

# The Excellence & News Objectivity Models as the Models for Harmonious Relationship between Public Relations Officers & Journalists

Rachmat Kriyantono<sup>1</sup>

School of Communication Brawijaya University Indonesia

**Abstract.** This paper is about socialization of two models, Excellence and News Objectivity. These two models were applied as proper solution to keep harmonious relationship between Public Relations Officers and Journalists. This socialization was based from interviews with 40 practitioners and the interviews revealed misperceptions about the functions of each profession. Journalists perceived that Public Relations practitioners often gave lack of information. However, Journalists were perceived to not report the realities objectively. To socialize these models, the author conducted a workshop for practitioners. It is hoped that these models can be applied a basis for practitioners as well as a curriculum in Indonesia educational institutions.

**Keywords:** Excellence, Objectivity, journalist, public relations

## 1. Introduction

Public relations officers (PROs) and mass-media practitioners (journalists) have a role the information source and disseminator. Public Relations is communication management to build harmonious-relationship between organization and its public (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Public consists of the communities, consumers, banks, non-government organizations, and mass-media. Communication management provides some activities such as providing open and reciprocal channels for sending and receiving information.

On the other hands, mass-media has a power to spread information widely and simultaneously so that it has ability to create public opinions (Kim, Han, Shanahan, & Berdayes, 2004; Scheufule & Moy, 2000). With such abilities, media is able to represent the society to control the political authority (watchdog). Media is one of the pillars of democratization. In the context of information accessibility and dissemination, it should be a mutualism-symbiosis between PROs and journalists. Both of them as partners to support each other to fulfill the public's right to gain information. PRO subsidies information to journalists and journalists disseminate information in order to reach the public.

The PRO-media relationships become the focus of the Information Subsidies theory. Gandy (1982, cited in Zoch & Molleda, 2006) stated that information subsidies are the efforts to reduce uncertainties which are felt by the journalists and the public. "When practitioners (PRO) are successful in convincing gatekeepers (mass media) to publish their information subsidies, practitioners influence the media agenda..." (Sallot & Johnson, 2009, p. 152). There was significant correlation between press-release provided by PRO and media contents (Kiouisis, Mitrook, Wu, & Seltzer, 2006). Sallot & Johnson (2009) found that most journalist -84% from 411 journalists- said that Public Relations makes very valuable contributions to support the journalists' works.

## 2. Research Method & Problem Recognition

The author did surveys to investigate whether harmonious-relationship between PROs and journalists happened in Indonesia. This survey consisted of either a content analysis of news media and interviews with 20 PROs and 20 journalists. The respondents were PROs from government and private institutions in Malang and journalist from newspapers and broadcasts in Malang. A content analysis of news media, it was revealed that there was a disharmony between PRO and media. For instances, a communication officer of the President of Indonesia said that media frequently reports the bad things about the government than good ones. People who just condemn and always look for other's mistake is considered to be good by the media (Jawa Post, 26 March 2012, p.27). President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono also criticized that media gave impartial

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<sup>1</sup> Correspondencing author: rachmat\_kr@ub.ac.id

and undetailed information (Ilho, 2011). Furthermore, the secretary of cabinet said that media often besmirch the government. As a protest, the secretary asked the government apparatus to refuse to be interviewed by journalists and avoid placing the advertisements into that media (Subianto, 2011).

In addition to news analysis, the author also interviewed some PROs and journalists in Malang City, East Java Province. The main questions were about how PROs perceived their relationship with journalists; how journalists perceived their relationship with PROs; what PROs thought the value of journalists to their works; what journalists thought the value of PROs to their works; how PROs expected their relationship to be in the future; how journalists expected their relationship to be in the future. The interviews involved 20 of PROs and 20 of Journalists.

