</b>	4.3%	0%
<b>8. Internet/web-based news and commentary</b>	4.3%	6.5%
<b>9. Newspapers</b>	2.2%	0%
<b>10. Television news and commentary</b>	2.2%	0%
<b>11. Radio news and commentary</b>	2.2%	0%
<b>12. Lobbyists</b>	2.3%	2.2%
<b>13. Ethnic associations</b>	2.2%	4.3%

### *Preferred method for receiving research reports*

Almost 60% of respondents preferred to access original reports about research conducted by universities, think-tanks, or other institutions, whether by U.S. mail (23.9%) or email (19.6%); from organisational websites (8.7%); or in scholarly journals (6.5%). Another 21.7% of respondents preferred personal contact by research authors (face-to-face, 10.9%; email, 8.7%; telephone, 2.2%). Finally, 19.6% preferred media reports, the majority consulting Internet/web-based sources over other media.

Just over half the respondents had used research from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Center for Health Policy (RWJFC) at the University of New Mexico (UNM) (13.0% frequently, 39.1% “once or twice”), even though the Center at NM’s flagship conducts and reports studies about state healthcare issues. The majority indicated receiving RWJFC information from original reports or through personal contact with report authors, rather than from mass media.

*Mass media’s usefulness as information source*  
Respondents were asked to rank the usefulness of newspapers, television, radio and the Internet with regard to receiving information about constituent concerns, public opinion, statehouse chatter and decision-making on issues, all focusing exclusively on healthcare policy (adapted from Kral, 2003; Riffe, 1988, 1990). Few respondents felt they “could not do their jobs” without mass media, regardless of channel.

However, for all channels and all subject matter, between 40% and 70% of respondents ranked mass media as useful to some extent (summation of extremely useful, moderately useful and somewhat useful categories for each channel and each topic). In contrast, across all channels and topics, some percentage of respondents felt mass media were “not useful at all.” Table 2 summarises ratings of mass media usefulness.

**Table 2: Media coverage of healthcare policy issues: Usefulness to legislators**

Coverage topic or issue	Could not do my job without it	Extremely useful	Moderately useful	Somewhat useful	Not at all useful
<b>Newspapers:</b>					
Constituent concerns about healthcare issues and policies	6.5%	21.7%	28.3%	6.5%	17.4%
Public opinion about healthcare issues and policies	0%	15.2%	30.4%	26.1%	8.7%
What is being said around the statehouse about healthcare issues and policies	0%	10.9%	30.4%	23.9%	15.2%
Input that informs my decision-making about healthcare issues and policies	2.2%	19.6%	21.7%	13.0%	19.6%
<b>Television:</b>					
Constituent concerns about healthcare issues and policies	2.2%	15.2%	30.4%	17.4%	15.2%
Public opinion about healthcare issues and policies	0%	10.9%	34.8%	19.6%	15.2%
What is being said around the statehouse about healthcare issues and policies	0%	4.4%	32.6%	19.6%	21.7%
Input that informs my decision-making about healthcare issues and policies	0%	13.0%	26.1%	15.2%	23.9%
<b>Radio:</b>					
Constituent concerns about healthcare issues and policies	2.2%	6.5%	26.1%	7.4%	28.3%
Public opinion about healthcare issues and policies	0%	6.5%	26.1%	28.3%	19.6%
What is being said around the statehouse about healthcare issues and policies	0%	4.3%	30.4%	15.2%	30.4%
Input that informs my decision-making about healthcare issues and policies	0%	10.9%	21.7%	19.6%	23.9%
<b>Internet/web-based:</b>					
Constituent concerns about healthcare issues and policies	8.7%	23.9%	13.0%	17.4%	7.4%
Public opinion about healthcare issues and policies	4.3%	8.7%	15.2%	23.9%	10.9%
What is being said around the statehouse about healthcare issues and policies	2.2%	21.7%	13.0%	23.9%	19.6%
Input that informs my decision-making about healthcare issues and policies	2.2%	26.1%	15.2%	15.2%	17.4%

### *Frequency of mass media use*

Legislators consumed different types of media at different frequencies but in general demonstrated recognition of newsworthiness of mass media. The majority of respondents accessed local newspapers or watched

television news daily. When daily access was combined with weekly access, a majority also watched television commentary, listened to radio news and accessed Internet news. Table 3 summarises respondents' answers.

**Table 3. Legislators' frequency of access for different types of media.**

Media-use activity	Daily	Several times/week		
		Sat/Sun	Never	
Reading local newspapers	65.2%	8.7%	0%	4.3%
Reading national newspapers	10.9%	30.4%	15.2%	19.6%
Watching TV news	60.9%	13.0%	0%	6.5%
Watching TV commentary	19.6%	39.1%	10.9%	10.9%
Listening to radio news	30.4%	21.7%	4.3%	21.7%
Listening to radio commentary	10.9%	32.6%	8.7%	28.2%
Accessing the Internet/web-based news and/or commentary	30.4%	34.8%	2.2%	10.9%

### *Attitudes toward mass media coverage*

Respondents indicated levels of agreement (Likert-type scale) with 22 statements about media's state legislature coverage (adapted from Kral, 2003; Riffe, 1988, 1990). Patterns of agreement emerged for statements 1, 3, 11, 13, 16, and 18; patterns of disagreement

emerged for statements 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21, and 22. Five statements (2, 4, 5, 8, and 19) showed bimodal distributions (nearly equal division along positive/negative lines). Table 4 summarises respondents' responses.

