



Bournemouth
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An Exploration of the Impacts of the Use of Media Releases on Agency Public Relations Practice in the United Kingdom

A dissertation submitted by

Christina Petrova

In partial fulfilment of the requirements of the award of
BA (Hons) Public Relations

CMC Academic Group

The Media School

Bournemouth University

2014/2015

Author's Address: z.k. "Sveta Troitsa", block 317 A, entrance 7,
apartment 151, Sofia, Bulgaria, 1309

E-mail: kristine_petrova@yahoo.com

Telephone: 07513683326

AUTHOR DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation/project is all my own work and the sources of information and the material I have used (including the internet) have been fully identified and properly acknowledged. I also declare that the hard copy and online submission of the dissertation are identical to one another.

Student signature

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ABSTRACT

The Internet's development in the past decade has transformed the global media landscape. The public relations (PR) industry, however, has been struggling to adapt to the changing media environment, which is why instead of making use of the multiple communication tools available to them nowadays, many professionals still prefer using press releases.

For over a century, the release has served as an important tool for communicating information to the publics via the media. However, while the media and the PR industry changed through time, the release remained the same. Despite this being a topic of interest for academics and professionals, existing literature and previous research fail to examine why releases are still used and how their use impacts PR. Therefore, this research will use mixed research methods to explore the impacts of the use of releases on PR by case studying agency practice in the United Kingdom (UK).

Based on the data obtained from six semi-structured interviews with experienced PR professionals (PRPs) and an online questionnaire, distributed amongst agency staff, this research discovered an issue with the term “press release”, mistakenly used by practitioners referring to a “media release” – release distributed to all types of media rather than the press only. This research also found releases are still widely used for a number of reasons even though they rarely generate media coverage. Poor coverage, however, was found to impact the relationship between agencies and their clients, while the use of releases to gain coverage was found to occasionally provoke journalists’ hostile behaviour.

Key words: Public Relations; Media Relations; Press Releases; Media Releases; Digitalisation; Agency Practice

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIPR - Chartered Institute of Public Relations

PR – Public Relations

PRP – Public Relations Professional

PRPs – Public Relations Professional

UK – United Kingdom

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Four hundred and seventy two definitions of public relations (PR) have been coined just between 1900 and 1976 (Tench and Yeomans, 2014). This remarkable number, however, does not mark an important milestone for PR but it explicitly demonstrates the dynamic nature of the profession, where the practitioner's role cannot be summarised in a single uniform definition.

Public relations professionals (PRPs) have a number of various responsibilities. However, a Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR, 2014) research, which investigated the current state of the profession in the United Kingdom (UK), reports media relations is the key daily responsibility for all practitioners - working as freelancers (74%), in-house (70%) and in an agency or a consultancy (78%).

When asked to describe their media relations work, PRPs suggest they are generally responsible for establishing and maintaining relationships with journalists and placing news releases in the media (Dozier et al., 1995). However, the literature reviewed for the purposes of this research revealed a lack of clear meaning of the term "news releases". Furthermore, existing literature fails to differentiate it from "press releases" and "media releases", which is why these three terms are often mistakenly used interchangeably.

This paper will aim to differentiate the terms from one another because "much of the information which practitioners seek to place in the media is communicated impersonally by news releases" (Aronoff, 1975, p.46). Thus, releases are an essential tool for strategic media relations practice, explored by a significant amount of studies (Supa and Zoch, 2009). Previous research, however, has not specifically investigated the impacts of the use of releases. Yet, their potential to influence the PRPs' ability to

impact newsgathering (Cameron et al., 1997) and the PRP's complex relationship with journalists (Yoon, 2005; Pang, 2009; Tilley and Hollings, 2008; Sallot and Johnson, 2006; Fedler and DeLorme, 2003; Supa and Zoch, 2009; Shaw and White, 2004; Aronoff, 1975) has been recognised because of their frequent use for information supply to the media (Lee, 1906; Supa and Zoch, 2009; Tench and Yeomans, 2014). Therefore, this research will look beyond strategic media relations to explore the impacts of the use of releases on agency PR practice in the UK, which will be investigated in the context of the global media digitalisation that has transformed media relations practice (CIPR, 2015).

This paper will start with a brief review and critical analysis of existing literature, whilst differentiating the terms “press”, “news” and “media releases”. The second section will present the research objectives and methodology. The subsequent section will then describe the collected data and provide an in-depth analysis of the detected themes. As a conclusion, the final section will discuss this paper’s findings, reflecting on the key research limitations, whilst making recommendations for further research.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Media Relations

Academic literature recognises the importance of media relations as a crucial function (Shaw and White, 2004) of PR. However, according to Tench and Yeomans (2014), only one definition of PR has been found to briefly mention media relations:

“PR is the planned persuasion of people to behave in ways that further its sponsor’s objectives. It works primarily through the use of media relations and other forms of third party endorsement.” (Morris and Goldsworthy, 2008 cited by Tench and Yeomans, 2014, p.236)

Even though media relations are “the tip of the iceberg – the most visible part” (Shaw and White, 2004, p.494) of PR practice, academics have not yet been able to define PR in a manner that reflects this. Controversially, hundreds of studies have been dedicated to examining media relations (Cameron et al., 1997), defined as “the relationship between the organisation and members of the media” (Coombs and Holladay, 2010, p.108). This implies PRPs serve as buffers between the media and their organisation (Cameron et al., 1997) with the purpose of influencing and informing its target audiences (Wragg, 2005). Therefore, media relations practice has three levels of impact, which could be measured using The Barcelona Principles (Ketchum, 2011, Figure 1) used to evaluate the effectiveness of media relations against their impact on the media (output), the audiences (outcomes) and the business (Ketchum, 2011).

[INSERT FIGURE 1]

2.2 Defining Releases

Turk (1985 cited by Supa and Zoch, 2009) suggests that as media relations executives, PRPs provide the media with “information subsidies” or what Supa and Zoch (2009) define as “prepackaged information to promote their organisation’s viewpoints on issues”. Hence, practitioners act as “pre-reporters” (Supa and Zoch, 2009), who seek to gain positive publicity for their organisations by distributing news, press or media releases.

Extensive research of the definitions and use of the three terms detected a trend in the academic and professional publications, which either use them interchangeably or use the term “press release” as a professional jargon phrase. For the purposes of this research, however, a clear differentiation is required.

Newsome and Haynes (2005) suggest news releases are placed and distributed on the Internet through news suppliers. According to Noble (2013), in contrast, press releases are distributed to press journalists only, while Smith (2014) argues “press release” is an “inappropriate and outdated term for news release which implies news for all media, not just the written press” (Smith, 2014, p.94). This paper, however, will adopt Heath and Coombs’ (2006) definition of the term “media releases” referring to releases distributed to all types of media. Yet, due to the terminology’s inconsistency in existing literature, the terms will be used interchangeably where appropriate.

Regardless of their minor differences, all releases have the same content structure, which Searls and Weinberger (2009) mock in their article “Markets are Conversations”:

“Take the standard computer-industry press release. With few exceptions, it describes an “announcement” that was not made for a product that was not available, quoting people who never said anything, for distribution to a list of people who mostly consider it trash. [...] A press release is written as a plainly fake news story, with headline, dateline, quotes and all the dramatic tension of a phone number.”

(Searls and Weinberger, 2009)

Using a sarcastic approach, the authors built a realistic profile of the modern media release which has become “overused and discredited” (Tench and Yeomans, 2014, p.241) as a communication tool. However, things were different over 120 years ago when the first release was reportedly used by Ivy Lee, often regarded as the founder of modern PR (Grunig and Grunig, 1992; Morris, 2009; Pang, 2009). He believed that even though journalists demonstrate hostile attitudes towards the use of releases, they are the only tool that enables transparent supply of prompt and accurate information to the media and publics (Lee, 1906).

Over a century later, releases have changed in means of distribution but they are still used to provide information to journalists, who receive up to a hundred releases per week via e-mail (Greentarget, 2014). Due to their extensive use, however, most releases are deleted when received (Fedler and DeLorme, 2003). Yet, while binning a release takes less than a second, writing it takes around nine hours (Bredholt, 2014) and its approval to be sent out might take days (Business Wire, 2014). Despite of the time and efforts invested in it, the information the release provides may never be used (Martin and Singletary, 1981) for various reasons, such as the PRP’s understanding of newsworthiness condensed in the release (Supa and Zoch, 2009) or even the complex relationship between PRPs and journalists as proposed by Augustine Pang (2009).

2.3 Journalists' Attitudes Towards PRPs

Pang introduced his Mediating the Media Model (2009, Appendix 1) to address the lack of systematic framework exploring the factors of influence on media relations (Pang et al., 2012). According to his model, the five key factors of influence are the journalist's mindset and routines; newsroom routines; extra-media influences and the media ideology. Yet, what makes Pang's model (2009) more accurate than others (Cameron et al., 1997; Yoon, 2005) is his acknowledgement of the impacts the global digitalisation has had on the media industry and the relationship between journalists and PRPs, which is an area of particular interest for the academia.

Over 150 studies have explored the relationship between PRPs and journalists since the 1960s only to find out journalists have negative attitude towards practitioners because of "their role as advocates, having hidden agendas, withholding information and compromising ethics" (Sallot and Johnson, 2006, p.152). The only exception to that is when the "Jeffers Effect" occurs when journalists who disregard PRPs demonstrate more positive attitudes towards practitioners they closely work with (Sallot and Johnson, 2006; Tilley and Hollings, 2008).

Fedler and DeLorme (2003) explored this relationship from a historical perspective and found journalists' hostility could be triggered by the methods PRPs used to gain publicity; salary difference and the consequent feeling of betrayal caused by many journalists switching to PR for the better pay; journalists' busy daily routines and the newsroom culture of their media outlet (also in Pang, 2009); etc. Yet, one particular factor stands out:

"... the journalist faces the daily task of selecting and trimming large volumes of information to what he considers as news. [...] For the practitioner, what this means, then is that they have to make more

aggressive attempts to shed the long-standing notion among journalists (DeLorme and Fedler, 2003) that they don't know what news is." (Pang, 2009, p.213)

Therefore, the journalists' mindset or the way journalists evaluate the newsworthiness of a story as individuals (Pang, 2009) plays a key role in their relationships with PRPs (Pang, 2009; Kopenhaver et al., 1984; Supa and Zoch, 2009; Aronoff, 1975). Journalists believe PRPs do not understand newsworthiness (Aronoff, 1975) but in reality they demonstrate the same understanding of what makes a story newsworthy (Supa and Zoch, 2009).

According to Supa and Zoch (2014) journalists and PRPs agree immediacy, timeliness, localness, human interest (personal rather than business angle), cultural proximity, unexpectedness, prominence (concerns well-known people, institutions or events), and significance are the eight factors, determining a story's newsworthiness. Yet, even though PRPs' share the same news values with journalists, in practice they behave differently as further investigation established most releases PRPs send out contain only two out of eight factors (Supa and Zoch, 2014). Thus, this provides supporting evidence to Fedler and DeLorme's (2003) proposition that journalists perceive releases as a manifestation of the PRPs' incapability of understanding what news is. This leads to an important question: Could it be that the use of releases fuels the hostility between PRPs and journalists? If so, how does this impact agency PR practice?

2.4 Impacts of Digitalisation

Kopenhaver (1985) and later on Supa and Zoch (2009) found journalists perceive media releases as "publicity disguised as news " (Kopenhaver, 1985 cited by Pang, 2009, p.210) that lack news value and timeliness, and could be poorly written:

“Practitioners continue to distribute their information in the same way they have always done but journalists do not value the contributors because of the manner in which the information is presented.” (Supa and Zoch, 2009, p.12)

These findings, however, are opposed to Solis and Breakenridge’s (2009, p.1) statement: “The Web has changed everything”.

Since 2004 the Internet has developed dramatically, triggering various changes in the media and PR (Macnamara, 2010). According to Grunig (2009), however, PRPs have not been able to adapt to and make use of these changes as they have started using new media the way they use old - “as means of dumping messages on the general population rather than as a strategic means of interacting with publics” (Grunig, 2009, p.1). Controversially, professional PR publications (“PR Week”, “PR News”, “Cision”, etc.) frequently announce the “death” of releases, following new web innovations they predict will cease their use, disregarding the fact releases are still widely used in the same standardised format mocked by Searls and Weinberger (2009).

Interestingly, a recent CIPR research shows the PR industry is also experiencing the impacts of the “24/7 newsrooms and ‘always on’ culture” (CIPR, 2015, p.31) just as much as journalists, whose job insecurity, stress and long work hours (DeLorme and Fedler, 2003) have increased in line with the global digitalisation. Combined with the ever-growing numbers of PRPs (Sallot and Johnson, 2006) and their inability to present information on time because of the time-consuming nature of media releases (Bredholt, 2014; Business Wire, 2014), an interesting phenomenon can

be observed. Instead of enabling the information flow between journalists and PRPs, the use of media releases could potentially impact both parties in a negative way.

PRPs lose valuable time in writing and distributing releases instead of actively engaging with creative and strategic activities (Grunig, 2009) that could be more beneficial for their organisations or clients. Furthermore, even though it has proven to rarely generate any media coverage (Cision, 2014), the release continues finding its way into journalists' inboxes, adding pressure to their otherwise busy work schedules.

2.5 Conclusion

Previous research explores multiple factors that could impact the effectiveness of media relations (Pang, 2009; Cameron et al., 1997; Yoon, 2005). This demonstrates the complexity of the PRPs' jobs, who meet daily challenges in the face of journalists and the evolving media landscape, whilst trying to gain positive publicity for their organisations or clients by writing and distributing releases.

Even though media releases have been overused to the extent, where they have been discredited as effective communication tools (Tench and Yeomans, 2014), they are still a topic of interest for academic literature and professional media. However, they only discuss what makes a good release (Newsome and Haynes, 2005; Noble, 2013) or what could be the next social media platform that could put an end to the use of releases. This lack of reflection on the bigger picture reveals a research gap in relation to the extensive use of media releases and the consequent impacts their use has on PR practice, which this paper will be aiming to fill in.

Due to the limited scale of this research, however, this paper will only case study the growing British PR industry, employing over 62,000 practitioners (PR Week, 2013). As agency PRPs are reportedly more involved with media relations compared to

in-house and freelance PRPs (CIPR, 2014), this author will focus on the impacts of the extensive use of media releases on agency PR practice in the UK, to obtain the most accurate and credible findings a research of this scale allows for.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Aim

This research's overall aim is to explore the impacts of the use of media releases on agency PR practice in the UK.

3.2 Objectives

1. Explore whether the effectiveness of media relations could be evaluated using the success of a media release as a measure;
2. Examine how the use of media releases affects the overall service provided to a client;
3. Investigate whether there is a relationship between the extensive use of media releases and the negative attitude of journalists towards PRPs.

3.3 Research Approach

Mixed research methods were used to obtain "mutually illuminating" data (Bryman, 2008, p.603). Therefore, a three-stage exploratory strategy was adopted, employing semi-structured interviews to obtain qualitative data that was analysed and used to design a questionnaire, which collected quantitative data to build on the interviews' findings (Creswell, 2009).

The first stage of the research followed an interpretivist approach, using inductive reasoning (Daymon and Holloway, 2011), to gain understanding about the topics synthesized in the objectives. Therefore, after the collected data was analysed in the second stage, its findings were used for the questionnaire's design. Hence, the research's final stage was underpinned by positivist thinking that aimed to confirm

whether the data unveiled themes and patterns applicable for the wider sample (Daymon and Holloway, 2011). Here, objectivity was key for obtaining data that was not influenced by the researcher's own bias (Daymon and Holloway, 2011), which could have affected the first two stages of the research because of the author's PR background.

3.4 Sample

Non-probability purposive sampling was used to recruit participants, who have a good understanding of the research topic (Bryman, 2008). Therefore, the population of PRPs was narrowed down to the sample - PRPs with at least one year's experience in media relations, who are currently or have been previously employed in a British PR agency.

This sampling method was selected based on the assumption that, compared to in-house and freelance PRPs, agency practitioners face more challenges in establishing relationships with journalists because they work on several accounts for clients operating in different sectors, which are respectively covered by many different journalists. Therefore, the "Jeffers Effect" (p.15) is less likely to be observed, predisposing agency professionals to more negative journalist attitude (Objective 3). Furthermore, agency PRPs reportedly spend more time on media relations (CIPR, 2014), which makes them more sensitive to the topics explored by Objectives 1 and 2.

3.5 Research Design

3.5.1. Interviews

Six half an hour semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide (Appendix 6), covering key topics of interest. Interviewees were given the

freedom to lead the interview in the direction they want, allowing them to give insights into what they see as relevant and important (Bryman, 2008). This approach allowed the use of quotes by earlier interviewees to be presented to later interviewees (Beardsworth and Keil, 1992) for further investigation and confirmation of detected patterns (Bryman, 2008).

Due to limited access to participants matching the sample, a pilot interview was conducted using convenience sampling. This enabled the evaluation of the interview guide, which was amended accordingly following a review of the pilot's findings.

3.5.2. Questionnaire

A hundred participants took part in a self-administered (Bryman, 2008) online questionnaire (Appendix 8), distributed using the snowball effect. However, to ensure this distribution method does not affect the data quality, filtering questions in the beginning of the questionnaire allowed only participants who matched the sampling criteria to take part.

Participants were given clear instructions for participation, encouraging engagement with all types of questions (open, single or multiple-choice, Likert scale and ranking), which were set to require a response to most questions, aiming to reduce the risk of missing data.

A pilot questionnaire was conducted with 10 participants, using convenience sampling, to detect issues with the format of the questionnaire; to check whether the questions address the objectives, and to evaluate whether participants understand the questions.

3.6 Data Evaluation

Data quality in mixed methods research is evaluated by the quality of the qualitative and quantitative data (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Therefore, validity and reliability criteria were used for both data types.

3.6.1. Reliability

Reliability is concerned with whether a study can be replicated (Yin, 2003). Due to the multiple factors influencing data collection, however, this research would be difficult to replicate. Yet, to increase the qualitative data's reliability the coded transcriptions of all interviews (Appendix 6) were provided. Similarly, the coded quantitative data (Appendix 9), generated by KwikSurveys's data analysis tool, with its corresponding codes (Appendix 7) were provided to support the research's internal reliability.

Each interview was transcribed by the author to gain a deeper understanding of the data. This enabled the comprehension of professional jargon; putting the interviewees' comments in context (Hatch, 2002) and relating quotes to non-verbal information observed during the interviews (Woods, 1986), whilst supporting the data categorisation and the detection of connections between different themes (Siedman, 2013).

3.6.2. Validity

The quantitative data's validity was tested with predictive validity so the questionnaire's data was examined against predetermined future criterion measures (Bryman, 2008). Therefore, the researcher established procedures for validity monitoring (Appendix 10) following Farber's (2001) suggested list of threats to validity

that evaluates the impact of the questionnaire design and the appropriateness of the predetermined measures on the research findings (Sarantakos, 2013), which were both tested with the questionnaire's pilot. No further changes were made to the questionnaire once it was amended. Furthermore, the filtering questions used guaranteed all participants match the sample, which reduced the threats to the findings' external validity (findings generalizability), whilst enabling the collection of reliable data.

Participant transcripts checking and thick description were used to enhance the validity of the qualitative data or the extent to which the findings accurately reflect the social worlds of the participants and the investigated phenomena (Creswell and Miller, 2000).

3.7. Reflections and Limitations

3.7.1. Mixed Research Methods

This approach is criticised for its complexity because it employs tools that are "inextricably embedded in commitments to particular versions of the world" (Hughes, 1990, p.11 cited by Bryman, 2008). However, this research's exploratory nature required the use of quantitative data for confirmation of qualitative data.

3.7.2. Generalizability

Purposive sampling targets specific part of the population and therefore, it does not allow generalization for the entire population or different cases (Calmorin et al., 2007; Bryman, 2008). The sample selection, however, guaranteed all participants had understanding of the topic which enhanced the findings' credibility, which is essential for the verification of the research findings in different cases (Daymon and Holloway, 2011).

3.7.3. Ethics and Confidentiality

Participants were asked to discuss their personal experiences as practitioners and therefore some of their answers included referrals to clients. For confidentiality purposes, the interview participants (Table 1) were given new names and their clients were referenced by using an alphabetical naming system (X, Y, Z, etc.). The questionnaire was anonymous.

Table 1: Interview Participants

New Name	Position	Sector
Sam	Director	Technology
Lindsay	Senior Account Executive	Technology
Owen	Account Executive	Brand
John	Partner	Geopolitical
Hannah	Senior Account Executive	Corporate
Rebecca	Account Manager	Corporate

3.7.4. Fieldwork

Three interviews were interrupted by clients' (Sam, John, Owen) calls but only one of these interviews was stopped and finished via e-mail (Owen). Two other interviews (Rebecca, Hannah) were merged together because of unexpected changes of the participants' availability. Therefore, both participants were interviewed simultaneously in a busy pub, where the researcher used an external microphone to guarantee the quality of the interview recordings. Even though the noise affected the participants' ability to hear each other, the interviewer used the rotation principle, where a participant was asked a question and then the second participant had to respond to the same question and the following one. This approach aimed to reduce the bias, created by the participants listening to each other's responses.

4.0 DATA DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This section will describe the data collected by both research methods used. It will also outline the detected key themes by critically analysing the research findings. All data will be presented in tandem to enable the understanding of the qualitative data (Bryman, 2008), which will be validated and supplemented by the quantitative data (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2004).

4.1 Terminology Used

Once all research participants were briefed on the research topic (Appendix 2), they were asked whether they can differentiate the terms “media”, “press” and “news release”.

All interview participants claimed they use the term “press release”, and none of them were able to differentiate the terms from one another. Consistently, 65 questionnaire participants suggested they “Strongly Agree” that “press release” is the accepted industry-wide term, while more than half of them claimed they cannot differentiate the terms (Figure 2).

[INSERT FIGURE 2]

Consistently with the secondary research (p.13), the data demonstrated preference for the term “press release”, used as a professional jargon phrase referring to releases distributed to all types of media. This suggests the approach to use the terms interchangeably was appropriate and in line with the terminology used in existing academic literature, professional PR publications and potentially the PR industry.

4.2 Objective 1

The secondary research did not go through an in-depth investigation of the methods specifically used for evaluating media relations because of this research focus on the use of media releases. Therefore, the interviews were used to obtain information about whether releases could be used to measure the effectiveness of media relations by examining what the participants perceive as a successful release and what influences its success.

4.2.1. Success Measurement

All interview participants suggested they measure a release's success using different criteria, summarised in Table 2 and outlined in detail in Appendix 11. The proposed criteria, however, were found to match The Barcelona Principles of Evaluation (Figure 1). This suggests the measurement of a release's success can be done on three levels: output, outcomes, and impacts on the business (Ketchum, 2011).

Table 2: Proposed Measurement Criteria

Output	Outcome	Business Impacts
Sentiment	Message pull through	Depends on the release's objectives. Success is achieved if the objectives are met.
Amount	Behavioural impacts	
Type	Attitude change	

One participant specifically noted that measuring a release's output is particularly important but it is not an appropriate measure of a release's success, which should be evaluated along with its other impacts:

"It is indeed important to measure the output of the number of press releases you write but it should not be a measure of effectiveness. It should be utilised in conjunction with the outtake that results to gauge effectiveness but most effectively - to look at outcomes." (John, p.119)

In contrast, the majority of questionnaire participants indicated they usually use the amount (40) and type (42) of coverage a release generates to evaluate its success (Figure 3), which suggests a release's output is most likely to define whether it is successful.

[INSERT FIGURE 3]

4.2.2. Factors Influencing the Release's Success

All interview participants suggested various factors, such as the release's newsworthiness, the appropriateness of its use and the news agenda's influence, determine whether it will receive coverage. Yet, all participants added they always follow up (via telephone or e-mail) with certain journalists to minimise the influence of these factors, which consequently increases their release's chances for success.

Two participants (Rebecca, Hannah) further noted that unlike the media interest in their clients, who the practitioner was and which agency they represented were not factors of influence because the PRPs' relationships with journalists do not guarantee their releases will receive coverage. Interestingly, one of them (Rebecca) confirmed the appropriateness of the sample selection (Section 3.4) by acknowledging that building and maintaining relationships with journalists is challenging for agency practitioners because their clients operate in different industries, covered by different journalists. The participant, however, added she believes the journalists she often works with are

likely to read her releases because they know her. Therefore, this suggestion underlines the importance of establishing relationships with journalists because this enables the occurrence of the “Jeffers Effect” (p.15). Consequently, journalists would demonstrate positive attitude and might read releases sent by PRPs they know instead of deleting them as soon as they receive them (Fedler and DeLorme, 2003, p.16).

To investigate whether a PRP's media relations skills are also a factor of influence, the interview participants were asked whether good media relations skills guarantee media coverage. All six disagreed, while one of them explained:

“Everyone in PR knows that the only way to guarantee coverage or no coverage... is by advertising. I think in PR you can never tell journalists what to write about. Unfortunately, when something... hasn't landed the way you wanted, it can sometimes be seen as – you know... you haven't done your job, you don't have the media relations skills.”

(Rebecca, p.131)

The questionnaire asked the participants to rank the key suggestions made during the interviews, depending on their impact on whether a release will receive coverage.

INSERT FIGURE 4]

The data illustrated in Figure 4 suggests newsworthiness is a key factor of influence on the release's success, as 80 participants ranked the release's newsworthiness of utmost importance. In contrast, the performance of the practitioner was ranked fifth by 63, suggesting more than half of the participants believe the practitioner's skills have little or no impact on the release's success. This was further

supported by the quantitative data, which shows 47 participants “Disagree” good media relations guarantee coverage (Figure 5).

[INSERT FIGURE 5]

4.2.3. Discussion

The data illustrated in Figure 6 (below) demonstrates split opinions on whether releases could be used to evaluate media relations effectiveness and whether releases are appropriate measurement criteria. Interestingly, even though a release’s success, usually measured by the amount and type of coverage it generates, was found to be subjective, the research findings suggest it could be used for the measurement of the effectiveness of media relations. Furthermore, five out of six interview participants (excluding Lindsay) suggested the coverage generated by a release could be used by clients to evaluate the performance of the agency. Thus, the interview participants suggested poor media coverage could affect the agency-client relationship and could create negative perceptions about the performance of the PRPs, looking after the account (John, Rebecca, Hannah). This was supported by the quantitative data shown in Figure 6, which suggests that although PRPs may not use the output generated by a release to evaluate media relations effectiveness, clients could use it to evaluate the agency’s performance. This finding’s implications, however, will be discussed further in Section 4.3 because of its direct relevance to Objective 2.

[INSERT FIGURE 6]

4.3 Objective 2

Objective 2 aimed to examine how the use of media releases affects the overall service provided to a client. Therefore, to gain understanding of this topic, the author investigated several different themes.

4.3.1. Use of Media Releases

All interview participants were generally protective of the use of releases, considered as important documents, which could be particularly effective when used strategically. However, all participants agreed the release, left alone without follow up media relations efforts is not as effective. In contrast, the quantitative data (Figure 7) demonstrated split opinions, suggesting all participants value the use of releases differently.

[INSERT FIGURE 7]

During this theme's investigation, all interview participants indicated sometimes clients specifically request releases. However, they confessed this reduces their flexibility to successfully communicate their clients' stories because as an official document, containing corporate information and branding (Owen, p.110), the release must go through "layers of approval" (Sam, p.94). The six participants described the release's approval process as inefficient because it is too slow (Bredholt, 2014; Business Wire, 2014) to respond to the requirements of the 24/7 news cycle (CIPR, 2015), whilst reducing the release's chances for getting coverage. Moreover, three participants (John, Rebecca, Owen) suggested the process dilutes the messages the release communicates:

[Releases] can often be so carefully scrutinised that they are refined to the point of having no content whatsoever, no meaningful content whatsoever. [...] This is caused by the nature of complex organisations and hierarchies and how they edit text, essentially writing by committee to the point the original body, the ethos of the content, is entirely denuded by virtue of the way in which it has been written.” (John, p.116)

Consistently with the qualitative data, 69 questionnaire participants suggested clients request releases (Figure 8). However, when asked why their clients request releases, all interview participants gave different suggestions as illustrated in Figure 9, which also shows the number of questionnaire respondents who agreed with the interviewees’ proposition, whist validating the qualitative data.

[INSERT FIGURE 8, 9]

4.3.2. The Agency-Client Relationship

All interview participants explained clients generally expect to receive support for their PR programs and help for generating media coverage. A participant explained that if the client’s expectations are not met, they might question the quality of the agency’s work:

[...] they want that extra thinking, extra dimension of how they can push their stories out. And if they don’t have their stories out: “Why am I working with you as an agency?” (Sam, p.99)

In different context two participants (John, Rebecca) implied clients hire agencies to help them get coverage because they do not understand the media. This

suggestion was validated by the questionnaire's findings (Figure 10) as the majority of participants "Agree" clients do not understand how the media operates (55), what makes a newsworthy story (46) and what journalists want (50). Nevertheless, the two interview participants added this is not important as it is the agency's responsibility to help clients get media coverage. Yet, all interview participants noted they have to manage their clients' expectations of how much coverage they could generate because poor coverage, following the distribution of a release, was found to have influence on the client's perceptions of the performance of the agency and the practitioners looking after the account, as suggested by the qualitative data presented in Section 4.2.3. and as confirmed by the data, shown in Figure 11.

[INSERT FIGURES 10, 11]

Adding to the earlier proposition that clients hire agencies for their media relations expertise, four interview participants (Sam, Owen, John, Rebecca) suggested sometimes clients hire agencies to specifically write and distribute releases on their behalf. This is consistent with the earlier finding that releases are commonly used because clients specifically request them (Figure 8) and the finding that PRPs would always send out releases if their clients insist, as suggested by all six interview participants. However, this contradicts the earlier finding that clients hire agencies for their expertise, which implies PRPs are paid to advise their clients whether a release is the best approach to getting coverage. Yet, the data shown in Figure 9 suggests this controversy is likely to be created by the clients' contradicting behaviour because they expect the agency will use their expertise to get them coverage but at the same time they have very specific requirements about the methods the agency should use to do so.

The questionnaire aimed to build upon this data, asking participants how often they advise their clients against sending out releases they expect to generate poor coverage (Figure 12) because it may not be the best way to communicate their client's story. Only 18 participants claimed they will "Always" discuss their concerns with their clients or superiors who have the authority to do so. Yet, 62 and respectively 56 participants suggested their clients are likely to take their or their superiors' feedback if they advised them against sending out a release (Figure 13). This finding, therefore, suggests there could be issues in the agency's internal communication as PRPs may not always give feedback to their superiors. Alternatively, there could be issues in the agency-client relationship as PRPs may not always give their feedback to the client, which might be the result of the client's controversial behaviour.

