

NEWS ELEMENTS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP
TO NEWS RELEASES

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Background	1
Statement of the Problem	3
Purpose of the Study	5
Value of the Study	6
Limitations of the Study	7
Definition of Terms	8
Thesis Plan	9
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	12
Studies of News Values	12
Introduction	12
Ross Commission Study	12
Wire Editor Study	13
News Value Study by Ward	14
News Value Study by Galtung and Ruge	15
News Release Studies	16
News Release Background	16
News Release as a Public Relations Tool	17
Writing a News Release	18
The Need To Use the Media	20
Comparison of Editor and Practitioner News Values	22
News Release Usage Pattern in Wisconsin	23
News Release Usage Pattern in Ohio Metropolitan Newspaper Study	24
News Release Category Usage Pattern	25
Attitude Study of Practitioners and Editors	26
Newspaper Editor Survey	27
Newspaper Editors Revisited	28
Textbook Study	28
Suggestions for Success	29
Summary and Conclusion	29
III. METHODOLOGY	37
Selection of Newspaper Editors	37

Chapter	Page
Daily Newspaper Sample	38
Weekly Newspaper Sample	38
Operational Definitions	39
Operational Definitions of Categories	40
Questionnaire Process	40
Scoring Method	41
Pretesting	43
Content Analysis Procedure	44
Selection Process	44
Collection Period	45
Scoring Method	46
Presentation of Data	47
Schedule	48
Weaknesses and Conclusions	48
 IV. FINDINGS	 50
Introduction	50
Survey Response	51
Intercoder Reliability	51
Weekly Survey Results	52
Survey Results for Daily Newspapers	54
Combined Survey Results	57
Content Analysis Results	59
Summary	63
 V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	 65
Discussion	67
Recommendations for Public Relations Profession	68
Recommendations for Further Research	70
Conclusion	72
 SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	 74
 APPENDIXES	 76
APPENDIX A - DAILY NEWSPAPERS	77
APPENDIX B - WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS	79
APPENDIX C - LETTER SENT TO EDITORS	82
APPENDIX D - SURVEY	84

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
I. Weekly Newspaper Editors' Ranking of News Elements	52
II. Type of Release Editors Are Most Likely To Print	54
III. Daily Editors' Ranking of News Elements	55
IV. Type of News Release Editors Are Most Likely To Print	56
V. Combined Editor Ranking of News Elements	58
VI. Combined Results for Type of Release Editors Are Most Likely To Print	59
VII. Breakdown of News Releases	60
VIII. Individual Analysis by Category	61

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Public relations techniques have been used in America since the time of the colonists. Public relations was born in North America in 1607, when the first settlers landed. In the early days of America public relations, experts used public relations as a tool to sway public opinion. "As the conflict between the colonists and the mother country moved to a climax, American public relations experts developed devices to win public support."¹

During colonial times the two chief means of reaching and influencing the public were newspapers and pamphlets.

Since those pioneering times, the public relations function has been expanded and more carefully defined. Edward Bernays, known as the father of modern American public relations, defines it as "the attempt, by information, persuasion and adjustment to engineer public support for an activity, cause, movement or institution."²

One of the means available to the public relations practitioners to engineer consent is the news release. A form of the news release has been used since colonial times.

If Bernays is the father of modern public relations then Ivy Lee is the father of the modern news release.

In 1906 Ivy Lee was asked by coal operators, who were on strike, to tell their side of the story to the American people. It is important to note that at this time the American press did not have access to the coal operators. In other words, Lee was acting as a press agent for the coal operators. The press would get their story but only from Lee.

It was at this point in time that the use of the modern news release came into being. "Lee was the first to use the handout system on a large scale."³ These handouts were, of course, the modern day news release.

Lee also helped create press agency. Lee, through his work with the coal operators institutionalized public information and press agency. The press was not given the easy access to chief executives that they once enjoyed. Instead, the media would have to speak to a spokesperson instead of the chief executive. This practice, press agency, made it more difficult for editors to get their stories. Editors though, by determining what would appear in their papers, played and continue to play an important role in determining the success or failure of public relations practitioners. This was the beginning of the relationship between public relations and the press.

The basic conflict lies in the never-ending struggle of the press to keep clear water flowing in the news streams and money coming into the cash register.

The other side is the effort of institutions and industries to get their stories told accurately and constructively.⁴

Public relations practitioners must work with editors if they are going to be effective in their jobs because, at least in the early days, "the practitioner's standing with the media managers shapes and limits his accomplishments."⁵

Over the years many things have changed in the field of public relations. The field itself has grown and matured. Editors and practitioners are still trying to define each other's role. The news release hasn't changed much though. Starting with Lee, the news release has been and continues to be a very important tool for the public relations practitioner.

Statement of the Problem

In order for a practitioner to do an effective job for his client he must be able to create awareness. Over the years the tool most often used to do this has been the written news release. Charles Honaker conducted a nationwide survey of newspaper editors in 1981. The survey results showed that editors use anywhere from 10-25 percent of the news release they receive.⁶ Why are so few news releases, in terms of percentages, used by the print media today?

Of course, there is not a magic figure but Honaker's study tends to support the idea that the percentage of releases used is low. The number used depends on factors such as circulation and whether the paper is a daily or

weekly, among other things. A study conducted in Florida found that "nearly half the editors use between 1-10 percent of those received. Only six papers use more than 25 percent."⁷

A spokesman for the Atlanta Constitution said, "approximately 10 percent of the releases we receive are of value to us."⁸ Although these figures are in no way universal they seem to support the contention that a small percentage of news releases are used.

News values are individual characteristics of a news story. Local angle and timeliness are two such news values. News values help editors determine if a given story is worth printing in a newspaper. In a sense editors use them, among other things, to judge what is printed.

Current studies also indicate that editors and public relations people, those most responsible for writing news releases, agree on news values. At least that is what Kopenhaver found in her 1985 study of Florida editors and public relations practitioners. "Both groups were almost identical in identifying importance of news values."⁹

Other studies have also looked into this question. For instance, "Honaker contends that journalism students are being taught to hate and reject news releases."¹⁰ Similar studies have been conducted in Texas by Craig Aronoff¹¹ and in Oklahoma by Linda Morton.¹² Their studies indicate that factors such as the circulation of the paper and whether

it's a daily or weekly influence the usage pattern of news releases.

Aronoff found, through survey results, that editors simply don't hold practitioners in very high esteem. Editors see practitioners as an obstacle to obtaining news.

If a news release contains the same elements that editors have identified as important and newsworthy, why don't they use more releases? Some research, such as the studies conducted by Aronoff and Jeffers, suggests bias on the part of editors.

In 1982, Carolyn Cline conducted a study of mass communication textbooks. "Cline found strong biases against public relations in the 12 introductory mass communications textbooks she surveyed."¹³ If this bias includes news releases, as Honaker contends, it then becomes easy to see why so few are printed in newspapers. The educational system may be partly to blame.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is two-fold. The first part will be a survey to determine what news elements Oklahoma newspaper editors feel are most important. In other words, what elements should news releases contain in order to be printed in a newspaper?

The second purpose is to determine if a collection of news releases received by Stillwater, Oklahoma, media contain the same elements that were identified as important by the

editors. It is important to note that there are many types of news releases and that only certain types, that will be defined later, will be studied in this project.

Beyond that, the study will try to determine if one type of news release is used more than another. Is it possible that one type of release is used in newspapers more often than another? If so, is one type of news release better written than another in terms of the elements identified by editors as important?

Value of the Study

This study has value to a number of people. The most valuable service this study provides is to the public relations practitioners in Oklahoma. It should tell the practitioners if the news releases they are sending to the media contain the same news elements editors feel are most important.

This study also has some worth to practitioners outside the Oklahoma area. The results may show that well-written news releases don't always get printed in the newspaper. So to be an effective practitioner it may not be enough to be a good writer. This study may also point out that a news release must be written for the editor as well as the public relations practitioner's organization or client.

This study should help to define the problem between editors and practitioners. There are a lot of theories around concerning why newspapers don't use more news

releases and this study should help to eliminate some of the doubt and pinpoint the problem. When this study is complete, practitioners and editors should be able to answer for themselves why a limited number of news releases reach the pages of newspapers.

In a very broad sense this study will benefit everyone. If this study can define the problem in its narrowest sense maybe the people involved, editors and practitioners, will come together and try to solve the existing problems. If the problems are solved, the flow of information will become more efficient and complete. In this case everyone benefits because everyone has more information.

It should help educators determine what they need to stress in the classroom besides the mechanics involved in writing. It should help determine what other tools are necessary in order to be an effective practitioner.

