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# Getting the Message Across: Message Dissemination Through the Social Media Platform as a Public Relation Tool as a Media Richness Perspective

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GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS: MESSAGE DISSEMINATION THROUGH THE  
SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM AS A PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL AS  
A MEDIA RICHNESS PERSPECTIVE

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Benjamin C. Flores, Ph.D.  
Interim Dean of the Graduate School

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by

Ana Isabel Gonzalez Michel

2012

## DEDICATION

Le dedico mi tesis a mi familia. Gracias por su amor, por ser mi pilar y por amarme incondicionalmente. A mi padre que me dio un ejemplo de arduo trabajo y ética laboral. Gracias por retarme a alcanzar nuevas metas; en parte empecé esta especialidad gracias a ti. Aun en tiempos difíciles no me dejaste sola, estoy agradecida eternamente por tu apoyo. A mi madre que siempre ha sido mi porrista. Tú me enseñaste a soñar con posibilidades y estuviste a mi lado dándome aliento en lo que los sueños se hacían realidades. En las tormentas más pesadas tú siempre fuiste un ejemplo de fortaleza. I dedicate this to my siblings Hector, Lulu and Mina who are my best friends, anchors and can always give me a truthful piece of advice, critique and encouragement. Finally to my brothers in law Jesse and Vedran, thank you for your help, your advice and support in this project. You all seriously ROCK MY WORLD.

Les amo con toda mi alma y seria mi placer poderles otorgar sus máximos deseos. Como solo soy humana limitada y pronto tendré voto de pobreza, confórmense con la dedicatoria de un año de esfuerzo, frustraciones, logros, descubrimientos y mucho trabajo en el cual ustedes fueron partícipes.

Les Amo y Que Mi Dios Me Los Cuide y Bendiga Siempre.

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THROUGH THE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM AS A  
PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL AS A  
MEDIA RICHNESS PERSPECTIVE

by

ANA ISABEL GONZALEZ MICHEL, B.A.

THESIS

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for the Degree of

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## ABSTRACT

Prior studies that evaluated social media recommended the use of social media in PR efforts. But they lacked the theoretical framework to fully evaluate the richness of the communication medium. Through Media Richness Theory, the investigator assessed the perceptions of 162 PR professionals to shed light on the richness of social media as a communication tool and, most importantly, as an effective tool for the purposes of PR. While this study revealed that social media is not a fully “rich” communication outlet, there are components that provide value to PR professionals. This study suggests that social media not simply be compared to traditional media, but instead be used as a collaborative tool for PR efforts. Based on the perception of survey participants, both quantitative and qualitative, social media provides a ‘rich’ outlet to develop a personal approach in the communication process to a target audience.

**Keywords:** Public Relations, Social Media, Media Richness Theory

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Improvements in computers, mobile technologies and integrated technologies have played an essential role in bringing the world together, and adding ease to the way people communicate with each other (Lica & Tuta, 2011). While the changes generated by technology have presented various opportunities to the field of communication, the fast paced transformations demand the prompt and intelligent adaptation in order to continue the efficient flow of information to its publics (Macario, Ednacot, Ullberg & Reichel, 2011). Among the various fields in communication that is faced with the challenges and opportunities of change due to technological advancements is public relations (PR) (Berkowitz, 2007).

For many years, the field of PR has created strategic relations between the source of the message and the receiver of the message, as well as encouraging action and change to benefit both parties. Through PR, a client is able to identify its target market, communicate with its audience and keep a pulse of the wants and needs of its consumers. According to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the definition and role of PR is to “help an organization and its public adapt mutually to each other” (PRSA.org, 2012). Since its inception, PR has relied on close relations with traditional forms of media to communicate with the public and its target audience. Through the use of press releases, PR professionals have communicated directly with news directors and journalists with the goal of obtaining coverage. The innovation of computer technologies and new communication outlets have allowed PR specialist direct access to their audience. As such, there is now a transformation of the delivery of the press release from news directors and journalist to directly to the addressees (Vorvoreanu, 2008). While PR has relied heavily on traditional forms of media, such as newspapers, television, and radio to communicate with its target audience, the 21<sup>st</sup> century brings a large array of challenges and changes that have the potential to impact the future of the field (Darnowski & Wright, 2010). PR professionals

agree that in the past ten years the role of technology has advanced at large steps presenting a challenge and opportunity for the future of the profession (Taylor & Kent, 2010).

The technological advancements in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have given the facility to have a two way relational communication, allowing for PR specialists to create dialogue between the organization and its public, instead of the one way communication model based on interaction between journalist and editors (Berkowitz, 2007). As such, the new technologies have the potential for PR specialists to access new tools to reach their audience directly while shifting the purpose and usage of traditional tools (Vorvoreanu, 2008) and media. The innovation of communication technologies have made it complicated for PR specialists to simply rely on traditional methods to communicate to their audience (Macario et al., 2011). Supported by the influence of innovative communication technologies, primarily the Internet, PR professionals have the potential to have a powerful impact in reach and message delivery to target audiences with the use of social media (Macario et al., 2011; Sharon, Wang & Junhao, 2011).

While this potential creates the resounding messages indicating the need for PR professionals to embrace social media as a career tool, there is lack of theoretical framework to support the proposed recommendations (Iodhia, 2012). In an effort to conduct objective and investigative research, the study is based on the foundations of Media Richness Theory with the goal of providing a justifiable investigation that leads to solid findings regarding the richness of social media as a mean of communication and an effective tool for PR based on the perception of PR professionals.

It is through this study that the role of social media as a rich tool for PR will be investigated with the use of Media Richness Theory (MRT). With support of the theoretical framework, the research aims to study the correlation and perception of PR professional's usage of social media as a medium to communicate to audiences effectively, and facilitate the professional tasks for PR professionals.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 The Evolution of Public Relations & Communication Technologies**

While Public Relations (PR) is regarded as a relatively new field, there is evidence that PR techniques were implemented in early civilizations such as ancient Greece (Marsh, 2010). It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century with the modernizations brought forth by the industrial revolution that PR began to take shape into the profession that is practiced today, becoming a field of constant changes (Wilcox, 2006). While PR is usually associated with crisis communication (Ferguson, Wallace & Chandler, 2012), historically the role of PR has been associated with disseminating a message on behalf of a company or client while positioning the message to the target audience, increasing visibility, and creating a positive public opinion (Berkowitz, 2007).

Starting in the early 1900's, PR consultants began to reach out to print news editors and journalists to deliver the message to an audience on behalf of their client (Berkowitz, 2007). In an effort to work with members of the press and facilitate message delivery, in 1906 former reporter Ivy Ledbetter Lee, introduced the press release as a PR tool to reach out to members of the press (Wilcox, Ault, Agee & Cameron, 1999). Since then, the press release has been used as an essential tool for PR specialists to provide information directly to media communicators (Vorvoreanu, 2008). With the introduction of new communication technologies such as radio and television in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, PR adapted and utilized new media as tools to reach target audiences (Sochowski, 2011).

By the early 1920's, the field of PR shifted from individual untrained publicists to a practice of educated professionals who were trained at a university to use the new communication technologies as a career (Wilcox, 2006). In 1923, New York University became the home of the first PR class, taught by Edward L. Bernays, who is credited to be the father of PR (Parcell, Lane & Cooley, 2011). A few years later, the aftermath of the Great Depression presented communication trials, primarily in the need to

communicate creatively to large audiences regarding public assistance programs and rebuilding public trust in American businesses. These adversities allowed, PR specialists the opportunity to develop into an industry (Sochowski, 2011). Later with the eruption of World War II, PR incorporated campaigns as a tactical approach to communicate with audiences and obtain public endorsement, predominantly to garner support for the entry of the United States into the war; by this time PR had adapted to the use of print, radio, cinema and television (Sochowski, 2011). After WWII, PR as a professional occupation boomed, maturing and growing towards the later part of the century, while becoming an essential part of the modern world (Wilcox, 2006). During the 1960's, civil and social right demands shifted the role of PR. At this time, the field became important in not only communicating a message, but it began to play an important role in conflict resolution (Wilcox, 2006).

As the field evolved and new opportunities developed in the 1970's and 1980's, communication technologies facilitated the dissemination of information through radio and television in the form of Public Service Announcements (PSA's) (Berkowitz, 2007). By the 1980's the PR tool kit had develop beyond the use of the traditional press release to require experience in writing, developing public service announcements, press kits, video footage, campaigns, writing scripts, and developing pieces of information as brochures (Parcell et al., 2011; Sochowski, 2011). During this time PR consultants became instrumental in creating a positive reputation for clients, resolved conflict and were also responsible for the creation of the attitudes that culminated in the sales of products and services (Wilcox, 2006).

Over all, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century the leading tool used to accomplish the PR communication goals was based on the relationship with editors, producers, and journalist working in traditional media outlets such as radio, television, and print (Parcell et al., 2011). It was required that PR specialists develop a close network and positive working relationship with news editors, journalists and producers to ensure that the focus of the information provided through the press release, was of appeal to the

publication and its audience (Parcell et al., 2011). PR was primarily charged with the distribution of the message, establishing a one-way form of communication with a limited amount of voices and closed options for attainment of feedback from the target audience, lacking a natural communication with audience and potential clients (Berkowitz, 2007; Mcnamara & Kenning, 2011).

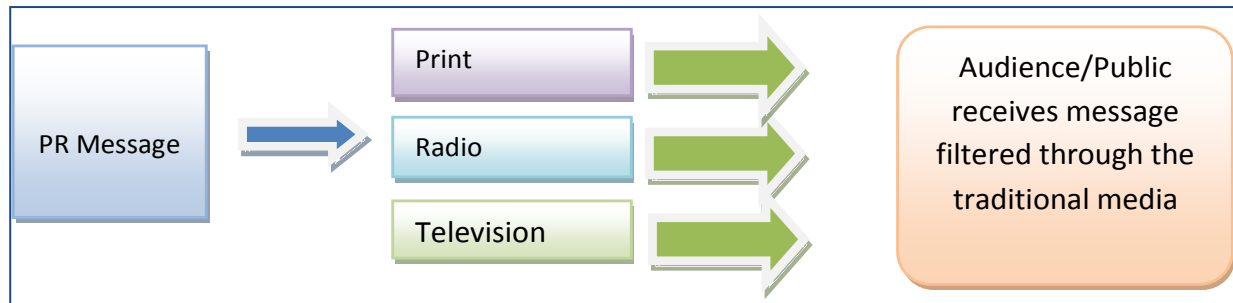


Figure 1: PR communication with the use of traditional media from 1900 – 1990

Before 1990 PR had limited control over the message delivery to the intended audience and relied primarily on traditional media (Sochowski, 2011). While the partnership with traditional media presented the opportunity to reach a generic audience, the message did not always get out as intended to the recipients (Berkowitz, 2007). In order to reach their audience, PR specialists were tasked to creatively look for angles that might assist in obtaining the interest of the media channels for the dissemination of the message to the audience (Parcell et al., 2011). While the relationship and dependency on traditional media communicators was strategic for message dissemination, it presented the risk that the message might not get disseminated, that the information did not always get out to the intended audience in a timely fashion, or that the message was edited by the filters of the traditional media delivering an edited or different message than the one intended (Berkowitz, 2007). Prior to 1990, the message was delivered to the media communicators in the form of a hard copy press release. A few years later, the introduction of the Internet facilitated electronic communication to members of the press (Vorvoreanu, 2008).

### **2.1.1 The Internet**

The introduction and mass public access to the Internet along with the groundbreaking communication technologies presented a new shift in the way PR specialists practiced at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Potter, Sallot, Cameron & Stamps, 2001). By the mid 1990's, PR authorities predicted that in the following years the field as a whole would begin to spend more time online with clients, the media, and the customers. In 1997, Johnson conducted one of the first academic researches regarding the use of the Internet as an instrument for PR work. In the study Johnson (1997) found that while many PR professionals used the Internet to communicate with some publics, the majority of PR specialists did not consider the Internet as a channel for strategic communication (Pasadeos et al., 2010).

By 1999 PRSA conducted a survey which reported that 99% of its membership used the Internet; that same year 48% of magazine and newspaper editors polled indicated that they obtained ideas for news pitch online (Potter et al., 2001). On a wide spectrum, organizations applied the usage of the websites as a tool to inform clients and audience of urgent issues, provide updates on information allowing the communication to be ready at the demand of the customer with global outreach capacities (Iodhia, 2012). Through the introduction of websites, e-mail, instant messaging, and blogs, PR specialists shifted from a one-way communication model to a two-way communication format. This allowed for the development and maintenance of dialogue, as well as aiding the mutual understanding of the needs between the audience and client (Wilcox, 2006). The innovative communication technologies allowed an evolution in the press release, facilitating delivery directly to the audiences through blogs, e-mail communication, and company websites (Parcell et al., 2011). The option to host tools like menus, portals, hyperlinks and an overall customization of information, granted the web-visitor enhanced information (Iodhia, 2012). As the profession developed primarily due to updates in communication technologies, PR specialists became charged with the management of the flow of information, and the needed to improve the impressions of the client to its market (Berkowitz, 2007). The website, as an

outlet of information, became a source for companies to extend their reach to clients and respond to urgent issues, provide updates and news at the convenience of the consumer on a real-time basis (Iodhia, 2012).

By the late 1990's, computer mediated communications advanced from a tool to a PR tactic (Parcell et al., 2011). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, PR had developed satellite media tours, video-releases, live streaming, and press material delivered on thumb-drives as well as shared the information through blogs. These changes provided immediate flow of information directly to the audience without an intermediary (Sochowski, 2011). By 2001, the availability to incorporate pictures, video, sound, and other information in electronic formats through the Internet became a new feature that enhanced PR (Pasadeos, Berger & Renfro, 2010). The advancements in communication technologies shifted the role of PR far beyond just media relations and disseminating information, into creating an understanding between the client and its public (Berkowitz, 2007). According to Wilcox (2006), at the start of the second millennium there were more than 200 universities in the United States that had major sequences in PR and instructed students in the modern requirements of the field:

Relate communication objectives to organizational objectives; 2) emphasize mutual understanding and conflict resolution; 3) formulate consistent messages on a global basis using multiple channels, 4) train management to implement global strategies on a local basis; 5) coordinate the communication activities of local managers and consultants around the world; 6) maintain and enhance organizational reputation on a variety of levels; 7) track, analyze trends, issues that can affect the organization. (Wilcox, 2006, p. 72)

At the beginning of the new millennium the Internet had become an important tool for communication and developed the concept of social circles that allowed easy communication between its users (Lica & Tuta, 2011). The innovations in the communication technologies became strategic in the most recent evolution of PR into a field that relies heavily on dialogue (Berkowitz, 2007).

