

PERCEPTIONS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS AND JOURNALISTS

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This research examines perceptions on the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists based on four categories of relationship: Satisfaction with contributions made to each other, interdependence, trust and ethical practices. A survey of 48 public relations practitioners and 63 journalists was conducted regarding their perceptions on each other's profession. Public relations practitioners polled for this survey were from the various government and corporate organisations while the journalists were from the print and electronic media organisations and publishing houses. Generally, the survey indicates some differences and similarities in the perceptions of the two groups with public relations practitioners holding stronger perceptions than the journalists on the various aspects of their relationship. The data suggests that public relations practitioners believe more strongly that the information they provide to the journalists enables the latter to perform more satisfactorily compared to the journalists who think less strongly of the contribution made by the former. The public relations practitioners also seem to think that there is more of a symbiotic relationship between the two groups than the journalists.

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists is, and has always been, a complex and necessary symbiotic liaison. Tensions, tempered with distrust and suspicion, exist on one hand and on

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the other synergies within the relationship allow both to function to produce communication content for the intended effect. Sources, including public relations practitioners, are perceived as controlling access to, and managing, information, while journalists are seen as controlling sources for communication with the public.

A study on Global Press-Public Relations Relationship conducted by Rainier PR, a London-based public relations agency, revealed that public relations professionals are not viewed in high regard, with a majority of reporters saying that public relations professionals have little knowledge of either clients' or journalists' needs (Adesara, 2004). On the other hand, there have been several anecdotal reports of grouses among public relations professionals on the lack of accuracy, defamatory reports on organisations as well as the payment demands (bribes) of journalists.

To appreciate that relationship, it is pertinent to understand the traditions and nature of the practices of the journalists and public relations practitioners. The common denominator of the functions of the two professions is information – while the public relations practitioners execute the publicity function by providing information to the media, the journalists seek out the public relations personnel for news material. Though ideally that relationship should be symbiotic and productive, in practice it has its problems.

Research that has been carried out for decades on this relationship indicates that both journalists and public relations practitioners are sceptical of each other's roles (Pincus et al., 1993). At the heart of this problem is the perceptual climate – journalists, among others, think that public relations practitioners do not understand news; public relations practitioners, on the other hand, complain that journalists do not understand the public relations role (Bolinger, 2003).

This article discusses the symbiotic relationship in the context of the interdependent nature of relationship between public relations and media practitioners, ethical considerations and the future challenges and trends facing practitioners in both these professions and whether this relationship has changed over the years as the professions mature. The article addresses the question of how public relations practitioners and journalists perceive each other in areas such as satisfaction in the contribution they make to one another, their interdependence, the trust

they have in each other and their ethical practices. Discussion also relates to whether years of experience bear any relevance to these perceptions on their interactive relationship.

Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that senior communication practitioners tend to be more concerned about ethics in their practice than younger communication practitioners who have joined the profession more recently. Because of this concern, years of experience is one of the variables examined in this article. However, this article does not draw conclusions on whether practitioners become more ethical as they grow in the practice, or whether those who entered the practice earlier (10 years and above) have a different viewpoint on ethics than those practitioners who are now entering or have only more recently entered into the industry (less than 10 years).

Information Subsidies

Central to the journalists-public relations relationship is the issue of access to information; while it is readily accepted that the media are important providers of information, it is the sources (that is, the public relations practitioners acting on behalf of their organisations) that decide what information about the organisation gets transmitted to the relevant public. The interaction between the sources who provide "information subsidies" (press releases, news conferences, briefings and official organisation documents and reports) (Gandy, 1982: 14) and journalists who receive and are influenced by these subsidies was described by Gans (1979) as a "dance". More often than not, the sources do the leading, initiating contact with representatives of the news media, selling story ideas and seeking to "manage the news by putting the best light on themselves" and those they represent (Gans, 1979: 117).

It is this nature of interaction that journalists sometimes resent as they find themselves having to rely on the public relations practitioners who are the "junction point" or the point of contact for interaction between the organisation and the media (Turk, 1986). The public relations information subsidies may not be the preferred source of information for journalists. Many journalists would undoubtedly prefer to talk to higher officials rather than to the information go-between. Research also suggests that when it comes to news values, journalists do not perceive

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their news values comparable to the news values of public relations practitioners (Sallot et al., 1998).

