BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

APPLYING GRUNIG’S MODELS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS: A Q-SORT ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS IN THE WOMEN’S NATIONAL BASKETBALL ASSOCIATION (WNBA)

A RESEARCH PAPER SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

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BY

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ABSTRACT

Title: “Applying Grunig’s Models of Public Relations: A Q-Sort Analysis of Public Relations Professionals in the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA)”

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This study examined the roles and functions of public relations professionals in the Women’s National Basketball Association. Grunig’s four public relations models were used to categorize the opinions of the respondents regarding their organization.

Eight respondents took part in the study. All respondents were given thirty-six statements that each described distinctive public relations activities and ideas. The statements were pulled from research originally conducted by Grunig and expanded upon by researchers Sulaiman Al-Enezi, Tamu Graham-Reinhardt and Jamie Mettler. Each respondent was instructed to sort the statements based on their opinions of the organization for which they were employed.

The results of this study were analyzed using the Q-method. Two factors were discovered through this process. Factor 1 (The Publicists) perceived their main role as advocates or publicists for the organization (falling into Grunig’s press agency/publicity model). Factor 2 (The Collaborators) perceived their role as more of a vehicle through which the behaviors and attitudes of their publics could be changed (falling closer to Grunig’s two-way symmetrical model). Both factors, however, showed signs of employing multiple models within their day to day activities. Neither factor fit completely into one model’s profile.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. ii

CONTENTS .................................................................................................................. iii

TABLES ......................................................................................................................... v

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 1

   Statement of the Problem

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ........................................ 4

   Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA)

   The Business of Sports

   Models of Public Relations

3. METHODOLOGY .............................................................. 15

   Population

   Q-Methodology

   Demographics

   Survey Questions

4. FINDINGS ................................................................. 18

   Factor 1 – The Publicists

   Factor 2 – The Collaborators

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS ........................................ 27

   Summary

   Conclusions

   Limitations of This Study

iii
Recommendations

APPENDIX ........................................................................ 33

A. Letter to Respondents ................................................. 34
B. Condition of Instruction ............................................... 35
C. Concourse of Statements ............................................. 36

REFERENCE LIST .............................................................. 40
TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Correlations Between Factors</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Significant Positive and Negative Statements with z-Scores for Factor 1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Significant Positive and Negative Statements with z-Scores for Factor 2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The professional sports industry includes about 800 organizations with combined annual revenue of over $16 billion (firstresearch.com). Before sports became a multi-billion-dollar industry, the term “public relations” within the industry was sometimes used to describe a job that only combined press agentry and publicity. However, the sports industry grew to such proportions that the need for a public relations practitioner became justified.

Professional teams have intricate relations with investors, their own players, stadium owners, transportation and housing facilities (at home and on the road) community supporters, media (with regard both to publicity and to contractual obligations – as in live coverage) and other important publics. (Newsom 2000, 16)

Public relations practitioners work under many titles within sports organizations. Some work in community relations, others in public affairs and still others were sports information directors. The complexity of the public relations role in general, not just in the sports industry, prompted the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) to define activities generally associated with public relations. Fourteen areas were listed. While publicity and press agentry were included, they were only two of the listed characteristics. Communication, issues management, community relations, advertising, promotion and media relations made the list as well (Heath 2001). Any search through a professional sports team’s staff directory will show managers and directors of each of
these areas. The issue, however, was not whether professional sports teams practice public relations. The issue was how effectively it was executed.

While there were numerous scholarly studies in different areas of professional sports, such as “Performance-Enhancing Drug Use in Amateur and Professional Sports: Separating the Realities from the Ramblings” by Bryan E. Denham, “Bright Lights, Big City: Do Professional Sports Teams Increase Employment?” by Ian Hudson and “Professional Sports, Economic Development and Public Policy” by Wilbur C. Rich, few scholarly studies had been done concerning the relationship between public relations and professional sports. Even fewer, not surprisingly, had been completed about the role of public relations in women’s professional sports.

The need for effective public relations in sports became even more important when organizations were in the beginning stages, as professional women’s leagues were. While the public relations strategies of leagues such as Major League Baseball (MLB) and the National Basketball Association (NBA) had been studied and assessed, researchers had yet to evaluate the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA). Launched during the summer of 1997, the WNBA was one of only two currently active women’s professional leagues in the country, and it was by far the most successful.

Statement of the Problem

Grunig and Hunt (1984) concluded that there were four models to practicing public relations: press agentry/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical. While the authors said all models were in practice, they determined that the two-way symmetrical model was the most ideal. This model used
research to facilitate understanding and communication between the organization and its publics, rather than allowing the organization to use messages to change the attitudes, opinions and behaviors of the publics.

This study examined these four models of public relations as they are applied to professional sports. Specifically, the attitudes of public relations professionals in the WNBA were analyzed in an attempt to determine what they believed to be the activities most often practiced in their respective departments. The WNBA was chosen as the subject of this study because of its importance to women's professional sports. No other female professional sports league has had the success of the WNBA.

Through this study, the researcher also determined which of the four public relations models the WNBA followed. The researcher believed that while these departments dominantly fell into the press agentry/publicity model, this was not their exclusive model. It was expected that the teams practiced a mix of the four public relations models; that they employed more than just propaganda techniques as Grunig implied.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA)

Created as a counterpart to the NBA, the WNBA began its inaugural season on June 21, 1997. Eight charter teams were named in October 1996. The Eastern Conference consisted of the Houston Comets, Charlotte Sting, Cleveland Rockers and New York Liberty. The Western Conference added the Los Angeles Sparks, Phoenix Mercury, Utah Starzz and Sacramento Monarchs.