Advances in communication technologies required for more PR specialists to use blogs, web sites, e-journals and social media as tools of outreach and information (Kent, 2010). According to a survey conducted in 2008 to 423 marketing, PR, small business and non-profit professionals, the goals for the press release had shifted. The study indicated that the online press release permitted for more visibility and credibility, granting the online press release the potential to achieve more than the traditional hard copy press releases that were delivered to the media gatekeepers (Vorvoreanu, 2008).

With the development of new communication technologies and the rise of social media, the press release evolved into not just a printed press release, but a communication tool used to reach directly diverse targets through new online communication channels (Vorvoreanu, 2008). While new technologies have become essential component in the PR tool box, older and traditional means of the professional practice continue to complement PR and have not been abandoned for their effectiveness (Seletzky & Lehman-Wilzig, 2010). Today PR is shifting its angle to cater to diverse culture, at the same time delivering effective communication through the use of information technologies (Pasadeos et al., 2010).

For the enablement of two way communication, the Internet demonstrated the potential to support clear and open message interaction between PR professionals and their audience through a cost effective platform and release information without the need of paying for placement (Potter et al., 2001). The use of new online communication outlets to reach targeted audiences are not only used by PR specialists, but also serve as a gateway for small business owners and non-profit organizations to promote their services when otherwise they not have the budget to reach their audience through traditional media (Vorvoreanu, 2008). New developments in PR due to the evolving technologies allowed the potential in making an impact on business goals and objectives demanding evaluation on the impact of performance (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011; Thurlow, 2009). In comparison to the previous measurements, such as clippings or media coverage, the Internet allows PR specialists to measure their

efforts by means of hits and visits to the company's website, number of e-mail messages or inquiries received online, and sales of product or services based on online/web offers (Wilcox, 2006).

### **2.1.2 Social Networking**

From 2000 to 2010, the role of communication technologies developed tremendously and acquired favor among PR specialists, who advocate for the use of electronic media as a tool (Taylor & Kent, 2010). Although various PR organizations are claiming that the new frontier in PR practice is social networking, Kent (2010) argues that social networking is a concept that has existed for decades. The notion of the social of network sites was first introduced towards the end of the 1970's as CompuServe offered a novel avenue for users to communicate through online discussions; in 1990 America Online opened the availability for their clients to e-mail as well as chat, and in 1997 sixdegrees.com introduced the notion of profiles, search for friends and organize contacts into groups (Brass, 2011).

The concept of the social network among professionals is based on the idea that a person must have a large network of business and professional relations to best accomplish a task (Granovetter, 1973). In the case of PR, the role of social networking is essential to help deliver messages and establish effective campaigns (Kent, 2010). In 2011 the BRASS Programing Planning Committee highlighted that social networking sites permit users to create a public profile, establish a list of for the purpose of sharing the connection and the connections of other users (Brass, 2011). Kent (2010) explains that any interactive communication media that allows for two way interaction and feedback is a form of social media, but establishes a differentiation from the modern social networks or social media, which is based on real-time interaction. Wright and Hinson (2010) add that social media provide a platform for anyone to publish digital creative content; give and access real-time feedback via online discussions and allows for the editing of the original message.

In the current state of interactive communication, the target audience for a communicator can fulfill multiple roles such as becoming a mouth piece for the company and influencing his/her network to favor the client (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). The communicator wants to inspire the behavior of the recipient based on the reaction to the message and has the ability to employ the target audience as an extension of their communication efforts (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). A survey conducted in 2008 to 283 PR professionals from different parts of the United States expressed that PR specialists were interested in using social media as a PR tool. The survey listed e-mail, blogs and intranet as items of social media (Eyrich, Padman & Sweetser, 2008). Out of the individuals polled, the premier tools for social media used in PR were e-mail (96.1%), intranet (68.2%) and video conferencing (39.1%). By 2010, social media included interactive social networking sites like MySpace, Facebook, and LinkedIn, as well as blogs, podcasts, message boards, online videos, picture albums, and mobile telephone alerts. Social media are based on consumer-generated content (Taylor & Kent, 2010). According to a recent poll of 1,060 PRSA members and PRSA prospects, social media engagement among PR specialists is seen as a potential and important tool with the promise to grow the proficiency of PR in the next five years (Darnowski & Wright, 2010). In comparison to traditional media, social media has the potential to provide an opportunity to offer a two-way messaging platform yielding a clear and open communication with the audience and the message sender (Wright & Hinson, 2009).

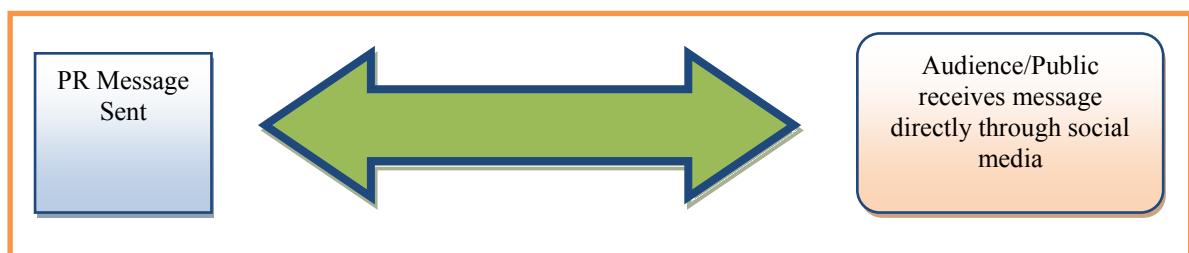


Figure 2: PR communication with the use of social media

Social networks are based by nature of the relation that can vary greatly from friendship or kin as in the case of Facebook, to professionals using LinkedIn and common interest topics followed on Twitter (Lica & Tuta, 2011). Based on the relationship that is developed through the social media, the

target audience becomes active and responds to the information sent by turning into an advocacy group that can extend messages significantly beyond traditional communications that relies on an intermediary to deliver a desired message (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). Analysts state that the constant evolution of social media has the potential to become tools of communication that will increase the return of investment of customers, will create awareness, brand recognition and cost effective marketing efforts (Brass, 2011).

- **74 seconds** – a new blog is created in the United States (Secko, 2005)
- **600 Million** – global Facebook users (Macnamara & Kenning, 2011)
- **2 Million** – videos are viewed a day on YouTube (Macnamara & Kenning, 2011)
- **200 Million** – global subscribers to twitter (O'Dell, 2010)
- **2 Billion** – tweets or micro blogs are sent out every day (O'Dell, 2010).

Figure 3: Social media by the numbers (*numbers of social media*)

The fast advancements of technological opportunities in communication have led to an evaluation among PR specialists to evaluate the new outlets, but have also created critique for being hesitant to reach out to social networking, blogging and other forms of social media (Eyrich et al., 2008). Though PR associations are expressing a need to adapt social media as a potential tool for outreach based on the large amount of users, there is little academic evidence that exists in establishing social media as an effective media tool with the potential of building relationships between the organization and the public (Taylor & Kent, 2010). Since the development of computer technologies, and most recently social media have the potential to become a useful tools for PR specialists, this study aims to measure how the PR communication process has been directly influenced by the use of social media. Evaluation of that influence will be measured through the theoretical lens of Media Richness Theory (MRT).

## **2.2 Media Richness Theory**

The fast paced innovations in communication technologies and the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, have modified the nature of human communication between individuals (Kupritz & Cowell, 2011). The evolution created by new technologies during the past ten years have allowed for new forms of interactions to establish between an organization and the people that are interested in it or dependent on it (Turner, Grube, Tinsley, Lee & O’Pell, 2006). With the demands to use time most efficiently and to communicate in a clear manner, communicators have analyzed the best way to deliver a message in order to motivate an action based on the message sent (Kupritz & Cowell, 2011). One of the leading theories used in the study and analysis of media selection in communications is Media Richness Theory (MRT) (Sheer & Chen, 2004). MTR is based on the supposition that organizations are social systems that must process information, but have obstacles created by uncertainty and equivocality (Daft & Lengel, 1986). As such, MRT analyses the richness of information with the goal of reducing these obstacles (Daft & Lengel, 1986).

The theory defines “equivocality” and “uncertainty” as the reasons behind the lack of effectiveness in an organization caused by faulty communication (Daft & Lengel, 1986). In MRT uncertainty is defined as the lack of information, (Tushman & Nadler, 1978) and equivocality is confusion, wrongful interpretation, and lack of understanding (Daft & Macintosh 1981). Based on MRT, the richness of a medium is grounded on the availability for: (1) instant feedback, (2) use of multiple cues such as body language and tone of voice, (3) use of natural language and (4) personal focus on the medium. Looking for instant feedback, use of multiple cues, natural language and personal focus, allows for a medium’s ability to transmit a rich message (Trevino, et al., 1990). By using rich media, the communication process is facilitated by reducing uncertainty and equivocality (Daft & Lengel, 1986). According to the theory presented by Daft and Lengel (1986) the three sources behind uncertainty and equivocality rely on “technology, interdepartmental relations and the environment” (Daft & Lengel,

1986, p. 563). The theory states that technology is the knowledge, tools and techniques used to transform a message. In technology, task variety is defined as the frequency of new and unforeseen events that take place during the conversion process, while task analyzability is based on the way the message recipient responds to the issue at hand (Perrow, 1967).

The model presented in MRT proposes that to avoid the uncertainty and equivocality based on task variety and task analyzability, personal contact and discussion must take place by the message sender and the message recipient (Daft & Lengel, 1986). The leading contests in interdepartmental relations are based on differentiation created by wide disparities between the message sender and the recipient making a common ground slim (Daft & Lengel, 1984). Based on MRT, creating coordination and interdependence between the message sender and recipient will reduce the equivocality. The equivocality and uncertainty in the environment are based on the fact that an organization is an open system (Thompson, 1967). In order to prevent challenges in communication, the organization must have a method to follow and help interpret external events and messages (Daft & Lengel, 1986).

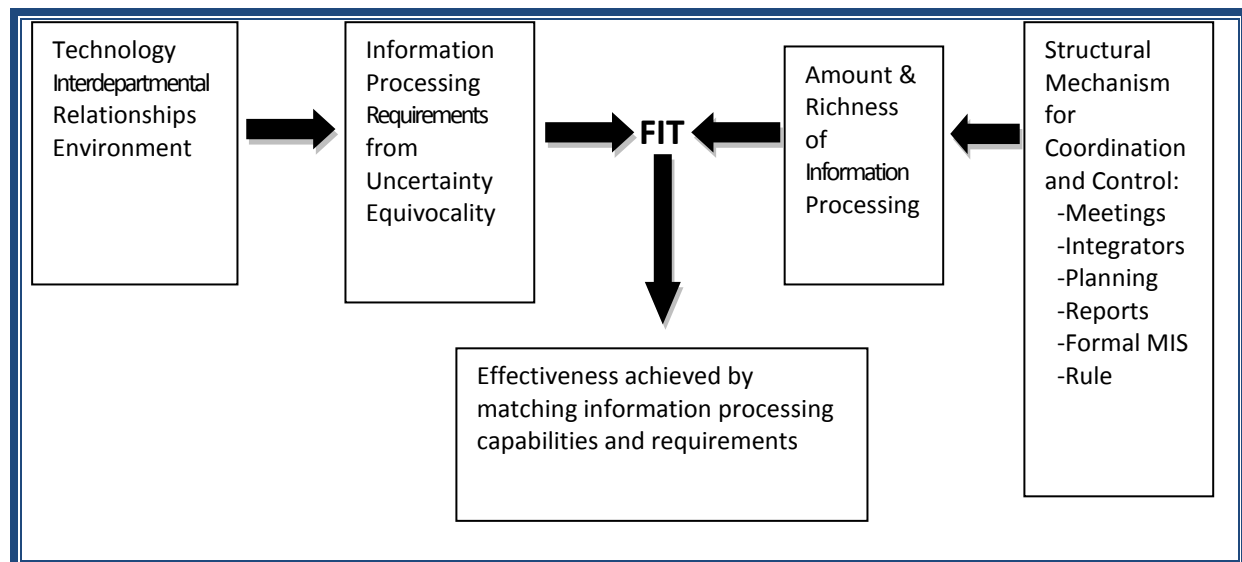


Figure 4: Original model of MRT by Daft & Lengel (1986)

According to Daft and Lengel (1986), rich media is personal and the theory highlights face-to-face interaction as the richest medium of communication because it provides immediate feedback from both the speakers, allowing the instant verification of the information shared. In addition, the personal communication provides a large variety of communication cues such as body language, vocal tone and the message delivery which are presented in a natural language (Daft & Lengel, 1986). It is the ability for interaction and personal communication that features the potential to develop a personal focus, closer relationship between the message sender and recipient (Sheer & Chen, 2004). Relationships in MRT have been found as a key in the selection of a media choice, the content and context based for the message delivery (Trevino et al., 1990). The message that is sent from sender to recipient is assumed to have a purpose, which is inspired by relational and self-presentation goals (Sheer & Chen, 2004). The message involves negotiation and feedback as organizational members work together to create symbols that convey relevant information. The social order based on negotiation is created through communication among organizational members (Russ, Daft & Lengel, 1990). Part of this component also motivates the message sender to keep a good relationship with the audience and the need to present a positive image in front of the message recipient as to secure their cooperation and obtain their respect (Sheer & Chen, 2004). In order to establish the communication and negotiations, the social environment might exhibit some pressure to use a given communication outlet in certain ways where an individual must also have the ability access and receive the message (Turner et al., 2006). The message delivery and the media that is used to communicate the message will be successful if the receiver understands the message that the sender intended to send, and that both the sender and receiver agree that the receiver has understood the message (Dennis & Valacich, 1999).