This study should also help students. Depending on the results it may tell them that writing skills are not enough to be a successful public relations practitioner.

If this study does indeed define the problem and editors and practitioners come together, everyone benefits. When information is suppressed society is hurt. When news releases aren't printed the public loses the chance to receive that information.

Limitations of the Study

This study does contain some limitations. The first

limitation has to do with the collection of news releases. Since the releases are being collected only from the Stillwater media the information the releases contain will be limited. Stillwater is not typical of all Oklahoma towns so the releases the media receive also will not be typical. Time and logistical problems make collecting releases outside of Stillwater impractical.

In order to get the cooperation of the local media, the collection procedures used must be flexible. The collection periods must be agreeable to all participating media.

The survey to be conducted will be only of Oklahoma newspaper editors and not editors from all over the United States. The answers given on the survey will only apply to Oklahoma.

Since over 100 news releases will be analyzed the results should give a fairly accurate picture of what is going on in Oklahoma. The results achieved may not give a totally accurate picture of what is happening around the country, but they should help to define the general state of affairs.

Definition of Terms

News Release- Anything written by an individual, group, or organization with the intent or purpose to create awareness or publicity and/or to explain or clarify a position of a person, place or organization. The final intent of a news release is publication in the print or broadcast media.

There are other forms of releases but this study is only concerned with written releases.

News Element/Value- Those things that a news release should contain in order to be published in a newspaper. The individual news elements will be defined by the author after the survey results have been collected and tabulated. Such elements include things like timeliness, prominence, and proximity.

Medium- A place or tool through which communication takes place. The media for this project will be the print and the radio media in Stillwater. The print media will be the Stillwater News-Press and the Daily O'Collegian, and the radio stations will be KOSU and KVRO.

News Release Category- The type of information the written material is trying to convey. The categories will be determined by the content of the release. Possible categories would include coming events, past events, timely topics, features, consumer information and institutional releases.

Thesis Plan

The second chapter will look more specifically at press releases and the articles that have been written about them. It will also focus on various studies concerning news releases and their use or lack of it.

The third chapter will explain step-by-step how the study will be conducted. The survey questions and the

sampling procedure will be explained.

The tabulation procedure for the survey and the content analysis will also be explained.

The fourth chapter will explain exactly what the study found. This chapter will explain the results of the study. The scoring system and what it means will be explained. The results will also be interpreted by the researcher.

The final section will sum up the findings and make recommendations concerning those findings. Recommendations as to what types of research can be done to further the work started with this study.

END NOTES

¹Edward L. Bernays, Public Relations, Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952, p. 27.

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³Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center, Effective Public Relations, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985, p. 33.

⁴Ibid, p. 267.

⁵Ibid, p. 266.

⁶Chuck Honaker, "Why Your Releases Aren't Working," Public Relations Journal, vol. 34. Leo J. Norhart, ed., (March 1978) pp. 16-19.

⁷Lillian Lodge Kopenhaver, "Aligning Values of Practitioners and Journalists," Public Relations Review, vol. 11. Ray E. Hiebert, ed., (Summer 1985) p. 36.

⁸Honaker, p. 19.

⁹Kopenhaver, p. 38.

¹⁰Ibid, p. 34.

¹¹Craig Aronoff, "Newspapermen and Practitioners Differ Widely on PR Role," Public Relations Journal, vol. 31. Leo J. Norhart, ed., (August 1975) p. 25.

¹²Linda P. Morton, "How Newspapers Choose the Releases They Use," Public Relations Review, vol. 12. Ray E. Hiebert, ed., (Fall 1986) p. 26.

¹³Kopenhaver, p. 35.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies of News Values

Introduction

The literature review consists of two parts. The first part deals with studies that have tried to isolate and identify individual news values.

The second part of the literature review looks at studies concerning news releases. The studies range from determining newspaper usage patterns of news releases, to comparisons of editor's and public relations practitioner's views on news values.

It is not enough to know that newspapers use a small percentage of the news releases they receive. It is equally important to know why. This chapter will also look at some of the studies that have tried to do that.

Ross Commission Study

In 1947, the first Royal Commission on the Press, the Ross Commission, was convened. The commission's goal was two-fold, first to determine what is news, and secondly to determine what factors influence news judgments.

For this study, the important part of the commission's findings are what they determined to be important news elements. The commission wrote, "the factors likely to influence news judgment are significance, drama-surprise, personalities, numbers and proximity."¹

Others have tried to define what the important news elements are in news stories. The material presented is the most relevant in terms of the study being currently conducted. This work though is lacking because it isn't a scientific study.

Wire Editor Study

In the mid-1950s Walter Gieber conducted a study of 16 telegraph wire editors. His purpose was to determine criteria for the selection of news items.

Gieber found out that, at least during that time, wire editors were more concerned with the mechanical aspects of a story than individual news values.

Gieber pointed out that the news value of a particular story was not the only consideration in the selection process. "The amount of space, the newshole available to the wire editors was also a major consideration."²

The newshole was not the only concern of Gieber. He wrote, "the gatekeeper's selection of news is in accordance with 'subjective' value criteria is limited by the number of news items available, their size and the pressures of time and production."³

News Value Study by Ward

In 1967, Walter Ward isolated individual news values. He wanted to determine what elements were present in news stories that ended up being printed in newspapers.

Ward collected 54 different news stories, each containing a variety of news values or elements. He then asked city editors to rank the stories in terms of the ones they would be most likely to use. Once this was completed, he believed it would be possible to determine which news elements were the most important or most used.

Originally Ward looked at six different news elements: timeliness, proximity, oddity, prominence, conflict, and significance. Later, Ward determined that many of his original six elements overlapped, so he changed the number of elements from six to three. After these changes were made, Ward studied prominence, normality, and significance.

Each of the three news elements contains a number of sub-elements. "Prominence includes, known principal(s), unknown principal(s); Normality includes, conflict, oddity, and normal; Significance includes, impact, magnitude, neither."⁴

Ward elaborated on his original work in 1973 while at Oklahoma State University. His conclusions were virtually the same. In 1973 Ward reported that "news evolved from a lower-level structure, which may comprise as few as five or six news elements. These elements carry different labels,

but they are familiar to virtually all newsmen and journalism educators."⁵

Ward's study of the three dimensional model has been used by a number of other researchers. Atwood,⁶ Rhoades,⁷ and Snipes⁸ have used this model to conduct similar research. Their results have shown that known principal, impact-conflict and/or oddity are the elements most often combined to make a news story.

Another finding that seemed to be common to the studies is that an article is more likely to be published in a newspaper if it contains a number of these elements. This is important especially to the current study. A news release may not be useful to editors unless it contains a number of news elements. Oddity or impact or any of the other elements by themselves may not be enough to get a news release published.

News Value Study by Galtung and Ruge

Another study often cited in research was conducted by Galtung and Ruge. They wanted to determine which values or news characteristics would increase the possibility of something being perceived as news, by editors, and thus be printed in the newspaper. In other words, what elements are necessary in order for an article to be published in a newspaper?

"Galtung and Ruge developed a framework of analysis consisting of a list of news-factors, the properties of

events which increase the likelihood that an event will be perceived as newsworthy."⁹ The elements cited, by Galtung and Ruge, were "frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, domestic news, consonance, unexpectedness, elitism, personalization, and negativity."¹⁰

Here again, this study is broad. It would be hard to conduct a content analysis using the above factors. Some of the elements would be too hard to operationally define.

News Release Studies

News Release Background

In order to understand studies concerning news releases it is first necessary to give some background on the news release.

A news release is a tool used by public relations practitioners to create awareness or publicity on behalf of a client or organization. For purposes of this study a news release is printed information conveyed to a newspaper or journal.

A news release comes in one of two forms. It is either written as background material, a fact sheet, for a journalist or as a story that can be used without alterations.

A news release is much like a news story in that they both contain many of the same elements. The lead of a news story must answer the questions who? what? when? where? how? and why? The same holds true for a news release.

Historically, the purpose of a news release hasn't changed. In 1758, it was used to create awareness; the same holds true today. The only thing that has really changed is the frequency and method of distribution. Today this increased frequency as well as the method of distribution can be directly attributed to technological advances in both printing and mailing capabilities.

The news release is very similar to a news story with a few mechanical alterations. Other public relations tools have been invented but the printed news release continues to endure.

The News Release as a Public Relations Tool

The news release has a long history as a primary tool of public relations practitioners. The form of the news release has grown and developed over time. The frequency of distribution of news releases has also changed over time. With all the technological advances in today's society, mass mailing of news releases and electronic distribution of news releases is commonplace.

