Mediating the media: A journalist-centric model in managing the media by corporate communication practitioners

Augustine PANG
Singapore Management University, augustine@smu.edu.sg

Mediating the media: a journalist-centric media relations model

Augustine Pang

*Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information,
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore*

Abstract

Purpose – The prevailing challenge faced by practitioners is to conduct effective media relations, especially with the proliferation of diverse media platforms both online and offline. For such a predominant and critical function, a systematic approach needs to be offered. This paper aims to address these issues.

Design/methodology/approach – A new model is developed, drawing on insights from corporate communications and journalism literature.

Findings – This model identifies two sets of influences that practitioners should seek to understand. The internal influences include journalist mindsets, journalist routines, and newsroom routines. The external influences include extra-media forces and media ideology.

Research limitations/implications – At this juncture, it is not able to predict causalities among the influences. What this model is able to establish is the connections among the influences. Future research can address that.

Practical implications – This model is instructive for new practitioners to view media relations as a holistic process rather than merely an information subsidy function. For seasoned practitioners, it serves to encourage them to re-evaluate their current strategies and to engage in strategic thinking on how to transform their current practices.

Originality/value – The author has developed a new model called mediating the media that is meant to equip practitioners to conduct media relations in a systematic manner with the primary objective of winning the journalists over by the knowledge of their work and their profession. This may form the basis for an initial trail that takes media relations to the next level.

Keywords Trust, Modelling, Information media, Corporate strategy, Corporate communications, Communication management

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

If there is an often-misunderstood area about what corporate communications practitioners do, then it must be that practitioners' only focus is media relations (Marketing-interactive, 2007). But media relations, argued Shaw and White (2004, p. 494), is "like the tip of an iceberg – the most visible part, but certainly not all there is."

Misconceptions aside, media relations remains an "important" and "tactical function" (Shaw and White, 2004, p. 494) of corporate communications. In media relations, practitioners seek favorable publicity for the organization's products and services (Sallot *et al.*, 1998; Seitel, 2004; Sinaga and Wu, 2007; Yoon, 2005b) often through information subsidy (Supa and Zoch, 2009) to "enhance the reputation of an organization" (Bland *et al.*, 2005, p. 55).

With the proliferation of diverse media platforms, engaging both online and traditional media remains a greater challenge (Wilcox and Cameron, 2009). How, then, does practitioners practice media relations? Thus, far, current literature is filled with prescribed lists of appropriate and non-appropriate strategies filled with dos and do nots. Fearn-Banks (2002), for instance, suggested practitioners should understand the reporter's job, and not play favorites with the media. Bagin and Fulginiti (2005) suggested establishing first name basis with reporters, build a climate of trust, and always be available to the media. Cameron *et al.* (1997, p. 140) argued that these "rules" are based on traditions, experience and common-sense knowledge developed in the practice. Supa and Zoch (2009) argued that such rules, while helpful, might not leave the practitioner any wiser. Is there no definitive way of practicing media relations?

For such a predominant and critical function (Wilcox and Cameron, 2009), a systemic approach needs to be offered. This author has developed a new model called mediating the media that is meant to equip practitioners to conduct media relations in a systematic manner with the primary objective of winning the journalists over by the knowledge of their work and their profession. This model is based on three premises. First, the practitioners must recognize the need to engage in what Lerbinger (2006, p. 99) called "proactive media relations." The goal, argued Lerbinger (2006), is to "gain maximum control over the media so that organizational objectives, such as promoting its public issues agenda, can be achieved." "Proactive media relations" requires practitioners and/or organizations to assume an "aggressive, high-profile approach" which may run counter to what is usually preferred, a low profile with the media (p. 99). Second, given the long-standing animosity and antagonism between journalists and corporate communications practitioners (Tilley and Hollings, 2008), practitioners must assume responsibility that cultivating good relations is a paramount task as journalists value relationships (Supa and Zoch, 2009) and journalists "hold practitioners responsible for them [developing relationships]" (Sallot and Johnson, 2006a, p. 151). Third, if practitioners are interested to cultivate viable and positive relations with the media, the onus is on them to understand how the journalist and his/her environment operate.

