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MEDIA AND PUBLIC RELATIONS: CROSS PERCEPTIONS AND THE ROLE OF  
MEDIA PITCHING

by

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## ABSTRACT

### MEDIA AND PUBLIC RELATIONS: CROSS PERCEPTIONS AND THE ROLE OF MEDIA PITCHING

Garrett Berberich

The current study looked at the relationship between public relations and media professionals in regard to roles in news generation, professionalism and media pitching. Qualitative interviews were used to ask 14 professionals from both parties for their views on the other in terms of the above topics. Additionally, research sought to understand whether evaluations on news generation and professionalism affected media pitching evaluations. Previous studies on news generation, professionalism and media pitching set the groundwork for current research.

Results showed that both professions broadly found media to have the larger effect on news generation, with public relations professionals being more split in the extent to which this was true. Both parties positively evaluated the professionalism of the other, and negatively evaluated media pitching. News generation proved to have an affect on media pitching evaluations, and interesting trends portrayed each party's focus to be on getting jobs done easily and effectively.

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### **Media and Public Relations: Cross Perceptions and the Role of Media Pitching**

The relationship between public relations professionals and media professionals is one often focused on the generation of news associated with a given organization, individual, business or cause. The relationship is often “practiced” through media pitching—attempts at gaining press coverage on a certain story, happening, person, or organization. (Larsson (2009) claims the majority of communication in this relationship as headed in one direction – from public relations professionals to media.) Because of these realities, the act of media pitching and all related factors affect the perceptions of media and public relations professionals when looking at the opposite party. It is important to understand cross perceptions to manage these relationships through pitching media effectively. This can help both parties to clearly communicate and generate news quickly, easily, and pleasantly.

Two aspects of the media to public relations relationship are professionalism and the generation of news. According to Larsson (2009), the relationship is comprised of communication, usually originating from public relations professionals, with a news management goal in mind. Publicity was also identified as the predominant goal in the relationship. Understanding one party’s thoughts on these topics can help the other party to communicate (through media pitching) in a way that addresses and caters to these opinions. The current study will explore these cross perceptions of roles in news generation and professionalism, reasons for the perceptions, and if (or how) they influence evaluations of media pitching. The resulting understanding will help public relations professionals and journalists be wary of the other’s opinions on these topics, and to communicate accordingly.

For purposes of the current study, news generation can be conceptualized as the interactions, information dissemination and work done to create or influence content in media outlets. This is consistent with Sallot, Steinfatt and Salwen's (1998) conceptualization of news generation, in which they identified the act as "influencing news." Additionally, they interpreted professionalism to include news values, autonomy, commitment, responsibility, perceived societal roles and job satisfaction. This serves as an accurate conceptualization of professionalism for the purposes of this study because all mentioned factors come into play when looking at the relationship between media and public relations.

Past studies have explored cross perceptions of media and public relations professionals. Common examples include Sallot and Johnson's (2006) study on the relationship between media and public relations professionals from the journalists' point of view, and Kopenhaver, Martinson, and Ryan's (1984) study on how professionals in this relationship in Florida viewed each other. However, there have not been many studies that focus on the role media pitching plays in these perceptions—specifically those about news generation and professionalism. For example, Sallot et al. (1998) found that public relations practitioners reported having a stronger affect on generating news than the media professional counterparts reported them having. In addition, Larsson (2009) found that media and public relations professionals were inconsistent in their estimations of how often public relations professionals successfully place news. These findings represent the challenge of journalistic resistance that faces many public relations professionals. While these studies explore media and public relations professionals' views on news generation, they do not include views on media pitching. Including media

pitching evaluations in studies on this relationship is an important step in exploring the relationship.

This study is aimed at finding reasons for the nature of the media to public relations relationship in both times of professional resistance and accommodation. Both possible circumstances could be rooted in media pitching. Results from Larsson's (2009) study showed that journalists do rely on public relations story ideas at times of low editorial content, calling the relationship mutually beneficial. Waters, Tindall, and Morton (2010) supported this shift in direction of communication, and reported that some media professionals are in need of content and refer to public relations professionals to obtain it. For this reason, it is important to understand that while media resistance is somewhat commonplace, it does not happen in every circumstance.

The potential for perceptions about a media or public relations professional to be related to the evaluation of a media pitch presents an interesting idea. Participants' reasons supporting their cross perceptions on professionalism and news generation will be compared to their opinions on media pitching. Doing so will illustrate to what extent media pitching evaluations affect the media to public relations relationship. The possibility that the cross-perceptions of news generation and professionalism are related to thoughts on media pitching makes for an interesting implication. Exploring if or how a pitch's evaluation is effected perceptions of news generation and professionalism could produce some noteworthy results that may support or challenge the level of importance associated with a media pitch.

This fills another gap in research, as bringing both sides of the relationship into the study introduces a number of interesting comparisons and factors. Many of these

comparisons have not been present in past studies that explore perceptions of the media to public relations professional relationships from one point of view. Past studies also often do not include media pitching – the main point of interaction in this relationship. Sallot and Johnson's (2006) study illustrates this gap in research, as they explored the relationship between public relations and media professionals from the point of view of 418 journalists. While this study proves valuable, it leaves room for supplementary research from a two-sided standpoint. Pincus, Rimmer, Rayfield & Cropp (1993) studied the relationship from the point of view of only newspaper editors, further demonstrating the need for studies utilizing sources from both sides of the relationship.

To address the previously mentioned gaps in research, this study aims to explore media and public relations professionals' perceptions of the other party in terms of news generation and professionalism. It then looks to apply or compare these perceptions to evaluations of the main interaction in this relationship – media pitching. Applying these broad opinions to the specific interaction of media pitching helps to focus the study and produce applicable results. The study looks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are public relations professionals' judgments of media professionals' role in setting the agenda for news coverage?

RQ2: What are media professionals' judgments of public relations professionals' role in setting the agenda for news coverage?

RQ3: What are public relations professionals' judgments of media professionals' professionalism?

RQ4: What are media professionals' judgments of public relations professionals' professionalism?

RQ5: How do public relations professionals evaluate media pitching?

RQ6: How do media professionals evaluate media pitching?

RQ7: How do cross perceptions of professionalism and roles in news generation influence public relations professionals' evaluations of media pitching?

RQ8: How do cross perceptions of professionalism and roles in news generation influence media professionals' evaluations of media pitching?

### **Literature Review**

Research studies in the past have explored the media to public relations professional relationship in a number of different ways. As previously mentioned, Sallot and Johnson (2006) and Pincus et al. (1993) explored the relationship from journalists' point of view. Additionally, studies like Sallot et al. (1998) looked at the relationship from both sides in regards to news values and roles in generating news. Studies on news generation, professionalism and views on the other party in the relationship apply to the current study. In addition, taking a look at best pitching practices and overall views on pitching can help serve as a point of reference when evaluating results of the current study.

Factors examined in the existing research include the entire public relations to media relationship, roles in news generation, professionalism, relational hostility, best media pitching practice and relevant case studies. Exploring these studies, theories and conclusions will help to provide a point of reference in regard to the current study's results.

### **PR and Media Relationship**

The relationship between public relations and media professionals is complicated and filled with shared goals – with seemingly conflicting reasons for them. Shin and Cameron (2003) described the relationship as mutually dependent and love-hate. Media professionals worry that information from public relations sources is not trustworthy.

Public relations professionals are aware of this mistrust, and therefore do not believe they will be treated fairly by journalists. Sallot and Johnson (2006) also explored the relationship from the journalist perspective, and reported love-hate sentiments in reference to public relations practitioners. In the study, journalists expressed a feeling of love towards public relations professionals because they could be a source for news content. However, they also expressed the feeling of hate for a number of reasons, including frequent contact and their seeming effect on the news. Journalists also found the relationship with public relations professionals to be important.

Bergman (2006) challenged the idea of always staying on message with media professionals, stating that interpersonal communication is also important when looking to maintain a relationship. He said that matching the right information with the right people is a crucial aspect of media relations. This finding points to an interesting line between talking “business,” and engaging in pleasant conversation. Stegall and Sanders (1986) found that public relations professionals have a greater need for co-orientation with the journalist than the journalist does with public relations professionals. This is because a public relations professional is one of many sources for a journalist, when that may not be the case from the public relations perspective (Stegall & Sanders, 1986). Understanding when each sort of interaction is welcomed and appropriate could go a long way in helping public relations professionals effectively pitch media.

Chia (2008) conducted qualitative interviews to explore the nature of practitioner-client relationships. Results showed that clients wished for practitioners to be more aware of their desires and to alter their messaging and public relations practices accordingly. This idea can relate to a public relations professional’s relationship with media. Being

aware of a media professional's desires and pressures can put a public relations professional in much better shape for obtaining coverage.

Neijens and Smit (2003) conducted surveys with public relations and media professionals to get a better understanding of the relationship. One interesting finding was that public relations practitioners found cooperation between them and the media to be positive. Conversely, some public relations professionals found journalists to be manipulative and of the desire to tell only their own stories. These opposing viewpoints imply a wide range of opinions on media from public relations professionals. It seems that interactions are often widely different and are dependent on the desires of the journalist.

Ledingham (2003) produced the theory of relationship management in public relations, with a focus between an organization and its publics. Ledingham (2003) stated that understanding and benefit are the end goals of relationship management both in general and in public relations. In addition, categorizing publics in order to choose the most effective and specific message should be an integral part of the public relations process (Ledingham, 2003).

Hon and Grunig (1999) explored relationship management and presented six aspects, which include access, positivity, openness, assurances, networking, and the sharing of tasks. Being aware of these axioms and aspects will help professionals to act accordingly within the relationship between media and public relations professionals. The axioms are found in the media to public relations relationship during information dissemination, negotiations and media pitches that occur over a number of communication channels. Specifically, access, sharing of tasks and assurances play a

predominant role in the media to public relations relationship. Initially, being able to have access to a media person can be a challenge, but is crucial to public relations success.

Assurances come into play because media professionals and public relations professionals give one another assurances often about news placements and interview availability. Assurances in this context help to avoid uncertainty in the relationship.

Sharing of tasks is a central aspect of the media to public relations professional relationship in that public relations could be seen as a supporting function for the media's research and news-content production requirements.

While some previously reviewed studies include thoughts of public relations professionals on media, the majority of studies focus on journalists' thoughts on the relationship. This could speak to who is doing the research and the general flow of information in the relationship. Generally, public relations professionals are attempting to get coverage from the journalist, not the other way around. Perhaps this need of public relations professionals explains why more studies are focused on how media professionals view the relationship. As previously mentioned, Larsson's (2009) findings supported this direction of communication.

### **News Generation**

The nature of the media to public relations relationship has been shaped by desires and opinions on news generation. As indicated in the introduction, news generation can be conceptualized as steps taken to influence the content covered in media outlets. Larsson (2009) found that public relations professionals felt they have a significant effect on topics of news coverage when media professionals claimed the opposite, except during editorial lulls. This result applies directly to the current study and

supports the previously reported findings of relational hostility.

Maxwell, McCombs, and Shaw's (1972) agenda setting theory applies directly to the goal associated with the media to public relations relationship – news coverage. Agenda setting is defined as when media select certain topics and cover them more prominently or frequently than others. This mirrors the goal of public relations practitioners, as they work to get news coverage for their clients.

Sallot et al. (1998) conducted surveys with 200 journalists and 200 public relations professionals. Results showed public relations practitioners reporting that they have a stronger affect on generating news than the media professional counterparts reported them having. Journalists did not “fear” the effect practitioners have on the news content. Also, public relations practitioners reported a higher assessment of their effect on agenda setting. These findings represent the challenge of journalistic resistance that faces many PR practitioners, therefore increasing the importance of a full understanding of the relationship. According to Samsup (2003), media professionals view public relations as a publicity-oriented profession with goals of only gaining coverage in news. This viewpoint seems to overlook all other functions of public relations such as management and relationship building. This therefore fosters a higher potential for resistance from media.

Hung (2005) used qualitative interviews to explore organization-public relationships in public relations. Results showed many participants found relationships with media to be win-win because both sides needed something. The business, and therefore the public relations professional, needs attention through coverage. Similarly, the media needs material and news to cover. This finding seems to stray from the idea of

consistent hostility and leans instead towards recognition of mutual goals being met. Turk (1986) found that public relations does have an effect on the agenda setting of news organizations and that newsworthiness and space availability largely determined usage.

Curtin (1999) explored the idea of journalism being affected and driven by the economic market and state of the industry from a financial standpoint. Using qualitative interviews, Curtin found that the financial implications of advertisers often affect the scope and nature of coverage. In addition, participants reported low levels of using public relations materials. Reported use of public relations materials was heavily determined by news value. However, some participants said public relations materials come in handy at times of editorial lulls. While participants said they rarely used public relations materials, the data said somewhat differently. For example, some results showed that public relations materials were used as sources for information or idea generation rather than direct publication. The fact that journalists gave little credit to public relations materials when they really used them in different ways reflects the mentioned resistance or hostility of media to public relations.

Xifra (2009) explored journalists' perceptions of public relations as well as their own contact preferences. Participants in Spain completed a questionnaire and in-depth interviews for the study. One interesting finding revealed that journalists received an average of 75 press releases a day. While this number could certainly vary from location to location, it uncovers the stiff competition each pitch is facing when sent to journalists. Xifra's study also reported email as journalists' preferred method of contact.

Sallot and Johnson (2006) explored the media-practitioner relationship in regards to journalists' views. Results showed that journalists who reported a higher reliance or

use of public relations practitioners also reported better relationships with them. This finding is similar to that of Sooyoung (2006) who found that public relations practitioners felt more “expert power” when communicating with journalists more frequently. It seems that both parties feel positive feelings as their frequency of communication increases. These findings point to the fact that news generation becomes less of a struggle on the part of public relations professionals as they feel this “expert power” and increased positive feeling.

Overall, it is evident that public relations professionals feel their content is used more often than media professionals do. This could be a result of conflicting conceptualizations of “used,” or simply the effect of existing biases.

### **Professionalism**

Opinions on professionalism between media and public relations professionals represent another relational factor that could determine frequency and success of interactions. As previously mentioned, professionalism can be conceptualized to include factors such as news values, roles in society, levels of appropriateness and responsibility.

Through use of a questionnaire, Jeffers (1977) explored thoughts public relations and media professionals have on those in their fields and in the opposite field in terms of ethics and ability. Results showed that participants held employees in their own field and employees in the opposite field that they work with regularly in higher regard. In other words, media professionals were reported to hold public relations professionals they know in much higher regard than they do the industry as a whole. This supports Nayman’s (1977) finding that journalists were okay with working as part of a team towards a collective goal. Jeffers’ (1977) findings could speak to media professionals’

resistance towards accepting the public relations profession in general. Public relations professionals were reported to hold media professional's values and skills in a more comparable regard to their own (Jeffers, 1977).

Unlike the team-oriented finding for journalists, Nayman found that public relations professionals place importance in having influence in organizational decisions. This sort of difference could be important when understanding the relationship. In addition, the journalism profession reported having a more altruistic goal in mind than did the public relations profession. This finding illustrates a potential difference in the relationship that could cause some hostility or tension.

Kopenhaver et al. (1984) conducted a survey to explore how public relations and media professionals in Florida viewed each other. One finding stated that journalists felt public relations practitioners promoted only products and services too often.