Due to the exterior influences of uncertainty and equivocality, computer mediated communication was labeled by MRT as a lean medium, and according to the theory is best to use when the message has the least probability of equivocality (Trevino et al., 1990). Toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century, information technology increased sophistication and became an essential component of the communication between individuals, primarily through the frequent use of e-mail and teleconferences (Russ et al., 1990). According to Russ et al. (1990) while new information technologies gained ground and added diversity in the way people communicated, the usage of computer mediated communication was not labeled to be a rich medium, recommending communication technologies to be used in occasions where equivocality was least and lean media efficiently transmit unequivocal messages to avoid future confusion or lack of understanding. The research conducted by Trevino et al. (1990) found that in the low-equivocality situations the individual selection and the style of the message sender may influence the media choice in low-equivocality communication. The study also found that the media selection can influence the message and communication that the sender rely on for decision making; this can also impact the outcome of the decision by the message recipient (Trevino et al., 1990).

Trevino et al. (1990) state that the use of computer mediated communication is better applied in low-equivocality community, where they do not recommend it as a rich medium. Compared with traditional face-to-face communication, electronic and computer mediated communication is viewed as poor for disseminating a rich message (Anandarajan, Zaman, Dai & Arinze, 2010). Yet with the advancement of new communication technologies and the growth of media choices, computer mediated communication is allowing immediate electronic feedback (Johnson & Keil, 2002). New research is suggesting that communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires the ability to use computer mediated communications to send and receive messages (Jablin & Sias, 2001). The innovations in communication technologies have provided changes in the richness of the medium, hosted by the Internet (Axley, 2000).

By the start of the new millennium, the improvement and effective use of electronic communication to increase face-to-face message delivery, along with the innovative management of knowledge, may actually be the key for success in the communication process and challenge the notion

that computer mediated communication is lean. The cues offered in a social context are essential to receive and understand the message, even in computer mediated communication (Kupritz & Cowell, 2011). The choice of media to disseminate a message is selected on the perception that these choices will result in effective communication (Turner et al., 2006). As such, some media are considered better able to transmit information depending upon where the information is used and in what situation (Dennis & Valacich, 1999).

According to Kupritz and Cowell (2011), there is a need to evaluate the communication channels in order to study the value that they add to the message delivery. Recent studies have proved that contrary to predictions based on MRT, computer mediated communication is found to be a rich medium to send and receive information (Anandarajan et al., 2010; Johnson & Keil, 2002; Sheer & Chen, 2004; Turner et al., 2006). Based on the findings by Sheer and Chen (2004), the original MRT did not predict the media choice for the communication involving heavy social influences of Internet. According to their study, relational goals appeared to be almost as important as task efficiency in media choice for positive messages delivered through written communication with e-mail being selected as the preferred communication outlet for message delivery (Sheer & Chen, 2004).

Johnson and Keil, (2002) showed in their study that contrary to the predictions of MRT, e-mail and v-mail were found to be rich mediums to send and receive information. Their argument indicated that e-mail provides faster communication with greater efficiency compared to face-to-face communication or regular mail services (Johnson & Keil, 2002). The study demonstrated that e-mail allowed individuals to exchange ideas spontaneously and casually discuss problems, share skills, coordinate activities, and stay in touch with one another without depending on the person's physical location (Johnson & Keil, 2002). Turner et al. (2006) studied the usage of social media focusing on instant messaging (IM) and e-mail as mediums of communication in an organizational setting. In doing

so, they suggested that the use of media may be an important factor to consider in addition to the actual message content sent when assessing performance.

### **2.3 Critique of Media Richness Theory**

The recent innovations in communication technology, driven by the Internet, encourage businesses and professional organizations to implement new communication technologies in a mandatory manner so that the companies can respond quickly to the demands and requests of the customers (Kock, 2004; Palvia, Pinjani, Cannoy & Jacks, 2011). The core of the fast changes in computer mediated communication is the demand to attain knowledge and information (Singh, 2011). Most importantly, the easy access to inexpensive computer devices with Internet service facilitates communication technologies to broaden beyond the work place and be attained by almost anyone (Kock, 2004; Singh, 2011). In 2005 the Kaiser Family Foundation polled Americans ages 8 - 18, and found that the younger generations of Americans were more dependent on computer mediated media, suggesting that there might be a future reliance and access to online media (Turner & Reinsch, 2007).

The choice of communication media used by an organization is dependent on the technology that will best meet the needs of the customer and workforce, as well as to satisfy the expectations brought forth by the globalization of information, customers and labor (Axley, 2000). The recent transformations in communication technologies became essential in the way people interact and communicate with each other (Kock, 2004). Moreover, they have led to a large amount of social dealings, both in and outside the workplace (Quan-Haase & Wellman, 2004). The ability to communicate anywhere is also increasing new venues and opportunities for interaction and globalization (Turner & Reinsch, 2007). The demands to have the right information readily available to communicate with clients and the need to spend less money and time in the process create a competitive environment, which increases economic pressures that require organizations to search for the richest medium to disseminate the message in the most efficient manner (Palvia et al., 2011).

While MRT is the principal theory used in the measurement of media richness and the effectiveness in message delivery, the theory is critiqued to have gaps by not including new communication technologies (Dennis & Valacich, 1999; Koo, Wati & Jung, 2011). While the facility to communicate with the use of computer mediated technology is quickly becoming more popular, the traditional interpretation of MRT states that computer mediated communication is least likely to facilitate a common understanding (Anandarajan et al., 2010). According to MRT, face-to-face communication is selected as the richest media and the communication source of preference; by comparison to other media that lack components that face-to-face communication has to enhance collaborative tasks (Kock, 2004). Due to its development before the evolution of the modern communication technologies (Timmerman, 2002), the MRT interpretation is restricted to traditional media and matured electronic media such as fax, telephone, e-mail, voice mail, and video conferencing (Koo et al., 2011).

Opponents of MRT present a challenge of the theory by arguing that computer mediated communication is multilayered and as such, communication richness or leanness derives from the interactions between people and organizations while selecting a form to communicate (Kupritz & Cowell, 2011). Hence, there is a new need to match the tasks sought by the media, even though it might be a leaner form of communication, primarily focusing on the role of social communications (Koo et al., 2011). Among the challenges presented, MRT is critiqued for focusing too narrowly on the objective attributes of the medium and the assumption that communicators choose a media outlet only on a rational basis (Timmerman 2002; Turner & Reinsch, 2007). Today's computer technologies challenge MRT as they vary in speed of offering feedback, and have a large language variety (Anandarajan et al., 2010). Recent research has refuted the traditional MRT by showcasing situations where information exchange is the desired outcome. In these cases, leaner media types can be more efficient than richer media types (Timmerman, 2002).

In the theory originally proposed by Daft and Lengel (1986), the media use is a rational function that helps determine which medium has the level of richness necessary to accommodate a message's complexity (Daft & Lengel, 1987). According to Timmerman (2002), MRT often fails to measure the media use as an activity that takes place as part of a larger, continuous process where the new forms of communication technology require MRT to go beyond the measurement of media complexity and measure media as a simple product of the objective features of media and message (Timmerman, 2002). In order to improve the understanding of this theory, a more comprehensive explanation focusing on the conditions under which the media is used and the role of the media in work practices and social relations is needed (Koo et al., 2011).

Based on the research conducted by Turner and Reinsch, (2007) society as a whole is one where people tend to engage in more than one activity at the same time. As such, new communication technologies have facilitated for individuals to multi-task by participating in multiple conversations, continuously sending and receiving messages on what is considered a lean media (Turner et al., 2006). Social media and new communication technologies have the potential to provide users the benefit of affordability, flexibility, controllability and the option to obtain and communicate information via the Internet (Singh, 2011).

Studies indicate that new computer mediated technologies can help create ideas, facilitate organizational communication and aid in task understanding (Koo et al., 2011). According to Singh (2011), the benefit of disseminating information to respondents by using communication technologies such as social media includes equal accessibility to information, flexibility to access the information one or more times, and the ability for users to monitor how fast or slow to obtain information. Recent research has focused on social media and its ability to foster social relationships that are created from community integration as various forms of social relationships are likely to emerge from the ongoing communication exchanges (Boateng, 2011).

Based on previous research, MRT can be used to measure the richness of the new Internet based communication technologies according to their potential to improve the performance of the task, which ultimately has the purpose of delivering a message effectively to the target audience (Koo et al., 2011; Palvia et al., 2011). In the traditional form of MRT, e-mail is considered a lean medium that does not readily support the level of communication richness associated with the richest form of communication, yet studies demonstrated that e-mail was perceived as a richer medium for communication within various company communication structures (Johnson & Keil, 2002; Lee, 1994).

A study conducted by Timmerman (2002) found that users perceived e-mail as a rich medium because of the availability for personal communication exchange. In their study, Turner and Reinsch (2007) challenged face-to-face communication by stating that a person communicating with another is expected to respond as soon as the other person is done, not permitting the respondent to prepare a reply. Unlike other forms of traditional communication, social media has the potential to allow messages to be edited prior to the response and just as the face-to-face communication, it is based on relationships (Lica & Tuta, 2011).

## **2.4 Major Concepts in Media Richness Theory**

A key component of MRT that is used by recent scholars to validate the theory and stating its relevancy is the desire for the use of an effective medium as a form of communication with the goal of reducing uncertainty and equivocality. To resolve the equivocality posed by MRT, individuals must select a medium to engage in dialog that exposes these various interpretations so that a solution can be attained (Turner & Reinsch, 2007). In 1998 Denis and Kinney demonstrated that MRT is a theory that can be used only as a media theory and not a media choice theory. Hence, MRT has the capacity to measure the situation requirements in terms of types of message, the purpose of the message, the participants of the communication process and the limitation on how a potential user may use the particular medium for effective communication (Koo et al., 2011). Earlier research conducted by Lee

(1994) highlighted the importance of understanding how communication richness takes place in computer mediated communication and apply the same criteria found in MRT to the communication perspective, so that the richness or leanness in communication can apply individually to the communication medium being measured.

Providing the starting point for the investigation in this article are the reports of empirical findings that electronic mail, despite what information richness theory would lead us to expect, can indeed readily support rich communication. Of course, knowing *that* e-mail can readily support rich communication is not the same as knowing *how* the richness occurs. (Lee, 1994, p. 144)

Additional perspectives have suggested that media choice is not always a rational choice, but that media selection is based on the circumstances that establish the need for the communication to take place by using a particular outlet (Turner & Reinsch, 2007). MRT is a relevant theory as various studies support its general use, but highlight that media richness has a social and contextual influence, which is important in the media selection process (Timmerman, 2002).

Dennis and Valacich (1999) indicated that according to MRT, rich media is that which has a greater language variety and can convey natural language rather than just numerical information. In their research, they proposed to apply the characteristics of MRT to computer mediated communication, modifying the original fixed variables so that the rich message can also measure new communications technologies based on the ability to provide multiplicity of cues in which the information could be communicated, the personalization of the message and rapid feedback (Dennis & Valacich, 1999). The foundation of MRT explains that some media, more than others, facilitate the message delivery and understanding depending where the information is used to help reduce uncertainty or equivocality (Dennis & Valacich, 1999). As such, for communication and message delivery to be successful, the

receiver must be able to understand the message that is being sent by the sender; allowing for both the sender and the receiver to agree that the receiver has understood the message.

The key components in testing the MRT are based on the ability to obtain instant feedback from the audience, the effectiveness of the communication source to disseminate the communication through different forms of personal expressions, the use of natural language and the personal focus on the medium (Lang & Sie, 2010). The bottom line recommended by previous scholars when using MRT is not to choose which media is better than other, but instead to effectively use the media by knowing that each media type has its different challenges and opportunities. In addition, depending on the situation certain media outlets are more favorable to use than others in the dissemination process, but the media must be tested by using the main components highlighted in MRT (Tuner et al., 2006). The growth and continuous development of communication technologies have expanded the media richness features, where a web-hosted communication allows easy and immediate access to information on a real-time basis (Iodhia, 2012).

This study aims to use MRT to measure the richness of social media as the tool selected by PR to disseminate the message to their audience. The study will be looking for instant feedback, use of multiple cues, natural language and personal focus to measure the richness of social media and evaluate the effectiveness of the message sent by PR professionals. Therefore, research conducted in the study will review if MRT has the potential to help measure the correlation and perception of PR's usage of social media as an outlet to communicate to audiences. Based on the premises of Daft and Lengel (1986) that organizations are social systems that must process information, the research will study the communication among PR professionals using social media as part of the social system to communicate with its audience. The research will aim to measure the richness of social media as a tool for PR while using as variables the four characteristics described in MRT geared to reduce the obstacles created by

uncertainty and equivocality: (1) instant feedback, (2) use of multiple cues such as body language and tone of voice, (3) use of natural language and (4) personal focus on the medium.

## **2.5 Media Richness Research Variables**

The four variables are important in the study as taken together they will assist in measuring the richness of social media as an outlet for communication and will help in adding a value on the communication source for the professional use of PR specialists to communicate with the target audience.

*Variable 1 - Instant Feedback:* According to Daft and Lengel (1984) the richness of the information disseminated has the ability to change understanding of the messages on a given period of time. The faster the feedback, the faster the information will be verified (Daft & Lengel, 1986). As such the immediacy of feedback plays an important role in maintaining the message clear and understandable, hence MRT states that the faster the feedback the richer the medium is (Daft & Lengel, 1986). The variable of instant feedback will help measure the immediacy of communication among the PR professional and the target audience. The study will aim to attain information on how fast and immediate the process is so that the research can define the richness of social media as a tool for PR professionals.