Inspired by and adapted from Shoemaker and Reese (1996) theory of influence, this mediating the media model posits both internal and external influences on media relations. The internal influences include journalist mindsets; journalist routines; and newsroom routines. The external influences include extra-media forces and media ideology.

The significance of this model is threefold. First, it encourages practitioners to look beyond their information subsidy function to engage in strategic thinking of what media relations mean to their organizations. Strategic thinking is the process in which practitioners re-evaluate, reaffirm, and re-enact a particular operational concern (Lerbinger, 1997). Second, a proactive approach to understanding the journalist and journalism by practitioners would certainly lead to greater media access and stronger media relations, which lead to a stronger public presence and image for the organization. Third, this model answers the call by Yoon (2005b, p. 786) for practitioners to focus "more on learning about how the media and journalists operate and use that knowledge to build, change, or maintain journalists' perceptions of their organizations."

Literature review
Influencing the media in the news production process through information subsidy function has long been the modus operandi in media relations (Bland *et al.*, 2005;

Lerbinger, 2006; Wilcox and Cameron, 2009). Corporate communication's influence on news content is dominant (Gandy, 1982), which researchers estimate to range from 25 to 50 percent (Cameron *et al.*, 1997). Journalists recognize that practitioners serve as one of the most important sources of news through (APCO Worldwide, 2008; Shin and Cameron, 2003). Sandman *et al.* (1976) argued that corporate communications' influence on news is so important that issues that suffer poor news coverage were managed by corporate communications who were "unskilled" or had no skills whatsoever (p. 266, cited in Cameron *et al.*, 1997, p. 112). Yet this process is fraught with challenges faced by practitioners: why do journalists dislike them? How do they build trust and cooperation with journalists?

To unearth the roots of antagonism that journalists have of practitioners, scholars have conducted more than 150 studies in the USA alone (Cameron *et al.*, 1997) – and counting. The antagonism is deep-seated (Tilley and Hollings, 2008), and journalists often treat practitioners "with contempt" (DeLorme and Fedler, 2003, p. 99). This is "puzzling" as journalists have "rarely, if ever, expressed a similar contempt for related fields" (p. 114).

The long-held and innate dislike journalists have for corporate communications practitioners stem from historical roots, DeLorme and Fedler (2003) argued. Consistently, it appears to revolve around the following three themes.

Practitioners do not understand what journalists want
Even though journalists recognize that practitioners serve an important information-subsidy function, those who do not know how to perform this function found little favor with journalists. In a survey among European journalists, more than two-thirds of practitioners were found to lack understanding of what journalists needed (APCO Worldwide, 2008). The deficiencies appear to fall in the area of news sense. Sallot and Johnson (2006b) found that 78 percent of journalists surveyed said practitioners offered information that were "overtly and overly self-serving" (p. 84) on behalf of their organizations. Kopenhaver (1985) found that 78 percent of journalists surveyed said that news releases were "publicity disguised as news" (p. 40). The top six reasons why editors rejected news releases were first, lack of news value; second, lack of local news angle; third, lack of information; four, lack of timeliness; five, poorly written; and six, grammatical errors.

Supa and Zoch (2009) replicated a study by Kopenhaver *et al.* (1984) study on how practitioners and editors in Florida viewed each other 23 years later. As far as how practitioners disseminate information to journalists, Supa and Zoch (2009) concluded practitioners still do not know how to present relevant information to journalists.

Practitioners do not understand journalism work
One would have thought that contacting journalists in advance of major news events would be internalized as part of information subsidy, but almost half of European journalists (46 percent) surveyed argued that practitioners do not perform this basic function (APCO Worldwide, 2008). This appears to perplex journalists. With a pressing 24/7-news cycle, journalists have wondered that if they can operate at such intensity (DeLorme and Fedler, 2003), why their counterparts in the same information system (Zhang and Swanson, 2006) cannot do likewise. It is probably why they are less tolerant of practitioners' perceived ineptness. Differences in pay also fuel the prejudice

(Tilley and Hollings, 2008). An entry-level journalist in the USA starts at US$24,000 while an entry-level practitioner starts from US$30,000 (Wilcox and Cameron, 2009), about 25 percent higher.