Val Ackerman, named president of the WNBA on August 7, 1996, took on the task of launching a successful women’s professional basketball league. Other attempts to launch such a league had failed as recently as 1991. At the same time the American Basketball League (ABL), a rival league, was trying to start up as well. To her advantage, however, Ackerman had the weight of the NBA behind her. The NBA bet heavily on its sister league. In fact, prior to the 2003 season, NBA teams were financially responsible for their WNBA counterparts.

While lackluster in comparison to male professional sports leagues, the WNBA saw great success in its first six seasons. In the league’s first game, the Liberty took on the Sparks in front of 14,284 fans at the Great Western Forum in Inglewood, CA.
Average attendance was more than 9,000 every season (WNBA.com). It took 29 years for the men's professional league to reach an average of 10,000 fans during the 1975 to 1976 season (Shank 2001, 556).

In 1997, Ackerman and Rick Welts, president of NBA Properties, were named Brandweek's Grand Marketers of the Year. The award honored their efforts in the much hyped, multifaceted launch of the league. “Ackerman and Welts spearheaded the start-up as if it were a major consumer product launch and vaulted women’s professional team sports into America’s cluttered sports consciousness” (Grimm 1997, 1). As a product launch alone, the WNBA was clearly one of the year’s most successful. “The average per-venue attendance for that first season came in at 9,669 spectators. This more than doubled their expectations” (Grimm 1997, 6).

Since the inaugural season, the WNBA expanded from eight teams to as high as 16, with the Detroit Shock and Washington Mystics joining the league in 1998, the Minnesota Lynx and Orlando Miracle in 1999 and the Indiana Fever, Miami Sol, Portland Fire and Seattle Storm in 2000.

The 2003 season, however, marked the beginning of a restructuring process and only 14 teams competed in the league. As was mentioned before, the NBA initially held financial responsibility for their WNBA teams. The restructuring program, however, shifted from collective ownership to individual ownership (WNBA.com). Consequently, when the WNBA contracts expired, the NBA teams were given the choice to renew the contract or to put their WNBA team up for sale. As a result, the 2003 season saw the losses of the Sol and the Fire. However, two teams were relocated. The Miracle moved
on and became the Connecticut Sun and the Starzz relocated and became the San Antonio Silver Stars.

Another benchmark in the leagues' successful history was the folding of the ABL. On December 23, 1999 the ABL called it quits. However, not everyone labeled this a victory for the WNBA. “There was too much red and not enough green. Partially because of the WNBA, but it was also part of a larger story: the failed promise of women’s professional team sports” (Goldstein 1999, 74).

United States women’s teams excelled at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, and each gold medal seemed to be a starting point for a new professional league. By 1997, two basketball leagues and a fast-pitch softball league were active. Soccer was set to begin soon after, and in 1998 a surprise gold medal sparked talks of a women's ice hockey league. By 1999, the ABL was dead, the National Soccer Alliance (NSA) was postponed and the Women’s Professional Hockey League (WPHL) had been completely scrapped. Women’s Pro Fastpitch (WPF) was struggling and volleyball had fractured into many small leagues. In comparison, the WNBA was a runaway hit.

Despite its success, however, very few researchers chose to study the WNBA, and of those few studies that had been done, none had a connection to the league’s public relation practices.

Gaines (2001) used means-end analysis to assess the factors that influenced attendance at WNBA games. This study focused specifically on season ticket holders for the Indiana Fever. The goal was to acquire information on what factors people found important when attending women’s professional basketball games.
Gaines (2001) randomly selected 100 season ticket holders and interviewed them using the laddering technique to explore the motives behind attendance. This interview technique was valuable because of the depth of the responses. The interviewer followed a line of questioning until the respondent could not come up with a deeper response, thus the interviewer got to the core of the respondents feelings and values.

The researcher’s results showed that people attended for many reasons. Among these reasons were the atmosphere, the effort of players, the competitiveness, social interaction, the chance to see female professional athletes and entertainment that appealed to the family. Many fans also said they attended games because they liked to feel as if they were really a part of something big.

Many sponsors felt the same way. Like the NBA owners, the 15 sponsors and the networks that televised the league (as of 2001) were willing to give the league time to develop. “It was seen as an opportunity, from a marketing standpoint, to get in on the ground floor” (Shank 2001, 556).

The Business of Sports

“Sports is not simply another big business. It is one of the fastest-growing industries in the U.S., and it is intertwined with virtually every aspect of the economy” (Ozanian 1995, 27). It became a billion-dollar market and it showed no signs of slowing down. Sports business covered everything from participation, equipment, promotions and recreational activities to the complete management and marketing of the organization (Pits and Stotlar 1996, 3).
Hefner (1994) completed a study on using models to measure the impact of sports on local economies. Based on the incredible growth sports have seen in the recent past, Hefner (1994) explained, “The importance of measuring economic impact correctly cannot be overemphasized.” According to the study, it was concluded that input-output modeling was the accepted method of measuring the economic impact of sports on a local economy. This model “determines all changes in demand” (Hefner 1994, 148). Using such a model was imperative for a league that wished to expand into an area. The process was not so simple as figuring the cost of a new playing facility. Hefner reminded sports professionals that this direct impact is also accompanied by indirect impact, such as the materials and services needed to build and run the facility. Hefner (1994) stated “the measurement of the economic impact of sporting events and facilities provides valuable information for policymakers.”

Once an organization was established, however, it was up to the managers to successfully run the program. Porter (1980) suggested that five forces shaped the way individual sports organizations could compete successfully. “By analyzing and understanding these five forces sports managers can develop a profile of the specific aspect of the industry in which they want to operate. This makes it possible to identify competitive opportunities” (Brooks 1994, 281).