**Table 4: Legislators' attitudes toward news media**

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Local and state news media are sometimes critical of the actions of local public officials and local government.	30.6%	69.4%	0%	2.8%	0%
2. Local and state news media sometimes get involved in issues that are best left to the decision makers.	6.7%	30.6%	8.3%	30.6%	13.9%
3. Much of the investigative reporting by local and state news media is little more than snooping for sensational news.	27.8%	30.6%	11.1%	30.6%	0%
4. Local and state news media are a good source of information about the interests and concerns of community leaders and influential citizens.	0%	44.4%	8.3%	36.1%	11.1%

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5. Local and state news media seldom really reflect the public's concerns about local and state healthcare policy issues.	5.5%	33.3%	19.4%	38.9%	2.8%
6. In general, local and state news media help the public reach a consensus about which way to go on a particular healthcare policy issue.	0%	36.1%	16.7%	33.3%	13.9%
7. When there are opposing positions on issues, local and state news media generally do a good job of presenting both sides.	0%	16.7%	5.5%	58.3%	13.9%
8. By criticising proposals made by political leaders, newspapers get in the way of society solving its healthcare problems.	19.4%	22.2%	2.8%	44.4%	11.1%
9. Local and state news media reports about healthcare issues and policies are usually accurate.	0%	19.4%	16.7%	50.0%	11.1%
10. Local and state news media reports about healthcare issues and policies are usually complete.	0%	11.1%	5.6%	61.1%	16.7%
11. By criticising proposals made by political leaders, news media help to point out possible problems with such proposals, thus performing a public service.	2.8%	47.2%	19.4%	22.2%	8.3%
12. In presenting the news dealing with political and social aspects of healthcare issues, news media deal fairly with all sides.	0%	8.3%	11.1%	63.9%	16.7%
13. News media exert a direct influence on public officials/ legislators as media provide information, advice, reaction and even direction to such officials.	2.8%	47.2%	13.9%	30.6%	5.5%
14. News media work with public officials/legislators to set a news agenda that directly influences other officials/ legislators as well as the broader public of ordinary citizens.	2.8%	19.4%	13.9%	52.7%	11.1%
15. In the past, media coverage about healthcare issues has prompted me to take legislative action on the issue covered.	0%	11.1%	22.2%	47.2%	19.4%
16. News media serve as a check on government by keeping legislative actions in the open.	8.3%	44.4%	16.7%	25.0%	5.5%
17. News media help serve the public interest by analysing and explaining complex healthcare issues and policies.	2.8%	25.0%	13.9%	44.4%	13.9%
18. News media select the news that is important by providing only the information that reporters believe the public needs.	8.3%	41.7%	13.9%	27.8%	8.3%

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree
19. News media help legislators explain their views and actions to the public.	2.8%	38.9%	13.9%	27.8%	16.7%
20. Given certain circumstances, I would change my position on proposed healthcare policy legislation based my response to a media editorial.	0%	2.8%	13.9%	50.0%	30.5%
21. I have proposed legislation on healthcare policy based on information carried in the media.	0%	8.3%	0%	58.3%	25.0%
22. I have changed my position on legislation about healthcare policy based on information carried in the media.	0%	5.5%	0%	58.3%	36.1%

### Demographic data

Respondents were split between Democrats (45%) and Republicans (35%); 19% declined to indicate party affiliation. Respondents ranged between two and 25 years legislative service, with mean service tenure of 11 years. All

respondents were older than 31 years, with the majority (57%) clustering between 51 and 70 years old. Three respondents (7%) were more than 71 years old. Table 5 presents selected demographic characteristics.

**Table 5: Responding legislators' selected demographic characteristics**

Demographic variable	Response levels	Percentages of respondents
Political orientation	Liberal	25%
	Conservative	30%
	Depends on issue	22%
	Libertarian	2%
	Moderate	2%
	Progressive	2%
	Declined to specify	17%
Legislative tenure	First legislative session	13%
	Second or subsequent session	87%
Gender	Male	61%
	Female	20%
	Declined to specify	19%
Ethnicity	White/not Hispanic	48%
	Hispanic/Latino	20%
	Native American	4%
	Multiracial	2%
	Declined to specify	26%
Highest education level	High school diploma	15%
	Bachelor's degree	33%
	Masters' degree	24%
	JD degree	7%
	Declined to specify	31%

### *Correlations*

No statistically significant correlations emerged between respondents' demographic characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity, age and education, and other data collected. Neither were any statistically significant correlations found among political party, political orientation, media use frequency and agreement with statements about the media nor between respondents' first choice of healthcare policy information source and attitudes toward the media.