News releases were used as far back as the colonial era. "In 1758, Kings College (now Columbia University) issued its first press release, announcing commencement exercises."¹¹

Politicians have also used the news release. Amos Kendall was hired by President Andrew Jackson in 1828 to

"interpret Jackson's rough ideas, putting them into presentable form as speeches and news releases."¹² During this same period, news releases were used to sway public opinion against Jackson and his opposition to the Bank of the United States. Matthew St. Clair Clark, publicist for the Bank of the United States, "saturated the nation's press with press releases, reports and pamphlets pushing the bank's case."¹³

News releases were also used as a campaign tool in the 1896 race between Bryan and McKinley. The news release was heavily used until the mid-1920s when radio was introduced. It's important to note that news releases are still used in political campaigns.

Publicity is probably the area of public relations that utilizes the news release most often. "Publicity, which consists mainly of the issuing of news releases to the media about the activities of an organization or an individual, is one of the earliest forms of public relations."¹⁴

News releases were one of the earliest tools of public relations practitioners. They were used by politicians, organizations, institutions and businesses. Their true value cannot be measured. Practitioners have many new tools at their disposal, but the news release continues to endure.

Writing a News Release

Every reporter has a personal method of writing a story. The same can be said for a practitioner writing a news release. The interesting point is that most practitioners

have had some sort of journalistic training. In fact, statistics show that most practitioners come from newspapers or some other journalistic profession.

Practitioners are taught to stress certain important news elements in the same way news reporters are. Practitioners are taught to distinguish newsworthy information from non-newsworthy information. Practitioners and journalists share not only similar training but in many cases identical training.

There are certain elements that a well-written news release contains.

"The lead--the first paragraph or perhaps the first two--is the most important part of the release. You can't write a good release without a good lead."¹⁵ Of course, the lead for a news release should answer the same questions as the lead for a news story. "In preparing news for the press, radio, or television the questions who? what? where? when? why? and how? should be answered."¹⁶

A well-written news release contains the same qualities as a news story.

"The news release that is well-written, and presents timely news of local interest stands the best chance of competing with other stories and articles for space or time in the mass media."¹⁷ In fact, the local angle is so important that "the lack of such a local angle is what editors cite most often when complaining about the deluge of releases and 'puffery' flooding the newsroom."¹⁸

The other characteristic that makes a news release unique is that of timeliness. "Timeliness characterizes any information that is less interesting or less important tomorrow."¹⁹ An effective news release needs to be received by an editor both before press time and before the actual event occurs.

A news release should be tailored to a particular medium. A newspaper should receive a news story type release. A release for broadcast should be in all capitals and triple-spaced. One type of release will not satisfy all different media.

A news release is unique in that it should contain "the name, address, and telephone number of the source."²⁰ It should also contain a release date. These are things not found in a news story. A release should have wide margins to allow room for the editor to write comments or directions on the release. A release should be tightly edited. "Never make a release two pages if one will do."²¹ A well-written news story with a few additions and adjustments will make a good news release.

The Need To Use the Media

In order for a practitioner to be successful it is necessary to reach the people. Whether fund-raising, creating publicity, or disseminating a news release, the bottom line is that the practitioner needs to reach the people. The best way to do this is through the mass media.

"The mass media reach into nearly every home and work place in the land, showering our citizens with far more messages than they can absorb."²² Practitioners can create certain events or news but by-and-large they need the media to get the message out. Simply put, "the mass media constitute the nation's public-information system."²³

Each medium presents the practitioner with a different opportunity. "Magazines differ markedly from newspapers in content, time element, and method of operation."²⁴ The print media offer the practitioner a choice, in terms of which he will use to get the message out. Magazines are more specialized and allow the practitioner to pinpoint the audience.

The spoken media offer even more opportunities for the practitioner. "Speed and mobility are the special attributes that make radio unique."²⁵ With nearly 10,000 radio stations broadcasting in the U.S. the potential for practitioners is virtually limitless.

Television probably offers the practitioner the greatest amount of choices. "The possibilities for the public relations specialist to use television are so numerous that they can be examined on two levels, network and local."²⁶ Television has grown and continues to grow at a very rapid pace. In fact, it grows so fast its impact is hard to measure. With the "average American spending 28 percent of his or her leisure time watching T.V."²⁷ it is not hard to understand why television is an important medium for

public relations practitioners.

The mass media reaches almost every American. Public relations, to be successful, must reach a mass audience. The variety that the mass media provide practitioners is also an important characteristic. The mass media offer the practitioner a way to reach a large number of people and a variety of ways to reach them.

Comparison of Editor and Practitioner

News Values

Lillian Lodge Kopenhaver conducted a study in 1985 of journalists and public relations practitioners. Her study included a survey on the news values important both to editors and practitioners. She also surveyed editors on the number of releases received and the number used. The final part of her study dealt with attitudes and perceptions of editors and practitioners.

Her study was based on a survey which had a response rate of 47 percent. She received responses from 47 editors. "Nearly half the editors said they receive between 51 and 100 press releases a week, and nearly a third receive more than 150 in that period of time."²⁸ She found that nearly "half the editors use between 1-10 percent of those received and only six papers use more than 25 percent."²⁹

The second part of the study asked editors to rank-order eight news values in order of their importance. Practitioners were asked to rank the same news values.

Kopenhaver found that "practitioners' own news value hierarchy agreed almost identically with the editors' own hierarchy."³⁰ So Kopenhaver, through her study, showed that practitioners and editors perceive news values virtually the same way. They tend to agree on which values are most important.

The sample used in this study, however, is small. It would be difficult to generalize to the entire country. The results or findings of the same study of Oklahoma practitioners and editors could be different.

News Release Usage Pattern in Wisconsin

Stephen Zielke of the University of Wisconsin conducted a survey of 12 Wisconsin weekly newspapers to determine usage of the news releases received from public relations sources.

Zielke found that "newspapers used the public relations information for about 10 percent of their content measured as news."³¹ He also discovered that the material came from a variety of sources. Government agencies, institutions and business firms were responsible for a majority of releases.

If a newspaper used a release it was most often because the release contained local interest. A lack of local interest was reported also the main reason for rejection of a news release.

News Release Usage Pattern in Ohio

Wren Aber conducted a study of usage patterns of news releases for three Ohio newspapers: the Cincinnati Enquirer, the Dayton Daily News and the Columbus Citizen-Journal.

Aber, with the help of the editors from the three papers, collected all the news releases sent to the three papers over a week's time. Aber kept track of which news releases were printed, and those that were discarded.

Aber's results showed that in order for a news release to be used it must come from a "local source, it should be sponsored by a civic or service organization, it should have original editing marks, no release time, no reproduction and copy key sponsor identification."³²

The editors said they "published releases that were developed specifically for their papers and rejected those sent to a large number of publications."³³

Metropolitan Newspaper Study

This study was conducted to examine the use of news releases by two metropolitan newspapers. Carol Roney, the author, was also looking for trends in the use of releases.

The author spent one week at the Nashville Tennessean and one week at the Cincinnati Enquirer. All the news releases rejected by the newspaper were collected. She then counted the total number of releases received and the total number used by each paper.

Honey found that "the majority of releases are not published as news stories. The Tennessean received 676 releases and printed 78."³⁴ Likewise, "the Cincinnati Enquirer received 579 releases; it published 162 releases."³⁵

When Honey asked the editors why most releases weren't used, they said the releases lacked local interest.

News Release Category Usage Pattern

This study, conducted by Linda Morton, was concerned with determining the type or category of news release that a newspaper would be most likely to print.

Under study were 408 articles released to 191 Oklahoma newspapers from the Oklahoma State University public information and agriculture information offices. The four newspaper characteristics studied were frequency, circulation, distance, and news staff size. The releases were categorized as coming events, past events, timely topics, institutional, features, consumer information and research.

The results of this study showed that "Oklahoma newspaper gatekeepers are more receptive to some types of articles than to others and their receptiveness differs according to a newspaper's frequency of publication."³⁶ The results also showed that "daily newspapers published an average of 7.6 percent of all articles sent to them, while weeklies published 9 percent and twice-weeklies published 21.6 percent."³⁷ Finally, the research showed that past events, features and institutional releases are published

so infrequently that their value should be questioned.

The one problem with this study is that it doesn't take into account the quality of the release. Quality is defined as, containing the necessary news elements.

Attitude Study of Practitioners and Editors

For the current study, the attitudes of editors and practitioners are very important. The Texas study was concerned with the attitudes of editors and practitioners. After all, it may be the attitudes of editors toward practitioners or vice versa that is causing the problem between groups. Aronoff's survey may help to explain why newspapers use so few news releases.