[INSERT FIGURES 12, 13, 14]

This was further supported by the finding that when asked what they would do differently to get the client's story out, the questionnaire participants' opinions were varied (Figure 14). Hence, this suggests agencies handle their relationships with clients differently and therefore their actions would also differ.

4.3.3. Alternative Communication Tools

Many social media platforms, which could potentially end the use of media releases ("PR Week", "PR News", etc.), emerged as a consequence of the global digitalisation. This was reflected during the interviews as the participants suggested a number of alternatives to media releases. However, when they were asked whether releases could be completely replaced, all participants disagreed. John addressed this question, asking: "*Is a spaceship an alternative to a car? Yes, but they do a different job.*" (p.119), while Sam suggested releases cannot be replaced because traditional

media is still used and sometimes even journalists would request releases (Sam, Rebecca):

"We are still doing traditional media relations. That's what our clients are looking for. Until such time when this environment changes radically – in delivery of news and information as such [...], we're gonna have to continue producing the way we've done it." (Sam, p.96)

The questionnaire followed the interviews' strategy, asking participants to select what they believe to be the best alternative to media releases. Initially only 21 participants disagreed there is an alternative but when asked whether the use of releases could be abandoned completely, 90 suggested they could not. Thus, this finding demonstrates the clash between Lee's (1906) opinion on the release's purpose and the professional media's belief that the release no longer serves this purpose effectively. Therefore, regardless of its small sample, the research showcased the PR industry's struggle to adapt to the digitalised media environment (CIPR, 2014) as PRPs continue using releases instead of making use of the multiple communication tools available to them nowadays (Grunig, 2009).

[INSERT FIGURE 15]

4.3.4. Discussion

This research found media releases are often used because clients sometimes specifically request them. By doing so, they unintentionally restrict what the agency can do for them in terms of strategic and creative approaches (Grunig, 2009) to getting their stories out. However, a concerning trend was revealed as participants suggested they would always send out a release if their clients insisted on that. This implies

practitioners might not always use their expertise and advise their clients on what is the best way to communicate their stories, even though the research showed most clients are likely to take their advice. Consequently, the practitioners will do what they are paid for and will try to get coverage by distributing a release to simply satisfy the client's request. Hence, the agency will eventually deliver an output which would not necessarily impact the clients' stakeholders or their business (Ketchum, 2011), suggesting the use of releases could affect the overall service provided to a client in a negative way.

4.4 Objective 3

To investigate whether there is a relationship between the extensive use of media releases and the negative attitude of journalists towards PRPs, this research investigated the impacts of several factors detected by the secondary research and the data presented so far.

4.4.1. Understanding Newsworthiness

The participants' understanding of newsworthiness was investigated as previous research suggests journalists believe PRPs do not understand newsworthiness (DeLorme and Fedler, 2003; Pang, 2009). Consistently with existing literature, all six interview participants could identify without aid at least two of the eight newsworthiness criteria (Supa and Zoch, 2009). In contrast, 60 questionnaire participants identified all eight (Figure 16). Yet, when asked how often they would send out a release that does not contain all of them, they confirmed Supa and Zoch's (2009) finding (p.16) that even though PRPs understand newsworthiness they do not always send out newsworthy releases (Figure 17).

[INSERT FIGURES 16, 17]

4.4.2. Threats to PRPs' Relationships with Journalists

The semi-structured format of the interviews enabled participants to identify several threats to their relationships with journalists without the interviewer addressing the topic, which could have biased their responses.

One participant (Sam) suggested PRPs sometimes treat journalists as "communication channels" (p.94), explaining this was wrong because PRPs have to establish and maintain relationships with journalists instead of approaching them only when they are trying to push their clients' stories out. Furthermore, three participants (Sam, Rebecca, Hannah) discussed the impacts of digitalisation on the media, addressing the fact that many media outlets have made staff cut backs, which increased stress levels among journalists, further straining (Section 2.4) the relationship between both parties.

As discussed in Section 4.3.2., the interview participants claimed clients sometimes insist on sending out releases. This was further supported by the quantitative data as 76 participants (Figure 18) suggested the most common reason for sending out a release, containing only few newsworthiness criteria, is the client insisting that they do so. However, receiving a release lacking newsworthiness could potentially irritate journalists, who might be even more displeased when PRPs follow up via e-mail or telephone. In relation to that, Hannah suggested junior staff could be pressured to repeatedly follow up with journalists. This proposition's validity was confirmed as 31 questionnaire participants indicated senior staff got them to send out a release that lacked newsworthiness (Figure 18):

"There have been so many times where someone has asked me to continuously call the same person and ask. "Check if they are going to use, check if they are going to use it!" and it's like – by this point, a week later, they would have used it if they were interested." (Hannah, p.135)

[INSERT FIGURE 18]

4.4.3. Reasons for Hostile Journalists' Attitude

The interview participants were asked to talk about their experiences with journalists, who demonstrated hostile attitude. The following factors were identified to have provoked it:

- Three participants pointed out journalists work under extreme time pressures due to the 24/7 news cycle (Sam, Rebecca, Hannah). 53 questionnaire participants agreed this is "Likely" to cause negative attitude.
- 35 claimed it is "Likely" that journalists who demonstrated negative attitude were already upset when they got in touch with them as suggested by Hannah and Sam;
- Only 15 questionnaire participants agreed journalists do not always see PRPs as the best sources of information as suggested by Sam and Rebecca;
- Hannah (p.37) suggested following up with journalists after sending out a release could annoy them. Although 49 questionnaire participants claimed that calling journalists is "Likely" to cause their negative attitude, opinions about e-mails were split;
- One interview participant (Rebecca), however, suggested the release itself is not the reason for the journalists' behaviour. The questionnaire therefore expanded on this suggestion, asking participants what factors are likely to provoke journalists' hostile behaviour. The data (Figure 19) indicated that selling in a story (39) and

pitching irrelevant or stories lacking newsworthiness (52) could be provocative but sending a release is not likely to cause a negative attitude (44).

[INSERT FIGURE 19]

Interestingly, three interviewees suggested it is part of the PRP's job to deal with journalists' hostility (Sam, John, Lindsay) with 32 questionnaire participants claiming they always experience negative attitude from journalists (Figure 20).

[INSERT FIGURE 20]

4.4.4. Discussion

Consistently with the secondary research (Supa and Zoch, 2009), this investigation confirmed that participants generally understand newsworthiness but they tend to send out stories that lack newsworthiness (Supa and Zoch, 2014), which may or may not be the result of their clients insisting on sending out a release. Either way, this research found journalists' negative attitudes are not simply triggered by receiving a release as several other factors could influence their behaviour (Pang, 2009). Thus, the top factors of influence were found to be directly related to the use of releases and the way they are presented to the journalist. Yet, the routines journalists follow in the newsroom (Pang, 2009) were found to be the most likely culprit in terms of influencing negative attitudes.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This research explored the impacts of the use of media releases on agency PR practice in the UK - a topic, deriving from the research gap in relation to the use of releases, recognised for their importance for media relations practice (Shaw and White, 2004).

Unlike the use of releases, media relations have been examined numerous times (Sallot and Johnson, 2006) but previous research focuses on the “how to” side of doing media relations, which restricted researchers from exploring “the reason behind” (Supa and Zoch, 2009): Why do practitioners establish relationships with journalists? Why do PRPs use releases? Why do journalists still demonstrate negative attitude towards PRPs in the highly digitalised media environment?

To address these questions, this researcher reached out to 106 PRPs to learn more than what the literature examined in this paper (Section 2.0) could tell about their work. By doing so, the research investigated the three objectives set in Section 3.2 by collecting qualitative data, which was validated and supported by obtaining quantitative data.

This methodology was used as the secondary research suggested the PR industry is extremely dynamic and therefore, dependent on many factors (Pang, 2009; Supa and Zoch, 2009; CIPR, 2014). This was reflected in the research, which demonstrated that the participants’ experience depends on their position within their organisations and the sectors they work in (CIPR, 2014). Even though this enabled the collection of rich data, it also limited the research as the participants expressed very individual-specific views on each research objective. While this was particularly useful in the first stage of the research, the amount and diversity of the collected data lead to

the design of a relatively long questionnaire. Consequently, the volume of the final data became a key limitation of the research, which inevitably influenced the quality of the data analysis. This, however, enabled data repetition, which revealed an unexpected interdependence between the objectives. Although they were examined separately, they were found to have much wider implications when analysed together.

In the process of investigating Objective 1, it was found the success of a media release is usually measured by the coverage it generates, which suggests PRPs should establish good relationships with journalists because that increases the chances of their release being read instead of deleted (Fedler and DeLorme, 2003). Yet, the research suggested practitioners need to follow up with journalists to increase the release's actual chances of getting coverage. However, this was found to sometimes affect the journalists' attitude (Objective 3) towards the practitioner, regardless of their relationship. As a result, the PRP's release might not receive coverage, which according to the research data could influence the client's service satisfaction (Objective 2).

This research suggests PRPs do not necessarily use their releases' success to evaluate media relations effectiveness (Objective 1) but it also suggests the output generated by releases could impact the client's service satisfaction (Objective 2). The research findings show that if a client is not happy with the amount or type of coverage generated by a release, they might question the quality of the agency's work. Yet, the coverage received does not guarantee the agency's service quality because coverage is only the output of sending out a release (Ketchum, 2011), which might be the single result delivered by the agency as proof of their work on the client's account.

Furthermore, this investigation suggests that when agencies distribute releases to satisfy their clients, they might send out releases that lack newsworthiness, which

could provoke hostile journalists' behaviour. However, receiving a release with no news value was found to be just one of several factors that could trigger their negative attitude.

Nevertheless, as previously discussed, the participants had very different opinions on the use and value of media releases. In the context of the finding that practitioners do not always approach clients or superiors to inform them a release might not be the best way to communicate particular story, this research detected a trend illustrated in the following fictional example:

Jane is a Senior Account Executive in a British agency who does not value the use of releases. A client wants Jane to send out a release, which she believes lacks newsworthiness and will not be of interest to the media. Yet, Jane sends it out without flagging this up to the Account Manager or the client, who might consider her feedback and allow her to use her expertise to suggest what is the best way to communicate the story the release is trying to tell.

5.1. Recommendations for Further Research

The example above demonstrates there could be issues with agencies' internal communication and the dynamics of the agency-client relationship. These issues should be identified by further investigation because of the multiple implications they could have for internal communications, recruitment and client management.

Further research should also explore how PR agencies evaluate the media relations work of their staff and how that corresponds to the way clients evaluate the agency's performance. This would allow much better understanding of Objectives 1

and 2. Yet, further research with a bigger sample, also including journalists, should be conducted to validate the data generated in relation to Objective 3 as this research's second most crucial limitation was the fact the topic was explored from a PR perspective only.

This research established that due to the sensitivity of the journalists' job, a wide range of factors could provoke their negative attitude towards PRPs. Further investigation should build upon the research data obtained because these findings could be beneficial for the improvement of the PRP-journalist relationship, which could potentially reduce some of the job-related stress for both parties.

Yet again, the most important question this paper was not able to investigate, due to limitations imposed by the small scale of the research, is not why PRPs struggle to adapt to the changing media environment, nor what prevents them from finding better ways to communicate their clients' stories. It is: Do PRPs, who are professional communicators have issues communicating – with their colleagues, their clients and the media?

FIGURES

Figure 1: Principles of PR Evaluation

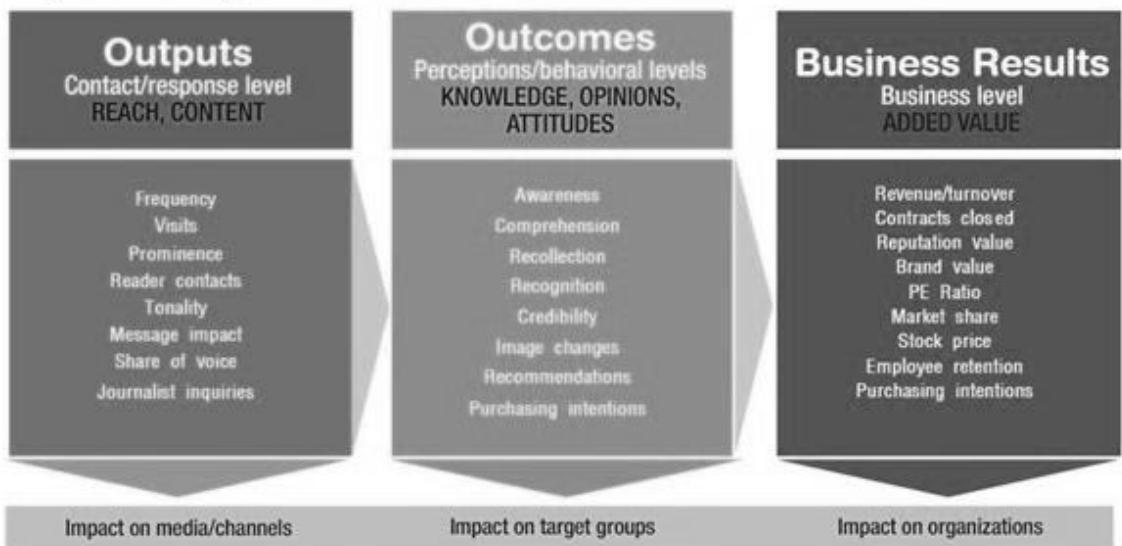


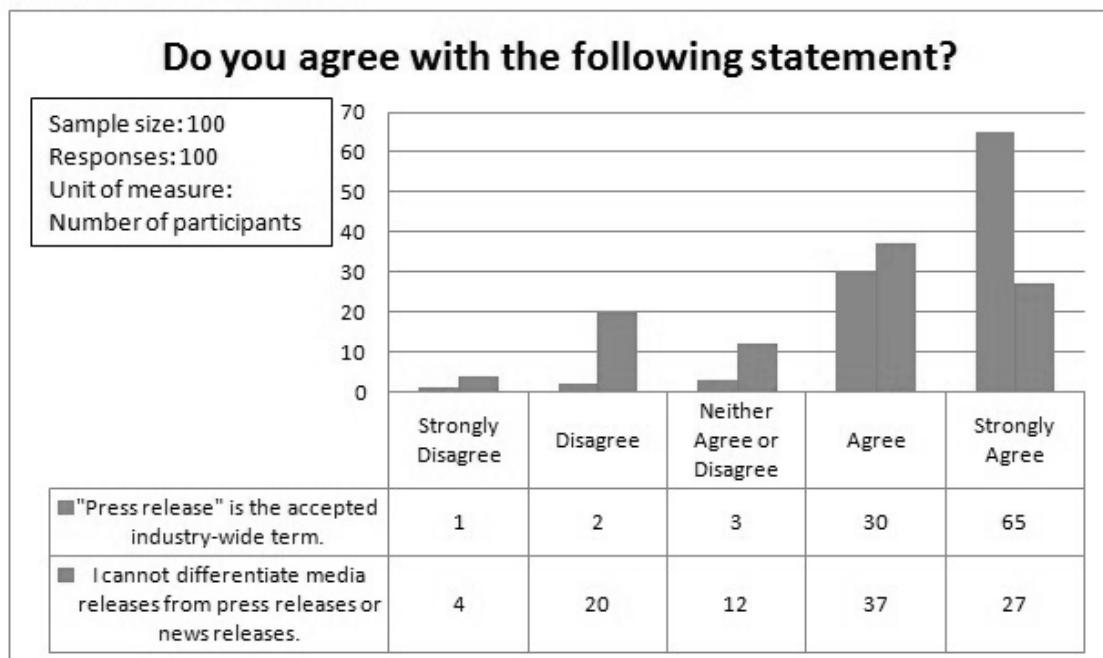
Figure 2: Terminology Used

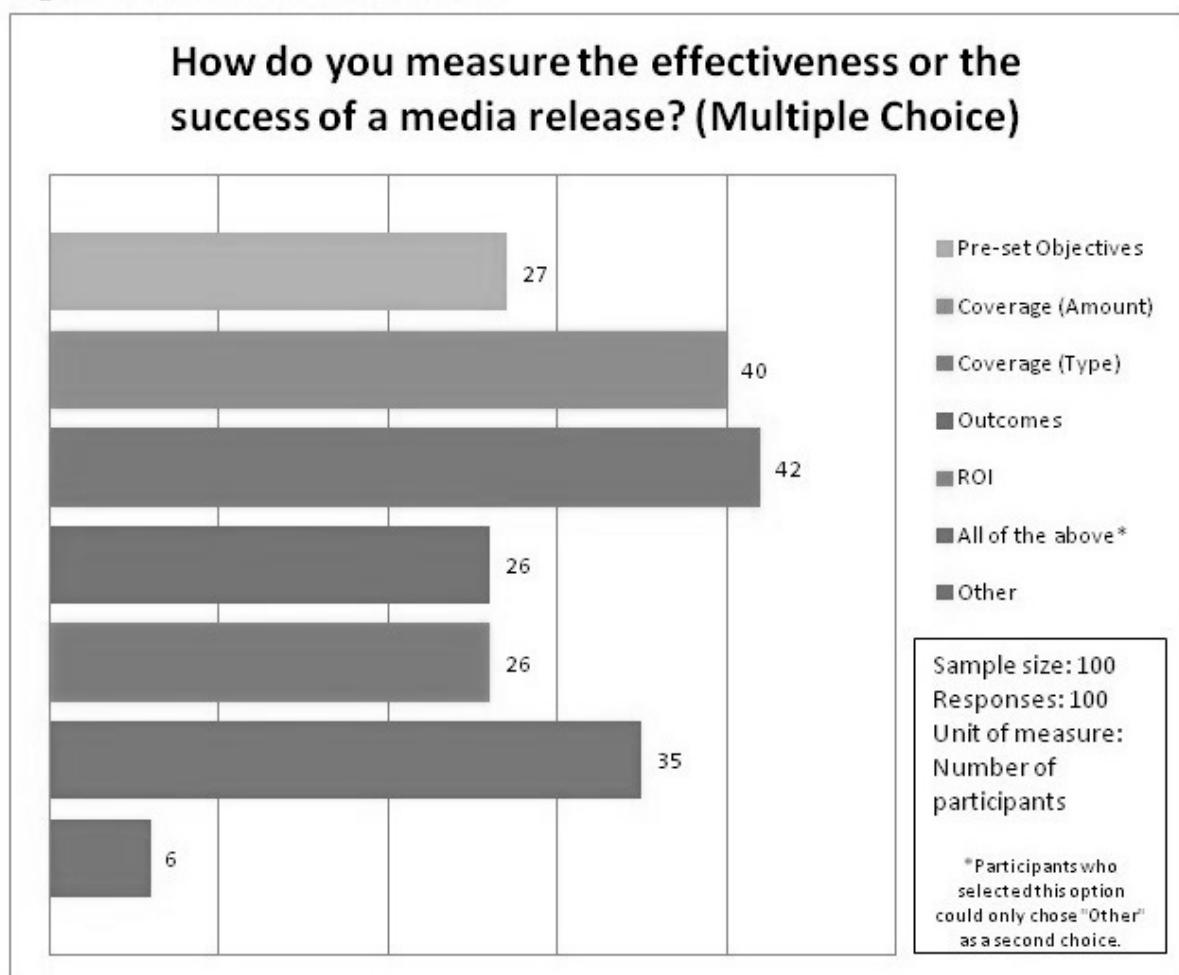
Figure 3: Measurement Criteria Used

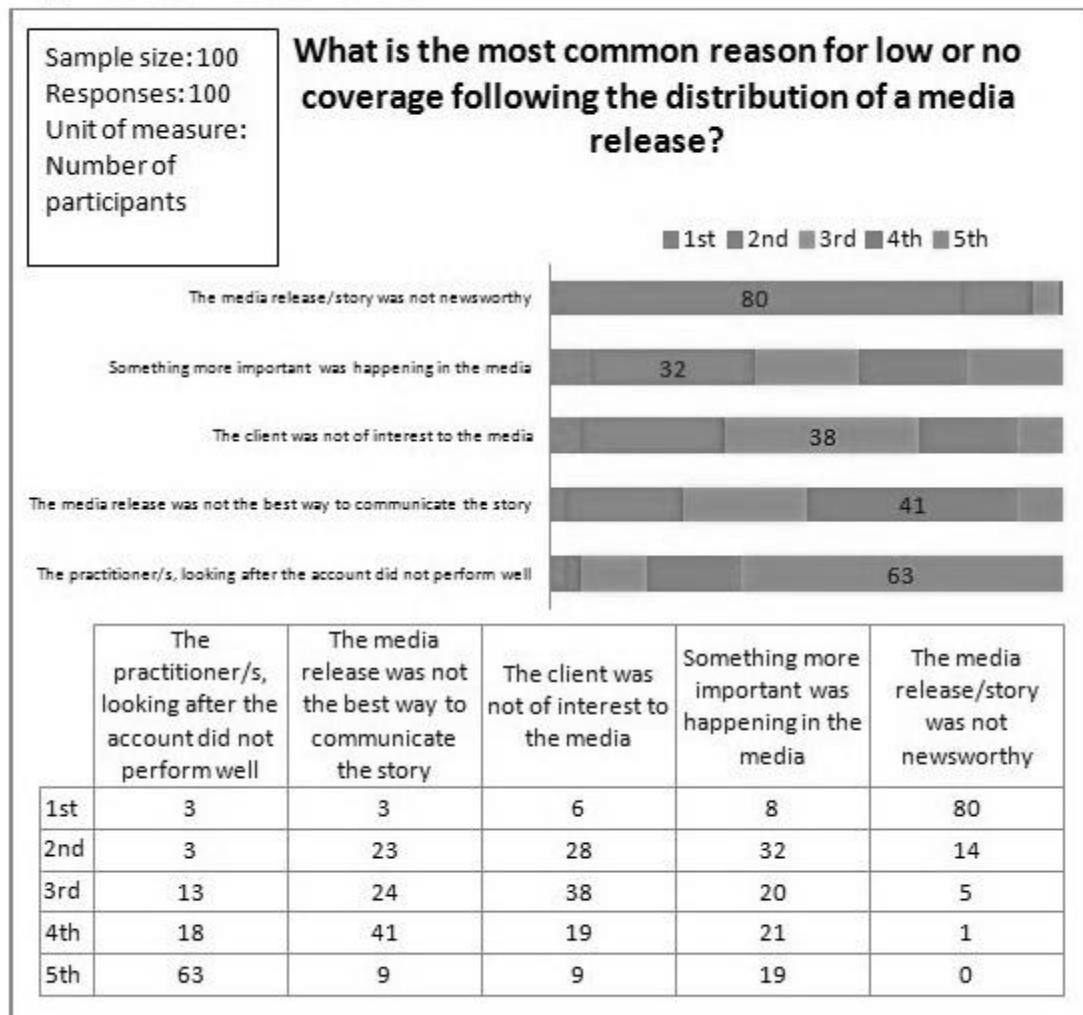
Figure 4: Factors of Influence

Figure 5: PRP's Media Relations Skills as a Factor of Influence

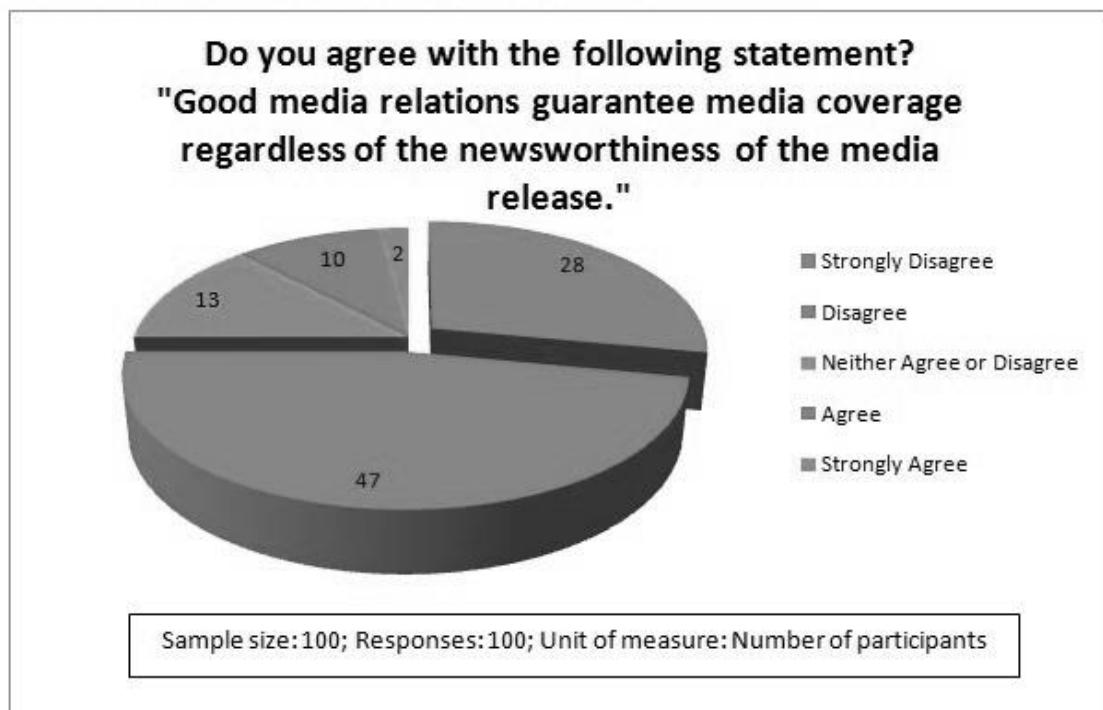


Figure 6: Releases as Measures of Success**Do you agree with the following statement?**

Sample size:100; Responses:100; Unit of measure: Number of participants

The media release could be used as criteria for measuring media relations effectiveness.

12 35 21 32

Clients could use the media coverage, generated by distributing a media release, to evaluate the performance of the agency.

6 13 14 57 10

The media release is not an appropriate criteria for measuring the effectiveness of media relations.

20 22 38 20

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neither Agree or Disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