Public Relations in Malaysia

Public relations as a formally recognised practice in Malaysia has its roots in the government sector. The primary function is to inform the publics of policies and to aid in the nation-building strategies of the government (Kaur, 2002; Taylor, 2000). Malaysia has seen a definite growth and increase in the sophistication of the public relations practice in the past two decades, especially since privatisation. Yet some practitioners have few relevant skills and knowledge to be able to carry out their duties effectively. Privatisation, globalisation and increasing activism have made it urgent for Malaysian organisations to have professional communicators to do "environment scanning" and to be "boundary spanners" for the organisation. These communicators thus, ensure that productive relationships are built with strategic audiences and conflict is minimised.

Several scholars argue that information management and communication skills are measures of organisational effectiveness (Kim, 2001: 4–6). As pointed out by Berkowitz and Hristodoulakis (1999), the professional public relations practitioners need to reshape not only their beliefs of their roles inside the organisation, but also the organisation's view of public relations. There is also a need to educate CEOs and dominant coalitions of organisations on what public relations is and what it can offer to the organisation, so that practitioners can "lift" public relations to a strategic level.

A study on professionalism among Malaysian practitioners (Kaur, 2002) conducted among a varied sample of 123 department heads showed that 72% of them had less than 10 years of experience working in the public relations field. Several came into public relations from other fields, including journalism and administrative careers. In fact, quite a number of early public relations practitioners was formerly journalists or associated with a media organisation. In her 1999 study on Malaysian public relations practitioners, Roziyatun (2004) found that there was a decreasing trend among practitioners joining any media organisation prior to joining the public relations industry (29.9%) compared to Idid's (1992) earlier study (34%).

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In a study on the managerial role of public relations practitioners of 16 organisations in Malaysia, it was found that media relations was one of the programmes that the practitioners managed the most, according to the heads of public relations departments. The public relations heads also thought that the planned activities resulted in positive media coverage and publicity (Kaur, 2005). Working with the media is a priority task among practitioners as evidenced in the above research. Some employers think a journalism background will assist in ensuring a more effective outcome of the dealings with the media.

However, the expansion of public relations education in the country provides skills and knowledge to aspiring practitioners who will be able to more effectively perform the variety of managerial tasks demanded of the profession more effectively and thus contribute to the growing professionalism of the industry. Nevertheless, the notion of professionalism in public relations is still transitory and yet to be defined. The commonly accepted professional body, Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM), has a non-mandatory Code of Ethics, which is barely known to, or recognised by, most practitioners. In general, the social, cultural and religious norms as well as government regulations on business guide the practitioners in their practice.

Journalism in Malaysia

The practice of journalism in Malaysia is often criticised for its lack of freedom and for its emphasis on the trivial. The fact that many of the media outfits either belong to the ruling political parties or the management are political appointees, does not endear them to the critics and interest groups. The media, however, make no apologies for their philosophy of working in tandem with the government for the advancement of national development. This philosophy of a guided and guarded media has thus far been the working formula for the media to function in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious environment.

Since journalism is not a profession in the traditional sense of the word, entry into the profession does not require special qualifications or skills. Nevertheless, since it is a craft with professional responsibilities, some form of accountability is required. The journalism practice is guided by two codes of ethics and various laws directly and indirectly related to the

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media. The 1972 National Union of Journalists Code of Ethics and the 1989 Canons of Journalism, though not mandatory, lend the media some modicum of professionalism, particularly in their interactions with various sectors in the society.

RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

Relationship-building in the Public Relations Context

Public relations has a vital and strategic role to play in building and enhancing on-going or long-term relationships with an organisation's key constituencies, including the media public. The importance of effective long-term relationships with strategic segments of the public for the achievement of organisational goals through various communication programmes has been widely acknowledged by many scholars and practitioners (Grunig, 1992). Ledingham and Bruning (2000) define public relations as relationship management. Other scholars have attempted to expand Ledingham's definition to question the value or benefit of relationships – what do the relationships do, what do they achieve and what are they for?

