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## Organization-Public Relationships Practices in University Setting

Rosli Mohammed<sup>a\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*School of Multimedia Technology and Communication, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 UUM Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia*

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to share the explicate and the linkages among relationship management quality indicators, of organization-public relationship were; trust, commitment, community involvement, participation and satisfaction, and types of organization-public relationship status. Data was collected by using questionnaire. It was proved that effective public relations practices makes organizations more effective and views relationship management in an even more potent role to meet corporate value enhancing objectives. In doing that the organizations need/must re-examine their OPR practices from public perceptions about how it reflect its relationships management quality and become a competitive advantage in itself.

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### 1. Introduction

Public relations are an interactive form of communication in which the targeted audiences yield information and are not mere information consumers. Succinctly, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), in its official statement on Public Relations, described public relations as helping our complex, pluralistic society to reach decisions and function more effectively by contributing to mutual understanding among groups and institutions. It serves to bring private and public policies into harmony (Hendrix, 2001). The major roles of public relations include three functions (Wilcox, Ault, Agee & Cameron, 2001). First, management function that creates, develops and carries out policies and programmes to influence opinion or public reaction about an idea, a product or an

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\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [roslimohd59@gmail.com](mailto:roslimohd59@gmail.com)

organization, as well as improves the mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the targeted groups. Second, the promotion of a favourable image - in other words, the practice or profession establishes, maintains or improves a favourable relationship between an institution or person and the public. Third, shaping public image i.e. the relationship between an organisation, or person and the public, with respect to whether the organisation or person is seen in a positive or negative light.

Like all human endeavours, an organization, is never devoid of crises, both internal and external. The success of public relations in building a mutually beneficial organisation-public relationship would depend on an effective public relation practice. Related to this, there are a limited number of academic articles focused on a university setting, especially on its image, identity and reputation (Brunner, 2004; Hon & Brunner, 2001). This paper will makes several contribution to academia and to industry in ensuring the attainment of organizational and public goals among which are, creating and sustaining an effective image, identity, and reputation.

## 2. Problem statements

The conceptualization of public relation as relationship management between an organization and its public has been gaining momentum among public relations scholars and practitioners. It is because they do realize that any organization, whether it wants it or not, has public relation. The trick is to establish a good organization and public relationship. Yet, out of those massive definitions, in 1985, Cultip *et al.*, defined public relation as the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and the various public in two-way communication on whom its success or failure depends. Moreover, Grunig and Huang's (2000) view that public relations makes organizations more effective by building relationships with strategic publics and views relationship management in an even more potent role within the organization by acting upon its wider intangible and tangible assets to meet corporate value enhancing objectives.

Kathleen Ladd Ward, former chair of the Public Relations Society of America's Research Committee, wrote in 1998 that although communications are important, the ultimate objective of public relations is to build and maintain beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics. Ledingham and Bruning (2000) extend this view of public relations as a relationship practice to obtain quality relational outcomes through optimal initiation and maintenance strategies (Ledingham *et al.*, 1999; Rosli & Adwan, 2013). Nevertheless, public relations scholars studying public relationships have attempted to explicate the financial contribution of effective public relations. It helps an organization make money by cultivating positive relationships with strategic stakeholders such as donors, consumers, shareholders and legislators who have power to influence whether organizational goals can be attained (Jo *et al.*, 2004). Yet, the bad relationship can be resulted as the effect of ineffective public relation.

Bruning and Ledingham (1998) went on to suggest five essential organization public-relationship factors: openness, trust, involvement, investment, and commitment. They also posited that the organization-public relationship has multiple factors on status: professional, personal and community. More recently, Hon and Grunig (1999) add some more indicators. They are trust, commitment, local or community involvement, and reputation, by which public relation will be able to enhance knowledge and establish awareness through recall and recognition. The public relations practices of any organisation is the major link between the organisation and its publics act as probes of the organization.

Organization-public relationship (O-PR) activities and functions can help the universities to be effective in achieving its stated goals and objectives. Indeed, within the context of O-PR, Grunig and Huang (2000) argue that public relations can help organizations to be more effective by maintaining relationships with their publics. And how can O-PR help achieve university effectiveness? It is proposed here, university's effectiveness can be measured by looking at whether the O-PR activities can help enhance the university's performance, especially on their academic quality, emotional engagement and touch with their students. The main question that arises at this point is – how, why and to what level does OP-R add to the accomplishment of organizational objectives? (Rhee, 2004).