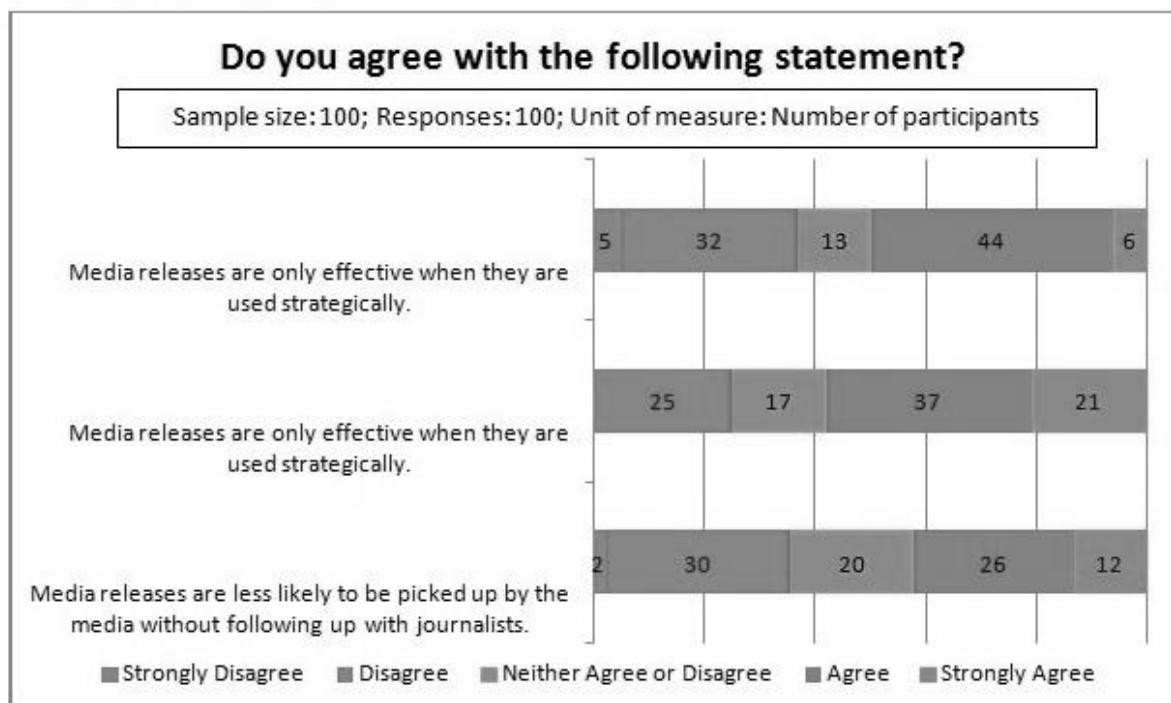
Figure 7: Use of Releases

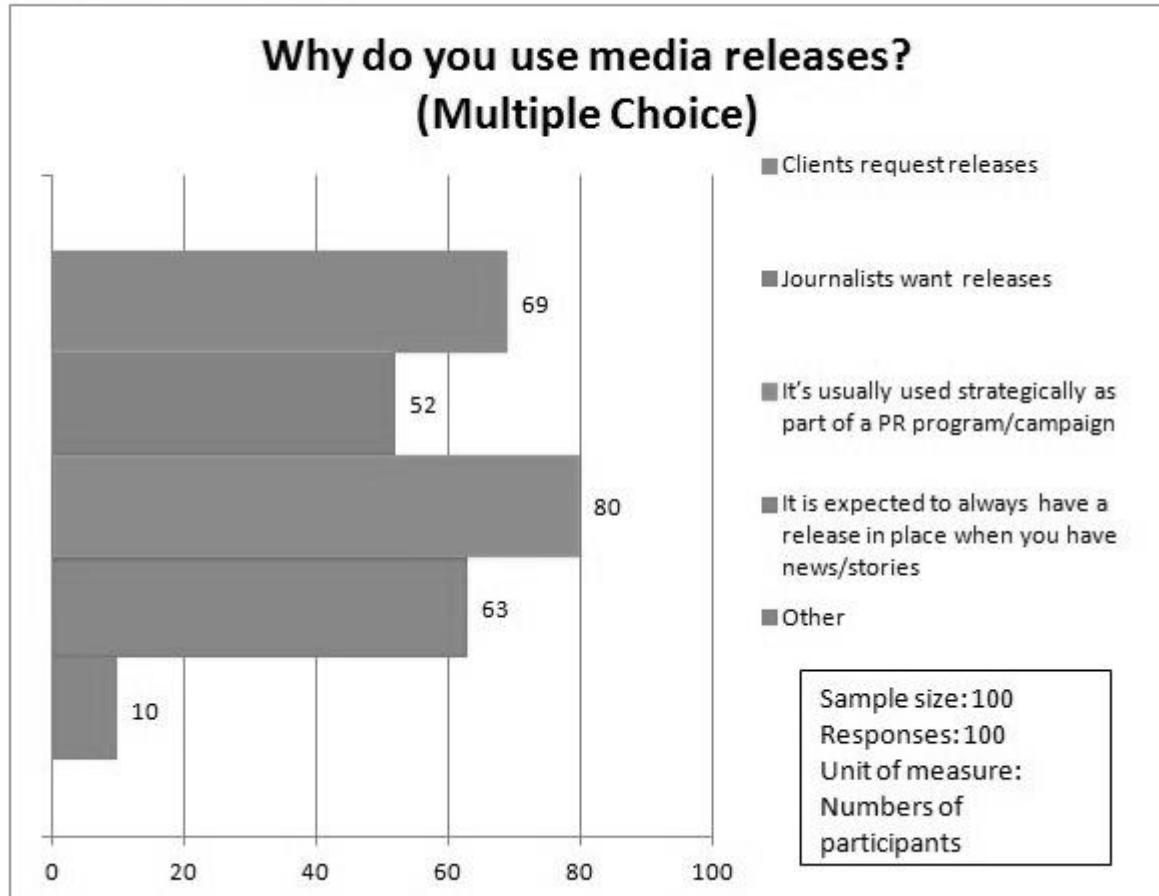
Figure 8: Use of Releases

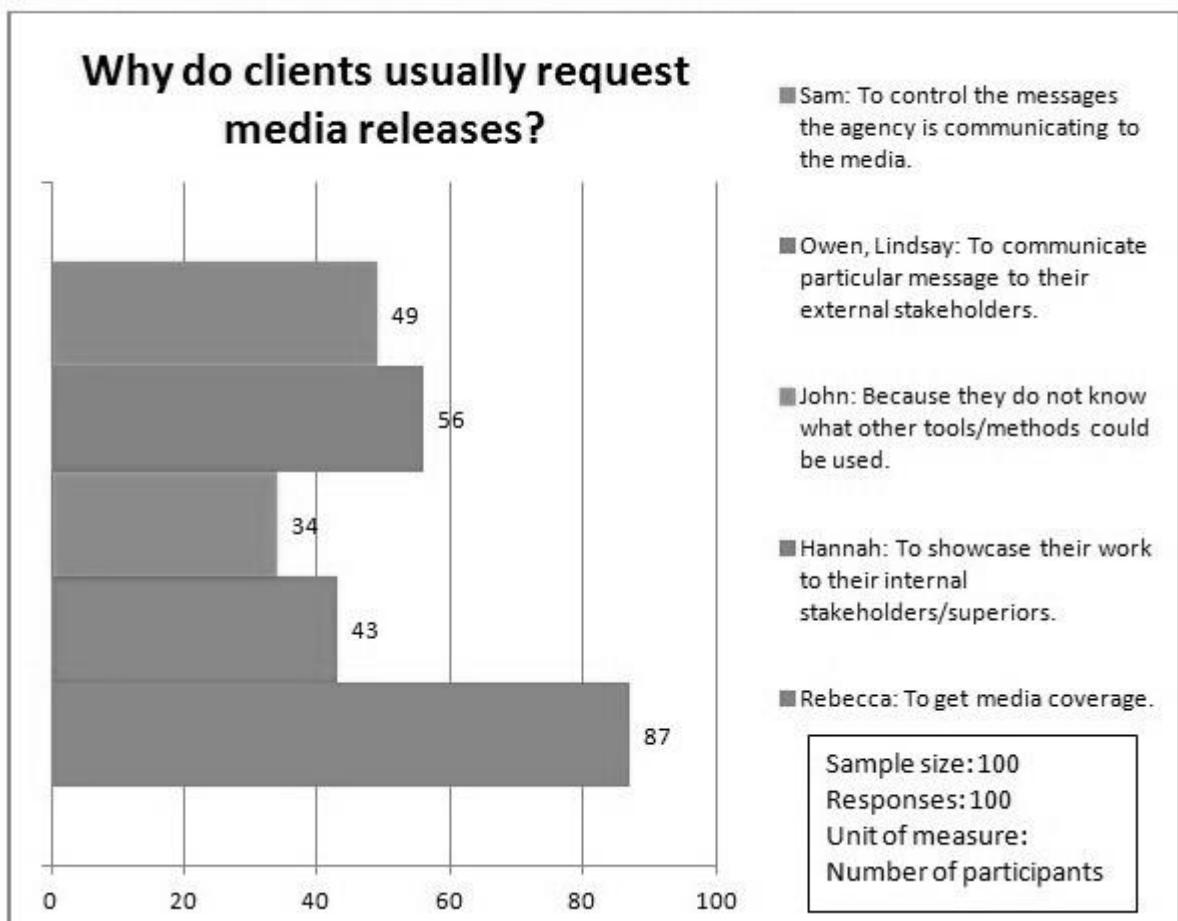
Figure 9: Reasons for Clients' Requests for Releases

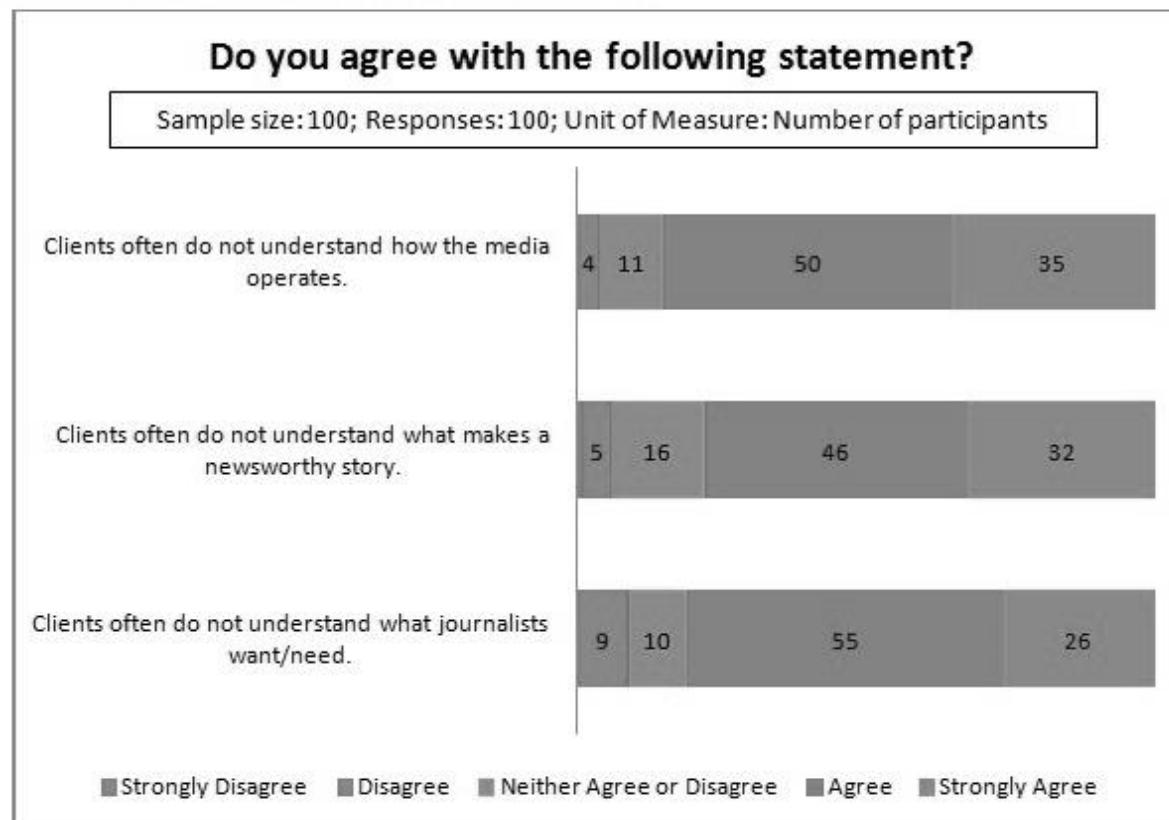
Figure 10: Clients' Understanding of the Media

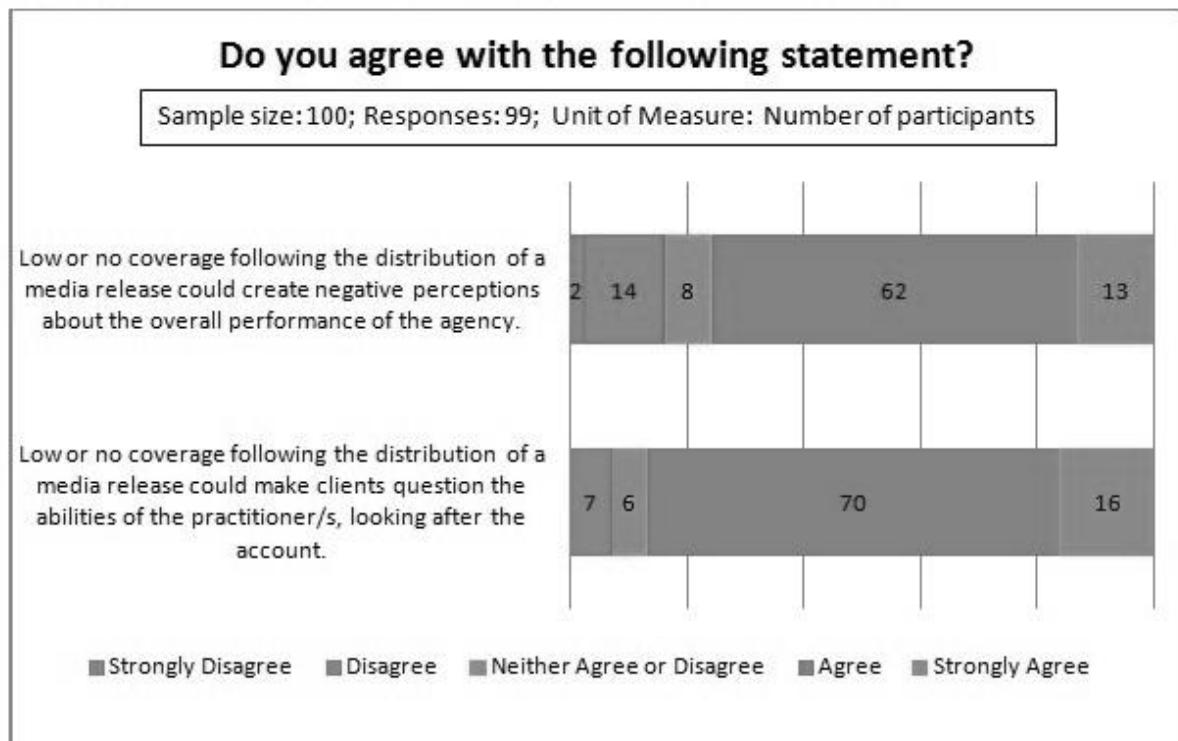
Figure 11: Coverage Impacts on the Agency-Client Relationship

Figure 12: Feedback Frequency

How often do you advise clients NOT to go forward with a media release if you expect it will not receive good/any coverage? Alternatively, how often would you flag this up to your superiors, who have the authority to do so?

Sample size: 100
Responses: 99
Unit of measure:
Number of participants



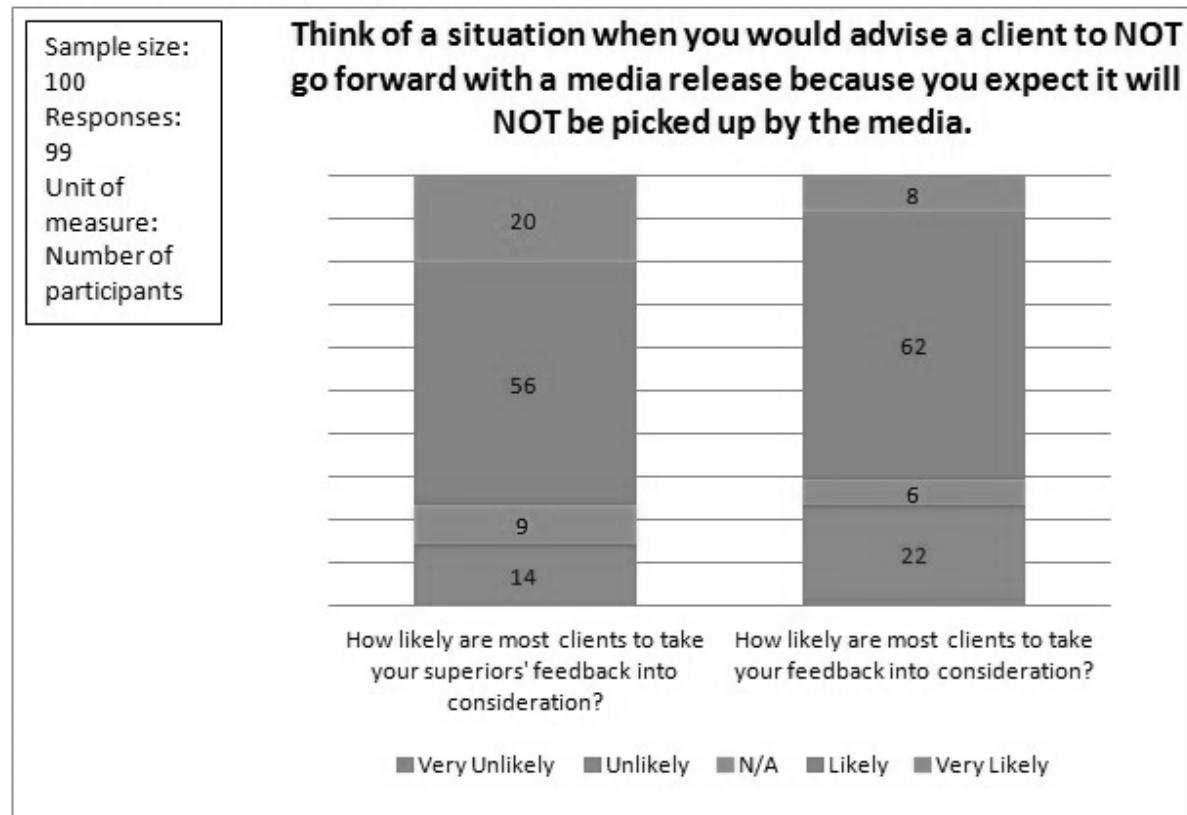
Figure 13: Clients Taking Feedback

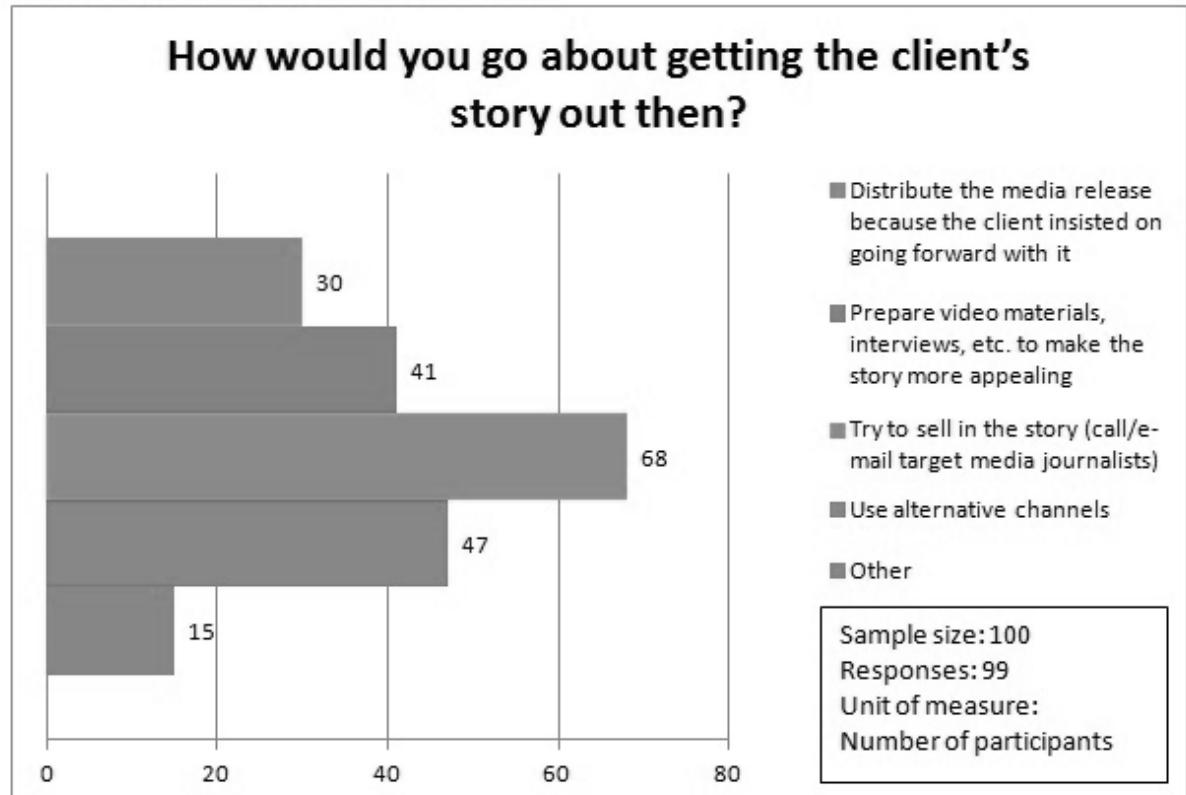
Figure 14: PRP's Post-Feedback Action

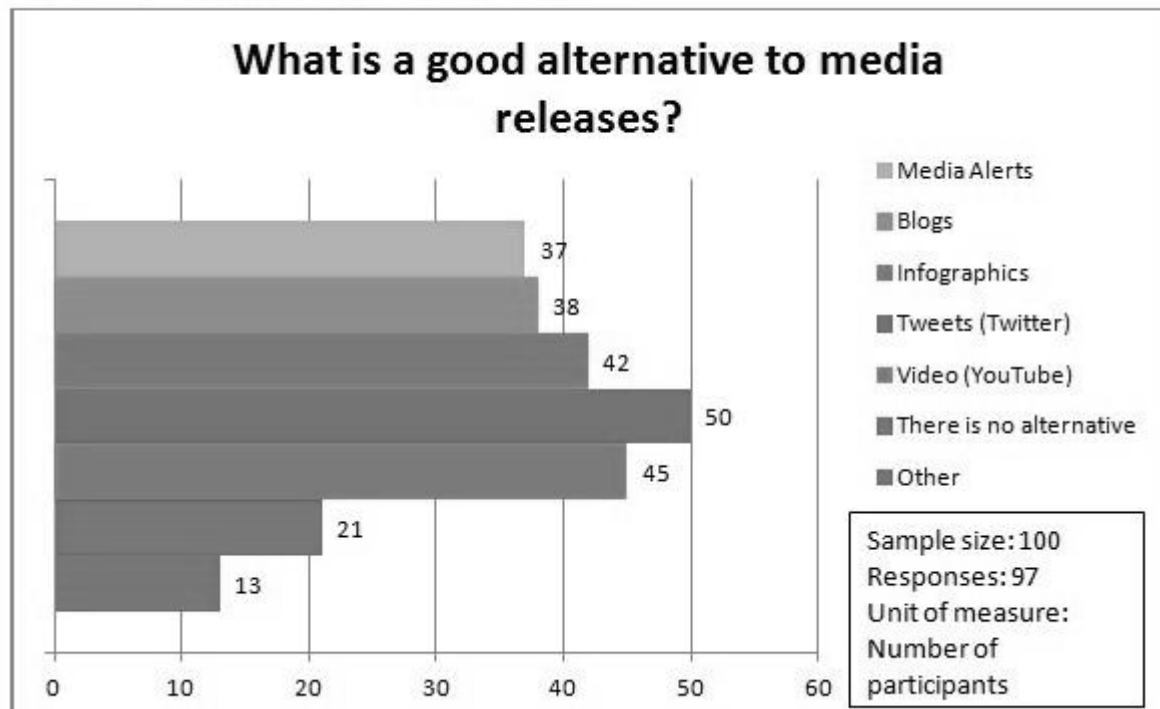
Figure 15: Alternative Communication Tools

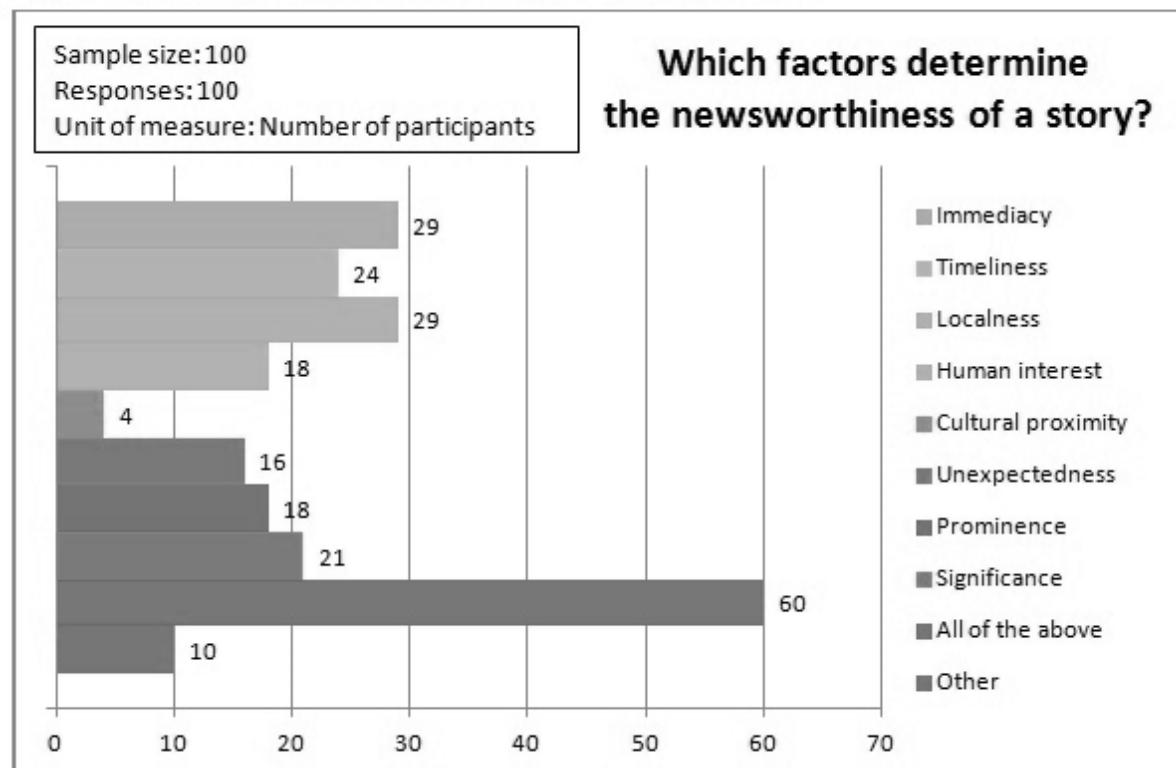
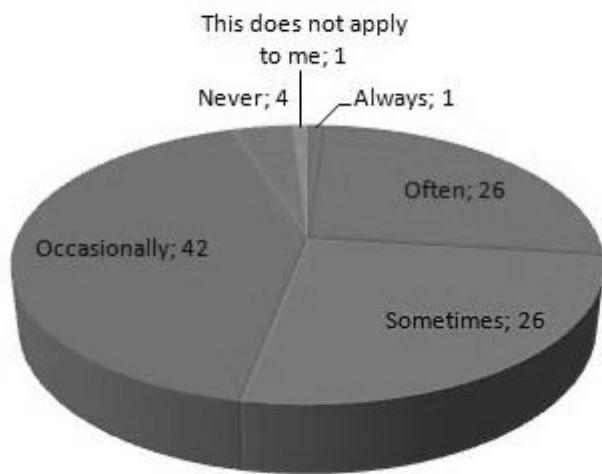
Figure 16: Participants' Understanding of Newsworthiness

Figure 17: Releases' Frequency of Distribution

How often do you/did you distribute releases that contain only few of the factors outline above?

■ Always ■ Often ■ Sometimes ■ Occasionally ■ Never ■ This does not apply to me



Sample size:100; Responses:100; Unit of measure: Number of participants

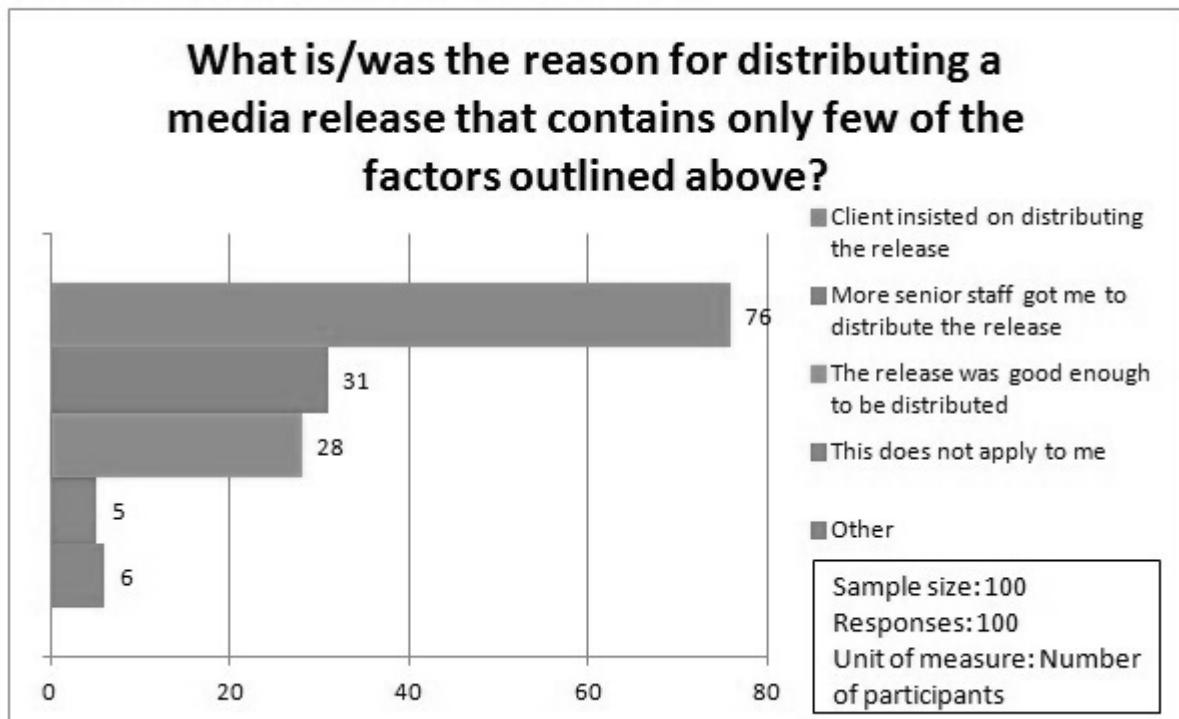
Figure 18: Reasons for the Release's Distribution

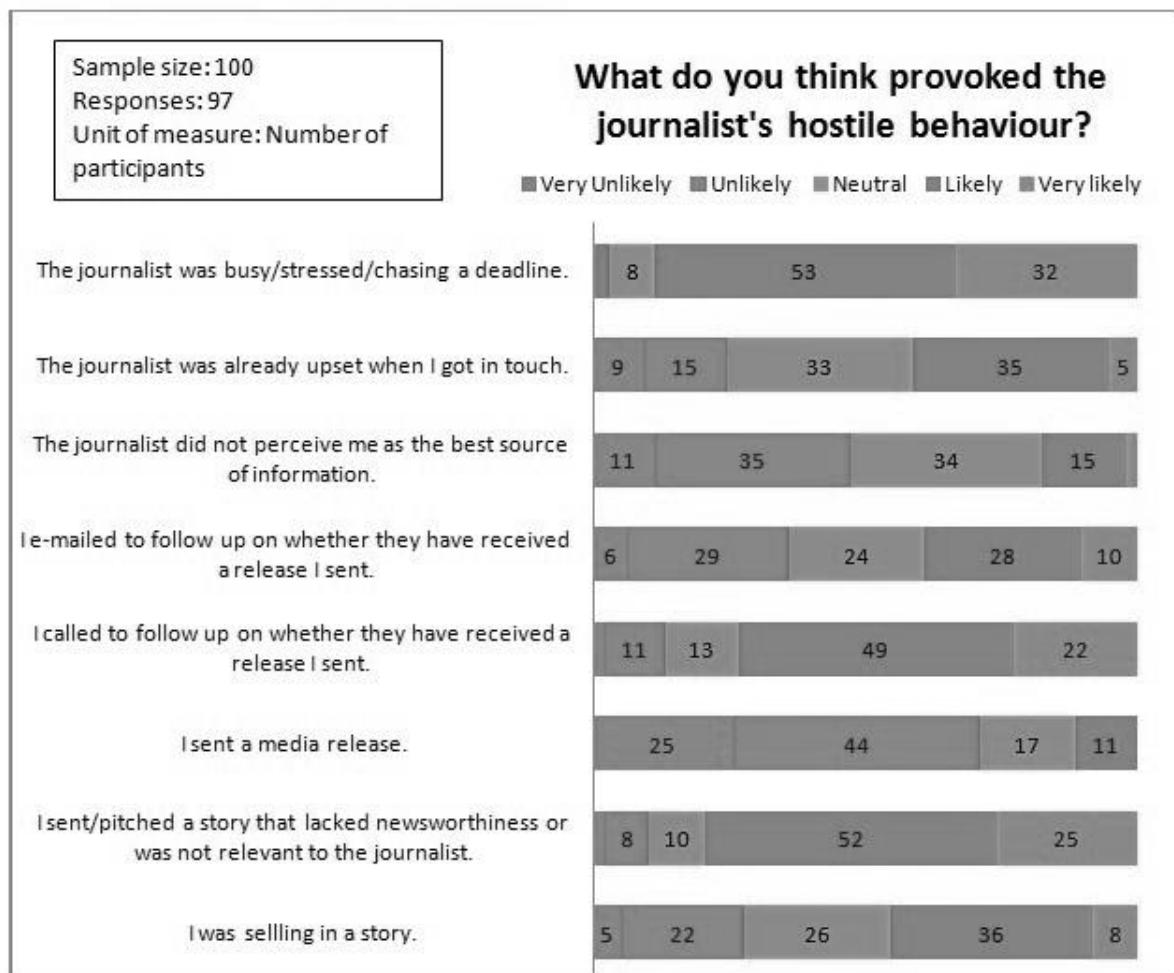
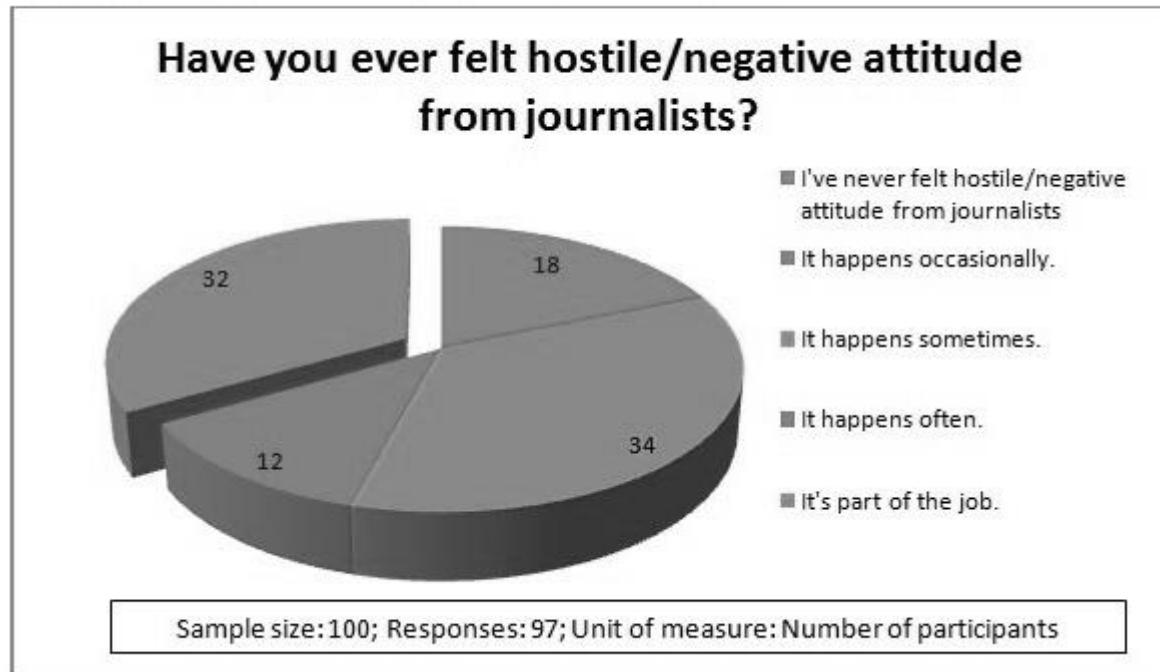
Figure 19: Factors Provoking Hostile Journalist Behavior