Practitioners do not understand media relations

While there are practitioners who appreciate the importance of developing relationships with journalists, journalists feel that the "bad apples" continue to reinforce the climate of distrust. Tilley and Hollings (2008) found that there was duality of skills among practitioners. One belonged to those who were not trained or knew what they were getting themselves into, for instance thinking it is the place to do "a lot of schmoozing" (Wilcox and Cameron, 2009, p. 13). As a result, they contaminate a nascent field that is still trying to consolidate its level of comfort and understanding. The other belonged to the skilled practitioners who made no qualms manipulating journalists to get good stories for their organizations.

The illusion some practitioners appear to be under about the state of their relationship with journalists cannot be more telling. Neijens and Smit (2006) found that among Dutch practitioners, more were generally positive about their relationship with journalists. The journalists, on the contrary, were less sanguine.

Current models of media relations

Two diametric models that enhance understanding of media relations are examined. The first model, developed by Cameron *et al.* (1997), examines media relations from the perspective of how practitioners can impact news. The authors presented a three-section model to explain how practitioners impact the newsgathering and news dissemination process. The first section examined relational domain between the practitioner and reporter based on two characteristics, namely, how reporters and practitioners view each other (mutual assessments), and the power dynamics, particularly the adversarial relationship between the reporter and practitioner. The second section of the model examined the organizational domain. If the practitioner indeed influences the news process, what background does the practitioner bring before any "informational transactions" (p. 113) take place between the practitioner and reporter? The authors argued three indicators, namely, ethical and professional values, the routines and practices that practitioners subscribe to, as well as the practitioner's news values and what the practitioner considers effective source materials, were considered in information dissemination. The last section examined the societal impacts of news sources. Two impacts were posited, namely, the impact of practitioners' information subsidy on news agendas, and how marketing pressures like budgetary constraints and profit motives affect the news "product" (p. 114). The authors argued that "framing" practitioner-journalist relations along these the relational, organizational and societal domains could "bring greater order" on how practitioners can impact the news agenda "upon which they strive to have an effect" (p. 148).

The second model, developed by Yoon (2005b), examines media relations from how practitioners can impact the journalists. Called the Media Access Model, Yoon (2005b) proposed that practitioners' expertise and journalists' perceptions of practitioners' expertise could be predictors in gaining access to the media. Expertise is examined from the perspective of what journalists regard as legitimacy. Legitimacy is a reflection of affective status, legality, competence, stability as well as credibility. Even though Yoon

(2005b) found that practitioners' expertise did not necessarily translate into increased media access, journalists' perceptions of practitioners' legitimacy had some impact on media access. Thus, the more legitimate journalists viewed the practitioners, the more positive and regular of the practitioners' organizations would the media coverage be. What was more persuasive about Yoon's (2005b) model was the finding that information subsidy, while important, should not be the main media strategy as it might not lead to media access. Instead, media relations should move beyond this "narrow view" (p. 766) to examine from a more holistic perspective to understand journalists and journalism.

Call for new framework
Yoon (2005b, p. 786) suggested that practitioners should "focus more on learning about how the media and journalists operate." To do so, Yoon (2005a, p. 434), in another study, argued for media relations to be viewed as "multidimensional." This approach should encompass three dimensions. Besides fulfilling the information subsidy function (action dimension), practitioners should gain knowledge of how the media operate (knowledge dimension). Finally, media relations efforts should be strategic in gearing towards favorable coverage (strategy dimension).

Following the call by Yoon (2005b) to develop an approach to understanding journalist and journalism, this author has developed the mediating the media model which is a journalist-centric media relations model. This model is inspired by and adapted from Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) theory of influences on media content called Mediating the Message. It is argued that by understanding how journalists and journalism work, practitioners would be better equipped to reach out to them and shape the conduct of media relations in a strategic manner (Yoon, 2005a).

Mediating the media model
This exploratory model posits both internal and external influences on media relations. The journalist perspectives are first enunciated, followed by applications for practitioners on how to respond to them.

Internal forces that shape media relations
The internal influences include the journalist mindset, journalist routines, and newsroom, or organizational routines.

