

EXPLORING PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE IN VIETNAM:
PUBLIC RELATIONS FUNCTIONS, PRACTITIONERS' ROLES AND
MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS FOR PRACTITIONERS

A RESEARCH PAPER

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTERS OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM

BY

HANH NGUYEN

ADVISOR – DR. DUSTIN W. SUPA

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

JULY 2010

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES	iv
 Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	4
International public relations	4
Public relations in Asia	6
Public relations in Vietnam	13
3. METHODOLOGY	26
Subjects and procedures	27
Internet surveys	27
In-depth interview	31
Institutional Review Board approval	32
Data collection and data analysis	32
4. RESULTS	34
Study demographics	34
Study findings	35
5. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION	53
Research questions	55
Limitations and suggestions for future study	79
Implications for practitioners	82
Conclusion	84
References	90

Appendices	99
Appendix A: Cover letter to interview participants (English & Vietnamese).....	99
Appendix B: In-depth interview question sheet (English & Vietnamese)	103
Appendix C: Cover letter to survey participants (English & Vietnamese)	107
Appendix D: Questionnaire (English & Vietnamese).....	111

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 4.1: Gender of respondents, breakdown of respondents by area, and managerial position of respondents	35
Fig. 4.2: Perception of practitioners on the importance of public relations.....	37
Fig. 4.3: Important skills for public relations practitioners	38
Fig. 4.4: Roles of public relations practitioners	39
Fig. 4.5: Decision making power of practitioners.....	40
Fig. 4.6: Is public relations department a separate unit?.....	40
Fig. 4.7: Structure of public relations department	41
Fig. 4.8: Functions of public relations department	42
Fig. 4.9: Is public relations the only responsibility of practitioners	43
Fig. 4.10: Gender * Managerial roles crosstabulation	50

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The trends of globalization play an important role in the field of public relations. In order to gain a better understanding of public relations theory and practice abroad, many scholars have conducted studies in many parts of the world. Some regions, such as Asia and Europe, are well researched by scholars (Wu & Baah-Boakye, 2007).

Pertaining to Europe, recent studies have focused on public relations practice in Austria, Norway, Germany, Greece, Hungary, and Slovenia (Vasquez & Taylor, 1999). Regarding Asia, there are numerous articles and book chapters that explore public relations practice in China, Taiwan, India, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines and Thailand (Wu, Taylor, & Chen, 2001). Yet, very little has been written about public relations practice in Vietnam.

In fact, only two authors have written specifically about public relations in Vietnam so far. Bruce C. McKinney, a faculty member in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, published two articles and one study about public relations practice in Vietnam in *Public Relations Quarterly* in 2000, 2006, and 2008. Besides McKinney, Hang Dinh, a Vietnamese author, wrote her books entitled *Public Relations– Theories and Practice* and *Public Relations –*

Basic Knowledge and Ethics in Vietnamese. In the books, she discussed public relations practice in Vietnam. Yet, what she discussed was based on what she saw and her experiences, rather than results drawn from scientific study.

Over the last several decades, Vietnam has experienced numerous changes. Although many westerners view Vietnam through the lens of war, in reality Vietnam is developing with rapid economic growth and stable politics. In terms of economic development, Vietnam has been the fastest growing economy over the past five years in Southeast Asia and the second fastest in Asia, after China. Exports now comprise up to 66% of the economy (Chandler & Prasso, 2006). Vietnam is the world's second-largest exporter of rice and the world's largest exporter of spices (Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs [BEAPA], 2010). Concerning international relations, Vietnam has established diplomatic relations with nearly 170 countries, including all world major powers and received Most Favored Nation status with 72 countries and territories (Embassy of Vietnam, n.d.).

Because of the emergence of Vietnam, especially its extensive trading relationships with many countries in the world, it is important to conduct a study about public relations practice in Vietnam. It is useful not only for the international public relations scholarship, but also for public relations practitioners who are doing, or plan to do business in Vietnam. Moreover, one cannot fully understand public relations practice in Vietnam by examining public relations of countries in the same region. For example, public relations in China or any country in Asia cannot be the same as public relations in Vietnam. Different political systems, cultures, and media environments make public

relations practice vary from country to country (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003). For this reason, it is meaningful to conduct this study about public relations practices in Vietnam.

Specifically, this study uses Internet survey and in-depth interview with the aim to explore the role of public relations in Vietnam, functions of public relations departments, practitioners' roles and the most important skills for Vietnamese public relations practitioners.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the years, international public relations has attracted much attention. Public relations in many countries in the world has been examined and the results showed that public relations practice vary from culture to culture. Compared to other countries, public relations in Vietnam has not received much attention from scholars.

International public relations

The world is growing smaller in many ways. Geographic boundaries are no longer a barrier for businessmen to practice. Similarly, in terms of public relations, globalization raises the concept of international public relations and it is quickly attracting the attention of scholars and practitioners. As a result, the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) was formally constituted in 1955 with the purpose to provide both intellectual leadership in the practice of international public relations and make available to its members the services that will help them meet their professional responsibilities and succeed in their careers (International Public Relations Association [IPRA], n.d.). Since 1990, *Public Relations Journal*, *Communication World*, *Public Relations Review*, and other publications have published many articles about public relations in many countries in the world (Wakefield, 1996). The International Association of Business

Communicators and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) also emphasized “global public relations” in its national conference and established a section for members specializing in international practice (Wakefield, 1996).

Farinelli (1990) stated that “public relations has fewer people with international knowledge and experience than in any of the other business sectors such as, advertising, financial services, and management consulting. We all service the same clients – but public relations has the worst record of all in keeping pace with international changes” (p. 42). Wakefield (1996) explained that, to date, most articles on international public relations focused on how to conduct cross-cultural media relations, how to deal with a crisis in one of its host countries, and how to avoid cultural blunders. These studies would help public relations practitioners gain some knowledge about public relations practice in the country that they are working, thereby helping avoid some mistakes.

A few scholars have tried to define international public relations practice. Wilcox, Ault, and Agee (1992) defined it as “the planned and organized effort of a company, institution, or government to establish mutually beneficial relations with publics of other nations” (as cited in Wakefield, 1996, p. 18). Grunig called it “a broad perspective that will allow [practitioners] to work in many countries – or to work collaboratively” with people in many nations (as cited in Wakefield, 1996, p. 18). Booth (1986) explained that the only true international practitioners are those who “understand how business is done across national borders and perform well in that context” (as cited in Wakefield, 1996, p. 18).

Public relations in Asia

According to Haque (2004), Asia is the largest of the seven continents in both size and population. It occupies almost one-third of the world's land area and 60% of the global population. There are forty-nine countries in this continent, which represent a wide diversity of culture and history. "They include some largest and smallest in terms of populations, some of the richest and poorest in gross national product, literate and illiterate, and the most developed and underdeveloped nations of the world" (p. 346). As a result, public relations practice in Asia also varies widely due to the differences in their political and development, educational levels and standards of living.

Many factors can affect the public relations practice across the border. Sriramesh and Vercic (2003) proposed a theoretical framework to analyze international public relations. They argued that the political system, culture, and media environment are the three most important environmental factors that affect the nature of public relations practice in different cultures. This can be seen clearly in Asia.

Cultural patterns have attracted much attention from scholars where international public relations is examined. Their influences on public relations are widely accepted (Vercic, Grunig, & Grunig, 1993). Hall (1959) said, "Culture is communication and communication is culture" (p. 191). Sriramesh & White (1992) explained that communication and public relations have also been viewed as synonymous. "Linkage between culture and communication and culture and public relations are parallel because public relations is primarily a communication activity" (p. 609). Leaf (1998) argued that "the greatest need of an individual or company dealing internationally is understanding the local culture and having the ability to use that understanding effectively" (p. 666). He

clarified this by discussing some examples as follows. In the Middle East, the rule of thumb that a businessman should remember is that many key purchasing influences place greater importance on personal relationship than on price. “This is very difficult for Western businessmen to understand. But with Bedouins, friendship and trust take precedence over the normal give and take of the capitalistic marketplace” (p. 666).

Another example is the decision making process in Japan. It can be frustrating because the decision-making is normally a committee function rather than an individual action. Everything takes more time and involves complex audiences. Yet employee relations are easier in Japan than in the West because of the staff loyalty. In many meetings, Japanese would mention their company name before they mention their name when introducing themselves to others for the first time (Leaf, 1998).

Individualism versus collectivism is one of the cultural dimensions that can affect business styles among different countries (Hofstede, 1980). Individualistic culture fosters competitive spirit, change, and challenge while collectivism tends to lean towards maintenance of status quo, social symbols, harmony, and collaboration. DeForest (1998) argued that U.S business culture values self-determination, achievement, future orientation, optimism, curiosity, problem-solving and doing more than expected (as cited in Ihator, 1998). Yet, these characteristics may not necessarily be welcome in other cultures. For example, Harris & Moran (1991) explained that Japan is a collectivism-oriented culture where individuals are not encouraged to stand out. A Japanese saying goes, “The nail that sticks up will be pounded down.” Indeed, in Japan, “group is the most important part of society and is emphasized for motivation. Equity is more important than wealth” (as cited in Ihator, 1998, p. 39). Thus, while individualistic

cultures appreciate competition, in collectivistic cultures, competition is managed and controlled, and there is collective success or failure, praise or blame. Plus, “compared to Western cultures, most of the Asian nations would easily fall more on the collectivist end of continuum” (Haque, 2004, p. 352).

The role of public relations in Asia

Due to the difference in political systems and media environment, the nature of public relations in Asian countries is also different compared to Western countries. Wu (2005) explained that in the United States, public relations is mainly used as a business tool for organizations. However, public relations is used as a political tool for some Asian governments as a nation-building tool. For example, Van Leuven (1996) studied public relations practice in South East Asia. He argued that public relations was used by the governments of Malaysia and Singapore as a tool for national development. Furthermore, Taylor (2000) conducted a public relations study in Malaysia. She argued that a campaign in Malaysia was aimed at improving relationships between two different ethnic groups, Chinese and Malaysian. Haque (2004) explained that in the vast majority of Asian countries, the major role of communication practitioners has been contributed to the so-called development communication. In this form of communication, national governments play important roles because they marshal all the media and communication resources in their countries to achieve socio-economic goals in a planned way. For example, in the 1960s, in Singapore, a campaign called “Lungs for Singapore” was launched to create a green environment. Other similar campaigns included family planning, road safety, prevention of drug abuse, and safety in construction and shipbuilding campaign. The government also promoted a “Speak Mandarin” campaign to

encourage the use of Mandarin to help promote trade and commerce with China. The government launched such campaigns in order to create not only a shared national culture but also a better society (Haque, 2004).

Haque (2004) concluded that, “in most Asian countries that are underdeveloped or developing, public relations is only a part of the government developmental programs that require huge communication campaigns to mobilize people to participate in the multiplicity of socioeconomic programs to uplift the society” (p. 351).

Characteristics of public relations departments

Grunig (1992) proposed an Excellence Theory of public relations. He argued that "marketing and public relations are distinct conceptually ... Excellent public relations departments will be separate from marketing departments whereas less excellent ones will be sublimated to marketing" (p. 19). Different from the United States, public relations is closely related to marketing or advertising in some Asian countries. Sriramesh et al. (1999) and Wu & Taylor (2003) suggested that public relations is linked to marketing in Japan and Taiwan (as cited in Wu, 2005). Chen (1991) conducted a study to investigate the marketing-oriented public relations activities in Taiwan. He found that some Taiwanese non-profit organizations, such as the Consumer Protection Foundation, used public relations as a tool for introducing their service to the public (as cited in Wu, 2005). The results of Wu & Taylor's (2003) study also demonstrated the close link between public relations and marketing in Taiwan. According to Wu and Taylor (2003), marketing and public relations are viewed as complementary functions in Taiwan. Regarding Vietnam, McKinney (2006) explained that public relations in Vietnam is considered as another form of paid advertising. This confusion might come from the fact

that media in Vietnam is considered as controlled; “if you want a release published in a Vietnamese media outlet, you pay for it” (McKinney, 2008, p. 48). In one page of a four-page public relations proposal created by an international advertising agency in Vietnam, page one was a cover sheet. Page two consisted of how to invite journalists to write about a company, page three explained that the agency could increase visibility for the company through advertising, and page four simply provided a statement thanking the organization for their interest in the company's public relations services (McKinney, 2008). McKinney (2008) explained that “companies that do not want to have public relations programs usually do not consult professional agencies, but dump this responsibility on their advertising staffs that do not know or understand the practice” (p. 19).

These previous Asian public relations studies demonstrated that the line between marketing, advertising and public relations in Asia is somewhat blurry. In these cultures, the marketing department, advertising department, and the public relations department closely cooperate with each other in order to gain benefits for the organizations.

Public relations practitioners' roles in their organizations

Excellence Theory (Grunig, 1992) discusses the public relations practitioners' roles in their organizations. It suggests that in order for public relations to contribute to the organization's effectiveness, the organization must empower communication management as a critical management function. Empowerment of public relations in an organization means “the senior public relations executive must be involved with the strategic management processes. [...] The senior public relations executive should be a member of the dominant coalition of the organization” (p. 13). Moreover, public relations

researchers have studied the four major roles that communicators play in the organization, i.e. the manager, senior adviser, technician, and media relations roles. Haque (2004) argued that in Asia, “practitioners in the profession, both in public and private sectors, seem to predominantly play the role of communication technicians, largely focusing on message production and distribution” (p. 358). Wu & Taylor (2003) also found that Taiwanese practitioners’ roles are technician-oriented rather than management-oriented. Taiwanese practitioners act as “windows”, which means interacting with their external publics by performing the communication facilitators’ or boundary spanner’s roles. Furthermore, in Vietnam, Dinh (2008) found that even with a Communication Manager or public relations manager in the organization, they perform technician roles rather than strategic management roles. Often, what they do is to deliver organizations’ information to their publics. In multinational organizations, public relations practitioners would only execute according to the available plan made by the board of directors worldwide.

However, in Japan, the case is different. Watson & Sallot (2001) conducted a study among 151 corporate public relations professionals in Japan in order to investigate how Japanese management styles have changed. The result showed that current public relations practice in Japan align more closely with what is practiced in Western societies. “Most practitioners in management positions have access to top management and many of them are part of the top management team. As members of the dominant coalitions inside their companies, these practitioners are in key positions to argue the importance of, and build respect for, public relations” (p. 399).

Gender equality in public relations is another issue that has attracted much attention from scholars. Haque (2004) argued that in many Asian nations, for example, in

the Muslim Asian cultures of the Middle East, strict gender segregation is still practiced, and many occupations still prevent women from participating. Yet, in other parts of Asia, such as Southeast Asia, East Asia and South Asia, women are pursuing diverse careers as well as having high positions in the society. In public relations field, Newsom (1996) discussed the roles of women in Indian public relations practice. She found that female public relations practitioners in India receive equal pay to male practitioners with comparable jobs although the Indian society is still paternalistic. Wu (2006) conducted a study to explore the gender equality issue in Taiwanese public relations. She surveyed 104 participants and found that male and female Taiwanese public relations practitioners are treated equally in terms of pay and promotional channel thanks to the Gender Equality in the Workplace Law in Taiwan.

Apparently, due to differences in economy, education, politics and culture, public relations practitioners' roles also vary in different countries in Asia.

Most important skills for public relations practitioners

With reference to the most important skills for public relations practitioners, Napoli, Taylor & Powers' (1999) study suggested that writing is considered as the most important skill in the United States. Many American public relations textbooks address the importance of writing. According to Seitel (2004), "even in the age of the computer, writing remains the key to public relations. Public relations practitioners are professional communicators. And communication means writing" (p. 396). This might not be the case of public relations in Asian countries. Wu (2005) argued that both media system and culture can affect the importance of writing for public relations practitioners and this is the reason behind the fact that Asian countries consider interpersonal skills as the most

important in public relations. She listed some examples of public relations in China and India. In India and China, public relations practitioners use personal influence as a channel to conduct most public relations activities. Sriramesh (1992) argued that public relations practitioners in India have to cultivate good interpersonal relationships with external publics in order to get governmental support and ensure positive press coverage (as cited in Wu, 2005). In Chinese culture, successful public relations practitioners should know how to build good *Quanxi* (interpersonal relationships) with their publics (Huang, 2000). Huang (2001) stated, “Chinese culture is relation oriented or social oriented. In essence, the most notable characteristic in East Asia is the emphasis on social relations” (p. 222). Wu and Taylor's (2003) study also demonstrated that Taiwanese practitioners focus on building interpersonal relationship. Taiwanese people thought that socializing is an important task for public relations practitioners. Thus, interpersonal communication skills, instead of writing, have become the most important skills for public relations practitioners in some Asian countries. Once again, Wu's (2005) study showed the same result on the importance of interpersonal communication. She explained this based on the collectivism versus individualism view. In collectivistic cultures, communication means building and maintaining interpersonal relationships. Therefore, interpersonal communication skills become the most important skill for public relations practitioners in that culture.

Public relations in Vietnam

Vietnam is located in South East Asia on a narrow strip of land shaped like the letter “S”. China borders it to the north, Laos and Cambodia to the west, the East Sea to

the east and the Pacific Ocean to the east and south. It has a 3,260km long coastline (BEAPA, 2010).

To the world, Vietnam is known more for wars than for peace. This is not surprising as the country went through many wars throughout its history. Vietnam has a four-thousand-year long history, yet for one third of its existence, the country was involved in wars. It experienced more than 1,000 years under Chinese domination, 100 years under French domination, 20 years involved in the Vietnam War (with the United States), and many other border conflicts with China and Cambodia. In 1975, Vietnam gained reunification of the north and south (with the fall of the south during Vietnam War). The nation building and development actually began after that (Asian Studies Center, n.d.).