However, political orientation was statistically significantly correlated ( $p \leq .05$ ) with newspaper usefulness regarding constituent concerns ( $R=.425$ ) and regarding information informing healthcare policy decision-making ( $R=.350$ ).

Ratings of mass media *usefulness* regarding several issues were statistically significantly correlated with *frequency of use*. Newspapers' usefulness regarding constituent concerns and public opinion were correlated with reading local newspapers ( $R=.334$ ,  $R=.336$ , respectively,  $p \leq .05$ ). Television's usefulness regarding constituent concerns and decision-making information were correlated with watching television news ( $R=.425$ ,  $R=.379$ , respectively,  $p \leq .05$ ). Television's usefulness regarding public opinion was correlated with watching television news ( $R=.408$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ) and with watching television commentary ( $R=.503$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ).

Radio's usefulness regarding public opinion and statehouse chatter were correlated with listening to radio news ( $R=.343$ ,  $R=.344$ , respectively,  $p \leq .05$ ) and with listening to radio commentary ( $R=.424$ , respectively,  $p \leq .01$ ;  $R=.415$ , respectively,  $p \leq .05$ ). Internet usefulness regarding constituent concerns ( $R=.569$ ), public opinion ( $R=.674$ ), statehouse chatter ( $R=.512$ ) and decision-making information ( $R=.638$ ) was correlated at the  $p \leq .01$  level.

### *Factor analysis*

Replicating Riffe's study (1990), factor analysis was performed on statements reflecting (1) adversarial attitudes toward media (Table 4, statements 1, 2, and 3) and (2) attitudes toward media roles in building

community consensus (Table 4, statements 4, 5, 6 and 7), regarding media issue-dependent usefulness. Statistically significant correlations ( $p < .000$ ) were found among statements 1, 2, and 3 (Chronbach's alpha = .976) and among statements 4, 5, 6 and 7 (Chronbach's alpha = .998).

For statements reflecting adversarial attitudes toward media, three components were isolated using principal component analysis, with Eigenvalues of 8.966, 2.145, and 1.342, respectively, explaining 89.1% of total variance. For statements reflecting consensus-building influence of media, three components were also isolated, with Eigenvalues of 7.907, 4.301, and 1.426 respectively, explaining 97.4% of variance.

## **Discussion**

### *Findings*

Expert colleagues were the first choice of NM legislators as information sources for healthcare policy decisions, followed by constituents (**RQ1**). Mass media were listed last as first-choice policymaking information sources, tied with lobbyists and ethnic associations, while the Internet was chosen as a first information-source preference by just 4.3% of respondents.

Approximately 11% of respondents listed research by universities and think-tanks as their most important information source (number four in the ranked list of 13). More respondents (20%) preferred mass media for receiving research than general policy information, but a majority (80%) preferred to receive copies of original research reports or personal contact from researchers.

In summary, the first choices of NM state legislators for gaining information for decisions on healthcare policy are colleagues, constituents, staff, university research, and legislative committee members (numbers one through five, respectively, out of a list of 13). Traditional mass media ranked last on this list, with new media ranking eighth. These findings support studies from other states indicating (1) mass media are last among legislators' preferred decision-making information sources (Brownson et al., 2011; Kral, 2003, Park et al.,

2010; Riffe, 1988, 1990) and (2) subject matter of legislation helps determine legislators' preferred methods of receiving information (Kirst, 2000; Sorian & Baugh, 2002).

Although few respondents listed mass media as their first choice among sources of information about healthcare policy issues, legislators as a whole rated mass media as useful in providing them with information about constituent concerns, public opinion, statehouse chatter and decision-making on issues (*RQ2*). Respondents' ratings of mass media usefulness varied across media types and issues. Few to none rated newspapers, television or radio crucial to overall job performance, regardless of issue, although when it came to tracking constituent concerns, 6.5% of respondents rated newspapers as essential and 22% extremely useful; 8.7% ranked Internet/web-based information as essential, and 24% extremely useful. In addition, concerning statehouse chatter and decision-making information on healthcare issues, 22% and 26% respectively ranked Internet/web-based information as extremely useful. The most frequent rating across all issues for all media types was "moderately useful" (Table 2), while from 9-30% of respondents felt media were "not at all useful" across all topics.

Regardless of their opinions about the usefulness of media information on particular topics, respondents were relatively frequent consumers of mass media (*RQ2*). The majority read local newspapers and watched television news daily; nearly one-third listened to radio and accessed Internet/web-based news/commentary daily. Fewer respondents watched TV commentary daily, and only 10% of them read national newspapers or listened to radio commentary daily (Table 3). A surprisingly high percentage (20-28%) never listened to radio news or commentary or read national newspapers.