Focusing on the transactional aspect of relationships, Broom, Casey and Ritchie suggested that relationships consist of the transactions that involve the exchange of resources between organisations and the public, these being represented by patterns of "interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organisation and its public" (Broom & Ritchie, 2000: 18).

In addition, several scholars have tried to define and research the factors that determine organisation-public relationships. Grunig and Hon (1999) developed a scale examining the organisation-public issues of trust, control mutuality, commitment, satisfaction, communal relationships and exchange relationships. Trust was defined as the level of confidence that both parties have in each other and the willingness to open oneself to the other party. The dimensions to trust include: Integrity – belief that the organisation is fair and just; dependability – the organisation will do what it says it will do and competence – belief that the organisation has the ability to do what it says it will do. Satisfaction is defined as the extent to which each party feels favourably towards the other because

positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced, and the benefits outweigh the costs.

Although most of these criteria may be used to measure organisation-public relationships in general, perceptions of relationships with specific segments of the public may need additional specific criteria to be examined depending on the nature of the public and the relationship being examined.

Organisations Setting the Agenda

Though journalists may not be satisfied with having to rely on public relations practitioners for information, they do use the information subsidies (Turk, 1986). Thus, when there is consumption of an organisation's message by the media (and it becomes part of the media's agenda and content), the organisation stands a chance of influencing the public agenda. Herein lies another problem in the press-public relations relationship, that is, the journalist's perception that the public relations practitioners have a hand in influencing the media content that journalists disseminate to the public. Journalists know that news is not necessarily what happens but what a news source says has happened. This dependence and reliance of journalists on public relations handouts do not go down well with the former.

The literature on the agenda setting influence of the public relations practitioners on the media indicates both an influence and non-influence. Turk (1986) reported that Fishman (1980), Gandy (1982), and Martin and Singletary (1981) noted in the 1980s that official sources of information were frequently used by journalists as they were viewed as reliable and that news releases substantially influenced the content of the news media even though not all news releases were published.

At the same time, there is also research suggesting that journalists' dependence on public relations information is not all that strong. Newspapers use information provided by public relations practitioners less often compared to information provided in response to specific requests from journalists. Newsworthiness of the information content is still the main criterion used to decide whether or not information subsidies would become news. The literature indicates that journalists

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decide as to what is news or newsworthy within a framework of journalistic convention and tradition (Turk, 1986). Very few information subsidies or public relations handouts are used because of organisational considerations like not newsworthy enough or because of unavailability of space.

ETHICS

In literature, a similar definitional framework is attributed to ethics, calling ethics a moral responsibility to one's community where standards of right and wrong relationships are emphasised. While there have been extensive writings on media ethics, this subject remains a difficult area to define and reconcile as the literature is filled with contradictions and little unity of opinion (Deetz, 1983). This difficulty in studying ethics (defined as principles that should underline behaviour) is largely due to the relativism in which ethics are shrouded. Relativism is the ethical theory that states that "what is right or good for one individual or society is not right or good for another, even if the situations involved are similar" (Frankena, 1973:109). What is "right" or "good" would be influenced by the social setting, cultural environment and the belief system of the individual. For instance, in the public relations and journalism professions, the existence of codes of ethics does not guarantee ethical behaviour for the simple reason that, because the codes are not mandatory, the observance of the codes would depend largely on the media practitioners. This leaves ethics very much to the discretion of the individual and in this lies the main crux of the ethical problem.

Hausman (1992) discussed three areas where ethical dilemma usually occurs – misrepresentation, relationship with sources and favours given to reporters. The ethics of the profession frown upon journalists going undercover to get information unless no other avenue is open to her or him and the information needed is of public interest. Journalists too are exhorted to maintain good rapport with sources so that the relationship can develop into a productive interaction.