With 35 years of development, Vietnam is now an emerging country in Asia. With its booming economy and its rising export competence, Vietnam has been the second fastest growing Asian economy over the past five years, after China, and the fastest in South-East Asia with exports comprising up to 66% of the economy (Chandler & Prasso, 2006). Vietnam is rich in natural resources, which includes coal, crude oil, zinc, copper, silver, gold, manganese, and iron. Vietnam's principal exports are crude oil, garments/textiles, footwear, fishery and seafood products, rice (world's second-largest exporter), pepper (spice; world's largest exporter), wood products, coffee, rubber, and handicrafts. Its major export partners include U.S., European Union, Japan, China, Australia, Singapore, Germany, and the United Kingdom (BEAPA, 2010).

Concerning international relations, Vietnam has established diplomatic relations with about 170 countries. It has trading relations with 165 countries and territories and

trade agreements with 76 countries. Vietnam received Most Favored Nation status with 72 countries and territories (Embassy of Vietnam, n.d.). According to a survey conducted by the Asian Business Council, Vietnam ranked third for investment attraction among Asian nations in the 2007-2009 periods, after China and India (Gide Loyrette Novel, 2009).

In 2000, Vietnam signed a bilateral trade agreement with the U.S. and this has brought benefits for both countries. Vietnam has exported more goods to the U.S than any other country, well ahead of the European Union, China, and Japan. In fact, since 1990, Vietnam's exports have increased faster than China. Vietnam is competing with Brazil to become the world's leading coffee exporter (McKinney, 2006). In 2007, Vietnam joined the WTO (World Trade Organization) as the 150th member. The membership with WTO has boosted the extensive trading relationship with even more foreign countries ("Vietnam-US relations," 2008).

Besides its booming economy, Vietnam is also renowned as one of the most peaceful countries for tourist destination in the world. According to Global Peace Index, Vietnam is in the top 38 most peaceful countries in the globe ("Vietnam ranks 38th for GPI," 2010). Vietnamese are welcoming friends from all over the world. Despite the dark history between Vietnam and the U.S., Vietnam is welcoming Americans back to the country and do business together ("Vietnam-US relations," 2008). Two thirds of the Vietnamese population was born after the war. For Vietnamese people, the Vietnam War is a part of the history, but not something they should dwell on (Zwerdling, n.d.).

Tourism in Vietnam is a significant component of the modern Vietnamese economy. Because of its rich culture and history, friendly people and breathtaking natural

beauty, Vietnam becomes an attractive tourist destination. There have been five sites recognized by UNESCO as worthy of natural and cultural World Heritage designation: Halong Bay, Phong Nha - Ke Bang, Hue, Hoi An and My Son (Indochina Travel Information Center [ITIC], n.d.). Lang Co beach in the center of Vietnam is listed as one of the most beautiful beaches in the world (McLean, 2008). Hotels and resorts of different categories of highest world standards are located along the 3000-kilometer-long coast line as well as in big cities in Vietnam (“Vietnam,” n.d.).

When doing public relations in Vietnam, international public relations practitioners should bear in mind factors that can affect their practice. Among two of which are differences in media and culture in Vietnam.

Regarding media background, Nguyen (2007) suggested that while media in the U.S. has freedom of speech, this is not the case in Vietnam. The government censors the media in Vietnam strictly. Often, the state and the party fund most of the newspapers and broadcasts. Media is considered as the voice of the state. Thus, one of the main functions of the media in Vietnam is to educate the masses on the party's lines, speeches, and policies. Censorship in Vietnam has spread across all communication media. For example, when watching a movie in Vietnam, some scenes may have been deleted for the sake of government censorship (Black, Bastos, & Saxby, 2009).

However, Nguyen (2007) commented that the media in Vietnam is gradually changing and becoming more independent. Some newspapers have become financially sustainable and no longer rely on the state's support. Television and radio stations are buying programs from private producers. Moreover, cable television has become widespread, so people have a chance to see other programs worldwide. Use of the Internet has

grown very quickly. According to the International Telecommunication Union (2009), Vietnam is among the top ten countries with the quickest ICT (Information and Communication Technology) growth. The index is based on universal indices, such as fixed telephone, mobile phone, broadband, and the ratio of computer users and Internet users. There are approximately 200 universities, colleges, professional and vocational training schools in Vietnam, and most of them are equipped with computers. Seventy percent of universities are connected to the Internet (“ICT profile – Vietnam,” n.d.). Since the beginning of 2006, the Prime Minister, the President, the Chairman of Parliament and some other ministers have begun having online conversations with citizens (Nguyen, 2007).

With regard to culture, Vietnam is a collectivist society which stresses the importance of family relationships and group decisions (Hofstede, 1980). Vietnamese people emphasize living harmoniously and attempt to avoid defamation of others. In conflicts, they prefer to come out with a win-win situation (Quang & Vuong, 2002). Huu (2004) added that in the collective culture of Vietnam, the family comes first, followed by friendship and the work place. In business, interpersonal relationships will make everything else much easier. Meyer et al. (2006) noticed that foreign investors who establish an amicable relationship with the local authorities find it easier to solve bureaucratic obstacles. Those relationships can be developed as (potentially) cooperative relationships. In Vietnam, building personal relationships is recommended in business (Meyer et al., 2006).

Furthermore, Confucianism has placed many influences on Vietnam’s society, and still does today. Black et al. (2009) advised that because Confucian values often

instill a fear of shame in the Vietnamese culture, public relations practitioners should avoid embarrassing anyone, which can cause that person to “lose face.”

As for gender equality, in comparison with other Asian countries, in general, Vietnamese women obtain high roles in society. Vietnam ranks number 31 of 102 countries on the OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index. Since the 1950s, the position of Vietnamese women has improved. In 2006, the National Assembly passed the country’s first Law on Gender Equality, which aims to address a range of issues including wage gaps and to eliminate discrimination based on gender (Social Institutions & Gender Index [SIGI], n.d.).

With regard to public relations publications, even though public relations in Asia has been well explored by scholars, there is a limited number of studies about public relations in Vietnam. Two researchers/authors who have written about public relations in Vietnam are Bruce McKinney and Hang Dinh. McKinney’s articles and studies about public relations practice in Vietnam were published in the *Public Relations Quarterly* in 2000, 2006, and 2008. A Vietnamese author – Hang Dinh wrote two books, entitled *Public Relations – Theories and Practice* and *Public Relations – Basic Knowledge and Ethics* in Vietnamese. Yet, her book provided theories and lessons on how to practice public relations rather than results yielded from a formal study.

According to Dinh (2008), public relations began in Vietnam in the 1990s and is now considered one of the most popular careers in Vietnam thanks to its activeness, creativity and high income. However, public relations practice in Vietnam is still in its early stages with limited public relations activities, such as event management and media relations.

In 1999, with his first trip to Vietnam, McKinney took a first look at public relations practice in Vietnam and stated, “public relations is in its infancy in Vietnam” (p. 23). There was only one bi-cultural public relations agency in Vietnam at that time – PUBCOM (Public Relations BiCultural Consulting) located in Hanoi. Its major clients were AT&T, Motorola, Oracle, and Swissotel. PUBCOM specialized in media relations, staff management and cultural training, special events management, and information services (McKinney, 1999). Six years later, in 2006, McKinney returned to Vietnam. While he could see the development everywhere in Vietnam, he found out that public relations in Vietnam had not progressed very far (McKinney, 2006). With the population of over 80 million, there were nine public relations agencies in Ho Chi Minh City and two in Hanoi.

Yet, another report showed different statistics about the number of public relations agencies. According to a survey conducted by the FTA market research company in 2005, the number of public relations firms rises by 30% every year on average. In 2005, there were more than 20 public relations agencies and over 200 advertising firms, which also offered public relations services. Also, it is worth noting that fifteen leading public relations companies in Vietnam are all domestic, while foreign companies like Ogilvy PR and Leo Activation ceased their operations in Vietnam. While clients searched for service from foreign-invested firms before, they now come to domestic public relations companies for advice because local companies seem to understand the local market better (“Domestic firms gain upper hand,” 2005).

It seems that it is difficult to know the exact number of public relations agencies as well as the number of public relations practitioners in Vietnam since there is no

official association like the PRSA in Vietnam. The only informal public relations club found is called *PR club*, an online network (<http://www.prclub.com.vn>). Still, the website is not updated frequently and many questions about public relations are still unanswered.

Today, in Vietnam, public relations is more well-known by companies. It is estimated that local firms have spent up to 25-30% of their advertising budgets on public relations activities, but many firms have not fully realised the potential for public relations in business yet, as it is a relatively new tool in Vietnam (“Domestic PR firms gain upper hand,” 2005). Only major firms, such as Caltex, Pepsi-IBC, and Coca-Cola have public relations department, which devote large amount of funds to public relations activities related to introducing products and providing sponsorship, charity, and press conferences (Thanh, 2003).

Regarding public relations education, the Journalism University in Hanoi launched its first public relations program in the country in 2006. For the first time, undergraduates can choose public relations as their major. In 2007, there was only one public relations lecturer who is professionally trained with public relations knowledge from an Australian university (Nguyen, 2007). Books about public relations are still limited in the Vietnam market. Recently, two public relations books – *Public Relations (Frameworks)* by Frank Jefkins and *The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR* by Al Ries and Laura Ries were translated. Dinh might be the author with the most public relations books published. She wrote two books about public relations, entitled “*Public Relations – Basic Knowledge and Ethics*” and “*Public Relations – Theories and Practice.*” *Relationship between public relations and advertising*

McKinney (2000) noted that public relations practice in Vietnam at that time was seen as reactive rather than proactive practice. “Most Vietnamese companies see public relations as ‘guest relations,’ whose purpose is to smooth over difficulties with corporate clients. An understanding of the value of news releases, backgrounders, newsletters, is foreign to most Vietnamese companies” (p. 24). In fact, several people who had public relations in their titles practiced little of what the West would consider public relations (McKinney, 2000).

More importantly, the line between advertising and public relations in Vietnam is very blurred, and most people still think that public relations is another form of paid advertising (McKinney, 2006). Additionally, McKinney (2006) argued that two of the biggest staples of the public relations practice in the United States, i.e news conference and news releases, did not work the same way in Vietnam.

When individuals are invited to news conferences, [...] a \$20 pay-off is expected (and U.S. dollars are preferred to Vietnamese dong), and most journalists slip out the door as soon as possible after the conference is started. If the organization holding the news conference does not follow this practice, he or she will be facing a room of empty chairs. The concept of the news release is even more perplexing in Vietnam: there is no free placement of news releases. If an organization wants a news release in a Vietnamese newspaper, they must pay for it – uncontrolled media is a foreign concept in this country. Probably the biggest obstacle that faces the practice of public relations in Vietnam is that it is perceived not as a tool that can increase a company's profits, but only as a method of maintaining cash flow within the company. (p. 20)

McKinney explained that this confusion might come from the fact that media in Vietnam is controlled. If one company wants a release published in a Vietnamese publication, they pay for it (McKinney, 2008).

Perception of image-building in public relations

While building a reputable image for the organization is considered one of the most important tasks in public relations, a survey showed that only 4.2% of Vietnamese enterprises care about their brand name or their image (Thanh, 2003). McKinney (2006) analyzed a case study of a large company in Vietnam as an example of how an organization deals with its public during crisis. The case study showed that Vietnamese public relations practitioners did not understand the value of their image.

Vietnam Airlines is the main airline company in Vietnam. In 2000, Vietnam Airlines purchased four Boeing 777s for lengthy international flights. After that, Vietnam Airlines decided to buy Pratt and Whitney engines instead of those made by General Electric or Rolls-Royce. The Aviation Authority of Vietnam (AAV) was upset when they discovered this because those engines are used for short flights, which puts the safety of passengers at risk. Despite the protest of the AAV, Vietnam Airlines purchased the Pratt & Whitney engines. Worse still, after this happened, Vietnam Airlines denied its responsibility and insisted that it did the right thing. Moreover, no apology or attempt at image-repair was made. This stance produced an extremely significant amount of negative publicity for Vietnam Airlines. Of the 318 stories examined in this study, 228 were negative, 66 were neutral, and only 24 were positive. Interestingly, despite all of this negative publicity, Vietnam Airlines was doing extremely well. It was expecting that its profits would rise to \$1.07 billion in 2006 from 970 million in 2005. The reason for Vietnam's Airlines' denial might be involved with the face's concept. The company was afraid of losing face to its public by admitting it made a poor decision. More importantly,

Vietnam Airlines does not have many competitors. Vietnamese people only have two choices for its flights: Vietnam Airlines and Pacific Airlines (McKinney, 2006).

However, Vietnam Airlines does not represent all organizations in Vietnam. Indeed, some organizations are beginning to pay attention to their brand name (Dinh, 2008). Most of them are international companies. These companies want to build good images through corporate social responsibility activities. For example, Dutch Lady (specializing in dairy) conducted a campaign called “Fire-Fly” to sponsor many scholarships for poor students (“Fire-Fly Campaign,” 2004). Unilever (specializing in personal care products) encouraged the community to donate uniform clothes for poor pupils (Dinh, 2008). Honda Vietnam (specializing in automobiles) has been involved with many corporate social responsibility activities, including offering scholarship to excellent students and pupils, building safety education centers, and helping the community during typhoons in central areas of Vietnam (“Social Activities,” n.d.).

Public relations practitioners' roles

While the Excellence Theory stresses the importance of public relations practitioners as strategic management and that communicator seniors should be involved in dominant coalition so that they can participate in the important decision-making process (Grunig, 1992), Dinh (2008) argued that this is not the case in Vietnam. Most Vietnamese organizations, especially governmental organizations, have communication departments. But the people in these departments are only responsible for one-way-delivering information, which means announcing organizations' information to publics. These staffs receive very little attention from the senior leaders of the organizations. Regarding private enterprises, today they are paying more attention to public relations.

Still, most public relations practitioners, even with the title ‘Communication Manager’ or ‘public relations manager’ play technical roles rather than strategic management roles. Public relations practitioners in Vietnam do not participate in strategic management or the decision-making process of the company. This can be clearly seen in multi-national enterprises, where strategic decisions are already made on a global scale and public relations practitioners in Vietnam only execute according to the available plan.

Dinh (2008) argued that the reason why public relations practitioners in Vietnam are not involved in strategic management function is because most of them are young and lack experience. Most public relations practitioners in Vietnam major in foreign languages or journalism. They lack knowledge and experience in politics, cultures, socio-economic, etc., which prohibits them from participating in the strategic management of the organization. Yet, Dinh thought that it is worth raising the question about public relations managers’ perceptions about the importance of the profession before blaming public relations practitioners’ lack of experience.

Most important skills for practitioners

In McKinney’s most recent study in early 2008, a survey was sent to one hundred and fifteen business managers to ask about their perceptions of public relations. Pertaining to the most important skills of public relations practitioners, his study showed that the highest rated activity was web pages and the lowest ranked was computer skills. This revealed some contradiction because how one could develop web pages without computer skills. Perhaps, the respondents might think that making webpage is important but they are not the ones who do it. Furthermore, oral skills were rated higher than writing skills.

The authors McKinney and Dinh have contributed to the knowledge of public relations in Vietnam. However, Dinh's discussion was not drawn from a scientific study. Besides, McKinney stated that the limitation of his study was that this was general survey of Vietnamese business managers, not Vietnamese public relations professionals. As a result, McKinney encouraged other studies in the field because the need for public relations practitioners will grow when Vietnam continues to experiment with a free-market economy. The positive responses toward public relations by the respondents of his recent study in 2008 also imply that public relations in Vietnam is perceived to be an important business function, and it will have tremendous potential in the coming years. It is high time to conduct a study with the participation of public relations practitioners in Vietnam in order to explore better the picture of public relations practice in the country.

As a result, this study aims to explore a better picture of public relations in Vietnam. This study will use survey method to answer to following questions:

- RQ1. Is the importance of public relations well-recognized in Vietnamese organizations?
- RQ2a. What are the functions of public relations departments in Vietnam?
- RQ2b. How are public relations departments structured in Vietnam?
- RQ3a. What roles do Vietnamese practitioners perform in their organization?
- RQ3b. Do public relations practitioners consult on major decisions in your organization?
- RQ3c. Does gender have an impact on practitioners' roles?
- RQ4. What are the most important skills for Vietnamese public relations practitioners?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study attempted to obtain an up-to-date picture of public relations practice in Vietnam. Various aspects of public relations practice were examined, including public relations' function, practitioners' roles, and most important skills for practitioners.

The current study was served as the first formal study about public relations practice in Vietnam, with the participation of public relations practitioners. No formal study about public relations in Vietnam has been found before except for one study carried out by McKinney in 2008. However, participants of McKinney's (2008) study were Vietnamese managers, and his study used only the survey method to investigate the perceptions of public relations of Vietnamese business managers.

Compared to that one study, this current study was unique because it was the first formal study about public relations in Vietnam with the participation of Vietnamese practitioners. McKinney (2008) stated that, "finding actual public relations practitioners would be extremely difficult – they just aren't that many in Vietnam. Currently, most public relations in Vietnam tend to be out-sourced to public relations companies that tend to be directed by non-Vietnamese individuals" (p.48). Yet this study was able to find and send 90 surveys to 90 practitioners and yielded a 64.4% return rate (58 respondents).

Furthermore, this study used the combined methods of surveys and in-depth interviews with the hope to gain a better and more updated picture of public relations in Vietnam.

This study was conducted using two-step process. Surveys were first sent out to participants via emails, using snowball sampling method. Because it was predicted that Internet surveys and snowball sampling could be time-consuming, in-depth interviews were carried out after the surveys were delivered in order to save time.

Subjects and procedures

Participants of this study were public relations practitioners from the cities of Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh and Hue, which are 3 major cities in the North, South and center of Vietnam. With reference to Ho Chi Minh city, with the population of more than 7 million people, Ho Chi Minh city is the highest population-concentrated city in the country. It is also considered as the largest economic and financial hub of Vietnam. Regarding Hanoi, it is the capital of Vietnam and is the second-largest city following Ho Chi Minh city with a population of more than 6 million people. Besides Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city, Hue city is also among the major cities in Vietnam and it is the second most developed city following Danang in the center of Vietnam. It was expected that choosing a representative from the North, South and Center of Vietnam would help gain a more comprehensive picture of public relations practice in Vietnam.