No statistically significant correlations emerged between respondents' first choice information source and attitudes toward media (*RQ2*). However, respondents' media-usefulness rankings correlated highly with media-use frequency, although significance of

these correlations varied according to media types and issues. The most statistically significant correlations ( $p<.01$ ) were found between viewing television news and listening to radio commentary and usefulness regarding public opinion and between Internet use and its usefulness for all issues listed. These results support previous studies which, while ranking mass media less-preferred sources, nonetheless ranked local above national media in influence on legislative decision-making (Tan & Weaver, 2009).

Legislators' responses to 22 attitudinal statements provide more insight into their opinions about mass media's ability to inform their policymaking decisions (*RQ2*) (Table 4). Analysis of patterns of agreement with these statements show that legislators believe that mass media (a) perform a watchdog role for the public (item 18); (b) perform a public service (item 11); and (c) serve as a check on government (items 3, 13) but also feel that mass media (d) sometimes are unfairly critical of government (item 1); (e) produce coverage that is inaccurate (item 9), biased (items 7, 10, 12) or sensational (item 3); (f) are ineffective in promoting consensus (item 6, 8) and increasing public understanding (item 17); and (g) do not affect legislator policy decisions or legislative actions (items 14, 15, 20, 21, 22). Respondents remained almost equally divided as to whether mass media (a) intrude into policy decisions (item 2); (b) are a good source of information about community leaders (item 4); (c) reliably reflect community concerns about healthcare policy (item 5); or (d) help legislators explain their positions to the public (item 19).

In summary, although mass media are not high on the list of legislators' preferred information sources, policy decision makers value mass media information as an important resource in doing their job and consult media on a regular basis. Their responses to 22 attitudinal questions replicating previous studies show that legislators believe mass media form an important link in the democratic process but remain critical of media fairness and competence in performing this role. Study results replicated previous findings of the importance of local newspapers in informing

policy and of the influence of media agenda-setting on legislator priorities, as well as revealing legislator scepticism about media fairness and accuracy and substantiating that legislators use media regardless of their predispositions against it (Kral, 2003).

Only political orientation was statistically significantly correlated with media usefulness across issues (**RQ3**). No correlations emerged between demographic/work-related data and attitudes toward media. Here, study results diverge from other investigators' findings that length of legislative career, gender, ethnicity, and party affiliation are correlated with attitudes toward and usage of mass media (Kral, 2003; Riffe, 1990), as well as with policy priorities and voting patterns (Poggione, 2004; Pruehs, 2006; Roberts & Smith, 2003; Schwindt-Bayer, 2006; Taylor-Robinson & Heath, 2003; Wright & Schaffner, 2002). Perhaps NM's uniqueness (majority-minority state, strong 400-year Hispanic heritage, small population, relative isolation) and lack of legislature professionalism (Squire, 2007) contribute to these findings.

Respondents' attitudes toward mass media related to media usefulness ratings across issues. Agreement with both adversarial (Table 4, items 1,2,3) and consensus-building (Table 4, items 4,5,6,7) statements predicted media usefulness ratings across multiple issue types ( $p<.000$ ). Thus, for this limited dataset, nulls for **H1** and **H2** may be rejected. That is, data from this study suggests that NM legislators who regard media as adversarial are less likely to rate mass media as important sources of healthcare policy information, while those who regard media as consensus agents are more likely to rate media as useful to their job functions. Responses indicating legislators' adversarial stance toward media and agreement about media's consensus-building potential match those studies replicated (Kral, 2003; Riffe, 1988, 1990).

#### *Implications for PIOs/PRPs and for further research*

Although NM legislators most frequently consult trusted advisors for issue information and view mass media with scepticism and distrust, they continue to value media

information in making healthcare policy decisions. To bridge any resulting influence gap, study findings suggest, PIOs and PRPs should broaden public relations strategies and tactics to better reach this audience. Both situational and excellence theories stress relationship building and maintenance through personalised methods and symmetrical communication strategies and tactics (Grunig, 2008; Kim & Grunig, 2011). Numerous study results recommend less reliance on mass media news subsidies and more on personal contacts and interactive delivery of dynamic messages designed to affect policy decisions (Brownson et al., 2011; Grunig & Grunig, 2010; Kim & Grunig, 2011; Sha, 2006).

Applying situational theory to developing message strategies and tactics allows PIOs/PRPs not only to target demographic characteristics and message and delivery preferences of legislators but also to identify and amplify real-time issue-comprehension stages relevant to individual audience members (Werder, 2006). Applying excellence theory to communication from PIOs/PRPs to legislators stresses mutually beneficial symmetrical models, including more personal contact and shifting from exclusive reliance on news subsidies for journalists, whom legislators neither trust nor consult (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Brunning & Ledingham, 2000; Mackey, 2006).

This study encourages PIOs/PRPs to adopt excellence theory's relationship approach (Hirasuna & Hansen, 2009; Park & Rhee, 2010; Taliaferro & Ruggiano, 2010). Excellence theory offers opportunities to build organisational social capital (Strauss, 2010), addressing relationship problems, such as half the study respondents never having accessed/used information from UNM's RWJFC.