*Variable 2 - Use of Multiple Clues:* MRT explains that the use of multiple cues includes the use of tone of voice, body language, symbols and gestures among others, with the goal of assisting in making the message clear and understandable (Daft & Lengel, 1986). According to Daft and Lengel (1986), multiple cues allow different items of reference and assist in the defining the message content with less uncertainty. MRT states that the fewer amount of cues will restrict the immediacy of feedback, which results in the lack of result of issues that can lead to mistakes or confusion (Daft & Lengel, 1986).

*Variable 3 - Personal Communication:* In their theory, Daft and Lengel (1986) highlight that rich media is personal and sociable. Originally MRT states that personal communication allows contact, preferably face to face with the recipient and sender. Hence, the personal communication is direct, straight forward and not formal.

Rich media are personal and involve face to face contact between managers, while media of lower richness are impersonal and rely on rules, forms, procedures or data bases. (Daft & Lengel, 1986, p.560)

Personal communication plays an important role in the richness of the media. Since the message requires negotiation and feedback as members work together to create symbols that convey relevant information, it is important to maintain a good relationship with audience (Trevino et al., 1990). The personal focus in the communication allows an attachment to the message leading to a responsibility and involvement to the task communicated (Sheer & Chen, 2004). This third variable will aid in understanding the relationship between the PR professional and its target audience, which can aid in developing better understanding of the audience, culminating in the audience serving as an extension of the PR efforts in the message delivery.

*Variable 4 - Use of Natural Language:* The use of natural language according to MRT is the simple and straightforward language allowing for the common interpretation between message sender and recipient. The information exchange, with the use of natural language, allows for understanding immediately without the need of additional interpretations that can lead to confusion. MRT explains that natural language is easy to use, facilitating the understanding of the message with little effort (Timmerman, 2002). This last variable plays an important role in establishing the measurement of how simple or complex the communication process between the PR specialists and the audience is.

The four variables (1) immediacy of feedback, (2) use of multiple cues in the language, (3) use of natural language and (4) personal focus on the medium are essential in reducing uncertainty and

equivocality, which can play a role in not understanding the message completely and have the potential to create obstacles in the ultimate message delivery. If these four variables are not in place, the richness of the message will not be measured accurately.

## **2.6 Perceptions of the Richness of Social Media as a PR Tool**

Based on the presented research, MRT has been able to effectively measure the perceived richness of social media when studied in a contextual environment (Dennis & Valacich, 1999; Koo et al., 2011; Kupritz & Cowell, 2011; Lee, 1994; Palvia et al., 2011; Singh, 2011; Timmerman, 2002; Turner & Reinsch, 2007). As indicated, social media has the potential obtain feedback, ease effectiveness of the communication source by different forms of personal expressions and the use of natural language. By following the recommendation of past authors, this study aims to use MRT as the theoretical frame work to measure the perceived richness of social media as a means to communicate to PR audiences.

As indicated by Turner and Reinsch (2007), computer mediated communication, primarily social media, has the potential to allow multiple communication interaction. Additional advancements in communication technologies have promoted a shift from one-way mass marketing communication to interactive marketing communication (Cui, Wang & Xu, 2010). The Internet now offers a large array of communication options such as e-mail, instant messaging, social network sites, and blogs, among many others (Pollet, Roberts & Dunbar, 2011). According to Briones, Kuch, Liu and Jin (2011) the nature of social media has the potential to become a helpful tool for PR specialist as they allow organizations to create dialogues with audience, such as Facebook where more than 700,000 business have active pages. Computer mediated communication present an opportunity for PR specialists who seek to use the interactive communication as a form to reach diverse audiences, to actively participate in the communication process with their network, and disseminate information about the brand and company

(Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). Social media today offers various communication opportunities that exceed the platform offered by traditional media (Iodhia, 2012).

The previous arguments are reasons behind the resounding message requesting that PR specialist shift efforts and maximize social media exposure (Taylor & Kent, 2010; Wright & Hinson, 2009). As such, a new trend is that PR specialists now manage social media and communication technology efforts (Smith, 2010). Previous studies indicated that PR specialist who wrote or kept blogs perceived that they had more prestige and expertise than those who did not (Poter, Sweetser, Chung & Kim, 2007). Research conducted by Sweetser and Kelleher (2011), examined Twitter as a leading social media activity in the PR tool kit. The study found that those who use Twitter personally found the value of social media (Sweetser & Kelleher, 2011). Among the premier users of social media are nonprofit organizations which benefit from social media in order to establish communication with audiences and develop relationships. These goals allow the education to the public about programs and services, and help establish a communication with their target audience (Briones et al., 2011). PR professionals are urged to adopt social media for the potential of establishing relationship-building capabilities (Briones et al., 2011; Poter et al., 2007; Wright & Hinson, 2009). Contrary to beliefs of social media, a MRT study conducted by Pollet et al. (2011) showcased results that the use of social network sites appear to have a limited impact on either the size and closeness of the official social networks or that their use was associated with a greater number of offline relationships or the emotional closeness of these relationships, information that contrasts to what is being stated by PR authorities.

Despite the growing popularity of social media and the urge for PR practitioners to embrace its practice, there are only a handful of studies exploring the usage and measurement of social media as a PR instrument (Briones et al., 2011). Furthermore, there is little or no academic evidence that uses a theoretical framework that evaluates features of social media as a potential tool to establish positive communication between the PR specialists and their audience (Taylor & Kent, 2010; Kent, 2010).

Without firmly established preferences, and professional experience regarding what works and does not work, young professionals, because of a lack of experience, are likely to believe that the articles they read in professional publications contain facts. Indeed, as noted above, few articles even question the value of social media. (Taylor & Kent, 2010, p. 212)

In order to meet the need for an academic and theoretical evaluation of social media as a potential tool for PR and as recommended by Taylor and Kent (2010), this study will aim to use MRT to measure the richness of social media as a tool that has the potential to help PR professionals do a better job. The study aims to analyze the function of social media as a tool for PR focusing on the components used to reduce uncertainty and equivocality. Based on research conducted by Sweetser and Kelleher (2011) investigation is needed based on the perception of PR leaders as a way to help make sense of changes in the general practice of public relations that result from the rise of social media.

The message delivery based on the MRT is conceptually the ability to enhance communication when the needs are matched by the medium used to convey the information. As such, message delivery is based on ability to effectively send a message by using a communication outlet to a target audience by reducing equivocality and uncertainty. Hence this study targets to research the perception of PR professionals regarding the richness of social media as a tool for PR using the foundation established by MRT: (1) instant feedback, (2) use of multiple cues such as body language and tone of voice, (3) use of natural language and (4) personal focus on the medium (Daft & Lengel, 1986).

Prior to analyzing the richness of social media as a tool for PR, the study will aim to understand what social media outlets are being used for PR and what communication purposes are being filled by the use of the outlet.

**RQ 1: How will different types of PR industries perceive the usage of social media?**

Based on the tools presented by MRT used to measure the richness of the medium to deliver the message and the notion that social media has the potential to provide instant feedback (Turner et al., 2006).

**RQ 2: How will different types of industries influence the perception of PR professionals towards social media in immediate feedback?**

MRT highlights the need to use natural language inspired by the spontaneous use of gestures and expressions leading to the understanding of the message. In their study, Koo et al. (2011) mentioned that social media has the potential to help create ideas, easing the message delivery and the task understanding. Social media allows its users to use a variety of cues, such as capitalized letter, emoticons to be used spontaneously depending on the conversation (Lica & Tuta, 2011).

**RQ 3: How will different types of industries influence the perception PR professionals towards social media in uses of various cues and natural language?**

MRT indicates that the richness of the medium is also determined by the potential for the message to be delivered in a personal manner (Boateng, 2011). Research conducted by Lica and Tuta (2011) showcases that social media is based on the relationships that allow a personal and natural form of communication.

**RQ 4: How will different types of industries influence the perception of PR professionals towards social media in personal approach?**

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODS & PROCEDURES**

The goal of this research is to establish an academic investigation of the richness of social media as a tool for the practice of PR. In order to accomplish this goal, the study is based on the core variables of MRT which are used to reduce uncertainty and equivocality: (1) instant feedback, (2) use of multiple cues such as body language and tone of voice, (3) use of natural language and (4) personal focus on the medium (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Through a conceptual lens, a survey was developed with the purpose of facilitating the attainment of information gathered that would lead to understand if social media is a rich communication rich tool that can benefit the PR practice.

### **3.1 Methodology**

The study was designed with the quantitative research approach in order to obtain objective information regarding a large group of PR professionals. While qualitative research provides profound insight to the topic being investigated, it is based on small samples that might not help understand the perceptions of a larger group (Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Richmond & McCroskey, 2008). The format of the quantitative research aided the investigator to conduct the research without bias by not permitting the input of her personal feelings or pre-conceived suppositions about the study. Furthermore, the search for the research questions proposed by this study required the input of a large pool of national PR professionals from diverse backgrounds. In order to reach various PR professionals at different geographic locations within the continental United States, the research used an online survey.

According to Frippiat and Marquis (2010), the survey is source used to obtain valuable information regarding certain populations. Through the use of the survey, the study aimed to gather data from PR professionals. The ideal survey participant was a PR specialist that utilized various communication outlets to send a message and sought to expand the outreach of the message through the use of social media. The survey aspired to provide a quick and non-intrusive platform as a method of

observation for the participating professionals. The usage of the survey as a research tool allowed for the gathering of information in a scientific and quantitative manner (Wrench et al., 2008). Most importantly the data gathered was intended to provide information about the PR practitioners, their relation, perception, attitude, and behavior in using social media as means of communication.

### **3.2 Research Population**

The research is intended to study the perceptions of PR specialists in the United States. As such, the investigator sought to obtain the participation of PR practitioners from various backgrounds and industries to help study the different perceptions of PR professionals about the richness of social media. In order to conduct their work efficiently, PR professionals are expected to use various tools and fill multiple roles in order to fully represent their clients and reach the intended audience (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). Hence, it is expected that the professional demands of PR specialists reduce the time available for the completion of the survey, requiring the survey questions to be delivered in a convenient, time efficient, prompt and concise manner (Kruckeberg, 1995). In an effort to seek a positive response rate from the highly occupied specialist, the survey that was used for this research was a self-administration survey.

### **3.3 Sample Frame**

The targets for this investigation were PR specialists that were gathered through the use of the search engine Google. The contact names and e-mail addresses for the pre-test and survey participants were gathered by searching under the categories of PR specialists, PR director, Public Information Officer and Public Affairs Officer. The investigator gathered for the initial pre-test sample 140 professionals. The survey respondents were obtained, through search engine by looking under, “contact: PR specialist,” “contact: public information officer,” and “contact: public affairs officer” (Appendix C). Upon selecting the website, the name of the contact, contact information and e-mail was provided free of

cost (Appendix C-1). During the search, the investigator encountered some companies that had more extensive PR departments than others. Some companies had two, three or even up to 30 PR professionals performing different tasks for the organization. In the case of those websites that had more than one PR professionals listed, the investigator randomly chose the second person listed. As such, only one contact was selected at random per organization web-page found with the help of the search engine (Appendix C-2). With the use of Google, the researcher had nationwide access to PR professionals free of cost and obtained their contact information in order to individually send a personalized invitation to participate in the online survey.

The online search was helpful as it also led to various free online PR directories. The first free public listing available was the O'Dwyerspr.com ([www.odwyerpr.com](http://www.odwyerpr.com)). This list allowed the researcher access 258 PR professionals. The investigator also obtained contacts from the Hispanic Public Relations society (9), the National Black Public Relations Society (19), the Southern Public Relations Federation (39) and the Central PR group (10) and different city chapters of PRSA in cities like Houston, Dallas, Albuquerque and New Orleans (127). In addition, some of the survey participants shared the questionnaire with other colleagues and membership organizations creating a snow balling sample (Appendix H-1). In total, the investigator obtained 462 names, e-mails and contact information to conduct the research. In addition the investigator also reached out to LinkedIn PR groups such as the Communications Professionals, Corporate Communication, Digital Marketing, Innovative Marketing, PR, Sales, Word-of-Mouth & Buzz Innovators-Innovation Network by Geral Haman, Marketing & Communication Network, Media Professionals Worldwide, PRwise, Public Relations Society of America, PR in History and Social Media Marketing. The request was placed on discussion boards in the different pages of the professional groups (Appendix C-3). The outreach through LinkedIn and the search of PR professionals allowed the research a very wide spectrum of PR professionals from different areas of expertise, years of professional experience from all over the United States.

### 3.4 Pre-Test

From December 1, 2011 to February 12, 2012 the researcher conducted a pre-test study with the purpose of calculating errors and accessing feedback from the sample in order to improve the study. The target population for the pre-test were PR professionals that were selected through the search of “contact: public relations specialist” and PR professionals of El Paso, Texas and New Orleans, Louisiana areas. In total, a database of 140 professionals was compiled. The selected representatives accounted for various PR industries and had different levels of experience. A personalized e-mail was sent to each participant. By February 12, 2012, 70 professionals had participated in the pilot test, indicating that it was probable to obtain a 50% response rate.

The initial pre-test indicated that the majority (59.2%) of participants were females, predominantly white (52.9%) from the agency and non-profit professional background. The average age of the participant was in the range of 25-34 with an average of 10 years of experience. The standard participant dedicated 20 percent of their eight hour work day to social media as part of their PR efforts. In the pre-test, the respondents indicated that Facebook (56.1%), Twitter (24.2%) and LinkedIn (13.6%) were the social media outlets mostly used. While the pre-test provided the investigation an idea of what the larger sample might look like, the critique received from participants was very valuable in modifying the instrument and creating an accurate survey. Among the recommendations made were the grammatical structure, addition of features to the instrument and proper function of the link.

*Pre-Test Comment:* “The link apparently doesn't work,” A.W.

*Pre-Test Comment:* “Your survey would have more credibility if you corrected all the typos. Following are two examples...,” J.M.