Internet surveys

Survey is considered as the most common used research methodology in public relations (Stacks, 2002). Stacks presented four basic ways to collect data: via telephone, mail, person-to-person, and the Internet. Among the four types, Internet survey is the easiest way to get access to participants. Its biggest advantage includes the access to

groups or individuals who would be difficult, if not possible, to reach through other channels (Wright, 2005). Internet survey also makes it easier with the analysis process because of the electronic questionnaires.

Snowball sampling

“Sampling is the science of systematically drawing a valid group of objects from a population reliably” (Stacks, 2002, p. 150). Snowball sampling begins with small sample of people whom a researcher has access to and whom, in turn have access to other people. The researcher then asks his/her first sample to introduce him/her with other members of the population. This method is used when a researcher has limited knowledge of the population (Stacks, 2002). Even though snowball sampling is sometimes seen as a biased technique because of its selections of individuals by their social networks versus random selection (Browne, 2005), this methodology was very effective in this specific study.

In this study, non-probability snowball sampling was used. Snowball sampling was chosen for this study for many reasons. First, it was very difficult to get a list of Vietnamese public relations practitioners online. There is not a so-called Public Relations Association that manages public relations activities in Vietnam. Thus, there are no official statistics about the number of public relations agencies in Vietnam (McKinney, 2006). As a result, finding a list of Vietnamese public relations practitioners seemed to be an impossible mission.

Second, even if the researcher had a list of public relations practitioners and delivered the surveys via mail or email, the response rate could be very low. The reason

is because Vietnamese culture highly values relationship. It is important to establish a relationship with someone before asking him/her for a favor.

When conducting his study about public relations practice in Vietnam, McKinney (2008) noted that a mailed survey would most likely never be returned because people will not respond your survey unless you are referred to them by someone they know. “Vietnamese business contacts are mostly referrals; essentially a business relationship is struck based on another business associate recommendation” (“Understanding Vietnamese business culture,” n.d.). Due to this cultural characteristic, there is a very low chance for feedback, if not no chance at all, for the researcher, who does not have a relationship with people she wants to study, to request for their participation. It is more desirable if she is referred to them first. As long as the reference is achieved and the relationship is established, the participation process will go smoother. For these reasons, snowball sampling was expected to be an effective method due to the limited knowledge of the population as well as difficult access to statistics and information of the populations.

Generation of survey sample

Starting from 20 of her contacts, the author asked her friends to introduce her to other practitioners they knew. When the author got new contacts, she sent them personalized emails, introducing herself and the referees who had provided her with their contacts. After the relationship was established, she mentioned about the study and asked if she could send a questionnaire to them. After having their approval, surveys were sent via practitioners’ emails.

In some cases, the relationship was first established by chatting on skype, yahoo messenger or facebook. It was because sometimes the only contact information the author got was a nickname, and not an email address. After getting to know each other, the author asked for participants' emails to send surveys to. Questionnaires were provided in both Vietnamese and English in order to increase the flexibility of the respondents.

As a result, 90 surveys were sent to 90 practitioners and 58 responses were received, which yielded a 64.4% return rate.

In general, surveys in Asia often suffer from a low response rate (Wu, 2003).

Vietnam is not an exception. When conducted study in Vietnam, McKinney (2008) said:

Finding individuals to sample is not an easy task in Vietnam. Mailed surveys would most likely never be returned, and it is difficult to approach Vietnamese companies to do survey research. You would have to have a connection to the company surveyed, and would most likely need to pass through several layers of management before you could circulate your survey. (p. 48)

Thus, compared to studies employing surveys method, this return rate was very desirable. For example, Wu & Baah-Boakye's (2007) Ghana public relations study reported a 53% response rate. Wu & Taylor's (2003) Taiwanese public relations study reported a 44% response rate. Ken et al.'s (2006) study on Bosnia public relations reported a 38% response rate. The key for this success was because the author took cultural factors into consideration. The author tried to establish an interpersonal relationship with potential respondents before asking for their participation. Personalized emails and follow-up reminders also helped increase the response rate.

Doing surveys in Vietnam can be time-consuming. Yet, it can produce good results if one knows how to invest time in building a relationship first. From 20 of the

author's contact, she could find 90 participants, which was the result of networks of networks.

In-depth interview

According to Kvale (1996), the qualitative research interview tries to “understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of people’s experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (p. 8). Stacks (2002) explained that the advantage of qualitative research with in-depth interview was to allow researchers to understand not only the problem being researched but also the person being interviewed. Besides, in-depth interview allows for introspection on the part of the interviewee and is still controlled by the interviewer. As a result, in-depth interview provides rich detail and the ability to understand what interviewees’ perspectives on a particular problem are.

Thus, besides Internet survey, the researcher hoped that by using in-depth interview, it would enable her to participate in a conversation with public relations practitioners to get to know their experience and opinion about their industry better with more detailed information.

For this current study, ten public relations practitioners engaged in in-depth interviews. Due to geographic distance (the researcher stayed in the U.S. while participants lived in Vietnam), email interview methods were used. A list of questions was first sent via email and respondents were asked to type their answers in a Microsoft Word file and to send back to the author via email. Follow-up questions were asked in order to clarify confusing and unclear ideas. For this current study, email interviews helped solve schedule conflict due to different time zones, thereby saving much time in

the interview process. The interview questions were written both in Vietnamese and English to increase the flexibility of the respondents.

Institutional Review Board approval

The researcher in this study received approval from the Institutional Review Board before conducting this study.

Data collection and data analysis

Regarding surveys, responses were collected over a period of two months. This was expected because as a local person, the author knew how much time it would take to communicate with Vietnamese respondents to first establish a relationship and to follow up with them. As a result, 58 completed surveys were returned among 90 surveys sent out. After the surveys were collected, they were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 18 software. The data were then analyzed.

Data analysis sought to answer research questions stated in the study. Because it was an exploratory study, most of the survey questions were analyzed based on frequency tables generated by SPSS 18. For one question, cross-tabulation tables were generated for the examination on the relationship between gender and managerial roles among Vietnamese practitioners.

Concerning in-depth interviews, it took over a period of one month to collect all of the interview transcripts. Interview questions were sent to ten interviewees and all participants returned their answers. After that, interview transcripts were coded and analyzed. In two cases, the author made an attempt to follow up with interviewees for clarification and additional information. For the current study, interview data served as

qualitative data, which provided more detailed information and explanation for the discussion.

The next chapter, “Results” will discuss findings from this study. The results should be able to answer research questions relating to public relations functions, practitioners’ roles and most important skills for practitioners.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Study demographics

A total of 90 surveys were sent to public relations practitioners in the cities of Hanoi, Hue and Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam via email. Of those, 58 surveys were returned, yielding a 64.4% return rate. Respondent demographics showed that 45 respondents (77.6%) were female and 13 respondents (22.4%) were male. A total of 26 of 58 respondents (44.8%) indicated that they worked in Ho Chi Minh City, 23 respondents (39.7%) indicated they worked in Hanoi while 9 respondents (15.5%) indicated they worked in Hue City. Fifty-two respondents (89.7%) worked for a corporation while six respondents (10.3%) work for a public relations agency. Respondents' titles included public relations executive, public relations director, public relations coordinator, public relations assistant, public relations manager, sales & marketing manager, communication manager/director, marketing manager/director, director of sales, and managing director.

The survey also revealed that the mean number of years experience as public relations practitioners that respondents had was 3.02 years. The number of years experience varied from less than 1 year to 10 years.

Fig. 4.1

Table showing gender of respondents, breakdown of respondents by area, and managerial position of respondents

	Frequency	Percent
<i>Gender of respondents:</i>		
Female	45	77.6
Male	13	22.4
<i>Breakdown of respondents by area:</i>		
Ho Chi Minh City	26	44.8
Hanoi	23	39.7
Hue	9	15.5
<i>Managerial position of respondents:</i>		
Yes	30	51.7
No	28	48.3
Total = 58		

Additionally, 30 out of the 58 respondents (51.7%) self-identified as holding a managerial role while 28 of them (48.3%) indicated that they did not hold any management position. Nineteen out of the 45 female respondents (42.2%) self-identified as holding a managerial role, while 11 out of the 13 male respondents (84.6%) indicated that they held management positions.

Study findings

The main goal of this study was to explore public relations practice in Vietnam in terms of public relations functions, practitioners' roles and important skills for practitioners. Thus, respondents were asked to share their opinions and their experience about these issues. The questionnaire was a combination of both rating-scale questions

(7-point Likert-type scale) as well as multiple-choice questions. The ten questions in the questionnaire helped to answer the study's research questions. The first three questions asked respondents to rate on a scale of 1 to 7 with 1 being "strongly agree" and 7 being "strongly disagree". The last seven questions asked respondents to answer multiple-choice questions.

1. *Public relations should be a separate department in all major Vietnamese companies.*

The mean score for this item was 3.17, which scored in the "slightly agree" category. The distribution of responses was strongly agree (19%), agree (31%), slightly agree (15.5%), neither agree nor disagree (8.6%), slightly disagree (6.9%), disagree (12.1%), strongly disagree (6.9%).

2. *The importance of public relations is well-recognized in your organization*

Public relations practitioners generally agreed that the importance of public relations was well-recognized in their organization. The mean score for this item was 1.95 with the following frequencies: strongly agree (44.8%), agree (31.0%), slightly agree (12.1%), neither agree nor disagree (8.6%), slightly disagree (3.4%), and strongly disagree (0.0%).

3. *Public relations practitioners are highly respected in your organization.*

The mean score for this item was 2.47 which fell between the "agree" category and "slightly agree" category. The distribution of responses was strongly agree (22.4%), agree (34.5%), slightly agree (19.0%), neither agree nor disagree (22.4%), slightly disagree (1.7%), and strongly disagree (0.0%).

Fig. 4.2

Perception of practitioners on the importance of public relations

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Public relations should be a separate department	58	3.17	1.912
The importance of PR is well-recognized	58	1.95	1.115
PR practitioners are highly respected	58	2.47	1.127

Note: A seven point scale was used with 1 = strongly agree and 7 = strongly disagree.

4. *What are the most important skills for public relations practitioners? – Written communication skills, interpersonal communication skills, technical competence, strategic planning skills, speaking different languages, and other skills?*

For this question, respondents were allowed to choose multiple answers. When data were entered into the SPSS, the question was broken down into six variables. The name of each variable was skill1, skill2, and so on, to skill6.

Fifty-four respondents (93.1%) indicated that interpersonal communication was among the most important skills for public relations practitioners. Forty-one respondents (70.7%) chose strategic planning skills as one of the most important skills for public relations practitioners. Thirty-six respondents (62.1%) agreed that written communication was among the most important skills for public relations practitioners. Twenty-seven respondents (46.6%) thought that the ability to speak different languages was among the most important skills in public relations. Twenty-three respondents (39.7%) answered that technical skills was among the most important skills.

Thirteen respondents (22.4%) chose “other skills,” and listed organizational skills, public speaking skills, persuasion skills, risk & crisis management skills, judgment skills, computer skills, and negotiating skills as most important skills. Besides, these

respondents also added characteristics that public relations practitioners should need, such as being creative, sociable, and knowledgeable in many fields, such as society, economy, and culture.

Fig. 4.3

Important skills for public relations practitioners

Item	Frequency	Percent
Interpersonal communication skills	54	93.1
Strategic planning skills	41	70.7
Written communication skills	36	62.1
Speaking different languages	27	46.6
Technical competence	23	39.7
Other skills	13	22.4
Total = 58		

5. *What are the roles of public relations practitioners in your organization? Writing press releases, communicating with media, writing company newsletters, producing company brochures, writing speeches for company executives, developing company web-pages, creating company advertising, buying advertisements, strategic planning with the dominant coalition, and other roles?*

Similar to item 3, for this question, respondents were allowed to choose multiple answers. When data were entered into the SPSS, the question was broken down into ten variables. The name of each variable was role1, role2, and so on, to role10.

Fifty-four respondents (93.1%) stated that communicating with media was one of the roles of public relations in their organization. Fifty-one respondents (87.9%) indicated that writing press releases was one of their roles as public relations practitioners. Forty-seven respondents (81.0%) chose writing newsletters. Thirty-eight respondents (65.5%)

answered that writing speeches for company executives was one of their roles as public relations practitioners. Thirty-seven respondents (63.8%) indicated that strategic planning with the dominant coalition was one of their public relations roles. Thirty-four respondents (58.6%) replied that producing company brochures was one of their roles as public relations practitioners. Thirty-three practitioners (56.9%) chose developing company web-pages. Twenty-five respondents (43.1%) answered that creating company's advertising was one of their roles. Twenty-three respondents (39.7%) agreed that buying advertisements was one of their roles as public relations practitioners. Eighteen respondents (31.0%) added other roles of public relations practitioners, such as brand management, crisis management, internal public relations, corporate reputation management, media crisis management, company's image promotion, events planning and organizing, corporate social responsibility activities planning, and media relations activities.

Fig. 4.4

Roles of public relations practitioners

	Frequency	Percent
Communicating with media	54	93.1
Writing press releases	51	87.9
Writing company newsletters	47	81.0
Writing speeches for company executive	38	65.5
Strategic planning with dominant coalition	37	63.8
Producing company brochures	34	58.6
Developing company web-pages	33	56.9
Creating company advertising	25	43.1
Buying advertisements	23	39.7
Other roles	18	31.0
Total = 58		

6. *Do public relations practitioners consult on major decisions in your organization?*

Forty-two respondents (72.4%) answered “yes” to the question while 16 respondents (27.6%) answered “no”.

Fig. 4.5

Decision making power of practitioners

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	42	72.4
No	16	27.6
Total = 58		

7. *Is the public relations department a separate unit within your organization?*

Twenty respondents (34.5%) indicated that the public relations department was a separate unit in their organization. Thirty-two respondents (55.2%) answered that the public relations department was not a separate unit.

Fig. 4.6

Is public relations department a separate unit?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	20	34.5
No	32	55.2
Not Applicable	6	10.3
Total = 58		

8. *How is the public relations department structured?*

Only respondents who answered that the public relations department was not a separate unit for the question number 7 had the option to continue to answer this question. There were thirty-two respondents (55.2%) who answered that the public relations

department was not a separate unit. Thus, among these 32 respondents, 16 of them (27.6%) indicated that the public relations department was a subset of the marketing department. Thirteen respondents (22.4%) stated that the public relations, advertising and marketing departments had overlapping functions. One respondent (1.7%) answered that the public relations department was a subset of the advertising department. Two respondents (3.4%) chose “others”. One of them explained that the public relations department was a subset of the sales department in their organization. The other respondent wrote that public relations, shareholder relations, and branding were all covered in her function. This answer was confusing because it did not directly answer the question about the structure of the public relations department. Six respondents (10.3%) chose “not applicable” because they worked at a public relations agency.

Fig. 4.7

Structure of public relations department when it is not a separate unit.

	Frequency	Percent
PR department is a subset of advertising department	1	3.1
PR department is a subset of marketing department	16	50.0
PR, advertising & marketing are overlapping functions	13	40.6
Others	2	6.2
Total = 32		

9. *What are the functions of the public relations department in your organization?*

Building and maintaining positive relationships with the public, being the spokesperson of the organization, dealing with crisis, strategic planning or other functions?

Similar to item 3 and 4, this question allowed respondents to choose multiple answers. When data were entered into the SPSS, the question was broken down into five variables. The name of each variable was function1, function2, and so on, to function5.

Fifty-seven respondents (98.3%) chose “building and maintaining positive relationships with the public,” thirty-seven respondents (63.8%) chose “dealing with crisis,” thirty-three respondents (56.9%) chose “being the spoke-person,” twenty-five respondents (43.1%) chose “doing strategic planning,” and eleven respondents (19%) chose “others”. Those that chose “others,” added “maintaining communication channel with clients,” “maintaining internal communication,” “budget propose and budget control,” “brand management,” “image management,” “corporate social responsibility,” “website management,” “advertisement writing,” and “support marketing activities.”

Fig. 4.8

Functions of public relations department

	Frequency	Percent
Build & maintain relationship with organization’s publics	57	98.3
Deal with crisis if it happens	37	63.8
Role as spoke-person of the organization	33	56.9
Do strategic planning for the company	25	43.1
Other functions	11	19.0
Total: 58		

10. Is public relations your only responsibility or is it one of many responsibilities you have?

Thirty-one respondents (53.4%) revealed that public relations was their only responsibility while 27 respondents (46.6%) indicated that it was one of many responsibilities they had.

Fig. 4.9

Is public relations the only responsibility of practitioners?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	31	53.4
No	27	46.6
Total = 58		

The results collected from survey questions and qualitative data collected from in-depth interviews helped answer the research questions for the current study.

Research question 1: Is the importance of public relations well-recognized in Vietnamese organizations?

Item 2 and 3 directly addressed this research question. Item 2 asked respondents to rate on a 1 to 7 scale (1= strongly agree and 7 = strongly disagree) the statement, “The importance of public relations is well-recognized in your organization.” The mean score for this item was 1.95, which fell into the category of “Strongly agree” and “Agree”. A majority of respondents (44.8%) chose “Strongly agree” for this statement. In general, it seems that the importance of public relations is well-recognized in Vietnamese organizations.

Additionally, item number 3, which asked respondents if public relations practitioners are highly respected in their organizations, also helped answer this first research question. It is assumed that if the importance of public relations is recognized in the organization, public relations practitioners will be highly respected. The mean score for this question was 2.47, which fell between the “Agree” and “Slightly Agree” categories. A majority of respondents chose “Agree”, followed by “Strongly agree”. In

general, public relations practitioners agreed that they are highly respected in their organization.

Research question 2a: What are the functions of a public relations department in Vietnam?