Sallot et al. (1998) examined cross perceptions between journalists and PR professionals and found that public relations professionals and journalists were reported to have similar news values. However, when asked during the study, journalists did not feel that news values were similar. This further represents a disconnect that seems to exist in the relationship. Sallot et al.'s result falls in line with that of Kopenhaver et al. because journalists had issues with the news values of both studies.

Xifra (2009) found that journalists questioned public relations practitioners' journalistic and news writing mentality and ability. This represents a relatively negative judgment of public relations professionals' professionalism, similar to Stegall and Sanders (1986), who found that journalists perceived public relations professionals to be ethically questionable and to have less honorable intentions. This supports the fact that

professionalism and ethics both come into play when looking at the professional relationship between public relations and media practitioners.

### **Relational Hostility**

The media to public relations professional relationship has been one described as being filled with tension, hostility and seemingly conflicting goals. At times, media professionals seem put off by the goals and ways in which public relations professionals interact, or the fact that public relations professionals exist at all. Understanding this aspect of the media to public relations professional relationship is important because it will provide context about where the relationship often stands.

DeLorme and Fedler (2003) performed a historical analysis that examined magazine articles, newspaper articles, and books. These samples range from as far back as the 1800's and were written for the public and journalists. The samples chronicled the careers of journalists and presented some of their reflections on the industry – specifically on public relations professionals. The historical analysis gives a look at the hostility in the relationship from its very beginning. Understanding these initial reasons could help explain reasons for hostility that still exist today.

Results of the analysis identified six factors that are interrelated and help to explain reasons for journalists' hostility, their persistence of the attitude, and any contradictions that exist (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003). Factors included calling public relations professionals pests and the thought that publicity (or public relations) exists now as a result of journalism with a goal of getting coverage for a certain topic, not for creating news. Also, early practices of public relations were accused of unethical activity such as bribes, gifts and exaggerations – being called “fakes” as a result. DeLorme and

Fedler also found that journalists were at times unhappy with their own careers, and even took part in some of the unethical exaggeration that public relations practitioners were accused of doing. These historical opinions help to set the stage for the current state of the public relations to media relationship.

Lucarelli (1993) explored the state of the newspaper industry from 1917 to 1921 and its effect on the views of public relations professionals. Results found that during this time period, a common question in the industry was whether to fill newspaper space through paid or free advertising content. Publicists were reportedly called “spacegrabbers,” with the opinion that they should not be in existence and that their demands for free space was hurting the industry in terms of integrity and financial success. St. John III (2009) also explored the backlash towards public relations professionals in the 1920’s as an attempt to protect journalistic integrity. The propaganda used in journalism to support WWI was later seen by journalists as ruining the industry’s values. This idea came to a head with an anti-publicity bulletin from the American Newspaper Publishers Association (ANPA) in the 1920’s. The desire to make money off of advertising for including publicists’ agendas helped to fuel this hostility – and could also be a source of the remaining feelings today. St. John III stated that these negative opinions on publicists from the 1920’s still exist, but publicists’ desired perspectives are still being published as a result of publicists’ effective information dissemination.

The previously mentioned feeling of “love-hate,” or an overall negative attitude towards public relations on behalf of journalists seems to be a common result in past research. Pincus et al. (1993) reported this negative feeling in their study that explored newspaper editors’ views and opinions on public relations. Results from a mail survey

showed negative opinions of public relations practitioners in terms of professionalism, integrity, and the extent to which they affect news coverage.

Len-Rios, Hinnant, and Park (2009) found that health journalists are more reluctant to use public relations material than are other journalists. They were found to be least accepting of material from businesses and government agencies.

Kopenhaver et al's (1984) results were consistent with the findings of DeLorme and Fedler (2003), stating that editors (or journalists) found public relations to be an unfavorable profession and viewed the practitioners in a negative light. Public relations professionals were reported to view their professions in a favorable light (Kopenhaver et. al., 1984). In addition, results showed that journalists and public relations professionals have similar news values, but journalists believe that is not the case. This is very similar to the previously reported finding of Sallot et al. (1998) and further illustrates a feeling of hostility in the relationship.

Shaw (2004) explored whether or not negative opinions like ones found between journalists and public relations professionals affected the education fields of journalism and public relations. Both educational parties disagreed that the relationship between public relations practitioners and the media is an adversarial one. Shaw suggested that the perception of a negative relationship could be affecting future and continued beliefs about the relationship.

While hostility is a well documented and reported dynamic of the media to public relations professional relationship, there are instances of accommodation and positive interaction. As previously mentioned, Waters et al. (2010) saw changes in the public relations and media fields, with media seeking out news content and information from

public relations practitioners. Understanding both the positive and negative experiences within this relationship in regards to media pitching will prove useful for the current study.

### **Media Pitching**

**Best media pitching practice.** The analysis of media pitching in past research helps establish rules involved with the interaction. Understanding what is considered best practice in media pitching helps to frame participants' views on pitching and helps explain how those views affect their thoughts on the relationship. Knowing the accepted practice of pitching gives the study a base from which to analyze and compare results.

Cannon (2006) explained tips to effectively pitch the media by explaining the “:60 second pitch.” He said a challenge in pitching media is not finding the idea, but making that idea as simple and compelling as possible for the media. His format for a pitch is a five-part process. First is the headline, which explains the topic in one phrase. The hook and facts follow the headline. This is followed by a quick explanation of why readers would be interested and an ask to the media contact for the story. Explaining why readers would be interested implies a need to understand the topic being pitched. Pelham (2000) supported the need for research to be done up front in order to demonstrate an understanding of the topic when pitching media. Cannon considered asking for a story important because it begins a dialogue about interest and what the reporter might need to turn the idea into a story.

Pelham emphasized the importance of immediacy, the use of multiple angles and conducting up-front research when media pitching. Making a reporter feel like a story

needs to be published quickly and providing them with multiple angles were two steps Pelham endorsed.

Through examination of qualitative interviews, Sallot (2006) studied journalists' assessments of media pitches and their preferred mode of contact. Journalists estimated that an average of 47% of news coverage results from contact with public relations professionals. Complaints from journalists about public relations professionals included a lack of news sense, local angle, timeliness, and objectivity. Of all interviewees in the study, 93% preferred to be contacted via email. Email was followed by phone, and then face-to-face contact.

Waters, Tindall & Morton (2010) saw changes in the public relations and media fields, in that an increased amount of media professionals have been seeking out public relations professionals for news content. They identified this shift in communication flow as media catching, which can be described as journalists seeking out story sources and information, rather than the commonly practiced reverse trend of pitching communication. The researchers explored the HARO, or "Help a Reporter Out," service, finding that information requests came from both traditional and new media sources, increasing the relevance and importance of media catching for public relations practitioners. These results show that media pitching is a two-way interaction, making the entire relationship and techniques used crucial for both sides.

Waters, Tindall and Morton (2011) performed content analysis on HARO entries to study the significance of deadlines in media relations. Results showed varying deadlines and publishing dates from outlet to outlet, increasing the need to monitor media catching services daily. Understanding established techniques similar to those of Cannon

(2006), as well as emerging trends in the public relations industry can contribute to pitching success.

Similarly to Ledingham (2003), Ni (2006) explored the effect public relations has on organizational strategies. Qualitative interviews with public relations managers and strategy managers confirmed the role of relationships in gaining competitive advantages. This supports the emphasis put on interpersonal relationships in the field of public relations.

**Media pitching case analyses.** Examining past cases of public relations and media interactions can help to establish effective pitching practice. Understanding how things were done in the past will ensure a more informed base of knowledge on media relations going forward. These cases can also help speak to the entire relationship between media and public relations professionals.

Mellado and Hanusch (2011) explored the relationship between Chilean journalists and public relations professionals. A questionnaire revealed that Chilean public relations and media professionals consider themselves part of the same professional community, but media did distance themselves from public relations professionals through their responses. Sinaga and Wu (2007) studied Indonesian journalists' use of public relations material through use of a survey. Results showed that journalists found newsworthiness to be the most important factor when deciding to cover a public relations professional's pitch. The next most important factor was reported to be the business pressures of each journalist's media organization. In other words, the coverage preferences of a media organization significantly affect the coverage decisions of journalists (Sinaga & Wu, 2007). While this may seem obvious, it is an important

point when looking at media pitching and the entire media to public relations relationship.

The first facial transplant in the United States was a significant and potentially controversial medical accomplishment, requiring competent media relations. Kravand (2010) explored the media relations done its outcomes during this transplant in 2008. Results showed that extensive planning and meticulous information dissemination decisions resulted in generally positive and respectful coverage. Associated media professionals considered all possible issues, such as withholding the surgery date to avoid the controversial coverage that would come with identifying the deceased donor.

The Orlando Magic's media relations efforts when building a new arena reveals some interesting strategies that can relate to media pitching (Miltrook, Parrish, & Seltzer, 2008). The Magic moved from advocacy to accommodation when dealing with resistance from publics. The analysis shows that the Magic initially defended themselves in the media, but finally kept the arena a private matter because of distorted information. This speaks to the fact that if information is not clearly presented to media, it can become twisted, resulting in organizational strain. This sort of strategy and use of accommodation is often found in the media and public relations professional relationship.

The existing body of research on the relationship between media and public relations professionals, including media pitching, sets a useful groundwork for the current study. Past studies identified a number of areas of tension between the two parties. The majority of previous research focused more on the media's evaluations on the relationship than the public relation professionals'. There was a commonly reported

disconnect between the media's and public relations' evaluations of public relations' affect on the news. Additionally, professionalism was defined for the purposes of the study. Much of the past research identified negative evaluations of professionalism between the two parties. Lastly, best practice and applicable case studies related to media pitching were reviewed.

Using existing findings and theories as a basis, the current study can expound on the topic of media and public relations professional relationships. Understanding how media pitching evaluations are related to judgments in the relationship could help professionals and scholars to further understand this often fragile, and even resentful or hostile, relationship.

Based on the above research and theories, the current study looks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are public relations professionals' judgments of media professionals' role in setting the agenda for news coverage?

RQ2: What are media professionals' judgments of public relations professionals' role in setting the agenda for news coverage?

RQ3: What are public relations professionals' judgments of media professionals' professionalism?

RQ4: What are media professionals' judgments of public relations professionals' professionalism?

RQ5: How do public relations professionals evaluate media pitching?

RQ6: How do media professionals evaluate media pitching?

RQ7: How do cross perceptions of professionalism and roles in news generation influence public relations professionals' evaluations of media pitching?

RQ8: How do cross perceptions of professionalism and roles in news generation influence media professionals' evaluations of media pitching?

### **Method**

The current study used qualitative interviews in order to leave room for elaboration, clarification and conversational flexibility. This allowed for all aspects of the topic to be explored. In addition, interesting comments or ideas can be expounded to help contribute to meaningful results. According to Talmy and Richards (2011), interview studies are useful for investigating participants' identities, experiences, beliefs, and life stories. The various sorts of information available through interviews speak to their flexibility. Talmy and Richards also stated that interviews are useful for data collection across a wide variety of still-expanding fields. Kazmer and Xie (2008) found that recording the interviews was useful for effectively explaining the opinions of participants, making data more comprehensive. Exploratory qualitative interviews were an appropriate research method for the current study given the complex nature of the media to public relations professional relationship. Giving participants the ability to speak freely with elaboration on this relationship uncovered previously unrecognized or unaddressed relational factors and nuances.

### **Sampling**

**Participant profile.** Participants in the current study are media and public relations professionals who have experience interacting with professionals on the other end of the relationship. There were a total of 28 participants interviewed for the study – 14 media professionals and 14 public relations professionals. Participants worked in many areas across the east coast, including Boston, Baltimore, New York City, Albany (NY) and Washington DC. Public relations participants have worked in a variety of forms

of public relations, including crisis communication, agency work and internal marketing roles. Specific fields of public relations included technology, event promotion, travel, non-profits, healthcare and politics. Public relations participants' titles included Principle, Vice President, Account Executive, Account Associate and Account Coordinator.

Experience levels ranged from decades to only 1 year.

Media professionals worked in areas such as newspaper, television, magazines and online. Specific topics of coverage included hard-news, science, education, technology, sports, food and fashion. Media participants' titles included managing editor, assignment editor, program director, news producer, food critic, freelance writer, society reporter and reporter. These titles and positions are consistent with previous studies on the relationship between media and public relations professionals. Experience levels ranged from decades to 1 year. Public relations professional participants are identified as P1-P14, and media professional participants are identified as M1-M14. For complete demographic information, see Table 1.

Sallot et al. (1998) studied journalists who worked in both broadcast and print mediums. In addition, Pincus et al. (1993) focused on the newspaper editors in a study focusing on cross-perceptions of public relations professionals. Therefore, using professionals who work as journalists and editors across a number of mediums for the current study helped to broaden the potential information received.

<b>Table 1: Participant Profile</b>				
<b><u>Participant</u></b>	<b><u>Sex</u></b>	<b><u>Specific Industry</u></b>	<b><u>Job Title</u></b>	<b><u>Area of Practice</u></b>
P1	F	Event PR (agency)	Account Coordinator	Baltimore, MD
P2	M	Tech PR (agency)	Account Associate	Boston, MD

P3	M	Political PR (in-house)	Communications Officer	Washington , DC
P4	F	Tech PR (agency)	Vice President	Boston, MA
P5	F	Travel PR (agency)	Account Executive	New York, NY
P6	F	Tech PR (agency)	Client Staff Assistant	Baltimore, MD
P7	F	Event PR (agency)	Account Coordinator	Baltimore, MD
P8	M	Event PR (agency)	Media Associate	Baltimore, MD
P9	F	General PR (agency)	Account Executive	Baltimore, MD
P10	M	Event PR	President	Baltimore, MD
P11	F	General PR	Self employed/freelance	Boston, MA
P12	M	Health PR (in-house)	Director of Communications	Boston, MA
P13	F	Tech PR (agency)	Account Associate	Boston, MA
P14	M	Non-profit PR (agency)	Principle	Baltimore, MD
M1	F	TV News	News Producer	Washington , DC
M2	M	Newspaper and Online	Food Critic	Baltimore, MD
M3	M	Newspaper and Online	Reporter/Weather Blogger	Baltimore, MD
M4	M	Newspaper and Online	Tech Reporter	Baltimore, MD
M5	F	TV Political News	Desk Producer	Washington , DC
M6	M	Online Publication	Managing Editor/Freelance Writer	Baltimore, MD
M7	M	TV News	Sports Director	Albany, NY
M8	M	Newspaper	Copy Chief	New York, NY
M9	M	Magazine and Newspaper	Freelance Writer	Boston, MA
M10	M	TV News	Assignment Editor	Baltimore, MD
M11	M	TV News	Assignment Editor	Baltimore,

				MD
M12	M	TV News	Producer	Albany, NY
M13	F	Newspaper and Online	Society Reporter	Baltimore, MD
M14	M	TV News	Program Director	Albany, NY

**Participant recruitment and access.** Media and public relations professionals were identified through convenience sampling in order to obtain a large quantity and wide array of participants. Using convenience sampling made recruitment more successful. Initial points of contact for the sampling were colleagues in the public relations field, contacts through prior education and acquaintances. Participants were contacted over email with a brief description of the study and an invitation to participate. Subsequent emails were used to schedule times and dates for interviews. IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval was obtained before beginning any interviews.

#### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data was collected over the phone and in person. Phone interviews used speakerphone and a laptop for recording. In-person interviews used a laptop for recording as well. The fact that interviews were multi-modal proved to support the study in that participants were easily accessible and therefore more willing to participate openly and freely. Also, using the phone as one method for interviews may have provided participants with a level of comfort, allowing them to be open and honest about their views.

Interviews lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes and were transcribed through note-taking to identify themes in results. Transcription was done by replaying each interview and writing down relevant results and themes. Themes between participants were then compared and used to generate results and discussion.

For example, the current study asked both parties about media pitching (among other topics). The researcher went through each participant's interview recording to report each response to the questions on the topic. Once complete, the researcher condensed responses of each participant from a given party into a more comparable list. The list was used as a basis for comparison and trend identification. Once these trends and conclusions were identified, the researcher referred back to more detailed responses to produce comprehensive results and discussion.

### **Interview Protocol (Instrument)**

A semi-structured and exploratory interview structure was used for the current study. A total of 13 interview questions were asked, with various follow up discussions used in order to further develop responses and thoughts. Two versions of the interview were created – one for media and one for public relations. The questions were the same but in reference to each party's profession. A goal of each interview was to use a conversational, fluid structure that allowed participants to express their opinions freely, without much regulation. Questions covered topics including demographics, professional information, and opinions on the other party in terms of professionalism, news generation and media pitching. Examples and elaborations were sought out to illustrate opinions and responses. The interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

A thematic analysis was done to identify themes and trends in results. Themes were identified in the interviews by replaying them multiple times and taking and comparing notes to establish similarities and differences. This information helped to uncover interesting results. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), a thematic analysis is

a flexible and accessible form of analysis that is increasing in popularity. Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that thematic analysis is also suited for qualitative research – therefore fitting with the current study. The current thematic method also uncovers interesting results without transcribing each entire interview. Analysis of the recorded notes and themes can help to produce the results and discussion sections. This strategy was evident when identifying the language used to describe aspects of the relationship. Notes were taken that recorded specific words used when answering questions. These notes produced interesting trends in repeated instances of words, such as “access,” “untailored,” and “gotcha story.” From these trends, a number of themes and results were found.

### **Results**

To begin the study, participants on both sides were asked to describe the relationship between PR and media professionals. These descriptions helped both set the tone for the topic of the interviews and serve as the groundwork for research.

Public relations participants’ responses broke down into a few main points. The majority of public relations professionals used phrases like love-hate, give-and-take, good and bad, collaborative and co-dependent to describe the relationship. Others however, called the relationship fragile (P12) or even said the relationship was uneven, with media having the upper hand (P10). P8 described this feeling of unevenness by stating that “PR wouldn’t exist without media, but media relies on PR more than they’re willing to admit.”

Many media participants echoed public relations professionals’ explanations of the relationship between public relations and media professionals, using words like

symbiotic, good and bad, and mutually beneficial. Other media participants agreed that the relationship can be good and bad, but were much more descriptive of negative aspects of the relationship than positive. With some descriptions leaning more negative and some more positive, an overwhelming trend was that media's description of the relationship truly "depends," on a case-to-case basis.

Participants from both professions largely agreed on the conceptualization of news. Explanations like timely, important and of interest to a large group of people were commonly used when asked to define news.

On both sides, the beginnings of trends in views on the relationship were developing. These trends continued to develop through the interviews and are identified under the following results and discussion.

### **Roles in Setting the Agenda for News Coverage**

Results to the first two research questions of the study were sought out in two ways during the interviews. First, participants on both sides were asked how many pitches a media professional receives in a given day on average. Next, they were asked how many of those pitches they think affect what gets covered in the news. After providing these "statistical" estimates, participants were asked to elaborate on whether that number is representative of the effect each party has in setting the agenda for news coverage.

**RQ1: What are public relations professionals' judgments of media professionals' role in setting the agenda for news coverage?** Interviews with the PR professionals revealed two schools of thought on media professionals' role in setting the agenda for news. The feeling that public relations affect was lower than media's was

prevalent, as well as some trends in the reasons for their views.

*Statistical results.* Participants' estimates of how many pitches a media pro receives in a given day were widely varied. P14, P13 and P1 estimated from 30 to as low as five, when P2, P9 and P11 estimated in the hundreds. Many participants, including P12 and P3, made a distinction between journalists that work for trade publications, major newspapers, smaller newspapers and TV. Others, like P3, P4, P7 and P8 could not give an estimate on the number, citing the range of publications and reporter coverage beats as their reasons. P8 called it "an impossible number," and P12 said "there are just so many variables." Some of the variables mentioned by P12, P3, P5 and others were the different beats, publications and interests or style of the journalist.

When asked about how many of those pitches affect what is covered in the news, two distinct schools of thought were revealed. The more prevalent trend reported the amount of pitches affecting the news to be low. P1, P3, P10 and P14 estimated the statistic to be around 10%. P11 estimated even lower, saying that "1% would be generous." Other interviewees, including P1, P2, P6, and P13 estimated that somewhere around 20% to 30% of pitches to a reporter on a given day affect the generation of news. This represented the belief that media control the generation of news to a higher degree than public relations from a numbers standpoint.

Conversely, a smaller but significant number of participants, including P4, P5, P7 and P9 estimated that around 50% of the pitches received by a reporter in a given day affect what is covered in the news. This represented the belief that, from a numbers standpoint, media control the generation of news to a more equal degree when compared with PR professionals.

*Elaborations and reasoning.* The two schools of thought (low PR effect vs. nearer equal effect) generally remained when asked to elaborate and provide reasoning for the above statistical estimates.

Themes in elaborations and reasoning for the statistical view that PR has a low effect were identified as media's unavoidable control and problems with media pitches.

*Control: they have the pen.* P3's reason for the estimate of a lower effect was that "journalists have the pen and they affect the news to a very large degree." This idea proved to be a trend in the reasoning coming from those in the "lower effect" school of thought. P14 said, "media are the gatekeepers" when asked to provide reasoning. P14 described PR professionals as "professional recommenders or agents." P1 agreed with this idea, calling media the "decision makers about what runs" in the news, and that "they have the upper hand" when compared to PR professionals. P14 elaborated further, stating that media pitching is similar to selling something and that one should "use the same stats as phone solicitations" when looking at it.

P8 and P10 made the distinction between the generation and the creation of news. P10 said "I think media pros have 100% affect on the news, they write it and produce it." P10 followed up by saying "PR has something closer to a 10% affect, sometimes a pitch is good, sometimes it gets ignored." Both P8 and P10 said that media affects the *creation* of news 100%. P11 mentioned that media professionals have "limited bandwidth, like we all do," and that media professionals "aren't just sitting at their desks waiting for a pitch to roll in so they can yay or nay them." Instead, "they are also operating from their own agenda, as it should be."

*Media pitching issues.* The belief that there is a serious issue with how media

pitching is done was another trend identified with public relations participants. The main issue identified was the idea of mass-spamming media pitches to a long list of media professionals. P13 justified the statistical view of public relations' lesser affect than media by saying "a lot of PR firms are focused more on quantity than on quality when it comes to pitching media." This focus on quantity was highlighted by P11 as well, who said that the "proliferation of media directory software" has made it "easy to blast out pitches to reporters, knowing nothing about them." P11 went on and called the "dial-for-dollars approach" to media pitching that some PR agencies adopt ineffective.

P1 assumed that media professionals "probably get a lot of pitches that are not applicable to them." P12 said "I've talked to reporters, and they get some *bad* pitches." P14's reasoning proves to be an effective summary of this trend in research, stating that "I think there is an epidemic of bad PR practice with people taking the 'let's throw as much up and see what sticks' approach. That is a very poor form of marketing."

The primary theme in elaborations on the statistical view that PR has a more equal effect on the news when compared to media was that PR fills a need.

*Media's need.* Public relations professionals that thought the effect on the news was more even between public relations and media professionals provided reasoning associated with the media's need for content and information. P4 acknowledged that public relations can't control everything, but said it was about 50-50 because "most political figures or companies have some kind of [PR] representation and they are plugging to control the message as much as they can." P9 agreed, saying, "PR firms are promoting what their clients are doing, and without that, media professionals would have no idea what is going on beyond breaking news."

*More to the effect.* When looking at the media's effect on setting the agenda for news, one trend was consistent across a large portion of public relations participants from both of the above viewpoints – there is more to public relations' role in setting the agenda for news than simple pitch-success statistics represent.

Participants who saw public relations professionals' effect on the news as being much lower than media professionals' acknowledged that there is more to the effect than only focusing on pitches. According to P10:

Good PR is increasing the awareness of a client to the media in hopes of generating coverage down the road. If nine media pitches don't work and the 10<sup>th</sup> does, the 10<sup>th</sup> might have only worked because of the first nine that didn't.

P3 felt this way as well, saying that while public relations professionals' affect on the news is significantly less than journalists, "journalists' jobs would be a lot more difficult without public relations professionals." P6 said "I think there is more to it, for sure," in reference to whether or not the statistical representation of public relations' effect on the news was accurate.

Other participants, including those who believed there is a more equal effect on the generation of the news, agreed that there was more to it than only the pitching statistics. P5 referred to the value public relations professionals bring with their access to experts. P12 also mentioned experts and the general understanding of the industry that a public relations professional might promote. P12 stated, "the biggest contribution PR can bring to a reporter is knowledge."

Overall, results in the form of estimated pitching statistics produced two schools of thought – a near equal role in affecting the news between media and public relations,

and media having a much more significant role in that effect than public relations. The majority of participants felt that media had an edge in this regard. When asked for elaborations and reasoning on these estimates, trends were revealed that remained consistent with the two trends in viewpoints. However, upon further discussion, a large majority of participants under both viewpoints acknowledged that there is more to the effect on the news (specifically public relations' effect) than the estimated pitching statistics portray.

**RQ2: What are media professionals' judgments of public relations professionals' role in setting the agenda for news coverage?** Broadly, media participants estimated the number of pitches or story ideas received from public relations professionals that end up affecting the news agenda to be low. When asked to elaborate on this number, trends were revealed in both reasoning and factors come into play when looking at the news agenda. Media participants acknowledged that public relations professionals have a role in affecting the news above and beyond the act (and reported statistic) of media pitching. A smaller number of participating media professionals stood by their indicated pitching statistic, stating that that number was representative of the role public relations professionals play in setting the agenda for news.

*Statistical results.* When asked how many pitches the average media professional received in a given day, most media professionals spoke of how difficult a question it was to answer. M5 said it depends on the publication. M9 said it depends on the beat (topic of coverage). Participants were up front about the fact that their experiences could sway their estimates when it came to media pitching.

Responses widely varied when pressed for an estimate on the average number of

pitches received in a given day. M14, M13, M7, M4, M3 and M2 put the number at 20 pitches or lower. M10 and M11 were at the other extreme, putting the number, based on their experience, at 180 pitches. All other participants' responses fell between 20 and 180, with the majority of estimates sitting around 50 pitches a day.

Media professionals tended to indicate that a low number of media pitches from public relations professionals affect the agenda for news. When converted into a percentage, all but one participant estimated less than 30% of pitches a day affected the agenda for news. M12 was the exception, putting the effect at nearly equal. However, the general estimation was significantly lower than this, with M1, M4, M5, M7, M9, M10, M11 and M12 estimating well below 10%. M4 called it "very rare" for even one pitch to affect news coverage on a given day. M3 admitted, "there are so many that I ignore," when it comes to media pitches. M9 elaborated on this gloomy perspective on public relations professionals' effect through media pitching, saying, "one or two pitches might get my attention and I will save them and do some research, but in the end, probably neither one of them will pan out." M13 and M14 felt they could not put an accurate number on how many media pitches affect the agenda for news.

***Elaborations and reasoning.*** Media professionals revealed a number of trends when asked to elaborate and provide reasons for their views and statistical estimates on public relations professionals' role in setting the agenda for news. Trends included issues with pitching, the need for trust and relationships, and the acknowledgement that there is more to the affect of public relations professionals on the news agenda than the statistical estimates of media pitching.

***Media pitching issues.*** Nearly all media participants mentioned problems with

media pitches as a factor in explaining the role of public relations in affecting the news agenda. M1 explained the problem by saying “there is a difference between a quality PR pitch and what amounts to a mass email.” The lack of relevancy was a point brought up by many when mentioning pitching issues. M5 said, “PR often sends a pitch to an entire list even though it doesn’t apply to half the people on it.” M6 elaborated on this point, saying, “most of the people approaching me didn’t take the time to know what might be relevant.” Similarly, M4 said a lot of media pitches were similar to cold calls and therefore were ineffective.

M2, M3, M10 and M11 explained that a large portion of pitches they receive are not localized enough or are too focused on a product. According to M10, “we get pitches from people we don’t even open emails from because they aren’t from our area.” M11 echoed this feeling, calling localization an issue, and that “we try to keep everything as local as possible.” M3 explained that some pitches received “seem more like self-promoting.”

*Trust and relationships.* A good portion of media professionals mentioned the need for trust and the power of a good relationship when it comes to relations between media and public relations professionals. These factors were described as necessary ways for media to use public relations effectively and more frequently.

M14 explained, “news departments by nature are extremely skeptical of everything – especially releases.” M4 built on this trend, saying “it is hard for me to trust a release if I don’t know you or have never written about you before.” M13 spoke of the implication a quality release can have - “if I get a good press release about an event, chances are there is some more organization behind the event – it’s going to be more well

done.” M8 also alluded to trust, saying that it having an “in” with media is helpful – specifically citing media professionals who now work in public relations, but have that level of trust with former colleagues.

Participants broadly considered having relationships with good public relations professionals to be an important part of what they do. M12 called establishing a relationship crucial to media relations, saying a media pitch will be more legitimate if a media person knows whom it is pitching them. M6 gave details of where established relationships can benefit, saying “if you have a PR person you have a good relationship with, it makes sense that you’d go to them when they have access to something you need. It’s easy.” M5 called the dynamic to be “very relationship heavy,” and M9 said it is not about the “beautifully crafted pitch.” Instead, it’s about having “somebody whose news judgment and honesty I can respect.” M11 stated, “I cherish the [PR pros] that are good at what they do.” M10 similarly stated that “good PR pros win the hearts of media – we can then try and make a weaker pitch work for our coverage.”

*More to it.* A large majority of media participants explained that there is more to the relationship and the effect public relations professionals have on the news agenda than simply media pitching. M2 and M9 were exceptions, saying that they believe the statistical estimates were representative. Interestingly, both M2 and M9 identified public relations statistical effect on the news agenda to be very low. M9 stated that public relations affects the news agenda “very little.”

However, the majority of media participants anecdotally described the effect public relations professionals have on the news agenda as higher than the statistical estimates represent. M3 explained that the access to experts and coordinating of

interviews are other important factors in looking at public relations' effect – saying that those items “sort of outweigh the pitching issues.” M7 emphasized the reliance on public relations, saying “we rely on PR so much, for information, play-by-play info and game notes.” M6 gave public relations credit, and said “PR has a large role in what ultimately gets covered in news.”