*Pre-Test Comment:* “I like the questions, though you should always allow for additional comments. Use of social media is still very limited in terms of feedback ... better in many cases

than traditional communication mediums, but still not as effective as face-to-face communication,” R.K.

*Pre-Test Comment:* “I did a quick review of your survey. Are you asking about me personally.... Or how we advise our clients? It’s a little confusing,” L.C.

*Pre-Test Comment:* “Remember traditional media are gatekeepers and this is not existent in social media. So you might want to ask a question somewhere to determine if the PR person thinks social media has more of an impact or less than a story in traditional media,” A.B.

An additional recommendation was the inclusion of a question that helped identify what type of PR function was mainly used through social media, such as customer feedback, finding new trends and product recall. Among the feedback provided by pre-test participants, the following comment was essential in alerting the investigator regarding potential problems with the measurement of the richness of social media as a PR tool.

*Pre-Test Comment:* “I completed your survey. The questions were very awkward and not really relevant to day-to-day PR industry. How are you measuring richness of social media? Good luck in your study, but not sure how accurate the results will be.” D.C.

In obtaining revisions and feedback from the chair and the department member of the thesis committee, the researcher learned that the scales used for the original instrument lack in measuring the richness of social media as a communication outlet. The original survey had been adapted from the Wright and Hinson (2009) survey to fit the four variables of MRT. While the Wright and Hinson survey is able to poll the usage and perceptions of PR professionals regarding their use of social media, it does not measure the richness of social media as it is intended in this study. The final design of the survey took into consideration the comments of pre-test participants and also incorporated a foundation of MRT to develop the final survey.

### 3.5 Variables & Instrument

As indicated in the literature review, the designed instrument was intended to measure the richness of social media using four variables: 1) instant feedback, 2) the use of multiple clues, 3) personal communication and 4) the use of natural language.

Variable	Definition
Instant Feedback	The immediacy as to how the feedback is received from the individual target audience
Use of Multiple Cues	The availability of the media to support the use of multiple written, oral and visual characters, symbols and cues in the language along with body language and tone of voice used in the message with the goal of supporting the message better and making the definition clear.
Use of Natural Language	The use of natural, straightforward communication that can be easily understood without reference or additional interpretation.
Personal Focus	The opportunity for the communication to develop interaction and a social relationship between the message sender and the recipient.

Figure 5: Variables and definitions of media richness theory

Faced with the urgent need to use scales that would measure the richness of computer mediated communication, such as social media, the research used the scales previously designed by Koo, et al. (2011) to analyze the media richness of new communication technology. (Appendix G)

The research conducted by Koo et al. (2011) allowed the study of seven elements of perceived richness in social media. The scales focus on the measurement of *task analyzability*, *task urgency*, *task complexity*, *social influence*, *social affinity*, *the usage of media* and *task performance*. As discussed previously, MRT intends to reduce equivocality and uncertainty by measuring the four variables of immediate feedback, use of multiple cues, use of natural language and personal focus (Daft & Lengel, 1986). By applying the four variables, a task or message can be analyzed. Under the notion of *task analyzability*, Koo et al. (2011) were able to measure how clear and understandable the communication guidelines are in computer mediated communication. According to the research, if the message and the

outcomes are well understood, problems related to equivocality and uncertainty are least likely to happen (Koo et al., 2011).

Under the research, *task urgency* or immediate feedback is used to measure how well a medium can provide rapid response and reaction in the communication process (Koo et al., 2011). The speed and effectiveness of the communication, according to Koo et al. (2011) is important as it allows participants to complete a task effectively in a shorter time frame. *Task complexity* can be associated with ambiguity, uncertainty, where the uses of multiple cues are needed to solve the task at hand with the least amount of confusion. Koo et al. (2011) discussed that appropriate use of social communication technologies can help reduce the task complexity by the use of personal communication and use of multiple cues.

Koo et al. (2011) Variables	Definition	Analysis of MRT Core Variables (Daft & Lengel, 1986)
Task Analyzability	The measurement of how clear and understandable the communication guidelines is studied	Instant Feedback, Use of Various Cues, Use of Natural Language, Personal Emphasis
Task Urgency	The measurement of how well a medium can provide rapid response and reaction in the communication process	Instant Feedback
Task Complexity	The use of multiple cues that are needed to help send a clear message with the least amount of confusion	Use of Various Cues, Use of Natural Language
Social Influence	The attitude and influence provided in the message dissemination by people of influence	Personal Emphasis
Social Affinity	Moderates the relationship between the task characteristics	Personal Emphasis
Task Performance	The relation between which communication channel usage matches task the characteristic	Instant Feedback, Use of Various Cues, Use of Natural Language, Personal Emphasis

Figure 6: The interaction between the Koo et al. (2011) scales and the variables of MRT as proposed by Daft & Lengel (1986).

The research also studied *social influence* as the attitude and influence provided in the message dissemination by colleagues, in other words the use of personal communication. The personal communication and attitude shared by individual group members may be influenced by the role models and opinion leaders encountered within the group. Koo et al. (2011) describe *social affinity* as the

understanding that personal relationships may have different communication modes including time, director volume and content. This is also likely to moderate the extent to which a group's general level of acceptance would influence an individual group member's level.

As such, *social affinity* moderates the relationship between the task characteristics (Koo et al., 2011). The final measurement used by Koo et al. (2011) is *task performance*. The research indicates that the ultimate performance effectiveness is related to the extent to which communication channel usage matches task the characteristics. According to Koo et al. (2011), the usage of computer technologies have resulted in improvements in work quantity and quality. The innovative technologies have increased the awareness and acquisition of relevant information as well as the capacity to rapidly distribute it. The productivity computer technologies have the likelihood to increase the quality of work; more connectedness will assist work and make it easier to reach people and access information. Hence, Koo et al. (2011) states that the usage of one or more social communication technologies has a positive direct impact on task performance.

In keeping with the scales presented by Koo et al. (2011) to measure the media richness of computer mediated communication questions in the research were based on MRT research. Those questions used on the survey were revised from the Koo et al. (2011) to measure the richness of social media as perceived from public relations professionals. A complete list of the Koo et al. (2011) scales can be viewed in Appendix G. The following questions were selected for the purpose of the current research:

*Adapted Question:* Gender: Male\_\_\_, Female\_\_\_, Other

*Original Question:* "Gender: Male, Female" (Koo et al.2011, p. 457)

*Adapted Question:* What industry do you work in? – Agency\_\_\_\_, Corporation\_\_\_\_, Education\_\_\_\_, Freelance/Independent\_\_\_\_, Government\_\_\_\_, Non-Profit\_\_\_\_, Small to Mid-size Business\_\_\_\_\_.

*Original Question:* “Type of company: financial, manufacturing, Whole sale and retail, logistics, electronic and electrical, logistics, IT related company, building and construction, hospital service, government and nonprofit organizations” (Koo et al.2011, p. 457)

*Adapted Question:* I use social media actively

*Original Question:* “My colleagues in the office use the current media actively” (Koo et al.2011, p. 457)

*Adapted Question:* My audience uses social media actively

*Original Question:* “My colleagues in the office use the current media actively” (Koo et al.2011, p. 457)

*Adapted Question:* Social media is a useful tool to communicate with clients and audiences

*Original Question:* “My seniors in the office confirm that the current media is a useful tool to communicate” (Koo et al.2011, p. 457)

*Adapted Question:* My peers use social media as a tool to communicate with clients and audiences

*Original Question:* “My seniors in the office use the current media actively” (Koo et al.2011, p. 457)

*Adapted Question:* I know my audience well

*Original Question:* “I know my communication partner well” (Koo et al.2011, p. 457)

*Adapted Question:* I can communicate with my audience regarding issues affecting my client

*Original Question:* “I can communicate with my colleagues comfortably” (Koo et al.2011, p. 457)

*Adapted Question:* I can communicate with my audience comfortably

*Original Questions:* “I can communicate with my colleagues about public as well as private issues,” “I can communicate with my colleagues in familiar situations” (Koo et al.2011, p. 457)

*Adapted Question:* Social media allows me to disseminate my message with the ease of use and standard formats

*Original Question:* “I usually do my work on the basis of standardized formats” (Koo et al.2011, p. 457)

*Adapted Question:* Social media allows me to send the message in a clearly known manner

*Original Question:* “The way to do the major types of work I normally encounter is clearly known” (Koo et al.2011, p. 457)

*Adapted Question:* Sending the message through social media is done simply

*Original Question:* “I simply achieved my task performance” (Koo et al.2011, p. 457)

*Adapted Question:* Social media allows me to communicate with my audience by using established procedures and practices

*Original Question:* “To do my work, I actually rely on established procedures and practices” (Koo et al.2011, p. 457)

*Adapted Questions:* Social media allows me to provide my audience fast feedback, Message delivery on social media should be carried out concurrently

*Original Question:* “My task should be carried out concurrently” (Koo et al.2011, p. 457)

*Adapted Question:* Message delivery on social media should be carried out on a real-time basis

*Original Question:* “My task should be carried out on a real-time basis” (Koo et al.2011, p. 457)

*Adapted Question:* Message delivery on social media should be carried out concurrently

*Original Question:* “My task should be carried out concurrently” (Koo et al.2011, p. 457)

*Adapted Question:* Social media allows me to use various forms of cues like written, visual images, audio and symbols to deliver clear and understandable message.

*Original Question:* “My task requires a variety of information” (Koo et al.2011, p. 457)

*Adapted Question:* Message delivery through social media requires the use of various forms of message delivery (i.e. sound, written, video, image).

*Original Questions:* “My task can be done on the basis of breadth and depth of knowledge” and “My task requires various kinds of experience” (Koo et al.2011, p. 457-458)

*Adapted Question:* I use social media for the following functions: News Releases, Customer Feedback, Find New Trends, Product Recall, Arrange Promotion Schedule (please rank in order of preference from top to bottom)

*Original Questions:* “I usually use social computer technologies to discuss an idea, procedure, and policy,” “I usually use social computer technologies to arrange schedule and share information,” and “I usually use social computer technologies to find some difficult solution and to solve sensitive issues in the organization” (Koo et al.2011, p. 458)

*Adapted Question:* The message sent via social media is more likely to influence the behavior and attitude of my audience

*Original Question:* “I can increase my task performance over social computer technologies efficiently” (Koo et al.2011, p. 458)

*Adapted Question:* Social media delivers the intended message to my target audience more effectively than traditional media

*Original Question:* “I can increase my task performance over social computer technologies efficiently” (Koo et al.2011, p. 458)

*Adapted Question:* The feedback received by my audience enhances the way I practice PR

*Original Question:* “Overall, I can increase my task productivity over social computer technologies” (Koo et al.2011, p. 458)

The investigation considers that the use of the 2009 Wright and Hinson scale was able to provide value to the study. Considering that the research done in this study is based on social media and public relations, seven questions in the research were based on that PR study. The seven questions used on the survey were revised from the Wright and Hinson (2009) survey and selected to measure the perception of PR professionals and their use of social media.

*Adapted Question:* In an eight hour workday, what percentage of your day do you rely on social media as a PR tool?

*Original Question:* “On average, approximately what percentage of your time working in PR and communication is spent with blogs and other social media?” (Wright & Hinson, 2009, p. 19)

*Adapted Question:* Social media pressures organizations to respond quickly to customers’ comments and criticism.

*Original Question:* “Since social media (including blogs) have made communications more instantaneous, they have forced organizations to respond more quickly to criticism.” (Wright & Hinson, 2009, p 11)

*Adapted Question:* The message sent via social media is more likely to influence the behavior and attitude of my audience.

*Original Question:* “The impact information disseminated about their organizations (or their clients) through blogs and other social media has on the formation, change and reinforcement of attitudes, opinions and behavior.” (Wright & Hinson, 2009, p 17)

*Adapted Question:* My audience expects to receive honest and truthful information through social media

*Original Question:* “Do you agree or disagree that people who receive information from blogs and other social media expect these outlets to be honest, tell the truth and advocate transparent and ethical culture?.” (Wright & Hinson, 2009, p 15)

*Adapted Question:* Social media delivers the intended message to my target audience more effectively than traditional media

*Original Question:* “Do you agree or disagree that social media (including blogs) are more accurate than traditional mainstream media?” (Wright & Hinson, 2009, p 13)

*Adapted Question:* Social media is changing how I respond to information from my audience.

*Original Question:* “Please tell us whether you agree or disagree that the emergence of social media (including blogs) has changed the way your organization (or your client organizations) communicate, handle external communication, handle internal communication” (Wright & Hinson, 2009, p 9)

*Adapted Question:* The feedback received by my audience enhances the way I practice PR.

*Original Question:* “Social media have enhanced the practice of PR.” (Wright & Hinson, 2009, p 11)

*Adapted Question:* Social media allows me to provide my audience fast feedback

*Original Question:* “Social media (including blogs) have made communications more instantaneous” (Wright & Hinson, 2009, p 11)

*Adapted Question:* I think social media are in conflict with traditional main stream media (newspapers, magazines, radio and television)

*Original Question:* “Do you agree or disagree that social media (including blogs) an mainstream traditional media (newspapers, magazines, radio and television are in conflict with each other?” (Wright & Hinson, 2009, p 10)

*Adapted Question:* I think social media compliments traditional main stream media (newspapers, magazines, radio and television)

*Original Question:* “Do you agree or disagree that social media (including blogs) an mainstream traditional media (newspapers, magazines, radio and television complement each other?”

(Wright & Hinson, 2009, p 10)

As such, message delivery was based on the ability to effectively send and receive a message through the communication outlet aimed to reach the intended target audience. The instrument was designed to help find a response to the research questions for the study. The use of the Likert-like scale for the majority of the 23 closed-ended questions allowed for a quick and practical response from the poll takers. Various PR specialists were surveyed to measure the effectiveness of social media as a communication outlet to deliver the message to their target audience. The accuracy of the message delivery was measured based on the instant feedback received from the individual target audience, the directness of communication, the personal level of message interchange and the type of language that is used to communicate with the audience.