In general, the author found that negative perceptions among others still took place. Most of PROs (85%) said that journalists frequently focus more on bad-news about organization; It also found that journalists were perceived by 13 PROs (65%) to rarely reported press-releases from PROs; journalists were perceived not to cover the realities objectively (agreed by 45% respondents). PROs felt that the media news were lack of balance or not cover both sides (perceived by 70% respondents); journalists did not make confirmation before reporting news (agreed by 55% respondents). On the other hands, most of journalists said that PROs did not provide open and free communication so that journalists found difficulty to search information (55% respondents agreed with this statement); Journalists also perceived that it was difficult to get access to executive in order to obtain direct interviews (agreed by 80% respondents); most of journalists stated that the information-subsidies, such as press release, did not match to their expectations (agreed by 70% respondents); PROs were perceived not to provide materials of information and facilities properly to support journalists' jobs (perceived by 50% respondents); PROs were perceived not actively provide information although journalists did not ask (agreed by 55% respondents).

Although both PROs and journalists were not happy about the functions of each profession, they agree that both journalists and PROs are valuable in the future. Most of respondents agreed that in the future they must build a good relationship between them. Furthermore, the author describe the example of the interviews. Dr. Zulkarnaen Nasution, the CEO of PROs Organization (Perhumas), admitted:

We face unbalance information from the media and a lot of journalists tend to report negative things only. I experienced that journalists who just focus on earn money are still numerous.

This statement was linked with one of PR managers' statement:

As I know 70% of journalists have motive to earn money when they are collecting news. The idealist journalist are 30% only; To earn money, journalists use several strategies, such as attacking by threatening that they will report badnews; Journalists admit that they are a members of NGOs, influencing the opposing employees to be whistle-blowers in order to attack the company.

From the journalists' perspectives, Mr Chusunun Juraid, Senior Editor of Malang Post, said that journalists face some situations: PROs are lack of ability to write press-release, low quality of resources, close information (i.e. giving no comment statement), and PROs rarely provide information as journalists need. From his experience, PROs in Malang are perceived as the worst. However, he also admitted that there were a lot of journalists that break code of conduct when doing their activities. Errol Jonathan, a senior radio journalist, perceived that both PROs and journalist have lack of ability to write news. Information subsidies from PROs did not consist of news-values so media was not interested to report. On the other hands, journalists frequently wrote 'rumor-journalism' due to unclear source of information.

Based on this survey above, the situation can be concluded into two main dimensions: (1) It was lack of trust among PROs and journalists; (2) Lack of professionalism among the two actors. The main dimensions can be drawn into several problems listed in the table 1 below.

Problem Recognition		
Dimensions	PROs	Journalists

No trust/misperceptions among PROs and journalists	Only representing the organization and more focus on image building.	News media were dominated by bad-news about private or government institutions.  Information about the success of development and good public services got minimum publicities.
	Lack of two way communication.	Were perceived of having motives to earn money.
	Tend to be closed so that journalists were difficult to gain information.	Tend to collect information from the sources outside the organization formal sources.
Lack of professionalism	Product of information did not match with journalists' need and standards of journalism.	News media were lack of objectivities, i.e. unclear sources, unbalance and inaccurate.

Table. 1: Problem Recognition.

### 3. Excellence and News Objectivity Models

The author socialized Excellence model to PROs. This model is assumed as the best model in public relations after James Grunig and his team studied into 321 companies in three countries, USA, UK and Canada for about 15 years (Grunig, et al, 2008). This model describes numerous variables that contribute to organizational effectiveness to build relationship with its public. In accordance with the efforts to build good harmony with media, the author socialized the principles of this model (Grunig, et al, 2008): involvement of public relations in strategic management; empowerment of public relations in the dominant coalition or a direct reporting relationship to senior management; integrated public relations function; public relations as a management function, separate from other functions; public relations unit headed by a manager rather than a technician; two-way symmetrical (or mixed-motive) model of public relations; department with the knowledge needed to practice the managerial role in symmetrical public relations; symmetrical system of internal communication; diversity embodied in all roles; Ethics and integrity.