Both the Malaysian Union of Journalists Code of Ethics and the Canons of Journalism contain statements alluding to the acceptance of bribe of any form as a "grave professional misconduct". The International Code of Professional Conduct for Public Relations Practitioners as well as the

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Institute of Public Relations Malaysia Code of Conduct, which although not specifically mentioning giving or accepting of bribes, expects members not to "engage in any practice which tends to corrupt the integrity" of the profession. Depending on how one defines "bribe of any form", freebies/junkets/ payolas of any value or nature are also seen as crossing into a gray and uneasy area in the journalist-public relations practitioner relationship.

The practice of public relations practitioners giving freebies and the acceptance of them by journalists is viewed subjectively by both professions. Whether they are referred to as "tokens of appreciation "or "bribes for favourable coverage", the concern over freebies is that they may influence the journalists in one way or another in their reporting. That some practitioners (both journalists and public relations practitioners) perceive this practice as acceptable is in itself disturbing.

Halimahton (1997) noted that almost all of 30 news workers interviewed for a previous research on media ethics said that accepting gifts is "part and parcel of news gathering". They viewed door gifts like pens and t-shirts as "building rapport" and "gestures of goodwill" rather than an attempt to bribe the journalists into giving the source of information favourable coverage.

Moreover, in the Malaysian context where giving has become a culture, not accepting may perhaps be seen to be insulting the giver or as rude behaviour. Journalists do not ask for these gifts, but when given, say are usually culture-bound to accept. The journalists interviewed were rather offended that some opinions claimed that gifts can influence their objectivity.

Nevertheless, the survey conducted by Rainer PR revealed that press trips, free lunches and other freebies do influence journalists. Between 40–80 percent of the 200 journalists polled admitted to being influenced by exotic press trips and free lunches. Almost 20 percent said the sources were the most important factor in persuading them to write a story (Adesara, 2004).

The Institute for Public Relations in the United States, like most other related organisations internationally, recognises the importance of this

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ethical issue. It has recently initiated a major new research programme to explore credibility, trust and ethics in the context of public relations practice. Credibility, trust and ethics emerged as the most important topics to senior public relations leaders who participated in a recent Institute study aimed at identifying new research priorities. The study was based on a scan of major public relations publications and conferences from 2001 to 2005 to identify the topics commanding the most attention (www.instituteforpr.org).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary objective of this article is to examine the differences and similarities in perceptions held by public relations practitioners and journalists on satisfaction with contributions made to each other, their interdependence, ethical practices, and trust of each other. An analysis through the following four questions, explains the objective.

1. What are the perceptions of public relations practitioners and journalists on satisfaction with contributions made to each other by years of experience?
2. What are the perceptions of public relations practitioners and journalists on their interdependence by years of experience?
3. What are the perceptions of public relations practitioners and journalists on trust with each other and years of experience?
4. Do years of experience influence how public relations practitioners and journalists perceive ethical practices?

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A survey of 48 public relations practitioners and 63 journalists was conducted regarding their perceptions of 19 statements on each other's profession. Questionnaires were distributed to the journalists and public relations practitioners by hand as well as via email. The researchers targeted to have a return of at least 50 responses each from the two media professional groups. Therefore, 70 questionnaires were distributed

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to each group in this purposive sample. The return was 48 questionnaires from the public relations practitioners and 63 from the journalists.

In the case of the journalists, researchers visited several news organisations, including The China Press, Karangkraf, Utusan Malaysia, New Straits Times Group, and Malaysiakini in order to distribute and then collect the completed questionnaires. Assistance was also sought through assistant researchers to distribute the questionnaires at other media houses, including television stations, RTM and TV3. Responses were sought from the various desks in the news organisations to ensure broader representation of the journalists. Editors, senior journalists and other journalists were approached to participate in the survey.

In the case of public relations practitioners, questionnaires were primarily sent via email to practitioners in consultancies as well as in various government and corporate organisations. Follow-ups were made in several cases to encourage return of responses. Senior consultants, public relations managers, and junior practitioners were included in the survey.

The sample of respondents was of both sexes and of those who had varying years of work experience. There was an attempt made to include respondents from these groups but with no specific percentage. Table 1 shows that the sample included 16 male and 32 female public relations practitioners and 32 male and 31 female journalists.