The survey was designed with six sections in that were aimed to obtain the perception of PR specialists regarding the richness of social media as perceived by different types of PR industries. Three of these sections are focused on the variables of MRT (feedback, language, personal communication and message delivery). The other two sections were used to obtain demographic information and the social media usage by PR professionals for their professional efforts. The first part of the survey, the demographic information, inquired participants about their gender, ethnic background, the type of industry and years of experience in the field of PR. Following, the survey participants were asked regarding their preference and usage of social media outlets and approximately how much time they use social media for their professional purposes (Appendix D, Appendix F).

### **3.6 Instrument Validity & Reliability**

Instrument validity was supported through a pre-test of the survey and a review of the questionnaire by the chair and members of the dissertation committee. The 50% response rate gave the

indication that the online survey was appropriate for the purposes of the study. The recommendations and edits received from the pre-test, as well as the advice and edits obtained from the committee members were used to revise the final instrument. In order to avoid confusion, the questions were designed in the first person, to help the participant provide their personal perception. The survey concluded with a comment box that allowed participants to freely share their opinions. The option to have a comment box also allowed the participant flexibility to share their knowledge and perceptions regarding social media; which in turn allowed the investigator to receive better information for the research.

After collecting the information from the participants, the researcher analyzed the insights of the population by using SPSS. The reliability of the sample was measured through the use of the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability test. Besides being the most popular dependability test, the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability test is also considered the most consistent test in the social sciences and communication (Wrench et al., 2008). The applied test indicates that the closer the variance value is to one, the stronger the proof that the scale is a good reliable scale and the value closer to 0 indicates that the values are not positively reliable (Norusis, 2008). In other words, the closer the Cronbach's Alpha results are to one (1) the more reliable the scales are.

With this in mind, the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability test was run on the variables used to measure media richness adapted from the Koo et al. (2011) scales: task analyzability, task urgency, task complexity, social influence, social affinity and task performance. The four measured variables used to describe social influence obtained a reliability measurement of .766, the three variables of social affinity were measured at .783, task performance was measured at .704 and task analyzability was measured by four variables scoring .816 in the reliability test. The two lowest scoring variables, yet at an acceptable level, were task urgency with a score of .657 and task complexity measured at .671. (Table 1) The

initial reliability test demonstrated that the MRT variables were fairly good and dependable for the purpose of this investigation.

Table 1  
*Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test of the MRT Variables*

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	
Number of Items		
<b><u>Task Analyzability</u></b>	<b>.816</b>	<b>4</b>
<b><u>Task Urgency</u></b>	.657	4
<b><u>Task Complexity</u></b>	.671	2
<b><u>Social Influence</u></b>	.766	4
<b><u>Social Affinity</u></b>	.783	3
<b><u>Task Performance</u></b>	.704	5

### 3.7 Questionnaire Implementation

As soon as the instrument had been revised and approved, the investigator began to compile a list of 462 PR professionals nationwide and identify with several professional groups through the social media site of LinkedIn. The master list included the name, company, e-mail address and state of the PR professional. Upon receiving the approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Texas at El Paso (Appendix A), the investigator sent an individual e-mail invite to each of the 462 members of the sample, extending a personal request to participate in the investigation. Each e-mail included a brief letter informing the possible participant about the purpose and goals of the investigation (Appendix B). The e-letter also provided a hyper-link to take the online survey, as well as the investigator's contact information for additional comments or information regarding the academic study (Appendix D).

Each e-mail was marked with a read receipt to inform the investigator who had read the e-mail and who deleted it without reading it. By sending the surveys via e-mail, the investigator was allowed to store in folders the sent e-mails (462), the e-mails that were no longer valid (41), e-mails that were deleted without being read (15), e-mails that were read (116), and conversations with participants

(64). It is anticipated that the majority of the e-mails not accounted for, were mixed with many other e-mails, landed in junk boxes or were regarded as spam (Appendix H).

“Sorry your email got buried but I just did the questionnaire – hope it is not too late,”  
survey participant 162.

In order to encourage PR professionals to participate in the survey, the questionnaire was sent again to the individuals who deleted the e-mail and those who did not account for the sent receipts. A total of 241 surveys were re-sent from April 9, 2012 to April 17, 2012. Over all, the investigator received a total 214 survey responses, out of which 162 were fully completed.

### **3.8 Data Collection & Data Cleaning**

From March 28, 2012 through April 27, 2012, the researcher collected the responses from a total of 214 individuals through Websurveycreator.com. Out of the 214 respondents only 162 completed the survey in its entirety, while only 52 people started the survey but did not complete it. For the purpose of the study, the investigation was based only on the responses attained from the fully completed surveys. The finished surveys were filed electronically and were also printed. The printed files were stored in a secure file at the researcher's home, while the electronic files were safe and could only be accessed with a security code.

At the completion of the data collection, the researcher reviewed each completed survey and paired the response with a code that facilitated the input of the data into the research program SPSS. Each question and answer choice was coded accordingly in the research codebook (Appendix E). The information compiled was matched and checked with the codes of the codebook. Once the compiled information had been coded, the researcher and a research volunteer entered the data into excel and SPSS.

## CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS & RESULTS

Once the survey had closed, the investigator was tasked with analyzing the results. Based on the information gathered, the anticipated unfolding of the investigation would lead to findings indicating the media richness of social media as a communication tool for PR professionals.

### 4.1 Demographic Data of the Sample

The investigation obtained the participation of 241 respondents. Out of this group only 162 fully completed the questionnaire. For the purpose of reporting better information, the investigation only used the fully completed 162 surveys. Out of the partakers, 44 (27%) were male, 117 (72%) were female and one person (.6%) preferred to be identified as other.

The ethnicity of the national participants was comprised of: 115 (71%) white, followed by 28 (17%) Latino/Hispanic/Chicano, seven (4%) African American, six (4%) Asian and six (4%) preferred to be acknowledged as other. The industries represented by the population included 47 (29%) in agency, 29 (18%) non-profit, 29 (18%) education, 18 (11%) corporate, 18 (11%) freelance/independent, 12 (7%) government and nine (6%) small to mid-size business.

Among the participants the largest percentage in age distribution was between the ages of 22 to 34. Of the respondents 59 (36%) were between the ages of 22 to 34, 45 (28%) were between the ages of 35 to 44, 42 (26%) were between the ages of 45 to 54, 15 (9%) were between the ages of 55 to 64 and only one participant (.6%) identified in the age range of 65 and over.

The participants were asked to provide how many years of experience in the field PR they had worked. The average of the 158 participants was 14 years of experience. The majority of participants, 38 (30.3%) had one to five years in the professional field, 35 (28.5%) shared six to ten years of experience, 23(14.2%) had 11 to 15 years of PR know-how, 20 (12.5%) express that they had 16 to 20 years of PR knowledge, 19(11.8%) had practiced PR between 21 to 25 years, 15(9.3%) had 26 to 30

years professional PR involvement, six (3.6%) individuals contributed with 31 to 35 years of experience and two (1.2%) participants had 40 years of proficiency in PR.

Table 2  
*Demographic Data of the Sample*

Demographic Characteristics	N	%	Frequency
<b><u>Gender</u></b>	162		
Male		27.2	44
Female		72.2	117
Other		.6	1
<b><u>Age</u></b>	162		
21 & Under		0	0
22 to 34		36.4	59
35 to 44		27.8	45
45 to 54		25.9	42
55 to 64		9.3	15
65 & Over		.6	1
<b><u>Ethnicity</u></b>	162		
African American		4.3	7
Asian		3.7	6
Latino/Hispanic/Chicano		17.3	28
White		71.0	115
Other		3.7	6
<b><u>Industry</u></b>	162		
Agency		29.0	47
Corporation		11.1	18
Education		17.9	29
Freelance/Independent		11.1	18
Government		7.4	12
Non-Profit		17.9	29
Small to Mid-Size Business		5.6	9
<b><u>Work Experience</u></b>	158		
1-5		30.3	38
6-10		28.5	35
11-15		14.2	23
16-20		12.5	20
21-25		11.8	19
26-30		9.3	15
31-35		3.6	6
36-40		1.2	2

## 4.2 Usage of Social Media

In order to address the first research question, the investigator evaluated the social media preferences and usage of the participants.

### **RQ 1: How will different types of PR industries perceive the usage of social media?**

Out of the participating pool of PR professionals 137 provided their percentage of social media use during their eight hour work day. Responses varied from 1% to 100%, but the average professional use of social media was 15% ( $M = 15.41$ ,  $SD = 21.380$ ) of the work day. The large majority of respondent, 94 (58%), preferred to use Facebook as the leading social media communication outlet for PR. Twitter was indicated as the second preferred social media outlet among 39(24%) of PR professionals followed by LinkedIn, which is used by 18(11%) of PR specialists. The least used social media outlets among PR professionals included Google + (2%), and You Tube (1%). Out of the participants who share their preference for social media outlet, three (2%) indicated other and listed blogs and e-mail as their preference to communicate with their target audience.

Table 3 demonstrates that the measurement of the PR perception and their usage of media is significant as  $p = .014$  when compared to the standard measurement of  $p < .05$ .

Table 3  
*ANOVA Table – Preferred Social Media Outlet by Industry*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Between Groups (combined)</b>	63.009	6	10.501	2.75	.014*
<b>Within Groups</b>	584.091	153	3.818		
<b>Total</b>	647.100	159			

\*  $p < .05$     \*\*  $p < .001$

The research indicated that the preferred social media outlet among the different PR industries and PR professionals selected was Facebook, with the education ( $M = 1.90$ ), non-profit ( $M = 2.07$ ) and government ( $M = 1.73$ ) sectors showcasing a higher dependency on the social media outlet to

communicate. The results also indicated that the PR that industries with larger diverse use of social media outlets were the agency ( $M = 3.06$ ), corporation ( $M = 3.44$ ) and small to mid-size business ( $M = 3.56$ ). While other industries focused their social media outreach by using Facebook as the leading social media communication outlet, the agency, corporation and small to mid-size business industries manage a proportionate usage of various social media outlets primarily reaching out to their audience through the use of Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn (Table 3).

In order to maintain the confidence of their target audience and effectively brand their client, PR professionals are required monitor, communicate and take a proactive approach, as it can prevent a crisis from taking place (Wallace & Chandler, 2012). Among the functions performed by PR professionals are communicating by sending out news releases, obtaining customer feedback, finding new trends and opportunities, announcing product recalls and finding avenues to arrange promotions. Based on the recommendations from the pre-test, the investigator considered that it was of importance to evaluate the different professional functions of PR and the outreach of these functions through social media. Hence, the participants were ask to rate according to their preference the functions of using social media: (1) send out news releases, (2) obtain customer feedback, (3) find new trends, (4) request and announce product recalls and (5) arrange promotion. The scale was coded from (1) as first preference to (5) as the fifth preference. The coding of the scale indicated that the lower scores represented higher preferences of use of the function through social media.

The PR professional pool indicated that their use of social media was mainly for the dissemination of information through news releases. News release was selected as the first preference by 136 (84%) participating PR professionals. The second most popular function by PR professionals was customer feedback 132 (82%). The role of finding new trends through social media was highlighted third leading preference 130 (80%). The usage of social media to outreach for the

arrangement of promotion schedules 97 (60%) was the fourth most used function and product recall 77 (48%) was highlighted as the least preferred PR function to be outreach through social media (Table 4).

Table 4  
*Generic PR Functions Used in Social Media*

Characteristics	N	%	Frequency
<b><u>News Release</u></b>	162	84.0	136
<b><u>Customer Feedback</u></b>	162	81.5	132
<b><u>Find New Trends</u></b>	162	80.2	130
<b><u>Arrange Promotion</u></b>	162	47.5	77
<b><u>Product Recall</u></b>	162	59.9	97

Out of 136 professionals that provided their input in this question, the large majority communicating news release was the leading function of their social media activities. Out of the samples that choose news release as their preferred social media function, the agency ( $M = 1.95$ ), education ( $M = 1.71$ ), government ( $M = 1.64$ ) and non-profit sectors ( $M = 1.60$ ) prefer to use the social media platform to communicate news releases with their audience more than the other professionals sectors.

The following most popular responses for usage of social media among PR professionals included finding new trends ( $M = 2.35$ ) and obtaining customer feedback ( $M = 2.28$ ). Customer feedback was the preferred task among government ( $M = 2.00$ ), education ( $M = 2.11$ ) and small to mid-size businesses ( $M = 2.17$ ). An interesting tendency was observed in the category of finding new trends, where it was the preferred task for the use of social media among the corporate ( $M = 2.08$ ) sector and the second most used task among the agency ( $M = 2.09$ ) industry.

Over all, the professional function of the different PR industries, primarily the agency, education, freelance/independent, non-profit and small business, preferred to use social media for the dissemination of news release, while the corporate sector indicated that the main use of social media was to find new trends (Table 5).

Table 5  
*PR Functions Used in Social Media by Industry*

Characteristics	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b><u>News Release</u></b>	136		
Agency		<b>1.95</b>	.975
Corporation		2.47	1.302
Education		<b>1.17</b>	1.083
Freelance/Independent		<b>2.00</b>	2.18
Government		<b>1.64</b>	1.206
Non-Profit		<b>1.60</b>	.645
Small to Mid-Size Business		<b>2.00</b>	1.155
<b><u>Customer Feedback</u></b>	132		
Agency		2.36	1.013
Corporation		2.71	1.326
Education		<b>2.11</b>	.934
Freelance/Independent		2.18	1.079
Government		<b>2.00</b>	1.323
Non-Profit		2.27	1.151
Small to Mid-Size Business		<b>2.17</b>	1.169
<b><u>Find New Trends</u></b>	130		
Agency		<b>2.093</b>	1.0423
Corporation		<b>2.077</b>	1.1875
Education		2.458	1.1025
Freelance/Independent		2.800	1.1353
Government		3.000	.7559
Non-Profit		2.500	.8341
Small to Mid-Size Business		2.250	1.0351
<b><u>Arrange Promotion</u></b>	97		
Agency		3.45	1.028
Corporation		2.27	1.272
Education		3.17	1.043
Freelance/Independent		2.67	1.658
Government		3.17	1.169
Non-Profit		2.83	1.465
Small to Mid-Size Business		2.50	1.732
<b><u>Product Recall</u></b>	77		
Agency		4.63	1.013
Corporation		4.20	1.135
Education		4.64	.674
Freelance/Independent		4.33	1.211
Government		4.50	.548
Non-Profit		4.73	.594
Small to Mid-Size Business		4.60	.894

### 4.3 Measurement of the MRT Variables

The study was designed to measure only the richness of social media as a communication tool used by PR specialists. The core of MRT is able to identify if a rich medium of communication includes immediate feedback, natural language, a personal approach, and various cues in the communication process. In order to understand the richness of MRT in the function of social media as a tool for PR, the core variables of MRT were assessed by using the adapted scales derived from the Koo et al. (2011) survey. The questions that addressed the MRT variables were measured on a seven point Likert-like scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree). (Appendix D & F) While the investigator did run tests to analyze the different components of MRT focusing on the gender, ethnicity, age, years of experience and industry, she considered that the focus of the study was to analyze the perception of PR professionals and highlighted the perception obtained on an industry level. Hence she focused on the comparison of PR professionals by industry to analyze the difference components of MRT.

