



Defining public relations roles in the U.S.A. using cluster analysis



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 29 April 2013

Received in revised form 23 August 2013

Accepted 22 November 2013

Keywords:

PR
Roles
Practitioner
Classification
Job

ABSTRACT

This exploratory study attempted to discover key public relations (PR) practitioner roles through a survey design using factor-cluster analysis. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) partnered with the researchers by inviting PRSA members to complete a survey in which 256 members participated. Although different items were used, the results of this study were similar to the findings of a study conducted on European PR practitioners by Beurer-Zullig, Fieseler, and Meckel (2009) thus suggesting concurrent validity. Five PR roles were found incorporating personal characteristics, modes of communication, management and technical functions, perceived level of respondent strategic planning process involvement, and attitudes about communication goals and PR measurement (including perceived competency). The roles were labeled negotiator, policy advisor, brand officer, internal communicator, and press agent. The negotiator and policy advisor roles, which were management positions, viewed measurement research as important in the practice of PR.

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1. Introduction

In a world extensively immersed in communication technologies, it is not surprising that human interaction is becoming more global involving the considerations and transference of diverse cultures and perspectives (Sriramesh, 2009). This trend does not escape the public relations (PR) practitioner (Conrad & Poole, 2012), who is in the business of communicating to internal and external audiences in a dynamic world where the nature of PR roles shift to keep up with technology and a changing world.

The PR organization essentially consists of practitioners who possess technical and managerial skills and responsibilities and where one of the two roles may be dominant, whether managerial or technical (Hogg & Doolan, 1999). The technician utilizes technology to execute communication tactics and the technician/manager oversees technicians, maintains a level of technical expertise, and deploys technologies in the service of PR.

Technology today allows us to easily measure PR effectiveness and related activities (Moreno, Verhoeven, Tench, & Zeffass, 2010). We can measure targeted publics' attitudes, values, and beliefs, as well as their "online" behaviors through numerous web analytics. Therefore, the importance and ease, with which we can now measure PR effectiveness will undoubtedly affect some PR roles because it can inform strategic planning and assessment (James, 2007).

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Another important consideration is the internal or external nature of communication and how it relates to PR roles. Internal communication has become increasingly important due to increased competition and a desire to seek internal audience feedback in an ever changing and fast-paced world (Arif, Jan, Marwat, & Ullah, 2009). External communication comes in various forms such as interpersonal lobbying efforts, corporate image building, and positive brand development. Depending on circumstances, the economic climate, organizational reputation, and governmental regulations, the emphasis on external communication can shift.

In sum, a PR role classification system should differentiate the technical and managerial aspects of the position as well as the importance ascribed to measuring PR communication effectiveness whether the focus is internal and/or external audiences. Considering the movement to globalization, perhaps this and other classification systems should be tested for their similarities and difference across national boundaries and cultures.

A review of the extant literature did not produce many PR role classification studies incorporating PR assessment. However, classification research is beginning to include the PR measurement function in Europe (Beurer-Zullig, Fieseler, & Meckel, 2009). A United Kingdom study by Moss, Newman, and DeSanto (2005) identified five PR roles: monitor and evaluator, key policy and strategy advisor, trouble shooter/problem solver, issues management expert, and communication technician. This study was replicated in the U.S.A. (DeSanto, Moss, & Newman, 2007). The three major differences between these studies and the present research is that we incorporate strategic planning; include PR measurement, which is now an area of increased focus and more assessable today; and differentiate between internal and external communication.

Along these lines, this research utilizes the Beurer-Zullig et al. (2009) European PR practitioner classification system henceforth called Beurer-Zullig. The Beurer-Zullig system comprises essentially two managerial roles and three technical roles representing a wide cross-section of PR roles including senior management, strategic management and development, those responsible for the organization's overall image to the publics, marketing related customer communication, and internal operational communication. The survey from which the typology was based comprises 14 items, including 1–3 item measures.