Table 1: Sex of Public Relations Practitioners and Journalists Interviewed

Profession	Public Relations Practitioners		Journalists		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Sex						
Male	16	33.3	32	50.8	48	43.2
Female	32	66.7	31	49.2	63	56.8
Total	48	100	63	100	111	100

Note: n = number of respondents

Table 2 shows that 17 public relations practitioners had less than 10 years' work experience while 30 had work experience of 10 years or more. On the other hand, there were 38 journalists with less than 10

years' work experience and 24 with work experience of 10 years or more.

Table 2: Years of Experience of Public Relations Practitioners and Journalists

Profession	Public Relations Practitioners		Journalists		Total	
Years of experience	n	%	n	%	n	%
< 10 years	17	36.2	38	61.3	55	50.5
10 years and above	30	63.8	24	38.7	54	49.5
Total	47	100	62	100	109	100

Note: n = number of respondents

The Questionnaire

A questionnaire was formulated with 19 statements to represent four categories identified by the researchers to answer the overall objective of how public relations practitioners and journalists perceive the contribution they made to each other. The categories included satisfaction with each other (six statements); interdependence (three statements); trust (five statements) and ethical practices (five statements). The statements in the four categories are listed in the tables below. Respondents were asked to respond on a scale of one to 10 on their agreement with the statements. The 10 scales were reduced to three to indicate levels of agreement of "least agree" (scales 1–3), "agree" (scales 4–6), and "most agree" (scales 7–10). This was to enable more meaningful analysis. A descriptive analysis was done to find out the level of agreement to these statements by the public relations and journalism practitioners using percentages.

Therefore, while the results explain perceptions held by the sample studied, these perceptions should not be generalized to be those of the whole population of public relations practitioners and journalists. This study used a non-probability sampling technique.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The 19 statements given to the public relations practitioners and journalists indicated that there were differences in the perceptions held by them on 11 statements. The differences are indicated according to the four identified categories.

1. Differences in perceptions held by public relations practitioners and journalists on satisfaction with contributions made to each other by years of experience.

Satisfaction is viewed as quality of information provided, its news value and timeliness to both parties as well as interaction that is beneficial to each other. Based on these assumptions respondents were asked to give their perceptions on six statements. Descriptive analysis was used by means of percentages. The percentages for public relations practitioners and journalists under the least agree category for statements 1, 3 and 5 are very different. Public relations practitioners are more agreeable to these statements than the journalists by a substantial percentage.

However, public relations practitioners have a better perception of the information they provide to journalists in terms of its quality (Statement 1), usefulness (Statement 2), news value (Statement 3), are happier with their interaction with each other (Statement 4) and timeliness in meeting deadlines (Statement 5) compared to the journalists. More public relations practitioners said they "most agree" to the statements than the journalists who only said "agree" as shown in Table 3.

A look at the impact of years of experience on the perceptions of the two parties about each other shows that there were differences in how they perceive their interaction (refer to Table 3). Statements 1, 2, 3 and 6 showed differences in perceptions of public relations practitioners with less than 10 years work experience compared to those with 10 years and more of work experience. Practitioners with 10 years and more work experience had a higher level of agreement to these statements.

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Only statements 1, 2, and 3 showed some differences in perceptions of journalists with less than 10 years' work experience compared to those with 10 years and more of work experience. The more experienced journalists had a higher level of agreement to the above statements.

The years of experience therefore, seem to have a stronger bearing for public relations practitioners than for journalists in how they perceive satisfaction with contributions made to each other in reference to the "most agree" category.

2. Differences in perceptions of public relations practitioners and journalists on their interdependence by years of experience.

Three statements were isolated to examine how both parties perceived interdependence with each other. Statements 1 and 2 showed that there were differences between how public relations practitioners and journalists perceived each other's interdependence. The majority of respondents from both professions rated as having a very high symbiotic relationship with each other (Statement 1) as shown in Table 4. A majority of public relations practitioners most agreed and agreed (31.3% + 41.7%) that the press would not survive without public relations input whereas the majority of journalists (61.3%) rated "least agree" to this statement. Respondents from both professions were agreeable to the statement that organisational development would be severely hampered without the press and there was no difference in their perceptions.