Journalist mindset. Even though Shoemaker and Reese (1996) argued that the journalist mindset is shaped various factors, like the background and characteristics of the individual journalist, such as the journalist's gender, ethnicity, education, experience, political affiliation, religious beliefs, and even sexual orientation, much of what the journalist perceives to be news is shaped by similar backgrounds which have been found to play crucial roles in perpetuating similar mindsets on news judgment (Buckalew, 1969; Peterson, 1979; Roberts and Bantimaroudis, 1997; Stempel, 1985; Smith *et al.*, 1988). Chibnall (1977) argued that journalists' framework of concepts and values is ordered by at least eight professional imperatives which guide their construction of news. These include immediacy, dramatization, personalization, simplification, titillation, conventionalism, structured access, and novelty.

From the journalist perspective, what this means is that the journalist faces the daily task of selecting and trimming large volumes of information to what is considered news (Sinaga and Wu, 2007). In doing so, the journalist always look at stories through lens of

newsworthiness. To enable them to do their jobs well, the journalist appreciates accessibility (Bagin and Fulginiti, 2005), willingness of the practitioners to help, and the exclusivity of stories (APCO Worldwide, 2008). They dislike stonewalling or suggestions on how they should write their stories because they consider it editorial interference.

For the practitioner, what this means, then, is that they have to shed the long-standing notion among journalists (DeLorme and Fedler, 2003) that they do not know what news is. Even though studies found that journalists and practitioners share similar new values, journalists appear to remain unconvinced of the values practitioners hold (Kopenhaver *et al.*, 1984; Sallot *et al.*, 1998). To enhance their information subsidy function, the practitioner can perhaps take a leaf from the insights shared by journalists in Sallot and Johnson's (2006a, b) study. First, know how journalists write and what interests journalists. Second, know the beat. Third, improve on their quality of writing. Four, be available to them (Richards, 1998). Five, practitioners should learn how to frame information in manners so that journalists can understand, for instance, contextualizing information to demonstrate the importance of the news.

The implications for the practitioners are, first, media training should include systematic monitoring of media. This would help practitioners identify their target journalists, these journalists' news values and organizations' standing in the eyes of the journalists (Yoon, 2005a, b). Practitioners "must work harder to sharpen their framing skills" (p. 85), argued Sallot and Johnson (2006a, b).

Journalist routines. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) argued that routines are "patterned, routinized, repeated practices and forms that media workers use to do their jobs" (p. 105). Routines are developed over time in response to organizational needs. Media organizations have their own sets of rules to help the system respond in predictable and structured ways. One of the cardinal routines is deadline (Ruff and Aziz, 2003). In order to meet deadlines, journalists want information fast (Richards, 1998) for fear of being "scooped" (Yoon, 2005b, p. 767).

From the journalist perspective, what this means is that to lend balance to their stories, the journalist would appreciate comments to make the stories fair (Bagin and Fulginiti, 2005). They dislike no comment because that indicates to the journalist either the practitioner does not want to be helpful or the practitioner has something to hide (Richards, 1998).

For the practitioner, what this means, then, is to understand what each news organizations' deadlines are. Knowing this helps practitioners disseminate information at times critical to the media's needs. Journalists found practitioners who deliver information according to their deadlines a "prime quality" (Yoon, 2005b, p. 767). Second, failure to meet the journalist's deadline leads to two losses:

(1) the opportunity to set on record the organization's perspective; and

(2) the possibility that the journalist could no longer trust the practitioner as an information provider (Ruff and Aziz, 2003).

Third, understanding deadlines allow the practitioner to know when to time their announcements and events to fit into the journalist schedule (Richards, 1998) to get maximum coverage. For instance, a story with a comparatively low news values may still get decent coverage if it is released on a slow news day. Four, understanding deadlines equip practitioners with ideas on how to fill news holes (Kim and Bae, 2006). Yoon (2005b,

p. 783) argued that "the more knowledge and expertise the sources [practitioners] had" about routines, the "more favorably" they were perceived by journalists.

Newsroom or organizational routines. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) argued an organization has clear roles, structure, and goal. Organizations have the power to decide how routines are imposed. Additionally, organizations are also subjected to economic constraints like advertising which often influence editorial decisions. The organization's influence can be insidious, argued Breed (1955), which can take place through a common socialization process to breed conformity.