The researchers sought to test the Beurer-Zullig (2009) classification system using a sample of American PR practitioners employing a different and more extensive instrument that not only captures the five PR roles, but also incorporates PR measurement and a number of additional demographic and organizational characteristics not examined by Beurer-Zullig and which builds on their framework. Principal components analysis (PCA)-clustering was utilized to differentiate roles (Dash, Mishra, Rath, & Acharya, 2010) followed by analysis of variance and cross-tabulations to further explore the relationships among characteristics and PR roles. Finding roles similar to the European-based Beurer-Zullig framework using a different instrument supported and provided concurrent validity for their classification system as it applies to American PR practitioners, and potentially provides more descriptive information about these PR roles. Similarities might also suggest how technology operates in conjunction with globalization in moving to a more standardized approach to PR roles.

2. Literature review

Classifying public relations practitioner roles has been approached from different perspectives. These efforts have increased our understanding of the PR professional's functions (DeSanto & Moss, 2004; DeSanto et al., 2007; Hogg & Doolan, 1999; Moss et al., 2005; PRSA, 1993; Toth, Serine, Wright, & Emig, 1998). Many of these classifications have one important characteristic in common (Austin, Pinkleton, & Dixon, 2000; Dozier & Broom, 1995). That is, practitioners largely fall into the overall roles of technician, manager, or some combination of the two (Hogg & Doolan, 1999). The technician focuses on creating and disseminating messages; whereas, the manager serves as a problem-solver and go between sometimes moving from internal to external audiences (Beurer-Zullig et al., 2009; Dozier & Broom, 1995; White & Dozier, 1992) scanning and collecting information from the external environment or stakeholders, which is then used in planning.

Beurer-Zullig (2009) developed a European PR practitioners' classification system based on two managerial roles and three technical roles. It represents a wide cross-section of PR roles ranging from senior management to tactician. The *negotiator* is a strategic management function and equates with reaching out to all stakeholders internally and externally. This role provides strategic planning and management input. The negotiator recognizes the value of PR measurement and its relationship to PR strategy as well as understands and facilitates speaking in a single voice. The person in this role engages in such tasks as lobbying and interacting with many internal and especially external stakeholders. Negotiators typically have seniority and 5–15 years of professional experience. They usually are men between the ages of 41 and 45. Their degrees commonly are in the humanities, communication, or business. Next, there is the *policy advisor*, who serves in a management and often technical capacity. This person develops overall plans and policies with other executives such as negotiators exercising advisory and control tasks. Most of the policy advisor's activities are internal unlike the negotiator. The policy advisor typically has over 11 years of professional experience and is an over 40 year old male. He is responsible for providing communication risk assessments and communication opportunities targeting internal and external audiences. He assumes responsibilities for communication planning and outcomes. He provides decision-making advice, contributes to strategic planning, is comfortable with PR measurement, and sees the value of measurement. Policy advisors typically hold a humanities, communication, or business degree. Third, there is the *brand officer*, which is a technical role. This role is responsible for specific aspects of marketing communication programs such as event and other customer-related tactics, and may report to the marketing manager. Typically a woman, she is given little opportunity to expand experience and promotion possibilities. She has 5–10 years experience and usually holds a business, humanities, or communication degree.

Fourth, there is the *internal communicator*, which is a technical and support position. This role is responsible for maintaining open communication between management and employees. Typically, a woman, she develops a sense of organizational community and serves as a resource for information. Little emphasis is placed on strategic planning or PR measurement. She usually has 5–10 years of experience, is over 46 years old, and holds a humanities or social sciences degree. Last, there is the *press agent* who focuses on external stakeholders and publics communication other than customers. This technical role involves publicity, media relations, writing speeches, and serving as the “journalist in residence” (Beurer-Zullig et al., 2009, p. 171). Press agents recognize the value of PR measurement. They are usually men less than 40 years, have 5–10 years of experience, and hold a humanities degree.

If these roles were placed on a strategic planning/PR measurement continuum, they would start with managerial roles. First, the negotiator is a consumer of goal-oriented communication strategic planning, who provides input and support for plans that are provided to her/him by policy advisors. Next, the policy advisor operates mostly internally to produce strategic plans. This person values and uses measurement research and develops objectives to support strategic plans consistent with organizational goals. The three technician roles are guided by strategic plans. They focus on three types of audiences: internal or organizational members, external customers, and other external groups such as media and opinion leaders. The press agent, who is responsible for interacting primarily with the media, communicates talking points and measures the dissemination of these points through outputs such as web site hits and press clipping. The internal communicator keeps the internal publics informed and motivated. Some tactics may be guided by informal qualitative evidence. The brand officer focuses on customer tactics.