The principles of Excellence model allow PROs to build two-way channel of communication in order to actively provide information for their public. As an important public, mass-media has a power to disseminate information and create public opinion based on how journalists frame the information. The form of framing can be determined by availability of information that journalists receive and how close the relationship between PROs and Journalists. From Kriyantono (2012) and Sallot & Johnson (2010), it can be drawn that building good relationship with mass-media is determined by several factors: providing information actively, providing facilities that support journalist to do their jobs, writing press-release based on journalism standards, and providing direct access to interview top-management. From the surveys, journalists' perceptions toward those factors were negative.

Excellence model becomes dominant paradigm in public relations study and practice (Gower, 2006; Greenwood, 2010; Pasadeos, Berger & Renfro, 2010; Sallot, Lyon, Alzura, & Jones, 2003; Wehmeier, 2009),

the most cited Public Relations works (Pasadeos, et al, 2010; Skerlep, 2001), and the first generation in public relations research (Gower, 2006). Botan & Hazleton (2009, h. 6): "Over the last 20 years, a leading body of work has developed around Excellence model." This model is a new model in Indonesia and has not been applied widely so that it is necessary to socialize it in order to increase the function of public relations to support both organization's and public's interests. Furthermore, as a new democratic country, Indonesia needs harmonious relationship between PROs and journalists as a basis to create a good public sphere. Socialization also incorporated workshop about the application of Excellence model. The participants were trained skill development, such as how to do research, manage public relations programs, produce public relations channel of communication (writing the news, press release, article, and newsletter), and how to build press-relations.

For journalists, the team socialized model of news-objectivity from Westenthal (McQuail, 2010). This model was selected with some reasons: (1) this model could accommodate the ethics and journalism principles that has been stated in Indonesia Press Regulation number 40/1999. Both model and regulations have principles of objectivity such as balance, neutral, separation between facts and journalist's self-opinion, accurate, completeness, informative, and relevant with social interest; (2) this model had been referred by the board of Indonesian press to measure the level of objectivity among Indonesian newspapers in 2004. From this research, most of Indonesian newspapers were not objective in writing news.

From the objectivity model, it can be described that the concept of accuracy means that journalists must present the truth based on facts. Completeness refers to the availability of news elements that make journalists inform reality in details. The popular formula to represent completeness are 5Ws and 1H (What, who, where, when, why, and how). Informative means that news must be written in such manners: understandable, clear, readable, and details. Balance means that journalist must present some point of views proportionally. Neutrality refers to the attitude of being neutral should be in journalists' heart when writing news.

This model emerged as a result of a need to present journalism works that free from particular propaganda. Allan (2004, p. 22) said that "press agents and publicity experts ... to create a wariness of 'official' channels of information. For those journalists alert to the danger of equating reality with official definitions of truth, the need for more 'scientific' methods to process fact was increasingly being recognized."

From the problem recognition, the author concluded that it is necessary to socialize the Excellence Model for public relations activity as well as the news objectivity model for conducting journalism process. The author conducted three day workshop to transfer knowledge of these models. 20 PROs and 20 Journalists who participated in interviews activities were invited to attend this workshop. PROs were trained to develop their ability to research and make audience segmentation; did communication management (planning, organizing, actuating and evaluation of communication programs); and how to write press-release, newsletter, company-profile, and other media of communications. Journalists were also trained to advance their ability to gather and write news by applying objectivity model.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Understanding the functions of public relations and journalistic is very important to be known by Public Relations Practitioners and Journalists. Both of them are the agent of information to fulfill the public's right to know. In order to conduct the functions properly, it is necessary for PROs to increase their ability to apply the Excellence model. For journalists, it is important to conduct their jobs based on news-objectivity model. The author chose the two models because the models work on public orientation. To increase the knowledge and ability to practice the models were the aims of the process of socialization. Particularly, the author aim to disseminate the models as primacy models to support democracy in Indonesia.

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