Aronoff conducted a survey of Texas newspapermen and public relations practitioners. The survey consisted of statements about public relations and asked the respondents to either agree or disagree using a seven-point scale.

"Aronoff sees both the personal and impersonal factors as influences on editors."³⁸ He went on to say that "most journalists agree 82 percent, that practitioners often act as obstructionists keeping reporters from the people they really should be seeing."³⁹

Basically, what Aronoff found is that most editors look upon practitioners unfavorably. Editors seem to be skeptical at best.

Aronoff summarized his findings this way:

If members of the public relations profession are concerned with the general receptivity of journalists to public relations practitioners and their products, this survey indicates that considerable work remains to be done in improving attitudes toward public relations held by the people serving as gatekeepers to the channels through which flows the information that shapes public opinion.⁴⁰

Newspaper Editor Survey

In 1978, Charles Honaker conducted a nationwide survey of newspaper editors. He was interested in determining the number of news releases a particular newspaper received in a given day or week. Finally, he was interested in candid responses of editors toward news releases. He was interested in any suggestions that editors had in order to make news releases better. Although this really isn't a scientific study, because the numbers given by editors are estimations, it gives a good indication of the number of releases received and the number used.

Charles Irish, assistant managing editor of the Sacramento Bee, said, "at least 50 releases land at our city desk daily, of that number, perhaps one is used if it's local and contains news."⁴¹ Tom Eblen, managing editor, Kansas City Star, said, "I have no idea how many releases we receive, but the number would certainly be in the hundreds in any given week. We use 0 to 5 percent of the releases we get."⁴²

Responses from other editors follow the same pattern. Jack Doughty, executive editor of the Seattle Post

Intelligencer, said, "the city editor estimates that the editorial department gets about 1,000 handouts a day.

Better than 90 percent are dumped with a quick glance."⁴³

The editors surveyed also offered their advice on how to improve news releases. There were, of course, many different responses but they can be summarized as follows:

Practitioners must carefully consider to whom they send releases, what is truly newsworthy, when they mail (not the day of or the day after the press conference), why they are sending anything, where, and how (fancy styles, gimmicky mailings, emblazoned headlines, obscene logos are not the things editors want).⁴⁴

Newspaper Editors Revisited

In 1981, Honaker repeated his original survey to see if anything had changed in three years. He surveyed the same people as he did three years before. Honaker said, "Today, those same editors, responding to my second survey, are even more repulsed by the steady and overwhelming flow of releases that are poorly written, fatuous, and have absolutely no news value."⁴⁵ Because editors see so many bad releases, often times the good releases are neglected.

Textbook Study

There has been some research that suggests journalists are being taught to "hate and reject" news releases. At least that is what Honaker contends. Aronoff suggests that journalists have a negative attitude toward public relations practitioners. The study of Carolyn Cline helps to support

the work started by Honaker and Aronoff.

In 1982, Cline conducted a content analysis of 12 introductory mass communication textbooks. She found that there was a "strong bias" against public relations in the textbooks.

Suggestions for Success

Although there are no guarantees for publication of news releases in newspapers, some authors have offered suggestions that they think will help get news releases published.

John Cameron Aspley and L. F. Van Houten said, "put in all the pertinent facts. Let the editor cut the story. Learn deadlines and get stories in a day or more ahead and make sure all names and addresses are correct."⁴⁶ Another suggestion was offered by Mark Forster. He said, "Develop a news angle that wakes up an editor. Do something to separate your article from competing stories that reach the editor's desk."⁴⁷

Summary and Conclusion

A number of studies have tried to identify the most important elements of a news story. The interesting point is that there isn't exact agreement in terms of the most important elements. Ward, in his study, combined a number of what he perceived as overlapping elements and developed a three-dimensional model of news.

Galtung and Ruge listed ten elements or news values. The Ross Commission listed six elements or values. Kopenhaver, in her study, listed six elements. The point is that there isn't one particular list that everyone will agree on. Local angle, timely, well written, accurate, newsworthy, and information seem to be common to most lists of news elements.

The news release has a long history in American public relations. It has and continues to be used as a tool to create awareness or publicity.

Politicians, businesses, and individuals have all used the news release to their benefit. It has survived the test of time and continues to be a very useful resource for practitioners.

The research indicates that the release has always been written the same. It is similar to a news story in that it stresses who, what, when, where and why and how in the lead. It also uses the inverted pyramid which is another similarity with news stories. The news release, though, does have its own individual qualities.

The news release always lists a name, address and phone number of someone that can be contacted if more information is needed. A news release should be right to the point. Wordiness is not a desirable quality of a news release.

Sometimes even a well-written release isn't enough. The media play a vital role in the success or failure of a practitioner and more specifically a news release. Most everyone uses the media to some extent. Whether they watch

television, read a newspaper or magazine or listen to the radio they are utilizing the media. In order to reach the people it is only logical that public relations practitioners use the media. Practitioners want to reach the largest possible audience with their message and the media provide a vehicle for doing that. The problem is that the media, newspapers in particular, aren't using very many news releases for stories in their papers.

The research concerning news releases shows that most papers use a small percentage of the total number they receive. Studies conducted in Ohio, Wisconsin and Florida indicate that small percentages of releases are used. This contention has been supported by a study of two metropolitan papers as well.

The work done by Honaker in 1978, and again in 1981, supports the idea that newspapers use a small percentage of the releases they receive. In fact, Honaker's findings indicate that the problem was more severe in 1981 than it was in 1978.

The reality is that news releases aren't being rejected simply because they lack the news elements editors feel they should contain. Of course, in some situations this is the reason but the point is, there are other reasons that releases are being rejected.

Kopenhaver's study shows that editors and practitioners share an almost identical view of the importance of news elements. It also shows, as has already been reported, that

Florida editors print a small percentage of the releases they receive. This would indicate that there are other problems between journalists and practitioners. The work of Aronoff and Cline helps to clarify this point.

Cline has shown that introductory mass communication textbooks contain "strong biases" against public relations. Aronoff believes that journalists have a negative attitude toward practitioners. He believes both personal and impersonal factors influence journalists. Kopenhaver also found that journalists hold themselves in much higher regard than they do public relations practitioners.

All these studies are relevant to the current study. The problem is that none of the studies have attempted to look at news releases in terms of the news elements they contain. This study will analyze news releases in terms of the elements editors feel are important.

Even if practitioners and editors agree on news values, that does not mean that a news release containing those values will be printed in a newspaper. Some researchers believe there are other obstacles that must be overcome in order for a news release to reach the pages of a newspaper.

Others have suggested ways to improve the possibility of getting releases printed in newspapers. The problem is that there is no conclusive evidence that indicates by following certain guidelines a news release will be printed.

In the final analysis, the gatekeeper, or editor, is the person who will determine the fate of the news release.

As Ward and others have said, the decision made by the gate-keeper is a subjective one.

END NOTES

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CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

From the literature on usage patterns of news releases a number of issues became apparent. The literature suggests that most newspapers use a small percentage of the total number of news releases they receive. This information led to some obvious questions. What news elements or characteristics are most important to newspaper editors? What elements or characteristics are actually contained in a news release? Is one category of news releases used more often by editors than another? This study will attempt, through the use of a survey of newspaper editors and a content analysis of news releases, to obtain answers to these questions.

Selection of Newspaper Editors

A computer printout of Oklahoma newspapers produced a list of newspaper editors to be surveyed. The printout was obtained from the School of Journalism and Broadcasting at Oklahoma State University.

The computer listing indicated that there were 204 weekly newspapers in Oklahoma and 56 daily newspapers. This

represents almost a 4:1 ratio of weeklies to dailies. A stratified sample was used to reflect this ratio.

Daily Newspaper Sample

From a total of 56 dailies listed on the printout a systematic random sample was used to obtain a sample of ten. Each paper will be numbered from 1 to 56. A random number table was used to determine a starting point. Once the starting point was determined every sixth newspaper was selected until ten were chosen.

It was assumed that all newspapers receive news releases. All newspapers that publish a daily edition have the opportunity to be selected. A list of the daily newspapers used in the survey can be found in Appendix A.

Weekly Newspaper Sample

A total of 204 weeklies make up the universe of Oklahoma weeklies. Each newspaper listed on the printout was given a number, 1-204. A random number table was used to determine a starting point. Once the starting point was determined, every fifth newspaper was selected until the total of 40 was obtained.

Here again, the assumption was made that all weeklies receive news releases. With this being the case, all weeklies listed were included in the universe. A list of the weekly newspapers used in the survey can be found in Appendix B.

Operational Definitions

Information- The news release should answer the questions Who? What? When? Where? and Why? and How?