2.1. Strategic communication and measuring effectiveness

Public relations have not been perceived as a serious organizational function compared to other areas where effectiveness and contribution are known and assessment metrics are readily available and used (Invernizzi & Romenti, 2009; Pieczka, 2000; Verhoeven, Zeffass, & Tench, 2011). Yet, the importance of assessment measurement is recognized. For instance, Austin et al. (2000) distributed a survey to 300 PR professionals and found that respondents indicated that pre-campaign, during, and post-campaign research was important. This study discovered two PR measurement types: outputs and outcomes. Output measures are dissemination related metrics such as counting media coverage or blog citations, which are immediate and viewed by the technician as important, but are not directly connected to business goals (Xavier, Johnston, Patel, Watson, & Simmons, 2005). The second measurement type is audience related outcomes (attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of the target audience), which are valued by the PR manager and are more complex because they provide a measurable link to business goals (Xavier & Patel, 2004). Outcome measures tend to be longer term and less concrete involving complex skills and resources such as the deployment of consultants or trained employees to develop the requisite assessment skills. Thus, depending on the evaluative goal, different measurement tools and levels of assessment skills may be required (Lindenmann, 1993; Xavier et al., 2005).

Surprisingly, little attention has been given to the merits and utilization of quantitative research to inform PR strategic planning (Grantham, Vieira, & Trinchero, 2011). The use of quantitative metrics is further diminished at the functional level. That is, technicians are the individuals who create and disseminate messages to publics and stakeholders. The technician is in a position to revise or create new messages to increase positive attitude and facilitate targeted audience behaviors that are in line with organizational goals and objectives. Yet, the technician is often removed from the planning and assessment process. This lack of connection is counterproductive because measurement is informed by PR strategy, and thus the ability to effectively monitor and adjust the campaign accordingly is diminished.

With the aforementioned considerations in mind, we intend to address the following research question and hypotheses.

RQ1: Will a cluster analysis of respondents from the United States reveal a similar classification model as that of the European-based Beurer-Zullig PR role classification study (2009)?

H1: Those participants identifying with technician-oriented roles will not value measurement research as much as those associated with managerial roles.

H2: Technician-role respondents will use more output focused PR assessment measures compared to the manager-based roles.

In sum, in testing the Beurer-Zullig (2009) PR classification system, we emphasized strategic planning, PR measurement, and an internal vs. external audience focus thereby extending the classification system to include additional factors important in defining PR roles.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample and procedure

Two-hundred and fifty-six self-selected PRSA members and practitioners participated in this study. Sixty-six percent ($n = 170$) of the respondents were women. The typical age range was 41–60 ($n = 160$, 62.5%). Ninety-one percent ($n = 234$) of the participants were white. For the most part, they held bachelors or masters degrees ($n = 238$, 93%). The top major was

journalism ($n = 65$, 25.4%) and the average number of years of PR experience was 20.5 ($SD = 10.05$). The most reported role was manager/technician ($n = 113$, 44%) and the focus of their PR efforts was external communication ($M = 71.9\%$, $SD = 21.7\%$). Generally, they worked for either a corporation ($n = 75$, 29%) or a non-profit ($n = 65$, 26%). The most indicated work industries were healthcare ($n = 50$, 19.5%) and higher education ($n = 43$, 16.8%). A majority of respondents resided on the East Coast of the United States ($n = 141$, 55%).

An online questionnaire was developed and pilot tested for item clarity and comprehensiveness. The survey sought to classify respondents according to a variety of demographic questions, years in the PR profession, organizational function, role in strategic planning, communication goals, types of communication used, level of measurement expertise, perceptions of PR measurement importance, and a number of organizational characteristics that extended PR practitioner role characteristics beyond the Beurer-Zullig et al. (2009) study.

3.2. Measures

The measures used in the study were not identical to those used in the Beurer-Zullig et al. (2009) study. They were developed in collaboration with PRSA with an emphasis on strategic planning, PR measurement, differentiation between internal and external communication, and personal and organizational characteristics in an effort to test for concurrent validity between the present study and the Beurer-Zullig research as well as expand upon previous research.