Reliance of legislators on expert colleagues and constituents supports legislative consensus building by following nonlinear, network-systems paths distinct from first-level agenda-setting using media channels (Hirasuna & Hansen, 2009). Survey responses bolster the idea that legislators prefer original research reports and personal author contacts when accessing university and think-tank materials,

lending further support to broadening public relations approaches when pitching to lawmakers (Sorian & Baugh, 2002). Such personal approaches could help move PIOs/PRPs into the ranks of the ‘expert colleagues’ so prized by legislators as information sources. Basic audience-segmentation and message-targeting expertise applies to crafting messages and selecting media – whether mass, interactive, or interpersonal – for delivery to legislators (Brownson et al, 2011).

Because legislators may view mass media as promoting adversarial relationships, PIOs and PRPs, as well as journalists, need to build better relationships with state lawmakers (Kral, 2003; Riffe, 1988, 1990). In addition to reaching legislators outside media channels, PIOs/PRPs should build better relationships with statehouse-beat journalists, maximising coverage by local newspaper and television news, the mass media most used by legislators.

Legislators’ negative views of mass media are strengthened by adaptive structuration within legislative chambers, influencing consultation of information sources sanctioned by colleagues. Breaking through and changing such structured information preferences demands innovative approaches by PIOs/PRPs, both in message targeting and in developing symmetrical delivery options in addition to the usual mass media channels.

Further research is needed to discover roots of NM legislators’ attitudes toward mass media and information source choices. In-depth interviews should be conducted with respondents more representative of the legislature’s demographic make-up, as respondents to this survey included an over-representation of white, male legislators. Data should be collected from PIOs/PRPs to discover attitudes toward practice driven by situational, excellence, and agenda-setting theories and explore openness to strategies and tactics suggested by these theories and willingness to embrace interactive and interpersonal methods of delivering messages. Finally, research should be undertaken to discover what, if any, differences exist between sources preferred and attitudes toward media

information about healthcare policy as compared with other types of legislative policymaking.

#### *Limitations*

Generalisation from this study is limited to the legislative body – NM Senate and House of Representatives – from which the respondents were drawn. However, the study results strongly support similar investigations involving other state legislatures; thus, conclusions may have applicability beyond statistical limitations of the study itself.

Additionally, the study focused exclusively on NM legislators and their information sourcing and delivery preferences regarding healthcare policy issues. No other audiences were considered, nor were more specialised media, such as health/medicine journals, considered when exploring legislator source/delivery preferences. Research has shown that, depending on target audience, such specialist publications may be more important than mainstream media in informing healthcare policy (Furlan, 2011). However, this inquiry was limited to the mass media and products of university and think-tank researchers. Therefore, it is possible that results would differ should more specialised publications be considered.

## **Conclusion**

The study authors believe their results offer caveats and opportunities for PIOs and PRPs seeking to influence state legislators. Through application of public relations situational and excellence theory and with an eye to effects on legislators of events driven by agenda-setting and adaptive structuration, practitioners could alter impacts on legislators’ policymaking decisions, as well as change negative opinions toward public relations. The information subsidy has proven a mighty weapon in the public relations arsenal, influencing mass media journalists in the crafting of their stories, and through these intervening audiences, reaching the target public with strategic public relations messages. However, evolving technology and individual preferences suggest that legislators could be reached with greater

effect by supplementing mass media sourcing and delivery with more personal, symmetrical relationship management strategies emphasising use of interactive media and interpersonal contacts.