Item 9 in the questionnaire most directly addressed this research question. Data from in-depth interviews also provided more detailed information relating to the question.

The item 9 asked, “What are functions of the public relations department in your organization?” Almost every respondent (N=57, 98.3%) agreed that “building and maintaining positive relationships with the organization’s publics” is a function of their department, followed by “dealing with crisis” (63.8%), “being the spokesperson of the company” (56.9%), and “doing strategic planning for the company” (43.1%). Those who chose “others,” accounted for 19%. These practitioners added “maintaining communication channel with clients,” “maintaining internal communication,” “budget propose and budget control,” “brand management,” “image management,” “corporate social responsibility,” “website management,” “advertisement writing,” and “support marketing activities,” as functions in their department (see fig. 4.8).

In general, data from surveys showed that “building and maintaining relationships with the organization’s publics” is the function that practitioners do the most in the public relations department and “doing strategic planning for the company” is the function that practitioners perform the least in their department.

Additionally, qualitative data collected from in-depth interviews showed that “building good relationship with the publics,” “internal public relations,” “image management,” and “marketing supporting activities” are among their department

functions. For example, one practitioner shared that, “because we are a public relations agency, building a good relationship with our clients is most important to us” (Personal communication, May 10, 2010). Other practitioners said:

Our public relations functions include building good relationships with the publics, such as the media, partners, clients, etc. The main responsibility of public relations staff is to establish two-way communication between the organization and its publics in order to gain understanding and support from the publics. (Personal communication, April 11, 2010)

In my company, besides building relationships with the media and the publics, the public relations department is responsible for managing the reputation of the company. It is also responsible for building and implementing a communication plan for the entire company, which includes sponsorship organization and events holding. (Personal communication, April 17, 2010)

In our non-profit organization, the public relations department is in charge of maintaining and promoting the organization’s image in order to build good relationships with many partners. This will make it easy for us to ask for grants. Public relations functions in our organization also include internal public relations, which helps connect employees in the company with each other, keep them informed about the company’s policy and activities, and make them feel proud to be a part of the company. (Personal communication, April 12, 2010)

As an education center, we partner with prestigious universities around the world to provide business programs, such as BBA and MBA. Our public relations department helps spread the word about these courses by organizing informational conferences, publishing information in the media (both print and online), updating our website, designing and printing brochures, fliers, etc. (Personal communication, April 14, 2010)

Research question 2b: How is a public relations department structured in Vietnam?

Items 1, 7, and 8 addressed the current research question directly although there was also valuable information to be examined from the interviews. Item 1 asked for respondents’ opinion if the public relations department should be a separate department. The mean score for this item was 3.17, which scored in the “slightly agree” category.

Thus, in general, practitioners slightly agreed that public relations should be a separate unit.

Item 7 continued asking respondents if public relations department is, in reality, a separate unit within their organization. More than half of the respondents (N=32, 55.2%) answered “No” and 20 respondents (34.5%) answered “Yes”. Six respondents chose “Not applicable” because they worked for public relations agencies where public relations department’s structure is different.

In order to obtain more detailed information about how public relations department is structured in Vietnamese organizations, item number 8 asked respondents if the public relations department is a subset of the advertising department or if it is a subset of marketing department or if the public relations, advertising, and marketing departments overlap with each other. Among the 32 respondents who answered that the public relations department was not a separate department, a majority of respondents (N=16, 50%) indicated that the public relations department is a subset of the marketing department, followed by 40.6% of respondents who answered that public relations, advertising and marketing are overlapping functions, 3.1% of respondents who said the public relations department is a subset of the advertising department, and 3.1% of respondents who indicated that the public relations department is a subset of the sales department (see fig. 4.7).

As can be seen from the results from surveys, most Vietnamese organizations do not have a separate public relations department. About one third of Vietnamese organizations have their own separate public relations department. In most cases, the public relations department is integrated with the marketing department.

Furthermore, data from in-depth interviews also showed practitioners' different ideas on public relations department's structure. Those who thought that public relations should be separated from other departments said that public relations has its own distinct functions and that it should be a separate unit.

My organization focuses on organizing activities to raise community awareness. Public relations differs from marketing and advertising. Thus, the public relations department should be a separate unit in order to allow practitioners more time to focus on public relations functions. (Personal communication, April 12, 2010)

By contrast, practitioners who indicated that public relations should be integrated into the marketing department commented that, "public relations should be a subset of the marketing department because public relations cannot be separated from marketing strategies of the company" (personal communication, April 12, 2010). Another practitioner said:

Public relations plays a very important role in our company because we are working in the culture-entertainment field. Public relations, via communication channels, helps support the overall marketing strategies in the company. Public relations and marketing are well related to each other. Thus, the public relations department should belong to the marketing department in order to gain the overall and complete source of information. (Personal communication, May 11, 2010)

Question research 3a: What roles do Vietnamese practitioners perform in their organization?

As far as practitioners' roles were concerned, "communicating with media" was the highest chosen public relations activity (93.1%), followed by writing press releases (87.9%), writing newsletters (81.0%), writing speeches for company executives (65.5%), strategic planning with the dominant coalition (63.8%), producing company brochures (58.6%), developing company web-pages (56.9%), creating company's advertising

(43.1%), buying advertisements (39.7%), and other roles (31.0%), such as brand management, crisis management, internal public relations, corporate reputation management, media crisis management, company's image promotion, events planning and organizing, corporate social responsibility activities planning, and media relations activities (see fig. 4.4).

It seems that for Vietnamese practitioners, communicating with media seems to be the most important activity while advertising relating activities are the least important. Other public relations relating activities, such as writing press releases, writing newsletter, writing speeches for company executive are also ranked highly in the list. Strategic planning activities are ranked somewhere in the middle.

During the interviews, practitioners discussed their responsibilities as follows: We hold press conferences, meet with reporters and journalists, write press releases, update websites and newsletters, and make sure we are available for the media when information is requested. As a marketing manager, I approve press releases, newsletters, and images before they are published. We discuss public relations campaigns for many different products and exchange information among public relations, advertising and marketing people so that plans are carried out smoothly. I also meet with senior journalists and editors to make sure the information is published as planned. (Personal communication, May 11, 2010)

I distribute press releases to journalists and follow up with them to provide additional information. I also collect published press releases and articles for the result-tracking analysis. The public relations coordinators in our company are responsible for holding press trips and media dinners.” (Personal communication, May 10, 2010)

As I work for an NGO, I plan and organize activities to raise community's awareness. I maintain good relationships with the media and partners. I am also responsible for answering interviews from the media or writing interview answers or speeches for senior executives. My responsibilities also include writing press releases and publishing newsletters for the organization. (Personal communication, April 12, 2010)

Research question 3b: Do public relations practitioners consult on major decisions in your organization?

Item number 6 directly answered this research question even though qualitative data from in-depth interviews also helped answer this question with more details. This question was asked in order to understand more about public relations practitioners' roles in their organization.

For this question, a majority of public relations practitioners (72.4%) answered that they consulted on major decisions in their organizations while 16 respondents (27.6%) answered they did not (see fig. 4.5).

Qualitative data revealed opposite ideas concerning this question. One practitioner commented that, "the senior public relations executives often consult on major decisions in my company. It is because in order to have good public relations strategies, one has to understand the development strategy of the company" (personal communication, May 11, 2010). Other public relations practitioners said:

Our public relations managers and directors are rarely involved with major decisions in our company. It is because the importance of public relations is not yet well-recognized. Still, there are misunderstandings between public relations and advertising. (Personal communication, April 2, 2010)

In our corporation, the head of public relations department, the public relations director, is involved in the decision-making process. However, those decisions are more involved with communication plans than the overall development plan of the company. Decisions for the overall development of the company are made by the board of directors. (Personal communication, April 17, 2010)

There is no public relations director or manager in our company. There is one person who is responsible for public relations activities. This person will coordinate with the management staff in order to plan strategies. However, the final decision is made by the management staff. Thus, public relations faces many

limitations and difficulties in my company. (Personal communication, April 4, 2010)

Research question 3c: Does gender have an impact on practitioners' roles?

Items number 2 and 6 in the demographics section directly helped answer this research question.

Demographic findings showed that there were more female practitioners participating in this current study – 77.6% of the participants of this study were female while 22.4% of the participants were male.

As far as gender and practitioners' roles were concerned, nineteen out of 45 female respondents (42.2%) said that they held a managerial role, while 11 male out of 13 male respondents (84.6%) indicated that they held management positions (see fig. 4.10). Clearly, male practitioners tend to hold management roles more than female practitioners do.

Fig. 4.10

*Gender * Managerial roles crosstabulation*

		Would you describe your current position as managerial?		
		Yes	No	Total
Indicating your sex	Female	19	26	45
	Male	11	2	13
Total		30	28	58

Research question 4: What are the most important skills for Vietnamese practitioners?

Item 4 addressed the current research question directly although there was valuable information to be examined from the in-depth interviews.

Among a list of important skills for public relations practitioners, interpersonal communication skills were the highest rated (93.1%), followed by strategic planning skills (70.7%), writing skills (62.1%), ability to speak different languages (46.6%) and technical skills (39.7%)(see fig. 4.3).

Qualitative data from in-depth interviews were consistent with results from surveys, which suggested that interpersonal communication skills are very important for practitioners.

In my opinion, the most important skill for public relations practitioners is interpersonal skills. Public relation is relationship-based. There is no place where it is as important to gain the trust from publics and the media than in public relations. (Personal communication, April 11, 2010)

It is very important to maintain a good relationship with our publics including internal publics, partners, and especially the media. Keeping a good relationship with the media will help increase the chance to get the message spread. Since the purpose of our program is to raise public awareness regarding environmental issues, the more people know about our activities, the more effective and easier it is for us to ask for grants and sponsorship when working with the government and enterprises. (Personal communication, April 12, 2010)

Besides, most of public relations practitioners agreed that strategic thinking and planning are among the important skills for practitioners. One practitioner said, “It is very important – the strategic planning skills. It is because public relations activities have to base on good strategies” (personal communication, May 11, 2010).

Strategic thinking and planning are essential skills. Public relations practitioners should be able to think and plan strategically in order to have long-term plans. It can take time to build a good image in the eyes of the organizational public, and once the company has a good image/reputation, it should be continuously maintained and developed. Thus, public relations practitioners need to think and plan strategically for long-term maintenance and development. (Personal communication, April 17, 2010)

On the contrary, one practitioner shared, during an interview, that strategic planning skills are not very important for public relations practitioners. He said, “It is not really important. If the public relations department belongs to the marketing department, marketing strategies already include public relations strategies” (personal communication, April 12, 2010).

The next chapter “Discussion” will discuss what were found in the study. Conclusion and implications for practitioners and future studies are also included in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study attempted to answer seven research questions regarding public relations functions, public relations practitioners' roles, and most important skills for public relations practitioners in order to reveal a better and more up-to-date picture of public relations practice in Vietnam. The study yielded many interesting findings – some are similar to previous studies while others are very different. Before discussing each research questions, it is necessary to first discuss the study demographics.

With regard to gender, it is worth noting that more female public relations practitioners than male practitioners participated in this study. The majority of respondents were female (N= 45, 77.6%). Male respondents (N= 13, 22.4%) only accounted for about one-fifth of the sample. The gender distribution of this study was similar to most public relations studies conducted in the United States (e.g., Sha & Toth, 2005) and Taiwan (Wu, 2006), which suggested that public relations is considered as a feminized profession in the United States and Taiwan. This is also the case in Vietnam.

Discussing gender in public relations practice, Wu & Baah-Boakye (2007) stated that the number of female public relations practitioners in Ghana is now growing because clients and employers perceive that female practitioners are able to undertake protocol

activities better, speak English fluently, and socialized better. Similarly, since Vietnamese practitioners viewed interpersonal communication skills as the most important skill in public relations, it is speculated that a majority of public relations practitioners might be women as well.

In terms of practitioners' experience, the mean number of year's experience that Vietnamese public relations practitioners had was 3.02 years, which is one year lower than practitioners in Taiwan (Wu & Taylor, 2003) and in Ghana (Wu & Baah-Boakye, 2007). Vietnamese public relations practitioners have been working in public relations field from 1 year to 10 years. Thus, it is speculated that the public relations in Vietnam was in its beginning phase about ten years ago. An exploratory study about public relations practice in Japan also revealed similar results (Watson & Sallot, 2001). The most number of year's experience that Japanese practitioners have in public relations field was also 10 years.

Regarding cities where Vietnamese practitioners work, nearly half of the respondents (44.8%) indicated that they worked in Ho Chi Minh City, followed by Hanoi and Hue city. This finding is not surprising because Ho Chi Minh City is the economic hub of the country. Although Hanoi is also a growing major city, it is more known for being a political center rather than an economic center. Even though the author is from Hue city, only 15% of respondents are from Hue city. Hue is also one of the main cities of Vietnam, but it is more famous for its tourism and history than its economy.

Respondents' titles included public relations titles, such as public relations executive, public relations assistant, public relations coordinator, public relations manager, public relations director; sales & marketing titles, such as sales & marketing

manager, director of sales, marketing manager; and other titles, such as managing director and CEO assistant. This suggested that public relations, marketing, sales and advertising might be mixed functions in Vietnamese organizations.

In order to facilitate discussion, each research questions will be discussed in turn.

Research question 1: Is the importance of public relations well-recognized in Vietnamese organizations?

Results from this study showed that the importance of public relations is generally well recognized in Vietnamese organizations and that public relations practitioners are highly respected in their organizations. McKinney's (2008) study also asked Vietnamese business managers the similar question, "Are Vietnamese managers aware of the practice of public relations?" The mean score was 3.0, which fell into the category of "Neither Disagree nor Agree". Only 5% of respondents chose "Strongly agree". Comparing the results of these two studies, it can be seen that public relations has now received more recognition in Vietnamese organizations than it once did.

Public relations has received more recognition perhaps because it has been developing very much in these recent years. Tracing back 10 years ago, when the first article about public relations in Vietnam was written by Bruce McKinney in 2000, public relations was considered to be in its infancy. There was only one bi-cultural public relations agency in Vietnam at that time – PUBCOM (Public Relations BiCultural Consulting) – located in Hanoi. Six years later, in 2006, McKinney returned to Vietnam. He said that although he could see much development, public relations in Vietnam did not progress very far. There were nine agencies in Ho Chi Minh city and only two in Hanoi.

Today, the number of public relations agencies in Vietnam is still unknown because there is no official organization that manages public relations activities in the country. Yet, it is likely that there has been an increase in the number of public relations firms in Vietnam since 2006. Collecting data from blogs of Vietnamese public relations practitioners, a list of more than 50 active public relations agencies was found. Based on the following data, the number of public relations agencies may be even larger.

According to the FTA – a market research company in Vietnam— the number of public relations agencies rises 30% every year on average. In 2005, the FTA reported that there were 20 public relations agencies and over 200 advertising firms, which also offered public relations services (“Domestic PR firms gain upper hand,” 2005). By doing a simple calculation based on the FTA’s report above (starting with 20 public relations agencies in 2005 with an increase of 30% every year), it can be estimated that there currently should be 74.3 public relations agencies in Vietnam in 2010. This number is consistent with the idea that the number of public relations firms in Vietnam is increasing. Thus, it can be speculated that the number of public relations agencies in Vietnam now is between 50 and 100.

Regarding education in public relations, the College of Social Sciences and Humanities in Hanoi first offered a regular course in public relations in 2005. In 2006, public relations officially became an undergraduate major at the Academy of Journalism and Information (Hanoi). Currently, many other education centers such as Thames Business School, MaIT Education Institution, etc. offer short-term courses on public relations. These short-term courses often provide practical knowledge and the instructors are often experienced public relations professionals from well-known public relations

agencies in Vietnam. These short-term courses often attract many applicants because they are 2 or 3-week long courses and the knowledge provided is practical.

Public relations receives more recognition today than it once did. The results showed that the importance of public relations is generally well-recognized by Vietnamese organizations and that public relations practitioners are highly respected in their organization. There is an increase in the number of public relations agencies. Education in public relations is in such high demand that it has officially become an undergraduate major at universities. Furthermore, many corporations are looking for public relations specialists to help them build a good relationship with their publics (Dinh, 2008).

Research question 2a: What are the functions of a public relations department in Vietnam?

Results in this study showed that building and maintaining positive relationship with the organization's publics seems to be the most important function of the public relations department in Vietnam. Vietnamese public relations practitioners perform this function via media relations, sponsorship, organizing events, etc. Important organizational publics, which Vietnamese public relations practitioners try to build a positive relationship with, include the media and its target publics. One practitioner said:

Public relations activities always aim at one specific, target group of public. Public relations is served as the bridge between the organization and its publics. In my company, our publics include external publics and internal publics, which are employees in the company. (Personal communication, April 2, 2010)

Respondents from public relations agencies added that maintaining good relationships with their clients is also very important. One practitioner said, "because we

are public relations agencies, building a good relationship with our clients is the most important to us” (Personal communication, May 10, 2010). This might be the case in Vietnam because the public relations market is very competitive. Even some foreign public relations agencies, such as Ogilvy PR and Leo Activation, had to cease their operation in Vietnam (“Domestic PR firms gain upper hand,” 2005). Thus, it is very important to maintain a good relationship with clients.

The results also suggested that important publics for public relations practitioners may vary even among Asian developing countries. While Ken & Taylor (1999) reported that government officials are often key publics in developing countries in Asia, this is not the case of public relations in Taiwan (Wu & Taylor, 2003) and in Vietnam while their key publics are often clients and the media.