Figure 20: Frequency of Journalists' Negative Attitude



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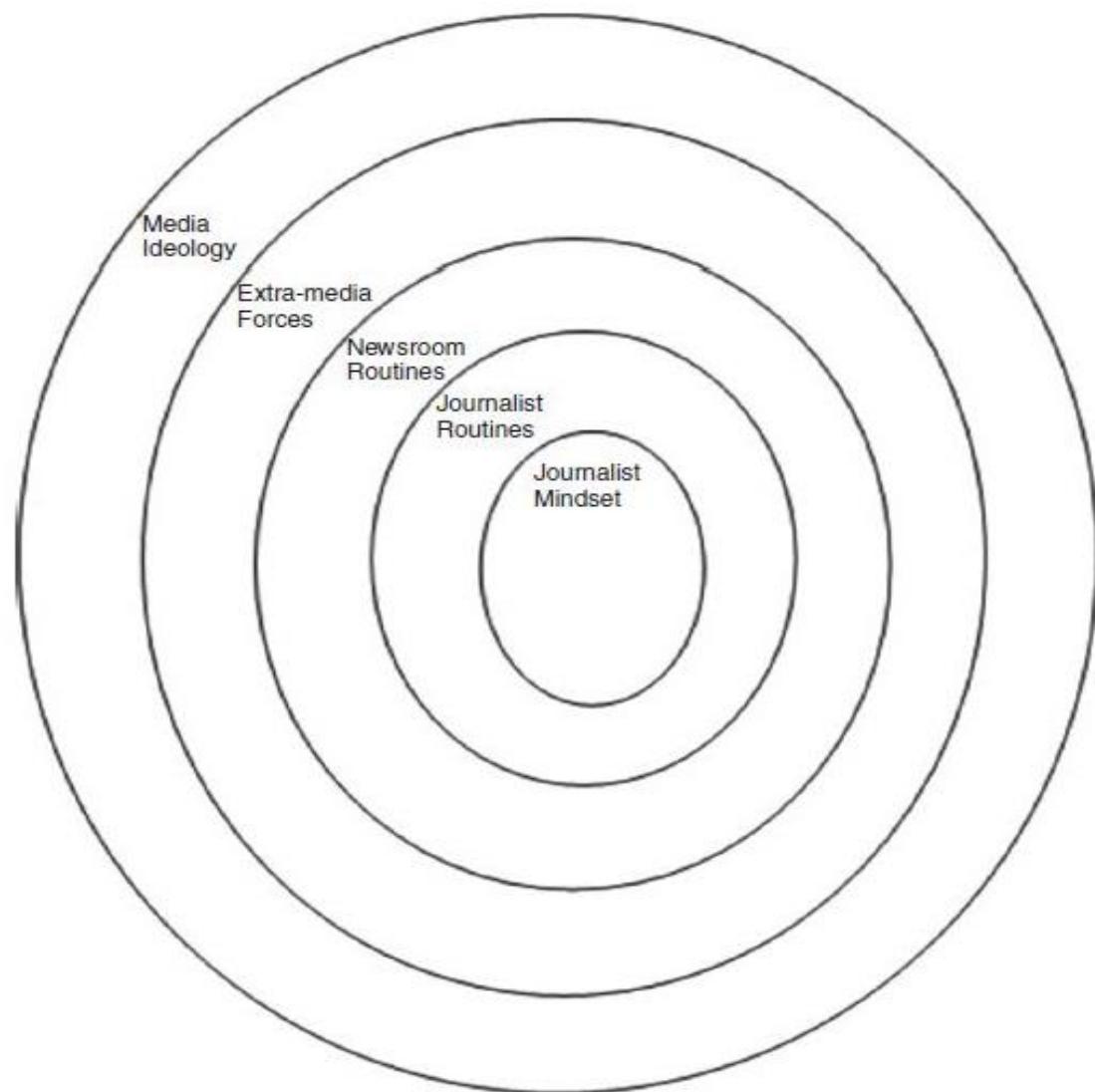
APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Mediating the Media Model

As briefly outlined in Section 2.3., Augustine Pang introduced his Mediating the Media Model (2009) to address the lack of systematic framework to study media relations (Pang et al., 2012) and Yoon's (2005) appeal, encouraging PRPs to learn "how the media and journalists operate and use that knowledge to build, change, or maintain journalists' perceptions of their organisations" (Yoon, 2005, p. 786).

Figure 21: Mediating the Media Model (Pang, 2009)



Pang's framework (Figure 21) consists of five interrelated concentric circles, each growing in importance and strength of influence on media relations as the model expands. In the core of the model are the internal forces, influencing media relations - journalist mindset, journalist routines and newsroom routines. These are followed by the external forces – extra-media influences and media ideology. Table 2 describes each one of these factors in further detail.

Table 3: Factors Influencing Media Relations (Pang, 2009)

Factor	Description
<i>Internal Factors of Influence</i>	
Journalist Mindset	The mindset of the journalists is a combination between his/her background and his/her individual characteristics. Therefore, the journalist's mindset is affected by his/her gender, ethnicity, education, experience, political affiliation, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, understanding of newsworthiness, values, etc.
Journalist Routines	The journalist's routines are the set of patterned and repeated activities he or she is involved in. These correspond to the newsroom routines and are related to any deadlines the journalist might be having. However, these are strictly specific for each media outlet.
Newsroom Routines	Newsroom routines are related to the media outlet's organisational structure – its role, hierarchical structure and goal. Based on these, the organisation decides what routines to impose within the media outlet and on the journalists. Yet, it also defines what media content will be published.
<i>External Factors of Influence</i>	
Extra-media Influences	Extra-media influences cannot be generalised as they could range from the outlet's freedom to supply people with information to legal or political constraints. These might include the journalist-source relationship and the confidentiality laws that apply when sharing information from the source, etc.
Media Ideology	Media ideology has to do with the media outlet's ideology or what position the outlet is likely to take in relation to politics or various societal affairs. Different media outlets have different media ideology that somewhat defines its readership.

In the conclusion of his paper, Pang (2009) provides a brief outline of how his model works:

"Like Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model, this model similarly comprises five layers of concentric circles, described as a "hierarchy of influence," each growing in importance and pervasiveness as it expands. At the heart or the bulls' eye of the concentric circle is journalist mindset, followed by journalist routines, and then newsroom or organizational routines. These are the internal influences on media relations. Extra-media influences form the next circle, and followed by media ideology. At the outermost circle, ideology is argued to have the most pervading influence on media relations (see figure 1).

If external forces appear to exert indirect influence on media relations, then internal forces exert more direct influences on media relations. Internal influences localize media relations to the individual organization and the journalist working for that organization. External influences are extensions of the localized relations, or what Cameron, Sallot and Curtin (1997) called societal impacts." (Pang, 2009, p. 217)

Pang's model was explored in this paper as he developed his framework in the context of the global media digitalisation. Other models, explored during the preparation of this paper's literature review (Section 2.0), were Cameron et al. (1997) and Yoon's (2005) models. However their models focus narrowly on exploring how PRPs can impact newsgathering (Cameron et al., 1997) and what factors PRPs need to consider to influence journalists (Yoon, 2005). Furthermore, in 2014 Pang et al. tested Pang's Mediating the Media Model and found out it is indeed applicable in practice.

Appendix 2

This appendix includes all the templates used for inviting participants to take part in the research.

Questionnaire Invitation for Participation (Personal Contacts)

Dear [title][name],

I would like to invite you to participate in my research. As you may be aware, at the moment I am working on my final year dissertation as a Public Relations student at Bournemouth University and I am currently looking for participants for my primary research.

My research aims to explore the impacts of the use of media releases on public relations practice. To do so, I need 100 public relations practitioners with experience in media relations, who are currently employed or have at least one year experience in agency PR, to participate in my research by filling my questionnaire (see link below).

The questionnaire is anonymous and takes around 10 minutes to complete. The data collected will be used for the purposes of my research only. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on my personal e-mail: kristine_petrova@yahoo.com, LinkedIn Account or on my mobile: 07513683326.

If you are interested in participating, you can fill in the questionnaire here: <http://kwiksurveys.com/s/i34kz46h7g989tu517503>

Thank you very much for your time. Your participation will be much appreciated!

Kind regards,
Christina Petrova

Questionnaire Invitation for Participation (Recommended Contacts)

Dear [title][name],

My name is Christina Petrova. At the moment I am working on my dissertation as a final year Public Relations student at Bournemouth University. I am contacting you because I would like to invite you to participate in my research.

My research aims to explore the impacts of the use of media releases on public relations practice. To do so, I need 100 public relations practitioners with experience in media relations, who are currently employed or have at least one year experience in agency PR, to participate in my research by filling my questionnaire (see link below).

The questionnaire is anonymous and takes around 10 minutes to complete. The data collected will be used for the purposes of my research only. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on my personal e-mail: kristine_petrova@yahoo.com, LinkedIn Account or on my mobile: 07513683326.

If you are interested in participating, you can fill in the questionnaire here: <http://kwiksurveys.com/s/i34kz46h7g989tu517503>

Thank you very much for your time. Your participation will be much appreciated!

Kind regards,
Christina Petrova

Interview Invitation for Participation (Personal Contacts)

Dear [title][name],

I would like to invite you to participate in my research. As you may be aware, at the moment I am working on my final year dissertation as a Public Relations student at Bournemouth University and I am currently looking for participants for my primary research.

My research aims to explore the impacts of the use of media releases on public relations practice. To do so, I am looking to interview public relations practitioners with experience in media relations, who are currently employed or have at least one year experience in agency PR.

The interview would take about 30 minutes and it would be conducted at a time (date) and location that is suitable for you. Your participation will be anonymous and the data collected will be used for the purposes of my research only.

If you are interested in participating or you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on my personal e-mail: kristine_petrova@yahoo.com, LinkedIn Account or on my mobile: 07513683326.

.
Thank you very much for your time. Your participation will be much appreciated!

Kind regards,
Christina Petrova

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My name is Christina Petrova. At the moment I am working on my dissertation as a final year Public Relations student at Bournemouth University. I am contacting you because I would like to invite you to participate in my research.

My research aims to explore the impacts of the use of media releases on public relations practice. To do so, I am looking to interview public relations practitioners with experience in media relations, who are currently employed or have at least one year experience in agency PR.

The interview would take about 30 minutes and it would be conducted at a time (date) and location that is suitable for you. Your participation will be anonymous and the data collected will be used for the purposes of my research only.

If you are interested in participating or you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on my personal e-mail: kristine_petrova@yahoo.com, LinkedIn Account or on my mobile: 07513683326.

Thank you very much for your time. Your participation will be much appreciated!

Kind regards,
Christina Petrova

Twitter Invitation for Participation

@[twitter handle], please fill in my dissertation questionnaire exploring the impacts of media releases on PR practice: <http://kwiksurveys.com/s/i34kz46h7q989tu517503>

See example below:



Hey @CIPR_UK please #help with my dissertation survey, exploring the impacts of the use of releases on PR practice:
kwiksurveys.com/s.asp?sid=i34k...



4:55 PM - 7 Apr 2015

Social Media Invitation for Participation

I am looking for some experienced PR professionals to help me with my final year dissertation. If you happen to work in an agency or have worked in one for more than a year, please fill in my questionnaire: <http://kwiksurveys.com/s/i34kz46h7q989tu517503>. Your help will be much appreciated!

Appendix 3

This appendix includes the consent agreements participants had to accept or sign in order to take part in the research.

Questionnaire Consent Form

This survey explores the impacts of the use of media releases (releases, distributed to all types of media not just the press) on public relations practice. It is conducted by Christina Petrova as part of an undergraduate research paper, undertaken in partial completion of an undergraduate degree in BA (Hons) Public Relations at Bournemouth University.

To take part in the survey you must confirm that your participation in this research is voluntary. Please be aware you have the right to withdraw your consent, discontinue your participation and withdraw your data at any time and for any reason.

The completion of this questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes. Your responses will be confidential. All the data collected will be used for the purposes of this research only.

To proceed to the survey you must agree with the conditions for participation. Selecting the "Agree" option below indicates that:

- You have read the information provided above;
- You voluntarily agree to participate;
- You are at least 18 years of age.

Interview Consent Form

I voluntarily consent to participate in an interview conducted by Christina Petrova as part of an undergraduate research paper undertaken in partial completion of an undergraduate degree in BA (Hons) Public Relations at Bournemouth University.

I have been made aware of the conditions for participation in advance and that I will be asked to share my experiences as public relations professional. Furthermore, I fully understand and agree with the following condition:

1. My identity and the identity of third parties mentioned during the interview will remain confidential.
2. The interview will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher and I have the right to review the transcript.
3. My participation is voluntary and I have the right withdraw my consent, discontinue my participation and withdraw my data at any time and for any reason, without penalty.
4. I will not receive payment or monetary rewards for my participation in this research.
5. I may be contacted in the unlikely event that the University needs to check the validity of the research findings.

Please state whether you agree to be contacted for follow up questions: _____

Printed Name:

Signature:

Date:

Appendix 4

Interview Guide

Participant Name:	Participant New Name:
Date:	Interview Total Duration:
Start time:	Finish Time:

Questions Legend

Question Type	Abbreviation/ Colour Code
Main Question	
Guiding Questions	
Sampling (Filtering Questions)	S
General Questions	G
Research Aim Questions	A
Objective 1 Questions	1
Objective 2 Questions	2
Objective 3 Questions	3

	Questions	Notes
S	1. Please tell me a bit about yourself starting with your current position and previous experience in PR.	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Current Position - Previous Experience 	[CONFIDENTIAL RESPONSE] Sampling question used by the researcher to obtain information about the participant and understand his/her background and experience. Responses will not be featured in the transcripts to guarantee the confidentiality of the participants.
S	2. Could you tell me more about your media relations experience?	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What positions you were holding when you gained it? - How long would you say your experience in media relations is? 	[CONFIDENTIAL RESPONSE] Sampling question used by the researcher to obtain information about the participant and understand his/her background and experience. Responses will not be featured in the transcripts to guarantee the confidentiality of the participants.
S	3. What are the key responsibilities or activities that describe media relations?	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the most common activities that public relations practitioners would be doing as part of their role as media relations executives? 	
G	4. Do you agree the following activities accurately sum up media relations practice?	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintaining Media Contacts on behalf of your clients; - Looking for newsworthy content to present to the media; - Writing and distributing Media 	

	Releases.	
	– Can you add to these?	
G	5. Is there any particular reason why you used the term news release/ press release/ media release earlier?	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are you able to differentiate the three terms from one another? – Which one is the appropriate term? Why? 	Explain that focus will remain on media releases (releases sent to all types of media).
G	6. Could you briefly outline what happens to a media release from the moment it's requested by a client to the moment it gets published?	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Who requests it? – What are their most common motives for requesting a media release? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How long does researching the topic of the media release takes you? – Who approves it? How long does that take? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How do you distribute it? – How many follow up calls/e-mail to you make/write? – Do you check deadlines, relevance of story to journalist, etc before sending them the release? 	
2	7. Could the time spent on media releases be better used for different	

	<p>activities such as campaign or strategic planning for example?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do you think that spending time on media releases limits creativity? What about strategic thinking?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do you discuss with your clients whether you should be sending out a release? – Have you ever advised a client to not send out a media release or the other way around? Under what circumstances?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Does the use of media releases influence the overall service provided to a client by not allowing PRPs to do more than simply distributing media releases to a list of journalists gained through the agency's media contact lists?
2	<p>8. Does the use of media releases limit creativity in communicating key messages?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How does the media release affect creative story/news telling (it's just a standardised document that features mainly facts, figures and quotes)? – Is the current format of the media release able to successfully communicate a client's competitive advantage,

	core competencies and corporate stories?	
G	<p>9. Is there an alternative to media releases? Is there any other tool that has the functionality of the media release?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is there any other tool that can replace what the media release does? – Why is [...] better? Can it really replace it? – What impact have the changing media landscape and social media had on media relations? – What impact did they have on media releases (their format, etc)? 	
1	<p>10. What is a successful media release?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is it successful when the release communicates the organisation's key messages? – Is successful when the release gets published? 	
1	<p>11. How do you measure the effectiveness or the success of a media release?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Views? – Awareness? – Increased interest? – Pre-set goals? 	
1	12. How would you measure the effectiveness of media relations using the media release as a measure or a criteria for success then?	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- What is the relationship between media relations and media releases? Is effective media relations equal to your media release being published in X, Y, Z publications?- How is low/no media coverage justified to clients?- Could that create perceptions of poor performance of the agency and potentially the practitioner?	
3	14. Do you think you generally understand what newsworthiness is?	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you perceive as a newsworthy story? - How do you think your perceptions differ from journalists' perceptions of newsworthiness? - Do you agree that the following factors make up a newsworthy media release: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Immediacy</u> (breaking news) • <u>Timeliness</u> (current or a new angle on events or a new trend) • <u>Localness</u> (relevant to local issues, trends or events) • <u>Human interest</u> (unusual, entertaining, about people in a personal rather than business sense, arouses emotions or will cause people to talk
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about it) • <u>Cultural proximity</u> (making an otherwise non-local story relevant to local readers, connecting to local interests or geography) • <u>Unexpectedness</u> (man bites dog) • <u>Prominence</u> (concerns famous or well-known

	<p>people, institutions or events)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Significance</u> 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do you often go against your beliefs for the client's sake? (Example: write and distribute a media release with no newsworthiness). 	
3	<p>15. Have you ever felt hostile attitude from journalists?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What provoked it? – What happened? – How did it make you feel? 	
3	<p>For my next questions I need you to think about situations when you have worked with a journalist on a story communicated with a media release or when you got in touch with a journalist to follow up on whether they would be interested in writing about your client.</p> <p>16. Do you think there is a relationship between the negative attitude of the journalist and the fact that you used a media release?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How would you explain the negative journalists' attitude toward public relations practitioners? – Is it the fact that you are PR person that annoys journalist? – Is it the fact that they've received just another media release? – Is it because they feel like they have the power to not publish your article? 	

Appendix 5

Interview Coding Guide

Objective	Theme	Colour Code
Terms	What term did the participant use?	
1	Measuring the Success of a Media Release	
	Factors Influencing the Success of a Media Release	
	Measuring Media Relations Effectiveness	
2	Use of Media Releases	
	The Relationship Between the Agency and the Client	
	Alternative Communication Tools	
3	Participants Understanding of Newsworthiness	
	Threats to Relationships Between PRPs and Journalists	
	Reasons for Negative or Hostile Journalists' Attitude	

Appendix 6

Interview Transcripts

Participant Number	New Name	Position	Sector
1	Sam	Director	Technology

Could you please tell me a bit about yourself starting with your current position and previous experience in PR?

[CONFIDENTIAL RESPONSE]

Do you have any media relations experience?

Yeah.

What positions were you holding when you gained your media relations experience?

[CONFIDENTIAL RESPONSE]

What are the key responsibilities or activities that describe media relations in your opinion?

Ah, the key activity is actually speaking to journalists a lot. Understanding what they need, understanding what our clients need and trying to match them. One of the important things I learned is we ought to often think about who... the clients who pay our bills obviously and also the clients who are media. And you have to treat them with the same level of focus, energy and attention. If you don't treat the media as a client your chances of success are limited. So you really have to understand about them as much as you understand about your client.

That makes sense. Do you agree the following activities accurately sum up media relations practice, starting with maintaining media contacts on behalf of your clients; looking for newsworthy content to present to the media; writing and distributing media releases?

Yes, at base level. Yes. I think that covers it. I think another part of it is... you kind of mentioned it in terms of finding stories but the actual critical part of it is understanding stories, media writing, what's on the agenda and understanding what your client story is. Trying to again find a common path with them. And beyond that actually, there is a bunch of other things that include directing engagement with media. People forget how important and valuable it is to actually go and spend time speaking to them. Sometimes we get caught in a wrapped and our relationship with those guys is on the phone but you don't build those relationships over the phone. No, you gotta go and spend time talking to them, go for lunch, go for drinks. It's not as the perception of PR – going out and having lunches all the time you know. Perhaps it was. That's how you built relationships many years ago. But 15 years I've been in PR... Yes, I've had lunch with journalists but it's not like I've done it every day or week, you know. But if you can do

that it's usually valuable because you get to meet them on their terms and you have a conversation. And I think that's the one of the fine balances when you are doing media relations and it's understanding the difference between relationship and trying to sell the client. You really have to go to that point about how you understand the client. Sorry... not the client – the media as a client in their own right as well. Because you have to be able to talk about a broad range of topics with them – not just your client. You've gotta really care about the things they care about. And likewise you just have to be kind of down to earth and treat them as individuals, who have their own pressures and have their own deadlines, and have their own personal lives. And sure, you've gotta be in that zone where the problems do arise you can have a straightforward conversation but if you kinda treat it as a... which I have done... as a channel. You're kind of treating them the wrong way. It's a dialogue.

Which one of the following terms is most appropriate to be used and why? Press release, news release or media release.

Hm, interesting.

There is no right answer here.

Yeah, yeah. I mean... Straight off. I don't use the term news release and media release. I use the term press release.

Could you briefly outline what happens to a press release from the moment it's requested by a client to the moment it gets published?

That can vary actually. I've seen that changes a lot. It depends what client you are with, what company you are representing, the type of... the nature of the program you are executing but typically many of the bigger clients have some sort of machine for developing press releases. I am saying typically, it's not always the case. And some of the smaller clients won't. So you kind of flex between the two of them. And it's again... the driver for what - "Can we get a press release together?" and actually there is a step before that which is "What have we got? What's story, what's news?". That's first of all – working out what's news and what isn't news, which is an important part of the journey until you really figure out whether there is news. It comes back to say [...]. You've gotta think about what's gonna get interest from the influencers and obviously then the end customers that you are trying to reach with this news. The press release is as you are saying, it kind of says – it's gotta be newsworthy. It's gotta be something that someone wants to cover and see if it's relevant and timely. So you've gotta take a step back first of all and say "Is that news?" and the client will then... You work with the client to figure out what elements are news, is the story news, what are not. And then you get to the point where you actually draft the press release. That can involve taking a brief from the client, working with perhaps the customers, working with a few of their internal stakeholders to kind of really understand what the story is. And then you, depending on the client... it can vary... you can get it through layers of approval cycles and you know – that's gonna add some time and then you eventually get the point where you have the final artifact product, which is the press release. But you then... the journey doesn't stop there. You get beyond that. There is no... The process is quite similar but the level of how iterative it is can vary based on number of factors.

How do you usually distribute press releases and here and how many follow up calls would you say you need to make before you publish the story.

It can vary on a press release. The first thing to say is – "Who the target audience is?" and if you are working in the technology practice for example you typically sell in to IT

buyers, which can be consumers and other businesses. As a call, you should know who that story is for and they should write about that story. That comes back to the press release. If you write a press release... like if you don't write the press release it's gonna go to the journalist and not seem as news cause actually that's more damaging to the relationship. And sometimes you have to but I will come to that later on. And then you... more often what we're trying to do these days is think through alternative and wider influencers that can help shape this story as well. So, you know – it could be a vertical media. It could be IT buyer, it could be retail magazine, we identify them as potentially core for the client to get that sales engagement piece going on their perception piece they are going to get. It can vary but you think of a core list it should definitely go to and then you think of a wider list. Sometimes... there's this thing that you have to think about tailoring press releases. In my time I've never tailored a press release for 5 different press releases or 5 different audiences. There's always one press release and it's the kind of... how you position it for them, how you angle it for them but... than can vary. You can follow up with 10 media, you can follow up with 20 but the critical part is following up. If you don't follow up, your chances are limited.

Do you check deadlines, relevance of story to journalist, etc before sending them the release because obviously deadlines are quite important for journalists and they can get fed up when you send them something too late.

Yeah, absolutely. The thing is that we're trying to get... this is in the UK and it can vary from market to market internationally as well. But then in the UK these days the best approach is to offer pre-briefings on the story. And maybe share if you have a good relationship with the journalist and if you have a good understanding with the client, you share a draft of the press release in advance so that they can have a view on the story. But as much as you can do before the embargo lifts, the better chance you have of getting that story published. So you never distribute on the day. I mean broadly never distribute on the day. That could be a really targeted approach and the distribution is confirmation. It's like... "I've spoken to you all guys. You have seen the press release. You've had a briefing. You've expressed your interest in the briefing."

The briefing can come on the day or even after but you know where you gonna stand with that announcement. And the next part is the validation. "So, here is the final press release. It's official."

Could the time spent on media releases be better used for different activities such as campaigns or strategic planning that can lead to something, attracting more media attention than the press release?

It's an interesting one and it goes back and forth between defining who the media are and who the influencers are. Some of my team will tell you. They can pitch a story based on an angle and you get pretty good interest and really good reception without them having seen the press release. Then they ask for the press release and because they can't see the story in the press release directly because sometimes this is what happens. You get clients who get into technical stuff. It doesn't then give them enough to write that story. So, for me... I still think the art of the work of doing a press release is actually, depends on how you actually look at, can be strategic depending on how you approach the topic. Cause what you are trying to do is take huge amount of information be about a product, be the story about a product you are launching and position it in a way where it makes sense for those influencers to write about it. If you think about it, people can say it's tactical but actually the strategy that gets to the point of actually writing that press release could be... should actually be something you go through in the process of defining the issue that you are trying to address – to the this product you are trying to launch. You know all – when you are trying to launch a new

initiative, what is this campaign trying to achieve. It's almost for me the campaign in one page. So it's gotta be completely reflective of that.

Do you discuss with your clients whether you should be sending out a release? Have you ever advised a client to not work on a press release? Under what circumstance was that?

Sometimes there's there's kind of a... this is the interesting part of it. There is the default to a press release when there's something to announce. There should be a press release. But it's almost sometimes driven... When we're talking about tech just as much as anywhere else. It's driven internally by the business client. It's on the client side. But this is important. I think we should let people know about. So the artifact that represents this moment is the press release. But the newsworthiness of that press release can vary. Sometimes when you think about certain companies they want to announce a chance in leadership or something, or an award. Something like that... which 9 out of 10 times is not really that relevant from a media perspective. And in that instance you've gotta have a good relationship with the client. Say "Look, I get that this is important. But you're not gonna get coverage on this so the amount of time that we do on the follow up and all that kind of stuff is perhaps better spent elsewhere."

So you have an open dialogue with them about that or if it's something that you then... Other times it could be that the artifacts that they've created – this press release, this story, this announcement is good. And there is a much better story in there so you've gotta spend time carving that with them as well. So actually the artefact's there but you've got to spend more time working out where the better message, the driver is. And then you push it out. There's two sides of it.

Do you think that the use of media releases limits creativity in communicating corporate messages of the client, competitive advantage and the competencies of the organisation?

It depends on whether you define, how you engage in that piece of content. And I am very much in favour of finding alternative means of delivering that news. But typically for example if you are going to use an infographic, your starting point is putting words on a piece of paper. And those words on a piece of paper, you can call them "a press release" or you can call them a story and they are going to be something that captures all of that stuff in a very simple way. So for me, it's a starting point for multiple different ways of doing it if it's a more compelling, a more creative way of doing it. I am in favour of that. As long as it's not wasting time. For example – you can spend a huge amount of time creating infographic that reflects a story but if for whatever reason... the news agenda is such that I've had numerous examples of something more important than that announcement comes in and you are scuppered. I mean real life changing things happen, right? And actually, they happen all the time so the media attention is taken away. As much as important your story is, there is a team there that have got X amount to do and they've got X amount of time. They have to prioritise and that means that your story gets shelved or pushed back. So you've done all that investment for your story and then even if you did the work beforehand – they just can't run it that day. I think we should as an industry explore new ways of articulating that story. Especially when move increasingly into a new social media environment. We should be looking at it... press releases are one thing but we've got to look at the context within which we are landing. I mean I am not gonna put a rough thumb in the air but 50% of the time we are still doing traditional media relations. That's what our clients are looking for. Until such time when this environment changes radically – in delivery of news and information as such, perhaps even automated – perhaps a machine is doing it which is quite plausible... we're gonna have to continue producing the way we've done it.

Is the problem the format of the press release or is it what it's trying to do?

Yeah, it is. The difference between a good and a bad press release is – does it capture the story. I mean – really capture the story. Is the quote something that you can... We're thinking about the components of the press release which are kind of the body, the opening paragraph, the meat – the body and perhaps some quotes, some reference points. If you are writing a quote and you think about how this quote is going to work... more often I see quotes that are put like nice quotes but really I can't see them print. So, that's when the value goes away. That's when people think of things they want to say rather than things they will see written. There's no way to get rid of them but you've got to find a way to strike that balance because in the perfect world you want that quote in the story.

Is there any other tool that can do what the press release is doing?