The first force was “Rivalry among existing sports organizations.” Competition could be beneficial when it increased the overall demand for the industry’s products. For example, a rivalry between two teams would cause a merchandising battle, and in doing so, this increased the demand for sports-related apparel (Brooks 1994, 283).
The second force was “Barriers to Entry.” This force depended on the area of sports involved. If someone wanted to enter the sports agency arena they just needed to print business cards and start an office and they would be a sports agent. There were no barriers to entry in this area. However, if someone wanted to come in and start a new professional basketball league, then there were barriers to entry. A perfect example was the ABL. They did not have the facilities, players or cash that the WNBA did, and as a result the league collapsed.

The third force was the “Power of Substitutes.” Every sports organization faced the potential impact of substitutes. While it was not as obvious as another league to compete with, it was as simple as other leisure and entertainment opportunities the public had to choose from. In order to steer clear of the negative effects associated with substitutes, it was important for the sports business manager to understand how and why sports fulfilled the needs of consumers. Then, they identified what substitutes provided the same satisfaction and how they reduced their threat (Brooks 1994, 284).

The fourth force was the “Power of Suppliers.” In sports, suppliers were considered any individual or company that provided a key product or service. “Powerful suppliers will often determine how much of the profits a sports organization can keep” (Brooks 1994, 284). It is important that managers identified the key supplier groups, which ones were powerful and how that power affected the organization.

The fifth force was the “Power of Consumer.” This force recognized the power that buyers exert upon suppliers. The more alternatives buyers had, the more power they had. Identifying and understanding the buyers associated with the organization was important to gaining profits.
Once managers evaluated their programs in relation to these forces, the important step was to understand and prevent them from being a detriment to the organization. Porter (1980) suggested such strategies as finding a different market position for the sport to use the competitive force to the organization’s favor.

Matthews (2001) offered an acronym to simplify sports marketing: PALE. It was a simple model explaining a complex subject.

P was for promotion. “Sports business is promotion; without promotion there is nothing. It’s not about product, price, place or anything else; it’s about promotion” (Matthews 2001, 18).

A was for access. “Part of the allure of sports is the status that comes with preferred, or exclusive, access: courtside seats in basketball, VIP boxes, locker-room visits, autograph signings with the star” (Matthews 2001, 19). If there was no exclusivity then there was no allure.

L was for logos. “The currency of sports marketing is logos” (Matthews 2001, 19). For a corporation, logos should have been treated like money; with respect. NASCAR was the perfect example of logo placement. Many people argued that it became the dominant motor sport because of the logos more than because of the action (Matthews 2001, 19).

E was for egos. “One should not be surprised that a high level of athletic performance is often associated with a large ego” (Matthews 2001, 19). The issue was not about avoiding or ignoring an athlete’s ego, but accommodating and managing it.
Promotion at the center, watch and manage access and egos and handle logos like cash. In the head-spinning world of sports business, PALE proved to be a simple model to follow for success.

Models of Public Relations

Grunig (1976) published the first in a program of research that brought researchers closer to an understanding of the different ways in which public relations practitioners and public relations departments practiced public relations.

According to Grunig (1992):

A model describes a set of values and a pattern of behavior that characterize the approach taken by a public relations department or individual practitioner to all programs or, in some cases, to specific programs or campaigns.

Grunig also stated that although all models were “false” in the sense that no representation captured reality perfectly, professionals had no understanding of reality at all if they had no model with which to work. The models were guidelines, and Grunig concluded that the two-way symmetrical was the ideal way for a public relations department to work. This was, in part, because in this model the goal of a public relations practitioner was to persuade and understand through communication rather than to only disseminate information to the public. Grunig realized that not everyone would follow the models, but they gave practitioners a standard for which to shoot.

Each model performed a different purpose and was meant to promote the understanding of the evolution and practice of public relations. (Grunig and Hunt 1984, 21).
The first model, press agentry/publicity, developed as early as 1850. This model was used to promote such heroes as Andrew Jackson, Daniel Boone, Buffalo Bill Cody and Calamity Jane (Grunig 1992, 287).

The press agentry/publicity model was a one-way model. The purpose was propaganda or information and the truth was not essential. The information traveled only from the organization to the public and used little research. This model was said to occur most often in sports, theater and product promotions, and it still exists today (Hunt and Grunig 1994, 9).

The second model was the public information model. This model developed during the early 20th century as a reaction to attacks on large corporations and government agencies by muckraking journalists such as Upton Sinclair and Ida Tarbell. Realizing that more than propaganda was needed, organizations hired journalists as public relations practitioners to write “hand outs” explaining their actions (Grunig 1992, 288). Ivy Lee was the most prominent example of this model.

The purpose of the public information model was to disseminate information. While it was also a one-way form of communication and little research was utilized, truth was of much higher importance. Government agencies, non-profits and businesses were the main users of this model (Hunt and Grunig 1994, 9).

The third model was the two-way asymmetric model. The purpose of this model was scientific persuasion. The communication was two-way between the organization and the public, however it was asymmetrical in that the organization sent the communication in such a way that they tried to change the public and leave the organization as was (Grunig 1992, 289). This method was the first to employ formative
research about the attitudes of the public. Edward L. Bernays was the foremost practitioner of this model.

The fourth and final model was the model that Grunig believed to be ideal. The final model was the two-way symmetrical model. The purpose of this model was to gain mutual understanding. The communication was two-way and was balanced in that it adjusted the relationship between the organization and the public (Grunig 1992, 289). Formative research was also employed in this model. The research was used to facilitate understanding and communication rather than to identify the messages most likely to motivate or persuade the publics. One major reason Grunig labeled this model as ideal was because of its ethical level. Because it was based on negotiation and compromise, the two-way symmetrical model was generally more ethical than the other three models.