As far as strategic planning was concerned, the results showed that it was the lowest chosen function of public relations in Vietnamese organizations. According to White & Dozier (1992), in order for public relations to be excellent and for the organization to be more effective, senior public relations practitioners must be a part of the dominant coalition, function at a high level of decision making, and participate in strategic management. Yet, it seems that strategic management is not considered high in the list of public relations functions in a Vietnamese public relations department. Still, it is interesting to note that “dealing with crisis” is the second most chosen function. If public relations in Western countries view crisis management as strategic functions because it includes both proactive and reactive programs, it might not be the case in Vietnam. Crisis management in Vietnam means “dealing with crisis” and “repair activities” rather than initiating proactive programs to prevent predicted problems. “Most

Vietnamese companies see public relations as ‘guest relations’ whose purpose is to smooth over difficulties with corporate clients” (McKinney, 2000, p. 24). Thus, while “dealing with crisis” was ranked high as a function of public relations department in Vietnam, strategic planning was the lowest chosen in the list. Perhaps, the reasons why public relations departments do not involve with strategic planning because other departments take charge of it. One practitioner mentioned, “If the public relations department belongs to the marketing department, marketing strategies already include public relations strategies” (personal communication, April 12, 2010).

Furthermore, education in public relations does not emphasize strategic management skills. Rather, communication and technician skills are more heavily taught. Taking a look at the syllabi of short-term public relations courses offered by MaIT, they include press release writing, media communication, event organizing, press conference organizing, public speaking skills, e-Marketing, etc. Strategic management skills are not mentioned in the syllabi.

Nevertheless, although strategic planning was lowest rated, there were 25 out of 58 respondents (43.1%) who chose this category. This finding still reveals a good sign. Even though public relations in Vietnam does not fully practice what western public relations considers “excellence”, some Vietnamese organizations are beginning to recognize the strategic management aspects of public relations. For example, an interviewee shared that, “Public relations department in my organization took charge of functions/tasks regarding brand management and image management. The department strategizes, builds, and implements the overall communication plan for the whole organization.”

Additionally, qualitative data from in-depth interviews helped address this research question. It seems that image management and internal public relations are also important functions of Vietnamese public relations departments. One practitioner shared her thoughts during the interview:

In our non-profit organization, the public relations department is in charge of maintaining and promoting the organization's image in order to build good relationships with many partners. This will make it easy for us to ask for grants. Public relations functions in our organization also include internal public relations, which helps connect employees in the company with each other, keep them informed about the company's policy and activities, and make them feel proud to be a part of the company. (Personal communication, April 12, 2010)

Besides, data from in-depth interviews revealed that many public relations departments have functions that overlap with marketing and advertising functions. For example, some practitioners said that their departments are also responsible for doing brand management, supporting marketing & business activities, and writing advertisements. One practitioner commented:

As an education center, we partner with prestigious universities around the world to provide business programs, such as BBA and MBA. Our public relations department helps spread the word about these courses by organizing informational conferences, publishing information in the media (both print and online), updating our website, designing and printing brochures, fliers, etc. (Personal communication, April 14, 2010)

This seems that her organization use public relations as a tool and advertise and promote their products and services. This might be because public relations, advertising and marketing are overlapping functions in those organizations. This will be further discussed in research question number 2b.

Regarding public relations functions in Vietnamese organizations, building positive relationships with the organization's publics, dealing with crisis, being

spokesperson of the company, strategic planning, managing internal public relations, managing image and reputation are important functions for a public relations department. Public relations departments also have advertising and marketing functions. Among the functions mentioned, building positive relationship with organization's publics is the highest rated function. Strategic planning is the lowest rated function; however, it still receives a high percentage. Almost half of the respondents (43.1%) chose this category, which suggests that companies are beginning to recognize the important aspect of strategic planning in public relations functions.

Research question 2b: How is a public relations department structured in Vietnam?

The results showed that a majority of Vietnamese organizations do not have separate public relations departments. In only about one third of Vietnamese organizations, the public relations department is a separate unit.

Yet, those who agreed that public relations should be a separate department, all commented that public relations, marketing and advertising are fundamentally different in nature. They serve different functions and tasks. Thus, public relations, marketing and advertising should not share the same department. One public relations practitioner, who works for a non-governmental organization said:

My organization focuses on organizing activities to raise community awareness. Public relations differs from marketing and advertising. Thus, the public relations department should be a separate unit in order to allow practitioners more time to focus on public relations functions. (Personal communication, April 12, 2010)

As far as public relations structure is concerned, Dozier & Grunig (1992) argued:

Public relations functions must be integrated within a single department. Because only with such structure does the practitioner have the autonomy and mandate to define publics and channels of communication dynamically. Only in such a setting can the practitioner focus on genuine strategic problem solving, rather than routinized communicating. (p. 402)

However, in Vietnam, practitioners did not show strong agreement that the public relations department should be a separate unit. Plus, more than half of respondents admitted that their public relations department was a subset of another department. It seems that Vietnamese practitioners do not fully realize the essence of a separate public relations department.

For those who said that the public relations department was not a separate department, most of respondents indicated that public relations is a subset of the marketing department. This is easily understandable because public relations is most often confused with marketing (Cutlip et al., 1994). Similarly, international public relations studies revealed that the public relations department in some Asian countries is not a separate department because public relations practitioners are also performing advertising and marketing functions, such as in Taiwan (Wu & Taylor, 2003), and Ghana (Wu & Baah-Boakye, 2007).

Discussing the structure of public relations departments and marketing departments, Ehling et al. (1992) suggested that even though public relations and marketing both are essential functions for a modern organization, they have different functions. Marketing functions are to identify, create and sustain markets for the products and services of the organization while public relations managers supervise programs for communication with publics – groups of people who organize themselves when an organization affects them or they affect it. Thus, because marketing and public relations

serve different functions, public relations cannot be excellent if it is subjugated to the marketing function. “When an organization makes public relations a marketing function, practitioners are reduced to the technician role, and the organization loses a valuable mechanism for managing its inter-dependence with its strategic publics” (p. 357).

Yet, in in-depth interviews, all Vietnamese practitioners who thought that public relations should be integrated into another department said that it should be a subset of marketing department. One interviewee commented, “Public relations should be a subset of marketing department because public relations cannot be separated from marketing strategies of the company.” This seems that in his/her company, the marketing department is responsible for overall strategies and public relations only do their tasks to support available marketing strategies. Therefore, the interviewee said that it is not necessary for public relations practitioners to have strategic planning skills because once the public relations department belongs to the marketing department, marketing strategies already include public relations activities. Another public relations practitioner shared the same idea, mentioning:

Public relations plays a very important role in our company because we are working in the culture-entertainment field. Public relations, via communication channels, helps support the overall marketing strategies in the company. Public relations and marketing are well related to each other. Thus, the public relations department should belong to the marketing department in order to gain the overall and complete source of information. (Personal communication, May 11, 2010)

Forty percent of the respondents answered that public relations, advertising and marketing functions are all overlapped. This might be the reason why public relations practitioners said that their departments are responsible for marketing and advertising

activities, such as doing brand management, supporting marketing and business activities, and writing advertisements.

As a result, how the public relations department is structured can affect public relations functions. If the public relations department is a separate unit, practitioners' technician role is reduced and the value of strategic thinking and planning is increased.

One practitioner shared his/her thought:

Public relations in Vietnam has an unequal level of development, and some people still think public relations is just dealing with press releases while it does mean much more than that. Public relations people know how to think strategically but they rarely have chance to get involved into the decision making process of a company. (Personal communication, April 3, 2010)

It is interesting that only one respondent chose "public relations is a subset of advertising department." This finding is different from McKinney's (2008) study, which suggested that many Vietnamese confuse public relations with advertising, and they think that public relations is advertising. When Vietnamese managers were asked about the most important skills of public relations practitioners, advertising skills were highly ranked. McKinney (2008) also commented that if a company wants a press release published in a Vietnamese publication, that company must pay for it. However, public relations department is still separate from advertising department. It may be because even though those press releases are paid to be published, they are still considered as "press releases" and they are separate from "advertisements". Furthermore, the rate to publish a press release in a Vietnamese publication may be different from the rate to publish an advertisement. Thus, "paid press release" is viewed differently from "advertisement".

Also, only one respondent said that in his/her organization, the public relations department is a subset of the sales department. The choice "The public relations

department is a subset of the sales department” was not listed in the questionnaire because based on study regarding public relations in Asia, it was found that public relations is most often confused with marketing and advertising (e.g. McKinney, 2006; Wu & Taylor, 2007). No study in Asian countries has found that public relations is confused with sales activity. Yet, some respondents for this study have job titles relating to sales; for example, director of sales or sales & marketing manager. Thus, for future studies, “sales” can be considered as an answer choice for this type of question when designing questionnaire.

Clearly, a majority of respondents indicated that the public relations department in their organization belongs to other departments. In most cases, it is either a subset of marketing department or public relations has overlapping functions with marketing and advertising. Only about one third of Vietnamese organizations have their own separate public relations department.

Question research 3a: What roles do Vietnamese practitioners perform in their organization?

Among nine activities related to public relations, the highest rated activity was “communicating with the media” and the lowest rated activity was “creating and buying advertising”. As one of interviewee said, communicating with the media is considered the most important activity because the media plays an important role to bring its organizational message to its publics and a good relationship with journalists will help increase the chance to get press releases published in Vietnam:

We choose not to pay the media to publish our press releases. After a press release is written and reviewed by our team, we send it to the media. Whether press

releases are published or not depends much on its content and our relationship with the journalists. (Personal communication, April 2, 2010)

The fact that creating and buying advertisements received the lowest rate in the current study is very different from McKinney's study in 2008, where advertising activity was rated very high. McKinney (2006 & 2008) reported that the line between advertising and public relations in Vietnam was blurred at best and most thought that public relations was another form of paid advertising. If a company wants to publish a press release, they will buy it. Also, "companies that do want to have public relations programs usually do not consult professional agencies, but dump this responsibility on their advertising staffs that do not know or understand the practice" (McKinney, 2006, p. 19). Thus, in McKinney's (2008) study, advertising activities received the second highest rated among most important public relations activities. Yet, findings from the current study showed that there is little relationship between public relations and advertising in Vietnam. Creating and buying advertisement is the lowest rated activity of Vietnamese practitioners. Also, when item number 8 asked about the public relations department's structure in Vietnamese organization, only one respondent stated that the public relations department is subset of the advertising department in their organization.

The difference between McKinney's (2008) study and this current study might be because McKinney's respondents were Vietnamese managers while respondents of the current study were public relations practitioners. There was a chance that Vietnamese managers might not understand public relations activities in their companies. However, this explanation does not have strong credibility because it is doubtful that managers would not understand the tasks of their employees. Or perhaps, public relations in

Vietnam has been changing since 2008. In 2008, public relations practitioners took charge of advertising activities, and at present they perform more public relations activities.

It would be too quick to come to the conclusion that there is little relationship between public relations and advertising and that Vietnamese practitioners do not confuse public relations with advertising as McKinney's (2008) study suggested. This is because regarding the issue of "paid press releases" that McKinney raised, in-depth interview data revealed some contradictory facts. Some interviewees said that their companies do not pay to get press releases published. Whether press releases can be published or not depend on its relevant content and the relationship with the journalists. Other practitioners said that they often pay the media to get press releases published. One practitioner commented:

Vietnamese publications also have sales departments which try to get our company to run press releases, advertisement or articles in their publications as clients. The price depends on the fame of the publications, the length of press releases, the location of the press releases on page, and etc. If you call a Vietnamese publication and say that you need to publish a press release, they will send you the quotation for running a press release immediately. Usually, the publications ask us to send them an edited press release and they just publish it. (Personal communication, April 23, 2010)

On the contrary, another practitioner said:

Usually, press releases are written by public relations specialists in our company. At the press conference, press releases are delivered together with an envelope (with money) to journalists. Whether they publish it or not depends on them. Yet, often, 90 – 100% journalists who attend the press conference will publish it in their publication. (Personal communication, April 14, 2010)

The method of organizing press conferences above seems consistent with McKinney's (2006) study, which pointed out that in a press conference in Vietnam, the pay-off money is expected among the media.

As a result, the contradictory results in this study revealed that as for media relations, Vietnamese practitioners practice public relations very differently in different organizations. While some organizations pay in order to publish a press release, others do not. Yet, it seems that the media in Vietnam accept money as payment to publish press releases in their publications. The author of the current study used to work for a U.S.-based public relations company in Vietnam. When her company distributed press releases to the media, some publications called back and said that they would not run the press releases unless they were paid for. Yet, her company never pays any publications in order to get press releases published. Press releases are published because of their relevant content and relationship between the company and journalists. Without having to provide payment to the media, her company was still able to get many placements. However, it appears that there is always a choice to pay the media to run press releases in Vietnam. Whether an organization does it or not depends on its business style.

It is also worth bearing in mind that when discussing a sensitive topic with Vietnamese, there is a chance that Vietnamese respondents will hide disadvantageous facts because of the fear of "losing face," an influence from Confucianism (Black et al., 2009). Vietnamese do not tend to disclose facts that make them look bad. Vietnamese practitioners might feel embarrassed to reveal that they pay in order to publish their press releases because it looks unprofessional. Thus, the both quantitative and qualitative data

in this study might not have enough credibility to come to any firm conclusion regarding this issue.

Future studies should be conducted to verify relationship between advertising and public relations in Vietnam. Because the current study does not mean to focus on examining this relationship, the questionnaire design did not include enough questions to verify this. Perhaps, an experimental study might result in better and more credible findings regarding this issue.

Writing press releases and writing a company newsletter were also highly rated as public relations practitioners' roles in the current study. There is a big improvement of the professional status of public relations in Vietnam between 2000 and 2010. In 2000, McKinney's (2000) study showed that an understanding of the value of news releases, backgrounders, and newsletters was foreign to most Vietnamese companies and that the western concept of public relations was somewhat still an unfamiliar concept in Vietnam. However, at present, it seems that writing press releases, writing company newsletter, preparing speeches for company executives become major activities for Vietnamese practitioners. Vietnamese practitioners now practice more of what is considered public relations in western countries.

Strategic planning – which is emphasized as an important skill and function in public relations in western countries, was rated somewhere in the middle. It was rated lower than technical and communication activities, such as communication with media, writing press releases, writing newsletter, writing speeches, but higher than technology-related (e.g. updating websites) and advertising activities. It is interesting to see the difference in percentage between item 5 and item 9 while basically these items asked the

same question. Item 5 asked respondents if strategic planning was one of their roles and the result yielded 63.8% while item 9 asked public relations practitioners if strategic planning was one of the functions of the public relations department and the result yielded 43.1%. If a public relations practitioner's roles include strategic planning, then the public relations department should include that function as well. Perhaps it might be because when respondents have titles, such as marketing manager/director or managing director, they are actually involved with strategic planning with the dominant coalition. However, they might not view themselves as belonging to the public relations department. Plus, as some respondents commented earlier, the public relations department was a subset of the marketing department and the marketing department was responsible for doing strategic planning for the company. Respondents with a marketing title, who are also involved with public relations activities, actually do strategic planning. Yet, they view themselves as a part of marketing department instead of public relations department. As a result, unclear titles and overlapping functions can lead to some confusing results like this.

While developing and updating webpages for the company is the highest rated activity in McKinney's (2008) study, it is among the lowest rated activity in the current study. Perhaps Vietnamese organizations might prefer hiring a technical team and have them be responsible for technological tasks in the organizations.

Questions regarding public relations' roles produced many interesting results. The results showed that public relations in Vietnam has been changing a lot in a professional way since 2000. Public relations practitioners are now responsible for writing press release, communicating with media, writing newsletters while 10 years ago those

activities were unfamiliar to Vietnamese practitioners (McKinney, 2000). Vietnamese practitioners now do not involve much in advertising activities, such as creating/buying advertisements. Even though strategic planning role ranked number 5 among nine activities listed, it still accounts for 63.8%. That means more than half of public relations practitioners in the study are involved with strategic planning.

Broom (1982) categorized public relations practitioner's roles into four basic roles, including (1) the expert prescriber (2) communication facilitator (3) problem-solving process facilitator (4) communication technician. The expert prescriber is responsible for identifying problems and providing solutions to management. The role of communication facilitator requires public relations practitioners to be the liaison between the organization and its publics (boundary-spanning role). Practitioners who play the problem-solving process facilitator role are members of the management team, who participate in planning and programming process. The first three roles (expert prescriber, communication facilitator, and problem-solving process facilitator) are considered as management roles. The communication technician role is a non-management role. Public relations practitioners with the communication technician role will use their communication and journalistic skills, such as writing and editing newsletters, writing press releases & feature stories, and communicating with the media.

Based on what Broom (1982) suggested, it seems that public relations practitioners in Vietnam spend most of their time performing the communication technician role since press release writing and media relations, etc are ranked among the highest (see fig. 4.4). Still, there is a sign that Vietnamese organizations are beginning to

understand the importance of public relations; thereby letting public relations practitioners get involved in strategic planning.

Research question 3b: Do public relations practitioners consult on major decisions in your organization?

Most of public relations practitioners (72.4%) answered that they consulted on major decisions in their organizations. The findings are different from what other authors' assumption about public relations in Vietnam. Dinh (2008) found that most Vietnamese organizations, especially governmental organizations, have communication departments. However, even with a Communication Manager, or Public relations Manager in the organization, they usually perform technician roles rather than strategic management roles. Often, what they do is deliver organizations' information to their publics. These staffs receive very little attention from the senior leaders of the organizations. Another author – Nguyen (2007) commented that most of public relation agencies could mainly provide clients' required services, such as media relations, events holding, and sponsorship. The number of companies that can offer consulting service to clients are very few. Yet, the results of this study showed that majority of public relations practitioners consult on major decisions of the organizations. One practitioner said, “the senior public relations executives often consult on major decisions in my company. It is because in order to have good public relations strategies, one has to understand the development strategy of the company” (personal communication, May 11, 2010). This is the most important reason for senior public relations executives in Vietnamese organizations to involve in the decision-making level of their companies.