3.3. Respondent characteristics

Personal characteristics requested were gender (M or F), age category (30 or younger, 31–40, 41–50, 51–60, and 61 or older), ethnicity (which was an optional question: American Indian or Alaska native, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Middle Eastern, White, and Other), level of education (Associate, Bachelor, Master, Doctorate, and Other), college major (fill-in-the-blank), number of direct reports (fill-in-the-blank), and years working in PR (fill-in-the-blank).

3.4. Primary work function

The primary work function items consisted of the following: “My primary work function is: as a manager (contribute to strategic policies); as a technician (develop materials); as a combined manager and technician; or as a consultant (external agency).”

3.5. Internal and external communication goals

There were 11 internal communication goals and eight external communication goals. The items were anchored in a 5-point scale ranging from 5 (very important) to 1 (very unimportant). Sample internal communication items were: “Communicating policy changes within the organization,” “Communicating organizational accomplishments,” and “Communicating employee opportunities.” Some external communication questions were: “Create awareness about the organization,” “Create awareness about the organization’s contribution to its geographic community,” and “Create awareness about products/services offered by the organization.”

3.6. Internal and external audiences’ communication tactics

This scale consisted of 29 communication channel items anchored in a 5-point scale ranging from 5 (very frequently used) to 1 (very infrequently used). There were nine external stakeholder items, which consisted of the following types of communication: news release, organizational website, social media, face-to-face meetings, speaker’s bureau, event sponsorship, direct mail, direct email, and brochures. Additionally, there were six items each for communication directed at management, peer, and employee stakeholders totaling 18 items. They were memos, email, reports, face-to-face meetings, social media, and intranet. Respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of their time devoted to internal communication and external communication.

3.7. Role and perceptions of strategic management and planning

The strategic management role scale consisted of four items anchored in a 5-point scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The items were “I am part of the organization’s senior management,” “I report to the organization’s senior management,” “I participate in strategic planning for the organization,” and “I produce the communications materials used to support our strategic plans.”

The perceptions scale was composed of four items, which were anchored in a 5-point scale. The items were: “My organization considers public relations and communications activities: 1 (extremely valuable) . . . 5 (not valuable),” “My suggestions for strategic planning are: 1 (always implemented) . . . 5 (never implemented),” “My organization considers public relations

impact to be: 1 (very important) . . . 5 (very unimportant),” and “My organization considers public relations to be a technical and product-oriented function: 1 (strongly agree) . . . 5 (strongly disagree).”

3.8. *Measurement tools used*

Seven PR measurement tools were included in the survey and were anchored in a three-point scale, which was 1 (least often), 2 (sometimes) and 3 (most often). The tools listed were clipping service reports, pre- and post-campaign surveys, content analysis, interviews, focus groups, tracking studies, and web site hits.

3.9. *Perceived PR performance measurement competence*

This scale measured respondents' self-perception of PR measurement competence. Four items comprised this scale. They were anchored in a 5-point scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The items were: “I feel comfortable measuring and evaluating our public relations results;” “I wish I knew more about the methods I should use to measure our public relations impact;” “My educational background prepared me to provide measurable public relations impact;” and “My working background prepared me to provide measurable public relations impact.”

3.10. *Perceived organizational importance of PR measurement*

These ten items captured the participant's personal views, as well as the participant's perception of the organization's perspective about the importance of PR measurement. Sample items were: “Management considers measuring public relations impact to be: 5 (very important) to 1 (very unimportant),” “In your view, providing measured results on perceptions of the organization's image is required: 5 (always) to 1 (never),” and “In your view, providing measured results for how the organization's products/s services are positioned is required: 5 (always) to 1 (never).”

3.11. *Organizational characteristics*

Participants were asked about their organizational type (Corporation, NGO, Non-profit organization, Government office, PR/Communications, and Other), industry type (fill-in-the-blank), number of workers in the entire organization (fill-in-the-blank), number of communication staffers (fill-in-the-blank), and work geographic region (Northwest, Southwest, Southeast, Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Heartland, and International). Contact the authors for a copy of the full instrument.