## References

- Aldoory, L. & Toth, E. (2002). Gender discrepancies in a gendered profession: A developing theory for public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 14(2), 103-126.
- Barrilleaux, C., Holbrook, T., & Langer, L. (2002). Electoral competition, legislative balance, and American state welfare policy. *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(2), 415-427.
- Bauer, M. W. & Bucchi, M. (2007). *Journalism, science and society: Science communication between news and public relations*. Florence, KY: Routledge.
- Bell, T. A. (2004). *The killer Ds and the media: Framing the coverage from Austin to Ardmore*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Austin, TX: University of Texas.
- Bratton, K. A. (2002). The effect of legislative diversity on agenda setting. *American Politics Research*, 30(2), 115-142.
- Brownson, R. C., Dodson, E. A., Stamatakis, K. A., Casey, C. M., Elliott, M. B., Luke, D. A., Wintrode, C. G., & Kreuter, M. W. (2011). Communicating evidence-based information on cancer prevention to state-level policy makers. *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, 103(4), 306-316.
- Bruning, S. D. & Ledingham, J. A. (2000). *Public relations as relationship management: A relational approach to the study and practice of public relations*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Burstein, P. & Linton, A. (2002). The impact of political parties, interest groups, and social movement organizations on public policy: Some recent evidence and theoretical concerns. *Social Forces*, 81(2), 380-408.
- Bybee, C. R. & Comadena, M. (1984). Information sources and state legislators: decision-making and dependency. *Journal of Broadcasting*, 28(3), 333.
- Calamai, P. (2008). Tragedy of the media commons. *Re\$earch Money*. 22(20). Retrieved from: [http://www.sciencemediacentre.ca/docs/smc calamai\\_rm\\_e.pdf](http://www.sciencemediacentre.ca/docs/smc calamai_rm_e.pdf)
- Cammisal, A. M. & Reingold, B. (2004). Women in state legislatures and state legislative research: Beyond sameness and difference. *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*, 4(2), 181-210.
- Dearing, J. W. & Rogers, E. M. (1996). *Agenda-setting*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- DeFleur, M. L., & Ball-Rokeach, S. (1989). *Theories of mass communication*. (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.). London: Longman.
- Dillman, D. A. (2000). *Mail and internet surveys: The tailored design method*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Dyer, C. S., & Nayman, O. B. (1977). Under the capitol dome: Relationships between legislators and reporters *Journalism Quarterly*, 54, 443-453.
- Fico, F. (1984). How lawmakers use reporters: Differences in specialization and goals. *Journalism Quarterly*, 61(4), 793-800,821.
- Flowers, J. F., Haynes, A. A., & Crespin, M. H. (2003). The media, the campaign, and the message. *American Journal of Political Science*, 47(2), 259-273.
- Fogarty, B. J. & Wolak, J. (2009). The effects of media interpretation for citizen evaluations of politicians' messages. *American Politics Research*, 37(1), 129-154.
- Fraga, L. R., Lopez, L., Martinez-Ebers, V., & Ramirez, R. (2006). Gender and ethnicity: Patterns of electoral success and legislative advocacy among Latina and Latino state officials in four states. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 28(3-4), 121-145.
- Furlan, P. (2011). Negotiating medical news: Strategies used by reporters and public relations practitioners. *PRism* 8(1). Retrieved from: <http://www.prismjournal.org/homepage.html>
- White, J. M., Willis, M., & Stohr, R. A. (2013). Legislators' reliance on mass media as information sources: Implications for symmetrical communication between public information officers, public relations practitioners and policymakers. *PRism* 9(1): <http://www.prismjournal.org/homepage.html>

[www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/8\\_1/Furlan.pdf](http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/8_1/Furlan.pdf)

Gandy, O. H. Jr. (1982). *Beyond agenda setting: Information subsidies and public policy*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Company.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Grava-Gubins, I. & Scott, S. (2008). Effects of various methodologic strategies: Survey response rates among Canadian physicians and physicians-in-training. *Canadian Family Physician*, 54(10), 1424-1430.

Grunig, J. E. (1989). Publics, audiences and market segments: Segmentation principles for campaigns. In C. T. Salmon (Ed.), *Information campaigns: Balancing social values and social change* (pp. 199-223). Beverly Hills: Sage.

Grunig, J. E. (1997). A situational theory of publics: Conceptual history, recent challenges and new research. In D. Moss, T. MacManus, & D. Vercic (Eds.), *Public relations research: An international perspective* (pp. 3-46). London: International Thomson Business Press.

Grunig, J. E. (2006). Furnishing the edifice: Ongoing research on public relations as a strategic management function. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 18, 151-176.

Grunig, J. E. (2008). Excellence theory in public relations. In W. Donsbach (Ed.), *The International encyclopedia of communication*, Volume 4 (pp. 1620-1622). Oxford, UK and Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Grunig, J. E. & Grunig, L. E. (2010, Oct 17). *Public Relations Excellence 2010. The Third Annual Grunig Lecture Series*. Delivered at the PRSA International Conference, Washington DC. Retrieved from: <http://www.instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/Third-Grunig-Lecture-October-17-2010-Transcript.pdf>

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

Grunig, J. E. & White, J. (1992). The effect of worldviews on public relations theory and practice. In J. E. Grunig, D. M. Dozier, W. P. Ehling, L. A. Grunig, F. C. Repper, & J. White (Eds.), *Excellence in public relations and communication management*, (pp. 31-64). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Grunig, L. A., Toth, E. L. & Hon, L. C. (2000). Feminist values in public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 72(1), 49-68.

Habermas J (1989) *The structural transformation of the public sphere*. Cambridge: Polity.

Hamilton, P. K. (1992). Grunig's situational theory: A replication, application and extension. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 4(3), 123-149.

Hays, S. P. & Glick, H. R. (1997). The role of agenda setting in policy innovation. *American Politics Research*, 25(4), 497-516.

Heath, R. L. (2000). A rhetorical perspective on the values of public relations: crossroads and pathways toward concurrence. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 12(1), 69-92.

Hirasuna, D. P. & Hansen, S. B. (2009). Is social science research useful to state legislators? *Regional Science Review*, 32(4), 429-444.