Graham-Reinhardt (1997) used Grunig’s four models to categorize the activities of the Mid-American conference’s sports information departments. Using Q-methodology, Graham-Reinhardt provided ten sports information directors with thirty-six statements regarding various public relations activities, which a public relations department would perform. Each respondent was asked to sort the responses according to how they perceived public relations activities were carried out within their respective departments.

Graham-Reinhardt (1997) found that all respondents agreed that truth is important in public relations. However, one group of respondents perceived their departments as following the press agent/publicity model and the second group perceived their departments as two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric. Neither group practiced one dominant form of public relations.
Mettler (2002) performed a similar study, which focused on the public relations professionals employed by Major League Baseball (MLB). Eleven respondents took part in that Q-sort. The respondents were asked to sort thirty-six statements that described typical public relations activities and philosophies. The statements were derived from original research by Grunig.

As was the result in Graham-Reinhardt’s (1997) study, all respondents believed that truth was important. However, these respondents divided into two different groups. One group perceived their role as advocates for the organization (Grunig’s press agentry/publicity model). The second group perceived their role as a neutral channel for communication (Grunig’s public information model).

While there were many studies related to Grunig’s four models, such as “Corporate Governance and Corporate Identity” by Eva Parum, “Public Relations and Technology: Practitioner Perspectives” by Melissa A. Johnson and “The Government Communication Decision Wheel: Toward a Public Relations Model for the Public Sector” by Brooke Fisher Liu and Suzanne J. Horsley, very few were related to professional sports. The researcher was unable to locate any similar studies that focused on women’s professional sports. Therefore, the researcher added to the body of literature and examined the public relations professionals in the WNBA. The research questions for this study were: What, if any, was the dominant model of public relations practiced by the WNBA? Did the public relations professionals employ more than one model? Were they using a model that was deemed “ideal” by Grunig? The researcher believed that while public relations professionals in the sports field performed some activities that fell under the press agentry model, this was not the only model they employed.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Population

In order to answer the questions posed by this study, all teams in the WNBA as of February 2003 were included in the sample. The 14 teams included were: the Charlotte Sting, Houston Comets, Cleveland Rockers, Los Angeles Sparks, Connecticut Sun, Minnesota Lynx, Detroit Shock, Phoenix Mercury, Indiana Fever, Sacramento Monarchs, New York Liberty, San Antonio Silver Stars, Washington Mystics and Seattle Storm.

A phone call was made to each organization to determine who their director of public relations was. In a phone call made to the WNBA offices in New York, the researcher learned that the titles for this position varied from team to team, which is consistent with titles for public relations professionals in general. The researcher determined the team’s equivalent position based on the information that was given in the initial phone calls.

After the list was compiled, a letter was sent to the individuals informing them of the project and its purpose. Two weeks following the initial contact a survey packet was sent to each participant. The packet included a 36-statement Q-sort questionnaire. Grunig (1983) originally developed the concourse of questions. Adaptations to these original statements were made later by three different researchers (Al-Enezi 1993, Graham-Reinhardt 1997 and Mettler 2002). The packet also contained a second letter
that explained the survey and important due dates, directions for completing the Q-sort, an answer sheet and a self-addressed stamped envelope for returning the answer sheet.

After the deadline for returning the surveys passed, a prompt letter was sent to any respondents who had yet to return their answers. Thank you letters were sent immediately upon receipt of each answer sheet.

Each answer sheet was evaluated using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program at Ball State University. The individual rankings for each statement were entered into the SPSS program and factors were analyzed, resulting in two factor types.

Q-Methodology

William Stephenson first introduced Q-methodology in 1953 (Stephenson 1953). The method was a research technique used to systematically quantify subjectivity.

Political scientist Steven R. Brown (1991) described the Q-Sort:

Q-methodology provides a foundation for the systematic study of subjectivity, and it is this central feature, which recommends it to persons interested in qualitative aspects of human behavior. Most typically, a person is presented with a set of statements about some topic and is asked to rank-order them, an operation referred to as “Q-sorting.” The statements are matters of opinion only, and the fact that the Q-sorter is ranking the statements from his or her own point of view is what brings subjectivity into the picture. There is obviously no right or wrong way to provide, “my point of view” about anything.

Participants in a Q-sort were asked to rank statements about the topic of study on a scale according to their own opinions; therefore there was no “correct” way to perform the survey. Once completed, the rankings were run through a factor analysis. Patterns of behavior that emerged from this analysis were what researchers were interested in when
they performed a Q-sort. "The nature of the segments and the extent to which they are similar or dissimilar" was what was important in the analysis (Brown 1993, 94).

Q-methodology, however, was not a perfect technique. First, because the factor analysis was best done with small samples, the results were not easily generalized. For this study, however, a purposive sample was used, so generalization was not important. A second problem with the Q-method was that it could become time consuming, especially if the sample was not easily reached.

Q-methodology was chosen by the researcher due to the lack of similar research on the subject. While the method did prove time consuming, using this method allowed the researcher to gain a good deal of valuable opinion-based knowledge from the public relations practitioners inside the industry.

Demographics

Demographic questions appeared on the bottom of the answer sheet. Respondents were asked for the number of years they had held their current position, their level of education, their gender and the professional organizations to which they belonged.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

Eight people responded to the Q-Sort representing a 57% response rate. The respondents who completed the Q-sort represented the following teams: Indiana Fever, Charlotte Sting, Seattle Storm, Phoenix Mercury, Cleveland Rockers, San Antonio Silver Stars, Connecticut Sun, and Detroit Shock.