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Table 3: Perceptions of Public Relations Practitioners and Journalists on Satisfaction with Each Other by Years of Experience

		Least Agree		Agree		Most Agree		
		PR	JN	PR	JN	PR	JN	
1	PR information helps enhance the quality of reporting.	< 10 Years	11.8	26.3	17.6	39.5	70.6	34.2
		10 Years and above	3.3	0	13.3	58.3	83.3	41.7
		TOTAL	6.3	15.9	14.6	47.6	79.2	36.5
2	PR practitioners provide useful information that expedite the work of a journalist.	< 10 Years	5.9	13.2	29.4	50.0	64.7	36.8
		10 Years and above	0	4.2	6.7	41.7	93.3	55.2
		TOTAL	2.1	9.5	14.6	47.6	83.3	42.9
3	Press releases from PR practitioners are useful for journalists as they have high news values.	< 10 Years	5.9	23.7	41.2	44.7	52.9	31.6
		10 Years and above	0	12.5	10.0	58.3	90.0	29.2
		TOTAL	2.1	19.0	20.8	49.2	77.1	31.7
4	Journalists and PR practitioners are happy with their interaction.	< 10 Years	5.9	8.1	64.7	54.1	29.4	37.8
		10 Years and above	3.3	12.5	16.7	50.0	80.0	37.5
		TOTAL	4.2	9.7	35.4	51.6	60.4	38.7
5	PR practitioners understand media deadlines.	< 10 Years	5.9	23.7	23.5	55.3	70.6	21.1
		10 Years and above	3.3	25	3.3	37.5	93.3	37.5
		TOTAL	4.2	23.8	10.4	49.2	85.4	27.0
6	Journalists are timely in their reporting on issues important to an organisation.	< 10 Years	11.8	10.5	64.7	34.2	23.5	55.3
		10 Years and above	3.4	12.5	20.7	37.5	75.9	50.0
		TOTAL	6.4	11.1	38.3	36.5	55.3	52.4

Note: PR = Public Relations Practitioner; JN = Journalist. Number of PR respondents = 48; Number of JN Practitioner respondents = 63.

Also, there was no difference between the more experienced and the less experienced practitioners within each profession in how they perceived their interdependence for Statements 1 and 3 as shown in Table 4. However, there was a difference for public relations practitioners with the experience of 10 years and above who "most agree" that the press would not survive without public relations input (Statement 2) (40%) as compared to those below 10 years of experience where the majority (11.8%) only "agree" to the statement. In comparison, the journalists with 10 years and more experience (79.2%) had a low level of agreement to Statement 2 compared with journalists below 10 years of experience (51.4%).

Table 4: Perceptions of Public Relations Practitioners and Journalists on Interdependence by Years of Experience

			Least Agree		Agree		Most Agree	
			PR	JN	PR	JN	PR	JN
1	PR practitioners and journalists share a symbiotic relationship.	< 10 Years	5.9	10.8	29.4	48.6	64.7	40.5
		10 Years and above	3.3	12.5	6.7	33.3	90.0	54.2
		TOTAL	4.2	11.3	16.7	41.9	79.2	46.8
2	The press would not survive without PR input.	< 10 Years	23.5	51.4	64.7	43.2	11.8	5.4
		10 Years and above	30.0	79.2	30.0	16.7	40.0	4.2
		TOTAL	27.1	61.3	41.7	32.3	31.3	6.5
3	Organisational development would be severely hampered without the press.	< 10 Years	0	5.3	35.3	50.0	64.7	44.7
		10 Years and above	13.3	0	43.3	41.7	43.3	58.3
		TOTAL	8.3	3.2	41.7	47.6	50.0	49.2

Note: PR = Public Relations Practitioner; JN = Journalist. Number of PR respondents = 48; Number of JN Practitioner respondents = 63

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3. Differences in perceptions of public relations practitioners and journalists on trust with each other and years of experience.

Five statements were analysed to examine how the two professional groups perceived trust with each other. Of these, only Statements 2 and 5 showed some differences in the perceptions between the two groups. Fewer journalists perceived public relations practitioners to be honest with the press (Statement 2) with 22.2% journalists stating least agree compared to 12.8% of public relations practitioners.