M12 credited media pitching, saying “PR people come into play with stories that aren't obvious,” echoing the opinion given by P9 in RQ1. M13 called the effect to be important, while M5 thought public relations has much more an effect than the media pitching statistical estimates.

Nearly all media professionals estimated the effect of public relations professionals from a media pitching statistical standpoint to be low. However, when asked to elaborate, media professionals tended to say there was more to the effect than what media pitching statistics represent. The main trend in reasoning for lower estimates was problems with media pitches themselves. Relationships and trust were identified as important factors when affecting the news agenda as a public relations professional. A few participants' results were outliers, by either giving public relations professionals significantly less or more credit in affecting the news agenda, both statistically and anecdotally.

### **Judgments of Professionalism**

Research questions three and four were aimed at understanding how each party judges the other's professionalism. For the current study, the idea of professionalism was broken down into three traits – ethics, commitment to profession, and clarity. These

aspects fall in line with Sallot et al.'s (1998) description of professionalism, mentioned in the above introduction.

**RQ3: What are public relations professionals' judgments of media professionals' professionalism?** Results show that the overwhelming judgment from public relations professionals on media professionals' professionalism was good. Trends in results were revealed as participants began elaborating on their opinions and identifying some exceptions to what they generally found to be good professionalism.

*Ethics.* Twelve of fourteen public relations participants considered media professionals to have good or acceptable ethics. P8 could not remember any instances where there was a lack of ethics, and P7 called all ethically questionable experiences outliers. P6 agreed, saying that when mistakes might be made in the press, they are corrected. P5, P9 and P12 all identified the ethics of media professionals to be pretty good. P12 went on and said "the integrity of reporters have been pretty good." P10 agreed, saying that media professionals have high ethics and that there has never been a problem.

P13 and P2 disagreed with the majority's assessments, calling the ethics to be generally not good. P2 said "I'm saddened by the ethics you see out there" and mentioned fact checking as one issue. P13 elaborated on the difficulty for media to stay objective, saying there are "very few journalists who I think can hold onto their integrity through their careers and not be affected by external factors, including relationships, upbringing, etc." P13 continued, saying that it is common for the media to "capitalize on somebody's pain to get a story," and that "ratings can affect the ethics of media professionals very quickly. An example was provided to support question of capitalization on one's pain. In

it, P13 discussed a news network (also P13's old employer) that stopped at nothing to interview a parent who had tragically lost a son.

*"Gotcha" story and fact-checking.* Both of these items proved to be trends that were identified as the normal exceptions to what participants found to be generally good ethics on the part of media professionals. P11 explained that reporters often seem to have agendas. P11 provided an example where a reporter set up an interview with a client based on one premise, when they "really wanted to write a critique of the non-profit sector." P12 also mentioned that some reporters are "always looking for that gotcha story," and that "that's fine, you know who they are."

Fact-checking was another detail that public relations professionals found to sometimes suffer with media. P9 said reporters don't seem to always do fact checking because of the immediacy of news, providing the example of NBC News mistakenly reporting the death of Neil Young rather than Neil Armstrong in late August. P14 elaborated on the perceived lack of commitment to media, saying that fact-checking often suffered as a result. According to P12, "it's a rare thing to read a news story a reporter as written and say 'they got it all right'." Similarly to P9, P12 did not attribute this to ill-intent, but rather to a lack of time and knowledge. P10 also mentioned that misquotes do happen from time to time.

*Commitment to profession.* The overwhelming trend in results found participants calling media professionals very committed to their professions. P10 called them incredibly committed, saying "I don't think people that are in media are casually in media because there is nothing better." P5 agreed, calling them very committed because "journalists don't make a lot of money, so I think they have to really love it in order to do

it.” P3 believed that media professionals take their jobs seriously.

P12 also found that media professionals are very committed to their craft. P12 provided an example of a time a client was on an interview and being asked very detailed and diligent questions. After the interview, when P12’s client complained and commented on the extensive level of questioning, P12 defended the reporter, saying, “I thought [the reporter’s] dedication was terrific!” After further explanation, P12’s client understood and also appreciated the reporter’s diligence. P11 and P12 said this level of commitment is not overly surprising given that media professionals tend to be curious by nature. Other participants calling media very committed included P7, P6 and P4. P9 and P2 found media professionals to be somewhat committed on the whole, with P2 believing younger professionals had lower commitment levels. P12 and P2 all mentioned the existence of an ego in many media professionals. P14 served as the main outlier, saying that less than 50% of media professionals were truly committed to their craft.

*Leaving media.* When discussing commitment levels in media, a number of participants mentioned the state of the media industry and the fact that many are looking to leave or have already left. P14 explained “there are a lot of jaded journalists out there: young people coming into the industry who are at mercy of their editors rather than focusing on the craft.” P14 provided a direct example, mentioning having spoken with a media pro recently that was leaving media to go into public relations.

P4 mentioned seeing many journalists leave their field for public relations. Both P4 and P5 mentioned the low level of pay as a possible factor. P11 and P14 mentioned a shrinking media industry or doubts on the future of the business, respectively. P12 agreed, saying the industry was “dying” and that “newspaper guys are trying to get out of

the industry” for that reason.

P13 and P2 serve as direct examples of this shift, being one-time media professionals. When asked for reasons, P13 mentioned being discouraged by some of media’s ruthless desire to get a story – to the point where ethics were sometimes strained. P2 also used to work in media and gave a near identical reason for moving to the public relations side. P2 said that it felt as though “I was helping tear apart a community with stories that didn’t need to be told.”

*Clarity.* Clarity was a topic that split a little more evenly as far as participants’ evaluations. After analyzing results, the slight majority found media professionals to be more clear than unclear. P9 called media pretty clear, and said being clear about how media prefers to receive pitches is the most important. P5 mentioned the lack of time in the industry as a factor for why media professionals tend to be very clear. P3 followed suit and called media “very good communicators.” P1 and P14 found the clarity of media professionals to be a bit more in the middle – giving the slight edge to being more clear than not. P1 called media professionals clear and said they tend not to “lead on” public relations professionals.

Some participants negatively evaluated media professionals’ clarity. P7 found them to be ambiguous and said they do not make promises. P13 also took issue with media professionals’ clarity, saying that media “can’t say PR pros won’t take no for an answer because media leaves the door open” with a lack of clarity. P14 said that the younger media were usually the reasons for any lack of clarity.

*Lack of feedback.* Providing a lack of feedback or being evasive were the most common complaints from those who positively judged media’s clarity when discussing

exceptions as well as those who judged clarity negatively. P10 said media can sometimes be evasive when “trying to get what they want or get a good story.” However, P10 said this was not an issue, and that “it’s no different than anybody else in any other business – playing games to get what they want.”

P13 stated “you never get feedback – that’s why it’s unclear.” P8, who found media to generally be clear, said that media might be evasive, but they are still clear. In elaboration, P8 said this evasiveness was not an issue:

The media don’t make promises, and why would they? As in any business, you’re silly to make promises. With media, you can get bumped at any minute, so they aren’t going to promise anything.

As previously stated, P9 explained that hearing back from media helps public relations professionals learn to pitch properly. P4 said there are “slight irritations with a lack of response to emails or calls. The sheer volume of pitches was an assumed reason provided by P4 for this.

***Responsibility on PR side.*** One striking result of the current research question was that some public relations professionals thought the onus for professionalism, ethics and clarity were truly on the side of public relations over media. P14 summarized this viewpoint in regards to clarity - “We’re the one’s doing the selling – it’s on us to be clear about that interaction.” P6 also put the responsibility for clarity on the public relations professionals, saying that “media can only work with what they are given.” P3 made the same point on the topic of ethics, saying “the possibility of questionable ethics is more likely in public relations than in media.”

Overall, public relations professionals usually found media professionals to have high professionalism. Ethics and commitment were especially consistent in results, with clarity ending up a bit more split. Participants elaborated on their views of media professionals' professionalism, producing a number of trends. While professionalism was generally considered high, trends in some complaints or exceptions were revealed, including a lack of feedback, media's desire for a "gotcha story" and a lack of fact-checking. Additionally, a group of participants commented on professionals leaving media to go into public relations, and stated that the responsibility of professionalism often lies on the side of the public relations professional.

**RQ4: What are media professionals' judgments of public relations professionals' professionalism?** Media professionals' results fell in line with those of public relations professionals, reporting that professionalism on the part of public relations professionals tended to be high. A few noteworthy trends were revealed in how media professionals go about judging public relations professionals' professionalism as well as the few issues or complaints that were identified.

*Ethics.* Media professionals found that the ethics of public relations professionals were predominantly positive. Not one media professional found that public relations professionals had unacceptable ethics. All results were reported as positive or mediocre to "varying."

M11 found public relations professionals to be ethical, and added, "we do think about what is ethical quite often." Further, according to M1, "we have a standard of story we need to meet. If we do something unacceptable, it will come back to us." M10 called the ethics good as well, saying that they are not really misled by public relations

professionals. M1 said it is “very rare to come across anything unethical or unprofessional” with a public relations professional. M2 said public relations professionals’ ethics are completely positive. M7 gave them a seven out of 10 on ethics. M9, a participant who tended to be harder on public relations professionals, found that ethics were never part of the issue. M8 and M4 were other participants who reported positive ethics on the part of public relations professionals.

Other media participants found the ethics of public relations professionals to be a bit more mediocre. M5 was one participant that was a bit more tempered with an ethics evaluation, saying “obviously they are selling a product or person,” but they do a pretty good job. M13 found that ethics also were pretty good for the most part, but that “they toe the line.” Additionally, M13 said “both sides require some level of ego, and that ego can get in the way on both sides.” M6 felt that “when you get into the nature of influence and promoting things, it’s very easy for things to become sketchy.” However, M6 said that public relations professionals toe the line of ethics but do not cross it.

M12 and M14 were a bit less committal in their reporting of ethics. M14 said it runs the gamut, and that “I would need to know the individual’s endgame and goals” in order to form an accurate judgment on ethics. M12 similarly stated “I don’t want to paint the entire industry with one brush.”

*Clip counting.* One trend identified when asking media professionals about ethics was the perception that public relations professionals were more focused on the quantity of clips rather than affecting the news. This trend was framed as an exception to what media professionals broadly evaluated as good ethics on the part of public relations professionals. M3 mentioned that it is easy to tell “when [public relations professionals]

are just trying to get a clip to add to the list.” For example, M3 recalled a couple of times when a public relations professional has been “bugging” him. After mentioning the situation to a colleague, M3 was told that the same thing was happening to them, from the same public relations professional. Their conclusion was that the public relations professional must get paid per clip.

M6 somewhat agreed with this assessment, saying “too much PR is placement-only focused,” and that “good PR doesn’t just want a release to be run, they want to figure out how their client can be put into a conversation where they fit in the news.” When discussing the topic of public relations professional’ professionalism, M9 gave an effective summary of this sort of concern on the part of media - “I suspect a lot of PR people spend time creating reports to their bosses saying how often they sent ideas out. That doesn’t help me and it doesn’t help them.” M12 also speculated that there might be an obligation to bosses that affects a lot of public relations practice.

***Commitment to profession.*** Most media professionals evaluated the level of commitment public relations professionals had to their profession as high. M8 called them definitely committed – “public relations professionals will often go the extra mile to help a reporter.” M3 had a similar assessment and spoke to the fact that others in media might not feel the same way – “some media are more cynical about PR than I am – they think they can’t trust them.” M1 and M4 pointed out a difference between the commitment levels of local public relations professionals and national public relations professionals. M4 said that “the regional PR pros we work with are generally understanding – they do the research to understand what I’m writing,” and that “what I find ineffective are the national pitches spearheaded by out-of-towners.” This result was

related to mentions of some national and untargeted pitches. M5 also found them to be committed and noted that many have a high level of experience.

*Clarity.* Evaluations of public relations professionals' clarity were either adequate or good. While a number of complaints surfaced through discussions on the clarity of public relations professionals, overall evaluations were not considered to be negative by media professionals. M3 said public relations professionals had good clarity, and that "sometimes they're better than the source itself." This directly aligned with P12's belief that the most important thing a public relations professional can offer the media is knowledge. M2, M13 and M7 also found public relations professionals to be clear.

Other participants found public relations professionals' clarity to be in the middle. M14 said it depends, and that often times, those with less experience are unclear. M11 also found clarity to be mediocre, mentioning that sometimes it can be difficult to find the date or important information in the release. In elaboration, M11 said "sometimes PR people will call and say 'what do I need to put in the release?' it's like.. really?". M10 called clarity to be "fine" on the whole, but said that sometimes releases can be too long – citing an example of receiving a seven-page release.

*PR responsiveness.* Responsiveness was one aspect of clarity that a number of media professionals brought up. M5 said that when she responds to a pitch with interest or questions, answers usually come back quickly. M5 elaborated, saying, "if I respond, and they don't get back to me, I'm going to find somebody who will." M9 told a story of a time he was writing a national story on education. For the story he reached out to a small community college to be included and did not hear back in two days. M9 was shocked and annoyed by this, saying, "if you don't get back to me like that in two days,

I'll go find somebody else.” While M3's assessment of public relations professionals' clarity was positive, he said a main point of conflict is not hearing progress on a lead from a public relations professional when the media professional is on deadline.

*Legwork.* Interesting discussions occurred with both M9 and M13 on the topic of legwork on the part of public relations professionals. Interestingly, these two participants had exactly opposite views on what is good practice on the part of the public relations professional. M13 discussed being pitched an event by a public relations professional, who says “I can give you the source's number.” M13 responded poorly to this, saying, “Don't make me do the legwork for something you are selling me. You set up the interview – you get them in touch – don't tell me to track them down.” However, M9 brought up a similar situation with the opposite opinion, saying, “I get emails saying ‘I have someone you can talk to for your story, send me your number, and I'll email them, and I'll get their number and specific availability and email it back to you.’” M9 hated this sequence of communication, saying, “Just give me their contact info,” and that good public relations professionals understand that a media prof will not bother if they make them jump through those hoops.

*Underwhelmed.* M2 and M11 mentioned the few times they were left underwhelmed after following through on a media pitch. However, neither attributed the lack of follow-through to ill intent from the public relations professional. M11 explained that it is unfortunate when “you are promised a room full of people” and it does not pan out. M2 gave an example of a time he followed through on a restaurant opening press conference. The restaurant ended up not being a big deal at all and was only a part of a larger announcement. M2 said that this one time, he called that public relations person

and said “please don’t do that to us again.” These results correlate with media’s strong emphasis on the importance of trust and relationships, found in RQ2.

*Access.* The ability to reach sources or public relations professionals when needed was a strong trend in results for the current study. Media professionals across the board tended to mention access as an exception to what they called generally good professionalism. The majority of references to access issues were accompanied by mention of “controversial” stories. This fact correlates directly with public relations professionals’ mention of attempts at a “gotcha story” as an exception to generally positive ethics on the part of media professionals – as indicated in RQ3.

As M4 put it, “PR pros will often come to me and want me to write something about them, but when I come with a controversial idea, they back off.” M4 summarized this situation by saying, “if you want to play the media game (as a PR pro), you have to be responsive or you will be ignored.” M7 agreed, giving an example of a time earlier in the year when a university public relations professional tried to talk him out of running a story until two days later. M7 went on to provide a truly detailed look into what it’s like on the side of media in these situations:

I’ll have done so many positive stories, and *now* when something is controversial we’re having a hard time getting to first base. It can’t always be positive, sorry.