4. *Analysis*

Classification of the participants was conducted using a principal components analysis (PCA) K-means clustering, two-stage approach (Dash et al., 2010). This method segments cases into statistically homogeneous groups (Mitchell, 1994). The components reveal underlying variables that drive cluster assignment.

More specifically, PCA with Varimax rotation was run on the primary work function item, which was recoded from low to high level of managerial role; the four roles in the PR strategic planning process items (from providing support to strategic planning to strategic planning decision-making), the eight internal audience focus questions, and the 11 external audience focus items. These items served to differentiate components predicated on the theoretically based technical/managerial roles, internal/external audience distinction, and the role of strategic planning, which were consistent with the Beurer-Zullig et al. (2009) study.

Five components emerged from the PCA based on Eigen values above 1.00. The total variance explained was 59.67%. Four items were dropped because loadings were under .50. The component that explained the most variance was internal audience focus, which accounted for 26.1% of variance with an Eigenvalue of 5.48. The loadings were .58–.82 and consisted of eight items. The second component, external audience focus, had loadings between .61 and .83 and consisted of five items. The third component, external outcomes, comprised three items loading .58–.80. The fourth component, managerial involvement in strategic planning consisted of three items with loadings .68–.82. The last component was a single item measure consisting of support for strategic planning, which loaded .81. Cronbach alphas were used to assess reliability, which ranged from .65 to .88.

K-means cluster analysis resulted in the following PR roles: Cluster 1: Brand officer ($n = 38$), Cluster 2: Press agent ($n = 30$), Cluster 3: Internal communicator ($n = 43$), Cluster 4: Negotiator ($n = 58$), and Cluster 5: Policy advisor ($N = 84$). Three cases were missing as a result of using the listwise procedure. The final cluster centers revealed: brand officers were not involved with strategic planning; press agents did not focus on internal audiences or external outcomes (suggesting that their focus was external); internal communicators did not focus on external audiences and negotiators were involved with strategic planning as might be expected; and policy advisors provided support for strategic planning.

Before running an ANOVA by cluster, a PCA with Varimax rotation was used on the communication tactics questions to reduce the number of items to a manageable level of analysis by constructing latent variables. The internal tactics loaded as follows: social media (.57–.82, $\alpha = .82$), memos (.84–.88, $\alpha = .86$), intranet (.82–.87, $\alpha = .83$), reports (.77–.80, $\alpha = .81$), face-to-face meetings (.54–.81, $\alpha = .69$), and internal email (.72–.75, $\alpha = .65$). The external tactics consisted of targeted communication

comprising mail, email, and disseminating brochures (.65–.77, $\alpha = .68$). External website-based information (.69–.70, $\alpha = .33$) and external events (.71–.77, $\alpha = .43$) were dropped owing to low reliability.

ANOVAs and cross-tabulations were run on the items. All items were single measures except the internal audience focus, external audience focus, internal communication tactics, and external communication tactics variables.

5. Results

RQ1: Will a cluster analysis of respondents from the United States reveal a similar classification model as that of European based [Beurer-Zullig et al. \(2009\)](#) study? Similar roles were discovered in the American PR sample. The following descriptions are based on statistically significant differences by PR role. There were no significant gender effects; the distribution was 2/3 women and 1/3 men. For the most part, college majors were consistent across the total sample with the top majors being: Journalism (25%), Communication (20%), Public Relations (19%), and English (10%). However, there were two statistically significant differences ($p < .05$). Brand Officer expected relative frequency for those who majored in advertising was 2.1%; however, the observed relative frequency was 7.9%. For the negotiator role, majors in Political Science/International Relations were greater than expected (10.3% vs. 4.8%).

Cluster 1: Brand officer ($n = 38$). Participants in this position indicated that they were technicians (44%) or technician/managers (44%). They focused on marketing messages to external audiences. Nearly 58% reported age as 31–50 years old. This role's average years of PR experience was 13.89, which was lower than all roles except that of internal communicator. They reported not being part of senior management as well as having little involvement in strategic planning directly or indirectly. They perceived that their suggestions were not taken seriously. Of all the roles, they believed the least that their organization valued PR or considered it a strategic function. Those in this role felt the least comfortable measuring PR effectiveness and wished they knew more about measurement. They felt that work did not prepare them properly to assess PR campaigns. In comparison to the other technical positions, they recognized the value of using the intranet to win over stakeholders.