The majority of public relations practitioners (70.8%) "most agree" that they set the agenda by providing information the organisation wants to divulge (Statement 4). In comparison, the majority of journalists (47.6%) only "agree" to that statement. Also, 48.9% public relations practitioners compared to only 22.6% journalists "most agree" that journalists tend to report more on what is controversial and negative about an organisation (Statement 5) (see Table 5).

Years of experience had no bearing on how the public relations practitioners perceived trust with journalists for four of the five statements (Statements 1–4). The majority of public relations practitioners with experience of 10 years and above (60%) "most agreed" that public relations practitioners and journalists mutually trust one another in their line of work whereas the majority of practitioners with less than 10 years work experience (70.6%) only "agree" to this statement.

More journalists with less than 10 years work experience (35.1%) stated least agree to Statement 5: "journalists tend to report more on what is controversial and negative about an organisation" compared to journalists with 10 years and more work experience (20.8%). In comparison, the difference was not obvious between the senior and junior public relations practitioners.

Table 5: Perceptions of Public Relations Practitioners and Journalists on Trust with Each Other by Years of Experience

			Least Agree		Agree		Most Agree	
			PR	JN	PR	JN	PR	JN
1	PR practitioners and journalists mutually trust one another in their line of work	< 10 Years	11.8	10.5	70.6	47.4	17.6	42.1
		10 Years and above	6.7	12.5	33.3	37.5	60.0	50.0
		TOTAL	8.3	11.1	47.9	42.9	43.8	46
2	Journalists perceive PR practitioners to be honest in their dealings with the press.	< 10 Years	12.5	21.1	56.3	52.6	31.3	26.3
		10 Years and above	13.3	25	36.7	41.7	50.0	33.3
		TOTAL	12.8	22.2	42.6	49.2	44.7	28.6
3	PR practitioners perceive journalists to be honest in their dealings with the organization.	< 10 Years	0	13.2	64.7	55.3	35.3	31.6
		10 Years and above	10.0	12.5	36.7	45.8	53.3	41.7
		TOTAL	6.3	12.7	45.8	52.4	47.9	34.9
4	PR practitioners set the agenda by providing information the organisation wants to divulge.	< 10 Years	0	7.9	29.4	42.1	70.6	50.0
		10 Years and above	0	4.2	26.7	54.2	73.3	41.7
		TOTAL	0	6.3	29.2	47.6	70.8	46.0
5	Journalists tend to report more on what is controversial and negative about an organisation.	< 10 Years	0	35.1	62.5	45.9	37.5	18.9
		10 Years and above	3.3	20.8	40.0	50.0	56.7	29.2
		TOTAL	2.1	29.0	48.9	48.4	48.9	22.6

Note: PR = Public Relations Practitioner; JN = Journalist. Number of PR respondents = 48; Number of JN Practitioner respondents = 63.

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4. Differences in how public relations practitioners and journalists perceive ethical practices by years of experience

Public relations practitioners and journalists were asked for their perceptions on five statements regarding ethical practices. There were differences between perceptions held by public relations practitioners and journalists for Statements 1, 2, 3 and 5 in Table 6. The majority of public relations practitioners (60.4%) "most agreed" that gifts to journalists are tokens of appreciation (Statement 1) compared to journalists (35.5%). The majority of journalists (37.1%) only "agree" to that statement.

For Statement 2 on "journalists expect gifts for covering an event," most public relations practitioners either "agree" (37.5%) or "most agree" (37.5%) compared to only 11.1% journalists who most agree to the statement. In fact, 61.9% journalists answered least agree to this statement compared to only 25% public relations practitioners.

The majority of public relations practitioners "most agree" (48.9%) to the statement that indirect forms of media bribery exist in Malaysia (Statement 3) whereas 47.6% journalists "agree" to the statement. The Statements 1, 2, and 3 had differences in answers between the two groups.