It’s not always positive. Sometimes there are negative stories, and we (the media) still need you (PR) to be cooperative.

M7 went on to talk about the tension that comes out of going around a public relations professional to reach a source. M10 also mentioned the tension from access, but said it is normally the case with public information officers and not with public relations

professionals.

M1 alluded to access issues when saying that some public relations professionals “play favorites with news outlets when it comes to breaking news stories.” M2 mentioned that at times, coverage is provided in order to maintain access to a source.” M10 also defended media when it came to the need for access, saying that “PR pros haven’t walked in our shoes and think we are out to get them.”

Based on RQ4 results, media professionals found the professionalism of public relations professionals to be generally high. After saying that things were broadly positive, media professionals seemed to be reminded of some problems with professionalism. While many made a point to say those problems were more rare than not, trends were found in mentions of some problems, including access, responsiveness and clip counting.

### **Media Pitching Evaluations**

The two following research questions, RQ5 and RQ6, asked participants to evaluate media pitching. Before doing so, participants were asked to identify where they thought the main point of conflict or tension existed.

**RQ5: How do public relations professionals evaluate media pitching?** Public relations professionals’ evaluations of media pitching were strikingly negative. Trends were revealed in the reasons given for this evaluation as well as what public relations professionals thought were the important aspects of media pitches.

***Main point of conflict.*** Before being asked to evaluate media pitching or even bringing up media pitching, participants were asked where they thought the main point of conflict existed in the relationship between media professionals and public relations

professionals. Results often pointed to media pitching. Ten of the fourteen participants mentioned or alluded to pitching when discussing the main point of conflict or tension. The mentions had to do with their lack of feedback or low quality. P3 said the main point of tension was public relations professionals over-pitching, or pitching stories “without a hook.” P4 cited the “exhaustion of pitches.” P6 said “it feels like I’m bombarding” with pitches, and that one sometimes feels like they need to “walk on eggshells around reporters.” P12 felt that “often, PR people don’t know what a good story is.” P10, P4, P13 and P7 mentioned not getting responses from pitches or the feeling that a pitch should have worked when it did not – pointing to a lack of responsiveness on the part of media professionals as a trend in what public relations professionals called the main point of conflict.

The interesting outlying opinion on the main point of tension came from P8, who said, “I’m aware of the idea of tension between PR and media, but I don’t think that exists.” In elaboration, P8 admitted that some could call the point of interruption tension. However, his view was that interruption happens in all forms of business, so it would not make sense to emphasize tension in this professional relationship any more than in others.

**Evaluations.** A negative evaluation of media pitching was given by twelve of the fourteen participants, with the remaining two evaluating media pitching as in the middle. Not one public relations professional evaluated media pitching positively. “Crap” was the most common word used to describe the quality of media pitches. P8 said “I know media gets bombarded with crap that doesn’t relate to them,” and P12 said, “I talk to reporters, and they get some *bad* pitches.” P9 and P5 evaluated media pitching at the medium level. However, both acknowledged issues with the craft, including a lack of relevancy.

Below are trends identified in participants' explanations of their negative evaluations of media pitching.

*Irrelevant and pitch blasts.* The most common issues identified with media pitching by public relations professionals were that they often were irrelevant and sent to a long list of media contacts without any tailoring. P13 said, "it's easy to create a mass template and shoot it out to everybody." P4 thought that was the wrong way to go, and that "I never think you should ever blast anyone." P14 felt this way as well, saying, "people are taking the 'let's throw as much up and see what sticks' approach, and that is a very poor form of marketing." P14 continued, saying that pitching has "turned into a numbers game that says let's just take a pitch and blast it out. I don't like that approach."

This sort of result became more and more prevalent as interviews went on. P10 gave examples of sending press releases to lists of 200 media professionals, a situation to which he said "come on, there aren't 200 people who are going to write a story." P11 called a lot of the pitches that are sent "generic." In regard to media pitching, P2 said "most are canned and not about real people," and P7 said they are not targeted enough. P8 also addressed that media likely gets a high quantity of pitches that do not relate to them. P4, P5, P6 and P9 and P11 all cited time as a factor contributing to the lower quality of pitches. For example, P11 said "there is less time for staff to follow through on pitches." Also, P9 said public relations often don't have time to read about every journalist they pitch, similar to how the media don't have time to read through all of the pitches they receive.

*Stretching and response.* Some participants mentioned how at times, it feels as though they are stretching for a story with some pitches they send. According to P5,

“sometimes you have to pitch the media to keep the client happy.” P5 continued, saying that clients are generally advised when the pitch will not work, but clients say to do it anyway. P12 addressed this situation directly, saying “PR people are afraid to push back on their marketing people, so they are in that awkward position of pitching something they know is not really a good story.” P2 also admitted that “sometimes it feels like I’m stretching,” with a pitch, but said he is up front with the media about that. P4 mentioned a similar dynamic, describing it as “pressure from the client to follow up for a yes or no” on media pitches. According to P4, that is where journalists get irritated.

The desire for a response from media professionals on media pitches was evident in interviews with public relations professionals. P4 did say, “if journalists said no, there probably wouldn’t be this much of a struggle.” P13 felt the exact same way, saying, “it’s pretty frustrating when you’ve spent all this time on a pitch and nobody gives you the time of day.” In elaboration, P13 called it unfair for a media professional to complain about bombardment when “they leave the door open.” P6 said it was public relations professionals’ job to follow up until receiving an answer to a pitch.” According to P8, however, “it’s not their job to accomplish my goals,” in reference to media. Interestingly, P13 said, “media going after a story is pretty much the same thing as pitching but in a different format.”

*Serious industry problem.* A group of participants followed up their negative evaluations of media pitching by calling this issue a very serious problem with the industry of public relations. P14 called the low quality of pitching “an epidemic, and I think it has hurt our industry significantly.” P1 had a similar assessment, saying that the media “probably gets a lot of crap,” and that that gives public relations professionals a

bad image. P12 built on this trend in results, calling the current state of pitching “a fatal mistake and it is hard to recover from that with a reporter.” P12 also called it “a matter of irrational exuberance on our part. P10 also called the current state of media pitching a problem with the industry. He said it makes media have a harder time finding stories and public relations professionals have a harder time establishing relationships when they are mis-pitching.

Participants also recognized that pitching is a crucial point in the relationship between media and public relations professionals. P6 said, “some might not think a media pitch is the most important material, but it is.” P3 also had this mindset, saying, “I don’t think PR pros pay enough attention to pitching. It’s a hated thing to do, but it’s a critical point where the two professions interact.”

A lack of training for junior employees was a factor brought up when explaining why bad media pitching happened and why it was an industry problem. P3 pointed out that the most savvy public relations professionals are not pitching the stories. Instead, the pitching role goes to “the lesser skilled or newer people at a PR firm.” P4 also commented on this issue, saying there does not seem to be enough time at public relations agencies to train junior employees in media pitching.

The extent to which public relations professionals negatively evaluated media pitches was incredibly high. Many called the majority of pitches unacceptably bad. A large majority of the critiques of pitches had to do with the fact that pitches were often sent as mass blasts and they were irrelevant to what a media professional was covering. A number of public relations professionals recalled times where it felt as though they were stretching with a pitch, but they still desired responses from media. In the end, a good

portion of public relations professionals called these problems a very serious industry problem.

**RQ6: How do media professionals evaluate media pitching?** Results show media professionals' evaluations of media pitching being mostly negative. However, while the majority of media participants did evaluate pitching negatively, there was another group that found pitches to be average or positive. Trends were revealed in how media professionals evaluated media pitching.

*Main point of tension.* When media professionals were asked about the main point of conflict or tension in the relationship with public relations professionals, they were not overly focused on media pitching. In fact, only M2, M6 and M12 found pitching to be the main point of tension in the relationship. M6's explanation serves as a good summary for this perspective, saying, "nobody likes to be interrupted, and PR is interruption by nature." Despite these few references to pitching in regard to the main point of tension, the most common trend in responses focused again on access and communication.

M7 immediately mentioned access when asked about the main point of tension. As an example, M7 discussed how difficult it is when a media professional is on deadline and a sports team or source is not made available for an extended period of time. M3 similarly said the main point on tension is "when you need somebody (a source) quick, and they don't get back to you when you're on deadline." M4 also identified access as the main issue, describing the problem as "overbearing PR people who don't let their highly trained executives speak for themselves." M4 went on to say "a goal for me is to get authentic insight from executives without the PR filter." M1 reiterated her issue with

access as far as some public relations professionals “playing favorites” about who to give a story to.

M9 took issue with a lack of progress updating or responding from public relations professionals, saying, “at least tell me when you can’t get me the answer.” M3 also mentioned that a lack of communication from public relations professionals about progress on a story was a primary source of tension.

*Evaluations.* The majority of media professionals evaluated media pitching negatively, with the remaining participants splitting evenly with positive or average evaluations. M12 stated the negative view quite straightforwardly, “sometimes PR pros don’t know how to pitch.” M11 said, “I can’t tell you how many times you hear us say ‘they just don’t get it’ about a PR person.” M6 seemed to agree, saying, “I think approach and strategy and approach are huge problems.” M9 answered the question summarily, saying, “I don’t think PR pros are particularly good at what they do.” Other participants to evaluate pitches negatively included M2, M3, M4, M10.

There were a few positive evaluations of media pitching coming out of media professionals. While these were certainly outliers, they speak to the range of potential evaluations coming from the media side when looking at media pitching. M13 found most media pitches to be “pretty good,” and that “sometimes it can be a little pushy, but that’s okay.” M13 also pointed to the economic downturn as an explanatory factor contributing to the positive evaluation of pitches – saying that “when money got tight – PR was cut early, and now that money is used judiciously with people who know what they’re doing.” M7 also found pitches to be good for the most part, saying, “if it’s a good pitch, we’re most likely doing the story.” M8 found pitches to be mediocre and pretty

straightforward, and M5 gave them a grade of “B.”

As previously mentioned, a number of trends were identified in participants’ explanations of their negative evaluations of media pitching.

*Untailored.* The overwhelming trend in why negative evaluations were given was that pitches were often untailored and generic. The majority of those evaluating media pitching negatively mentioned the fact that they were not tailored as a reason. M1 said media professionals probably receive untailored “blanket pitches” 60% of the time. M10 felt similarly and spoke to a media professional’s typical reaction to them, saying “if it seems like you’re reading from a script when you’re pitching me, I’m tuning you out.” M3 found that the majority of pitches “aren’t related to what I cover or are just trying to promote a particular product,” and that public relations professionals “don’t necessarily pay attention to what I’ve written.” M4 also found that pitches were mostly sent to the wrong person.

Some participants responded with a level of annoyance in regard to the kinds of untailored pitches they receive. M4 expressed this annoyance, saying, “if they spent ten minutes on the Internet looking at what I write about, they’d know it (a pitch) works,” and that “we aren’t a part of your marketing strategy.” M9 felt that the majority of pitches were off topic, saying, “don’t waste my time,” in reference to public relations professionals. Additionally, M9 said, “persistence is not a virtue in PR. Going to the same person over and over with the same pitch because you haven’t heard back is just going to piss them off.” M5 seemed annoyed about untailored pitches as well, saying that she might know to whom an off-target pitch should go but will not forward it on to that appropriate contact. When asked why, M5 said “you couldn’t even look to see what kind

of show we do here.”

*Easy to identify.* Some media professionals that negatively evaluated pitches spoke about how bad pitches were easy to identify. M9 spoke to how easy it was to tell, saying many pitches “go straight to the trash from subject line.” M5 also found it very easy to identify bad pitches because they often have incorrect outlet names or reporter names. M14 found it easy to identify bad pitches, and that those that are not targeted are dismissed summarily. M14 pointed out that who a media pitch is sent to is an easy way to tell whether a pitch is of acceptable quality. As a Director of Operations for a TV station, M14 often knew that if a pitch was sent to him, it was likely untargeted and not worth attention.

M1 said it was very easy to tell when a media pitch is selling something. The biggest sign of this, according to M1, is when the product name is blatantly in the first sentence or if the name is in the release way too many times. M6 found it easy to distinguish between good or bad pitches as well, saying, “good pitches would make sense on a broader context.” Getting things that were completely out of the blue were seen as clear indicators for M6. M3 was another participant who said it was very easy to “identify pitches quickly as trash.”

*Not about “quality.”* A couple of media professionals made a point that their evaluation of media pitching was not necessarily based too much on the pitch’s quality. M11 felt that it was not about the quality of the media pitch. Instead, the substance was the most important part, saying, “the story needs to be the real pitch.” M9 also had this viewpoint when evaluating pitches, saying, “it’s not about writing the most beautiful pitch.” M9 gave an example to support this, describing a time where, for a story, he asked

university public relations professionals how many veterans went to their university. Many of them got back to him immediately with the clear answer. However, one public relations professional responded with an impressively crafted response – that did not answer the question that was asked. M9 used this example to say, it’s not about writing a beautiful pitch or response. Instead, it’s about being honest and straightforward with answering questions and getting information. M6 said “it’s really not that quality is the problem, it’s the strategy and the approach.”

*Choice of responding.* Media professionals had varying opinions on whether or not they should respond to media pitches. M2 thought he did a better job with responding than the rest of media. By way of explanation, M2 said:

For thoughtful, targeted pitches addressed to me, it’s always worth my time to respond directly and explain why that pitch isn’t working. This saves everyone a lot of time down the road. It may take time to do, but it’s a worthwhile investment.

M13 responded very similarly, viewing media pitching with those who might be inexperienced, or doing it poorly, as an opportunity to educate. M13 went on to say “when I am dealing with somebody new, there is a level of education I will provide.” Additionally, M13 said there have been times where a call to the public relations firm was necessary to let a boss know that their employees are “alienating reporters.” M13 made it clear that this was not to get the employee in trouble, but instead to educate.

M3 said he tends to ignore the pitches he receives, but that others might respond to a pitch and ask, “why would I cover this pitch?,” if the pitch was not targeted or effective. As for why M3 ignores pitches, he said, “the PR pro doesn’t seem to be waiting

on my response. If it seems a bit more local, I'd be more likely to." As previously mentioned in results, M9 tends to delete emails from subject line if they look like they will not apply. While M1 did not share whether or not she tended to respond to pitches, she did provide an interesting viewpoint that directly applies to this choice, saying, "our responsibility lies with the viewer, not with the person sending the pitch."

Media professionals predominantly found media pitching to be done poorly. However, included in results were those who found pitching to be average or actually well done. Media professionals varied on how they approached the decision to respond or not to media pitches. Those who evaluated media pitches negatively did so usually because the pitches were untailored and they were said to be easily identifiable. Lastly, some media professionals made a point to mention that while high quality pitches are nice, it is much more important to have substance or a real story.

### **Cross Perceptions Affecting Media Pitch Evaluations**

The final two research questions looked to find out whether cross perceptions on professionalism and roles in news generation affected media pitching evaluations. Results were sought out through asking participants whether their judgments on the relationship transfer to media pitching, and if the result of one interaction will color the evaluations of the entire group of professionals.