From the journalist perspective, what this means is that the newsroom has established a certain routine, schedule, and culture that sets the structure on how it works. There is an established order of conformity to authority and roles. Generically, the reporter reports to the supervising editor, who in turn reports to the overall editor. In military parlance, these are command positions with direct influence on media content and relations. Additionally, there are copy editors and sub-editors whose jobs are to enhance the reporters' stories. They are known as staff positions, with no direct influence on media relations. Beyond the organizational structure, the media as an organization is also subjected to market and business pressures which leads to compromise between business consideration and newsroom values. Even though news production is often judged by news values and routines, the reality is that news organizations are businesses that need to watch their bottom lines (Cameron *et al.*, 1997).

For the practitioner, what this means, then, is to understand who holds manifest power in deciding news and who holds latent power. Reporters, editors and owners who are in command positions should arguably be the foci of practitioners' attention and relations because they hold manifest power. Yet, at the same time, even though copy editors, sub-editors, newsroom managers, business managers do not have direct influence on media relations, they can play instrumental or latent roles in influencing those who hold manifest power. For instance, a newsroom manager can subtly influence new production by marking a press release high on a supervising editor's priorities. Second, when faced with budget constraints and tighter manpower constraints, organizations are likely to rely on the use of information supplied by practitioners instead of investigating on their own (Cameron *et al.*, 1997; Sinaga and Wu, 2007). This means that practitioners who supply information, footages, and ideas that are favorable to their causes may face less resistance in the use of such materials. Third, if practitioners can persuade those who hold manifest power, particularly the owners in news organizations that publishing or running special features that are based on practitioner-supplied materials can generate a "win-win" situation that increases organizational profile as well as help news organizations increase profits, such collaborations may ensure regular and prevailing presence for the organization. Four, marketing pressures can exert influence on editorial decision. The key is knowing when to pull the plug.

External forces that shape media relations
The external influences include extra-media forces and media ideology.

Extra-media forces. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) defined extra-media influences ranging from organization-press relations that affect the channels and nature of news dissemination, such as the freedom of newsmakers to supply journalists with information; to issues like legal constraints (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

From the journalist perspective, what this means is that they have to work within the larger parameters set on them. For instance, in his study of a prominent online media organization in Malaysia, Pang (2006) found that lack of press accreditation, which was not extended to journalists in Malaysiakini.com, limited its access to covering political events. Additionally, legal restraints, namely the defamation, sedition, official secrets and internal security laws imposed on journalists were also prohibitive, and limited what kinds of information journalists could use.

For practitioners, what this means, then, is first, the need to understand the nature of media practices in each contexts they operate in. In China, for instance, interaction with the media is based on a remunerative understanding. Whenever the media show up for events, they are "entitled" to "transport fee," regardless of whether they eventually publish the story or not. The level of remuneration depends on the prominence of the events and size of the organization that organizes it. Practitioners operating in such contexts would do well to take cognizance of such extra-media influences. Second, understanding legal parameters would also help practitioners know the limits in which they could position the organization in the media. For instance, one might be tempted to persuade the media to criticize a competitor in the media. This might be futile because the media might not report it if it infringes on defamation laws. The practitioner who appreciates such larger forces at work would not take it personally despite strong relationship with that particular media.

Third, this informs the types of information that practitioners should use when engaging journalists. The complementary use of credible sources like government to supplement news has been found to influence coverage (Kim and Bae, 2006; Len-Rios *et al.*, 2009; Powell and Self, 2003). What this all means is that practitioners who are savvy to what kinds of sources work for journalists would stand a better chance to ensure coverage of their interests. For instance, if one was tasked to craft a news release on the benefits of soy beans, what would attract journalists would be to present supported studies from federal state health authority like the food and drug administration instead of showing anecdotal evidence.

Media ideology. Ideological forces are defined as the "symbolic mechanism that serves as a cohesive and integrating force in society" (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996, p. 221), like the state-press system. Ideology, among other functions, helps to "predict when media and political elites intervene against normal journalistic routines and professionalism" (p. 224).

From the journalist perspective, what this means is that they operate within the larger ideological framework. In the USA, for instance, journalists largely operate without fear or favor because they are protected in the first amendment. On the contrary, in China, because it subscribes to an authoritarian press ideology (Merrill, 2000), there is a "total integration of media and government" (Parsons, 1997, p. 72).