This was the question posed in a research foundation, and the question was tackled by a group of six researchers (Grunig, Grunig, Dozier, & Ehling, 2002). These researchers added to the original question with what they considered as the excellence question: How must public relations be practiced and the communication function organized for it to contribute most to organization? (Grunig, 1992). The IABC team as they were called came to the conclusion that organizations are only effective when they choose to achieve those goals which satisfies their self-interest as well as the interests of the public they are dealing with (Grunig, Grunig, & Ehling, 1992). Therefore, effective practiced in public relation is widely needed to manage good relationships, show its impact toward

building good image, identity and reputation of the organization as well as to solve problems between the organization and its key-public. As commonly practised, the university has to offer the services to the public that surpass the desired levels of satisfaction to continue to enjoy the good will of the public. Based on the above discussion of the importance of organization-public relationship, the study intends to answer the following questions:

- What is the relationship between O-PR (trust, community involvement, commitment, customer satisfaction, and openness) with university performance?
- Which types of relationship practices relates to university performance?
- Which dimensions of organization-public relationship best predict organization effectiveness in building university performance?

### 3. Theoretical framework

$H_1$  and  $H_2$  which predict about the relationship between variables were analysed using the Pearson correlation. The Pearson correlation examined the relationship between the perceptions of the relational factors of O-PR practices and types of relationship practices (professional, personal, and community relationship).  $H_3$  examined the relationship between the perceptions of the relational factors of the types of relationship practices (professional, personal, and community relationship) and University performances (emotional engagement, emotional touch and academic quality).  $H_4$  was analysed using multiple regressions to predict the most important O-PR practice (trust, commitment, community involvement, openness, and patient satisfaction) and to determine the predictor practice with the greatest influence on university performance.

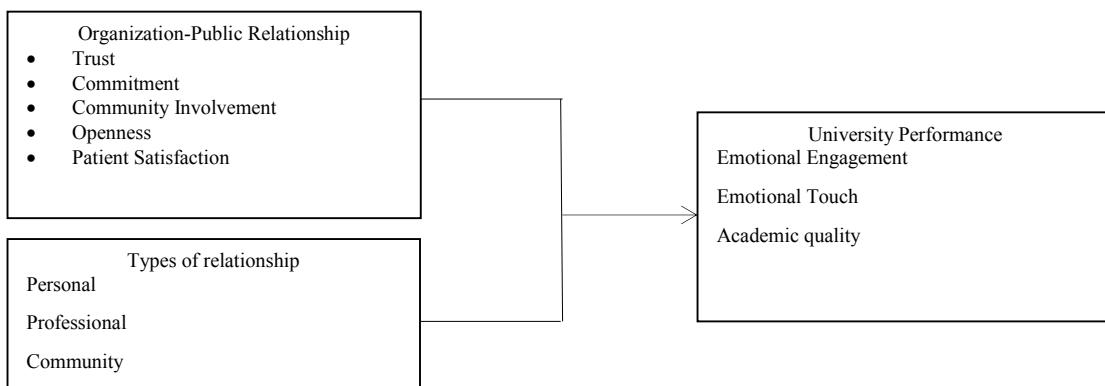


Fig. 1: Hypothesis and Theoretical Framework Development.

### 4. Population and sample

The researcher used simple random sampling base on all the list of student' names that were obtained from UUM records and these were entered in the computer. To make the sample truly random the researcher has the list of all registered University Utara Malaysia (UUM) students' names and entered in the computer to ensure the sample truly randomly selected. The questionnaires were distributed to 200 UUM students with 94.8% response rate.

### 5. Data collection method

The questionnaire was divided into four parts. Part one was devoted to collecting demographic information. Part Two of the public relations practice was designed to collect information about the practiced of O-PR, including trust, community involvement, commitment, patient satisfaction, and openness. Part Three of the public relations practice was designed to collect data about the types of relationships, including professional, personal, and

community relationships. Part Four was designed to determine organisation effectiveness by measuring the respondent perception about university performance

Dimensions of organization-public relationships utilized in this work has been used by number of scholars (e.g. Kim, 2001; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Bruning & Galloway, 2003; Bruning, Dials & Shirka, 2008; Jahansoozi, 2007; Bruning et al., 2006; Yang, 2005; Grunig, 1992; Huang, 2001; Rosli & Adwan 2013). Table 1 shows variables and number of items.