#### **RQ7: How do cross-perceptions of professionalism and roles in news generation influence public relations professionals' evaluations of media pitching?**

Results on how cross perceptions affected evaluations tended to vary, with some trends being revealed through analysis of data in previous research questions. Evaluations of professionalism or personality tended to be kept to the individual. They did not seem to

affect evaluations on media pitching. However, results indicated that evaluations on media professionals' roles in affecting the news agenda did affect how public relations professionals approached media pitching.

***Keep to individual.*** The majority of public relations participants said that they keep their judgments from experiences to the individual person. P10 described this by saying, "my view of a media person has never been tainted by my experience with another." P8 does not generalize and provided a real-world comparison for why. P8 said that if one girl treats you badly, it does not mean that all girls will. P5 reported keeping it to the individual as well, and said, "I'm not that jaded yet."

P4 and P13 both kept it to the individual to a high degree. P13 explained it by saying "I'm going to stop working with you if you don't treat me with an iota of respect." P4 also said she may not work with a media professional again after having a bad experience. One alternative to this method that P4 mentioned was contacting the media professional's superior to ask for advice on how to best work with them. A few participants, including P3, P1, P6 and P11 did not claim to keep all interactions to the individual. Instead, they admitted that it does effect their perceptions at times on a general scale.

As the above quotes represent, the idea of keeping judgments to an individual seems to be related to issues of personality or professionalism. A result from P8 describes this pretty clearly – "if you're rude to me, I'm going to have a negative opinion of you, but that's not just media, that's life in general." P7 agreed, saying "you can't let one person's response spread to your evaluation of others." Words like "response" and "rude" speak to the fact that these are in reference to interpersonal interactions, rather than roles

in the generation of news.

*News generation and media pitching evaluations.* Based on interview results and on analysis of data from earlier research questions, participants' pitching does tend to be affected by their views on media's role in the generation of news. P10 claimed that pitching has to be influenced by perceptions of the media. Results to this research question revealed that the majority of public relations participants understood media's ability to make a final decision on media pitches. As a result of this implied belief, participants mentioned a number ways they approach or react to media pitching.

*Media's say.* As interviews went on, it became clear that there was recognition of the need to cater to media's desires when pitching media. This implies a relation to the earlier finding that most public relations professionals thought media had a much higher affect on the news agenda than public relations professionals. P14 described this mindset clearly, saying "when I'm pitching, it's not what I or my client thinks is most important. It's what the media thinks is most important." P14 continued, saying that going for newsworthiness needs to be the priority before client attention because "media controls the agenda."

P7 similarly said "ultimately they [media] have the final say," and that this makes her wary of how she approaches media in media pitching. P13 used a comparable strategy, saying, "I change my style [of pitching] based on the outlet or writer." As previously mentioned, P12 emphasized the need to make sure clients are aware of the need to pitch for newsworthiness, because "the worst thing that can happen as a PR pro is that nobody cares what you say." P6 similarly explained that clients need to know that getting media coverage requires pitching towards the media's needs. Further, P6 admitted

that her judgment, that public relations only affects the news agenda 20%, also affects pitching in that it “makes me know I need to work harder to get the placement.” P8 built on the trend, mentioning that one must pitch to the needs of the media by looking for story ideas that will get the media eyeballs.

All of these public relations professionals evaluated the media’s affect on the news agenda as being high.

*Assume no response.* A couple of media professionals explained that they do not expect to hear back from the media professionals they pitch to. P10 felt that the media does not have an obligation to respond to every email they receive, saying “it is not their duty to respond.” This falls in line with P10’s evaluation of media’ role in affecting the news, as he said public relations only affects it 10%, and media affects 100% of the production.

P3 said, “I send emails sometimes and know it’s very unlikely that I’ll get any interest.” P3 seemed okay with this situation. This mindset speaks to P3’s evaluation of media’s role in setting the agenda for news, a topic to which he said “journalists have the pen.” P2 also said “I understand I’m probably not going to hear back but I will do my best.”

*Time.* The judgment that the media has a high effect on the generation of news seemed to also affect how public relations professionals use their time. P1 mentioned that because of this, “I spend more time focusing on my priority outlets.” P2 said he breaks up his media targets in tiers of importance in order to save time. P11 said that the low number of pitches that end up working does affect the way to pitch media, and that “I think realistically about how I spend my time.”

When asked, the majority of public relations professionals claimed that they kept their judgments from an interaction to the individual. This ended up relating to judgments on professionalism. However, participants' views on how the media affect the news agenda did influence how they approached and reacted to media pitching. Specific trends identified as a result of this news generation evaluation included time management, assuming no response and catering pitches to the fact that media has the final say.

**RQ8: How do cross perceptions of professionalism and roles in news generation influence media professionals' evaluations of media pitching?** Results to RQ8 uncovered a number of trends shown through interview question responses as well as comparing data for RQ2, RQ4 and RQ6. Professionalism seemed to be a point that could cause a media professional to avoid a public relations professional down the road. However, evaluations on roles in news generation seemed to be correlated with how media professionals evaluated media pitching.

*To generalize or not.* Media professionals were somewhat split on whether they let experiences with public relations professionals affect their evaluations of the profession and industry on the whole, or if they keep it to the individual. Nearly half said their judgment did spread on some level, with the other half keeping it to the individual.

M6 leaned towards keeping to the individual, saying, and "I don't remember a single name of PR people who sent me bad pitches; it's not really that big of a deal." M9 said, "I would never generalize PR people." M1 also kept it to the individual, perhaps more so than others, saying they are just as likely to use a good pitch from someone approaching them for the first time as they are from somebody they know. M1 did clarify that being known can help, but said that it is not a deal-sealer. M7 said, "Things blow

over in a hurry. I don't hold grudges." However, M7 did admit to keeping bad experiences in the back of his mind. M2 said, "I look at PR people on a personal level," rather than generalizing.

Other participants found that generalization was inevitable. M8 clearly represented this perspective, saying, "I think we are all prone to generalization. If you have a good experience, you're grateful, but if you get blown off, you naturally feel resentment." M8 continued, saying, "I suspect many journalists believe they are being exploited." M10 and M11 felt that a bad experience can cast negative evaluations across the given public relations professional's company, at the very least. M5 agreed, saying, "I tend to think bad experiences are just from those types of companies." M12 felt that evaluations certainly spread to public relations professionals on a general scale. M12 said, "that's what drives the stereotype. Every time you get a silly pitch – that creates a general opinion of PR people." M3 built on the trend, saying it colors evaluations of "PR pros across the board unless you know them and you wouldn't apply it to them."

***Getting burned.*** As conversations continued about how experiences (good or bad) with public relations professionals affected evaluations on the part of media professionals, the idea of being left out to dry or getting burned on a story began to take shape as a trend. It became clear that many media professionals judged public relations professionals based on whether they can help them do their jobs quickly and easily.

M11 clearly represented this point of view, saying, "We will avoid you." As an example, M11 mentioned that there was one public relations professional working for a museum in the area that he tends to always avoid because of how bad that public relations professional happens to be. In explanation, M11 said, "it's not that we hate anybody – it's

a matter of trust.” M10 echoed this perspective and explained that it casts a shadow on the agency because they (the media outlet) are relying on that source or interview. When something like that falls through, M10 said he then has to hear it from higher-ups and managers.

M3 also felt that getting burned was a focal point of judgment for media professionals on public relations professionals. M3’s view was represented through him finding that not hearing back from public relations professionals when on deadline to be the most common point of conflict in the relationship. M1 said, “you remember how trustworthy [public relations professionals] are.”

*News generation and media pitching evaluations.* The media that saw higher effect on the news agenda on the part of public relations professionals tended to also evaluate media pitching in a slightly more positive light. This was found to be especially true with participants who highly evaluated public relations professionals’ effect on the news agenda. These results are noteworthy, given the fact that positive evaluations of media pitching were more rare than not. M13 found the effect of public relations professionals on the news agenda to be “important.” Additionally, M13 found that the majority of media pitches are good. M7 followed the same trend, finding that public relations professionals have a “large” effect on news generation and that media pitches were also largely positive. M8, who found pitches to be straightforward, also found that public relations professionals had a larger effect on the news.

This sort of correlation extends beyond only the positive evaluations. M9 found that public relations professionals affect the news “very little” and that the majority of

media pitches are bad. M9 was far from alone on the negative side of this trend, with M10, M11, M2 and M4 producing results that had similar correlations.

Results showed that media professionals' evaluations on roles in news generation were correlated to evaluations of media pitching. There was an even split on whether experiences with public relations professionals affected judgments of them on a large scale or if they were kept to the individual. Despite this split, judgments on public relations professionals seemed to be focused on whether or not relations with them ended in a media professional getting burned on a story when on deadline.

### **Technology**

One result outside of the research questions showed a number of participants mentioning changes in technology as a factor in the nature of the relationship and the entire news industry. M4 mentioned the existence of the Internet as a great way to provide coverage that may not be fit for print. M4 elaborated, saying that newspapers are shrinking, and as a result, they are more selective for what goes in print but not as selective about what goes online. M2 agreed, calling his blog a great way to maintain relationships with public relations professionals. M2 said, "I can give somebody something on the blog and it doesn't cost me anything or compromise the ideal. I'll do it, in my head knowing that I'll be able to access that [PR] person when I really want them." M2 added that it was "something I'm frankly happy to do." P14 also mentioned technology's role in changing the news industry. P14 said, "50 or 60 years ago, people had greater attention spans," partially as a result of technology.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

Results of the current study provide some interesting conclusions and facts about the views on the relationship between public relations and media professionals, and how these views affect the act of media pitching.

### **Key Findings**

Below are brief summaries of the findings of the study:

- Participants from both professions similarly described the relationship as love-hate or mutually beneficial.
- Both groups of participants broadly acknowledged that media has the upper hand in terms of the generation of news, but that there is more to the effect of public relations than pitching statistics represent. Public relations participants were more split in this evaluation, with a small group of participants calling the split between media and public relations' effect to be 50-50.
- Both public relations and media participants evaluated the other party's professionalism positively, with a number of revealed trends that were exceptions to this evaluation.
- Public relations and media professionals both tended to evaluate media pitching negatively, with public relations participants being more negative in their judgments. Exceptions included a few public relations participants calling pitching mediocre, and a few media participants calling pitching good. The main problem with pitching was identified by both parties as being untailored or irrelevant.

- For both parties, evaluations on professionalism did not seem to affect media pitching evaluations. However, news-generation role evaluations did affect how each party evaluated media pitching. Public relations professionals described steps taken during pitching because of this evaluation. Similarly, media professionals' low or high evaluations of public relations' news generation roles correlated with their negative or positive evaluations of media pitching.

### **Findings and Past Literature**

A number of telling similarities and differences were revealed upon comparing results from the current study to results from past studies, included in the above literature review. Revealed are consistencies that support the current research and also help draw interesting conclusions in areas where results may differ.

**RQ1-2: Evaluating roles in news generation.** Results from the current study largely seemed to fall in line with past research on evaluations of roles in news generation and media pitching. These findings help to further support results and establish trends in scholarly research.

Research from the current study started off with participants using phrases like love-hate and mutually beneficial to describe public relations and media's relationship. This falls directly in line with Shin and Cameron's (2003) description of the relationship. In it, participants used words like mutually dependent and love-hate. This similarity helps confirm current participants' understanding of the relationship between media and public relations professionals.

Ledingham's (2003) theory of relationship management in public relations stated

that crafting specific messages based on each public is an important part of public relations. The current study directly supports this theory, in that a number of participants found the lack of research or the untailored nature of media pitches to be serious problems. Hon and Grunig (1999) presented six axioms of relationship management: access, positivity, openness, assurances, networking, and the sharing of tasks. Results from the current study are consistent with these axioms. For example, both parties mentioned either access (media) or a lack of responsiveness (public relations) as the main point of conflict in the relationship. Both of these issues are covered in Hon and Grunig's axioms: access and assurances. This consistency seems to confirm that studies on relationship management in general can apply to the professional relationship between public relations and media professionals.

Regarding roles in news generation, previous literature reported findings similar to those of the current study. When looking at press release quantity, Xifra (2009) reported that journalists in China received about 75 press releases a day on average. While this study was a quantitative questionnaire, 75 per day falls in the wide range of results reported by media professionals in the current study. This consistency once again confirms the awareness and validity of the current study's participants.

Shin and Cameron (2003) found that some journalists did not find information sent from public relations professionals to be overly trustworthy. This result was present in the current study, with participants like M4 and M13 mentioning the importance of knowing the source of information in the release is legitimate before running with it. However, not all participants found information from public relations professionals to be untrustworthy. Other media participants, including M5 and M7 mentioned that if a pitch

is good, they would almost automatically use it. This could be explained by the fact that both of these participants work in the television industry, where news stories are happening with more frequency.

Sallot et al. (1998) found that public relations professionals reported having a higher effect on generating news than their media counterparts gave them credit for. This result was found through quantitative research. While the current study does not have raw statistical data to compare, results did show slight similarities to this finding. As reported, public relations participants were a bit more split than media in their news-generation role evaluations. Also, Larsson (2009) found that public relations professionals were inconsistent in their reporting of how often they successfully place news. This also is similar to the current study, as some public relations professionals reported below 10%, and others reporting as high as 50%.

In the current study, both sides reported a lower effect on the news from public relations professionals when compared with media. However, there was a smaller group of public relations professionals that called the effect nearer to equal with media than low. Media, on the other hand, consistently reported public relations' affect to be below 30%, with only one participant as an exception. Therefore, on the whole, public relations professionals did evaluate their affect on the news to be higher than media professionals evaluated that affect to be. This falls in line with Sallot et al.'s (1998) findings.

**RQ3-4: Evaluations of professionalism.** Previous studies highlighted in the literature review that looked at evaluations of professionalism were split in whether their results were in line with those of the current study. In all, studies pertaining to professionalism did not confirm the current results as frequently as those focused on

news generation and media pitching.

As mentioned in the literature review, Stegall and Sanders (1986) found that journalists perceived public relations professionals to be ethically questionable and to have less honorable intentions. The current study found the opposite result, with no media participants evaluating public relations professionals as having broadly negative ethics. Rimmer, Rayfield, and Cropp (1993) found a similar result to Stegall and Sanders (1986), with negative opinions from journalists on public relations professionals' professionalism and integrity – both of which were found to be broadly positive in the current study. As indicated in the results above, a few participants in the current study made a point to say the other party's integrity was good.

This contrast is noteworthy. Details of the two above studies and the current research reveal possible explanations for this stark disagreement. To begin, the two previous studies were done in 1986 and 1993. This 26 or 19-year difference from the current study represents a long period of time where dynamics and interactions in the relationship could change. This seems to be enough time for two groups of professionals to learn more about one another and develop their interpersonal relations accordingly.

Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, the development of the Internet and email has lessened the degree to which a media pitch might interrupt a reporter. Public relations professionals can now send an email at any point in time, knowing with relative confidence that they will reach their intended target. Without this 24-hour communication channel, getting in front of a media professional would have been much more difficult, therefore increasing the urgency with which public relations professionals seek them out. This may have resulted in the lower evaluations of public relations professionals'

professionalism and integrity on the part of media professionals. As mentioned in results of the current research, some media professionals made a point to emphasize the importance of new media, and how it provides them with new opportunities for coverage, therefore bettering relationships with many public relations professionals.