There's lot of things emerging that allow... Stories that are written through Twitter. Actually some companies are not even putting out press releases nowadays and some clients only do announcements. There's the blog. There's all the information. Here's a link to it. Take it from there. There could be that something landed in the context of the Tweet. It could sent via e-mail but like a pitch that refers back to the blog. A blog is a nice way actually. And if it comes straight from an individual in the company who's articulating their point of view... sometimes their point of view could manifest in many different ways. Yeah, there is and I am sure there are other channels.

Why do you say that blogs are better than the press release? Can they actually replace the use of press releases?

Depends on what type of information you are trying to drive. It depends on the journalist writing that story. If you get the press release in the right context – just looking for facts. Lets imagine in a blog there is 60 bullet pointed facts. Just how engaging it is. So depends on how creative you are and getting that blog to a place where it delivers the facts in a way that someone can actually lift them and potentially put into their story. As I said, it really does vary depending on the influence of the journalist you are speaking to. Could it stand against that point? I mean, I don't know. Possibly. You see a lot of stories being written off the back of blog posts. It could be a really painful thing when you see a client planting blog posts you know nothing of and then all of a sudden that's become the story of the day.

What impact have the changing media landscape and social media had on media relations and media releases in particular?

Journalists don't want press releases and some continue insisting on having them so it's a fine balance. I think the impact it should have had is... Gone should have been those days of having 5 page long press releases. It's totally pointless. If you can't get the story in one page, maybe two – total waste of time. The shift where in many of the publications and the media I've been working with seems a bit scaled back or teams are run in helluva lot pressure. Certain magazine which we used to work with were weekly many years ago. We had to make sure we work against they work schedules. Now their schedules are oblivious. They keep turning back stories. So the impact of the press release is... the impact that it has on the format of the press release is that you really don't have time to waste their time.

What is a successful media release? Is it successful when the release communicates the organisation's key messages of your client in a really good way or is it successful when the release gets published? Or both of course!

What is the outcome is the most important thing. If you are focusing on the outcome of the press release you should focus on working towards that outcome.

How do you measure the effectiveness or the success of a media release?

Not as well as we could do potentially. Obviously you've seen the story which is the output but sometimes there's ways of understanding how engaged they are in that release. If that's something that you put over tiny url. I've heard this but I haven't used it actually. You can see how long someone's been on that page. So you put up the press release and they are kind of reading it through a link. The amount of time someone has spent on that press release shows how effective it has been. I haven't tried it myself. There are different ways of evaluating receptions of that announcement and maybe there's sort of an automated way. But actually there's another way – just talking to the journalists and say "What you think?". Sometimes they can give you that feedback as well. That's useful. That's a lot of crap.

How would you measure the effectiveness of media relations using the media release as a measure or criteria for success?

Depends on how you want to evaluate the press release. You have a bunch of messages that you wanna track a part of that announcement. And when that press release goes out. What are the things that you want to see that came though so they can evaluate that level of outcomes as well. Did it cover briefly these three or four messages.

What is the relationship between media relations and media releases? Is effective media relations always equal to your media release being published in X, Y, Z publications?

In media relations it's getting the news out. Nowadays is all about getting the news out.

Is that the clients' fault? Is it clients pursuing media coverage rather than you setting the goal of "Yes I will publish your story out there"?

When you take a step back and you think of strategic communications. What are we trying to achieve and why are we trying to achieve it? As an industry perhaps, on the client side we look at what is the behavioral change you are trying to affect or the attitudinal change you are trying to affect. What it is one moment from you think about the stories and the messages that are driving to the point where it comes out in print or online, or whatever it is. So, it's part of the supply chain... of the demand change of stories. I think that to answer your question there – it all goes hand in hand. It's all linked in.

How would you justify low or no media coverage to a client?

It can vary. Sometimes something has happened, something more important than that piece there. That's a difficult conversation but that's the reality. Sometimes as much as you think about how confident you are in your story, you've seen that story run 10-15 time before... similar stories I mean. For that day, or that moment it went out it just didn't have enough relevance or resonance. It could be a bunch of other things that happened in the news agenda that are more important. It's a difficult conversation to have actually but it's one that you have to have. It's not like it doesn't happen.

Could poor performance in relation to getting coverage affect the reputation of the agency and potentially the practitioner?

Yeah, that's why the clients in many respects buy us for – because they want that extra thinking, extra dimension of how they can push their stories out. And if they don't have their stories out: "Why am I working with you as an agency?", which is one part of it. Sometimes I've seen great, huge amount of media coverage but hasn't moved the dial because you haven't thought of the behavioral change that it's gonna affect. So, that could be a reason why clients go that point when they are like – "Yeah, great but we wanna change agency." Look, the media coverage is out of scale here. What is the business impact? It can vary from client to client but there's no [...] on this one to be honest.

It's interesting that you mention that. Do you think that might be the fact that you sent our a really interesting media release rather than doing the strategic thinking behind it?

Sometimes it's the pace of things, sometimes it's just to move along. Even if you want to take the client down that route, it's not where they wanna go cause internally their stakeholders are all "We're gonna get press". And there's a lot of work to be done to get internal stakeholders.. "Why do you want to get press? Why do you think that's gonna be the way to get the change that you want?". And that takes us to a whole new level of consultancy but it depends again on clients, industry, role of PR in that organisation and as to whether that's gonna work. It's gonna vary hugely, it's not necessarily something that's a smaller client or a bigger client. The variables are huge.

Do you think you generally understand what newsworthiness is?

Yeah, I'd like to think that I probably do but sometimes I get surprised by what's newsworthy actually.

What do you perceive as a newsworthy story? Could you briefly outline things that make a really good story.

First and foremost, is it something that's going to be relevant to that audience. That audience should care about and therefore, the media, journalist, publication that's representing that audience or speaking to that audience should therefore think it's relevant for. It's gotta be news. It can't be incremental stuff like a slight modification of [...]. An initiative that's one of [...] similar initiative that are out there. It has to be something that has some level of unique value. Timely. Sometimes you can have the greatest story of all times but it's not reflecting what's going on in the media environment so it won't be relevant. You've got to think about what's going on before you land it. Get the story in a nice and easy way where you can understand it. Good quote. The way you can – just solid facts you can understand as third party endorsement or something. Not necessarily a quote from that third party but just as a credit.

Do you often go against your beliefs for the client's sake? Would you go ahead and try to publish a press release even though you think is not newsworthy at all?

You've got to have that conversation with the client. If they kind of insist on what you do and you do. But you kind of go back to that conversation that you have to the journalist on the other end . You've got to try and find a way of getting in there. So for example you say "Look, news from this client comes from X, Y, Z, I think it might make a nice

news in brief maybe. I think it can make a story like this if you cover it. Be honest about how you feel that story is going to work for them. The press release is not gonna give you a much as you think so what will make it work for you?"

If you try to push it to a journalist and they see it all the time without having any context, without having any understanding of what.. what is newsworthy, what do you think is newsworthy and that's your relationship there.

Have you ever felt hostile attitude from journalists?

All the time. It's part of the job. And part of the job is to be critical. So your part of the job is to understand that story enough to be able to say why they should be writing it.

- Client Call -

What usually provokes bad attitude from journalists?

A lot of things. A lot of my colleagues say it's a huge amount of time and pressure. So you've got to understand that time and pressure. And sometimes you don't and they can be aggravated, which is part of it. Other times, they could have just spoken to someone else and they were aggravated from that persona and it translates to you. Other times, maybe there are just people who perhaps have chosen their profession... perhaps they are not very much social people.

Is it the fact that you are PR person that annoys journalist? Is it the fact that you've sent them just another media release? Is it because they feel like they have the power to not publish your article?

Perhaps all of those in different amounts. I remember a very famous editor of the Sun newspaper telling me that from a journalist perspective all they care about is ego-driven – where are my features featuring in the newspaper and where's my name again in that newspaper. And other thing is access to power as well. So they judge you based on your power to access information – what you can get them, which is the game of play.

Final question. Do you think there is a relationship between the negative attitude of journalists towards PRPs and the fact that PRPs continue using press releases?

It could be. I'd love to do some more in-depth research about that and understand that but there could be an element of "Why are you sending me that crap? I've got so much to do!". But then it's that point where you have something really interesting and they are like "Where's the press release?". So it comes back to that pressure and time thing – what kind of pressure they are under and what amount of time they have, and also your relationship with them. If you can just have your open up and have an open dialogue the better it comes. And it's still difficult when you are an account executive and you are on the phone and it's a bit nervy when you start. In the beginning of your career, it can be that phone call – your 30 seconds to land a piece of information. It depends on the context of how you can understand the context. And sometimes this comes with experience. Sometimes you can be a really confident person and you can land it. It could vary again. But does the press release influence the relationship with the journalist. Yeah, I think that's something to look at.

Participant Number	Name	Position	Sector
2	Lindsay	Senior Account Executive	Technology

Can you tell me a bit about yourself starting with your current position and previous experience in PR, really briefly?

[CONFIDENTIAL RESPONSE]

Could you tell me a bit more about your media relations experience, what positions were you holding when you started gaining it, how long your experience is?

[CONFIDENTIAL RESPONSE]

What are the key responsibilities or activities that describe media relations in your opinion?

I think, honestly, it's really important knowing what your media wants and what they're interested in is really important. I think understanding your clients and what they want to achieve and the story they want to tell is really important.

Do you agree that the following activities accurately sum up media relations practice, starting with: maintaining media contacts on behalf of your clients; looking for newsworthy content to present to the media; writing and distributing media releases?

Yeah, I think that's a lot of it, a lot of it is also about thinking about you can offer the media in the best possible way, I think that's really important as well. I think maintaining regular contact with the media is really important, I think constantly reading what they're writing is really important as well.

Is there any right term – press release, news release or media release? What do you usually use?

I just usually call it press release.

So the purpose of my research is to explore the impacts of media releases which I consider a press release sent to all types of media, not only the press. Are you able to make a difference between those 3 terms anyway?

Can you repeat the 3 terms?

News release, press release and media release.

A news release typically sounds like it's more news-driven, a press release sounds like it's more informative and then we have something called a media alert which isn't really a press release, it's more just an alert that goes out to the media that say that a company will have a presence at particular event or they're planning to make an announcement on a particular day or they'll have their CEO in town or something like that.

Could you briefly outline what happens to a media release from the moment it's requested by a client to the moment it gets published?

Sure. The client says they probably have some news or something to announce so it's a case of looking into what that is and working out with the client why it's significant to the company. Then it's a case of understanding that, writing a release, show it to the client, revising any drafts and it goes through certain levels of approval stages within a company internally for our client to make sure that it's correct, it's factually correct, it's all messaged with the brand, there's nothing inaccurate with it. So once it's approved it comes to us and then we distribute it on the date on which we said that we'd distribute it on.

Do you do any follow-up calls following the send out of the press release?

Yes, always.

Do you check deadlines' relevance of the story to the journalist that you're approaching for it before sending them the release?

We're always in contact with the media so we always try and understand what kind of crunches that might be happening, if there's any big news happening on the day, if they might be out on events so we always keep an eye out for those things, just so we can make sure we can work with the journalists in the best possible way.

Do you have a particular list of journalists that you closely work with and you have a strong relationship with, rather than approaching new journalists for different clients?

We're always mapping and trying to reach new journalists as they enter new roles, as they change jobs. We're always looking to expand, but we also have very much a core group of contacts that we've built up and that also depends on the client as well.

Could the time spend on media releases be better used for different activities such as campaign planning or strategic planning?

It's part of a broader...the press release is part of a broader PR...sort of campaign, it's one aspect of it.

Do you discuss with your client where you should be sending a press release?

Yes, we always talk about sort of key media that they can be approaching and journalists that might find the news interesting, journalists who should receive the news. We always discuss that kind of thing with them.

Have you ever advised a client not to send out a release and under what circumstances?

If we don't think it will be relevant. So for example if a press release is talking about news that's based in say Spain and it's very specific, it's all about Spain and what's happening in Spain and it might not be relevant to the UK media then we wouldn't suggest sending it to the UK media. We can always send it as an FYI, as a heads-up to the media but if it's not relevant then there's no point necessarily just putting it in their inbox.

Would you say that the media release is just a document full of random content with a quote and contact details?

No, I wouldn't.

So if that's the case that it doesn't impact the quality of the service you provide your clients....

How do you mean?

Most practitioners, most journalists actually, think that the press release is just a bunch of words that just don't have any newsworthiness behind it, it's just a story you're trying to sell to the media to get published and so on and they say that it actually damages their reputation of their clients. Would you agree with that to some extent?

No. Press release, I think, it depends on how it's used. I think the press release, if it's written well and thought out well it can hold really valuable and important. **It could be a really useful document.**

Does the use of media releases limit creativity in communicating key messages?

I think it can help you think about different ways when beyond the press release. So the press release forms one part of a campaign or an announcement and it might be a really useful document in terms of having all the key information in there but it doesn't limit on creativity should you do stuff around it.

Is the current format of the media release able to successfully communicate core competencies, competitive advantage and so on?

Sorry, can you repeat that again?

Is the format of the media release able to communicate all that you're trying to do in terms of key messages, core competencies, competitive advantage and so on?

It will be trying to communicate the key messages in the news, yes. And also in the end there's a thing called a boiler plate which just outlines who the company is and sort of details a little bit more about them.

Is there an alternative to press releases, is there any other two that can replace the press release in terms of functionality and so on?

Yeah – **blogs**. Quite often people will announce news on blogs and it's a blog post that goes live. So that's quite often done for example. The press release is a really useful document in having sort of a format that outlines the news or the announcement but there are different ways to announce news.

Why would you say that blogs are better than the press releases and can they actually completely replace it?

I wouldn't necessarily say they're better, I'd say they serve a different purpose. A blog can be used for a variety of things, it could be used to announce a product but it could also be used to sort of make a different kind of announcement – someone will be at a particular event, a company will be at a particular event or it could be used for a piece

of thought-leadership, it could be used to extend the press release around a piece of research that a company has done. A blog can be used for a variety of purposes to supplement a press release.

What impact has the changing media landscape had on media relations do you think?

I think the media are really well connected now, I think the changing media landscape with social media means there's new ways to speak to them, there's new ways the media can speak to companies as well. So there's new ways to explore relationships there.

Would you say that the press releases are not the only way to do so anymore?

To communicate company needs?

Yes.

I think it's one or a company message, to communicate a company message or to communicate a brand I think it's one aspect.

What is a successful media release then?

A successful press release is one that's got a really catchy headline, it tells the news or what's trying to be said in a really clear, succinct way that gives the media all the information they need. It's honest, it's accurate, it will contain probably a good quote from an executive, maybe a quote from a customer to back it up, it will also be written in the language of the company but it will also be easy to digest.

Would you say it's successful when it gets published?

Yes, I think in terms of the amount of coverage that you see for the press release, yes I think that could definitely show how good it is I think in terms of what it's saying if it could bring to life the company message and what's being said or announced then yes, I think the amount of coverage it generates. But I think you also have to take in to a lot about the factors the day the press release goes live. So for example it could go live on a really busy news day and there could be some really big announcements, there could be lots of stuff happening. A global, economic, local news that could impact the success of your press release.

How do you measure the effectiveness or the success of media release?

Generally by coverage.

How would you measure the effectiveness of media release using the media release as a criterion? Does getting coverage mean that you are good at media relations really?

Yes and no. I think coverage is a good metric to be able to understand and pick up the success of your media relations, but I also think it depends on the news that you're announcing as well. And the other factors that go into the campaign.

How is low or no media coverage justified to a client?

Usually we will speak to the client at how we expect some news or press release to run, what kind of coverage it will pick up. We'd usually talk to our clients about the newsworthiness of the announcement, if it's a small announcement or a big announcement. If it's a small announcement and it's not very specific say to the UK media, then it may not receive as much coverage. Usually we would have worked with the client to talk through what we expect.

Could no coverage create perceptions of poor performance of the agency and the practitioners looking after the account in particular?

Not if you've worked with a client closely and set expectations. We always try to get coverage for our clients no matter what.

Do you think that the press release is an effective communications tool because of its current format...

Actually just coming back to that last question...

Oh yes, of course.

It also depends on our clients objectives.

Good one.

There might not be after coverage, there might be after something completely different.

Great. Back to the next question, do you think that what makes the press release is its format, the fact that it's communicating key messages that you wouldn't be able to communicate in any other way really?

I think it serves its purpose.

Do you think you generally understand what newsworthiness is?

Yes, I think because we work in the news I think we need to understand it.

How do you think that your perceptions differ from the perceptions of newsworthiness of journalists?

I think because we work really closely with journalists and we try to have an understanding of what they're looking for. A lot of people who work in agencies can be externalists.

What factors do you think make up a newsworthy story?

It depends on your client, it depends on their objectives and it depends on what's being announced so it's quite hard. But I think it needs to be something unique, something that's relevant to the UK or to your market, the country you're in, the readership so the audience who the news will impact or affect.

Have you ever felt a hostile attitude from journalists?

I think journalists understanding your media really impacts the way you work with them so if you understand how the journalist works, when their deadlines and their crunches are, then they'll generally be positive with you and want to collaborate and work with

you. If you don't understand someone or how they work and you call them up at an inconvenient time and not approach them with the right topic they're not going to like it. So I think you need to understand your media in that sense, so know what your pitching, who are you speaking to, when's a good time to call them and if the kind of news you are reaching out to them is of interest.

Have you ever been in touch with a journalist with a story that you don't perceive as newsworthy, regardless of what you think it is but for you clients' sake?

On the whole, we try to make sure that the content that our clients go with is of interest to the media and that's by knowing and understanding the media.

Do you think there's a relationship between the negative attitude by journalists and the fact that you use the media release to approach them?

No, I mean, could you repeat that again?

Do you think there's a relationship between the negative attitude of journalists toward PRPs and the press release?

I think if a PR person sent an irrelevant press release to a journalist it kind of just fills their inbox in and it almost acts as spam, it means that they have so much to weigh through, they are really tight on time, they're really busy people, they need to know what you're sending them otherwise it is just inconvenient. So I think of the fact that journalists could be sent releases that aren't relevant can impact, yes.

How would you generally explain the negative attitude some journalists towards PRPs?

I think it's again not having understanding, I think again if PRs don't have an understanding of media and what they're looking for and how they operate and what stories and news is important to them individually, then I think that can have an impact.

Do you think journalists sometimes make use of the fact that they have the power to not publish your press release?

No, I think that's quite hard to answer from being not a journalist, but the journalists that we work with on the whole try to write or write stories that are relevant and appropriate, I don't think it's to do with power. I think their job is to produce the right news for the right audience.

Great, that's all. Thank you.

- Discussion Continues After Interview -

I think the press release is really valid because as a management consultant you used to be able to go back, so if you're not in PR it serves a broader purpose cause it sits on a company's website and it shows their news and their communication. So you can go and do your research on a company and on a product, you can look onto the news and what they've done, what they've said historically. So I think it's really important as well from a company communication point of view, not just from a news and media point of view, I think it's more of a broader communication, it serves a role in a much more broader communication purpose.

It's just that every now and then you can see publications on PR News, PR Daily, PR Week. All the press releases, once they get that and it's not....and the reason why I chose that topic is because I wanted to investigate why is it that people claim that it's dead when it's not – we continue using it...

It might have changed role, its role might have changed in a traditional sense cause there are other ways to speak and engage with the media but from sitting on a company website and being a point of information it's still being used. I think that, you know, there are loads of different ways to engage with the media and journalists, whether that be through events, through blogs, there's different ways. With the press release, it still plays part in a broader field now. Its role might have shifted and adapted because of the changing media landscape, but campaigns account for much more bigger...communication campaigns can take much bigger shapes. So we have video content where people can communicate messages on through pieces of video. It really depends on what the objective of the communication campaign is. If it's about news, the press release is fine, it serves a great role. But it's one aspect, you can again launch news and event at a show. As well as that perhaps the communication campaign isn't necessarily about news, it might be about something much broader, about raising awareness about a particular issue. Charity might be raising awareness about a particular issue or something like that for example. So there's other ways to communicate, it depends on who the audience is and who you're trying to reach. Are you trying to reach say the everyday person on the street and is that medium going to be through the newspaper or news, or is it going to be through doing something more broadly and that raises awareness through like Twitter or Facebook for example. And newspapers and media play one aspect of it, are you reaching out to bloggers for example? It just depends.

Do you think it's harder to establish a good close relationship with journalists that are getting smaller clients published more regularly and so on? Cause when you have a big client you can say: "oh, we have great news, we have a big brand name, are you ok to publish it?"

I don't think you can ever tell a journalist what they should or shouldn't publish; I think that's up to them. It depends, I think you can have a really amazing small start-up for example, that's really doing some amazing work, it might be really interesting. You can have journalists who would be interested in that. You can have a one-man-band who's doing some incredible stuff and really doing something that's really changing industry or a cause or something, along those lines for example. And again that could be really interesting, I think it depends on what they're doing and what a company is doing, whether they are big or small.

How much of the coverage that you get for clients started off with sending out a press release would you say?

Again it completely depends on the campaign and the objective. It completely depends on the news, it also completely depends on what's happening in the news that day. Some days you could see loads of coverage, other days it might be really busy and it will be a case of picking up the phone and speaking to the media. It really depends on what the objective of the campaign is, what stage of the campaign you're in, what the news is and other factors more broadly at play in terms of what's happening in the news that day.

Have you ever destroyed relationships with a journalist just because you approached them with not such a great news story?

No. Journalists are always interested in a lot of things. It's just making sure it's relevant and the right topic for them, so for example it wouldn't be advisable to send to a journalist who specialises in finance a press release on a new chocolate bar for example.

How do you go about working on a story that the client wants you to publish?

Depends on what's being published.

Do they allow you to have more impact on how you shape the story?

Depends on the client.

So there are clients that wouldn't allow you that much freedom?

It really depends on what their needs are and what work we're doing with them

Good, thank you very much.

Participant Number	Name	Position	Sector
3	Owen	Account Executive	Brand/Consumer

So, first off tell me a bit about yourself starting with your current position and previous experience in PR.

[CONFIDENTIAL RESPONSE]

So, you are involved in media relations. Is that right? Can you tell me a bit more about your experience in media relations. What positions you were holding when you gained most of it?

[CONFIDENTIAL RESPONSE]

What would you say are the most common responsibilities or activities that describe media relations practice?

At Company A, what do we do media relations-wise? Identify news hook, news stories. Hopefully this should be inside lead so we have Company B – our research partner. And we all speak to our client about their business goals – their objectives, are the launching a new product, are they trying to reposition the business, are they trying to speak to wider world about their business in a new way. We would identify what strategic issues there are, what their objectives are. We will identify those insights and anything that's insight lead. For example – X is a massive retailer it has X amount of X around the world but no one thinks about X as a Y brand, do they? You think M is a Y brand or N but no one thinks X is retail brand. But they are I think the second best Y in the world. So, do you just go out with a press release and say: "Hey, by the way we are the biggest Y in the world?"

No. You craft together a more compelling story and that would probably be generated by research. So, X has a point of view on retail across the world. So Company B worked on that. It came up with a few insights. X now has substantial to say about Y as a whole at a global level. And as a result of that, that gives you the PR army collateral to that to speak to the whole world. So, X finds that the next 5 years of Y will involve "X, Y and Z" and we have the insights to back it up. We have the research to back it up so that we can then go to the media and demonstrate X's point of view. If things are this and this, we think that X should be speaking about this. We should be speaking to the congress, we should be speaking to the media about this, we should be speaking to the business titles. Global business titles are the same. We should be interviewing our head of the Y business, who is a really important person. And that is how slowly over time you build the perception of X being a major retailer. It take time but there are a few elements to it and it's more than just writing a press release and try to pitch it in.

Do you agree the following activities accurately sum up media relations? So, first - maintaining media contacts on behalf of your clients; looking for newsworthy content to present to the media; writing and distributing media releases.

I'd say the top 2 are very important. It's very hard to... No. It's important to build a network, build your contacts, build relationships because then you can have more meaningful conversations and then you can speak to them about – "Oh, we have this thing coming down the line. Look at this, this and this. It's gonna be fun, it's gonna be great. [...]"

It's hard when you have to call them and they don't know the person. They don't know what your interests are going to be, they don't know what you're looking for. You can do your research and you can kind of guess but it's when you speak to them that you build that relationship. [...]

Which one do you think is the accurate term to use – media release, press release or a news release, where there's no right answer here?

I use press release still. I suppose that's not actually right. So, this news release has to have news in it, right? That's the way I see it. If there's no news in it, it's not a news release because you're not announcing any news, which we sometimes do. Media release is... You can write a media release just updating the media on "X, Y and Z". Sometimes there are not so many news so you're just putting that out there. Press release is the general term. I still use this one.

Could you briefly outline what happens to a media release from the moment it's requested by a client to the moment it gets published?

Good question. It varies. In an ideal world... We have right... What do we do for X? So, we know when the announcement it's going to be. I will interview the client, I will interview the experts to get a really full idea of exactly what they want to announce. Cause they normally talk about in general terms what we're talking about "X, Y, Z".

While I am interviewing them I will be [...] notes about what I think is the news because ultimately that title, that first paragraph has to be – this is what we're saying and it's really clear. The journalist will know exactly what you are doing within two lines. So X clients probably have a good skill on that but there are people in the business who are very intelligent and they don't know that you have to get that story across in two lines. So they will talk in more general terms and I will try to unpack what they are saying and try to think about what those two first lines are going to be. What's the news.

Then I will draft it as an essay-y article. I will draft it, probably send it my account director to review. He'll have some changes. Make the changes, send it to the client. Client will have some changes. Client will probably send it to the right people who've been quoted in the release. Check if they are okay with that or what's been said. Send it back. Make other changes. Ideally after two round of changes, that's it.

For X, every media release has to go through something called XXX which is an internal checking service and it has to go through legal. So everything we say has to be checked because it's massive company. Everything you say has to be substantiated, backed up. Legal may say we shouldn't really say that or we have to phrase that in slightly different terms. Probably take out some of the news punch. That happens sometimes and then, there's your release. Good to go.

How do you distribute it then? Do you make any follow up calls? Do you check the deadlines of the publications you are approaching?

Yeah, so trade side – I've got really good relationship with the trade titles I speak with so I know what their deadlines are. If I send them something they will probably put it online that day. If it's a national story I will never send the press release first. I will call them because ideally before the embargo is lifted, I will try to call the day before and say "This is going down tomorrow. This could be a good story. This is this and this. The press release is going to talk about that and the angle is X, Y and Z". We will try to cut it up. So, speaking to The Telegraph, it's a health story. So the press release, maybe a general one, which talks about all kinds of things not just health, I will speak to health journalist and say "Look, the press release is going to talk about this and this but the story – those are the key bits. You wanna talk about those bits because of... I saw that

you did a recent story on that. This is talking about that in a totally different way. You can bring the story to life and it's news – your take on this". And then you send the press release the day after. You set it up. You know it up and the day after you smash it out.

Do you have a hard time establishing relationships with journalists that you don't know?

Yes. You gotta work on it. It just takes practice and time.

Do you think the time spent on media releases could be better used for different activities such as campaign or strategic planning?

It's a good point. I think possibly. I think a lot of hours... cause we're an hours business because we charge by the hour... We budget for our time. We think X amount of hours will be needed to write and send a press release but sometimes it can come lower, sometimes it can be higher. It's always very time consuming. It's more time consuming than you think it's gonna be. Strategic planning – probably. But in the end of the day the client will always want a press release.

Why do you think they want press releases?

Because that's the one place where you can, where you have like... Traditionally it's where you have the most controlled. Even if that might not be seen as the particularly new, innovative and exciting, it's the one place where you can have a lot of control. And it's still seen as quite time efficient I think. You write the press release – it might not take very long. What we should be actually doing at the same time is making sure our other assets are amazing. Making sure that we have video content if possible. Making sure our whole story, making sure all the content that we put towards it is more compelling for the journalist. Or making sure that we've got interviews with spokespeople, making sure that we're flexible. Making sure that we realise that when we pitch our story to journalists they might come back with requests and we are more flexible with what we can provide. And sometimes we're not that flexible. And sometimes we should build with more flexibility in our planning and later stage. So to an extent you are right.

Do you often find yourself educating a client that press release is not the way to go?

Sometimes, yes.

Have you ever discussed with a client whether you should send that media release? Have you advised them not to do so? Under what circumstances?

No. In my experience we always go forward with the press release regardless actually. Cause I work for quite formal brands I suppose. You may find if you spoke with someone on the brand team that they might have still written the press release but I think that here, we still do a lot of... we still write a press release because of what I said before - it's our main point of control. You can always point to that for our statement.

Do you think that press releases generally limit creativity? And if so, does that consequently provide the overall service you provide to a client?

Yeah, certainly they limit creativity. So, there was this one time when a company came to us... I don't remember what they were called [describes company]. There was this guy who said there is a better way of doing releases. Instead of sending across a PDF or a word document you send across a link to a website which has all your press

materials there. And it's live, and they can download the content and you can upload photos as you are going. And you can upload the press materials and you can make it all... Write that down cause you might wanna check that out. And I said "What we should be doing is – we should use their services!"

And you can make the page all branded. If it's diet coke – make it diet coke. But we might have done it but I still think we still stick to – "Oh, just lets send them the release and the photos in attachment."

Just like there are better ways... For example – we had a big thing for X at [describes event]. Really cool story. Big media launch on the day and we used a service called G. So we had all our press materials there and we turned around video editor the night and we put them online and we had photos going straight online. So, you just send the journalists a link to that thing and they can download. Great stuff. This is what you should be doing all the time.

How do you think the media release affects creative story telling then?

A good press release has the best elements of creative story telling because it's news. It captures what is relevant. It's kind of an article if you get it right. But because it is just a written document... you know there's just more to the story than you can put some words on page, there's the photos, [...], many things. Infographics! You can do great stuff here you just need to be making sure it's not just the release.

Do you think that the current format of the press release is just not really functional? Is it able to successfully communicate key messages, competitive advantage, core competencies?

I still think it's a good format.

Is there an alternative to media releases?

There could be. Yeah. I think there are all kinds of, depending on the brand you work for. I think that you can... I think that they are not going away. I think you can be clever and more creative with digital solutions. So, when H do a big launch – it's not just a release. It's the whole story. It's live tweeting launch. It's snippets of information. It's taking the journalist, taking your audience on the journey. It's not just like they are going to copy and paste it to their newspaper.

Blogs have been mentioned to be a good replacement of press releases. Do you think they can actually completely replace the press release?

No, I think they can't.

What impact have the changing media landscape and social media had on media relations and the media release in particular?

Change in media landscape means there are opportunities to be clever, do better stuff, be more reactive, be more prepared to be prepared well. If you are prepared well you can be in control. Do you know what I mean by that? If you get it right. It can be really, really effective. Your joint up comms – that's all the transmedia globally, I'm sure that somebody today has told you about that. So the traditional, hybrid and owned media, right? And if you get it right and you make sure your strategy touches on all of those at the same time, it can be really valuable.