### 4.4 Immediate Feedback

In order to measure immediate feedback the Koo et al. (2011) scales utilize the variable of task urgency. The variable is defined as the measurement of how well a communication medium can provide a rapid response and reaction in the communication process. Four items were measured to determine if social media matches the requirement of immediate feedback as indicated in MRT and help answer the second research question:

**RQ 2: How will different types of industries influence the perception of public relations professionals towards social media in immediate feedback?**

Survey participants were asked to rate from (1) strongly agree to (7) strongly disagree the following four statements: (1) social media allows me to provide my audience fast feedback, (2) the delivery of multiple messages on social media can be carried out concurrently, (3) message delivery on

social media can be carried out on a real-time basis and (4) social media helps to pressure organizations to respond quickly to customers' comments and criticism.

A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was calculated to study the variable of task urgency and obtain the perception of PR participants as part of their professional industries. In order to obtain information regarding the industry perception of PR professionals and the ability provide their audience fast feedback through social media it was noted that  $F = 2.566$ ,  $p = .021$ ,  $\eta^2 = .090$ . In the analysis of the PR professional perception that social media allows the delivery of multiple messages to be carried out concurrently, the  $F$  value was calculated at  $F = 3.409$  while the significance level attained by the study was  $p = .003$  obtaining a calculation of the effect size for the test of  $\eta^2 = .117$ .

Table 6  
*Variables of Task Urgency – Item Statistics*

Characteristics	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b><u>Social media allows me to provide my audience fast feedback</u></b>	162	1.79	.815
Agency		1.83	.732
Corporation		1.89	.583
Education		1.79	.726
Freelance/Independent		1.78	1.003
Government		1.83	.835
Non-Profit		1.41	.501
Small to Mid-Size Business		2.56	1.590
<b><u>The delivery of multiple messages on social media can be carried out concurrently</u></b>	162	2.22	1.124
Agency		2.19	.876
Corporation		2.69	1.455
Education		2.21	1.082
Freelance/Independent		1.78	.943
Government		2.17	.937
Non-Profit		1.90	1.047
Small to Mid-Size Business		3.44	1.590

Only two of the four statements used to obtain the industry perception of the immediacy of feedback among PR professionals were significant: (1) social media allows me to provide my audience fast feedback  $p = .021$  and (2) the delivery of multiple messages on social media can be carried out concurrently  $p = .003$ . The statements were compared to the average standard of  $p < .05$ .

Table 7  
ANOVA Table – Task Urgency Perceived by PR Industries

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b><u>Social media allows me to provide my audience fast feedback</u></b>					
Between Groups (combined)	9.655	6	1.609	2.566	.021*
Within Groups	97.209	155	.627		
Total	106.864	161			
<b><u>The delivery of multiple messages on social media can be carried out concurrently</u></b>					
Between Groups (combined)	23.713	6	3.409	3.409	.003*
Within Groups	179.725	155	1.160		
Total	203.438	161			

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .001$

In general, PR professionals agreed that social media does comply with task urgency and meet the requirement of immediate feedback under the categories of the availability to provide their audience with immediate feedback ( $M = 1.609$ ). In addition, PR professionals somewhat agreed that the delivery of multiple messages can be carried out concurrently ( $M = 3.409$ ).

Based on the eta square ranges the investigator noted that there were differences between the PR industries and their perception of fast feedback and dissemination of a message concurrently. A Tukey HSD post hoc test was conducted to provide further insight regarding the industry differences among PR professionals and their perception of task urgency. In the category of providing audience with immediate feedback, the test highlighted that the industries with most difference in their perception are small to mid-size business ( $M = 2.56$ ) and non-profit organizations ( $M = 1.41$ ). The perception of PR professionals varied among small to mid-size businesses ( $M = 3.44$ ) and the industries of agency ( $M = 2.19$ ), education ( $M = 2.21$ ), freelance/independent ( $M = 1.78$ ) and non-profit sectors ( $M = 1.90$ ) in the category of dissemination of message concurrently.

As a result, the research indicates that there is agreement among PR professionals in their perception of social media as an effective platform to provide immediate feedback to their audience.

After calculating the one-way ANOVA and conducting a Tukey post hoc test, the researcher learned that while the majority of PR professionals are in accordance with the role of social media providing immediate feedback, the small to mid-size business sector tends to slant to an uncertain agreement on the variables used to measure immediate feedback.

#### **4.5 Usage of Various Cues & Natural Language**

In order for a message to be clear and understandable, MRT states that the media used to deliver the message must allow the usage of various cues, and the use of a natural language. Under the scales adapted from Koo et al. (2011) the MRT variables that measure the use of various cues and natural language are studied under the category of task complexity. This variable is described as the use of multiple cues that are needed to help send a clear message with the least amount of confusion. The study of task complexity was intended to help answer the third research question:

##### **RQ 3: How will different types of industries influence the perception of public relations professionals towards social media in uses of various cues and natural language?**

Task complexity was studied in the instrument with two questions: (1) social media allows me to use various forms of cues like written visual images, audio and symbols to deliver a clear and more understandable message and (2) an effective message delivery through social media requires the use of various electronic cues like sounds, written symbols, videos and images. Survey participants were asked to rate from (1) strongly agree to (7) strongly agree.

The participants perceived that social media does not allow the use of various cues and that in order for a clear message to be sent the communication outlet does not require the use of various cues as the results obtained were not significant. Therefore, PR professionals don't perceive that social media use various cues and natural language in the delivery of the message.

## 4.6 Personal Approach

According to MRT, a rich communication medium will have a personal approach, where the exchange of information can be addressed directly without communicative barriers. Based on the Koo et al. (2011) scale, the personal approach in the communication process can be measured by studying social influence and social affinity. The study of these two variables aimed to provide a notion of accuracy of final research question:

**RQ 4: How will different types of industries influence the perception of public relations professionals towards social med in personal approach?**

### 4.6.1 Social Influence

Social influence is defined as the attitude and influence provided in the message dissemination by opinion leaders, in this case PR professionals. In order to obtain the perception of PR professionals regarding social influence, survey participants were asked to respond four questions by ranking them from (1) strongly agree to (7) strongly agree: (1) I am actively engaged in social media, (2) my audience is actively engaged in social media, (3) social media is a useful tool to communicate and (4) my peers use social media to communicate.

Participants indicated that they agree that their target audience is actively engaged in social media ( $M = 2.43$ ). The eta square range of  $\eta^2 = .094$  under the category of active audience engagement in social media indicated that there are different perceptions on the discussed category among the PR

Table 8  
*Variables of Social Influence – Item Statistics*

Characteristics	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b><u>My audience is actively engaged in social media</u></b>	162	2.43	1.097
Agency		2.45	1.080
Corporation		3.17	1.505
Education		2.17	1.037
Freelance/Independent		2.28	.895
Government		2.75	.754
Non-Profit		2.07	.842
Small to Mid-Size Business		2.78	1.302

industries. The Tukey HSD post hoc test indicated that PR professionals in the fields of corporation ( $M = 3.17$ ) tend to perceive the participation of their audience as least active, while the education ( $M = 2.17$ ) non-profit ( $M = 2.07$ ) and freelance/independent ( $M = 2.28$ ) industries tend to perceive a higher engagement in social media from their audience.

Out of the statements responded by participants, only one measurement was significant. The perception that PR specialists feel that their audience is actively engaged in the use of social media was significant ( $F = 2.681, p = .017, \eta^2 = .094$ ) as compared to the standard measurement of  $p < .05$ .

Table 9  
ANOVA Table – Social Influence by PR Industries

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b><u>My audience is actively engaged</u></b>					
<b>Between Groups (combined)</b>	18.219	6	3.037	2.681	.017*
<b>Within Groups</b>	175.534	155	1.132		
<b>Total</b>	193.753	161			

\* $p < .05$     \*\* $p < .001$

As a result, PR professionals do perceive a social influence in the use of social media. The leading cause for the social influence is the involvement of the audience as it has the potential to be the reason why PR professionals use social media. The other measurements of social influence were not significant to the study.

#### 4.6.2 Social Affinity

Social affinity is described as a variable that moderates the relationship between the tasks. PR professionals participating in the survey were asked to rank social affinity by responding to three questions based on their professional perception by answering from (1) strongly agree to (7) strongly disagree. Statements asked as part of social affinity were: (1) I identify with my audience, (2) I can

communicate with my audience comfortably and (3) I can communicate with my audience regarding issues affecting my client.

The investigator learned that this is the highest approved category and perceived as the richest in the use of social media, as all of the variables are significant. Over all, survey participants agreed that social media meets the requirements of social affinity in the communication process. Participants agreed that they identify with their audience ( $M = 2.19$ ), allowing them to communicate comfortably with their target audience ( $M = 2.19$ ), and also communicate with audience issues that affect the client ( $M = 2.06$ ).

Among the industries that responded, the agency ( $M = 2.06$ ), freelance/independent ( $M = 2.00$ ) and non-profit ( $M = 2.07$ ) sectors were the PR branches that most identified with their audiences, while the government ( $M = 2.83$ ) and small to mid-size business ( $M = 2.78$ ) industries somewhat identified with their audiences. These last two sectors identified with their audiences the least. While the consensus among PR professionals is that they agree that they can communicate comfortably with their audience, the agency ( $M = 1.79$ ), freelance/independent ( $M = 1.72$ ) and non-profit ( $M = 1.76$ ) sectors were the sectors that perceived their communication with their target audience most comfortably. On the other hand, the small to mid-size business sector ( $M = 2.56$ ) perceived the communication with their audience least comfortably.

The final variable under social affinity, showed cases that while PR professionals in general perceive to agree in their ability to communicate with their audience regarding issues that affect their client, the agency ( $M = 1.89$ ), freelance/independent ( $M = 1.83$ ), and non-profit ( $M = 1.83$ ) sectors scored the highest under this category. In comparison and just as in the previous results, the small to mid-size business ( $M = 2.56$ ) industry tend to slant disagreement in this category.

The study indicated that PR professionals do agree with the notion of social affinity more than any other category. The results suggest that social media does allow for PR professionals to have a

relationship with their audience allowing for a personal communication. The agreement of PR professionals with the concept of social affinity available through social media re-enforces the notion that PR professionals do perceive social media to be a more personal form of communication than traditional media.

Table 10  
*Variables of Social Affinity– Item Statistics*

Characteristics	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b><u>I identify with my audience</u></b>	<b>162</b>	2.19	.843
Agency		2.06	.840
Corporation		2.11	.725
Education		2.17	.889
Freelance/Independent		2.00	1.085
Government		2.83	.937
Non-Profit		2.07	.530
Small to Mid-Size Business		2.78	.667
<b><u>I can communicate with my audience comfortably</u></b>	<b>162</b>	1.92	.804
Agency		1.79	.690
Corporation		2.06	.725
Education		1.97	.865
Freelance/Independent		1.72	.835
Government		2.33	1.073
Non-Profit		1.76	.511
Small to Mid-Size Business		2.56	1.130
<b><u>I can communicate with my audience regarding issues affecting my client</u></b>	<b>162</b>	2.06	.886
Agency		1.89	.787
Corporation		2.33	.970
Education		2.17	.966
Freelance/Independent		1.83	.985
Government		2.50	1.000
Non-Profit		1.83	.711
Small to Mid-Size Business		2.56	.726

The study of the one-way ANOVA indicated that social affinity was the strongest variable of MRT as perceived by PR professionals. Under the statements PR professionals identifying with their audience the study indicated that  $F = 2.422$  while the significance level attained by the study was  $p = .029$  obtaining a calculation of the effect size for the test of  $\eta^2 = .086$ . The ability of PR professionals to communicate with their audience comfortably through social media was evaluated as  $F = 2.260$ ,

$p=.040$ ,  $\eta^2 = .080$ , while the perception to communicate to with the audience regarding issues affecting the client was noted as  $F = 2.226$ ,  $p = .043$ ,  $\eta^2 = .079$ .

Table 11  
ANOVA Table – Social Affinity Perceived by PR Industries

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b><u>I identify with my audience</u></b>					
Between Groups (combined)	9.810	6	1.635	2.422	.029*
Within Groups	104.635	155	.675		
Total	114.444	161			
<b><u>I can communicate with my audience comfortably</u></b>					
Between Groups (combined)	8.364	6	1.394	2.260	.040*
Within Groups	95.593	155	.617		
Total	103.957	161			
<b><u>I can communicate with my audience regarding issues affecting my client</u></b>					
Between Groups (combined)	10.034	6	1.672	2.226	.043*
Within Groups	116.466	155	.751		
Total	126.500	161			

\*  $p < .05$     \*\*  $p < .001$

#### 4.7 Overall Media Richness

In order to measure the full effect of MRT, the Koo et al. (2011) scales utilize task analyzability and task performance for their measurement of media richness. The concept of task analyzability is used to measure how clear and understandable the communication is. Task Performance helps analyze the relationship between the communication channel, in this case social media, and it helps determine if the communication outlet will help match the characteristic for the communication purposes. Task analyzability and task performance use the core four variables of MRT (immediate feedback, personal communication, usage of various cues and use of natural language) in evaluation of the communication

medium. The study of the previous variables under task analyzability and task performance intend to contribute to the response to RQ2, RQ3 and RQ4.