Holba, A. (2006). Commentary: Publics, dialogism, and advocacy: Notes towards a reconceptualisation of public relations in the United States. *PRism* 4(1): [http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Praxis/Files/Journal\\_Files/2006\\_general/Holba.pdf](http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Praxis/Files/Journal_Files/2006_general/Holba.pdf)

Holtzhausen, D. R. (2000). Postmodern values in public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 12, 93-114.

Hon, L. C., & Grunig, J. E. (1999). *Guidelines for measuring relationships in public relations*. Gainesville, FL: The Institute for Public Relations, Commission on PR Measurement and Evaluation.

Jackson, N. A. & Lilleker, D. G. (2009). Building an architecture of participation? Political parties and Web 2.0 in Britain. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 6(3-4), 232-250.

Kim, J-N. & Grunig, J. E. (2011). Problem solving and communicative action: A

White, J. M., Willis, M., & Stohr, R. A. (2013). Legislators' reliance on mass media as information sources: Implications for symmetrical communication between public information officers, public relations practitioners and policymakers. *PRism* 9(1): <http://www.prismjournal.org/homepage.html>

- situational theory of problem solving. *Journal of Communication*, 61(1), 120-149.
- King, J. D. (2000). Changes in professionalism in U.S. state legislatures. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 225(2), 327-343.
- Kirst, M. W. (2000). Bridging education research and education policymaking. *Oxford Review of Education*, (26)3/4, 379-391.
- Kral, A. (2003). *Print media impact on state legislative policy agendas*. Unpublished masters thesis. Manship School of Mass Communication, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.
- Lariscy, R. W., Avery, E. J., & Sohn, Y. (2010). Health journalists and three levels of public information: Issue and agenda disparities? *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 22(2), 113-135.
- McCombs, M. & Shaw, D. (1976). Structuring the 'unseen environment'. *Journal of Communication*, 26, 18-23.
- McDonald, L. M. & Hebbani, A. G. (2011). Back to the future: Is strategic management (re)emerging as public relations' dominant paradigm? *PRism* 8(1). Retrieved from: [http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/8\\_1/mcdonald\\_hebbani.pdf](http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/8_1/mcdonald_hebbani.pdf)
- McQuail, D. (1994). *Mass communication theory*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mackey, S. (2006). Misuse of the term 'stakeholder' in public relations. *PRism* 4(1). Retrieved from: [http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Praxis/Files/Journal\\_Files/2006\\_general/Mackey.pdf](http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Praxis/Files/Journal_Files/2006_general/Mackey.pdf)
- Macnamara, J. (2010). Public communication practices in the Web 2.0-3.0 mediascape: The case for PRevolution. *PRism* 7(3). Retrieved from: [http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Social\\_media/Macnamara.pdf](http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Social_media/Macnamara.pdf)
- Maestas, C. (2003). The incentive to listen: Progressive ambition, resources, and opinion monitoring among state legislators. *The Journal of Politics*, 65(2), 439-456.
- Park, H. & Rhee, Y. (2010). Associations among relationship maintenance strategies, organisation-public relationships, and support for organisations: An exploratory study of the non-profit sector. *PRism* 7(2). Retrieved from: [http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Praxis/Files/Journal\\_Files/2006\\_general/Holba.pdf](http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Praxis/Files/Journal_Files/2006_general/Holba.pdf)
- Park, S-A., Len-Ríos, M. E., & Hinnant, A. (2010). How intrinsic and extrinsic news factors affect health journalists' cognitive and behavioural attitudes toward media relations. *PRism* 7(1). Retrieved from: [http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Praxis/Files/Journal\\_Files/2010\\_general/Park\\_Len-Ríos\\_Hinnant.pdf](http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Praxis/Files/Journal_Files/2010_general/Park_Len-Ríos_Hinnant.pdf)
- Poggione, S. (2004). Exploring gender differences in state legislators' policy preferences. *Political Research Quarterly*, 57(2), 305-314.
- Preuhs, R. R. (2006). The conditional effects of minority descriptive representation: Black legislators and policy influence in the American states. *Journal of Politics*, 68(3), 585-599.
- Riffe, D. (1988). Comparison of media and other sources of information for Alabama legislators. *Journalism Quarterly*, 65, 46-53.
- Riffe, D. (1990). Media roles and legislators' new media use. *Journalism Quarterly* 67(2), 323-329.
- Roberts, J. M. & Smith, S. S. (2003). Procedural contexts, party strategy, and conditional party voting in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1971-2000. *American Journal of Political Science*, 47(2), 305-317.
- Sabatier, P. & Whiteman, D. (1985). Legislative decision-making and substantial policy information : Models of information flow. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 10, 395-421.
- Salter L (2005) The communicative structure of journalism and public relations. *Journalism* 6(1), 90-106.
- Schwindt-Bayer, L. A. (2006). Still supermadres? Gender and the policy priorities of Latin American legislators. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50(3), 570-585.
- Sha, B. L. (2006). Cultural identity in the segmentation of publics: An emerging theory of intercultural public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 18(1), 45-65.
- White, J. M., Willis, M., & Stohr, R. A. (2013). Legislators' reliance on mass media as information sources: Implications for symmetrical communication between public information officers, public relations practitioners and policymakers. *PRism* 9(1): <http://www.prismjournal.org/homepage.html>