Cluster 2: Press agent ($n = 30$). Respondents in this position indicated that they were technician/managers (56.7%). Nearly 54.3% reported age as 31–50 years old. Press agents averaged 21 years of PR experience. Although their primary focus was external stakeholders, especially the media, results suggest that they communicated with management about influential external stakeholders such as the media. Compared to the other two technician roles, press agents reported some strategic planning participation. They felt more comfortable with PR measurement than did brand officers. Yet, they scored lower than practitioners in other roles on the importance of outcome objectives such as product, service, and organization image awareness, and stakeholder positive attitudes. While previous studies indicated that practitioners in the press agent role focused on measuring outputs ([Lindenmann, 2006](#)), that finding was not supported in this study.

Cluster 3: Internal communicator ($n = 43$). Participants in this role reported that they were technician/managers (60.5%). Nearly 33% recorded age as 41–50 years old. The average number of years in PR was 15.14. This group focused on internal communication. They reported that developing stakeholder positive attitudes as important. As expected, respondents in this role scored low on external audience focus. They reported not being part of senior management, but did produce supportive communication material for strategic planning. Compared to the managerial roles, internal communicators did not value PR measurement and did not think that the CEO/CFO preferred measurable PR results. They reported little face-to-face communication with stakeholders and scored in the middle on viewing stakeholder positive attitude outcomes as important.

Cluster 4: Negotiator ($n = 58$). Participants in this position indicated that they were consultants (48.3%) and nearly 38% reported age as 51–60 years old. The negotiators reported nearly 26 years of PR experience, were senior managers, and participated in strategic planning although they did not produce supportive strategic materials. They reported contributing to outcome plans such as stakeholders' positive attitudes toward the organization. These individuals spanned boundaries as indicated by their focus on both internal and external audiences. Those in the negotiator role valued the following items more than respondents in at least one of the technical roles: measuring organizational image, product and services positioning, and PR campaign effectiveness as important. They reported that their budget was linked to measurable results. They felt comfortable measuring PR results and claimed that their work prepared them for PR assessment.

Cluster 5: Policy advisor ($n = 84$). PR practitioners in this position indicated that they were technician/managers (56%), 45.2% reported age as 51–60 years old, and averaged 22.42 years of PR experience. Responses suggest that this management position was involved with researching and developing strategic plans for senior management. In fact, policy advisors played a key role in developing strategic plans. Their activities involved spanning boundaries by interacting with internal and external audiences. The policy advisor understands what can be done, can marshal resources, and also assesses the situation pre-campaign, during the campaign, and post-campaign so that PR plans will be cost-effectively implemented through monitoring and adjusting accordingly, as well as post-campaign assessment. Similar to those in the negotiator role, those in the policy advisor role valued the following items more than respondents in at least one of the technical roles: measuring organizational image, product and services positioning, and PR campaign effectiveness as important. They felt comfortable measuring PR results and claimed that their work prepared them for PR assessment. They were involved with outcome objectives such as creating awareness and positive attitudes toward the organization.

H1: Those participants identifying with the technician-oriented roles will not value measurement research as much as those associated with the managerial roles. This hypothesis was supported. An ANOVA revealed that the internal communication technician role scored significantly lower than the negotiator and policy advisor on a number of PR measurement questions. “Measuring organizational image as important” (internal communication technician, $m = 3.21$ [.96], negotiator, $m = 3.83$ [.96], $p = .031$, and policy advisor, $m = 3.92$ [1.04], $p = .003$); “Measuring products/services positioning as important” (internal communication technician, $m = 3.47$ [.86], negotiator, $m = 4.07$ [.95], $p = .025$, and policy advisor, $m = 4.01$ [.98], $p = .033$); “Measuring ad campaign effectiveness as important” (internal communication technician, $m = 3.74$ [1.00] and policy advisor, $m = 4.21$ [.96], $p = .030$); “Feel comfortable measuring PR results” (internal communication technician, $m = 3.19$ [1.03], negotiator, $m = 3.78$ [.92], $p = .030$, and policy advisor, $m = 3.75$ [1.12], $p = .044$); “My budget is linked to measurable results” (internal communication technician, $m = 2.42$ [1.16] and negotiator, $m = 2.97$ [1.23], $p = .048$); “The CEO/CFO prefers measurable PR results” (internal communication technician, $m = 2.91$ [1.27], negotiator, $m = 3.79$ [1.04], $p = .003$, and policy advisor, $m = 3.60$ [1.19], $p = .026$); “My educational background provided me with PR measurement competence” (internal communication technician, $m = 2.58$ [1.20] and policy advisor, $m = 3.29$ [1.46], $p = .050$); and “I wish I knew more about PR measurement” (internal communication technician, $m = 3.72$ [1.10] and policy advisor, $m = 3.02$ [1.24], $p = .019$). The PR measurement results may be in part because the internal communication technician role focuses on internal audiences where little internal PR measurement is conducted.