Table 1. Measurement Items

Variable	No.of Items	Scale	Source/Year
Trust	5	Seven-point likert scale	Jo,Hon &Brunner 2004, Bruning & Ledingham, 1999
Commitment	6	Seven-point likert scale	Jo,Hon &Brunner 2004 Bruning & Ledingham, 1999
Community Involvement	5	Seven-point likert scale	Jo,Hon &Brunner 2004 Bruning & Ledingham, 1999
Satisfaction	4	Seven-point likert scale	Jo,Hon &Brunner 2004 & Grunig, 1999
Control Mutuality	5	Seven-point likert scale	Jo,Hon &Brunner 2004 Burchfield, 1997
University Performance	13	Seven-point likert scale	Alessandri, Yang & Kinsey 2006

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Relationship between organisation-public relationship practices and university performance

Findings states that a significant relationship exists between O-PR and university effectiveness. The Pearson correlation is 0.351(trust), commitment at mild relationship with 0.416, community involvement(0.274). The significant effect ( $p < 0.05$ ) indicates that O-PR improvement will improve the effectiveness of University Utara Malaysia(UUM). The highest practice correlated with effectiveness was satisfaction ( $r = 0.480$ ) and commitment(0.416). The lowest O-PR practice was control mutuality ( $r = 0.226$ ). As the result in Table 2 suggests, a significant positive relationship exists but the magnitude strength was mild.

Table 2. Pearson correlation result

Organisation-public relationship practices	Effectiveness
Trust	.351**
Commitment	.416**
Community involvement	.274**
Control Mutuality	.226**
Satisfaction	.480**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The study helps create best O-PR practices between the UUM and its publics. The best practice will increase the efficiency and performance of UUM, especially when they have good practices of trust, commitment, community involvement, patient satisfaction, and openness in enhancing the relationship with their public, especially with the students.

### 6.2 Influence of OPR practice with university effectiveness.

Table .3 shows the significance of trust, commitment, community involvement, patient satisfaction, and control mutuality, as the p-value is less than 0.05. Based on P-value and Beta values among the independent variables, satisfaction stands as the main predictor explains (13.5%), and commitment is the second predictor explains (9%). While openness and trust practices are low contributed toward the university in developing its academic excellence,

emotional touch and emotional engagement with the students. The R-square value was 31.1 %.

Table 3. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.558	.311	.293	1.06335

Predictors: (Constant), trust, commitment, community involvement, openness, satisfaction

The results of the current research show that all O-PR factors justify the effect on the UUM performance. The model of this effect is significant. The highest effect on the performance effectiveness of university is O-PR correlated with community relationship, with a Pearson correlation of 0.822. The results indicate that there is a need for UUM to improve and become more effective and there are other variables that contribute university effectiveness.

## 7. Discussion and conclusion

Aside from the theoretical contribution of this study, managerial contributions can be provided to demonstrate how top management can extend more support to public relations practice. Enhancing the O-PR can take place by increasing the level of trust, commitment, community involvement, control mutuality, and customer satisfaction, which in turn, improves the efficiency of services among the students. In addition management and practitioners should use these as guidelines to focus their improvements on these key points in managing an effective relationship with their publics. Moreover, the variable that affected organisational effectiveness most was commitment and satisfaction; the type of relationship that affected organisational effectiveness most was personal relationship. These findings are consistent with previous research. An effective organisation cannot be achieved without a good practice of relationship with its stakeholders. These three outputs can be achieved by practicing excellent O-PR by combining a healthy practice of trust, commitment, community involvement, satisfaction, and control mutuality with the public. Other dimension used by other researchers (Jo, Hon & Brunner, 2004), such as exchange relationship, communal relationship should also be added as a variables of study to capture the organization-public relationship were supported in the observed data set.

The importance of relationship management for understanding the strategic OPR practices of public relations to organizational effectiveness has been discussed in a number of studies in managing organization publics. The OPR dimensions (trust, commitment, satisfaction, community involvement and openness) are significantly related in projecting and promoting the image, identity, and reputation of their organisation. Furthermore, by practicing effective O-PR assist the managers to appreciate the centrality of building the image and identity of a university. Therefore, O-PR practices must act as the bridge between institutions, management, employees, and customers with the institutions. This role is very important for university's seeking to provide quality services and satisfaction among its customer and other stakeholders. Universities need to cultivate a good relationship with their students and to obtain favorable reputation held by students, while ensuring active communication behavior of students and the quality of students' educational experience (Yang, S.U, 2007). Men and Hung (2009) reported what one of his subjects had to say regarding the importance of public relations:

*No matter which party is hostile to you, it will affect your long-term development. There is a famous saying in ancient China, 'the water can take the boat as well as overthrow the boat'. If we say our company is a boat, then the relationships with all the public are the water. If the water dries up, there is no resource. We can only gradually become a lonely and sunken wood (p. 10).*

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