The reason why senior public relations executives do not involve in decision making level is because the importance of public relations is not yet well-recognized in the organizations. Two practitioners shared their thoughts as follows:

Our public relations managers and directors are rarely involved with major decisions in our company. It is because the importance of public relations is not yet well-recognized. Still, there are misunderstandings between public relations and advertising. (Personal communication, April 2, 2010)

There is no public relations director or manager in our company. There is one person who is responsible for public relations activities. This person will coordinate with the management staff in order to plan strategies. However, the final decision is made by the management staff. Thus, public relations faces many limitations and difficulties in my company. (Personal communication, April 4, 2010)

Dozier (1992) suggested a link between public relations' roles and their decision-making power in their organizations. If a public relations practitioner has the decision making power, they will perform managerial roles in their organizations. Public relations practitioners who perform technician roles do not have decision making power. More than 70% of respondents indicated that public relations practitioners in their organizations have decision making power. Thus, it is speculated that about 70% of public relations practitioners hold managerial roles and get involved in the decision making level of the organization.

However, a question in the demographics section asked if respondents hold any managerial roles and only half of respondents answered "yes". At the first glance, the result seemed confusing because they both refer to managerial roles. But actually, they are different questions. Item number 6 above asked respondents if public relations practitioners in their organizations hold managerial roles while the question in demographic section asked if the respondents themselves hold any managerial roles. The

former yielded more than 70% while the latter only yielded a little more than 50%. This can be explained because the respondents themselves might not hold any managerial roles, but their colleagues do.

Dozier & Grunig (1992) commented that the public relations unit needs access to management decision making in order to obtain up-to-date information on organization decisions and actions. “Only through such information can public relations practitioners initiate proactive programs designed to prevent problems – and active publics – from emerging. Prevention is more cost-effective than repair” (p. 402). It is hoped that with involvement in the decision-making level, Vietnamese public relations practitioners are able to add more value to their organizations.

Research question 3c: Does gender have an impact on practitioners’ roles?

Hon et al. (1992) argued that women already dominate the public relations field in terms of numbers, but not yet in terms of leadership power. Most public relations students are also women. In the U.S., women are the majority of the field. This might be also the case of Vietnam.

Demographic findings showed that a majority of the participants of this study are female – about 80%. Male practitioners only account for one-fifth of the sample. The gender distribution of this study is similar to most public relations studies conducted in the United States (Sha & Toth, 2005) and Taiwan (Wu, 2006). Public relations is considered a feminized profession in the United States and Taiwan (Wu, 2006).

Discussing the gender in public relations practice, Wu & Baah-Boakye (2007) stated that clients and employers think that female practitioners are able to undertake protocol activities better, speak English fluently, and socialized better than their male counterparts.

Therefore, the number of female public relations practitioners is now growing in Taiwan. As for Vietnam, building relationship with organizational publics is considered as the most important function in public relations. Thus, interpersonal skills and communication skills are very important, especially in a relationship-based culture like in Vietnam. Since, women are considered better in interpersonal communication, the number of female practitioners is now growing as well.

However, even though the number of female practitioners outweighs the number of male practitioners, fewer women perform managerial roles than men do. Only 19 out of 45 female respondents (42.2%) indicated that they held a managerial role, while up to 11 male out of 13 male respondents (84.6%) indicated that they held management positions. Apparently, most of male respondents in the current study hold managerial roles. As a matter of fact, Vietnamese culture is strongly influenced by Confucian ideas, which stress the importance of the roles of men. Even though women's role in Vietnamese society has improved very much in comparison with other Asian countries, women are still prevented from obtaining leadership roles in their organization. However, in order to have a better picture of gender in Vietnamese public relations practice, another study should be conducted, examining other aspects, such as salary and roles between female and male practitioners.

Research question 4: What are the most important skills for Vietnamese public relations practitioners?

Results showed that interpersonal communication skills, strategic planning skills and writing skills and were among the highest rated skills while speaking different

languages and technical skills were among the lowest rated skills (see fig. 4.3). It is worth noting that strategic skills were rated higher than writing skills.

According to Vietnamese public relations practitioners, interpersonal skills are the most important skills. These results are consistent with other results in the current study, where practitioners stated that communicating with media and building good relationship with their organizations' publics are the most important functions. In order to build and maintain a good relationship with organizational publics, interpersonal communication is of great importance in Vietnamese culture. Also, 9 out of 10 interviewees shared the same idea. One interviewee shared his/her view:

In my opinion, the most important skill for public relations practitioners is interpersonal skills. Public relations is relationship-based. There is no place where it is as important to gain the trust from publics and the media than in public relations. (Personal communication, April 11, 2010)

Another public relations practitioner commented that “without maintaining good relationships, public relations practitioners cannot perform their jobs.”

The reason interpersonal relationships are very important in Vietnam can be attributed to its culture. In reference to the first dimension in culture proposed by Geert Hofstede (1980), compared to Western cultures, “most of the Asian nations would easily fall more on the collectivist end of continuum” (Tilson & Alozie 2004, 352). Huu (2006) indicated that in the collective culture of Vietnam, the family comes first, followed by friendship and the work place. Personal relationships play a major role in all of these groups in Vietnamese society. In business, interpersonal relationships will make everything else much easier. Meyer et al. (2006) noticed that foreign investors who establish an amicable relationship with the local authorities find it easier to solve

bureaucratic obstacles. Those relationships can be developed as (potentially) cooperative relationships. In Vietnam, building personal relationships is recommended in business.

An article found on the website, www.vietnam-culture.com, which provides helpful tips for foreigners who work in Vietnam, stated:

Vietnamese business relationship inevitably becomes a social relationship after a while. Unlike Western business relationship which remains professional and perhaps, aloof, even after a long time, Vietnamese business relationship becomes a social one. The more you share your personal life, including family, hobbies, political views, aspirations, the closer you are in your business relationship. Sometimes, a lot of time is spent discussing matters outside of business, but then a lot of time, the other party is also making up his mind about your deal based on how much he sees your personal relationship with him. (“Understanding Vietnamese business culture and etiquette,” n.d.)

McKinney (2000) also shared that to do business in Vietnam, one must establish a relationship with the potential business partner first. It would not be effective to start a business transaction without first having some sort of an interpersonal relationship or introduction. “In Vietnam and China, trust and acceptance in a business transaction hinge on a mutual respect and trust of the other party which perhaps is at the heart of every successful public relations program” (p. 24).

Furthermore, real experience from the author has proven this right. When the author sent out surveys for this current study, because of the limited of practitioners’ contacts she had, Internet survey with snowball sampling was employed as research methodology. In order to establish a good interpersonal relationship with potential respondents, which the outcome of the survey depended on, the author had to write personal emails to each respondent she was referred to, mentioning who the referee was and trying to establish a relationship first. The actual questionnaire was sent after the relationship was established. As a result, the outcome of the survey was very high.

Starting from 20 of her contacts, she was able to send 90 questionnaires to 90 practitioners. The returned questionnaires were 58, which yielded 64.4% return rate. As for snowball sampling and Internet survey methodology, this return rate was quite high in comparison with other studies employing similar methodology.

A public relations practitioner, who works for a non-governmental organization in the environment field in Vietnam, concluded how importance interpersonal relationship is in public relations, saying:

It is very important to maintain a good relationship with our publics including internal publics, partners, and especially the media. Keeping a good relationship with the media will help increase the chance to get the message spread. Since the purpose of our program is to raise public awareness regarding environmental issues, the more people know about our activities, the more effective and easier it is for us to ask for grants and sponsorship when working with the government and enterprises. (Personal communication, April 12, 2010)

Ranked after interpersonal communication, surprisingly, were strategic planning skills. More than 70% of respondents agreed that strategic planning was the most important skill. This finding is quite consistent with the finding of item 5, asking about practitioners' roles. Strategic planning activities also received a similar percentage – 64%. It is likely that public relations practitioners in Vietnam are beginning to recognize the importance of management and strategic planning functions in their field. One interviewee shared his/her thought about this:

Strategic thinking and planning are essential skills. Public relations practitioners should be able to think and plan strategically in order to have long-term plans. It can take time to build a good image in the eyes of the organizational public, and once the company has a good image/reputation, it should be continuously maintained and developed. Thus, public relations practitioners need to think and plan strategically for long-term maintenance and development. (Personal communication, April 17, 2010)

Writing skills were also ranked higher than 50%. Yet, it still placed after interpersonal skills and strategic skills. This result is consistent with McKinney's (2008) study, which indicated that writing skills were rated lower than oral skills and other skills. However, it is different from the result of Napoli, Taylor, and Powers' (1999) study, which suggested that writing skills are the most important in the U.S. The different results in these two studies suggest that important skills for public relations practitioners might vary from culture to culture.

The ability to speak different languages was among the least important skills. This is also the case of Taiwan. Wu & Boah-Boakye's (2007) study showed that Taiwanese practitioners chose proficiency in foreign language as the least important skill. It might be speculated that public relations practitioners do not have as many foreign clients as domestic clients.

In conclusion, regarding most important skills for Vietnamese public relations practitioners, interpersonal communication is listed the highest in the list. Since culture is a factor that makes public relations vary among countries (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003), this finding is understandable because Vietnamese culture highly values interpersonal relationship in all aspects of life. Strategic planning skills were ranked the second most important skills– which is good news for public relations practice in Vietnam because this reveals a professional development of public relations as a profession in Vietnam.

Limitations and suggestions for future study

This exploratory study attempted to reveal an updated picture about public relations practice in a country that has not been adequately touched before. The significance of this study is that it discusses various aspects of public relations practice in

Vietnam, such as public relations functions, practitioners' roles, gender issue and most important skills for practitioners. Thanks to its broad study scope, this current study helps build a profile of public relations practice in Vietnam. However, it is important here to point out what this study does not accomplish.

The first limitation of this study is its ability to broadly generalize the findings. Even though the respondents of this study include practitioners in three main cities in Vietnam, the results found cannot be generalized for the whole country. Plus, there is no way to identify the number of public relations practitioners in Vietnam today. Thus, 58 respondents who participated in this study might be too small to generalize for all of public relations practitioners in Vietnam. In other words, the only population to which the results can be generalized are the participants of this study. For this reason, future studies should find more respondents in many other cities in order to do a nationwide study. Only by doing that could results be generalized to a greater extent.

The second limitation of this study lies in its methodology. The methodologies used for this study are surveys and in-depth interviews. The author did not actually observe public relations practitioners while they were doing their work. Thus, it is impossible to know whether what they stated is true or not. Especially, in a culture where "face concept" is a concern like in Vietnam, there is a chance that the practitioners told a lie or hid the facts if they reflected poorly on them or their companies. For this reason, it is assumed that a study that employed participant-observation might yield better results. With that kind of study, public relations practice is well observed and a truthful picture can be revealed.

Finally, even though this study has provided an updated profile of public relations practice in Vietnam in various contemporary research issues, including public relations functions, practitioners' roles, gender issues and most importance skills for practitioners, it did not research other important aspects of public relations. Since, public relations practice in Vietnam has not been sufficiently studied before, there are still many topics that can be researched in order to have a more comprehensive picture of public relations in Vietnam.

A study about public relations education is of great importance because public relations in Vietnam is in its beginning phase. There is only one university in Vietnam that offers public relations as an undergraduate major. Thus, it is significant to examine public relations education in Vietnam in order to provide suggestions on how build a better program for better knowledge of public relations. Because education is the root of the future development, a good program will help practitioners perform their roles more effectively and professionally.

Ethics in public relations should also be given full attention. Through the lens of western public relations, public relations in Vietnam might be judged unethical when paying the media in order to get press releases published. There might be more unethical activities in public relations in Vietnam that the current study has not touched and they need to be examined for a more professional practice in the future.

Exploring societal and cultural influences on Vietnamese public relations is another topic of research. Through the current study, it is revealed that culture has a great deal of effect in the way public relations is practiced in Vietnam. A deeper examination of the relationship between culture and public relations will help inform our

understanding of international public relations and add new insights into the impact of culture on practice.

Implications for practitioners

The study results suggested that if Vietnamese public relations practitioners could be knowledgeable in social, economic, politics field, they could be at higher management level thereby participating in the strategic planning process of their organizations. Today, the importance of public relations is generally recognized in Vietnam. Vietnamese practitioners should gain broad skills and experience in the relating fields to prove that they can add more values to the organization if they have a chance to do strategic planning with the dominant coalition. Vietnamese practitioners also should raise the importance of a separate public relations department because it will allow them to focus more on strategic planning activities and less on technical activities in the organization. It also prevents practitioners from participating in marketing and advertising activities and makes public relations their only responsibility.

Regarding international public relations practitioners, it is important to bear in mind that interpersonal communication is very important in a relationship-based culture like Vietnam. In public relations specifically, a good interpersonal relationship with the media can help increase the chance to get press releases placed. A good interpersonal relationship with clients will keep them loyal. International businessmen should invest time and effort in building a good relationship with clients, partners, governmental officials, etc. when doing business in Vietnam. Besides, when looking for public relations employees, interpersonal communication is one of many important skills that should be taken into consideration.

In Vietnam, it seems that there is always a choice for practitioners to pay the media to have press releases published in Vietnamese publications. An international organization has to decide if they want to follow that practice or not. Results from the study showed that not every organization chose to pay in order to get press releases published. Instead, a cultivated good relationship with journalists and a good-written press release can help improve press release placements. By doing that, practitioners will help maintain the objectivity of press releases and the essence of public relations. Public relations practitioners in Vietnam need high-profile companies that help encourage them to practice professionally and ethically.

Vietnamese practitioners are generally familiar with public relations activities, such as writing press releases, writing newsletters, communicating with the media, holding events, etc. Yet, they do not get many opportunities to involve in strategic planning with the organization as much as they wish. The study findings showed that in general, Vietnamese practitioners are aware of strategic planning skills. Thus, if they are challenged and encouraged to participate in strategic activities, it is hoped that they can add more value to the work they perform.

Finally, based on the study findings, it seems that public relations in Vietnam is developing fast. However, there are no guidelines for professional development. It is suggested that an organization, such as the PRSA in the U.S., should be established in order to manage public relations activities in Vietnam and help provide professional and ethical guidelines for the practice.

Conclusion

The current study yielded several interesting findings beyond the scope of the research questions. It revealed a more updated picture of public relations practice in Vietnam, a country that has not been adequately studied before.

Public relations roles

Public relations in Vietnam has made much progress since the first study about public relations in Vietnam was conducted in 2000. The importance of public relations is generally recognized in Vietnamese organizations. Moreover, public relations practitioners are well respected in their organizations. Most of Vietnamese practitioners hold managerial positions in their organizations. Even though the number of public relations practitioners and public relations agencies in Vietnam is still unknown, it is likely that the number of public relations agencies is increasing. FTA – a market research company in Vietnam, speculated that the number of public relations agencies rises 30% every year on average (“Domestic PR firms gain upper hand,” 2005).

Recently, public relations has become a popular career for the young generation to pursue because of its activeness, creativity, and high income (Dinh, 2008). As a result, there is a strong demand in public relations education. For the first time, in 2007, public relations became an undergraduate major that students now can apply for.

In 2000, there was only one public relations agency in Vietnam and Vietnamese practitioners practiced little of what is considered public relations in western countries. For example, press releases and newsletter were still foreign concepts to most Vietnamese practitioners. At present, it is speculated that the number of public relations agencies is more than 50. Public relations practitioners are very familiar with press

releases, press conference, holding events, etc. Today, with all of these developments, it can be gathered that public relations in Vietnam is no longer in its infancy. However, whether or not Vietnamese practitioners perform excellent public relations is another question.

Public relations department functions and structure

Building positive relationship with organizational publics seems to be the most important functions of public relations in Vietnam. Important organizational publics include the media, clients, and specific target publics of the organization. Yet, key publics do not include government officials as in developing countries in Asia (Ken & Taylor, 1999).

Strategic planning was listed the last among functions of public relations practitioners. It might be because the public relations department is included in the marketing department and strategic planning is done by the marketing department. Crisis management is also an important function of public relations in Vietnam. Yet, crisis management in Vietnam is more involved with reactive activities rather than proactive activities.

With regard to public relations department structure, a majority of Vietnamese organizations have the public relations department integrated into other departments. In most cases, public relations department is a subset unit of marketing department. As a result, because the public relations department is not a separate unit, Vietnamese public relations practitioners cannot be involved with strategic management in their organizations; thereby performing technician roles rather than strategic planning roles.

Practitioners' roles

It seems that Vietnamese public relations practitioners are now performing public relations activities, which were foreign to them 10 years ago, such as communicating with the media, writing press releases, writing newsletter, writing speeches for company executives, and doing strategic planning. Vietnamese public relations practitioners are not involved much with advertising activities, such as creating or buying advertisements.

Communicating with the media is the most important task for Vietnamese practitioners. This is because the media is a channel that helps practitioners disseminate messages. A good relationship with journalists will help them fulfill that task better; for example, getting press releases published. Through this study, some contradictory findings regarding “paid press releases” were found among respondents’ answers. Some respondents said that their organization does not pay to publish press releases while some admitted that they pay to publish a press release. Perhaps, paying for a press release or not depends much on the company’s business style. Yet, it seems that there is always a choice offered by Vietnamese media – pay to publish press releases. Perhaps, more practitioners pay to run press releases. Yet, they did not admit it because this may make them look bad. “Losing face” is a concept that should be taken into consideration in this case in Vietnamese culture.

Interesting still, even though an organization pays to have press releases published, they still do not consider it as advertisement. According to one practitioner, Vietnamese publications even have quotations for running press releases on their publications. While a paid press release is considered unethical in the U.S., it does not seem that way in Vietnam.

Although strategic planning is one of the important functions of public relations in the U.S., it does not receive much attention in Vietnam. Strategic planning activities were rated lower than other communication and technician functions, such as writing press release, communicating with the media. Even though more than 70% public relations practitioners have decision making power and more than 50% of respondents of this study hold managerial roles, strategic planning activity does not seem receive high attention as it should be.