Additionally, compared to the managerial roles, the brand officer role scored lower on the following measures: “Measuring ad campaign effectiveness as important” (brand officer technician, $m = 3.79$ [1.09] and policy advisor, $m = 4.21$ [.96], $p = .040$); “Feel comfortable measuring PR results” (brand officer technician, $m = 2.97$ [1.10], negotiator, $m = 3.78$ [.92], $p = .003$, and policy advisor, $m = 3.75$ [1.12], $p = .002$); “My budget is linked to measurable results” (brand officer technician, $m = 2.42$ [1.20] and negotiator, $m = 2.97$ [1.23], $p = .049$); “I wish I knew more about PR measurement” (brand officer technician, $m = 3.95$ [1.16] and policy advisor, $m = 3.02$ [1.24], $p = .001$); and “Work background provided me with PR measurement competence,” (brand officer technician, $m = 3.24$ [1.08], negotiator, $m = 3.97$ [1.21], $p = .025$, and policy advisor, $m = 3.88$ [1.17], $p = .043$). These results may be owing to the tactical nature of the position.

H2: Technician-role respondents will use more output focused PR assessment measures compared to the manageable-based roles. There was no evidence to support this hypothesis.

6. Discussion

Through the usage of a new instrument informed by the Beurer-Zullig 2009 European PR roles study, a factor-cluster analysis was conducted to test an expanded version of the 2009 study original roles schema on American PR practitioners. The results provided concurrent validity for the original study. The five PR roles incorporating personal and organizational characteristics, communication tactics used and orientation, management and technical functions, perceived level of respondent strategic planning involvement, and attitudes about communication goals and PR measurement (including perceived PR measurement competency) reflected the PR roles of the Beurer-Zullig et al. (2009) study. Three roles were technician/manager (press agent, brand officer, and internal communicator) and two roles were manager (negotiator and policy advisor).

The gender breakdown in the European study was 49% women and 51% men; whereas, in the American study, it was 66% women and 34% men. This was unlike the European study where men held a majority of all roles except the internal communication position. Sixty percent of the European PR practitioners were 30–45 years old and 63% of the American practitioners were 41–60 years old. Overall, European PR professionals' college/university degrees were in the Humanities, Communication, Business, and PR related (certificates). However, American PR professionals' degrees included Journalism and English, which emphasize writing.

There were differences within American PR roles and in comparison to European PR roles. Those classified as brand officer tended to have more advertising majors compared to the other American PR roles. This is understandable since this role is responsible for developing messages that persuade customers to purchase products and/or services offered by the organization. They also tend to self-identify as technician/managers unlike their European counterparts who identified themselves as technicians. In addition, American brand officers reported having somewhat more PR experience than European brand officers.

European press agents tended to be men with five to ten years of experience unlike their American counterparts who indicated that they were technician/managers and mostly women with an average of 21 years' experience. Those in the press agent role are tasked with generating favorable media coverage for the organization. This role focuses on dissemination or output measures such as counting web site hits, increasing followers in social media, measuring the number of times the organization was noted in news coverage, and other source related measures. This finding is consistent with previous research (Diga & Kelleher, 2009; Pieczka, 2000). Findings suggest that this group devotes little effort toward attitude formation and behavioral outcome objectives.

