

Editor's Corner: Spring 2010 *Public Relations Journal*

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Six research articles have been selected for inclusion in the Spring 2010 edition of *Public Relations Journal*, the open-access, peer reviewed, electronic research journal published by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and available at www.prsa.org/prjournal.

The articles are:

- “Forced Transparency: Corporate Image on Wikipedia and What it Means for Public Relations,” authored by Marcia W. DiStaso, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Public Relations in the College of Communications at Pennsylvania State University and Marcus Messner, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Journalism in the School of Mass Communications at Virginia Commonwealth University.
- “An Analysis of New Communications Media Use in Public Relations: Results of a Five-Year Trend Study,” authored by Donald K. Wright, Ph.D., APR, Fellow PRSA, Professor of Public Relations in the College of Communication at Boston University and Michelle Drifka Hinson, M.A. Director of Development Institute for Public Relations that is based at the University of Florida.
- “Examining the Gender of Sources in Media Releases. Does the CEO Matter?,” authored by Hilary Fussell Sisco, Ph.D, Assistant Professor of Public Relations in the School of Communications at Quinnipiac University; Lynn M. Zoch, Ph.D., Professor and Director of the School of Communication at Radford University, and Erik Collins, Ph.D., J.D., Associate Director for Graduate Studies and Research in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of South Carolina.
- “More Words, Less Action: A Framing Analysis of FEMA Public Relations Communications During Hurricanes Katrina and Gustav,” authored by Seth Oyer, Ph.D., Assistant Professor and Public Relations Sequence head in the Department of Journalism and Public Relations at Bowling Green State University; J. Keith Saliba, Ph.D., Assistant Professor in the Department of Communications at Jacksonville University and Franklin Yartey, a doctoral

student in the Department of Journalism and Public Relations at Bowling Green State University.

- “Examining the Role of Social Media in Organization-Volunteer Relationships,” authored by Windy L. Hovey, a recent graduate from the University of Oregon with a M.S. in Communication and Society and a certificate in Nonprofit Management.
- “Whose Site Is It Anyway? Expectations of College Web Sites,” authored by Sheila M. McAllister-Spooner, Ph.D., APR, Assistant Professor of Public Relations in the Department of Communication at Monmouth University.

The article by Professors DiStaso and Messner describes how collaboratively edited information on social media that circumvents traditional media gatekeepers and poses a challenge to public relations practitioners. This research focuses on how the online encyclopedia Wikipedia gives corporate critics an opportunity to shape the public image of major corporations. The article reports on a longitudinal panel study that analyzed the framing of 10 Fortune 500 companies on Wikipedia between 2006 and 2010. It was found through content analyses of tonality and topics of more than 3,800 sentences in the articles for Wal-Mart, Exxon Mobil, General Motors, Ford, General Electric, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, Citigroup, AIG, and IBM that the negativity increased over time and that the focus shifted from historical information to legal concerns and scandals. The findings show that public relations practitioners need to pay close attention to the forced transparency about their companies on Wikipedia.

The Wright-Hinson research reports on their fifth annual global empirical study of the impact that social media and other aspects of the new technologies are having on public relations practice. Results strongly suggest the new communications media are having a dramatic impact on public relations. As has been the case with each year of this trend study, results show considerably more agreement in some areas than was the case in previous years. This year’s study reports that 85 percent of the public relations practitioners surveyed believe new communications media have changed the way organizations communicate. Findings continue to suggest these changes are more prominent in external than internal communications. Results continue to show that traditional news media receive higher scores than blogs and social media in terms of accuracy, credibility, telling the truth and being ethical. Although most surveyed said that public relations practitioners should measure the impact new media are having on public relations campaigns, only a small number actually are conducting this kind of research.

The impetus for the Sisco, Zoch and Collins article study came from research indicating that reporters seem more likely to quote male sources than female sources. The question for the researchers then became whether we, as public relations practitioners, are causing some of this imbalance by providing reporters with a disproportionate number of male sources. The primary purpose of the research presented in this article was to turn the tables on previously published research by looking at the sources

provided to reporters through the subsidy of corporate news releases. The researchers chose to investigate how releases from the top 25 companies on the Fortune 500 list compared to those from the highest-ranked 25 corporations headed by women to determine if releases from women-headed companies would be more likely to quote women as sources.

The article authored by Oyer, Saliba and Yartey comparatively analyzes the Federal Emergency Management Agency's crisis public relations communication leading up to and during hurricanes Katrina and Gustav to determine what, if any, changes FEMA made to its communication strategy. Employing framing analysis, the authors discovered that, aside from an increase of more than double the number of words devoted to its Gustav crisis communication, the action statements within FEMA's crisis rhetoric had significantly decreased since that before and during Katrina.

Hovey's contribution to this issue examined the use of social media sites by a nonprofit social dance center and the role the sites played in the relationships between the organization and its volunteers. Document analysis was used to study the center's Facebook group, YouTube channel, Flickr site, and blog. Interviews and a focus group were then conducted with the director, operating manager, and 16 volunteers. The study presents new information about strategies organizations employ to cultivate relationships with their publics through social media. It also demonstrates ways in which social media use can result in both positive and negative relationship outcomes.

The article by Dr. McAllister-Spooner reports on an examination of college Web site preferences of high school students, parents/guardians of high school students, and high school guidance and admissions counselors suggests that offering dialogic Internet features could impact the likelihood of submitting applications. The findings also show that intuitive interface and useful information that generate return visits take precedence over flashy graphics, photos, and interactive features.

Public Relations Journal is edited by Donald K. Wright, Ph.D., APR, Fellow PRSA, Professor of Public Relations in the College of Communication at Boston University, with assistance from Elizabeth A. Polito, a Boston University graduate student. The major intention of the *Journal* is to facilitate the transfer of knowledge from the educational to practitioner communities. Additional information about the publication can be found at www.prsa.org/prjournal or by e-mailing Dr. Wright at don.wright@prsa.org.