For practitioners, what this means, then, is how it informs their understanding of the role each media plays in the contexts they operate in. In the USA, *The Washington Post*, for instance, is known for its liberal perspectives while *The Washington Times* is known for its conservative views (Song, 2004). In the UK, for instance, there are quality national broadsheets like *The Financial Times*, *The Times*, *Independent*, and mid-market tabloids like the *Daily Mail* and the down market tabloids like the *Sun* and *Daily Mirror* (Ruff and Aziz, 2003), followed by regional daily press and local newspapers. Each of them plays specific roles in society. A tabloid may be shunned by the elites, but they are

proven channels to reach out to the less educated (Pang, 1996). Knowing where each media fits into the societal puzzle would inform practitioners on how they can tailor messages to their specific audiences. For instance, use the national media to announce major investments and regional media if there is a regional angle (Bland *et al.*, 2005).

How the model works
Like Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model, this model similarly comprises five layers of concentric circles, described as a "hierarchy of influence," each growing in importance and pervasiveness as it expands. At the heart or the bulls' eye of the concentric circle is journalist mindset, followed by journalist routines, and then newsroom or organizational routines. These are the internal influences on media relations. Extra-media influences form the next circle, and followed by media ideology. At the outermost circle, ideology is argued to have the most pervading influence on media relations (Figure 1).

If external forces appear to exert indirect influence on media relations, then internal forces exert more direct influences on media relations. Internal influences localize media relations to the individual organization and the journalist working for that organization. External influences are extensions of the localized relations, or what Cameron *et al.* (1997) called societal impacts.

While it is argued that there is a linear flow of influences, in that media ideology influences filter down to extra-media influences, to organizational, to routines, and then to the journalist, the model also accords dynamic interactions among the influences. It is thus conceivable that though ideology dictates media system, the individual ideology of journalist can ultimately decide the kinds of relations he desires with practitioners. For instance, even though US system encourages the contest of ideas and thus welcomes practitioners the freedom to perpetuate their points of view, the individual journalist may decide to curtail this process if the journalist finds the practitioner not credible. An embracing media system like the USA does not necessarily ensure dynamic interactions between practitioners and journalists. The converse is also true. Similarly, extra-media influences like the legal constraints may have more forceful impact on journalist routines than organizational routines. For instance, an ongoing legal suit (extra-media) may limit what the practitioner can disclose to the journalist covering the case even though the journalist would naturally demand information because of looming deadlines and competition from other media (journalist routines).

Though the model may often be regarded as a hierarchical flow of influences, this author agrees with Shoemaker and Reese (1996) that what is of greater significance in constructing such a hierarchy of influences is first, to "better appreciate the different perspectives that are possible" because any single perspective does not present the "complete picture;" and second, "combining multiple levels of analysis" allows us to draw "connections" among them (p. 271).