News Value- This will be defined in terms of Walter Ward's three dimensional model developed in his 1967 doctoral dissertation.¹ A news release will be considered as having news value if it contains PROMINENCE, NORMALITY and SIGNIFICANCE.

Prominence is defined as news involving a person, group or institution which has gained fame through accomplishment, accident, etc.

Normality is defined as content involving oddity, conflict or normal situations. Oddity is something rarer than unusual. Conflict is a clash between persons, places or things. Normal are actions not considered an oddity or a conflict.

Significance is defined as participation in an event by a large number of readers or the potential impact of something on a large number of readers.

Local Angle- A news release must concern or be concerned in some way to the people receiving the information. The information must concern the people within the newspaper's circulation area.

Mechanical/Grammatical Errors- Errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation and word usage.

Poorly Written- Information that does not flow logically from the lead. Also lack of a slug line and the name and

phone number of a person who can be contacted in case further information is needed.

Timeliness- The release must concern information that affects people today or in the near future. Near future is defined as within a two-week time period.

Operational Definitions of Categories

Institutional- Releases that relate to an entire institution, business or organization. It includes reports of activities, services and any accomplishments.

Coming Events- Releases that announce or promote activities or events sponsored by a group, individual, institution, or organization.

Past Events- Releases that summarize an event or that are dated and received by the media after an event has occurred.

Consumer Information- Releases that provide information to consumers. This type also includes releases that give instructions or tell consumers how to do something.

Timely Topics- Releases that deal with current topics or issues in the news.

Features- Releases that focus on an individual or group or institution. Releases that tend to promote and are of interest to the population as a whole.

Questionnaire Process

A cover letter describing the study and asking for editor participation was sent, along with the questionnaire

and a self-addressed, stamped envelope to each participant.

The respondents were given two weeks to respond to the survey. The survey was sent out on October 13. After two weeks had gone by, a follow-up survey was sent to those editors who did not respond the first time. The follow-up survey was sent out on October 27.

The questionnaire sent to those individuals was exactly the same as the first one. The cover letter was similar. One sentence was added to the cover letter indicating that that editor had not returned the questionnaire sent to them previously. The respondents were simply asked to fill out and return the questionnaire. Copies of the cover letter and the questionnaire are found in Appendixes C and D.

Scoring Method

A questionnaire made up of two questions was constructed to determine editors' opinions on the necessary elements news releases should contain and the types of release they would be most likely to print in their papers.

The editors were asked in each of the two questions to rank-order, in terms of their importance, six items. A one represents the most important element and a six represents the least important element.

The first question, concerning the elements a news release should contain will help to guide the content analysis. This question will tell what elements are most important in the minds of the editors.

If asked, ten newspaper editors would list ten different news elements. For this reason, this study used a list that had already been used.

The elements selected for this question came from a similar 1985 survey conducted in Florida by Lillian Lodge Kopenhaver.² The first question concerns the news characteristics of information, news value, local angle, mechanical/grammatical error, timeliness and poor writing.

These elements were selected for a couple of reasons. First, Kopenhaver proved that these elements could be operationally defined. Secondly, this list seemed to be the most complete. These six characteristics are mentioned most often in the research conducted preparing for this study.

Operationally defining news value presents certain problems. Research shows there is not universal agreement as to what constitutes news value. For this reason Ward's three-dimensional model of news was selected as the operational definition. A mean score of the rankings was used to tabulate the results of the survey.

The second question was included to determine if editors favor one category of news release over another. Six different categories were used for this study. The same directions and scoring method were used for this question as for question one. A one will represent the category editors will be most likely to print and a six will represent the category editors will be least likely to print.

The elements for this question came from a study conducted by Linda Morton.³ Morton, in her study, listed seven different categories of news releases. The current study uses only six because the sample of news releases did not contain any information on research. Morton's seventh category was research.

After looking at the sample of news releases, it was determined that all releases could be placed in one of six categories. The categories were taken from Morton but were operationally defined to fit the current study.

The elements or categories used for the second question were institutional, coming events, past events, consumer information, timely topics and features.

It would be interesting to know the total number of releases received in a given period of time but it was determined, by looking at previous research, that most editors do not keep track of such information. Since any information received on this question would be an educated guess it was decided to omit this question.

Pretesting

Once the questionnaire was completed it was given to two colleagues, one a graduate student and the other an undergraduate, and a faculty member before it was sent to the respondents. The questionnaire was deemed reliable after it was returned without comment or question.

The independent variables studied were daily and weekly

newspapers. The dependent variable was the response of editors to the questions contained in the survey.

Chi square, spearman rho and dependent t-tests were conducted to analyze the data obtained.

Each independent variable was looked at separately. After this, the results were compared to determine what, if any, differences appeared between the responses of daily and weekly newspaper editors.

Content Analysis Procedure

Selection Process

The local media in Stillwater, Oklahoma, were used to obtain the news releases necessary for the content analysis. The newspapers were the Stillwater NewsPress and the Daily O'Collegian. Two local radio stations were used to collect releases. The radio stations to be utilized in this study were KOSU and KVRO.

Two newspapers and two radio stations were selected simply to give the study balance. It is also assumed that the topics of releases sent to newspapers and radio stations may be different, thus giving the content analysis greater variety in terms of topics.

It is also important to note that these media were selected on the basis of their willingness to cooperate with the study.

Collection Period

The collection period for the news releases had to be agreeable to all the media participants in order to enhance reliability and validity. The collection periods also had to be during the fall semester of 1988 to ensure enough time for analysis.

The collection of the news releases was conducted in two one-week periods. The first collection period was September 12-16 and the second was October 24-28. These periods were used simply because they were convenient for all concerned. Other collection periods were considered but could not be used because of a conflict with one or more of the media. Because of Homecoming at Oklahoma State University, and other promotional activities, KOSU had a very limited calendar in which it could take the time for collections. Homecoming was also a problem for KVRO. The collection dates had to be periods when the media didn't have other pressing matters.

At the beginning of each collection week an empty box was delivered to each of the participating media. They were instructed to put the news releases received during that week's period in the box. Both the used releases and the unused releases were placed in the box. On Friday afternoon of each week, the box was collected.

Scoring Method

Once all the releases were collected they were categorized using the categories mentioned previously. Since there was a great variety in the releases, some were not included in the sample. Editorials and sports releases were not considered. Only those releases that fit the categories previously defined were used in the content analysis. All the releases were analyzed since they had been categorized.

Each release had its own scoring sheet. The sheet listed the six news elements previously defined. A separate sheet was used for news elements and category of release. The individual release was scored on the presence or absence of the news elements. Three judges were used to score the releases. Two judges looked at each release. If the judges disagreed on the presence or absence of a particular news element a third judge would break the tie.

A frequency count was used to determine totals. Once the totals were computed, it was possible to compare the elements contained in news releases with the elements reported to be most important to editors.

The entire news release was not analyzed. The content analysis looked only at the first, second and last paragraph of each news release. There was no reason to look at the entire release if the same information could be obtained by looking at only three paragraphs.

Presentation of Data

Six tables were used to present the results of the survey of newspaper editors.

One table showed the survey results of the responses of weekly newspaper editors, one showed the results of the responses of daily newspaper editors and the third combined the results of weekly and daily editors. Three tables were used to explain the data obtained from each survey question.

On the lefthand side of the table was the particular news characteristic and on the right the corresponding mean score that element received.

Under the news characteristics, the types of releases were listed. On the right side was the corresponding mean score.

The results of the content analysis were illustrated using one table. This table had six columns and six rows. Each row represented a different type of news release. Each column represented a different news characteristic.

The numbers actually contained in the table represent the number of news releases that have that particular element. The numbers were also expressed as a percent of the total.

Schedule

The survey results were scored and tabulated during the month of December 1988.

The content analysis was conducted during the month of January 1989 with the assistance of two judges.

Weaknesses and Conclusions

Because of time and money this study only analyzed news releases collected from Stillwater media. For the same reasons the survey was limited to Oklahoma newspaper editors. These two factors limit the ability to generalize the results.

Another weakness was the size of the sample. The small sample size made it difficult to generalize.

Finally, it was assumed that the news releases collected to be analyzed are typical. If they were not typical the reliability of the results was affected.

END NOTES

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CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

A survey of 50 Oklahoma newspaper editors was conducted to determine what news elements they considered most important for a news release to contain. The survey also asked editors to rank-order six different types of news releases in terms of the one they would be most likely to print.

A content analysis was conducted to determine if the elements identified as important by the Oklahoma newspaper editors were present in the news releases.