The release is still there – you know, in the middle. You can do more. You can do social, traditional, all at the same time.

Okay. What is a successful press release?

Get your story on a page. I like one page releases. Maximum – a page and a half. What is a successful release – a quote that doesn't say "I am really excited to announce bla-bla-bla."

A headline that you think can actually... If a press release that has a headline that you think will be a headline in the newspaper. A successful release tells the story of what you say in the first paragraph/ What does a successful release do? Yeah, you've gotta get the headline right. The headline will be the thing that you essentially send to the journalists in the subject line potentially.

How do you measure the effectiveness or the success of a media release?

One, when you get lots of coverage. Two, informal feedback from journalists. Three, if you gave it to someone who hasn't worked in the business they would understand it. It's probably what you should do first. That's the sign of a successful press release. Can you send it to your mum and she understands it and say "Oh, that sounds really cool. I understand that". That's a good press release. It doesn't matter what business you are in – whether you are really techy, trade stuff, if he can understand what you are saying in the first paragraph. That's a good release.

What about the behavioral impacts?

Oh, you also mean afterwards. A good release needs good coverage, good story and ultimately everything we're doing here is to impact behavioural change.

How would you measure the effectiveness of media relations using the media release as a measure or a criteria for success?

You can do a message pull through, which we have done before with X – it is quite effective. You work through all the coverage and you set how many key messages got through. You had them in the press release essentially. Was the coverage positive, neutral or negative? Did we have key message pull through and to what extent? And then what we've done before is to what extent are quality score coverage. So, a lot of people talk about PR value. PR value is a bit outdated really. It's a number done on advertising.

They've announced that it's no longer used, that if you pitch it to someone you're disqualified – when you apply for awards for instance. If you are an agency applying for your client to be presented at those awards. If you use that, you're automatically disqualified because you used it.

Yes, exactly. So, we use quality score which are much better. But it's a more holistic way picking coverage – it's a more honest way. Times have changed. Clients are pushing us for better return on investment. How do we know that spending X thousand pounds on a campaign is actually you know is a [...] investment for us a business. You know, we have to demonstrate that what you've done was of quality. So we take them all and list them. We work with our K team to do coverage measurement and tracking. And that works quite well actually.

Would you say that effective media relations equals to your media release being published straight away?

Yeah, definitely.

How is low or no media coverage justified to a client?

That has happened before. How is it justified? You have to hold your hands up sometimes and say – our insight wasn't good enough, our news value wasn't strong enough, wasn't clear enough, wasn't a good story, didn't resonate with the people we are speaking to. Make sure that we don't do that next time.

Could that create perceptions of poor performance of the agency and potentially the practitioners looking after that account?

Yeah. Yeah.

How effective is a media release as a communications tool left alone when it's usually accompanied by several phone calls and following up with journalists?

Relatively effective. Depends on how good your story is. If it's a good story. Journalist are always [...] to tell it. If it's a good story, a good release you get the coverage. You have to put in the work.

- Interview continued via E-mail –

Do you think you generally understand what newsworthiness is? What do you perceive as a newsworthy story?

Clear news value. Clear headline. Compelling story that if you were an ordinary person you would want to read about in the paper, or on twitter, or on your phone.

How do you think your perceptions differ from journalists' perceptions of newsworthiness?

Journalists are always thinking about their readers. PRs have to keep one eye on their client's needs, expectations, objectives and limitations. So our perceptions of newsworthiness may not differ that much, but consultants have to balance the needs of different types of people. Good PRs endeavour to push their clients to consider newsworthiness at all times. Likewise they can empathise with a journalist's need to think about what their readers like.

Do you often go against your beliefs of what newsworthiness is for the client's sake? (Example: write and distribute a media release with no newsworthiness).

I have done before, but I always counsel against it.

For my next questions I need you to think about situations when you have worked with a journalist on a story communicated with a media release or when you got in touch with a journalist to follow up on whether they would be interested in writing about your client. Do you think there is a relationship between the negative attitude of the journalist and the fact that you used a media release?

Some journalists are more negative than others depending on their experience, their beat, or just the kind of day they're having. A good PR navigates around the journalists' needs and their readers, and anticipates what would be useful for them regardless.

Is it the fact that you are PR person that annoys journalist? Is it the fact that they've received just another media release? Is it because they feel like they have the power to not publish your article?

Yes to all of those questions.

Participant Number	Name	Position	Sector
4	John	Partner	Geopolitical

Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your career starting with your current position and previous experience in PR?

[CONFIDENTIAL RESPONSE]

Great, so you've had quite a lot of media experience I would imagine?

[CONFIDENTIAL RESPONSE]

What are the key responsibilities or activities that you would say describe media relations?

Well there's no hard and fast definition but my interpretation would be the management of the relationship between media outlets and your client.

Do you agree that the following activities accurately sum up the basics of media relations practice, starting with maintaining media contacts on behalf of your clients; looking for newsworthy content to present to the media; writing and distributing media releases?

Yes, that's what I would define as common or garden media relations, yes.

Is there any particular reason why would you use the term press release to media release or news release?

No, they're all exactly the same thing.

Okay, could you briefly explain what happens to media release from the moment it's requested by a client to the moment it gets published?

That depends very much upon the client. In traditional circumstances, in the agency model, the agency will provide a supporting function to the client. Now it can be sometimes that the client has their own in-house press office function and perhaps the outlet drafts the press release, sends it to the agency for assessment, corroboration, whatever you want to call it, a process of refinement and then using an agreed process is released to an agreed list of outlets. Now that process changes depending on the nature of the client, you know, our clients we tend to operate on an arms-length basis. So they're the ones that do the writing and releasing and we provide our service on a white-label basis. And as I say, there's no hard and fast rule. In your question you, I suspect, are not just looking for the procedure. I mean, you know, some of the pitfalls of press releases that they can often be so carefully scrutinised that they are refined to the point of having no content whatsoever, no meaningful content whatsoever. I have had many, many press releases cross my desk that have absolutely no human meaning whatsoever. I think the problem that this is caused by is the nature of complex organisations and hierarchies and how they edit text, essentially writing by committee

to the point the original body, the ethos of the content is entirely denuded by virtue of the way in which it has been written.

Why do you think that clients go for press releases straight away?

Because they're not imaginative. And not all clients do. Here in Company A Geopolitical we like to think of ourselves as being outcome focused on what our clients need. A press release is a piece of output. Frankly, I don't care how I affect the behaviour or the actions or the thought processes of my key target audiences as long as I do in a way that my client wants them to be affected. Now that might involve using the media as intermediaries and it might not and often it doesn't. Often in our clients cases we deal with things that the average person might perceive as controversial and sometimes writing press releases get you nowhere. Because it's a 'he-said-she-said' sort of arrangement whereby we say this and the opposition say that and the press pick which one they think is going to sell more newspapers. Really, to be honest, I think we've moved beyond that these days and there are different ways of getting your messages to market. But to answer your question directly – why is it that clients ask for them – the clients ask for them because they're unimaginative. And that's ok because they pay us to be imaginative.

Do you write any press releases on behalf of your clients?

Yes.

Do you have any procedures how you distribute them? Do you distribute them to a specific list of journalists?

Yes, of course.

Do you check their deadlines in advance? Do you already have established relationships with the journalists that you approach?

It depends entirely on the circumstances, sometimes yes, sometimes no. If we want to place a story...a press release has its role. For example, when I ran the press office for X in Afghanistan there were circumstances. Generally those sorts of stories that were good news stories, that were fillers, that are of human interest that you could put out as a press release and they would be take up. By virtue of the fact that it was copy that journalists could utilise. But when it comes to an important issue, the press release has its place to give the corporate position, but I wouldn't use it as my methodology of choice to release news.

Could the time spent on media releases be better used for strategic planning or campaign planning, let's say?

Well it's a bit of a leading question but I think that too much time is spent on press releases for the reasons I outlined in my earlier answer. People become hugely obsessed about the fine potential meanings of a press release whilst paying less attention the words that they say, the actions that they portray in the way that they operate. And operation is a form of communication, right? So yes, too much time is spent on press releases. Could that time be better spent elsewhere – probably yes. And I adventure to say that that time could be better spent in working in a more effective way of getting your messages into your key target audiences.

Do you think that spending time on media releases actually limits creativity in whatever you are doing?

Not per se, no. I think that what limits creativity is often the formulaic nature of press release. And I think the way in which it goes back and forth between clients and the agency, that's what wastes time.

Do you find yourself often discussing with clients whether you should be putting a press release out? Have you actually advised them to not send out a press release?

Oh absolutely, I have advised customers not to send out press releases.

Under what circumstances?

Under the circumstances where the press release would have no effect. Often people, because they have a sort of attention bias, think that what they're doing is more important than what someone else is doing. And because they live and breathe their organisation they perceive that it has a higher level of importance and relevance to the average person on the street than it actually does. So they then think it's a jolly good idea to put out a press release because that press release will obviously be taken up by the major international news outlets because it's the most important story of the day. But sometimes what they need is a reality check to show them that it's not actually that important relative to everything else that's going on.

How do media releases affect storytelling?

They affect storytelling because of the reasons I've outlined twice already, which is this anodyne nature of how press releases work. Can work, not always, sometimes you can have quite sparky press releases, that's absolutely fine. But **often they are utterly dry, devoid of human endeavour.**

Is the current format of the press release able to successfully communicate a client's competitive advantage, their core competencies and so on?

No. As I say, in terms of communication output, a press release is only one part of the sort of trilogy of communications and often the way that the client operates, i.e the manifestation of their core competencies is in and of itself a message. The way in which their (the client's) staff portray themselves, where their offices are, the way that they operate, the rules by which they operate, the customers that they have – these are all messages and are more likely to adequately communicate a client's core competencies than a press release.

Is there an alternative to media releases that has the same functionality?

At the end of the day, press releases used to be sent out, I'm sure, by carrier pigeon and possibly by post. And now I use Mailchimp. The fact of the matter is there's still a lot of writing on a virtual piece of paper about a certain subject seeking to catch the eye of somebody you might want to write about it. So is there an alternative to that? No, because the alternative to that would be some other mechanism of putting some information onto a virtual page and sending it to someone else who's going to write about it.

Quite a lot of practitioners point out blogs as an alternative.

Yeah, but that's merely on the route to market. As I said at the beginning of this interview, the press releases is merely a route to market. It's not even the actual

market that you require, the market you require is your key target audiences and you want to achieve some sort of change in those audiences. Perhaps it might be an increase in levels of [...] understanding for example. But by writing a press release you're not actually talking to your key target audiences, you're talking to an intermediary. And if you use blogs, if you use other forms of social media you are merely communicating with an intermediary. Okay, I grant you, if certain forms of social media are especially carefully targeted or have experiential content then you are, and can, if it's carefully crafted directly affect and interact with your key target audiences. Yes, true. Is that an alternative to press releases? Well yes, but it serves a different purpose altogether. Is a spaceship an alternative to a car? Yes, but they do a different job.

What impact has the changing media landscape had on media relations and press releases in particular?

That's fairly obvious. There has been a proliferation of outlets and that's a good thing because it means that the long tail can be populated by virtue of content copy of a press release. I was at a facility on Tuesday and at this facility we had BBC, ITV, Fox News, Sky, all the usual candidates and we had the Hackney Post. The fact of the matter is that these outlets, although very different, have their place and the changing media landscape means that there's a lot more place that you can put content. That's obvious. There's also a lot of different ways in which that content is displayed but frankly what I think we see is just a Pareto curve really. The biggest, most influential outlets, although they might change in type and size are still the same ones and the long curve just gets bigger. And the methodology of communicating, i.e. electronically means that we can more adequately communicate with that long curve.

What is a successful press release?

One that gets uptake in outlets and creates outtake which changes the perception or behaviour of key target audiences in terms of outcome.

So this is a way to measure its effectiveness really?

Yes, the way to measure a press release's effectiveness, which is a piece of output, is to balance the resource that's allocated to creating the output with the outcome that was generated as a result. Now this is the Holy Grail of communications. The fact of the matter is no one really understands why one press release or a combination of press releases changes the opinions of key target audiences but they do. Otherwise I would be out of a job and you would never get a job. The fact of the matter is that it is indeed important to measure the output of the number of press releases you write but it should not be a measure of effectiveness. It should be utilised in conjunction with the outtake that results to gauge effectiveness but most effectively - to look at outcomes, linked through together.

Is effective media relations equal to your press release being published in X, Y, Z publications?

At a certain level, yes. And in fact many clients pay for that. But that from the perspective of somebody who is in the business of outcomes, not output, I would say we need to move away from thinking of whether a press release is effective or not effective. We need to say: "well ok, what's going to be the thing that creates the most effective outcome for the least resources?"

How is low or no media coverage justified to a client if you were the one sending out the press release at the time?

That the outlets weren't interested in the story.

Could that create perceptions of poor performance at the agency?

Of course it could. Because there's a perception on the part of the clients that agencies have the keys to outlets but that isn't true. In certain circumstances the relationships built up between agency staff and media personnel means that coverage could be generated. But fundamentally a story stands up based on how good it is.

How effective is actually the press release left alone without the follow-up emails and follow-up calls?

Less effective than the press release with follow-up emails and follow-up calls.

Do you think that you generally understand what newsworthiness is?

Yes, otherwise I'd be out of a job.

What do you perceive as a newsworthy story?

Something that media outlets will carry because they perceive that it will be of interest to their key target audiences.

How do you think your perceptions differ from journalists' perceptions of newsworthiness?

My perceptions are biased by virtue by the fact that I'm paid by my clients to find their stories interesting.

Do you often go against your beliefs of what newsworthiness is in terms of – you see a story is not so newsworthy but you just go ahead and try to pitch it to the media?

The concept of agency work is we get paid to assist our clients with the presentation of their issues they see as important to their strategic success. So I wouldn't be doing my job very well if I didn't seek the most newsworthy element of a story that was not, on the face of it, newsworthy. However, I reiterate, we are in the business of strategic communication here and so there is, at the level we operate at, much more give and take whereby clients will say "is this story of interest"?

Have you ever felt a hostile attitude from journalists?

Absolutely. A lot of journalists hate agency staff.

What usually provokes their negative attitude?

I think it is because, and I generalise here, ours is an industry that at the more junior levels is full of people who are trying to push stories. Now that's their job, there's nothing wrong with what they do, but I think often that some journalists have a perception that what they do is a sort of...was a constitutional role to guard the guardians, watch the watchers and that PRPs frustrate the execution of their constitutional role. I think that that's horse shit. They, just like us, are doing a job

whereby they sell stories to their customers who paid for them and our job is to portray the stories of our clients to our customers who often are journalists, not exclusively. It's very much the same thing, it's just two sides of the same coin.

Could the use of press releases add up to the whole negative attitude of journalists?

Oh yeah, because press releases are so easy to release, out it goes, hundreds of press releases. I've seen inboxes of journalists just as a continuous filling Tetris-like arrangement on their screen, and no wonder. And the language is straight out of the estate agent school of hyperbole, it's utter rubbish on occasion. But that's the negative externality of a sales type environment in which people are encouraged to be novel and dynamic. And of course, young professionals in the public relations sphere are all young and dynamic and are all trying very hard to get their press release about dog food noticed above their press release about post-it notes. And so fuss ensues the race to the bottom of hyperbole and PR speak. But not all of PR is like that. The more you get to the sort of things we do here at Company B Geopolitical, the less you do stuff like press releases.

Final question that came up as something interesting to explore – do you think that bigger clients are a lot more easier to pitch to the media? Their stories and so on?

Yeah, because with size comes scale and with scale comes interest. And often, in our world, controversy. And controversy is what makes news newsworthy, in many respects, not exclusively of course. When I worked for the Organisation A there were plenty of interesting things that the role made me do that are out with the norm, man-bites-dog type stuff. And that made it easier to sell the stories. It wasn't necessarily a function of size, it was a function of what the organisation did. Now that's not always true, you can have small organisations that do do interesting things and you can sell their stories quite effectively. But just like everything in life, the larger the organisation, the more the interests of the organisation, the more controversial those interests, the more likely it is that you're going to have stories that are more newsworthy.

In the same context, do you think that what organisations you are representing in terms of agency also has an impact?

You mean the organisation you choose to be your agency?

No, in terms of you are from this agency and you call a journalist, if that was another agency do you think your story would have had a similar impact?

Do agencies themselves carry a message, is that what you're saying?

Yes.

Well, that's a moot point. If I was a multimillionaire and I had a legal dispute, I would go and get the biggest Magic Circle law firm I could possibly lay my hands on. Why would I do that? Well, I don't know much about the law, apart from obviously keeping within the bounds of it so I would venture to say that the largest law firms have the access to the best resources, the finest minds and all the rest of it. So I might get the very best service even though it's going to cost me, if money were no object I would go there. And therefore it might follow that the very fact that I'm going to go to whosoever I choose, you know - Slaughter and May - to do my legal work might carry itself a message to those with whom I am in opposition to say that I'm serious. Company A

has a reputation of being a serious, fearless, multidisciplinary, full-service public relations agency. I would like to think our clients come to us because they know that we would assist them in solving their communications issues. Whether it makes a difference to what our intermediaries or, indeed, our key target audiences think I couldn't possibly say, but it might be a bit like the law example.

NOTE: Client rings throughout the interview.

Participant Number	Name	Position	Sector
5	Hannah	Senior Account Executive	Corporate
6	Rebecca	Account Manager	Corporate

Could you tell me a bit about yourself starting with your current position and previous experience in PR?

[CONFIDENTIAL RESPONSES]

Can you tell me more about your media relations experience? What positions you were holding when you gained it? How long would you say your experience in media relations is?

[CONFIDENTIAL RESPONSE]

What are the key responsibilities or activities that describe media relations?

Rebecca: I would say there's kind of two broad areas. So, proactive and reactive. [...] Proactive is you trying to push out particular news messages on behalf of your client that a journalist hasn't asked about. And you've got a variety of ways to do that – pitching features or finding what the journalist has already written about, or issuing news releases, press releases. And then obviously the reactive side is having journalists call you up. They want to know about this, "I want to run a story about this. I am interested in knowing about X, Y, Z."

So, broadly splitting media relations into those two categories.

Hannah: So I would say pretty much the same as Rebecca said. Managing our client's relationship with the media effectively. So, everything from making sure there's positive news coverage for them. And if anything comes through... anything negative comes through, make sure we deal with it appropriately. And then generating new ideas as well, also new campaigns – just new ways of obtaining their public image.

Which one is the appropriate term – news release, press release or media release?

Hannah: We tend to use press release at Company A. I can imagine that other agencies use a different but I would say press release.

Rebecca: I mean, essentially they all mean the same thing. I'd probably say press release. I think it's sort of a term that's used for news that you are issuing on behalf of the company.

Could you briefly outline what happens to a media release from the moment it's requested by a client to the moment it gets published?

Rebecca: It probably depends according to the client. Some clients are very particular and very thorough in their brief. Others are not so might just gonna have to kind of generate further ideas to flesh out a press release. You might gonna have a two-way

conversation where you think – “To make this more interesting we need certain information. Could you provide that to us?”

For some clients... obviously global clients like X, which Company A works with, they will have a press release that they've done globally and you might kind of want to tweak it a bit for the local market, add relevant information that's sort of specific for the UK market. So, I think it very much depends on the client, the nature of the press release issued by the organisation but I think for the most part a client will give you a brief. The degree of detail in that brief is quite varied but usually there will be sort of a two-way chance for us to say “Okay, here's what we think? What else we might need? Did you think about this angle?”

And then if that's agree we'll sort of develop it. There's usually one or two rounds of amends – again depending on the clients. So, it's not, you know, it's not kind of a two-step process of the client giving us a brief, us giving them a press release. It can take a few steps to kind of agree on what the press release is about and make sure it's the best it can be.

How do you usually distribute it once it's approved?

Rebecca: It probably depends on... When I think of the term press release, I probably think about something that's news. Something that's not targeted towards landing one really great feature. Or landing one specific publication. When I think of its use, it's kind of... you distribute it quite widely to just use a media list of... I think as well when you sort of send it, kind of distribute it fairly widely – more widely than not then, you know, some clients... Even if you think that's a story that journalists might not write about, there's... “Oh, why did I get that press release?”

If it's official news which I like to think of a press release as, I try and make sure it's going out to every journalist that is relevant to the company.

Do you usually make follow-up call to make sure they have received or whether they are interested in writing the story?

Rebecca: Not all the time. It depends on the press release. If you think it's newsworthy, it's worth making up those follow up calls to make sure people haven't missed it. If it's something that I think is probably “You know, I don't think that's not necessarily something that's gonna be of interest or widely picked up” but I've sent it so that I know people would have got it or maybe won't. And some media lists that can be quite long so you might target a couple of people who you think are... definitely want to make sure that they've received it and get some feedback whether that's something that they are interested in. So I might sort of may say if I sent it to lets say a hundred people media list, I might maybe make 5 to 10 calls depending on what the press release is.

Do you check the journalists' deadlines before you approach them, before you call them?

Rebecca: I think in an ideal world you would. But the case often is that once it's approved, it needs to go out straight away because you don't want to kind of delay. And also I think that with a global or with an official news... press release there could be lots of going out to lots of different journalists with different deadlines and different things so it's very hard to coordinate that. So, I think... you know by sending it out that's the fairest way almost to kind of distribute the news. I think that if you want to think more strategically about it -“Okay, where do I want this press release to be covered?”... so, if I have my key trade title, I might send it to them first and say “If you run it on this day” and send it to everyone else the day after, that will give them the chance to have the story exclusively. And then after it's sort of been covered, give it to

everyone else. I think it's very difficult depending on your target media... It can be very different to coordinate to every sort of title and every journalists' deadline and that sort of thing. I think it's worth thinking about "Where do I want it to land?" and working with that.

Same question. Could you briefly outline what happens to a media release from the moment it's requested by a client to the moment it gets published?

Hannah: I think there's two ways to go about it. Sometimes we think of an idea and pitch that to the client and say: "We know this is coming up. We recommend writing a press release" and wait for them to come back to us and let us know that's fine. And then, in that instance we'll get the information from them. Or it's them coming to us with information and we'll start drafting it. I'd say it will probably take about few hours to draft a press release. It's not something that will take a whole day. Usually it's a page, a page and a half. We then send it back to the client for approval and then quite often there's a lot of toing and froing with it so that they could say "Oh, can you change this? Can you change that?". And it can take a few goes before it's perfect. And then – you sort of decide who you are gonna go to with it. And then we set our media lists and then send it out.

So, when you distribute it do you target any particular journalists or you target a wide range of journalists, hoping to get more coverage by doing so?

Hannah: Most of the time. We always have a target list. For example if it's for Y, which is one of our clients. They are a [describes nature of the business] so we go to drinks trades or [...] drinks and alcohol. And we tend to have the same people we go to all the time and sort of journalists that know us. And if you go to a range of people I think that you have a better chance of getting more coverage than if you go to one or two. Sometimes there are instances where a client would want to be in one publication, which is really important to them. In which case, you just go to them and say: "We have this news. We want people to know. Are you interested in covering it?"

Do you do follow up calls to make sure the journalists have seen the press release?

Hannah: To be honest, I am not that keen on follow up calls. I think a lot of the time with PR with journalists... they get so many e-mails and so many calls all the times. So, when you call them to check, to see if they've received the press release, they get a bit funny and they will often say "Oh, yeah. I've seen it. I saw it."... but then they are not interested in it. That's why they haven't responded. So, I do think if it's a big announcement for the company or your client really wants to be in the publication, I think it's worth making up that follow up call. But sometimes I think, in PR we tend to call journalists and ask them if they've seen the press release just for the sake of it, which is not ideal. It annoys journalists a bit.

What about deadlines. Do you check journalists' deadline before sending them a press release in advance? Or you send it out once it's approved.

Hannah: Usually. Sometimes we try and fit it around deadlines so that we can have better chances of getting covered but to be honest most of the time we send it as soon as it's approved. And we know that the clients wants that news out. We will just send it straight away. And sometimes that doesn't mean we've missed a deadline and have to wait for the next week for it to go in but yeah.

Do you think that the time spent on media releases be better used for different activities such as campaign or strategic planning?

Hannah: I do think there is value to media releases. Especially like... for the majority of our clients, when they are going out with something... when they go out with media releases, it's usually because they've got news to report. I think that campaigns are a bit like... they require a lot more planning and it's a bit on a bigger scale, where day to day things going on with the company, that's the way that the media know what they are doing. So I think they are useful in that sense.

Do you think that the use of media release impacts creativity in terms of what you are doing for the client?

Hannah: Sometimes I think there are instances, where you have clients who always go out with news and press releases, and "We've just done this and we've just done that." And it's like... you know, constantly coming up with something and bombarding the media with it, where they could be using that time on bigger campaigns. But I do see the value in them.

Do you discuss with your clients whether or not you should be sending out a release?

Hannah: Sometimes... Well, I don't personally because I am still quite junior so I still wouldn't have that responsibility. But there are instances where a client will say "Oh, we wanna go with a press release on X, Y!" and we know that's not gonna get press coverage. That's not newsworthy. And it depends, it's the discretion of the account manager or the account director but in that case you are in your right to push back and say "Alright. We can do that for you. We can do this press release but we don't think it's gonna get picked up and it's not gonna get any coverage." And it's up to the client to decide whether they want to proceed or not.

Does it often happen clients to want a press release even though that they don't have any newsworthy story?

Hannah: Yeah, a 100%. I think with a lot of clients – they don't know the media the way we do. So, an announcement that is seen really big for their business and is a big deal to them but might not be a big deal to the media. So, they think "Oh, this is really important, it is huge for us!" And it probably is huge for them but what's huge for them and what's huge for the media is completely different so we do have that. We have that quite regularly.

Could the time spend on media releases be spend more efficiently on let's say campaigns or strategic planning?

Rebecca: I think often the press release is the result of strategic planning or something like that, depending on if it's a day to day press office thing or something that's part of a wider campaign. I agree with Hannah. I believe that press releases do definitely still have a place. Approval's process could often be a lot more efficient in terms of clients not giving consolidated feedback instead of giving all the suggestions and amends in one go rather than often is the case of... you know – they give one set of amends and then you send it back again. It kind of goes back and forth and then it goes to another person internally. So, clients... It's the process that could be a lot more efficient rather than the release itself. But I definitely think that the press release is an important part of PR.

Have you ever advised a client not to use a press release for particular story?

Rebecca: Yes. I think when we would advise against a press release, it would be perhaps about if it's a story that just might be suitable for say one or two specific trade publications. So, if that's the case we will sort of say... We wouldn't say to the client "Why bother sending a press release" but we might say "Given that it's something that's gonna be of interest really to a certain title it just might be worth..." ... I think there is a phrase that we're using – kind of a media pitch rather than a press release because in the mind of PRs and clients a press release is a very official document that needs to be signed off Head of Corporate Comms, sometimes depending on the size of the company maybe a senior. Whereas a media alert sounds like something a little bit more informal. So if it's something that we think is not really going to be news, that's gonna have a broader appeal we might say "Oh, you know it's a nice local story and there's one local paper" and that's kind of... let's do a media pitch, which is basically a press release but it's smaller and it's not called a press release. So, clients don't get as nervous about it and it's not you know... I think that's something that we do sometimes. In terms of the press release – there are some things where we know it's not gonna be of interest to any media so we wouldn't say "Look, this is quite a nice story but maybe it's worth mentioning it in a different..." A press release is a key message, a part from something else rather than something itself.

Does the press release limit creativity in communicating key messages?

Rebecca: I think it's definitely always worth thinking, questioning whether the press release is the best way to communicate a certain message. Is there something that might be better, communicated by exclusive interview or media briefing, or round table, a presentation or an event? But sometimes... it's always worth thinking about what's the best way to get this message across. I think because Hannah and I work within the corporate team, sort of experiential event might not work for some of our clients. Whereas for a consumer campaign, or a product launch a press release is probably not the best way to communicate that. But often a press release is just a straightforward way of communicating something but as I say – it's always worth thinking "Is this the best way to do it?"

How does the media release affect creative story telling?

Rebecca: It's kind of a difficult one. I think a press release is very much a news announcement and there's a difference between... I mean... I don't know, I think a lot of people don't see a press release as solely creative itself. But I think it can be a quite creative, intellectual process cause essentially you are thinking about what is the story here and how can I make it most interesting. It's not necessarily the language – using creative language in a press release. It's the narrative itself. So, I think that a press release in its self can be quite a creative thing.

Do you think that the current format of the media release with its headline, its body, quotes and contact details, able to successfully communicate a client's competitive advantage, core competencies and corporate stories?

Rebecca: Yeah, I think they can. I think that sometimes they can be overcomplicated so that messaging gets lost a bit but... you know – clients could be quite keen on having "London, UK" in the beginning of the press release and that sort of "Ends" and "Notes to Editors". That can all sometimes complicate a press release which is essentially straight like a few paragraphs. And I think that often with partnership press releases... you know – "Oh, everybody needs... We have to have all those people having a quote." That can [...] in the message as well. So I think that often the message can get diluted by internal politics and approvals, and people shoehorning their messages in when that's not necessarily what the particular press release is about. I think sometimes as well there can be a client... any client can have a few

messages that want to tell to different people and one press release is not always going to communicate everything you want to communicate from the company. It might just be a way to communicate something. And clients often want every single press release to communicate every single commercial advantage or unique selling point they have but it shouldn't be that one press release communicating everything. I think there's gotta be... I think that yeah, messages in press releases can be diluted. I don't think that any one press release should have more than two or three messages in them.

Hannah, does the use of media releases limit creativity in communicating key messages?

Hannah: I think they can be good for communicating key messages if it's done in a subtle way. So, I think... as Rebecca said – press releases are more about news announcements but I think sometime you can weave it in, weave your news into the bigger picture of the company and its background. Things like that. So, in that sense I don't think it limits it. I think it can still be included. Creativity? I don't know how creative you can be with a press release. I mean... It depends what kind of PR you are working in. If you work in Consumer – you can be a bit more "out there" with what you are saying but it tends to have that standard format everybody tends to follow in PR.

Is there an alternative to the media release?

Hannah: I think you can have short media alerts, which is what we do for one of our clients regularly. Consider of doing the press release with its standard format – you know with like and outline and then a quote. That sort of thing. We just go out with a few – one or two paragraphs, outlining what the key news is. And for journalists who are busy and haven't got time to read through a press release because they receive a 100 press releases a day, sometimes their text which can condense everything in a paragraph or two... it could be quite helpful there.

What about blogs? Do you think they can be an alternative to press release?

Hannah: I don't know. I think blogs are quite different. With press releases – they are very matter of fact, very objective... subjective? No, objective. Where as blogs is more of an opinion, sort of an angle, which is a bit more informal. I think they are very different.