In terms of gender, the respondents were split down the middle. Fifty percent were male, 50 percent female. The respondents were also a young group. All of the respondents were under 39 years of age, with 63 percent falling into the “under 30” category. Of the eight respondents, six had degrees in a communications-related field (journalism, mass-communications, broadcast, marketing, advertising, and/or public relations). Two respondents studied business as part of their degree. Two of the respondents had no communications studies in their backgrounds. Their degrees came in the areas of sport management, exercise and fitness, and psychology. Only one of the respondents had gone on to earn a Master’s degree. Three of the eight respondents indicated that they were members of professional organizations. Those organizations included the Michigan Professional Speakers Association, Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA), and Women’s Sports Foundation.
The factor analysis of the eight Q-sorts resulted in two factor types. Correlations between these two factors are shown in Table 1. The two factors were labeled “Publicists” and “Collaborators.” Analysis of statement z-scores suggested that Publicists agreed more strongly with the press agent/publicity model statements and Collaborators agreed more strongly with the two-way asymmetrical statements. The Collaborators were more apt to value public opinion and two-way communication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
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<tr>
<td>Factor 1</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
<td>0.2852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 2</td>
<td>0.2852</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factor 1 – The Publicists

Factor 1 was composed of six respondents. Publicists significantly agreed with seven statements, and significantly disagreed with six statements (See Table 2).

Factor 1 respondents strongly agreed that promotion of their team was highest on the priority list, choosing such statements as “We believe the role of our department, first and foremost, is to be an advocate for the team,” “The simple purpose of my department is to get publicity for the team,” and “In a broad sense, I would say the primary goal of our department is to help the team control the publics that affect it.”

Factor 1 respondents also disagreed with statements such as “In this franchise, my department is more of a neutral disseminator of information than an advocate for the
team, or a mediator between management and publics,” “The two-way communication process does not have to accomplish a mutual effect on both management and publics,” and “The media/public relations philosophy in this department is to tell the truth to the media even if it is unfavorable to the team.” The stance on these statements further strengthened their placement into the “press agent” category by illustrating that mutual understanding between a franchise and its publics was not the main goal.

Factor 1 respondents provided the following comments in regard to why they selected the statements they most agreed with:

“The purpose is to get publicity for the team; to create that message and bring the players to life.”

“The goal is positive promotion in every way possible.”

“Our main goal is to bring the most positive light to our team, and if our department has to try to work on the attitudes of media members to change our coverage, that is a priority.”

It is interesting, however, that even though the Publicists disagreed with the statement “The media/public relations philosophy in this department is to tell the truth to the media even if it is unfavorable to the team,” they also disagreed with the statement that “In the communication process, complete truth is not essential.” So, while they may not have offered up the unfavorable information, it is refreshing to know that they did not frown upon lies or fabrication in order to promote their organization – a characteristic that Grunig assigned to his press agentry/publicity model.

Two statements differentiated Factor 1 from Factor 2. Factor 1 respondents significantly agreed with statements 14 and 36 while Factor 2 respondents significantly disagreed with these statements. This was not surprising as these statements dealt with controlling the publics and making publicity the main purpose of the department.
Table 2. Significant Positive and Negative Statements with z-Scores for Factor 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>z-Scores</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>We believe the role of our department, first and foremost, is to be an advocate for the team</td>
<td>2.142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>The simple purpose of my department is to get publicity for the team.</td>
<td>1.839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>In the communication process, our staff believes that truth is important.</td>
<td>1.664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>This franchise views my department as, first and foremost, to be an advocate for the team.</td>
<td>1.538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Our staff mostly tries to get favorable publicity into the media and to keep unfavorable publicity out.</td>
<td>1.474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>In our department, our staff disseminates accurate information, but does not volunteer unfavorable information.</td>
<td>1.298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>In a broad sense, I would say the primary goal of our department is to help the team control the publics that affect it.</td>
<td>1.057</td>
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**Significant Disagreement**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Number</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>z-Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Most public/media relations efforts in this franchise involve one-way communication from the team to its publics.</td>
<td>-1.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>The two-way communication process does not have to accomplish a mutual effect on both management and publics.</td>
<td>-1.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>The media-public relations philosophy in this department is to tell the truth to the media even if it is unfavorable to the team.</td>
<td>-1.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The most public/media relations efforts in this department involve one-away communication from the team to its publics.</td>
<td>-1.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>In the communication process, complete truth is not essential.</td>
<td>-1.268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>In this franchise, my department is more of a neutral disseminator of information than an advocate for the team, or a mediator between management and publics.</td>
<td>-1.920</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The respondents in Factor 1 were split down gender lines. Three were male and three were female. Four of the six respondents in this group fell in the “under 30” category while two were “30-39.” One hundred percent of the respondents in Factor 1 had public relations experience prior to their position with the WNBA.

Factor 2 – The Collaborators

Factor 2 was composed of two respondents. The Collaborators significantly agreed with four statements and significantly disagreed with five (See Table 3).

The Collaborators agreed with far more statements that fell into the “Two-Way Symmetric Model” category than did the Publicists. The respondents from Factor 1, in fact, had no significant response to any statements in this category.

The respondents in Factor 2 were named the Collaborators because they appeared to have a stronger tie to their publics. They agreed with statements that took into account effects on both their organizations and the publics they faced. Not only that, but they significantly disagreed with statements that fell into the “press agentry/publicity model” category.

The Collaborators agreed with statements such as “Most public/media relations efforts in our franchise involve two-way communication between the team and our publics,” “The purpose of my department within this franchise is to change the attitudes and behaviors of publics,” and “The two-way communication process has to take into account mutual effects on both management and publics.”

The respondents had this to say about why they agreed with those statements:
"I chose the ethical/integrity statements because that is what is most important to us (truth, etc.)"