The internal communication role participants were mostly women with 15 years' experience. These participants self-reported being technician/managers. Practitioners in this role are responsible for tactical internal communication. They facilitate a sense of community within the organization. This role corresponds closely with its European counterpart who reported less professional experience (5–10 years).

Those who were classified in the role of negotiator self-identified as manager and/or consultant with an average of 26 years experience. Negotiators provide input and are informed by strategic plans in executing their internal and external

tasks. In the United States, they were mostly women between the ages of 51 and 60. Unlike respondents in other American PR roles, they reported more than the average number of Political Science/International Relations degrees. Their European counterparts, who were primarily men, reported being younger (41–45 years old) and less experienced (5–15 years).

American policy advisors reported being managers between the ages of 51 and 60 with 22 years of experience. They tend to be women. European policy advisors reported having over 11 years experience and being over 40 years old. They typically were men. Individuals in this role conduct research and develop PR strategic plans. Last, negotiators and policy advisors focused on both internal and external audiences because in order to contribute to strategic planning, an understanding internal and external stakeholders is essential (Arif et al., 2009), including their knowing organizational core competencies and capabilities.

One dissimilarity between the Beurer-Zullig et al. (2009) study and this research was the differentiation between technical and managerial roles. Acknowledging that operational definitional variations may have played a part in this discrepancy, it appears that American technical PR practitioners share managerial responsibilities in executing their duties unlike their more technically focused European counterparts. This implies that the American PR industry may be more decentralized where more managerial responsibilities are shared.

Accurate PR measurement informs strategic planning, monitors campaign effectiveness, and ultimately serves to legitimize the PR function within the organization. The importance of PR measurement is not lost by those holding the negotiator and policy advisor roles. However, there appears to be a disconnection among the utilization of PR measurement and the primarily technical roles. PR research and measurement beyond output measures can potentially inform technicians so that they can more effectively execute their duties. More specifically, brand officer responsibilities would be better served if she/he had knowledge of brand awareness, attitudes toward the brand, and brand purchase intention. Press agents would be more effective if they had knowledge of how their organization were perceived by external stakeholders, including the media. Moreover, those practitioners performing internal communication are in a position to influence the organizational culture concerning attitudes about PR measurement and its usage. They can encourage the usage of appropriate PR measures that inform planning and guides PR tactics (Arif et al., 2009). Deal and Kennedy (2000) call this “tapping the network” and making a targeted practice an organizational and personal value.

Of the three technical roles, staff performing the brand officer function expressed a greater desire to know more about PR measurement. This might reflect the fact that sales revenues can easily be linked to campaign effectiveness.

Overall, the need to measure public relations activities continues to be encouraged but not necessarily put into practice. The actual implementation of PR measurement and evaluation is instigated by practitioners who are strategic planners or part of the dominant coalition (DeSanto & Moss, 2004). As practitioners grow and mature in their roles, evaluation seems to be a standard part of the job. This is further facilitated by the Internet and social media, where web analytics are easily available for PR measurement and assessment. Organizations would be well advised to invest resources and training to develop their PR practitioners who express interest in the full range of PR measurement tools.

6.1. Limitations and future research

One study limitation was that participants were self-selected and tended to be in the managerial or technical/managerial role. These practitioners were inclined to be part of the organization's dominant coalition and many play a role in strategic planning. Perhaps future research might implement cluster sampling techniques that provide more of a cross-section of the PR practitioner. Additionally, the response rate was 5.1% and thus may represent a response bias.

Future research that expands the Beurer-Zullig et al. (2009) study PR role classification should be applied to Europe and other geographic regions to assess the extent of its generalizability. Last, changing technologies suggest that this type of research should occur periodically or at a point of major technological shifts so that there is an opportunity to reassess, revise, and redefine these evolving PR roles.

7. Conclusion

Public relations have clearly defined itself as a dynamic and evolving profession especially in the digital age. Changes in required skills (McAllister & Taylor, 2007), ability to execute with new technologies, and the globalization and diversification of the business climate in the past decade alone illustrate the need to consistently examine and re-examine PR role responsibilities and update them in order to plan and provide the expertise needed to effectively implement PR programs, a fact that is increasingly recognized in the PR industry (James, 2007; MacNamara, 2010; McAllister & Taylor, 2007).

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