Cutlip et al. (1994) indicated practitioners' lack of broad business experience, passivity about organization politics, technical educations, gender, and tenure in their organizations as factors that prevent practitioners from the dominant coalition. This might be also the case of Vietnam. Dinh (2008) argued that the reason why public relations practitioners in Vietnam are not involved in strategic management is because most of them are young and lack experience. They lack knowledge and experience in politics, cultures, socio-economic, etc., which prohibits them from participating in the strategic management of the organization. As a result, public relations practitioners in Vietnam perform communication technician roles rather than strategic management roles. This suggests that if Vietnamese practitioners are knowledgeable in business, politics, economy, etc., they might have a better chance at getting to a high management level as well as getting involved in the strategic planning process of their organization.

Decision making power of public relations practitioners and gender

The findings show that most of Vietnamese practitioners consult on major decisions in their organization. This again proves that Vietnamese practitioners are generally highly respected and seem to have decision making power in their organization.

It is also worth noting that more than 50% of respondents that participated in this study hold managerial positions. Hopefully, when Vietnamese practitioners reach the management level, they are able to have more valuable contribution to their organizations.

A majority of public relations practitioners in this study were women. This suggests that public relations in Vietnam might be a feminized field. Regarding decision making power among gender, women are still prevented from obtaining management positions in public relations in Vietnam.

Most important skills for practitioners

Most important skills for Vietnamese practitioners are interpersonal communication skills, strategic planning skills and writing skills. As a relationship-based culture like Vietnam, it easily makes sense that interpersonal communication skills are the most important. One practitioner shared her thought, saying that “Unlike other jobs, when you are done with your work in the office, sometimes you have to hang out for coffee with your clients or partners in order to maintain a good relationship. Thus, going back home late or sacrificing your weekend for work is common in this job.”

Even though it seems that public relations practitioners are not as involved with strategic planning activities as they should be, Vietnamese practitioners still think that strategic planning skills are important. This is a good sign in order to practice excellent public relations in the near future.

Writing skills were among important skills. Yet, it was rated lower than interpersonal communication skills and strategic skills.

In conclusion, public relations in Vietnam has made much improvement since 2000. It is no longer in its infancy. Yet, the road to excellent practice might still be long

for Vietnamese practitioners because at present, it seems communication technician roles are what public relations practitioners are performing. Even though most Vietnamese practitioners hold management roles in their organizations, it appears that they have little chance to do strategic planning activities. In most organizations, the public relations department still belongs to the marketing department or there are overlapping functions among advertising, marketing and public relations. However, it is hoped that in the future development, public relations will be able to shape its way toward excellent practice.

REFERENCES

- Asian Studies Center. (n.d.). *Vietnam history*. Retrieved from http://asia.isp.msu.edu/wbwoa/southeast_asia/vietnam/history.htm
- Black, P., Bastos, S., & Saxby, S. (2009). *Public relations in Vietnam: The social environment*. Retrieved from <http://www.prinvietnam.net/social.html>
- Botan, C. H., & Hazleton, V. (2006). *Public relations theory II*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Broom, G. M., Casey, S., & Ritchey, J. (2000). *Concept and theory of organization-public relationships*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. (2010). *Background note: Vietnam*. Retrieved from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/4130.htm>
- Chandler, C., & Praso, S. (2006, Nov 21). Vietnam Vroooooom: Asia's second-fastest-growing economy takes the global stage. *Fortune Magazine*. Retrieved from http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive/2006/11/13/8393174/index.htm
- Culbertson, Hugh M. & Chen, Ni (1996). *International public relations: A comparative analysis*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- DeForest, M. E. (1998, September) Hecho en Mexico: Tips for success. *Apparel Industry Magazine*, 59, 98-106.
- Dinh, H. (2007). *Public relations – Theory and applications*. Hanoi, Vietnam: Labor & Society Publisher.
- Domestic PR firms gain upper hand*. (2005). Retrieved Feb 15, 2005 from <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/news/2005/02/374969/>

- Dozier, D. M., Grunig, L. A., & Grunig, J. E. (1995). *Manager's guide to excellence in public relations and communication management*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Ehling, W., White, J., & Grunig, J. (1992). Public relations and marketing practices. In, J. E. Grunig, D. Dozier, W. Ehling, L. Grunig, F. Repper, J. White (Eds.), *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* (pp. 357-393). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Embassy of Vietnam in the U.S. (n.d.). *History of Vietnam's diplomacy*. Retrieved from http://www.vietnamembassy-usa.org/foreign_policy/history_of_diplomacy/
- Farinelli, J. L. (1990). Needed: A new U.S. perspective on global public relations. *Public Relations Journal*, 46 (11), 19-42.
- Finney, J. (2008). Six Secrets of Top Performers. *Communication World*, 25 (3), 23-27.
- Fire-Fly Campaign*. (2004). Retrieved October 04, 2004 from <http://vietbao.vn/Kinh-te/Chuong-trinh-Khuyen-hoc-Den-Dom-Dom/10881134/89/>
- French, P. (2007). *Vietnam – The latest tiger has teeth*. Retrieved from <http://www.ethicalcorp.com/content.asp?ContentID=5361&ContTypeID=>
- Gide Loyrette Novel. (2009). South East Asia. *The Brief*, 27. Retrieved from http://www.eurochamvn.org/downloads/Gide%20Loyrette%20Nouvel%20-%20Brief_South%20East%20Asia_No%2027%20-%209.%20February%202009.pdf
- Gorp, B., & Pauwels, L. (2007). Position and role of public relations in large Belgian organizations. *Public Relations Review*, 33, 301-305.
- Grunig, J. E., & Huang, Y. H. (2000). *From organizational effectiveness to relationship indicators: Antecedents of relationships, public relations strategies, and relationship outcomes*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Grunig, J. E., Dozier, D., Ehling, W., Grunig, L., Repper, F., White, J. (Eds.). (1992). *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Grunig, L. A, Grunig, J. E., & Dozier, D. M. (2002). *Excellent public relations and effective organizations: A study of communication management in three countries*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Haque, M. (2004). Introduction to Asian public relations. In *D. J. Tilson & E. C. Alozie (Eds.), Toward the common good: Perspectives in international public relations* (pp. 341-362). Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Harris, P., & Moran, R. (1991). *Managing cultural differences*. Houston, TX: Gulf Publishing Company.
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Holtzhausen, D. R. (2007). Activism. In J. E. Grunig, E. L., Toth, & L.A. Grunig (Eds.) *The future of excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp. 357-380). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hon, L., Grunig, L., & Dozier, D. (1992). Women in public relations: Problems and opportunities. In, J. E. Grunig, D. Dozier, W. Ehling, L. Grunig, F. Repper, J. White (Eds.), *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* (pp. 419-438). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Huang, Y. H. (2000). The personal influence model and gao guanxi in Taiwan Chinese public relations, *Public Relations Review*, 26, 216–239.
- Huang, Y. H. (2001). A cross-cultural, multiple-item scale for measuring organization-public relationships, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 13, 61–90.

- Hung, C. F. (2007). Toward the theory of relationship management in public relations: How to cultivate quality relationship. In J. E. Grunig, E. L., Toth, & L.A. Grunig (Eds.) *The future of excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp. 443-376). Hillsdale , NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Huu, N. (2004). *Wandering through Vietnamese culture*. Hanoi, Vietnam: The Gioi Publisher
- ICT Profile – Vietnam*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.apdip.net/projects/dig-rev/info/vn/>
- Ihator, A. (2000). Understanding the cultural patterns of the world – An imperative in implementing strategic international PR programs. *Public Relations Quarterly, Winter*, 38-44.
- Indochina Travel Information Center. (n.d.). *World heritage sites in Vietnam*. Retrieved from <http://www.vietnamtravels.vn/Vietnam-travel-information/World-heritage-sites.htm>
- International Public Relations Association. (n.d.). *IPRA's mission*. Retrieved from <http://www.ipra.org/detail.asp?articleid=26>
- Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (2007). Beyond excellence: Extending the generic approach to international public relations: The case of Bosnia. *Public Relations Review*, 33, 10-20.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, London: Sage Publications.
- Leaf, R. (1998). International public relations. In P. Lesly (Ed.) *Lesly's handbook for public relations and communications* (pp. 665-680). Lincolnwood, IL: NTC Business Books.

- Leaf, R. (1998). International public relations. In P. Lesly (Ed.), *Lesly's Handbook for public relations and communications* (pp. 665-680). Chicago, IL: NTC Publishing Group.
- Ledingham, J. A. & Bruning, S. D. (2000) *A longitudinal study of organization-public relationship dimensions: Defining the role of communication in the practice of relationship management*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Lesly, P. (1998). *Lesly's Handbook for Public Relations and Communications*. Lincolnwood, IL: NTC Business Books.
- McKinney, B. (2000). Public relations in the land of the ascending dragon: Implications in light of the U.S./Vietnam bilateral trade agreement. *Public Relations Quarterly, Winter*, 23-26.
- McKinney, B. (2006). Public relations in Vietnam: A six-year perspective. *Public Relations Quarterly, Issue 2*, 18-22.
- McKinney, B. (2008). An investigation into the perceptions of public relations of Vietnamese business managers. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 52, 44-48.
- McLean. (2008). *Lang Co beach to join club of the world's most beautiful beaches*. Retrieved from <http://www.nowpublic.com/style/lang-co-beach-join-club-world-s-most-beautiful-beaches>.
- Meyer, K. E., Tran, T. & Nguyen, H. (2006). Doing business in Vietnam, *Thunderbird International Business Review* 28, No. 2, 263-290.
- Napoli, P., Taylor, M., & Powers, G. (1999). Writing activities of public relations practitioners: The relationship between experience and writing tasks. *Public Relations Review*, 25, 369-381.

- Newsom, D. (1996). Gender issues in public relations practice. In H., Culbertson & N. Chen (Eds.), *International public relations: A comparative analysis* (pp. 107-117). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Nguyen, H. (2007). *A glance at public relations evolution in Vietnam and its current issue* Unpublished manuscript, Sogang University, Korea.
- Quang, T. & Vuong, N. T. (2002). Management styles and organizational effectiveness in Vietnam, *Research and Practice in Human Resource Management*, 10(2), 36-55.
- Rhee, Y. (2007). *Interpersonal Communication as an Element of Symmetrical Public Relations: A Case Study*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Seitel, F. (2004). *The practice of public relations*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Sha, B. L., & Toth, E. L. (2005). Future professionals' perceptions of work, life, and gender issues in public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 31, 93-99.
- Sharpe, M. L. (1998). Five essentials of understanding international public relations, *International Public Relations Review*. Sept, 23-27.
- Smith, R. (2002). *Strategic planning for public relations*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Social Activities*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.honda.com.vn/web/SocialActivities.aspx?zoneid=96&lang=en-US>
- Social Institutions & Gender Index. (n.d). *Gender equality and social institutions in Vietnam*. Retrieved from <http://genderindex.org/country/viet-nam>.
- Sriramesh, K. & Vercic, D. (2003). *The global public relations handbook*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Sriramesh, K. (2007). The relationship between culture and Public Relations. In J. E. Grunig, E. L., Toth, & L.A. Grunig (Eds.) *The future of excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp. 507-526). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Stacks, D. (2002). *Primer of public relations research*. NY, New York: A Division of Guilford Publications, Inc.
- Taylor, M. & Kent, M. L. (1999). International public relations: when government is the most important public. *Public Relations Review*, 25, 131–144.
- Taylor, M. (2000). Toward a public relations approach to nation building. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 12(2), 179–210.
- Thanh, P. (2003). *PR – Bring the organizations to their publics (in Vietnamese)*. Retrieved July 09, 2003 from <http://www.vnn.vn/kinhte/doanhnghiep/2003/7/18438/>
- Tilson, D. J. & Alozie, E. C. (2004). *Toward the common good: Perspectives in international public relations*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Toth, E. L. & Grunig, L. A. (1993). The missing story of women in public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, Vol.5, 153-177.
- Understanding Vietnamese business culture and etiquette*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.vietnam-culture.com/articles-116-17/Understanding-Vietnamese-business-culture-and-etiquette.aspx>
- Van Leuven, J. K. (1996). Public relations in South East Asia: From nation building campaigns to regional interdependence. In H. Culbertson & N. Chen (Eds.), *International public relations: A comparative analysis* (pp. 207-222). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Vietnam ranks 38th for global peace index.* (2010). Retrieved June 14, 2010, from <http://www.english.vietnamnet.vn/social/201006/Vietnam-ranks-38th-for-global-peace-index-916070/>
- Vietnam.* (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.travelandleisure.com/guides/vietnam-asia/hotels>
- Vietnam-US relations: Chronological Overview.* (2008). Retrieved June 26, 2008, from <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/files/2008/06/790302/>
- Wakefield, R. (1996). Interdisciplinary theoretical foundations for international public relations. In H. M. Culbertson & N. Chen (Eds.) *International public relations: A comparative analysis* (pp. 17-30). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Wakefield, R. (2007). *A retrospective on world class: The excellence theory goes international.* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Watson, D. & Sallot, L. (2001). Public relations practice in Japan: An exploratory study. *Public Relations Review*, 27, 389-402.
- Wu, M. & Taylor, M. (2003). Public relations in Taiwan: Roles, professionalism, and relationship to marketing. *Public Relations Review*, 29, 473-483.
- Wu, M. (2005). Can American public relations theories apply to Asian culture? *Public Relations Quarterly*, Fall, 23-27.
- Wu, M., & Baah-Boakye, K. (2008). A profile of public relations practice in Ghana: Practitioners' roles, most important skills for practitioners, relationship to marketing, and gender equality. *Public Relations Quarterly*, April, 31-36.
- Wu, M., Taylor, M., & Chen, M. (2001). Exploring societal and cultural influences on Taiwanese public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 27, 317-336.

Zwerdling, D. (n.d.). *Revisiting Vietnam: history and reconciliation*. Retrieved from <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/vietnam/vnation/history.html>.

APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS (ENGLISH VERSION)

SUBJECT: Request for research interview

Dear _____:

My name is Hanh Nguyen, and I am a graduate student at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, United States. My major is public relations. I am currently working on my final research paper, entitled “Exploring Public Relations Practice in Vietnam: Public Relations Functions, Practitioners’ Role and Important Skills for Practitioners.” I am using in-depth interviews and Internet survey as my methodology for my research, and am hoping you would be willing to participate for the interview.

This study will help those who do business in Vietnam be more successful in obtaining a good relationship with their publics because of a better understanding of public relations practice in Vietnam. Thus, as a public relations practitioner, your insight would be invaluable to my study. There is no foreseen risk to you as a participant in this study. There is also little chance of discomfort with this study because it does not ask personal questions. Rather, it only asks your opinion about your work field.

As mentioned above, the interview will be focused on your opinion and experience about public relations practice in your company/organization. It will take you about 20-30 minutes to answer the interview questions. Because I am in the U.S., I would like to send the interview questions to you via email.

If you are willing to participate in the interview, I will send you the questions in advance. There is no payment/reward for participants in this study. However, I can offer you an executive summary of my findings.

All of your responses will be kept confidential. My advisor, Dr. Dustin Supa (dwsupa@bsu.edu) and I are the only people who can see the data for this study. I will

make sure that any information I include in my research does not identify you as the respondent.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You do not have to talk about anything you do not want to and you may end the interview at any time without any penalty.

Also, I would appreciate it if you could introduce me to other public relations practitioners that you know. By helping introduce me with other practitioners, you would agree that I can use your name with the newly recruited subject.

For your better understanding about my study, I attached a narrative of my study including its purpose/rationale, subjects involvement requirements, methodology, and data handling for your reference.

Thank you for considering my request, and I will look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best wishes,

Hanh Nguyen

APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS (Vietnamese version)

THƯ NGỎ

V/v: Mời tham gia phỏng vấn

Kính gửi _____:

Tôi tên là Nguyễn Thúy Hạnh. Tôi là sinh viên cao học, chuyên ngành PR (Quan hệ công chúng) tại trường Ball State, thành phố Muncie, tiểu bang Indiana. Tôi đang thực hiện đề tài luận văn của mình, “Tìm hiểu về hoạt động PR tại Việt Nam: Chức năng của PR, vai trò và kỹ năng quan trọng của chuyên viên PR.” Để thu thập dữ liệu cho đề tài của mình, tôi sử dụng phương pháp phỏng vấn (in-depth interview) và điều tra qua bảng câu hỏi (survey). Sự tham gia của anh/chị đóng vai trò rất quan trọng trong chương trình nghiên cứu của tôi.

Là một chuyên viên PR, quan điểm của anh/chị đóng vai trò rất quan trọng đối với kết quả của nghiên cứu này. Nó sẽ giúp cho những ai đang và dự định kinh doanh tại Việt Nam có một sự hiểu biết sâu sắc hơn về ngành PR tại Việt Nam để từ đó có những chiến lược PR thích hợp.

Việc tham gia phỏng vấn không gây bất lợi gì cho anh/chị bởi các câu hỏi chỉ chú trọng vào ý kiến của anh/chị về kinh nghiệm làm PR và đồng thời không có bất kỳ câu hỏi riêng tư nào. Trả lời các câu hỏi phỏng vấn sẽ mất khoảng 20-30 phút. Hiện tại tôi đang ở Hoa Kỳ và không có điều kiện trở về Việt Nam để thực hiện phỏng vấn nên tôi sẽ gửi các câu hỏi phỏng vấn qua email cho anh/chị.

Nếu anh/chị đồng ý tham gia phỏng vấn, tôi sẽ gửi các câu hỏi phỏng vấn trước cho anh/chị. Tôi rất tiếc là không có tiền thù lao hay phần thưởng nào khi tham gia phỏng vấn. Tuy nhiên, tôi có thể gửi cho anh/chị bảng tóm tắt kết quả nghiên cứu sau khi hoàn thành luận văn.

Các câu trả lời của anh/chị sẽ được giữ bí mật. Chỉ có tôi và giáo sư hướng dẫn luận văn của tôi, tiến sỹ Dustin Supa (dwsupa@bsu.edu) có thể thấy dữ liệu thô của các cuộc phỏng vấn. Với các thông tin được đưa vào nghiên cứu, tôi sẽ không tiết lộ thông tin cá nhân của anh/chị với tư cách là người trả lời.