Lastly, the fact that only 28 participants were interviewed for the current study could contribute to the disconnect between these results and those of some past studies. While the validity and understanding of the current study's participants have been confirmed through various other studies with similar results, the low sample size could be a factor.

There were some previous studies on professionalism where results aligned with those of the current research. Samsup (2003) found that some media professionals saw public relations as a publicity-oriented profession whose goals were only gaining coverage in the news. In the current study, media professionals positively evaluated ethics, but a trend with this result developed when exceptions to these positive evaluations were mentioned. The exception was that some media professionals felt that public relations professionals could be too focused on the counting of clips (press hits).

While this was framed as an exception in the current research, the consistencies in mentions of the viewpoint provide a level of validity to both studies. Again, the majority of participants in the current study did find that public relations professionals offered more than simply trying to get coverage in the news. As previously indicated in the results, a number of participants agreed that there was more to public relations' effect than simply media pitching statistics. These comparisons point to the fact that while media seems to have an understanding of public relations' effect beyond pitching media,

there are still some underlying sentiments that the focus is sometimes overly concerned with coverage.

Neijens & Smit (2003) conducted qualitative interviews and reported that some public relations professionals found media to be manipulative and only wanting to tell their own stories. This falls directly in line with the current study's result that circled around mentions of "gotcha stories." Other findings by Neijens & Smit proved to be consistent with the current study as well. For example, Neijens & Smit (2003) found public relations professionals that reported the cooperation between the two parties as positive. This also aligns with results of the current study because mentions of the "gotcha story" were framed as exceptions to what public relations professionals widely considered positive professionalism.

**RQ5-6: Media pitching evaluations.** Previous studies concerned with media pitching covered topics or problems that were mentioned by participants in the current study. As indicated in the literature review, Waters et al. (2010) found that a number of media are seeking out stories from public relations professionals – reversing the trend in direction of communication. This act was called media catching. The current research supported this finding. This was specifically indicated when media tended to report access issues as an exception to what they found to be good public relations professionalism. The access issues they had were associated with not hearing back on availability of an expert or needed information for a story. The fact that media participants in the current study found access to be a significant exception to their positive evaluations confirms Waters et al.'s (2010) finding of the existence of media catching.

Common complaints about media pitches from the perspective of media in the current study were also consistent with previous findings. Sallot's (2006) study serves as an example, in which media found a lack of a local angle, a lack of timeliness and lack of objectivity to be common problems with media pitches. The current research found similar results – specifically in regard to a lack of a local angle and objectivity. Additionally, Bergman (2006) said that an important part of media relations is matching the right information with the right people when pitching. Participants in the current study agreed. This speaks to the fact that media's complaints about media pitching are pretty consistent. Working towards solving these complaints is therefore more realistic for public relations professionals.

Cannon (2006) discussed techniques for successfully pitching media, including conducting up-front research. Media participants in the current study supported this finding, with irrelevant pitches being considered a big problem. As mentioned in the results, some participants mentioned frustration with the fact that public relations professionals couldn't take the time to find out what they write about. Pelham (2000) found that immediacy and timeliness were important aspects of media pitching. Results from the current study supported this finding as well, with a number of participants from both parties mentioning timeliness as an important aspect of pitching media.

This consistency between previous research and the current study speaks to the fact that there seems to be a general understanding in both professions of how one should effectively pitch media. Both parties' negative evaluations of media pitching also speak to this understanding.

**RQ7-8: Roles in news-generation and professionalism affecting media**

**pitching.** Past studies were not found that examined how cross perceptions of professionalism and roles in news generation affected evaluations of media pitching. As mentioned in the introduction, this points to an interesting gap in research. Understanding the areas of importance to each party when forming their evaluations of the other during the main point of interaction (media pitching) could prove beneficial to the entire relationship.

**Theoretical Implications**

Detailed analysis of results revealed interesting implications about the relationship between public relations and media professionals. Comparing results from public relations and media participants helped draw conclusions that further explain the complex and often-scrutinized relationship.

**Media's control - news generation roles.** Evaluations on the role each party played in affecting the news agenda proved telling. Overall, both parties seemed to recognize the fact that media has a higher effect on the news agenda than public relations professionals. However, as one might expect, the media was more consistent in this finding. There was a group of public relations professionals who evaluated the effect of both parties on the news agenda to be near equal. It is important to reiterate that despite these findings, both parties did feel that there is more to the affect that public relations professionals have on the news agenda, without putting an actual number on it.

However, the fact that both parties acknowledged media's larger effect and control of the news agenda was an important explanatory factor when looking at remaining results. As results to RQ7 and RQ8 showed, evaluations of news generation

roles proved relevant in how participants evaluated media pitching. As was evident in the critiques of media pitching, the responsibility for making pitches understandable and successful rested on the shoulders of public relations practitioners. This result frames what seems to be the agreed upon direction of “authority” in the relationship. Those who have a lower effect on the news need to cater to those who have a higher affect in order to be successful. As P11 described, “PR wouldn’t exist without media.”

Additionally, some participants from both parties expressed the challenge in accurately depicting how often one party effects the news. Reasons given for this difficulty were the number of different beats, publications and styles of journalists and public relations professionals. While results seemed to break through the broadness of the participants, this point is important.

**Professionalism – not the issue.** Results showed that when asked about professionalism; both sides seemed to evaluate each other positively. Nearly all participants evaluated the commitment to profession and the ethics of the other party as good. Clarity was considered to be good for the most part, with some exceptions being voiced from both parties. This generally positive evaluation points to the fact that on the whole, the interpersonal interactions are not overly problematic.

Understanding this assessment lets one rule out the theory that a lack of professional appropriateness from either party is affecting the relationship negatively. The manner in which both parties interact with one another did not seem to be a problem for participants. Instead, participants were more focused on the frequency or strategy with which communication occurs in the relationship – and how that affects them doing their jobs quickly and easily. This focus was shown through results in evaluations of media

pitching and discussions about the main point of conflict in the relationship. However, the first place this disconnect was noticeable was identified as a trend in exceptions to the positive evaluations of professionalism.

**“Gotcha” vs. “controversial” stories.** One interesting point of dissention was revealed when delving deeper into the topic of professionalism. In elaborations on exceptions to what each party called good professionalism of the other, both parties brought up the idea of a not-so-positive or contentious story.

The interesting detail with this lies in the fact that both parties brought up the not-so-positive story from opposite perspectives. The trends in phrasing used by each party to describe not-so-positive stories were the first hints at this. Public relations participants tended to call them “gotcha stories,” when media participants tended to call them “controversial stories.” This one-phrase difference is substantial. It points out a dissension in what the aim and goals associated with the story are. “Gotcha” implies that the story itself is an attempt at exposing or catching somebody at something. “Controversial” is more focused on the topic of the story rather than the assumed goals surrounding its creation.

The feeling behind the use of “gotcha” was confirmed when many public relations professionals mentioned that sometimes journalists have an “agenda” or goal to write a certain kind of story. As previously mentioned, P12 said there are some reporters who “are always looking for that gotcha story.” This point of view speaks to public relations professionals’ commitment to protecting and portraying their clients in the best light possible. Further, the point of view falls in line with the theory, mentioned above, that both parties were more focused on the strategy or frequency with which communication

occurs in the relationship than the appropriateness and professionalism. The interest reflected here was in doing ones job as effectively and easily as possible.

Conversely, media found it problematic when a public relations professional would be over-protective whenever a “controversial” story would come up. M7 provided a description, saying that not all stories can be positive and that media still needs public relations to be helpful and responsive when negative or controversial stories happen. M11 mentioned this issue as well, to which he said that media is not out to get them (PR pros) and it seems as though public relations professionals have a harder time thinking on their feet when approached with these kinds of controversial stories. This finding shows that media professionals also are focused on doing their jobs, which, at times, includes writing stories on topics that might be seen as more controversial than positive.

It seems that public relations professionals are wary of putting their clients in harm’s way, and attribute attempts to the contrary as sometimes purposeful. On the other hand, media professionals are impatient with attempts to protect a client from what they see as an important news story. These conflicting viewpoints circle around the strategy and ease with which jobs on each side of the relationship are done.

**Media pitching evaluations.** Both parties tended to agree in their mostly negative evaluations of media pitching. The parties were largely on the same page when it came to the low quality of media pitches. Interestingly, nearly all public relations participants evaluated media pitching negatively. Considering media pitching is something that they themselves do frequently, it was interesting to hear this trend in judgment.

Both parties’ judgments became even more similar when they provided their primary reason for the negative evaluation of media pitching. Media professionals said

the biggest problem was that pitches were “untailored,” and public relations professionals’ biggest critique was that most were “irrelevant” and “mass blasts.” This finding further supports the conclusion that both parties tend to agree on the problems with media pitching. The fact that the primary complaint about media pitching was similar between both parties represents a realistic opportunity for improvement. If both sides disagreed on the main problem with media pitching, a solution may not be as apparent. Similar to the dissention between “gotcha” or “controversial,” this finding has to do with the strategy used when communicating between the two parties. However, this agreement in pitching evaluations raises the question of why significant changes have not already been made to address these mutual complaints.

In reality, monitoring changes in media pitching across the board would require another extensive study. A couple of participants did mention some factors that partially explain why these badly evaluated pitches are still occurring. A small group of public relations participants, including P3, P4 and P5, cited the lack of training and time as factors contributing to the problems with pitching media. As P11 explained in the results, the extensive availability of media directory and distribution software makes the mass blasting of potentially untailored and irrelevant pitches much easier.

Additionally, public relations participants’ pitching evaluations were more uniformly negative than were the media’s. This finding could lead one to a number of conclusions about the relationship. First, it could lead one to believe that public relations professionals are overly apologetic about pitching, given that they know the media has the upper hand in the news generation. In addition, it could imply that public relations professionals are harder on themselves than maybe media professionals would be. This

view is feasible, considering that media pitching is an act done by public relations professionals.

Lastly, while some participants admitted to infrequently making the above-mentioned pitching mistakes, the majority of public relations participants critiqued media pitching as if their own pitches were not part of the problem. This could speak to a general “it’s not me” feeling around public relations, or simply mean participants in the study were high-performing public relations professionals.

**Main point of conflict.** A noteworthy result was revealed when both parties were asked where they thought the main point of conflict or tension existed in the relationship. Interestingly, both parties tended to identify a point in conflict that put the blame on the other party.

Public relations professionals called pitches to media and a lack of responsiveness on the part of media the main point of conflict in the relationship. Specifically, P4 and P13 mentioned that media not responding to pitches makes their job difficult. P4 implied that responses would make things much easier and P13 discussed how it was unfair to complain about pitches as a media person if they are not providing feedback. Once again, this issue in the relationship seems to be directly associated with strategies of communication and how they affect the doing of each job. The fact that public relations professionals most frequently identified a lack of responsiveness as the main point in conflict illustrates their focus on doing their jobs effectively. One might assume that if pitches were much more successful, the need for a response may not be as high.

Media professionals similarly pointed to access issues as the main point of conflict in the relationship between public relations and media professionals. These

access issues in question were actually pointed at public relations professionals, opposite from the responsiveness issues mentioned by public relations professionals. Media professionals such as M1, M3, M4, M7, M10 and M11 called access the main point of conflict in the relationship. As previously mentioned, M4 cited the frustration with public relations professionals that do not allow their expert sources to provide “authentic insight.” Media being on deadline is a factor that plays into the importance of access for media professionals. M3’s mention that being on deadline makes the idea of access a significant concern is important in a number of ways. First, it points to the conclusion that media professionals are not unhappy with access issues because they feel slighted or personally crossed. Instead, they are unhappy with access issues because of how these issues threaten their ability to do their jobs or meet their deadline.

Second, it is an example of the kind of information that public relations professionals would be very well served to be aware of. This also applies to public relations professionals’ mention that without feedback, they cannot improve their media pitches. Both of these results further represent ways that the education of both parties on the day-to-day working of the other party could be helpful. If public relations professionals fully understood when deadlines were and what was required in order to meet them, the issues with access could be helped. If media professionals understood the process of media pitching and how helpful being responsive and perhaps constructive might be, the issues with media pitching could be also be helped.

**News generation and media pitching.** Research questions seven and eight aimed at evaluating whether participants’ views on the other party’s roles in news generation and professionalism would affect their views on media pitching. The similarity in media

pitching evaluations between the two parties was a relatively unexpected result – making this analysis more challenging. Straightforward analysis of data in previous research questions may have produced more telling results if media pitching evaluations were widely varied. However, this analysis, as well as anecdotal responses from participants, did produce results that pointed towards news generation role-evaluation as a significant factor when in participants’ evaluations of media pitching.

Both media and public relations participants found that media held the upper hand when it comes to setting the agenda for news coverage. An important consideration is that public relations professionals were more split on what their role was in affecting the news – between very low affect and near equal effect. However, in the eyes of both parties, the general locus of control on the news agenda still remained with media.

This understanding was expressed by public relations professionals through their identification of specific pitching-related areas where this belief seemed to come into play – their assumption of no response and their time-management. Both of those trends were based on this understanding of media’s control – proving that their evaluations of media’s role in affecting the news agenda does affect their evaluations and approaches to media pitching.

For media professionals, the effect of their news generation evaluations on media pitching was evident through analyzing the results to previous research questions six, four and two. As reported in the results, this analysis showed that media professionals that evaluated public relations professionals’ role in setting the news agenda more positively, tended to also evaluate media pitching more positively. Additionally, media professionals’ mention of their concern with “getting burned” and losing out on a story

opportunity, further supports the fact that doing their jobs easily is a focus.

These findings reiterate the importance of understanding how both parties view the other in regard to roles in news generation. As indicated in results and discussion, media professionals found problems in areas where public relations professionals made their job more difficult than easy. Given the largely agreed upon locus of control, it is important for public relations professionals to understand that it is largely their responsibility to make jobs easy for the media. Results show where the locus of control exists (media), and that making their own jobs as easy as possible seems to be a goal of both parties. For this reason, public relations professionals should recognize the locus of control and act accordingly by making media professionals' jobs as easy as possible. What might result could be increased pitching and relational success.

**Paradox of generalization.** There seemed to be an adverse reaction to the idea of generalizing about the other party. Many participants who generalized during the interview said that they would never generalize about the other party. "Keeping it to the individual" was a phrase used frequently by a number of participants on the media and public relations side. While this paradox is interesting, it is important to note that there a good portion of responses that mentioned how difficult it was to paint a group of people with one brush. However, as M8 said, "we're all prone to generalize."

Explanations for this contradiction were not sought out in the interviews. However, a number a possible reasons exist. It seems as though participants, particularly on the public relations side, were very wary about admitting to generalizing. This could have something to do with the previously mentioned agreed upon locus of control in regard to news generation. Public relations professionals may have been more careful not

to speak negatively on a broad scale about the group of professionals that, in some ways, determine their success. This possibility also spreads to media professionals. As indicated in the results section, trust and relationships were cited as important ways for media professionals to use public relations more effectively and frequently. Therefore, attempts to not speak negatively on a broad scale about public relations professionals seem logical.

These possible reasons explain why “keeping it to the individual” was a common response in research questions seven and eight. They also explain the number of qualifying statements that would come before some generalizations. Examples of these statements include when M12 said “I don’t want to paint the entire industry with one brush,” and when P12 mentioned the number of different beats and publications as real factors affecting how many pitches media professionals use in general.