This study sought to determine if news releases contained the same news elements that Oklahoma newspaper editors identified as important. The findings reveal that a very low percentage of the releases contain all the elements identified as important by Oklahoma newspaper editors.

Further, the results indicate that one type of release does not contain more or less of the elements identified as important by Oklahoma newspaper editors.

Analysis of 227 news releases, collected from the Stillwater media, show that a very low percentage of the releases, under 50 percent, contain a local angle or news value.

Local angle and news values were the news elements ranked most important in a survey of Oklahoma newspaper editors.

Survey Response

In Oklahoma, the ratio of weekly newspapers to daily newspapers is almost four to one. There are approximately 204 weekly newspapers and 56 daily newspapers in Oklahoma. A random sample of 50 Oklahoma newspapers representing the four-to-one ratio was obtained. See Appendixes A and B for the newspapers included.

A total of 50 newspapers were selected to be surveyed, 10 dailies and 40 weeklies for a total of 50. The response rate for the dailies was 90 percent or 9 out of 10 surveys were returned.

The weekly newspaper response rate was 70 percent or 28 out of 40 surveys were returned. The overall response rate was 74 percent or 37 out of 50 surveys were returned.

Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability was computed to be .8333, which means that the coders agreed 83 percent of the time in their coding decisions. A score of 1.00 would mean perfect agreement between the coders.

Weekly Survey Results

The questionnaire asked editors to rank in order of importance two lists. The first list was a collection of six news elements and the second list was a collection of six different types of news releases.

Results for the first question are reported in Table I and show that local angle was ranked most important by Oklahoma weekly newspaper editors with a mean score of 1.286 on a six-point scale. News value was the next most important element with a mean score of 2.571.

TABLE I
WEEKLY NEWSPAPER EDITORS' RANKING
OF NEWS ELEMENTS
N=28

Category	Mean	Rank
Local Angle	1.286	1
News Value	2.571	2
Timeliness	3.571	3
Information	3.821	4
Poorly Written	4.464	5
Mechanical/Grammatical Errors	5.036	6

The overall mean for this category is 3.458 using the same six-point scale.

The mean score indicates that local angle and news

value were the two most important elements to the editors. The rest of the mean scores and their rank in order of importance are listed in Table I.

There is strong evidence to support the contention that the differences in the means are real differences and not due to chance. Using a t-test for dependent groups the mean differences were significant at the .05 level of confidence except for two. The mean difference between timeliness and information was not a significant difference at the .05 level of confidence.

The mean difference between mechanical/grammatical errors and poorly written was also not significant at the .05 level. The reason for this may be because editors look at these two elements as the same thing or in the same category.

The editors were next asked to rank order six types of news releases according to their importance. As shown in Table II feature news releases were ranked as the type editors would be most likely to print with a mean score of 1.071 on a six-point scale. News releases containing timely topics were ranked second with a mean score of 2.714.

The overall mean for all rankings by weekly newspaper editors in this category was 3.404. The rest of the results of this ranking are in Table II.

The mean differences were found to be real differences and not due to chance at the .05 level of significance in all cases but three.

TABLE II
 TYPE OF RELEASE WEEKLY EDITORS
 ARE MOST LIKELY TO PRINT
 N=28

Category	Mean	Rank
Features	1.071	1
Timely Topics	2.714	2
Consumer Information	3.500	3
Coming Events	3.929	4
Institutional	4.286	5
Past Events	4.929	6

A significant difference in the means was not found between institutional news releases and coming events releases, past event releases, and timely topic releases. In other words, any difference found between the means of these three pairs of news releases may be attributed to chance.

Survey Results for Daily Newspapers

The results from the editors of daily newspapers almost mirror the results for the weekly newspaper editors with just one exception. Local angle and news value received the same mean scores. The results indicate that the daily newspaper editors feel local angle and news value are of equal importance.

The results concerning news values of daily newspaper editors are listed in Table III. These results have been

altered because two editors ranked local angle and news value with equal importance which was contrary to the instructions on the questionnaire. The overall mean for this category was 3.68.

TABLE III
DAILY EDITORS' RANKING OF NEWS ELEMENTS
N=09

Category	Mean	Rank
Local Angle	2.00	1
News Value	2.00	1
Timeliness	3.67	3
Information	4.33	4
Poorly Written	4.89	5
Mechanical/Grammatical Errors	5.22	6

The mean differences were found to be significant in all cases at the .05 level of significance except in four cases. In other words the differences in the means were real differences and not due to chance except in four cases.

Timeliness paired with information, mechanical/grammatical errors and poorly written were all found not to have a significant difference in mean scores at the .05 level of significance. Mechanical/grammatical errors paired with poorly written was also not found to have a significant

difference at the .05 level of significance.

A probable explanation for this is the small sample size. A larger sample may yield different results.

The editors of the daily newspapers agreed with the weekly newspaper editors in ranking the type of news release they would be most likely to print. The overall mean for all rankings by the daily newspaper editors was 3.44.

The editors ranked features as the type of news release they would be most likely to print followed by timely topics. As Table IV indicates the margin between the mean scores of features and timely topics is not large when compared to the margins between the mean scores as ranked by daily editors.

TABLE IV
TYPE OF RELEASE DAILY EDITORS
ARE MOST LIKELY TO PRINT
N=09

Category	Mean	Rank
Features	1.33	1
Timely Topics	1.89	2
Consumer Information	3.44	3
Coming Events	4.00	4
Institutional	4.22	5
Past Events	5.78	6

The means for institutional news releases and coming events news releases are not significant differences at the .05 level. The means for timely topics and features are also not significant at the .05 level. These differences can be attributed to chance.

Here again, a possible reason for this is because of the small sample size.

Combined Survey Results

The combined survey results are very similar to the results obtained for weekly and daily newspaper editors separately. The results indicate that editors for weekly and daily newspapers hold the same news elements to be important. They also agree as to which type or types of news releases they would be most likely to print in their newspapers.

The combined results concerning news values show editors rank local angle as the most important news element with a mean score of 1.459. News value was ranked as the next most important news element with a mean score of 2.432. The overall results with mean scores and corresponding rankings are listed in Table V.

In all cases, local angle and news value were rated as the most important news elements. Timeliness was also rated as more important than information but the mean scores are relatively close.

TABLE V
COMBINED EDITOR RANKING OF NEWS ELEMENTS
N=37

Category	Mean	Rank
Local Angle	1.459	1
News Value	2.432	2
Timeliness	3.596	3
Information	3.946	4
Poorly Written	4.568	5
Mechanical/Grammatical Errors	5.081	6

The weekly and daily results show that mechanical/grammatical errors were rated as least important by a relatively wide margin. These results would indicate that the editors were in almost total agreement when rating local angle as most important and mechanical/grammatical errors as least important.

The editors of weekly and daily newspapers ranked news releases in exactly the same order. It follows that the combined results will follow the same pattern. The only difference is the mean score but that is to be expected since the weekly and daily totals were combined. The combined results for the type of news release most likely to be printed are listed in Table VI.

These results would seem to indicate that the editors were in almost total agreement concerning features and past events. Features clearly are the first choice of editors

and past events are the last choice of editors in terms of the type of release most likely to be printed.

TABLE VI
COMBINED RESULTS FOR TYPE OF RELEASE
EDITORS ARE MOST LIKELY TO PRINT
N=37

Category	Mean	Rank
Features	1.135	1
Timely Topics	2.514	2
Consumer Information	3.486	3
Coming Events	3.946	4
Institutional	4.270	5
Past Events	5.135	6

The results obtained from the survey were used as a guide for the content analysis. The purpose of the content analysis was to determine if a collection of news releases contained the news elements identified as important by Oklahoma newspaper editors.

Content Analysis Results

The breakdown of the categories of news releases and the corresponding number of each type in the sample are listed in Table VII.

TABLE VII
BREAKDOWN OF NEWS RELEASES

Category	Number	Percent
Institutional	31	14%
Consumer Information	33	14%
Features	34	15%
Timely Topics	20	9%
Past Events	25	11%
Coming Events	84	37%
Total	227	100%

There are over twice as many coming events news releases as any other type. Coming event news releases comprise over 1/3 of the total sample.

All the other categories are fairly well grouped together with only 6 percent separating them. Although one category is much better represented this shouldn't make a difference.

According to Oklahoma newspaper editors the two most important news elements are local angle and news value.

Of the 227 news releases contained in the sample only 40 or 18 percent contain a local angle. Only 102 or 45 percent of the news releases contain news value.

A large portion of the news releases, 161 or 71 percent, contain timeliness. A large portion of the news releases, 157 or 69 percent, also contain information.