"Given the nature of the product that the WNBA presents, I feel that our efforts at this point are to break down barriers in perceptions and attitudes of the public including those in my department."

Table 3. Significant Positive and Negative Statements with z-Scores for Factor 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>z-Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significant Agreement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Most public/media relations efforts in our franchise involve two-way communication between the team and our publics.</td>
<td>2.149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>The purpose of my department within this franchise is to change the attitudes and behaviors of our publics.</td>
<td>1.956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Our staff determines how successful a season is from the number of people who attend events or purchase products or services.</td>
<td>1.757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The two-way communication process has to take into account mutual effects on both management and publics.</td>
<td>1.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significant Disagreement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>The simple purpose of my department is to get publicity for the team.</td>
<td>-1.171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>In a broad sense, I would say that the primary goal of our department is to reduce the negative impact this team has on its publics.</td>
<td>-1.183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Our staff believes that public/media relations are an art that cannot be measured or evaluated.</td>
<td>-1.558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>In a broad sense, I would say the primary goal of our department is to help the team control the publics that affect it.</td>
<td>-1.569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>In this franchise, or staff members are essentially journalists in residence.</td>
<td>-1.950</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The respondents in Factor 2 were split down gender lines. One was male and the other was female. They were also evenly split in the age category as well. One respondent fell in the “under 30” category and the other was “30-39.” One hundred percent of the respondents in Factor 2 had public relations experience prior to their position with the WNBA.

One other interesting demographic finding in Factor 2 was that one respondent described their position title as “Community Relations Manager” and their short answers showed that slight difference compared to all other respondents. This respondent indicated that they “feel there is a fair amount of two-way communication. We take into account the concerns of the community that are voiced to us as well as disseminate information to the public.” This respondent was the only one who mentioned direct community involvement in their short answer portion.

The results of the Q analysis showed that there were significant differences between the responses given in Factor 1 and those given in Factor 2. Factor 1 respondents believed that first and foremost they were advocates for their organization (press agentry/publicity). They tried to get favorable publicity into the media, but tried to keep the unfavorable out (press agentry/publicity). For them, the simple purpose of the department was to get publicity for the organization (press agentry/publicity). However, they disagreed with two typically “publicist” characteristics in that they believed that truth was essential and that most media relations efforts involved one-way communication from the organization to its publics. In short, they were not interested in establishing a relationship with their publics, at least not one beyond that for the good of
the organization. In fact, they said that the primary goal of their department is to control the publics that affect it.

Factor 2 respondents believed that the two-way communication process had to take into account mutual effects on both management and publics (two-way symmetrical). They believed that the purpose of the department within their organization was to change the attitudes and behaviors of their publics – not to control them (two-way symmetrical). They also agreed that most public relations-type activities in their organization involved two-way communication between the organization and their publics (two-way symmetrical). They disagreed with the idea that public/media relations are an art that cannot be measured (press agentry/publicity) as well as with the idea that the simple purpose of the department was to get publicity for the organization (press agentry/publicity).

So while it seemed apparent that Factor 1 was far more interested in telling and not listening and that Factor 2 sought to gain mutual understanding in their work, it was interesting to see that neither group noted research as a significantly important piece of their job. In looking at where the research-related statements ranked with respondents, both groups ranked them in a similar way. Most statements fell into the middle of the pack with z-scores that ranged from 0.193 to -0.549 which indicated that while they did not place a high priority on them, they also do not significantly disagree with them. While this was not a surprise for the Factor 1 group, based on the level of agreement the Factor 2 group had with two-way symmetric statements, it was more surprising that those respondents did not place more emphasis on the research portion of their field.
The results of this study appeared to support Grunig's findings that one dominant model was not practiced over all others. Although both groups seemed to lean heavily toward one model over the others, Factor 1 toward the press agentry and Factor 2 toward the two-way symmetrical, they were still not exclusive. Other models were certainly present, just in a more minor way.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The questions addressed in this study were: What, if any, was the dominant model of public relations practiced by the WNBA? Did they employ more than one model? Were they using a model that had been deemed “ideal” by Grunig? It was the hypothesis of the researcher that while public relations professionals in the sports field must perform some activities that fall under the press agentry model, this was not the only model they employed.

To determine the validity of this hypothesis, a Q-Sort was performed. The statements included on the survey originated and were compiled from four different sources (Grunig 1983, Al-Enezi 1993, Graham-Reinhardt 1997 and Mettler 2002). Each survey contained 36 statements and nine demographic questions. A total of fourteen participants were contacted and sent a packet containing an introductory letter, the survey instrument and instructions on how to complete it. A response rate of eight (57%) was attained.

After analysis of the data, two factors appeared. Respondents were placed into two factors based on their level of agreement and disagreement with the 36 statements in the survey. Factor 1 (The Publicists) consisted of six respondents. These six
sorted the statements in a similar way. Factor 2 (The Collaborators) was made of two respondents. Each respondent fit into one of the two categories.

The results of the factor analysis showed that there was significant differential between the two groups. Factor 1 agreed most with the press agentry/publicity model, agreeing that their main purpose was to be an advocate for their organization and to garner publicity. Factor 2 agreed more so with two-way symmetrical statements indicating that they strived to change the attitudes and behaviors of their publics and that most of their activities involved two-way communication.

The results of this study supported Grunig’s findings that a single model was not practiced exclusive of the others. In the case of Factor 2 where two-way symmetrical stood out as most prevailing, the group did not indicate that research was a high priority in their operation – a key component to the two-way symmetrical model. So although one stood out among the rest, the respondents in Factor 2 also exhibited characteristics of the other models – they were not exclusively practicing within the two-way symmetrical model.