Despite this potential contradiction in generalization comments, the result itself is noteworthy. While media reported generalizing more often, both parties found it important to try and keep individual interactions to the individual. This speaks to a larger conclusion, that both parties were more committed to getting their jobs done than they were worried about an unfavorable interaction or unfavorable reputation of another professional.

### **Practical Implications**

The current study’s results introduce a number of conclusions that could directly affect the understanding of the relationship as well as its practice.

**Ideas for improvement.** Results from the current study reveal a number of opportunities for improving the relationship between media and public relations professionals.

Participants from both parties negatively evaluated media pitching, with a common complaint that they tended to be untailored. Findings to the current study were also consistent with past literature on common pitching problems and techniques for success. Based on these results and further discussion with participants, a number of solutions to issues with media pitching have become apparent.

One possible solution would be training. M10 mentioned the need for public relations professionals to be trained more about how media works from a day-to-day perspective. This would be a great first step. However, perhaps the true solution would be to have both sides undergo education on the day-to-day workings of the other party. While both parties use higher education to gain knowledge and skill in their craft, their day-to-day workings, and those of the other party, seem to be of a lesser focus. Understanding day-to-day workings could help confirm or dispel some assumptions that each party might have about the other. They would both be able to put themselves in the shoes of the other party, which could change the way they interact – potentially for the better.

As previously explained, both parties identified similar issues when asked about the main point of conflict in the relationship. Media said access to public relations professionals and their sources was the main issue, and public relations professionals said a lack of responsiveness from media was the main issue. The potential solution of training could help limit the negative effects of these identified problems.

One possible barrier to this solution is time. Professionals on both sides are quite busy on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, identifying a way to quickly provide this education or integrate it into their day-to-day workings would be important.

Another solution to media pitching issues would be to increase staffing on the public relations side. While increasing staffing is directly related to financial success, it could reduce the need to send pitches out in mass blasts because there may be more time. It could also allow public relations professionals to conduct thorough research on their media contacts as well as the pitches they are sending. This additional time could be used to accommodate the above-mentioned solution – training each party on the day-to-day workings of the other.

Revamping media distribution software to include the information about a media professional that is needed in order to write a relevant, researched pitch could be very helpful in solving identified problems with media pitching. Being able to immediately find all articles written by a journalist when searching for him/her in the software would save time and resources for public relations professionals. The mention of media distribution software and online media channels by participants speaks to the shift occurring in media from traditional print to alternate forms of communication. As indicated in the results, media participants often mentioned the value of their blogs and online channels for news dissemination and for maintaining relationships with public relations professionals. This shift is an important transition for both parties to be aware of as they continue interacting, and necessarily adapting, to reach their professional goals.

**Agreement – focus on getting the job done.** As indicated in the theoretical implications, participants from both parties tended to similarly evaluate the other party on all topics of research – roles in news generation, professionalism and media pitching.

It therefore seems as though public relations professionals and media professionals agree on many fundamental aspects of the relationship. They agree that

media holds some higher level of control or effect on the news. They agree that both parties have good professionalism. They agree that media pitches are generally not well done, both providing the same primary reason for that evaluation. They also both seem to reflect that news generation role-evaluations do effect how they approach and evaluate media pitching. The areas of disagreement seem to be associated with both parties trying to do their jobs as well and as quickly as they can.

Disagreement exists with a “gotcha” or “controversial” story because one party (PR) wants to protect their client and the other (media) wants to report the news that they see as important. The parties disagree on the main point of conflict in the relationship. One party (PR) feels that a lack of response from media makes it difficult to do their jobs effectively. Similarly but conversely, the other party (media) feels that a lack of access from public relations professionals to their clients or experts makes it difficult to do their jobs effectively.

These disagreements, coupled with the fact that both parties evaluated professionalism positively, point to the fact that there is an important goal of getting the job done easily and quickly on the part of both media and public relations professionals. Understanding this mutual goal could serve both parties well from a professional and relational standpoint.

Overall, the current study varied in its consistency with past studies. Past studies on roles in news generation and media pitching tended to be consistent with results from the current study. However, evaluations of professionalism in the current study were

more split as far as their consistency with past research. This common consistency speaks to the validity of participants as well as the study.

Areas of agreement in the relationship, including professionalism, news generation roles and media pitching evaluations, point to the fact that both parties are broadly on the same page. This fact creates a true possibility for relational improvement. Additionally, it begs the question of why improvements have not already been made. This question specifically applies to media pitching. If both parties acknowledged that pitching needs improvement, and provided similar reasons, then why hasn't improvement been overly reported? Possible explanations could include time or client pressure. However, pressure from public relations superiors to deliver clips of news coverage could be another significant explanatory factor. Possible pressure to always follow up and get an answer from media, or to reach out to xx number of media people, could be contributing to the continuation of this mutually critiqued style of media pitching.

The areas where both parties disagreed were generally focused on getting their own jobs done quickly and easily. Understanding this mutual goal could be an important step in addressing the issues in the relationship, mentioned by either party.

A number of options to improve these identified issues have become apparent through the current research. As mentioned in the above discussion, educating both parties on the day-to-day workings of the other party could improve the success and mutual benefit of the relationship. Additionally, addressing staffing deficiencies and improving media distribution software could be helpful.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

While the current study produced significant results related to the relationship

between public relations and media, there were a number of limitations as well as areas where additional research would be useful to the topic.

### **Limitations**

One limitation had to do with the number of participants and the structure of research. There were 14 participants interviewed from public relations and 14 from media. While this number proved enough to produce trends and legitimate results, adding more interviewees would open up the study for more perspectives and experiences. The structure of research used was qualitative interviews. This structure proved useful because it gave participants the ability to elaborate on their opinions and provide thought-out insight rather than providing only a number or multiple-choice response. However, a few areas of the study would have been supplemented through statistical investigation and significant analysis testing beyond the anecdotal tracking and recording that did occur. Specifically, adding this sort of structure to RQ1 and RQ2, which focused on roles in news generation, could have proved useful. The current research did provide meaningful results to RQ1 and RQ2, but adding statistically significant results to this topic could bring another informative layer to the research.

The broadness of the current study served also as a minor limitation. The three topics covered in the research – roles in news generation, professionalism and media pitching – encompass a very large portion of the relationship itself. Because of this broadness, participants' interviews sometimes would veer from those three specific topics. While these unstructured elaborations often produced great insights, the lack of structure was a factor that affected the study.

Additionally, “public relations professional” and “media professional” both

encompass a wide range of professions. This was done on purpose in order to get as many points of view as possible. The resulting wide-range of views provided viewpoints and trends in research that could arguably represent those of both broad professions. However, the degree to which each specific profession affected the results was not overly explored.

The fact that the age and experience of participants was not an explicit factor in deciding on whom participants were was a minor limitation to the study. Attempts to draw from an array of ages were made through participant-outreach, but specific age and experience guidelines were not set. These guidelines, if representative of both industries' age breakdowns, could have made the current study that much more significant.

Convenience sampling was a similar kind of limitation. While quality participants were certainly found for the study, using random sampling or a structured and industry representative sample could have added another element of accuracy.

### **Future Research**

Results of the current study reveal opportunities for additional research that could expand on the topic of the relationship between media and public relations.

Media pitching is one area where additional study could prove useful. The current study produced interesting results, specifically in the elaborations of participants' media pitching evaluations. As reported in the results and discussion, both parties identified mass, untailed pitches as significant problems. Based on this result, it would be interesting to study the comparison between mass pitches and individualized, targeted pitches. Media professionals could report the percentage of pitches they receive that they think are mass, untailed pitches. On the other side, public relations professionals could

report the percentage of their own pitches that are sent out using mass-distribution software.

These statistics would provide insight on how many pitches sent from public relations professionals are from mass distributions. It would then compare that number to media's estimate of how many of their received pitches are from mass-distributions. Results would show how accurate media's assessment of mass pitches might be. Additionally, the study would ask media how often they use a mass-pitch for a story, and how often public relations professionals' mass-pitches result in stories. A comparison between these two results would show the success rate of mass pitches vs. individualized pitches.

As mentioned in the limitations, participants in the current study were from a number of different fields within public relations and media. It would be interesting to design a study that looks at evaluations of the relationship from more specified fields of the professions. For example, a study could focus on evaluating the roles in generation of news. It could then interview media who work in television and print, as well as public relations professionals that work for agencies and private institutions. After conducting research to obtain these evaluations, the study could compare and contrast how each specified field responded.

Participants in the current study often speculated on the day-to-day workings of the other profession. It would be interesting to study these day-to-day workings in regard to how each profession spends their time related to media pitches. A comparison between media and public relations professionals' time spent creating or using pitches could provide insight to each party's process for the relationship.

### **Conclusion**

The relationship between public relations and media professionals is one surrounded by scrutiny and in-depth analysis. Descriptions in past research and the current study call the relationship mutually beneficial and love-hate. Disagreements and conflicts in the relationship have been identified in past research – some of which are consistent with results from the current study. On the other hand, the current study produced results either not covered by previous research or that were inconsistent – including each party’s positive cross-perceptions of professionalism, and the result that evaluations of news generation roles seemed to correlate with media pitching evaluations.

On the whole, the current study showed participants on both sides broadly agreeing on their cross-perceptions of news generation-roles, professionalism and media pitching, with some differences in the extent to which cross-perceptions were positive or negative. When delving deeper, however, participants’ elaborations on their similar cross-perceptions revealed some noteworthy and telling disconnects – and in rarer cases, nearly exact consistencies (media pitching issues).

Identification of the main point of conflict in the relationship (access and lack of responsiveness) and exceptions to positive evaluations of professionalism pointed to an interesting implication – both parties’ cross perceptions and focuses were rooted in how the other party affected their ability to do their own jobs quickly and easily. Additionally, the fact that evaluations of media pitching were correlated to those of news generation-roles, and not professionalism, supports this implication.

Potential solutions to some of the identified strains in the relationship were introduced after analyzing results to the current study. These include educating both

parties on the day-to-day workings of the opposite party, an increase of staffing in order to save time, and the revamping of media distribution software to include needed information about media pitching targets.

Participants in the study acknowledged that public relations is interruption by nature. This fact proves important when searching for explanations as to why many of the cross perceptions between the two parties were similar and not overly negative. It seems, based on results and on evaluation of the communication landscape, that technology plays a role in easing the tension between the public relations and media professions. It helps bring both parties together in a way that is controllable and flexible.

The first way tension is eased through the use of technology is by decreasing the extent to which each interaction is an interruption. It is logical to assume that an email represents a significantly lower level of interruption than a phone call, letter, or face-to-face interaction. Those on the receiving end of emails have a choice on when they care to address that communication – if at all. With phone calls, that choice is still there, but with less flexibility as far as getting the message before choosing to address the communication. With face-to-face interaction, that choice is all but gone. Having this increased level of choice that accompanies the use of technology allows media and public relations professionals to feel less bothered by media pitches or other interactions. This seems to have resulted or, at least correlated, with some of the more positive cross-evaluations reported in the current study.

Additionally, technology lets both parties build their relationship. As indicated in results, some media participants have increased flexibility for where they can provide coverage, such as blogs or social media accounts. Public relations professionals can also

better accomplish their goals, as needed contact information and past coverage is easily accessible with the help of technology. This reduces the levels of stress on both sides in the relationship. Lastly, media professionals have an easier time using technology to reach public relations professionals or their clients/experts. If this ease did not exist, access, the main point in conflict in the relationship identified by media, would be an even larger issue – likely damaging the relationship.

In all, the current study aimed to add in-depth elaborations on the relationship between public relations and media professionals from both parties to the existing body of research. Specifically, the study examined what aspects of the relationship were points of focus when evaluating media pitching and the other party in general. Results revealed a number of interesting perspectives and possible solutions, producing a legitimate opportunity for relational improvement.

## APPENDIX A

RQ1: What are public relations professionals' judgments of media professionals' role in setting the agenda for news coverage?

RQ2: What are media professionals' judgments of public relations professionals' role in setting the agenda for news coverage?

RQ3: What are public relations professionals' judgments of media professionals' professionalism?

RQ4: What are media professionals' judgments of public relations professionals' professionalism?

RQ5: How do public relations professionals evaluate media pitching?

RQ6: How do media professionals evaluate media pitching?

RQ7: How do cross perceptions of professionalism and roles in news generation influence public relations professionals' evaluations of media pitching?

RQ8: How do cross perceptions of professionalism and roles in news generation influence media professionals' evaluations of media pitching?

**Rapport Questions:**

1. How are you today?
2. How is everything going with you lately?

**Background Questions:**

1. Could you share some background information with me concerning your profession?
2. What does your job specifically entail?
3. How did you get into the public relations or media profession?
4. How would you describe the relationship between PR professionals and media professionals?

**Interview Questions for Public Relations Professionals:**

**RQ1:** What are public relations professionals' judgments of media professionals' role in setting the agenda for news coverage?

1. How would you define or describe "news?"
2. How many pitches do you believe the "average journalist" receives in a given day?
3. Of these pitches, how many do you believe affect what is covered in the news?
4. To what extent do you believe media professionals affect the generation of news?

**RQ3:** What are public relations professionals' judgments of media professionals' professionalism?

5. How would you evaluate the overall ethics of media professionals?
6. How committed to their profession would you say media professionals are?
7. How would you evaluate media professionals in terms of their clarity?

**RQ5:** How do public relations professionals evaluate media pitching?

8. Where do you feel the point of potential "conflict" or "tension" is most commonly located between media professionals and public relations professionals?
9. What is your evaluation of most media pitches from public relations professionals?
10. What are the most important aspects of media pitches?

**RQ7:** How do cross perceptions of professionalism and roles in news generation influence public relations professionals' evaluations of media pitching?

11. What aspect of the public relations to media professional relationship affects your judgment of media professionals the most?
12. Does the result of one pitch, good or bad, color your evaluation of that particular media professional or media professionals in general?
13. How do your perceptions of the media affect the way your pitch?

**Interview Questions for Media Professionals**

**RQ2:** What are media professionals' judgments of public relations professionals' role in setting the agenda for news coverage?

1. How would you define or describe "news?"
2. How many pitches do you believe the "average journalist" receives in a given day?
3. Of these pitches, how many do you believe affect what is covered in the news?
4. To what extent do you believe public relations professionals affect the generation of news?

**RQ4:** What are media professionals' judgments of public relations professionals' professionalism?

5. How would you evaluate the overall ethics of public relations professionals?
6. How committed to their profession would you say public relations professionals are?
7. How would you evaluate public relations professionals in terms of their clarity?

**RQ6:** How do media professionals evaluate media pitching?

8. Where do you feel the point of potential "conflict" or "tension" is most commonly located between media professionals and public relations professionals?
9. What is your evaluation of most media pitches from public relations professionals?
10. What are the most important aspects of media pitches?

**RQ8:** How do cross perceptions of professionalism and roles in news generation influence media professionals' evaluations of media pitching?

11. What aspect of the public relations to media professional relationship affects your judgment of media professionals the most?
12. Does the result of one pitch, good or bad, color your evaluation of that particular public relations professional or public relations professionals in general?

13. How do your perceptions of public relations professionals affect the way you handle pitches?

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