- Sheehan, K. (2001). E-mail survey response rates: A review. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. Retrieved from: <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol6/issue2/sheehan.html>
- Simien, E. M. (2007). Doing intersectionality research: From conceptual issues to practical examples. *Women & Politics*, 3, 264-271.
- Smith, A. (2007). *Getting results with press releases: What to say, how to say it, who to send it to*. London, UK: DL Wilcox.
- Sorian, R. & Baugh, T. (2002). Power of information: Closing the gap between research and policy – when it comes to conveying complex information to busy policymakers, a picture is truly worth a thousand words. *Health Affairs*, 21(2), 264-274.
- Squire, P. (1992). Legislative professionalism and membership diversity in state legislatures. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 17, 69-79.
- Squire, P. (2007). Measuring state legislative professionalism: The Squire Index revisited. *State Politics and Policy Quarterly*, 7(2), 211-227.
- Strauss, J. R. (2010). Capitalising on the value in relationships: A social capital-based model for non-profit public relations. *PRism* 7(2). <http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Praxis/Files/Journal%20Files/Strauss.pdf>
- Swanson, D. L. (1988). Feeling the elephant: Some observations on agenda-setting research. *Communications Yearbook* 11, 603-619.
- Swers, M. (2001). Understanding the policy impact of electing women: Evidence from research on Congress and state legislatures. *Political Science & Politics* 34(2), 217-220.
- Taliaferro, J. D. & Ruggiano, N. (2010). "It's human beings talking to one another": The role of relationship building in non-profit lobbying. *PRism* 7(2). Retrieved from: <http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Praxis/Files/Journal%20Files/Taliaferro%20Ruggiano.pdf>
- Tan, Y. & Weaver, D. H. (2009). Local media, public opinion, and state legislative policies: Agenda setting at the state level. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 14(4), 454-476.
- Taylor-Robinson, M. M. & Heath, R. M. (2003). Do women legislators have different policy priorities than their male colleagues? A critical test case. *Women & Politics*, 24(4), 77-101.
- Toth, E. L. (2001). How feminist theory advanced the practice of public relations. In R. L. Heath (Ed.), *Handbook of public relations* (pp. 237–246). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Vasquez, G. M. (1993). A homo narrans paradigm for public relations: combining Bormann's symbolic convergence theory and Grunig's situational theory of publics. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 5(3), 201–216.
- Webster, J. G., Phalen, P. F., & Lichty, L. W. (2006). *Ratings analysis: The theory and practice of audience research*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Werder, K. P. (2006). Responding to activism: Experimental analysis of public relations strategy influence on attributes of publics. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 18(4), 345-356.
- White, J. M. (2012). Toward a new model of communicative action for public information officers. *Journalism Practice*, 6(4), 563-580.
- White, J. M. & Wingenbach, G. (2013). Potential barriers to mass media coverage of health issues: Differences between public information officers and journalists regarding beliefs central to professional behaviors. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 25(2).
- Wright, G.C. & Schaffner, B.F. (2002). The influence of party: Evidence from the state legislatures. *American Political Science Review*, 96(2).
- Yanovitzky, I. (2002). Effects of news coverage on policy attention and actions: A closer look into the media-policy connection. *Communication Research*, 29(4), 422-451.
- White, J. M., Willis, M., & Stohr, R. A. (2013). Legislators' reliance on mass media as information sources: Implications for symmetrical communication between public information officers, public relations practitioners and policymakers. *PRism* 9(1): <http://www.prismjournal.org/homepage.html>

**Author contact details:****Corresponding author:**

Judith M. White, PhD.

Assistant Professor, Communication &  
Journalism

The University of New Mexico  
MSC03 2240, 1 University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, NM 87101-0001  
505-264-8382  
Fax 505-277-2068  
jmw49@unm.edu

Matt Willis, M.A.  
Doctoral Student  
Information Science and Technology  
Syracuse University  
School of Information Studies  
337 Hinds Hall  
Syracuse, New York, 13244  
mwillis@syr.edu

Rachel A. Stohr, M.A.  
Doctoral Student  
Department of Communication Studies  
422 Oldfather Hall  
University of Nebraska  
Lincoln, NE. 68588-0329  
rstohr84@gmail.com

**Copyright statement:**

The authors retain copyright in this material, but have granted *PRism* a copyright license to permanently display the article online for free public viewing, and have granted the National Library of Australia a copyright licence to include *PRism* in the PANDORA Archive for permanent public access and online viewing. This copyright option does not grant readers the right to print, email, or otherwise reproduce the article, other than for whatever limited research or educational purposes are permitted in their country. Please contact the corresponding author named above if you require other uses.

---

<sup>i</sup> Financial support for this research was provided by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Center for Health Policy at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.