Conclusion and implications
In this study, this author has proposed a new model called mediating the media that is meant to equip practitioners to conduct media relations in a systematic manner. It is an exploratory model, a framework to consolidate the diverse examinations of journalist-practitioner relations with the aim of providing a cohesive picture of what media relations entail. This model is instructive for new practitioners to view media relations as a holistic process involving a set of interacting influences rather than
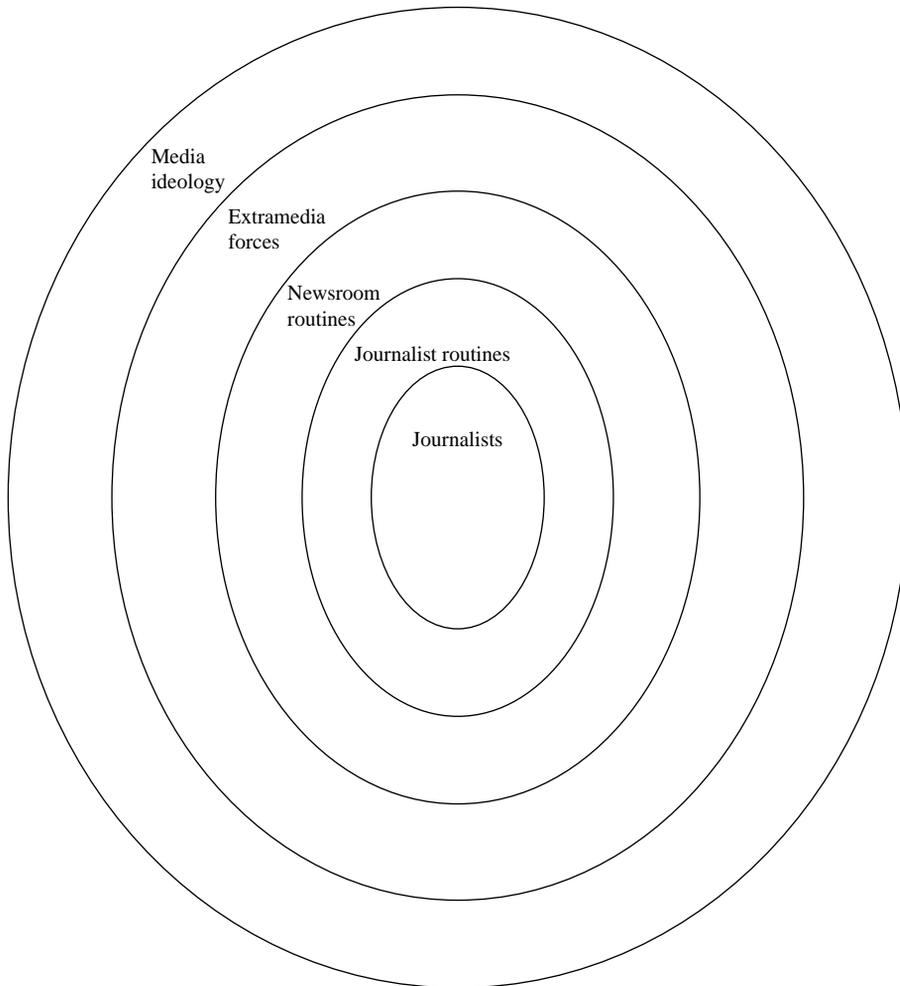
merely an information subsidy function. Bowen (2003) has found that corporate communications majors still regard media relations as information subsidy in a "one way flow of communication from the organization to publics" (p. 207). For seasoned practitioners, the model serves to encourage them to re-evaluate their current strategies and to engage in strategic thinking on how to transform their current practices. Supa and Zoch (2009) argued that many senior practitioners who have risen through the ranks might not have formal education experience in corporate communications. This model can hopefully provide a systematic guide.

On a practical level, what can be done to encourage a holistic appreciation of media relations? First, begin fostering practitioner understanding of journalism by including journalism training in corporate communications curriculum. Current training, while comprehensive (Bowen, 2003), has not included journalism. To reach out to journalists and understand journalism culture (Shaw and White, 2004), one has to learn how to write

like one (Richards, 1998) and think like one (Sallot and Johnson, 2006a, b). It is no surprise then that journalists regarded practitioners who have prior journalism experience as "more skilled and ethical" (Sallot and Johnson, 2006b, p. 85). What would be a good start would be to make it mandatory for practitioners to undertake intermediate or even advanced journalism classes before they graduate.

Second, as commonsensical as this may sounds, good media relations begin with establishing relationships (Howard, 2004). The longer journalists know the practitioner, the more they "feel more kindly" (Len-Rios *et al.*, 2009, p. 57) towards them and the "more favorably they view the progression of their relationships" (Sallot and Johnson, 2006a, p. 157). One reason why practitioners and journalists in South Korea enjoy strong relationships is due to *cheong*. Berkowitz and Lee (2004) defined *cheong* as a "kind of spiritual tie that is unconsciously established through direct or indirect contact and common experience" (p. 431). Though it arises from a historical context, this is reinforced by "continuous contact and common experience" (p. 433). Short of having a cultural precedent like in Korea to kick-start the process, this mediating the media model can help practitioners appreciate journalists and illuminate what influence them.

One limitation of this model is, like Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model, that it is not able to predict causalities among the influences. For instance, it is not able to say that an open media ideology would necessarily lead to greater access to the media and stronger media relations. At this juncture, what this model is able to establish is the connections among the influences. Future research can address that.

As Sallot *et al.* (1998) argued, there is much in common between the two professions. This model, arguably, is a further attempt to ground the relationship based on the premise that we as practitioners should take the first steps. If we do that successfully, this may form the imprints of an initial trail that take media relations to the next level.

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Corresponding author

Augustine Pang can be contacted at: Augustine.Pang@ntu.edu.sg

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