What impact has the changing media landscape had on media relations and media releases in particular?

Hannah: I think it has impacted the relationships with the media. I don't know what it was like 20 years ago but now, it's very much... Because there are so many PR agencies and there's the internet and all these things, I think that everything has changed. Not necessarily in a negative way but there's so much information constantly going back and forth. And whereas before if you wanted to get in touch with a journalist you'd... I don't know fax them or call - actually have a conversation with them. Now, everything is on e-mail and they get so many e-mail a day that they might not necessarily see yours. I think in that sense that has affected the relationship in a way.

Is there an alternative to the media release? Is there any other tool that has the functionality to replace media releases?

Rebecca: I think that a media alert sounds a bit more "friendly" to a client because it doesn't require senior approval. So, often a press officer or a PR marketing manager can approve a media alert whereas a press release might have to go through a few more levels of seniority. So I think that in terms of the approval process of press

releases, it's quite inefficient – not a great use of time. So, that's often a way to cut down the bureaucracy and you are doing the same thing which is essentially releasing news but it's kind of maybe a less official format. But obviously there are some cases where **an official press release, which is very formal, is absolutely the only way to release news.** For example, if it's a publically listed company and you are releasing their financial results – there are laws and regulations about how you report that to the press. So, I think that it depends on the story but often clients are like "Oh, we've won an award! We've launched a new product." That is easier to do in a more of an alert... as I've said – two, three paragraphs and a quote rather than a formulaic press release that could quite often be difficult to get through. **Because the media is 24 hours now and there's constantly news.** And you know – sometimes you might want to do a quote, comments on some news that's come up that day, that's relevant to your client. For those cases, we will just try and get one quote out as one paragraph out to the media rather than a press release. And sometimes it's calling a journalist you might know and say "Do you want an interview? Do you want to speak to my client? Do you want to meet them for a coffee?" rather than launching news officially.

What impact has the changing media landscape had on media relations and media releases in particular?

Rebecca: I think it's made it much harder to get your news across. **There are so many PR agencies and there are so many companies that fight all the time for coverage.** Online media as well. Traditional newspapers are reporting on news differently so they are breaking it as it comes out. And then, it's kind of moving onto something else. I think sometimes it could be quite difficult. At the same time the traditional media has shrunk a bit and online media has really grown. There are kind of new website popping up all the time and it can be hard to know how popular they actually are and how important they are. So, it can be a little bit harder now than it was to really hone in who the right journalists more than anything cause there are so many more publications, especially online.

So what impact has that had on the use of media releases?

Rebecca: **It can sometimes make PRs and clients feel better to know that they've released a press release.** But I think **it's harder to measure its success** because there are more online publications and it can take... It's hard to figure out, who's gonna be interested in what and whether it's going to be a really important publication. And sometimes there will be a new publication popping up and a client will be like "Oh, I've seen this website. Maybe they can do our news" and I think it just makes it a bit harder to know, to measure the impact of your press release cause are you measuring the impact of how many people that you've sent it to are covering it. Is that the best way because it's quite hard to figure out who the best people are?

So when is it successful – the press release?

Rebecca: I don't know. I think a successful press release is something that's **gonna get coverage.** But I think **it's the right kind of coverage.** So a lot of these new online publications, especially the trade publications will just publish anything, so any news release. We call it "churnalism", it's like they are churning out new content all the time and a lot of it is just taking word to word stuff from your press release, which is great in a way. But in a way – that's not valuable. Is that valuable coverage? So, a successful press release is something that will **stand out and be taken by journalists**, and made into something a little bit more than your press release.

Hannah, what is a successful media release?

Hannah: Do you mean – what it looks like or the impacts of it?

So, is it successful when the release gets picked up by the media or is it successful when it communicates key messages?

Hannah: I think it's a bit of both. For a lot of clients – coverage is their main thing. So, when you go back to them and you've got the numbers – "Oh, we've got 10 nationals and 15 trades" ... for some clients that is enough. Whereas for others – they prefer one or two pieces, part of a wide feature on something, where they've positioned them as experts in the field. So, I think it really depends on the individual clients I suppose. For me – a successful press release is – all the time you've invested in it you get out of and the original goal of the client has been achieved. If they wanted to go out and communicate the news that that's happened and it's been widely announced – I think that's the result for them.

How do you measure the effectiveness or the success of a press release?

Hannah: Usually we tend to go by coverage. In PR it's very much about if you can drift off the press release and it hasn't got any coverage – either the story was not strong enough or the journalists weren't interested in it. I'd say that that's how you can determine it – by the pick ups it gets, by the responses of the journalists you get.

Rebecca: Yeah, I think it's a mixture of quality and quantity. So, if you have one piece of coverage in a national publication – sort of a big feature rather than 10 pieces of coverage in lots of trades that would probably cover anything. I think it's the national piece that's gonna be successful for me. But if the original aim of the press release was to cover that key trade publication and that's what we've done – then obviously that's what success looks like. I think for me it's a mix of quality and quantity. I'd rather have one really good piece of coverage than lots of pieces of churnalism kind of thing that's not gonna stand out for your client and then bosses.

How would you measure the effectiveness of media relations using the media release as a measure or a criteria for success then? Or let me rephrase that - what is the relationship between media relations and media releases? Is getting coverage equal to good media relations practices?

Rebecca: Do you mean what's the role of the media release in successful media relations? With the press release I suppose I am talking about proactive media relations as opposed to reactive. Although sometimes you would issue a press release about a controversial issue, I think that often journalists – when you call them and you pitch an idea and you don't know... and it might be something that you have in mind just e-mail them because they need information to look at. Still a lot of the time when you call journalists and you are like "Oh, that sounds interesting, do you have a press release?" and I think that the press release is still very helpful for journalists because it's a way of summarizing what you want them to write about. So your news has to be relevant and also the press release has to be relevant and it provides context. I think for some journalists you can have a short e-mail pitch and they'd be like "Yes, I am interested in that!" and they will say "Do you have a press release? Because they want to put it in context." They want to fact check it and you can't really do that with a telephone pitch or a quick e-mail but they might want to interview your client. I think it's often helpful for journalists to have a press release so I think they expect it. And if you don't have it and it's news they might think "Oh, I can't really bother to ask so many questions myself." You know – journalists are very busy. The idea of a press release is to put it all in 500 words to make it kind of relevant.

How is low or no media coverage justified to a client?

Rebecca: I think that when a client briefs you on a press release and you from the brief that's not necessarily something that's going to be of interest – you have to manage

the expectations before you even send the press release out. If you are going to a client and saying "We haven't got any coverage." after you've sent out the press release – that's a more difficult conversation than having raised it from the beginning. So, "Okay, we can do a press release. How about that? Not sure it's gonna get wide coverage but it's gonna be good for the media to know." – kind of phrasing things like that. I think if that's something that you, as a PR agent, thought that was going to be something quite useful or successful and it hasn't been – that's where your calls to the media could be quite helpful because then you can get a little bit of feedback. Some clients won't be that pleased if you don't have any coverage after a press release that you've said yourself will be something out of interest for the media. As long as you know that you've tried your best and you've spoken to the right journalists, it's gone to the right people and you have kind of an idea on why it hasn't quite worked. If you can say to your client what you're gonna do next. So maybe you've learned from your conversations with journalists that that's more of a feature so we're gonna pitch it as an exclusive to one title or this is something that might be worth mentioning in an interview later, down the line. If you think about sort of reasons it hasn't gone well and solution and learnings so that you can kind of learn from it.

Can the lack of coverage create poor perceptions about the practitioner looking after the account and could that damage the client's opinion about their agency?

Rebecca: I think it can. It is very unfortunate when something like that happens and I think that this is why it's important to manage expectations quite clearly from the inception of the idea. Everyone in PR knows that the only way to guarantee coverage or no coverage... the only way is by advertising. I think in PR you can never tell journalists what to write about. Unfortunately, when something hasn't gone... hasn't landed the way you wanted, it can sometimes be seen as – you know... you haven't done your job, you don't have the media relations skills. But from my experience when a story hasn't landed and I've had a conversation with the clients about it afterwards, I never feel that they thought it was our ability. Personally, I've never felt that a client has criticized our ability to sell in a story, based on not getting coverage from a press release.

Why do clients want press releases?

Rebecca: I think that it makes them feel... I think it protects them. I think that people see as a very official document if it's signed off by everybody internally that need to [...] on file, everybody feels better because that's what's been released to the media and everybody has seen it. Everybody said it's okay because so if there's anything that's kind of... is misunderstood based on that the agency has sent to the media and that protects the agency as well. If you client has seen the press release that has been sent out and it hasn't got coverage or has been spurning away that you hadn't thought about or even if one of the facts is wrong... you know – your client has seen that, their manager has seen that. So in a way it protects the agency and it protects the client but it's an official document. Whereas if you pitched something on an e-mail and nobody has really seen it and or you'd speak to a journalist on the phone and you've said something that perhaps turned out it wasn't a 100% right... because it wouldn't be somebody lying but a genuine mistake. Everyone's quite busy, I think the press release is just a way of covering everybody and that everybody is quite clear on what has been communicated externally to media.

How would you measure the effectiveness of media relations using the media release as a measure or a criteria? What is the relationship between media relations and media releases? Does good media relations practices mean you will necessarily get coverage?

Hannah: I think it helps. I don't think that anything's ever guaranteed. I think there's a lot of factors to consider. Yeah, I think they are important. I think it's one way to get coverage but there are lots of other ways you can go about getting your name out. There's round tables for [...] we do [...]. In corporate, you can do reports, you can do interviews so I don't think that it's just necessarily that just media releases might help.

How is low or no media coverage justified to a client?

Hannah: Pretty similar to what Rebecca said. I think that it's something that you have to manage beforehand. If you know that a press release, something that's going out is not newsworthy you should really say something in the beginning. When it comes back to you and you have to have that discussion with the client and there's no coverage, then... you can justify it but it's something that should always be flagged in the first instance. I also think that clients that know about whether the news works, they can figure out themselves. If it's Budget Day for example and all the journalists are talking about politics, and you want to go out with a story that has something to do with politics it's not gonna get any coverage because everyone else. All the journalists are talking, covering something else. In that sense, I suppose... Yes.

Why do clients want press releases?

Hannah: I think it's... Not to sound bad but it's an ego thing. They have their own agendas and if they are a listed company or something – they have shareholders and something like that... If they are doing something within that company and they see it as a big deal for them they would want others to know about it: "Oh, look at what we're doing. We're building this new building. We're investing in this."

And it's a way of making them look good. In a lot of the reactive stuff that we do in PR, it's because something negative has been said about them or there's a crisis so a press release is their way of going out proactively and saying "Look at the great stuff we're doing." You won't really get business that write about negative stuff, it's always about something good they've got in the pipeline. It's their way of getting their message out there.

How effective is a media release as a communications tool left alone – without the follow up calls and e-mails, and so on?

Hannah: I think it depends on the strength of the media release. If it's a really strong release and it's written in a way... if the story is strong enough. And number two – if it is written in a way that the journalist can look at it and get it in 5 minutes I think it's useful.

Do you think you generally understand what newsworthiness is?

I think at this stage I do. In the beginning when I first started out in PR, you might not have the best idea about what kind of... You might know about national newspapers for example but you might not know what specific trade journalists will cover and things like that. As time goes by and you read those publications, and you deal with the journalists on a daily basis you start to understand what kind of things they will cover and why. Now, if a client comes to and has an idea they want to share, and they think that it can make a great press release but I know I've conversations with that journalist and I know that wouldn't be something they'd cover. Then obviously I'd flag that.

What do you perceive as a newsworthy story?

Hannah: I think in that sense it's news. A lot of the times we write press releases that are about "Okay, you've done this and you've done that but is it news?" News is something that people need to know about, something that's in the public interest in

that sense. So, I think that if you are doing something really minuscule within your business that isn't really important to anyone else outside your business. That's not news. That shouldn't really be in the public domain because it's not anything that will affect the average people. If it is something that will affect the readers of the journal or the readers of the newspaper, that will then make it newsworthy.

Would you go against your beliefs of what newsworthiness is if the client insists that you should go forward with a story?

Hannah: Yes, I think again with me being at the stage of my career that I am at. I think that if I wanted to push back on something like that I would be able to tell someone more senior in the team and say "You know, I don't think that that's gonna get picked up." But I think that a lot of the time in PR, because you do know the clients and you don't wanna cause trouble, you do just sort of nod your head and go "Yeah, yeah, I will draft that press release for you" and when it comes out. And when it's gone out and no coverage appears, it can look... it cannot make you look bad but they can start to see you a bit differently in that sense.

So, do you think that you understand what newsworthiness is?

Rebecca: Yes, I think you always know what national news is. To be honest, it depends per publication and who reads them, especially with the trade journals. Sometimes, something that I think is of no interest actually is for particular title because they have particular audience and I think that's just learning about that audience and what's important to them. You've got to think about what you think is interesting, what the journalists think is interesting and what their audience thinks is interesting. You've got to put yourself in the shoes of the readers and the audiences of different media outlets that you are targeting. In terms of news – something that's new, something that's like "So what?". Does it have the "So what?" factor, why should the public care about it. And if you can say why, then it's newsworthy.

How do you think your perceptions differ from journalists' perceptions of newsworthiness?

Rebecca: I don't think that they differ in a sense that I don't think... I wouldn't think that something that I thought was really, really interesting and I'd be extremely surprised that a journalist also thought that. I think that the things I think are going to be of interest for the journalists are and thinks that I don't think will be of interest for journalists are not. I think obviously for a journalist, they'd want to dig a little deeper into the story and kind of give it a wider angle than just your company. So, I think that obviously that is newsworthy for my client and then because they are covering the whole industry, they might link it up. So they kind of might join it up with few different things they are working on so it can be a wider piece or something like that. So I think the journalists are... I think that our job is to identify the news for our client and it's their job to join the dots – maybe package up particular story. It's not just about us because journalists' role is not to just write about organisations, it's to write about trends and things like that. So, this is where they have a different eye on your news.

Would you go forward with a press release if you know it's not newsworthy?

Rebecca: I think you have to because that's what your client is paying you to do in the end of the day. If they want to go forward with something. If you've recommended, if you were honest with your client what advice you'd give or you know "Maybe I wouldn't go forward with the press release. Maybe I'd do this or mention it as a part of an interview." If they still want to do it even though you've raised your concerns it's not self-serving or perhaps that's not something that's gonna get picked up. As long as you've said those things if the client wants you to do it, it's your job to do it I guess.

Have you ever felt hostile attitude from journalists?

Rebecca: Yes.

What provoked it?

Rebecca: I think it's usually when it's a story that they think is very self-serving. So, you know it might be about client who has won an award or your client has said something like "Oh, we think that more..." For example Hannah works for Client A. Lets say they have put out a survey for put that say "Oh, Client A's survey shows that pubs will be more successful if they supplied Client A [describes product]." That's what would really make a journalist because they will just think "That is so self-serving." Or if you are trying to say something that's quite negative... we have a few clients, where they might... If it's ingenuous I think that this will also make them annoyed. So if you are launching a new product and you're claiming that it's real value for money and it's not then that's gonna be something that will really annoy them. But journalists are not as bad as you think, if they don't want to write about something they won't. If they feel your article is self-serving and disingenuous they will get annoyed. If they don't think your story is interesting, they won't get annoyed but then if you keep pestering them, then they will get annoyed. I don't think that a journalist has ever been... Or unless if you think you have a journalist on the wrong list – they are writing about beer and you're sending them things about ageing cream then they could get annoyed.

Back to Hannah. I missed one question. How do you think your perceptions differ from journalists' perceptions of newsworthiness?

Hannah: I don't know. I think they are quite similar. The thing that might differ is the client's perception of newsworthiness from journalists. Because we work with media all the time – and we might think is interesting they might think it's interesting and we sort of get it. Where is with clients who don't interact with the media that often they might have something that they think is really interesting and newsworthy but really it might not be. So really, the real difference doesn't lay between us and the journalists in that sense.

Have you ever felt hostile attitude from journalists?

Hannah: Yeah, definitely. I'd go with what Rebecca said about things being self-serving like the nature of the press release and what it is that we are selling in. I think with journalists you need to remember that they are under a ridiculous time constraints, especially national journalists. You have got people calling your phone non-stop, and you've got a deadline, and you've got a 100 e-mails coming in. And I think that sometimes they can be hostile but it's not because of your press release or because of something you might have done. Sometimes it's literally down to the fact that they are busy people and they have deadlines. They've got so many other people calling them and doing exactly what you are doing.

Do you think that there is a relationship between the negative attitude of the journalist and the fact that you are sending them a press release?

Hannah: You mean - do you think they are negative because we are sending them the press release. I think that the negativity comes from the fact that the press release is not newsworthy and they are not interested or if you pester them – that's the things. Sending the press release with journalists is... with the way e-mail is, you can send anyone and e-mail and if they want to ignore, they can. But if you are calling them constantly and they are picking up the phone and you are saying "Oh, have you seen

the press release", that's where they start getting annoyed. For most journalists they probably don't mind to be called just once, friendly. But if they are interested, I am firm believer that if they are interested they will use it. There have been so many times where someone has asked me to continuously call the same person and ask "Check if they are going to use, check if they are going to use it!" and it's like – by this point, a week later, they would have used it if they were interested. They've seen it. I've called to ask if they've seen it. They've seen it. They are just not going to use it.

Do you think that the fact that you are a PR person annoys them?

Hannah: I don't know. I think there is that love-hate relationship between PRs and journalists. To an extend... my sister is a trained journalist and we always have that thing where... they think that PR is bombarding them with all that... because **they know how it works – clients paying us money to make them look good**. We are contacting them saying "Our clients have done this. Our clients have done that." And they get so many people doing that to them every day. To an extend I do think they need us because if you pick up any national newspaper and... I did this a couple of weeks ago actually when we had some training... and you actually look through national newspapers nowadays and you can really tell which story is PR-driven. You get certain things like what's happening in Syria – that's not PR-driven actually, that's something that's going on. But you get those surveys in the Metro, or sometimes on the front page of the Daily Mail or something like that, and you know that's something that's PR-driven. That's research that someone pulled together. I think there is a lot of value in PR in that sense.

Do you think that journalists often make use of their power not to publish your press release?

Hannah: I don't think they do it for specific reason. I don't think they do it just to be nasty. I think if they do it, they do it because they are not interested in it.

Back to Rebecca. Do you think there is relationship between the negative journalists' attitude and the fact that you use press releases to pitch your stories?

Rebecca: I don't think it's the press release. If it's a good press release they will be glad to have received it. I think the things is PRs often feel... especially when you are more junior... and like that being annoying by sending them a press release but actually if the journalist then writes up your story... **Well, you've done them a favour because they need stories and you have them**. And sometimes they will receive your press release, they will like it and they have something on hand so it will be easy. So, I think it's a two-way relationship. It's not just them writing up stories and we should be really grateful. Actually, we have stories and they write about them if they are interested. And I think if it's a press release or an e-mail pitch, or a telephone call, if they think your story's interesting and they write about it, I think... they are not going to be annoyed about receiving a press release. If it's totally irrelevant to what they write about – yes, they will be annoyed. **And if you follow up, and follow up and obviously that's something that they are not interested in... obviously that's where the hostility comes**. I think it's not the press release itself but how the PR follows up from there.

Do you think that the fact that you are a PR person annoys them?

Rebecca: I think some journalists are very receptive to PRs and they work with them all the time, and they are happy to do that. Whereas other journalists don't like to be... you know – they'll happily if they see a press release they might follow it up with a call and do some digging to write up a story about it. **But they don't like to be called by PRs and they always say "Oh, I want this Chief Executive's direct line"** and this is when you are

like... Some journalists are like that – they see the PR as some kind of barrier to a good contact. I don't think they see you as a good contact. They see the chief executive of your client as a good contact. That's just the way it is. I think some journalists are like that. Most journalists are not like that and they do appreciate that PRs are going to help them get stories.

Has there been a situation when a journalists, who you are working on a story with has made use of the fact they have the power to not publish your press release?

Rebecca: Just trying to think carefully. No, I don't think so. I don't think that journalists think of themselves that way "Oh, we can be nice to PRs or we can't." I think journalists really think about their readers and they genuinely think "Is this story going to be interesting for my readers. And if I want to publish it, it doesn't matter, who the PR is." I think it's a really straightforward process. I think if you've annoyed them in the past or you don't really have a good relationship with them perhaps they are less receptive to your press release. So, they will get a lot of e-mails a day and let's say if there's a PR they work with quite a lot, they'll say "Oh, there's an e-mail from Rebecca, lets see what she is..." or whereas there's an e-mail from someone they've never heard of, they've never spoken to before... with a press release, maybe they are more likely to read it or something. Or if they've had loads and loads of calls from a PR before, that's really annoyed them. I think it's because there are so many stories so in a way... there might be 5 stories that they need to fill a page and they are all newsworthy but they can only use 3 of them maybe if you've annoyed them in the past or if they don't know you, maybe yeah but I don't think it's the press release itself that is making them annoyed.

Do you think it can add up pressure?

Rebecca: What do you mean?

You mentioned that you don't think that a press release can annoy them but they receive up to a 100 press releases per week, do you think that the press release can just add up to their pressure?

Rebecca: No, I think it depends on the press release and whether it's interesting for them. I think that if you send them an interesting press release they are not going to be annoyed. If you send them a press release that isn't of interest, I don't think they will be annoyed again. It's just a story.

Do you think that who your client is and what agency you're from has impact on publishing your press releases on your media relations practice, not so much your skills as a PR person?

Rebecca: Oh, yes. I see. Definitely. I think there are some brands that I work with that are very prestigious. For example I used to work with X and I work with Y at the moment. I think that if someone sees that brand name in the subject box... Y has news about this or X... then they are like "Oh! Uh!" If it's a brand no one has heard, they don't see why that's important. To say that Y is launching a new click and collect service, Y is a market leader so that's probably gonna have wider knock on effect on the rest of the retail market. Whereas if some tiny little shop in Nottingham... why is that important for everyone else? I think the brand name definitely... To answer to your question – yes, definitely. Your client, who they are and how important they are and how big they are is going to have effect on whether or not a press release get used.

What about the agency that you are representing? Does it have any impact on depending if it's a big or a small agency?

Rebecca: I think a smaller agency is likely to have smaller clients and big agencies have big, tougher clients. So in a way, it's kind of back to the clients. So, their brand name rather than your brand name as a PR agency. Personally, I've never heard... I know quite a few journalists who I've worked with and socialized with and I've never... no one has ever said "Oh, you know there are some PR agencies we take stories from and there are some PR agencies that we hate and we don't want to." I think it's the story and who it is about rather than the PR agency. I think perhaps... I would say a team of journalists who've had particular bad experience with certain agency... maybe they've been given wrong information or anything like that, then they would be a bit... I think journalists still have to trust your agency as a brand as well as your client's brand. But in terms of issuing proactive press releases I've never heard of "We won't take stories from that agency."

Back to Hannah. Do you think it depends what client you are representing and what agency you are calling from when you are pitching stories to the media?

Hannah: Yeah, a 100%. Obviously we are quote a big agency. The agency I worked for before were a lot smaller and you know – sometimes I'd have a press release where they are talking about the bigger scheme of things but they haven't got a big name, people haven't heard of them and it's a really hard sell. I think the majority of initial conversations you have with journalists is explaining who you are and what you do. And that takes up so much time. If you think journalists only have 10 seconds... like an elevator pitch – you only have 10 seconds to get your press release and what it's about across. If you spend 7 of those seconds explain who you are and who your client is, it affects your success rate.

As for agency, I do think it matters – the story and the brand. But I do think all agencies have reputation and again I say this because my last agency did not have the best reputation. They were very well known for bombarding journalists on Friday with Sunday and Monday stories to a point, where there was various national journalists who flat out said they didn't want to receive any news from us. That's the actions of few individuals but it's because we are on the direction of the management, who... that's their regular approach. That's been their approach for the last 20 years. In that sense, that shows how your agency can have bad reputation, which affects your clients' chances of getting coverage.

How hard it is to establish and maintain relationships with journalists when you work in an agency because obviously when you work in-house you have a few journalists, who will be following the stories around you?

Hannah: With agencies is pretty much the same. The way we work, you won't have more than 4 or 5 accounts so for the majority of the publications you are dealing with. It's like... for example for Z, I have a good relationship with the trade publications and every time we have a story we can call them and they will know we are. I think it's easy to keep that balance.

Rebecca?

Rebecca: I think it can be difficult when you work across lots of different sectors. So, for example I work on 5 accounts and they are all very different sectors. So sometimes it can be... for each client, there will be a different set of trade publications and journalists. Once you've got your head around which are the key ones and usually for any industry, there will be 2 or 3 really key trades, and there will be a bunch of journalists nationally that will be really important to you. So, it's not too much. There will be broad contacts that will be good for most of your clients – for example broad business journalists, who you can call and pitch a few different clients' stories. It's not

specific by sector but I think... Hannah and I both work on the corporate team which I think helps. We only do corporate PR which is sort of trades and nationals from a more business news angle. Where is, I think... if you had to do that on top of consumer PR, where there are hundreds of women's magazines... then it can get a little bit confusing. Obviously the sector is important and the type of PR that you do. Corporate and reputational, talking to B2B or if that's B2C – business to consumer and who you talk to through your comms.

Do you think that the more senior you get, the more easier it is to get press releases published?

Rebecca: No. I don't think so because a journalist is still going to take the press release for news value for the most part. They will judge it on the story rather than who is sending it to you.

What if they don't know you?

Rebecca: I think it's more difficult to get that seen. But once you get over that, even if they know you – that's not gonna make them write your story. It's going to make them look at your story, which is slightly different. But I think if you are... Sometimes I think that if you are pitching interviews, meetings or coffees rather than sending out press release that it's... I've noticed that if you're account manager or account director, or head of a team, then a journalist will kind of want to meet up with you for a coffee. Where is maybe they don't want to meet a grad because they don't think "He doesn't really... She doesn't really know the strategic important stuff I want to know about."

But in terms of the press release – yeah, it helps to get your press release seen cause often if a journalist deleted it after they've read it, if the subject line box is not interesting – they are ruthless. But even if they don't and they look at your press release and they are interested that doesn't mean they will cover it.

Hannah? Does it depend whether you are more senior... Is there a relationship between your seniority and how successful you are in getting your story published?

Hannah: I don't think so. I think one thing to bear in mind is that usually more senior people within PR wouldn't be sending press releases as well. And associate director wouldn't really catch them on the phone "Oh, we've got that press release we just wanna sell this in." I don't think it matters. It's not about the press release. It can depend on your relationship with the journalist and all the other factors we've previously discussed.

Appendix 7

Questionnaire Coding Guide

N#	Type	Question	Answer Options	Code
Page 1				
1	Single Choice	<p>To proceed to the survey you must agree with the conditions for participation. Selecting the "Agree" option below indicates that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You have read the information provided above; - You voluntarily agree to participate; - You are at least 18 years of age. 	Agree	1
			Disagree [Ends survey]	2
Page 2				
2	Single Choice	What is your gender?	Male	1
			Female	2
3	Single Choice	Can you confirm that you...	... are currently employed in a PR agency in the United Kingdom and you have more than 1 year experience in media relations.	1
			... have been previously employed in a PR agency in the United Kingdom and you have more than 1 year experience in media relations.	2
			None of the above applies to me. [Ends survey]	3
Page 3				
4	Single Choice	What is your current position or what was your last job position in the agency you worked for?	Account Executive	1
			Senior Account Executive	2
			Account Manager	3
			Account Director	4
			Associate Director	5

			Head of Department/ Partner	6
			Other	7
5	Single Choice	What sector/department/division are/were you working in?	Corporate	1
			Digital	2
			Technology	3
			Consumer	4
			Brand	5
			Crisis	6
			Political/Geopolitical	7
			Financial	8
			Luxury	9
			Healthcare	10
			Other	11
6	Single Choice	How many years of media relations experience do you have?	1+	1
			2	2
			3	3
			4	4
			5	5
			6	6
			7	7
			8	8
			9	9
			10-15	10
			16-20	11

			20+	12
	Page 4			
7	Likert Scale	Q7-1: "Press release" is the accepted industry-wide term.	Strongly Disagree	1
			Disagree	2
		Q7-2: Press releases, media releases and news releases are the exact same thing.	Neither	3
8	Multiple Choice	Why do you use media releases?	Agree	4
			Strongly Agree	5
			Journalists want releases	1
			Clients request releases	2
			It is expected to always have a release in place when you have news/stories	3
9	Likert Scale	Q9-1: The media release is an effective communications tool on its own.	It's usually used strategically as part of a PR program/campaign	4
			Other, please specify	5
			Strongly Disagree	1
			Disagree	2
		Q9-2: Media releases are less likely to be picked up by the media without following up with journalists.	Neither Agree or Disagree	3
			Agree	4
		Q9-3: Media releases could be used strategically as part of a PR program/campaign.		
		Q9-4: Media releases are only effective if they are used strategically		

		Q9-5: Media releases are the best way to control the message.	Strongly Agree	5
		Q9-6: Media releases are time efficient compared to other PR activities.		
	Page 5			
10	Multiple Choice	Which factors determine the newsworthiness of a story?	Immediacy (breaking news)	1
			Timeliness	2
			Localness (relevant to local issues, trends or events)	3
			Human interest (talking about people in a personal rather than business sense)	4
			Cultural proximity (making an otherwise non-local story relevant to local readers)	5
			Unexpectedness ("man bites dog")	6
			Prominence (concerns famous or well-known people, institutions or events)	7
			Significance	8
			All of the above	9
			Other	10
11	Single Choice	Have you ever written and/or distributed a release that lacks most of the factors outlined above?	Yes	1
			No	2
12	Single Choice	How often do you/did you distribute releases that contain only few of the factors outline above?	Always	1
			Often	2
			Sometimes	3
			Occasionally	4
			Never	5

			This does not apply to me	6
13	Multiple Choice	What is/was the reason for distributing a media release that contains only few of the factors outlined above?	The release was good enough to be distributed	1
			Client insisted on distributing the release	2
			More senior staff got me to distribute the release	3
			This does not apply to me	4
			Other, please specify	5
14	Likert Scale	<p>Do you agree with the following statement?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q14-1: Clients often do not understand how the media operates. • Q14-2: Clients often do not understand what makes a newsworthy story. • Q14-3: Clients often do not understand what journalists want/need. 	Strongly Disagree	1
			Disagree	2
			Neither Agree or Disagree	3
			Agree	4
			Strongly Agree	5
15	Multiple Choice	Why do clients request media releases?	To get media coverage	1
			To control the messages the agency is communicating to the media	2
			To communicate particular message to their external stakeholders	3
			To showcase their work to their internal stakeholders/superiors	4
			Because they do not know what other tools/methods could be used	5
			Other	6
		Page 6		
16	Multiple Choice	What characterises a successful media release?	Receives good coverage (quality)	1

			Receives a lot of coverage (quantity)	2
			Impacts behaviour, attitudes and opinions	3
			Receives good feedback from journalists	4
			Communicates key messages successfully	5
			All of the above	6
			Other, please specify	7
17	Multiple Choice	How do you measure the effectiveness of a media release?	Pre-set goals	1
			Amount of coverage	2
			Type of coverage	3
			Outcomes (attitude/behaviour change, message pull-through)	4
			Return of investment (ROI) for the client	5
			All of the above	6
			Other, please specify	7
18	Likert Scale	Q17-1: Clients could use the media coverage, generated by distributing a media release, to evaluate the performance of the agency.	Strongly Disagree	1
		Q17-2: Good media relations guarantee media coverage regardless of the newsworthiness of the media release.	Disagree	2
		Q17-3: The media release could be used as criteria for measuring media relations effectiveness.	Neither Agree or Disagree	3
		Q17-4: The media release is not an appropriate criteria for measuring the effectiveness of	Agree	4

		media relations.		
		Q17-5: Media relations effectiveness cannot be measured.	Strongly Agree	5
19	Ranking	What is the most common reason for low or no coverage following the distribution of a media release?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q19-1: The media release/story was not newsworthy • Q19-2: The media release was not the best way to communicate the story • Q19-3: The client was not of interest to the media • Q19-4: The practitioner/s, looking after the account did not perform well • Q19-5: Something more important was happening in the media 	1-5
Page 7				
20	Likert Scale	<p>Do you agree with the following statements?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q20-1: Low or no coverage following the distribution of a media release could create negative perceptions about the overall performance of the agency. • Q20-2: Low or no coverage following the distribution of a media release could make clients question the abilities of the practitioner/s, looking after the account. 	<p>Strongly Disagree</p> <p>Disagree</p> <p>Neither Agree or Disagree</p> <p>Agree</p> <p>Strongly Agree</p>	<p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p> <p>4</p> <p>5</p>
21	Single Choice	How often do you advise clients NOT to go forward with a media release if you expect it will not receive good/any coverage? Alternatively, how often would you flag this up to your superiors, who have the authority to do so?	<p>Always</p> <p>Often</p> <p>Sometimes</p> <p>Occasionally</p> <p>Never</p>	<p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p> <p>4</p> <p>5</p>
22	Likert Scale	Think of a situation when you would advise a client to NOT go forward with a media release because you expect it	<p>Very unlikely</p> <p>Unlikely</p>	<p>1</p> <p>2</p>

		<p>will not be picked up by the media.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q22-1: How likely are most clients to take your feedback into consideration? • Q22-2: How likely are most clients to take your superiors' feedback into consideration? 	Not Applicable	3
			Likely	4
			Very likely	5
23	Multiple Choice	<p>How would you go about getting the client's story out then?</p>	Distribute the media release because the client insisted on going forward with it	1
			Prepare video materials, interviews, etc. to make the story more appealing	2
			Try to sell in the story (call/e-mail target media journalists)	3
			Use alternative channels	4
			Other, please specify	5
		Page 8		
24	Single Choice	<p>Have you ever felt hostile/negative attitude from journalists?</p>	It's part of the job.	1
			It happens often.	2
			It happens sometimes.	3
			It happens occasionally.	4
			I've never felt hostile/negative attitude from journalists.	5
25	Likert Scale	Q25-1: What do you think provoked the journalist's behaviour?	Very unlikely	1
		Q25-2: I sent a media release.		
		Q25-3: I called to follow up on whether they have received a release I sent.		