Only a small number of the news releases, 46 or 20 percent, are poorly written while 125 or 55 percent contain mechanical or grammatical errors. A summary of the totals for each group can be found in Table VIII. The numbers in the table represent the news releases that contained that particular element. The percentage represents the proportion of the total in a given category that contained that element.

TABLE VIII
INDIVIDUAL ANALYSIS BY CATEGORY
N=227

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Coming Events	74 88%	44 52%	14 17%	29 35%	35 42%	71 85%
Past Events	16 64%	16 64%	06 24%	19 76%	01 04%	19 76%
Features	21 62%	06 18%	07 20%	20 59%	01 03%	23 68%
Timely Topics	13 65%	16 80%	07 35%	13 65%	03 15%	12 60%
Institutional	17 55%	12 39%	04 13%	25 81%	03 10%	25 81%
Consumer Information	16 48%	08 24%	02 06%	19 58%	03 09%	11 33%
Total	157=69%	102=45%	40=18%	125=55%	46=20%	161=71%

Legend: 1= Information
2= News Value
3= Local Angle
4= Mechanical/Grammatical Errors
5= Poorly Written
6= Timeliness

There is strong evidence to support the contention that there is a relationship between the categories of news releases and the news elements. In five of six cases, the observed chi square is larger at $df=5$ than the critical value of 20.5 at the .001 level of significance.

Only timely topics with an observed chi square of 10.68 at $df=5$ is not significant at the .001 level or the .05 level. The needed chi square at .05 is 11.1 and since 10.68 is smaller it is not significant. For timely topics there is no relationship between the category and the news elements.

A possible explanation is that editors evaluate timely topics on a different type of scale so the elements listed in this study don't affect timely topics. The news elements in this study may not be relevant to timely topics. (See Table VIII on page 61 for content analysis results.)

Local angle was rated as the most important news element by editors yet it is the category that had the lowest overall percentage. In other words not very many of the news releases studied contained a local angle. In fact, timely topics had the highest rating in this category with only 35 percent. Only 35 percent of the timely topics studied contained a local angle.

News value, the next most important news element, scored better but it was still under 50 percent. Three of the six categories scored better than 50 percent. In other words, of the news releases studied only three categories

contained news value more than 50 percent of the time.

Timeliness was rated by the editors as the third most important news element. Timeliness received the highest overall score with 71 percent. This means that 71 percent of the news releases analyzed contained timeliness.

Information was the fourth most important news element and followed timeliness closely in terms of overall percentage. Information received an overall score of 69 percent.

It is interesting to note that a small percentage, 20 percent, of the news releases were rated as poorly written but 55 percent of the news releases had some kind of mechanical or grammatical error.

A spearman rho correlation was conducted between how editors ranked news elements and how they actually ranked in the content analysis. The computed spearman rho value was $-.314$. Although this is a weak correlation it means that editors aren't receiving news releases with the news elements they think they should be receiving.

Since the scores for individual categories are so varied it is hard to determine if one type of news release is better written in terms of the news elements studied than another. The only thing that can be said with certainty is that most of the news releases studied leave out the most important news element, local angle.

Summary

After analyzing both survey results and 227 news

releases some patterns emerge. Clearly, editors feel local angle and news value are the two most important news elements.

Results from the content analysis reveal that these are the two elements that news releases lack most often. The results also reveal that most news releases, over 50 percent, contain timeliness and information.

Finally, a small percentage of the news releases studied are judged poorly written but a large percentage, over 50 percent, contain some kind of mechanical or grammatical error.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Public relations was born in America in 1607 when the English settlers landed in Jamestown. Public relations was used during this time as a tool to sway public opinion against England.

Since those pioneering times, public relations has expanded and become more carefully defined. It has also grown in scope and importance.

Even with all the changes in public relations, one tool has endured the test of time. That tool is the news release. The news release also dates back to colonial times.

Even though increased technology has given practitioners more tools to use to sway public opinion the news release has endured. It has, though, encountered a problem and this study is concerned with that problem.

The problem is that only a small percentage of the news releases sent to newspapers end up being published. The question this study tried to answer is why is this happening.

To help answer this question a survey of Oklahoma newspaper editors and a content analysis of news releases collected from Stillwater media were conducted.

The survey questionnaire asked editors to do two things; first, to rank in order of their importance six news elements, and second, to rank six different types of news releases in order according to which they would be most likely to print. This information was used as a guide for the content analysis.

A total of 227 news releases were collected from the Stillwater media. The news releases were categorized and analyzed to see if they contained the same news elements identified as important by Oklahoma newspaper editors in the survey.

A secondary purpose was to determine if one type of news release was better written than another. A well written news release should contain local angle, news value, information, timeliness and lack mechanical or grammatical errors.

The findings indicated that editors clearly felt local angle and news value were the two most important news elements. They also said they would be more likely to print a feature news release. From the editor rankings a mean score was obtained for each element and category and ranked according to that mean score.

Editors ranked local angle as the most important news element followed by news value, timeliness, information, poorly written and mechanical/grammatical errors.

Editors said they would be more likely to print feature news releases followed by timely topics, consumer

information, coming events, institutional and past events.

The content analysis results indicated that only 18 percent of the sample contained news releases with a local angle while only 45 percent of the news releases contained news value.

Most of the news releases did, however, contain information. In fact, 69 percent contained information. A high percentage of the releases, 71 percent, contained timeliness.

Probably the most interesting result revealed that 55 percent of the news releases contained some kind of mechanical or grammatical error while only 20 percent were judged poorly written.

The results indicate that timely topics were better written than any other category of news release. In the sample of timely topic news releases 35 percent contained a local angle. This was the highest percentage of any category. A large percentage of timely topics, 80 percent, contained news value. Here again, this was the largest percentage for any category.

These results are not absolutely conclusive but since timely topics contain the two most important news elements in the greatest frequency they must be rated as best written.

Discussion

The results of the content analysis indicate that public relations practitioners or whoever is responsible for writing news releases are leaving out the two most

important elements.

The results show that less than half the releases studied contained news value and an even smaller percentage contained a local angle.

A large percentage of the news releases contained information and timeliness while only 20 percent were poorly written.

Although the results are not conclusive, the researcher feels that news value and local angle are the only news elements that really count.

In other words, local angle and news value are what make people read a story and other elements help to complement the two elements.

Even though the editors said they would be more likely to print feature articles the results indicate that this type of news release isn't better written than any other type.

Clearly the writers of news releases are doing a good job using some of the news elements while doing a poor job using others. This study found that a large percentage of news releases contain information and timeliness. The problem is that they are doing a poor job using the elements most important to editors, namely local angle and news value.

Recommendations for Public Relations Profession

The work of Honaker, cited earlier, and others clearly

indicates that editors use a small percentage of the news releases they receive.

A possible solution would be to include the news elements identified as important by editors. Local angle and news value are missing in most news releases. Public relations practitioners may find more of their news releases on the pages of newspapers if they include local angle and news value.

Public relations practitioners need to learn that if they want their news releases published they are going to have to start writing for newspaper editors as well as their client. News releases must be news stories.

Public relations students as well as public relations instructors need to learn to stress local angle and news value in their writing. If a practitioner is going to write for the editor as well as the client that person must write newsworthy releases.

Public relations students need to be aware of the importance of using proper mechanics and good grammar in their writing. This study showed that all too often, over 50 percent of the time, a news release will have a misplaced comma or period or a similar error. Grammatical errors, such as using a plural verb with a singular noun, were also found.

These results indicate that the writers of news releases have either neglected or forgotten some basic writing rules or procedures. Not only should a news release contain news elements it must also be free of errors both mechanical

and grammatical.

Recommendations for Further Research

Although this research project answered the question under study, much more work needs to be done in order to better the communication and cooperation between newspaper editors and public relation practitioners. The current study could be repeated on a national level to yield much more generalizable results. Although there is no reason to believe that Oklahoma newspaper editors and public relation practitioners are different, in terms of their beliefs than others, only a national survey could prove this.

The following are possibilities for further research in this area:

1. A nationwide random survey of weekly and daily newspaper editors should be conducted. This would give much more validity to the study. It would also allow the researcher to make broad generalizations.

In conjunction with a nationwide random sample of editors a nationwide collection of news releases should be obtained. This would give a better representation of the entire population. These two improvements would give the current study more validity and reliability.

2. A study should be conducted to compare the delivery method and subsequent use of news releases. In other words, is a computer-to-computer transmitted news release more likely to be published than one delivered to the newsroom

by hand or delivered in the mail?

3. A study of the use of different colored paper and the frequency of publication should be undertaken. This study would make it possible to determine if a news release printed on one color of paper is printed more often in a newspaper than another.