Việc anh/chị tham gia phỏng vấn là hoàn toàn tự nguyện. Anh/chị không cần phải đề cập những thông tin anh/chị không muốn nói. Anh/chị cũng cho thể chấm dứt cuộc phỏng vấn bất kỳ lúc nào anh/chị muốn.

Cuối cùng, tôi sẽ rất cảm kích nếu anh/chị có thể giới thiệu các chuyên viên PR khác mà anh/chị biết để tôi có thể mời họ tham gia phỏng vấn cho nghiên cứu này. Khi nói chuyện với những người này, tôi sẽ đề cập các anh/chị với tư cách là người giới thiệu.

Để anh/chị có thể hiểu sâu hơn về đề tài nghiên cứu của tôi, tôi đính kèm theo bức thư này đề cương nghiên cứu mà bao gồm thông tin về mục đích nghiên cứu, thông tin cần thu thập từ người phỏng vấn, phương pháp nghiên cứu và cách xử lý thông tin.

Xin cảm ơn và rất mong được sớm làm việc với anh/chị,

Hạnh Nguyễn

APPENDIX B

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Personal Information

(Gender, name of organizations/companies, location, years of experience, position, major of study)

2. Public relations practice

- a. In your opinion, what is public relations? What are functions of public relations in your organization?
- b. Is public relations your only responsibility or is it one of many responsibilities you have?
- c. What are responsibilities of public relations practitioners in your organizations? (responsibilities of PR Assistant, PR Manager, PR Director, etc.)
- d. Can you describe a typical day of each position in your department?
- e. Are there any obstacles you have to deal with at work? What are they?

3. PR department structure

- a. How many people are there in your organization?
- b. Which department do you belong to? How many people are there in your department? How many public relations practitioners are there in your organization?

- c. Does your organization have a separate public relations department or is it included with other departments, such as Marketing department or Advertising department?
 1. If yes, do you think it is important that public relations should be a separate department? Why?
 2. If no, which department is the public relations department joined with? In your opinion, do you think this is a good decision to have the PR department joined with another department? Why?
 3. Is the senior public relations executive in your organization involved with the strategic management processes/decision-making process? Is the senior public relations executive a member of the dominant coalition of the organization? Why?
4. Most important skills of public relations practitioners
 - a. What are the most important skills and the least important skills for a public relations practitioner? Why are they considered as the most important and least important skills?
 - b. In your opinion, are strategic planning skills important for a public relations practitioner? Why or Why not?

APPENDIX B**IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (VIETNAMESE VERSION)****BẢNG CÂU HỎI PHỎNG VẤN**

1. Thông tin cá nhân

(Giới tính, Tên cơ quan làm việc, Địa chỉ cơ quan, Số năm kinh nghiệm, Chức vụ, Chuyên ngành học trước đây)

2. Hoạt động PR (Quan hệ công chúng)

- a. Theo anh/chị, PR là gì? PR có chức năng/vai trò gì ở công ty anh/chị làm việc?
- b. Hoạt động PR mà anh/chị thực hiện là công việc chính thức hay là kiêm nhiệm?
- c. Nhiệm vụ của một chuyên viên PR ở nơi anh/chị làm việc là gì? (trợ lý PR, quản lý PR, giám đốc PR,...)
- d. Anh/chị có thể mô tả một ngày làm việc của mình??
- e. Khó khăn nào anh/chị thường gặp khi làm việc?

3. Cấu trúc bộ phận PR

- a. Có bao nhiêu nhân viên trong công ty của anh/chị?
- b. Anh/chị thuộc phòng nào? Có bao nhiêu người trong phòng/ban của anh/chị? Có bao nhiêu chuyên viên PR trong công ty của anh/chị?

- c. Công ty của anh/chị có bộ phận PR riêng biệt hay bộ phận PR trực thuộc hoặc nằm trong một bộ phận nào khác (như phòng Marketing, Advertising)?
- i. Nếu có, anh/chị có nghĩ rằng bộ phận PR nên là một bộ phận độc lập? Tại sao?
 - ii. Nếu không, bộ phận PR nên nằm trong bộ phận nào? Việc bộ phận PR gia nhập với các bộ phận khác có phải là một quyết định đúng? Tại sao?
 - iii. Giám đốc PR ở công ty của anh/chị có được quyền tham gia vào các quyết định chiến lược của công ty không? Giám đốc PR ở công ty của anh/chị có là thành viên chủ chốt trong công ty không? Tại sao?
4. Kỹ năng quan trọng của chuyên viên PR
- a. Các kỹ năng quan trọng nhất và ít quan trọng nhất đối với một chuyên viên PR là gì? Tại sao?
 - b. Anh/chị có nghĩ rằng kỹ năng suy nghĩ chiến lược và lập chiến lược là một kỹ năng quan trọng đối với chuyên viên PR không? Tại sao?

APPENDIX C

COVER LETTER FOR SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

SUBJECT: Request for participation of research Internet survey

Dear _____:

My name is Hanh Nguyen, and I am a graduate student at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, United States. My major is public relations. I am currently working on my final research paper, entitled “Exploring Public Relations Practice in Vietnam: Public Relations Functions, Practitioners’ Role and Important Skills for Practitioners.” I am using in-depth interviews and Internet survey as my methodology for my research, and I am hoping you would be willing to participate for the survey.

This study will help those who do business in Vietnam be more successful in obtaining a good relationship with their publics because of a better understanding of public relations practice in Vietnam. Thus, as a public relations practitioner, your insight would be invaluable to my study.

There is no foreseen risk to you as a participant in this study. There is also little chance of discomfort with this study because it does not ask personal questions. Rather, it only asks your opinion about your work field. As mentioned above, the questionnaire will be focused on your opinion and experience about public relations practice in your company/organization. This survey has two sections and should take about 10-15 minutes.

If you are willing to participate in the survey, I will send you the questionnaire via email. There is no payment/reward for participants in this study. However, I can offer you an executive summary of my findings.

All of your responses will be kept confidential. My advisor, Dr. Dustin Supa (dwsupa@bsu.edu) and I are the only people who can see the data for this study. I will make sure that any information I include in my research does not identify you as the respondent.

Please remember that your participation is completely voluntary. You can stop your participation at any time without any penalty.

Also, I would appreciate it if you could introduce me to other PR practitioners that you know so that I can send the survey to them. By helping introduce me with other practitioners, you would agree that I can use your name with the newly recruited subject.

For your better understanding about my study, I attached a narrative of my study including its purpose/rationale, subjects involvement requirements, methodology, and data handling for your reference.

Thank you for considering my request, and I will look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best wishes,

Hanh Nguyen

APPENDIX C**COVER LETTER FOR SURVEY PARTICIPANTS (VIETNAMESE VERSION)****THƯ NGỎ**

V/v: Mời tham gia điều tra qua bảng câu hỏi

Kính gửi _____:

Tôi tên là Nguyễn Thúy Hạnh. Tôi là sinh viên cao học, chuyên ngành PR (Quan hệ công chúng) tại trường Ball State, thành phố Muncie, tiểu bang Indiana. Tôi đang thực hiện đề tài luận văn của mình, “Tìm hiểu về hoạt động quan hệ công chúng tại Việt Nam: Chức năng của PR, Vai trò của nhân viên PR, và kỹ năng quan trọng của nhân viên PR.” Để thu thập dữ liệu cho đề tài của mình, tôi sử dụng phương pháp phỏng vấn (in-depth interview) và điều tra qua bảng câu hỏi (survey). Tôi rất hy vọng anh/chị sẽ nhận lời tham gia điều tra qua bảng câu hỏi, giúp tôi hoàn thành nghiên cứu của mình.

Sự đóng góp của anh/chị có ý nghĩa rất lớn. Là một nhân viên PR, quan điểm của anh/chị rất quan trọng đối với nghiên cứu này. Kết quả nghiên cứu sẽ giúp cho những ai đang và dự định kinh doanh tại Việt Nam có thể xây dựng một mối quan hệ tốt với công chúng thông qua sự hiểu biết sâu sắc hơn về ngành quan hệ công chúng tại Việt Nam.

Việc tham gia trả lời câu hỏi không gây bất lợi gì cho anh/chị bởi các câu hỏi chỉ chú trọng vào ý kiến của anh/chị về kinh nghiệm làm PR của mình chứ không hỏi bất kỳ câu hỏi riêng tư nào. Bảng câu hỏi có 2 phần và anh/chị sẽ chỉ mất khoảng 10-15 phút để hoàn thành nó.

Nếu anh/chị đồng ý tham gia, tôi sẽ gửi bảng câu hỏi qua email cho anh/chị. Sẽ không có tiền thù lao hay phần thưởng nào khi tham gia phỏng vấn. Tuy nhiên, tôi có thể gửi cho anh/chị bảng tóm tắt kết quả nghiên cứu sau khi hoàn hành luận văn.

Các câu trả lời của anh/chị sẽ được giữ bí mật. Chỉ có tôi và giáo sư hướng dẫn luận văn của tôi, Tiến sỹ Dustin Supa (dwsupa@bsu.edu) có thể thấy dữ liệu. Với các

thông tin được đưa vào nghiên cứu, tôi sẽ không tiết lộ thông tin cá nhân của anh/chị với tư cách là người trả lời.

Việc anh/chị tham gia trả lời câu hỏi là hoàn toàn tự nguyện. Anh/chị không cần phải đề cập những thông tin anh/chị không muốn nói. Anh/chị cũng có thể ngừng tham gia bất kỳ lúc nào anh/chị muốn.

Cuối cùng, tôi sẽ rất cảm kích nếu anh/chị có thể giới thiệu các chuyên viên PR khác mà anh/chị biết để tôi có thể mời họ tham gia nghiên cứu này. Khi nói chuyện với những người này, tôi sẽ đề cập các anh/chị với tư cách là người giới thiệu.

Để anh/chị có thể hiểu sâu hơn về đề tài nghiên cứu của tôi, tôi đính kèm theo bức thư này đề cương nghiên cứu, bao gồm thông tin về mục đích nghiên cứu, thông tin cần thu thập từ người phỏng vấn, phương pháp nghiên cứu, cách xử lý thông tin.

Xin cảm ơn và rất mong được sớm làm việc với anh/chị,

Hạnh Nguyễn

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONNAIRE

EXPLORING PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE IN VIETNAM:
PUBLIC RELATIONS FUNCTIONS, PRACTITIONERS' ROLE AND
MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS FOR PRACTITIONERS

Thank you for your participation in this survey. The purpose of this study is to understand the public relations practice in Vietnam. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability. You may stop at any time. By returning this survey, you are giving your consent that your answers will be included in the study data.

Your responses will be kept confidential and your name will not be used in any study data. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability. This survey has two sections and should take about 5-10 minutes. If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact Hanh Nguyen at nguyenthuyhanh81@gmail.com. If you would like an executive summary of the findings, please email me and I will be happy to send it to you at the conclusion of the study. Thank you for your participation.

4. What are the most important skills for public relations practitioners? (You can choose multiple answers)

- Written communication skills
- Interpersonal communication skills
- Technical competence
- Strategic planning skills
- Speaking different languages
- Others (please specify):

5. Below is a list of public relations practitioners' roles. Please check if it applies to public relations practitioners in your department. (You can choose multiple answers).

- Writing press releases
- Communicating with media
- Writing company newsletters
- Producing company brochures
- Writing speeches for company executives
- Developing company web-pages
- Creating company advertising
- Buying advertisements

Strategic planning with the dominant coalition (e.g. CEOs, Board of Directors, etc)

Others (Please specify):

6. Do PR people consult on major decisions in your company?

Yes No Your comments:

7. Is the public relations department a separate unit within your organization?

Yes No Your comments:

8. If you answered no, please check what applies to your public relations department:

Public Relations Department is a subset of the Advertising Department

Public Relations Department is a subset of the Marketing Department

Public Relations, Advertising and Marketing are overlapping functions

Others (please specify):

9. What are the functions of the public relations department in your organization? (You can choose multiple answers).

Build and maintain positive relationships with your organization's publics

Role as the spokesperson of the companies

Deal with crisis if it happens

Do strategic planning for the company

Others (please specify):

10. Is public relations your only responsibility, or is it one of many responsibilities you have?

Yes, PR is my only responsibility

No, PR is only one of many responsibilities I have

Your comments:

Section 2

This section contains questions about you. This information will in no way be used to identify you. It is simply used for classification purposes. This information will be useful in better understanding public relations practice information in Vietnam.

1. Your name:

2. Please indicate your sex:

Female

Male

3. Are you currently working in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City or Hue?

Ho Chi Minh City

Hanoi

Hue

Others (please specify):

4. How long have you been practicing public relations?

5. Would you describe your current position as managerial?

Yes

No

6. Please write any additional comments here:

Thank you very much for your participation.

APPENDIX D**QUESTIONNAIRE (VIETNAMESE VERSION)****BẢNG CÂU HỎI ĐIỀU TRA****TÌM HIỂU VỀ HOẠT ĐỘNG QUAN HỆ CÔNG CHÚNG (PR) TẠI VIỆT NAM:
CHỨC NĂNG CỦA PR, VAI TRÒ CỦA CHUYÊN VIÊN PR VÀ CÁC KỸ NĂNG
QUAN TRỌNG NHẤT CỦA CHUYÊN VIÊN PR**

Xin chân thành cảm ơn anh/chị đã dành thời gian trả lời bảng câu hỏi này. Mục đích của nghiên cứu này nhằm tìm hiểu hoạt động quan hệ công chúng (PR) tại Việt Nam. Vì việc trả lời bảng câu hỏi dưới đây là hoàn toàn tự nguyện, nên anh/chị có quyền ngừng tham gia bất kỳ lúc nào. Câu trả lời của anh/chị sẽ chỉ được sử dụng cho nghiên cứu này, chứ không cho mục đích nào khác. Và thông tin của người tham gia sẽ được giữ bí mật.

Bảng câu hỏi này gồm 2 phần và anh/chị mất khoảng 5-10 phút để trả lời. Nếu anh/chị muốn có bản tóm tắt kết quả nghiên cứu này, hoặc có bất kỳ câu hỏi, đề nghị nào, xin hãy liên lạc với tôi qua địa chỉ email nguyenthuyhanh81@gmail.com. Một lần nữa, chân thành cảm ơn sự hợp tác của anh/chị.

4. Kỹ năng nào là quan trọng nhất đối với một chuyên viên PR? (Anh/chị có thể chọn nhiều hơn 1 lựa chọn.)

- Kỹ năng viết
- Kỹ năng giao tiếp
- Năng lực chuyên môn (Technical Competence)
- Kỹ năng hoạch định chiến lược
- Kỹ năng ngoại ngữ (có thể giao tiếp bằng nhiều ngoại ngữ)
- Kỹ năng khác (vui lòng ghi rõ):

5. Dưới đây là danh sách các nhiệm vụ của một chuyên viên PR. Vui lòng đánh dấu vào các vai trò mà một chuyên viên PR ở công ty anh/chị đảm nhận (Anh/chị có thể chọn nhiều hơn 1 lựa chọn)

- Viết thông cáo báo chí
- Liên lạc với nhà báo
- Viết bản tin (newsletter) cho công ty
- Làm brochure cho công ty
- Soạn bài nói chuyện/trình bày cho quản lý cấp cao
- Phát triển và cập nhật website cho công ty
- Làm quảng cáo cho công ty
- Mua quảng cáo cho công ty

Cùng lập chiến lược với các quản lý cấp cao

Các nhiệm vụ khác (vui lòng ghi rõ):

6. Chuyên viên PR (bao gồm chuyên viên PR cấp cao) ở công ty anh/chị có tham gia tư vấn đối với các quyết định chiến lược của công ty không?

Có Không Ý kiến riêng của anh/chị:

7. Bộ phận PR ở công ty của anh/chị có phải là một bộ phận riêng biệt?

Có Không Ý kiến riêng của anh/chị:

8. Nếu anh/chị trả lời “Không” ở câu hỏi số 7, vui lòng đánh dấu vào các lựa chọn mà anh/chị thấy hợp lý tại công ty của mình dưới đây.

Bộ phận PR là một phần của phòng Quảng cáo

Bộ phận PR là một phần của phòng Marketing

Bộ phận PR, Quảng Cáo và Marketing có chức năng chồng chéo nhau

Ý kiến khác (vui lòng ghi rõ):

9. Chức năng/nhiệm vụ của bộ phận PR ở công ty anh/chị là gì? Vui lòng đánh dấu vào các lựa chọn mà anh/chị thấy hợp lý tại công ty của mình.

Xây dựng và duy trì mối quan hệ tốt với công chúng (public) của công ty

Đóng vai trò là người phát ngôn của công ty

Xử lý khủng hoảng (nếu có)

Lập kế hoạch chiến lược cho công ty

Các nhiệm vụ khác (vui lòng ghi rõ):

10. Công việc PR mà anh/chị đang làm là công việc chính thức hay là kiêm nhiệm?

Chính thức

Kiêm nhiệm

Ý kiến riêng của anh/chị (vui lòng ghi rõ):

PHẦN II

Phần này gồm những câu hỏi về thông tin cá nhân của anh/chị. Thông tin này sẽ được giữ bí mật. Mục đích của phần này là để phân loại giữa các người tham gia với nhau.

1. Họ và tên:

2. Giới tính:

Nữ

Nam

3. Anh/chị hiện đang làm việc tại thành phố nào?

Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh

Thành phố Hà Nội

Thành phố Huế

Nơi khác:

4. Anh/chị làm PR đã được bao lâu?

5. Vị trí của anh/chị trong công ty là vị trí quản lý?

Có Không

6. Nếu anh/chị có ý kiến nào khác, vui lòng ghi rõ ở đây:

Chân thành cảm ơn sự tham gia của các anh/chị!