		Q25-4: I e-mailed to follow up on whether they have received a release I sent.	Unlikely	2
		Q25-5: I was selling in a story.		
		Q25-6: I sent/pitched a story that lacked newsworthiness or was not relevant to the journalist.		
		Q25-7: The journalist was already upset when I got in touch.	Neutral	3
		Q25-8: The journalist did not perceive me as the best source of information.		
		Q25-9: The journalist was busy/stressed/chasing a deadline.	Likely	4
		Q25-10: The journalist did not know me. .		
		Q25-11: The journalist felt negatively towards the agency I worked for.	Very likely	5
		Q25-12: I did not have a good relationship with the journalist		
26	Open-ended	Is there anything else that might have provoked the journalist's behaviour?	N/A	N/A
27	Ranking	What is the biggest threat to a PR practitioner's relationship with journalists?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q27-1: Using media releases. • Q27-2: Following up on releases. • Q27-3: Sending/pitching irrelevant news stories, which lack newsworthiness. • Q27-4: Treating journalists as communication channels. • Q27-5: Being unable to provide the information they require. 	1-5

28	Open-ended	Is there anything else that could potentially endanger your relationship with a journalist?	N/A	N/A
Page 9				
29	Single Choice	Is there an alternative communication tool/channel that can put an end to the use of media releases?	Yes	1
			No	2
30	Multiple Choice	What is a good alternative to media releases?	Media alerts	1
			Blogs	2
			Infographics	3
			Tweets (Twitter)	4
			Video (YouTube)	5
			There is no alternative	6
			Other, please specify	7
31	Single Choice	Could media releases be abandoned completely?	No	1
			If yes, under what circumstances?	2

Appendix 8

Questionnaire Example

Do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The media release is an effective communications tool on its own.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media releases are less likely to be picked up by the media without following up with journalists.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media releases could be used strategically as part of a PR program/campaign.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media releases are only effective when they are used strategically.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media releases allow control of the message.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media releases are relatively time efficient compared to other PR activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Which factors determine the newsworthiness of a story?

Selected Answers:

- All of the above

Have you ever written and/or distributed a release that lacks most of the factors outlined above?

Yes

How often do you/did you distribute releases that contain only few of the factors outlined above?

Often

What is/was the reason for distributing a media release that contains only few of the factors outlined above?

Selected Answers:

- Client insisted on distributing the release
- More senior staff got me to distribute the release
- The release was good enough to be distributed

Do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Clients often do not understand how the media operates.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clients often do not understand what makes a newsworthy story.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clients often do not understand what journalists want/need.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Why do clients usually request media releases?

Selected Answers:

- To get media coverage
- To control the messages the agency is communicating to the media
- To communicate particular message to their external stakeholders
- To showcase their work to their internal stakeholders/superiors

What characterises a "successful" media release?

Selected Answers:

- Receives good coverage (quality)
- Receives a lot of coverage (quantity)
- Impacts behaviour, attitudes and opinions
- Communicates key messages successfully

How do you measure the effectiveness of a media release?

Selected Answers:

- All of the above

Do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Clients could use the media coverage, generated by distributing a media release, to evaluate the performance of the agency.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good media relations guarantee media coverage regardless of the newsworthiness of the media release.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The media release could be used as criteria for measuring media relations effectiveness.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The media release is not an appropriate criteria for measuring the effectiveness of media relations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Media relations effectiveness cannot be measured.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What do you think provoked the journalist's behaviour?

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Neutral	Likely	Very Likely
I sent a media release.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I called to follow up on whether they have received a release I sent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
I e-mailed to follow up on whether they have received a release I sent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was selling in a story.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I sent/pitched a story that lacked newsworthiness or was not relevant to the journalist.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
The journalist was already upset when I got in touch.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The journalist did not perceive me as the best source of information.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The journalist was busy/stressed/chasing a deadline.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The journalist did not know me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The journalist felt negatively towards the agency I worked for.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Is there anything else that might have provoked the journalist's behaviour? This question is optional.

What is the biggest threat to a PR practitioner's relationship with journalists? Please arrange the following statements, starting with the one you perceive as the biggest threat to a practitioner's relationship with journalists. To do this, simply drag and drop each line to its allocated position.

- ⊕ Sending/pitching irrelevant news stories, which lack newsworthiness.
- ⊕ Treating journalists as communication channels.
- ⊕ Being unable to provide the information they require.
- ⊕ Following up on releases.
- ⊕ Using media releases.

Is there anything else that could potentially endanger your relationship with a journalist? This question is optional.

Is there an alternative communication tool/channel that can put an end to the use of media releases?

Yes

What is a good alternative to media releases?

Selected Answers:

- Media alerts
 - Infographics
-

Could media releases be abandoned completely?

Selected Answers:

- No
-

Appendix 9**Coded Questionnaire Data**

N	Q5	Q6	Q7-1	Q7-2	Q7-3	Q8-1	Q8-2	Q8-3	Q8-4	Q8-5	Q9-1	Q9-2	Q9-3	Q9-4
1	5	3	5	4	4	1	1	1	1		2	4	5	3
2	4	5	5	5	5	1	1	1	1		3	2	4	2
3	4	2	5	5	5	1		1			4	4	5	3
4	4	10	1	2	3	1	1				3	3	3	2
5	10	12	4	4	4		1	1			2	3	5	2
6	1	1	5	5	5	1	1	1	1		4	2	4	4
7	4	1	4	2	1		1				4	4	4	4
8	4	9	5	5	5	1	1	1	1		4	4	4	2
9	5	4	5	2	2	1	1	1	1		2	2	4	2
10	1	5	5	5	5	1	1	1	1		4	4	5	5
11	9	4	4	4	4	1			1		2	4	4	5
12	3	10	5	4	4	1	1	1	1		2	4	5	5
13	1	1	5	4	4	1		1	1		4	4	4	4
14	1	7	4	4	4	1		1	1		1	4	4	4
15	1	1	4	1	2			1			4	4	5	2
16	1	4	5	5	4	1	1	1	1		4	4	4	4
17	10	1	5	1	2	1	1	1			3	2	3	4
18	4	1	4	4	4	1					2	2	4	4
19	10	10	2	4	3	1			1		3	2	4	4
20	4	3	5	2	4	1	1		1		2	4	4	5
21	4	5	4	1	1		1	1	1		4	4	4	3
22	1	3	4	4	4		1	1	1		2	5	5	5
23	4	1	5	4	4	1	1	1	1		3	4	4	4
24	3	10	4	5	5	1	1		1	1	1	5	4	2
25	3	8	5	5	5	1	1	1	1	1	4	2	5	2
26	3	9	5	2	2		1	1	1		4	2	4	2
27	3	6	5	4	4	1		1	1		3	4	4	3
28	4	2	4	3	3				1		2	4	4	4
29	4	9	4	4	4			1			4	3	5	5
30	1	3	4	4	4			1			3	4	4	3
31	10	5	4	4	3	1	1				2	2	3	3
32	3	10	5	5	5	1	1	1	1		1	4	4	5
32	10	1	4	2	4			1			1	4	4	4
34	3	2	5	4	4		1	1	1		5	2	5	2
35	3	10	4	4	4				1		2	2	4	3
36	4	6	5	2	2			1			4	2	5	2
37	8	9	5	2	2	1	1	1	1		2	2	4	4
38	10	3	5	2	2	1		1	1		3	5	4	3
39	3	6	5	4	2	1	1	1			4	3	4	4
40	3	2	5	4	4	1	1	1	1		4	4	4	4
41	1	1	4	3	3	1		1	1		4	2	4	4
42	1	3	5	5	5	1	1		1	1	4	2	4	4
43	10	12	5	5	1	1	1	1	1		2	5	4	5
44	2	3	5	2	3	1		1	1	1	3	4	5	4
45	3	12	4	4	4	1	1		1		2	3	4	2
46	2	1	5	5	4	1	1	1	1		2	4	5	4
47	6	5	5	5	2	1	1	1	1		2	3	4	3

48	1	4	4	4	4	1		1			4	1	5	4
49	2	3	5	3	5			1			5	2	5	4
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51	5	2	5	2	4	1	1	1	1		2	4	4	4
52	1	4	5	5	5			1			4	2	5	4
53	4	11	2	4	4	1				1	4	2	4	4
54	2	8	5	5	4		1	1	1		4	4	4	3
55	4	1	5	4	4	1					2	2	4	4
56	1	9	5	5	5	1			1	1	4	4	4	4
57	10	1	5	4	4		1	1	1		2	4	4	4
58	7	12	4	1	2			1	1		2	4	4	5
59	10	8	4	2	2			1			2	2	4	4
60	10	10	5	5	5			1			4	3	4	4
61	4	7	5	5	1	1	1	1	1		4	2	4	5
62	3	10	5	5	5	1		1			3	5	5	3
63	7	3	5	5	5	1	1		1	1	5	3	5	2
64	9	1	3	3	3			1	1		2	2	2	3
65	4	2	5	4	4	1	1	1	1		4	4	4	4
66	1	3	5	3	2	1		1	1		4	4	4	2
67	4	7	3	2	2	1			1		2	3	4	4
68	1	1	5	4	3	1	1	1	1		4	3	4	5
69	2	4	5	5	5	1		1	1		4	5	4	5
70	9	1	5	2	2	1		1			2	5	2	3
71	3	3	5	5	5	1	1	1			2	4	4	5
72	1	2	5	5	5	1	1	1	1		4	5	5	5
73	5	9	5	5	5			1			2	3	5	2
74	1	12	4	4	4	1	1	1			1	5	4	4
75	9	1	4	2	2			1			4	2	5	5
76	2	10	5	5	5	1	1	1	1		3	3	5	5
77	4	12	5	5	5		1	1			4	1	4	3
78	3	10	5	5	5	1	1	1	1		5	5	5	2
79	5	12	4	5	5	1	1	1	1		4	3	5	2
80	5	10	5	4	4			1			2	4	5	2
81	2	1	5	4	4	1	1				3	5	4	2
82	9	2	5	4	2	1	1	1			5	3	5	4
83	10	3	5	2	3			1			4	3	5	3
84	4	10	4	4	3			1			4	3	5	5
85	5	3	4	2	2	1		1	1	1	3	4	4	4
86	2	1	4	3	3	1	1	1	1		5	2	4	5
87	10	10	5	4	2			1			4	2	5	3
88	10	10	4	4	4			1	1	1	4	2	5	2
89	9	10	5	4	4	1		1	1		4	4	5	4
90	3	8	5	5	5	1		1	1		4	2	4	2
91	10	1	5	4	4			1	1		4	4	4	5
92	10	9	5	3	2	1	1	1	1		2	5	4	4
93	2	10	4	4	4	1	1	1	1		2	4	5	2
94	3	1	4	2	2			1			4	3	4	2
95	3	3	5	5	5	1		1	1		4	3	4	5
96	3	1	5	4	4	1			1		2	3	4	4
97	3	8	5	5	5	1	1				4	2	5	3
98	3	1	4	4	3	1		1			2	3	4	5
99	3	10	5	2	4	1		1			4	2	5	2
100	1	7	5	2	4	1	1	1	1		2	4	5	2

N	Q9-5	Q9-6	Q10-1	Q10-2	Q10-3	Q10-4	Q10-5	Q10-6	Q10-7	Q10-8	Q10-9	Q10-10	Q11	Q12
1	4	3									1		1	3
2	4	3									1		1	2
3	4	4	1	1	1			1	1	1			1	3
4	2	2	1		1			1	1				2	3
5	2	1		1						1		1	1	3
6	2	4									1		1	2
7	4	2	1	1	1	1		1		1			1	3
8	4	4									1	1	2	4
9	2	2	1	1		1		1	1	1			1	2
10	2	5	1	1	1	1		1	1	1			1	2
11	2	1	1	1	1				1				1	4
12	4	3									1	1	1	3
13	2	4	1	1	1	1		1		1			1	3
14	4	3									1		1	4
15	3	3									1		1	4
16	4	4									1		1	3
17	3	4									1		2	2
18	4	2	1			1							1	2
19	3	4									1		1	3
20	2	4									1	1	1	2
21	4	3									1	1	1	4
22	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1				2	5
23	4	3									1		1	2
24	2	3									1		1	2
25	4	4	1	1	1		1	1		1			1	2
26	4	4									1		1	4
27	2	4									1		1	4
28	2	4									1		1	4
29	5	4	1	1	1								1	4
30	3	3	1			1				1			1	4
31	2	4									1		1	3
32	4	4									1		1	1
32	4	2									1		1	3
34	4	3									1		1	4
35	1	4										1	1	2
36	5	5									1		1	4
37	4	1									1		1	2
38	4	3									1		1	3
39	4	3	1							1			1	2
40	4	3									1		1	4
41	4	3									1		2	4
42	2	4									1		1	2
43	4	1									1	1	1	4
44	3	4									1		1	4
45	4	3									1		1	4
46	2	4	1		1	1		1					2	2
47	4	2									1		2	2
48	3	3			1					1		1	1	5
49	5	5			1			1					2	4
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51	4	5									1		1	2

52	2	3								1		1	4
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55	4	5			1							2	2
56	5	5	1	1	1			1	1			1	4
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6	1	1	1			4	4	5	1	1	1	1		1
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8	1	1	1			2	2	2	1	1				1
9	1	1				5	5	5	1	1				
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9	1	1						1	1				2
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12					1	1					1		4
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14							1		1	1	1		2
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7		1	1	1		2	3	4	4	4	4	3	2	4
8	1	1	1	1		3	2	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
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11		1				3	1	4	5	4	4	1	2	5
12		1	1	1	1		1	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
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18	1					2	3	5	4	3	4	4	2	4
19				1		1	3	5	4	3	4	4	4	4
20	1	1	1			3	4	5	4	5	5	2	2	2
21			1	1		4	2	2	2	3	4	1	3	4
22				1		1	4	3	1	5	3	5	3	5
23		1	1			1	2	5	3	4	4	3	4	5
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27			1	1		4	2	5	3	2	4	3	3	3
28		1	1	1		4	2	4	2	2	4	3	4	4
29		1	1			2	2	4	2	3	4	4	3	4
30			1			1	1	4	3	2	2	3	2	4
31					1	2	2	4	2	3	5	3	3	4
32	1	1	1	1		3	1	5	5	2	5	2	2	5
32			1											
34		1		1		1	2	3	2	2	5	4	3	5
35	1		1		1	3	3	2	2	3	3	4	3	4
36		1				4	1	5	5	1	5	3	3	4
37			1	1		1	1	4	4	2	4	2	2	4
38		1	1			3	2	3	3	3	5	3	3	4
39	1		1			1	2	4	3	4	4	4	2	4
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41	1	1	1			4	2	4	2	3	2	4	3	4
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48					1	3	3	4	4	3	3	1	3	3
49				1		3	2	4	4	4	4	2	2	5
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51	1	1	1			3	2	4	4	4	4	2	2	2
52		1	1	1		4	2	5	5	2	5	5	2	5
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54					1	3	2	4	3	4	2	3	3	3
55		1	1			2	2	4	4	4	4	2	4	5
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57			1			3	2	4	2	4	4	4	2	4
58		1	1	1		1	1	2	3	3	4	4	2	5
59			1			3	2	4	4	2	4	3	3	4
60					1	1	1	3	3	3	4	4	4	5
61		1	1			1	2	5	2	3	5	5	2	4
62	1		1			1	3	4	3	3	4	3	3	4
63	1		1	1		1	2	4	2	4	5	1	1	5
64					1	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
65		1				1	1	2	2	4	4	3	2	3
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67		1			3	2	4	2	4	5	2	2	2	5
68			1		3	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	5	
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70			1		2	3	3	2	3	3	4	2	5	
71		1			4	1	5	1	4	5	1	1	4	
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73			1		3	2	3	3	2	5	3	3	4	
74			1		1	1	1	4	1	4	1	1	1	
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89			1		4	2	4	4	4	5	4	2	5	
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91		1		1	4	2	2	2	3	3	3	2	4	
92		1	1	1	3	3	4	3	2	2	4	2	5	
93			1	1	1	4	2	4	2	2	4	4	3	5
94		1		1	3	2	4	4	4	4	4	2	3	
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97		1	1		1	1	4	4	4	4	2	2	4	
98		1	1		3	2	4	4	3	4	3	1	4	
99														
100	1		1											
N	Q25-9	Q25-10	Q25-11	Q26	Q27-1	Q27-2	Q27-3	Q27-4	Q27-5	Q28	Q29			
1	3	4	1		5	4	2	1	3	1	1			
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32											
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36	4	4	5		4	1	3	5	2	1	1
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39	2	3	2		4	1	2	5	3		2
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88	4	4	4	1	5	4	1	3	2	1	1
89	3	4	3		5	4	1	3	2		2
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94	3	4	3		4	5	2	3	1		1
95	3	3	2		4	2	1	5	3		1
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98	3	2	1		5	4	2	1	3		1
99											
100											
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2	1			1	1			1			
3	1		1	1				1			
4	1		1					1			
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12	1	1	1	1	1					1	
13	1	1	1	1		1		1			
14			1		1			1			
15			1					1			
16	1			1			1	1			
17	1		1	1	1			1			
18				1				1			
19		1	1	1	1				1		
20						1		1			
21	1		1	1			1	1			

22		1		1	1			1	
23	1		1	1				1	
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25						1		1	
26		1	1	1				1	
27	1							1	
28			1	1				1	
29		1	1	1				1	
30		1	1	1				1	
31	1		1		1			1	
32						1		1	
32									
34						1		1	
35						1	1	1	
36	1	1			1			1	
37				1				1	
38				1				1	
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40	1	1	1	1	1			1	
41	1	1	1	1	1			1	
42	1			1	1			1	
43						1		1	
44					1	1	1	1	
45	1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1
46		1		1	1			1	
47	1			1	1			1	
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53							1	1	
54							1	1	
55		1		1	1			1	
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58		1	1	1	1			1	
59		1		1	1			1	
60	1							1	
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62	1							1	
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64							1		1
65						1		1	
66						1		1	
67		1		1				1	
68						1		1	
69		1			1	1		1	
70		1		1			1	1	
71						1		1	
72						1		1	
73			1		1			1	
74						1		1	

Appendix 10

Validity Monitoring

As outlined in Section 3.6.2., the procedures for validity monitoring were established based on Farber's (2001) suggested list of threats to validity (Sarantakos, 2013). These are outlined in Table 3 below, as cited by Sarantakos (2013, p. 101):

Table 4: Farber's List of Threats to Validity (2001)

Threat (Sarantakos (2013, p. 101))	Validity Monitoring Procedure
Unexpected structural changes might occur during the course of the study, subjecting respondents to different conditions.	The questionnaire structure was tested with a pilot that was distributed to 10 participants, as outlined in Section 3.5.2. Once the questionnaire was amended to address the issues detected by the pilot, no further changes were made to the questions, responses, structure or question order.
Normal developmental changes are to be expected in longitudinal studies where data collection occurs in, say, five year intervals.	Not relevant.
Diverse methods may be used over the course of the study, subjecting respondents to different research instruments.	The questionnaire was sent out to participants, who have not previously taken part in the research.
Different sampling procedures may be employed during the course of the study, leading to selection problems.	The sampling of this study was pre-determined as described in Section 3.4. Therefore, to eliminate this threat, filtering questions were used in the beginning of the questionnaire. The participants had to choose one of three available sampling options. The first two defined whether they are currently or have been previously employed in an agency, while the third one did not allow them to participate in the research. Consequently, only participants matching the sample could participate.
There may be diverse personnel in the study, with different levels of different competence, experience, knowledge and attitude.	There was no prevention against this threat. However, the diversity of the participants was discussed in Section 5.0.
Changes or alteration in recording techniques may lead to inconsistent records.	Not relevant.

Appendix 11

Criteria for Measuring the Success of a Media Release

All participants suggested they evaluate a release's success by using different measurement criteria, which can be classified in three categories – output (impacts on media), outcomes (impacts on target audiences) and impacts on the business (Ketchum, 2011). Table 4 outlines all suggestion made, while Table 2 summarised the top repeated proposed criteria.

Table 5: Suggested Criteria for Measuring the Success of a Media Release

Participant	Release Evaluation	Media Relations Evaluation
Sam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output • Engagement with content • Time spent reading a releases • Journalists' feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depends on what objectives you've set for your release • Messaging tracking • Outcomes
Lindsay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coverage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coverage • Campaign/ Release Objectives
Owen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coverage • Journalists' feedback • Behavioural change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Message pull through • Coverage sentiment • Type of coverage
John	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes • Output 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outputs, outcomes and business impacts all together
Rebecca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type and amount of coverage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client's objectives
Hannah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coverage • Journalists' Feedback • Client's objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coverage

Research Ethics Checklist



Research Ethics Checklist

Reference Id	7011
Status	Approved
Date Approved	11/03/2015

Researcher Details

Name	Christina Petrova
School	Media School
Status	Undergraduate (BA, BSc)
Course	BA Public Relations
Have you received external funding to support this research project?	No

Project Details

Title	Final Year Dissertation
Proposed Start Date	16/02/2015
Proposed End Date	18/05/2015
Supervisor	Kevin Moloney

Summary (including detail on background methodology, sample, outcomes, etc.)

Research Questions: 1.How does the media release impact on the public relations practice?2.What is the relationship between the extensive use of media releases and the attitude of journalists towards public relations practitioners?3.Is the use of media releases influencing the reputation of the profession in a negative way?4.How does the use of media releases affect the overall service provided to a client?5.How is the effectiveness of media relations measured in relation to the use of media releases? Questionnaire and in-depth interviews will be used to address the objectives set by this research and investigate the research questions outlined in the first section of this proposal. These two methods are most appropriate for this research because they will facilitate a discussion with the participants, enabling me to gain as much detailed information as possible straight from the source of information. Population: •PR professionals Sample:
 •Questionnaire will be aiming to collect 100-150 responses while interviews will be conducted with 5 practitioners.
 •Practitioners who are currently employed or have at least one year experience in agency PR and have experience in media relations will be approached with invitation to take part of this research. No interns or placement students will be approached. •Participants who are employed/ have been employed in an agency in the UK only will be approached. This will create consistency in the findings because the participants would be expected to have worked in a similar environment and would have similar experience in media relations. Due to the limitations of this research approaching practitioners in other countries will not be considered because their participation will require further research of the cultural specifics and market environment of their country. •No age, gender or salary sampling will be used as it is irrelevant for the purposes of the research. •Participants will be asked to provide information about their position which will be used for further sampling and in-depth analysis of the research's findings. Sample Justification: The reason why this research will focus on practitioners with relevant experience in a job position in an agency is because agencies send out a large number of media releases on a daily basis. Furthermore, this research will be conducted under the assumption that unlike in-house practitioners, agency practitioners are less likely to establish a long-term relationship with journalists because they usually work on several accounts for clients operating in different sectors. In-house public relations professionals should be facing fewer challenges in establishing strong relationships with journalist because their media lists would consist of local media, specialist publications and national journalist who would have particular interest in their organisation. Therefore, media relations are supposedly more challenging for agency public relations professionals.

External Ethics Review

Does your research require external review through the NHS National Research Ethics Service (NRES) or through another external Ethics Committee?	No
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Research Literature

Is your research solely literature based?	No
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Human Participants

Will your research project involve interaction with human participants as primary sources of data (e.g. interview, observation, original survey)?	Yes
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Does your research specifically involve participants who are considered vulnerable (i.e. children, those with cognitive impairment, those in unequal relationships—such as your own students, prison inmates, etc.)?	No
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Does the study involve participants age 16 or over who are unable to give informed consent (i.e. people with learning disabilities)? NOTE: All research that falls under the auspices of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 must be reviewed by NHS NRES.	No
Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited? (i.e. students at school, members of self-help group, residents of Nursing home?)	No
Will it be necessary for participants to take part in your study without their knowledge and consent at the time (i.e. covert observation of people in non-public places)?	No
Will the study involve discussion of sensitive topics (i.e. sexual activity, drug use, criminal activity)?	No
Are drugs, placebos or other substances (i.e. food substances, vitamins) to be administered to the study participants or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind?	No
Will tissue samples (including blood) be obtained from participants? Note: If the answer to this question is 'yes' you will need to be aware of obligations under the Human Tissue Act 2004.	No
Could your research induce psychological stress or anxiety, cause harm or have negative consequences for the participant or researcher (beyond the risks encountered in normal life)?	No
Will your research involve prolonged or repetitive testing?	No
Will the research involve the collection of audio materials?	Yes
Is this audio collection solely for the purposes of transcribing/summarising and will not be used in any outputs (publication, dissemination, etc.) and will not be made publicly available?	Yes
Will your research involve the collection of photographic or video materials?	No
Will financial or other inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?	No
<p>Please explain below why your research project involves the above mentioned criteria (be sure to explain why the sensitive criterion is essential to your project's success). Give a summary of the ethical issues and any action that will be taken to address these. Explain how you will obtain informed consent (and from whom) and how you will inform the participant(s) about the research project (i.e. participant information sheet). A sample consent form and participant information sheet can be found on the Research Ethics website.</p>	

Informed consent will be gained by each participant, who will have to individually agree to participate before taking part in the research. Participants will be asked to fill a consent form before the interview. The results will be anonymous. Participants will however be asked to provide their details for the purpose of record keeping. Moreover, they would be asked whether they want to be named or not. Audio materials will be used for the recording of the in-depth interviews. They will not be made available publicly. Transcripts will be offered to respondents for checking. Participants will be asked to discuss their experiences as practitioners. Some of their answers might include referrals to previous or current clients. Therefore, client and participant confidentiality must be strictly monitored where needed. This will be considered when designing the consent form/question. Participants will be advised to restrain from naming clients. If this occurs by accident, client names will be protected by naming them X, Y, Z, etc. in both relevant transcripts and results analysis.

Final Review

Will you have access to personal data that allows you to identify individuals OR access to confidential corporate or company data (that is not covered by confidentiality terms within an agreement or by a separate confidentiality agreement)?	Yes
<p>Please explain below why your research requires the collection of personal data. Describe how you will anonymize the personal data (if applicable). Describe how you will collect, manage and store the personal data (taking into consideration the Data Protection Act and the 8 Data Protection Principles). Explain how you will obtain informed consent (and from whom) and how you will inform the participant about the research project (i.e. participant information sheet).</p>	
<p>The results of both methods used will be anonymous. Participants will however be asked to provide their details for the purpose of record keeping. Moreover, they would be asked whether they want to be named or not. Participants will be asked to discuss their experiences as practitioners. Some of their answers might include referrals to previous or current clients. Therefore, client and participant confidentiality must be strictly monitored where needed. This will be considered when designing the consent form/question. Participants will be advised to restrain from naming clients. If this occurs by accident, client names will be protected by naming them X, Y, Z, etc. in both relevant transcripts and results analysis.</p>	
Will your research involve experimentation on any of the following: animals, animal tissue, genetically modified organisms?	No
Will your research take place outside the UK (including any and all stages of research: collection, storage, analysis, etc.)?	No
<p>Please use the below text box to highlight any other ethical concerns or risks that may arise during your research that have not been covered in this form.</p>	
None.	

Researcher Statement

JOURNALISM / BROADCAST RESEARCHERS: I confirm that I have consulted and understand the	Yes
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<p>Research Ethics Supplementary Guide: For Reference by Researchers Undertaking Journalism and Media Production Projects (available on the Research Ethics page)</p>	