Three different colors of paper could be used and then count the number of stories printed in the newspaper and compare that to the color of the news release.

4. In the opinion of the researcher, the study that would yield the most important and interesting results would be a comparison of the personal relationship between sender and editor and the number of news releases published. A personal relationship would be operationally defined as "friends on a social level."

The personal relationship between sender and editor may be the most important element in getting a news release published. It would be possible to compare the news releases sent from sources with no personal relationship with the editor to those sent from people with a personal relationship with the editor.

A possible hypothesis is that if the editor is friends on a social level with the sender the sender of the news release has a better chance of being published regardless of the quality of news release.

5. A study of need vs. content would also be helpful, especially for the public relations practitioner. Will

editors use more news releases when the newshole is larger?

If a relationship was found, practitioners could send news releases to editors on days with the largest newshole. This may lead to an increased chance of publication.

These five studies would help the public relations practitioner determine how best to get a news release published.

Conclusion

This study indicates that public relations practitioners are doing a poor job in preparing their news releases for newspaper publication in the sense that many releases do not contain the elements editors think are important, especially local angle and news value.

The days are gone when a news release can be written specifically for a client. A news release must also be written for the editor. Including local angle and news value in a news release will go a long way in correcting this problem.

With so much information competing for so little space, practitioners must do everything possible to get news releases published. If they don't they are missing a great opportunity to reach a larger audience.

If public relations practitioners want their news releases printed in newspapers they are going to have to change their current practices.

Educators need to impress upon their students the

importance of local angle and news value. They also need to improve students' grammatical and mechanical writing skills. If this study is any indication, those who are writing news releases are lacking in this particular skill.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

DAILY NEWSPAPERS

1. Altus Times, P.O. Box 578, 218 W. Commerce, Altus, Oklahoma 73521.
2. Anadarko Daily News, P.O. Box 548, 117-119 E. Broadway, Anadarko, Oklahoma 73005.
3. Claremore Daily Progress, P.O. Box 248, 315 W. Will Rogers, Claremore, Oklahoma 74018.
4. El Reno Daily Tribune, P.O. Box 9, 201 N. Rock Island, El Reno, Oklahoma 73036.
5. Guymon Daily Herald, P.O. Box 19, Guymon, Oklahoma 73942.
6. Lawton Constitution, P.O. Box 2096, Lawton, Oklahoma 73502.
7. Oklahoma City Associated Press, 500 N. Broadway, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73102.
8. Pawhuska Daily Journal-Capital, P.O. Box 238, 700 Kihekah Ave., Pawhuska, Oklahoma 74056.
9. Shawnee News-Star, P.O. Box 1688, 215 N. Bell St., Shawnee, Oklahoma 74801.
10. The Tulsa World, P.O. Box 1770, 318 Main Mall, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74102.

APPENDIX B

WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS

1. Logan County News, P.O. Box 879, Guthrie, Oklahoma 73044.
2. Ardmore Democrat, P.O. Box 1328, Ardmore, Oklahoma 73401.
3. Boswell Times, P.O. Box 460, Boswell, Oklahoma 74727.
4. Chelsea Reporter, P.O. Box 6, Chelsea, Oklahoma 74016.
5. Washita County Enterprise, P.O. Box 475, Corn, Oklahoma 73024.
6. Eakley Country Connection, P.O. Box 206, Eakley, Oklahoma 73033.
7. Fairview Republican, P.O. Box 497, Fairview, Oklahoma 73737.
8. Eldorado Courier, P.O. Box 10, Eldorado, Oklahoma 73537.
9. Gage Record, P.O. Box 277, Gage, Oklahoma 73843.
10. Heavener Ledger, P.O. Box 38, Heavener, Oklahoma 74937.
11. Grove Sun, P.O. Box 969, Grove, Oklahoma 74344.
12. Kiowa County Star-Review, P.O. Box 432, Hobart, Oklahoma 73651.
13. Lawton The Times, P.O. Box 7285, Lawton, Oklahoma 73506.
14. Madill Record, P.O. Box 529, Madill, Oklahoma 73446.
15. Mountain View Record-Times, P.O. Box 488, Mountain View, Oklahoma 73062.
16. Meeker News, P.O. Box 686, Meeker, Oklahoma 74855.
17. Oklahoma City Black Chronicle, P.O. Box 17498, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73136.
18. LeFlore County Sun & News, P.O. Box 546, Poteau, Oklahoma 74953.
19. Pawnee Chief, P.O. Box 370, Pawnee, Oklahoma 74058.
20. Rush Springs Gazette, P.O. Box 597, Rush Springs, Oklahoma 73082.
21. Konawa Stratford Star, P.O. Box 157, Konawa, Oklahoma 74849.

22. Shawnee American, P.O. Box 1592, Shawnee, Oklahoma 74801.
23. Tinker Take-Off, 2854 ABG-PA, Tinker AFB, Oklahoma 73145.
24. Wagoner Record-Democrat & Times, P.O. Box 40, Wagoner, Oklahoma 74467.
25. Tulsa Eastside Times, 8545 E. 41st St., Tulsa, Oklahoma 74145.
26. Waukomis Oklahoma Hornet, P.O. Box 669, Waukomis, Oklahoma 73773.
27. Latimer County Today, P.O. Box 606, Wilburton, Oklahoma 74578.
28. Wynnewood Gazette, P.O. Box 309, Wynnewood, Oklahoma 73098.
29. Lincoln County News, P.O. Box 248, Chandler, Oklahoma 74834.
30. Barnsdall Times, P.O. Box DD, Barnsdall, Oklahoma 74002.
31. Afton American, P.O. Drawer D, Afton, Oklahoma 74331.
32. Guymon Observer, P.O. Box 19, Guymon, Oklahoma 73942.
33. Hominy News-Progress, P.O. Box 38, Hominy, Oklahoma 74035.
34. Drumright NewsJournal, P.O. Box 912, Drumright, Oklahoma 74030.
35. The Weleetkan, P.O. Box 427, Weleetka, Oklahoma 74880.
36. Ryan Leader, P.O. Box 220, Ryan, Oklahoma 73565.
37. Kiowa County Democrat, P.O. Box 305, Snyder, Oklahoma 73566.
38. The Pocola News, P.O. Box 122, Pocola, Oklahoma 74902.
39. Nowata Star, P.O. Box 429, Nowata, Oklahoma 74048.
40. Glenpool Post, P.O. Box 608, Glenpool, Oklahoma 74033.

APPENDIX C

LETTER SENT TO EDITORS

Wouldn't it be nice if every press release sent to newspapers was useful? As you know, most press releases aren't used by newspaper editors.

I am working on a study that should help to eliminate this problem. The study combines a survey of Oklahoma newspaper editors with a content analysis of selected press releases. The purpose is to determine what elements or news values editors feel are most important for a press release. A content analysis of press releases will tell me if the elements or values in press releases are the same as those mentioned by editors.

My goal, with your help, is to improve the understanding between newspaper editors and public relations practitioners. At the very least, this study should help to create awareness of the problem on the part of public relations practitioners.

I cannot accomplish my goal without your help. Enclosed you will find a short questionnaire that I would like you to fill out and return to me in the self-addressed envelope provided. Your help in this matter will be greatly appreciated.

If you have any questions please call me at (405) 624-2357 or write me at 502 W. Maple #7-C, Stillwater, Oklahoma 74074.

Sincerely,

Steve Stengel

APPENDIX D

SURVEY

INSTRUCTIONS. Please fill out the questionnaire and return it using the self-addressed stamped envelope. If you have any questions please contact me at (405) 624-2357 or write to me at 502 W. Maple #7-C, Stillwater, Oklahoma 74074.

1. On a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being the most important and 6 being the least important, please rank the following list of reasons for rejecting press releases. A one would represent the most important element and a six would represent the least important element. Please use each number, 1-6, once.

- _____ Lack of timeliness
- _____ Lack of information
- _____ Lack of news value
- _____ Lack of local angle
- _____ Mechanical/grammatical errors
- _____ Poorly written

2. On a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 representing the type of press release you would most likely use and 6 being the release you would be least likely to use, please rank the following types of press releases. Please use each number, 1-6, once. Use is defined here as either a partial source, background material, or verbatim.

- _____ Institutional (ex. Oklahoma State University)
- _____ Coming events (ex. the Presidential election)
- _____ Past events (ex. the State Fair)
- _____ Consumer information (ex. a release covering how to fill out the new tax forms)
- _____ Timely topics (ex. the effect of low oil prices on Oklahoma residents)
- _____ Features (ex. a story of a local person competing in the Olympics)

VITA

Steven Patrick Stengel

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: NEWS ELEMENTS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO NEWS
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