There was no obvious difference in the perceptions between the two groups for the following two statements: Direct forms of media bribery exist in Malaysia (Statement 4) and gifts in the form of cash to journalists are acceptable (Statement 5). Both groups agree that there were some direct forms of media bribery. Also, the majority of both groups were least agreeable to the notion that gifts in the form of cash to journalists were acceptable. There is a practice of giving *angpows* (cash gifts ranging from about RM200 – RM1,000) during cultural festivals by certain parties in Malaysia. Generally, it is assumed to be rude not to accept an *angpow*, especially if it is given by the host.

Years of experience showed some bearing for Statements 2 and 4 for public relations practitioners. More public relations practitioners with 10 years and above work experience least agreed to statements

2 and 4 compared to their junior colleagues. In addition, more senior journalists least agreed to Statements 2 and 5 compared to their junior colleagues. It is of concern that the findings show more junior journalists (35.1%) are of the opinion that gifts in the form of cash (Statement 5) are acceptable compared to their senior colleagues (16.7%).

Table 6: Perceptions of Public Relations Practitioners and Journalists on Ethical Practices by Years of Experience

		Least Agree		Agree		Most Agree		
		PR	JN	PR	JN	PR	JN	
1	Gifts to journalists from PR practitioners are tokens of appreciation.	< 10 Years	11.8	27	35.3	37.8	52.9	35.1
		10 Years and above	6.7	29.2	26.7	33.3	66.7	37.5
		TOTAL	8.3	27.4	31.3	37.1	60.4	35.5
2	Journalists expect gifts from PR practitioners for covering an event.	< 10 Years	11.8	55.3	47.1	31.6	41.2	13.2
		10 Years and above	33.3	75.0	30.0	16.7	36.7	8.3
		TOTAL	25.0	61.9	37.5	27.0	37.5	11.1
3	Indirect forms of media bribery exist in Malaysia.	< 10 Years	17.6	28.9	29.4	47.4	52.9	23.7
		10 Years and above	10.3	20.8	41.7	45.8	48.3	33.3
		TOTAL	12.8	25.4	38.3	47.6	48.9	27.0
4	Direct forms of media bribery exist in Malaysia.	< 10 Years	23.5	36.8	47.1	44.7	29.4	18.4
		10 Years and above	37.9	45.8	41.4	20.8	20.7	33.3
		TOTAL	34.0	39.7	42.6	36.5	23.4	23.8
5	Gifts in the form of cash to journalists are acceptable.	< 10 Years	82.4	64.9	5.9	21.6	11.8	13.5
		10 Years and above	80.0	83.3	16.7	12.5	3.3	4.5
		TOTAL	81.3	71.0	12.5	19.4	6.3	9.7

Note: PR = Public Relations Practitioner; JN = Journalist. Number of PR respondents = 48; Number of JN Practitioner respondents = 63.

CONCLUSION

Journalists and public relations practitioners play distinct roles in their respective professions. Their roles and paths often cross, creating a situation that has always been viewed as a love-hate complexity, at times symbiotic and with camaraderie, at other times tinged with suspicion and distrust. The survey seems to indicate that public relations practitioners believe more strongly that the information they provide to the journalists enables them to perform more satisfactorily compared to the journalists who think less strongly of the contribution made by the public relations practitioners. The public relations practitioners seem to think that there is more of a symbiotic relationship between the two groups than the journalists.

Generally, the two media professional groups mutually trust one another and think that each is honest in its dealings with the other. Nevertheless, the public relations practitioners believe more strongly than the journalists that the former control news about an organisation and that the journalists tend to report more on what is controversial and negative about an organisation.

Public relations practitioners seem to think that giving gifts to journalists is less of a breach of ethics compared to the journalists. They consider gift-giving as a token of appreciation. In addition, the public relations practitioners seem to believe that journalists expect gifts for covering events more than the journalists do. Nevertheless, neither group agrees that cash gifts are acceptable. However, junior journalists have fewer qualms about receiving cash as a gift compared to senior journalists.

Generally, there are some differences and similarities in perceptions held by public relations practitioners and journalists on satisfaction with contributions made to each other, their interdependence, trust of each other and on ethical practices. Public relations practitioners seem to hold more positive perceptions than the journalists on the various aspects of their symbiotic relationship.

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