Conclusions

This study explored the ways in which public relations professionals perceived their roles within their franchise of the WNBA. Participants were asked to sort the statements based on Grunig’s four models of public relations in a way that they believed most accurately described their position within the organization.

Six of the eight respondents identified with the press agentry/publicity model of public relations. The other two respondents identified more with the two-way
symmetrical model. The finding showed, however, that neither group fell exclusively into one model. This supported work that had been done by the previous researchers.

The researcher’s hypothesis was that while public relations professionals in the sports field must perform some activities that fall under the press agentry model, this was not the only model they employed. The findings suggested that this held true for one of the two factors – those respondents in Factor 1 agreed with statements that fell under the press agentry model, but they also agreed with statements that fell into other models. They also disagreed with press agentry statements, making it apparent that they were not exclusively publicists in their practices.

Those respondents in Factor 2, however, significantly agreed with many statements from the two-way symmetrical model. They agreed with one press agent statement, but most of the statements that they significantly disagreed with also came from that model showing that Factor 2 fit the press agent model in a minor respect, but it was not the model that they employed.

The results of this study, however, showed an interesting difference in comparison to past research. Mettler (2002) found that public relations professionals within Major League Baseball also broke into two factors, but those groups fell into the press agent model and the public information model. No mention was made about significant agreement with the two-way symmetrical model. While it was found that “the findings showed that there was not an exclusive model for either group” (Mettler 2002, 59), neither group significantly matched with Grunig’s “ideal” two-way symmetrical model.
The researcher felt that perhaps this disparity came from the difference between the groups surveyed – Major League Baseball versus the Women’s National Basketball Association. In the short answer portion of their survey, one respondent stated that “given the nature of the product that the WNBA presents, I feel that our efforts at this point are to break down barriers in perceptions and attitudes of the public including those in my department.” The WNBA was a young program in the scope of other professional sports groups. That, and the fact that it was a professional sports league for women, presented some different obstacles and challenges with which those in the baseball league did not have to contend.

Given the respondent’s statement it was easy to see how professionals within the WNBA could fit more into the two-way symmetrical model. Those practitioners were trying to change the attitudes and behaviors of the public when it came to women in professional sports, not just promote a product like Major League Baseball that had been around for generations. The researcher felt that this was a valuable addition to the body of research. This disparity between professional sports leagues illustrated that not all sports-related public relations practitioners were alike. They certainly employed more professional techniques than propaganda, and many of them in the WNBA used techniques perceived as “ideal” within the industry.

So while publicity and public information were certainly used by public relations professionals within the WNBA, they were not the only models employed, and were not even the predominant models into which some professionals fell. At least a group of those professionals was doing more that just advocating for their organizations – they
were trying to change public perception of the larger picture – women in professional sports.

Limitations of This Study

There were limitations encountered while conducting this research. First, there was little done in the area of public relations and professional sports and even less done in professional women’s sports. As professional sports continues to grow and to influence society at increasing levels it is important to continue examining the role that public relations plays in the industry.

Another limitation was the difficulty in receiving the responses. It took over a year to receive enough responses to make the study viable. The Q-Sort packets were sent after the WNBA season had ended with the hopes of receiving a better response rate. However, the researcher discovered that those public relations professionals who were targeted for the study never really had an “off season.” Since WNBA teams were often found within organizations that also owned NBA teams, the public relations professionals often served double duty and worked for both the WNBA and NBA teams – which made them extremely hard to access, let alone to persuade to complete a Q-Sort.

Recommendations

Since this study was completed the WNBA has continued to grow and change. A few of the teams have changed and the organization is a bit older and presumably wiser. The conducting of a second study would be very interesting, to see if the results are still the same – to see if the public relations professionals still feel as if they are out to change
attitudes and behaviors, or to see if perhaps they have fallen into that press agent/publicist stereotype that those in the professional sports industry are often lumped into.

It would also be worthwhile to see if the practitioners feel that have seen a change in the public since the start of the league, and if so, how? Have their public relations efforts made a difference over the years? Have they changed attitudes and broken down barriers through their work?

Additionally, further research should be conducted into women and sports in other genres. How are other professionals within the female sports industry performing? Do peers in other organizations feel the same need to break down barriers and perceptions, or does the lack of other professional arenas for women in sports tell an important tale?

It would also be interesting to see if those professionals within the WNBA franchise are still pulling double duty with their NBA team. And if so, what effect is that having on the turnover rate among the professionals? Are they feeling a time crunch, and could that be one reason why formal research isn’t being conducted – formal research that would truly make them fit into that two-way symmetrical model – the “ideal” model? If research continues in this industry then perhaps the professionals in the area will see what improvements they might make to help develop their organizations further.
APPENDIX
APPENDIX A

Respondent Letter

July 10, 2003

xxxx
xxxx
xxxx
xxxx

Dear xxxx:

Hello! My name is Christi Girton and I am a public relations graduate student at Ball State University. I am working on the final requirement toward my degree, my master’s thesis. The topic I have chosen to research is the attitudes of public relations practitioners in the WNBA. In my work thus far I have found little research that has been completed on women’s professional sports in general and practically none on public relations in this area. With your help I would like to change that.

I feel that the public relations departments of the WNBA play an integral part in the league’s success and I am interested in learning more on the preferences of employees in these departments. By using a research technique known as Q methodology I will be examining the attitudes of professionals in your area. My hope is to find what methods are being used to promote the teams and if these methods are the most effective, based on Grunig’s four public relations models.

Your role in this process is a simple one and will require approximately 20-30 minutes of your time. Your name will be kept anonymous so as to gain the most honest and accurate responses possible. Enclosed in this packet you will find instructions on how to perform the Q-sort, a set of 36 index cards to be used in the survey, a data collection sheet for your results, a form for demographic information and a return envelope so you can easily send your results back to me. There is a possibility that you may be called for a brief 5-minute interview if your results stand out among the group. The short interview will only ask that you elaborate on your responses, nothing more.

I ask that you please return your results to me no later than July 25th. I understand that your schedule is hectic this time of year and if for some reason you are unable to complete this study by July 25th, please pass it on to a co-worker in your department. I must receive one survey back from each team in the league and while I would ideally like to have the top person complete it, that is not imperative to my study.

Thank you in advance for your participation. As a former collegiate athlete I would like to do all I can to help women’s professional sports succeed and I see the completion of this study as my first step. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study please feel free to contact me at (765) 285.8900 or drop me an e-mail at cegirton@bsu.edu.

Sincerely,

Christi Girton
APPENDIX B

Condition of Instruction

How to perform the Q-Sort

This Q-Sort is designed to measure what you believe to be the public relations methods most often employed by your department. The survey includes four types of statements, all based on James Grunig’s four models of public relations: press agentry/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical.

1. Read through all 36 statements first so as familiarize yourself as much as possible.

2. After reading through the statements you will begin to divide them into three piles. One pile will contain the statements with which you most agree, one will contain those statements with which you most disagree and the third pile will contain the statements on which you do not have a strong opinion. There is no right or wrong answer in this study. Please sort the statements based on how you feel your department handles different aspects of public relations.

3. From the “agree” pile, please select the two statements with which you most agree. Write the numbers of these two statements into column on the far right of the data collection grid. Continue placing the numbers of statements based on your level of agreement, working your way toward the center of the grid.

4. Follow the same approach with the “disagree” pile. Place the numbers of the two statements with which you most disagree into the far left column of the grid. Continue to work your way toward the center based on your level of disagreement.

5. Finally, use the statement from the “neutral” pile to fill in the rest of the grid. Those statements that you agree with more will fill in on the right side and those that you disagree with more will fill in from the left. Those statements that you truly do not feel strongly about will fall into the center column.

6. Please fill out the three short-answer questions on the second page of the data collection sheet. You may use the back of the sheet for any additional comments or opinions pertaining to the three questions or any of the 36 statements in the Q-sort.
APPENDIX C

Concourse of Statements

The following statements were included in the packet sent to respondents. They were divided based on the public relations model with which they went.

Press Agency/Publicity Model

- In our department, public relations and publicity mean the same thing.

- This organization views my department, first and foremost, to be an advocate for the organization.

- Most public/media relations efforts in this organization involve one-way communication from the organization to its publics.

- Our staff believes that public/media relations are an art that cannot be measured or evaluated.

- Our staff mostly tries to get favorable publicity into the media and to keep unfavorable publicity out.

- We believe the role of our department, first and foremost, is to be an advocate for the organization.

- In the communication process, complete truth is not essential.

- In a broad sense, I would say the primary goal of our department is to help the organization control the publics that affect it.
- The simple purpose of my department is to get publicity for the organization.
- Our staff determines how successful a campaign is from the number of people who attend events or purchase products or services.

**Public Information Model**

- In our department, nearly everyone is so busy writing news stories or releases and producing publications that there is no time to do research.
- In this organization, our staff members are essentially journalists in residence.
- In a broad sense, I would say that the primary goal of our department is to reduce the negative impact this organization has on its publics.
- In the communication process, our staff believes that truth is important.
- In this organization, my department is more of a neutral disseminator of information than an advocate for the organization, or a mediator between management and publics.
- Media/public relations philosophy in this department is to tell the truth to the media even if it is unfavorable to the organization.
- In our department, our staff disseminates accurate information, but does not volunteer unfavorable information.
- Most public/media relations efforts in this organization involve one-way communication from the organization to its publics.
- I would say that our staff uses simple, yet unscientific means to determine the success of our efforts.
Two-Way Asymmetric Model

- Before beginning a public relations campaign our staff does research to determine public attitudes toward the organization and how it can be changed.

- Most public/media relations efforts in our organization involve two-way communication between the organization and our publics.

- After a campaign was completed, our staff did research to determine how effective it had been in changing people’s attitudes.

- In a broad sense, I would say the primary goal of our department is to help the organization control the publics that affect it.

- When our staff provides information to media, they use whatever research they can find about the possible effect the information will have on the public, to make sure that the public sees the organization favorably.

- Before starting a campaign, attitude surveys were assessed to pretest public acceptance of the campaign.

- The broad goal of our staff is to persuade publics to behave the way the organization would like them to behave.

- The two-way communication process does not have to accomplish a mutual effect on both management and publics.

The Two-Way Symmetric Model

- The two-way communication process has to take into account mutual effects on both management and publics.

- The purpose of my department within this organization is to change the attitudes and behaviors of our publics.
- Most public relations-type activities in our organization involve two-way communication between the organization and our publics.

- Before starting our department, staff members used surveys or informal research to find out how much management and their publics understand each other.

- The purpose of our department is to develop mutual understanding between the management and the public they face.

- The organization believes that the staff in my department should provide mediation for the organization – to help management and publics negotiate conflict.

- In a broad sense, I would say that the primary goal of our department is to help the organization change in order to reduce the negative impact it has on its publics.

- Our media/public relation's philosophy is to open the organization to reporters and to help them contact news sources inside the organization themselves.

- Our staff evaluates its programs by doing informal research on how many people have been exposed to their programs and how much they have learned about the organization – NOT surveys to find out if they have changed their attitudes.
REFERENCE LIST


40


Newsome, Doug, Judy VanSlyke Turk and Dean Kruckeberg. 2000. This is PR: The realities of public relations. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth.