#### 4.7.1 Task Analyzability

The importance of task analyzability is that the variable it is able to measure if the computer mediated communication can prevent uncertainty and equivocality. The goal is to measure if the message is well understood, as it can be the source of an accomplished task or problems due to faulty communication (Koo et al., 2011). In order to measure the perception of task analyzability of PR professionals and social media, the survey asked the participants to select from choices from (1) strongly agree to (7) strongly disagree based on their perception. Choices presented to the PR professionals were: (1) social media allows me to disseminate my message with ease of use, (2) sending the message through social media is done simply, (3) social media allows me to communicate with my audience by using established procedures, and (4) social media allows me to send the message in a clear manner.

Out of the participants, the non-profit ( $M = 1.72$ ), government ( $M = 1.75$ ) and freelance/independent ( $M = 1.83$ ) industries, were the branches of PR that agreed with the simple mode of sending a message through social media. In comparison the agency ( $M = 2.49$ ) corporation ( $M = 2.39$ ) and small to mid-size business ( $M = 2.56$ ) industries tended to somewhat agree with the notion of sending a message in a simple manner through social media.

Table 12  
*Variables of Task Analyzability – Item Statistics*

Characteristics	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b><u>Sending the message through social media is done simply</u></b>	162	2.15	1.159
Agency		2.49	1.349
Corporation		2.39	.979
Education		2.10	1.175
Freelance/Independent		1.83	.857
Government		1.75	1.288
Non-Profit		1.72	.797
Small to Mid-Size Business		2.56	1.236

From the categories used to measure task analyzability, the only significant perception attained by PR professionals was the use of social media to send the message in a simple manner. The concept of being able to send messages in a simple manner was evaluated as  $F = 2.681$ ,  $p = .046$ ,  $\eta^2 = .078$  and it obtain over all agreement from PR professionals ( $M = 2.15$ ).

Table 13

*ANOVA Table – Task Analyzability Perceived by PR Industries*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b><u>My audience is actively engaged</u></b>					
<b>Between Groups (combined)</b>	18.219	6	3.037	2.681	.017*
<b>Within Groups</b>	175.534	155	1.132		
<b>Total</b>	193.753	161			

\* $p < .05$     \*\* $p < .001$

#### 4.7.2 Task Performance

The final variable that was used to measure the perception of PR professionals regarding their use of social media is task performance. Task performance evaluates the effectiveness in which the communication media is used to communicate the task at hand (Koo et al., 2011). PR professionals were asked to rate five questions based on a selection from (1) strongly agree to (7) strongly disagree based on their perception. Task performance questions were: (1) a message sent via social media is more likely to influence the behavior and attitude of my audience, (2) my audience expects to receive honest and truthful information through social media, (3) social media delivers the message to my target audience more effectively than traditional media, (4) social media is changing how I respond to information from my audience and (5) the feedback received from my audience enhances the way I practice PR.

The variables of task performance were not perceived as significant among the participating PR professionals. Hence, PR professionals perceived social media to support the message being sent in a clear and easy manner under task analyzability, but did not perceive the variables under task performance to be rich components social media communication.

Koo et al. (2011) Variables	Analysis of MRT Core Variables (Daft & Lengel, 1986)	Supported RQ
Task Analyzability	Instant Feedback, Use of Various Cues, Use of Natural Language, Personal Emphasis	Finding supported RQ 4
Task Urgency	Instant Feedback	RQ 2 - Supported
Task Complexity	Use of Various Cues, Use of Natural Language	RQ3 – Not Supported
Social Influence	Personal Emphasis	RQ 4 - Supported
Social Affinity	Personal Emphasis	RQ 4 - Supported
Task Performance	Instant Feedback, Use of Various Cues, Use of Natural Language, Personal Emphasis	Not significant and was not supported

Figure 7: Summary of supported RQ's found through the perception of PR professionals.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This paper argues that while social media offers an innovative approach to diversifying the PR professional tool kit there remains a necessity to analyze their relationship through a theoretical framework. With the use of MRT, the investigator was able to acquire the perceptions of PR professionals regarding the communication richness of social media as it refers to the labor needs of the participants. The results suggest that PR professionals perceive social media to be a richer medium for message dissemination than traditional media and that PR specialists perceive the effectiveness of their message sent via social media to have higher media richness than the message via traditional media.

### 5.1 Discussion

This investigation indicated that PR professionals are reaching out to their audience through the use of social media, primarily through forums such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. The investigator found it curious that in spite of the vast promotion and hype on social media outlets like Google + and ForeSquare, PR professionals did not reach out to their subscribers through those platforms. Only four participants used Google+, while none disseminated information via FourSquare. The study indicated that the industries of agency, corporation and small to mid-size business tend to diversify usage of various social media platforms, while the other professional industries focus their energies on communicating with their audience through Facebook.

The leading purpose of the social media efforts among PR professionals are (1) communication news releases with audience and (2) obtaining customer feedback and searching for new trends.

“In addition to being a fast and viral communications channel in PR, I believe social media is the fastest way to monitor industry news and trends, which allows us to react in a timely manner if news is bad and capitalize on opportunities quickly if the news is good,” said Survey Participant 103.

In the analysis of the industries, it was significant to note that the agency, education and non-profit sectors primarily use social media to (1) send out news releases, (2) obtain customer feedback and find new trends. The investigator discovered that the leading efforts of social media use among PR professionals is to disseminate news releases. In contrast, the corporate sector preferred social media to find new trends. In addition, all of the participants indicated that that social media does not compete with traditional media.

“While many believe that traditional media will be replaced soon by social media, both need to work hand and hand to truly be effective. Although some news outlets have been "outed" so to speak as biased, blog writers still have a much greater reputation at skewing the stories they write,” said Survey Participant 145.

Over all, PR professionals perceive that social media compliments their labor efforts along with the use of traditional media. Instead of considering social media as an alternative forum for communication goals, PR practitioners recommend that social media should be incorporated into the PR tool box.

“Social media has a different audience than traditional communications. You can't choose one or the other; you must use both for different people you want to reach,” said Survey Participant 130.

“Social media is only a tool/channel of PR, all components have to integrate and all PR prof have to use SM like they use business wire, clipping services, media training.... all works holistically in a marketing strategy,” said Survey Participant 126.

This research data support previous investigation that encourages the use of social media and new communication technologies as essential components in the enhancement of the PR profession, while still using traditional communication outlets for their effective message delivery (Seletzky & Lehman-Wilzig, 2010). “I think social media is an "add" to the mix of how organizations communicate with audiences and has to be used in today's environment where customers expect interactivity. What we need to remember is that formal communications are

essential to ensure that the substance that professionally developed communications provides is not lost,” said Survey Participant 148.

### **5.1.1 Immediate Feedback**

The variable used to measure immediate feedback was task urgency. Under this category, PR specialists indicated that social media allowed them to provide their target audience with fast and immediate feedback. In addition, PR professionals shared that social media allowed them to carry out various messages at the same time.

“Social media is great because it's immediate, targeted and affordable,” said Survey Participant 45. “Our primary goal for social media is to position our organization as a thought leader. We use it more for content circulation than distributing our own news. We do invite conversation and solicit feedback,” said Survey Participant 142.

One interesting opinion was highlighted while comparing the different perspectives among the participating PR industries and their perception of task urgency. Among the respondents, those in small to mid-size businesses had stronger perceptions towards disagreement. In summary, the majority of the participants labeled the immediate feedback component of social media as rich for the PR communication goals. This statement supports the findings of Lan and Sie (2010), which indicated that short messaging systems such as social media are more effective in transmitting messages for immediate information delivery. The results also support the research conducted by Johnson and Keil (2002), where computer mediated communication were considered rich for the immediate communication exchange of ideas. The agreement of survey participants to perceive social media as a communication outlet that will allow them to send various messages concurrently also supports the investigation conducted by Turner et al. (2006), who suggested that social media has allowed participants to engage in multiple conversations continuously.

### **5.1.2 Usage of Various Cues & Natural Language**

Another surprising correlation is that PR professionals don't perceive social media as a tool that can help prevent uncertainty and equivocality through the use of various cues and natural language.

"Social media is a compliment to what we do as traditional PR practitioners but we cannot neglect it in today's society. It's instant so it can bring with it positive change like it can bring instant negative feedback if something isn't done correctly. The key is a well thought out strategy as to what social media tools will be used, the messaging and delivery just like you have to do with tradition," said Survey Participant 127.

### **5.1.3 Personal Approach**

Under the concept of social influence, a significant response indicates that PR professionals are socially influenced by the engagement of their target audience. In addition, all the variables measured under social affinity were significant and showcased that PR professionals perceive a personal communication relationship with their target audience. More than any other MRT variable, PR professionals perceive social media as a rich communication outlet to establish and maintain a personal approach in the communication process with their target audience.

The findings also suggest that the PR message sent through social media is influenced by the active audience involvement in the communication platform. Based on the perception of their audience, PR professionals will tailor their message and be influenced in their communication and promotional efforts.

"Social media is continuing to evolve and can be a key influencer in public opinion," said Survey Participant 50.

Communication between the audience and PR professionals was also significant through social affinity. Under this category, PR professionals indicated that social media tends to foster a positive platform where the PR practitioner and the audience can communicate. The survey participants agreed

that they identify with their audience well, that they can communicate with their audience comfortably, and that they can communicate with their audience regarding issues that affect the client (s).

“Social media allows me to send a message directly, without the need of a third party broadcaster,” said Survey Participant 60.

Koo et al. (2011) alluded in their investigation that social influence and social affinity are important to determine the media selection and the message to be delivered. This study suggests that PR professionals perceive that social media can be a more personal form of communication than traditional media.

#### **5.1.4 PR Industries**

This investigation supports the findings of Iodhia (2012) in which companies or PR professionals have the potential to use innovative technology to personally engage with their target audience and increase brand awareness as well as trust. While social media did not prove to fully be a rich communication outlet according to all the variables presented in MRT, the research does suggest that social media is a rich outlet to establish personal communication with target audiences.

“There are definitely strengths and cons to social media and traditional media. Both are still necessary for a full PR plan. Social media allows presenting a more personal touch to our communication and reaching specific audiences. It helps us get to know some of our audience and create personalized communication for our various target markets. It allows us to communicate more frequently and in more dynamic ways with comments, messages, video, audio and pictures. It allows us to communicate immediate news,” said Survey Participant 56.

Among the different MRT variables, the significant variables suggested that the non-profit, agency and freelance/independent industries perceived social media to have a richer communication approach. It is assumed that social media helps these industries establish an outreach, education and dissemination of the different programs and services offered by the client. These findings support previous observations

that indicate that non-profit organizations and agencies tend to benefit from social media as a form of creating and maintaining communication with audience (Sweetser & Kelleher, 2011).

Conversely, while the majority of the PR industries agreed with the different components and functions of social media, the small to mid-size business sector lagged behind in the use of new communication outlet. In contrast to the findings of Vorvoreanu (2008) small to midsize business did not perceive social media as a rich communication outlet and ranked disagreeably with the MRT variables. The results can be linked to the concept that many small to mid-size businesses contend with a limited labor force and employees will tend to perform various jobs (Ramos-Davidson, 2011). Hence a PR professional who works for a small to mid-size business might be limited in their social media efforts.

The social media involvement of the corporate industry was also limited, primarily in the personal approach. While the corporate sector leads in the usage of social media to find new trends, it is expected that the corporate sector might be limited in the use of social media due to the rules and regulations that prohibit certain message dissemination.

“I only use about 5% but starting to become a greater % as financial services start to embrace social media. I have several clients that are in the financial services space and they are grappling with social media and compliance issues. While they know they need to embrace social media they are trying to figure out how to do it and get everything past compliance lawyers,” said Survey Participant 156.

### **5.1.5 Additional Insight**

In the comment section of the survey 21 PR professionals shared additional feedback to the investigation. The predominant recommendation for PR professionals by participants was to utilize social media, but to include it with traditional PR efforts. Based on the insight of participants, social media will not replace traditional media and must be used along with traditional methods to reach a

wider spectrum of audience. PR professionals are recommended to think strategically when using social media to maximize the outreach and communication efforts.

“Social media has been an effective tool especially with our younger audiences but it is a challenge to make it match with our older audience base,” said Survey Participant 72.

Among the challenges faced by PR professionals in the use of social media are the constant changes and new features that occur with social media. These innovations require that PR professionals invest time engaging with those innovations.

“It does take more time and effort to keep up all the different channels of communication. It also takes time to keep up with the latest technology as it continually changes and new apps and social networks pop up. In some ways, social media creates an environment where news becomes old very quickly. What everyone was talking about last week is quickly forgotten and considered old news. So as a PR professional you need to stay very current and keep your information refreshed every day,” said Survey Participant 56.

“When dealing with my Latino audience many still prefer a one-on-one relationship, personal connection. Although Facebook is my first preference for use, the continued changes have made it difficult to be consistent. There are still some tweaks that need to be done to social media before I consider it a more reliable tool. Good luck,” said Survey Participant 99.

While various PR professionals stated that they would like to involve their client in a more active social media participation and expand their PR efforts virally, challenges include fear of negative comments, skeptic attitudes and company laws.

“I work for a public accounting firm so have to be careful for what purposes I use social media. We still have partners in the firm who are skeptical of social media's impact so I can't put all my eggs in that basket or rely on it to do much more than augment my traditional marketing/media efforts,” said Survey Participant 84.

“The problem with social media is the anonymity that allows people to post unkind things without fear of retribution,” said Survey Participant 45.

“As context, I'm in life sciences marketing. I'm pushing my clients toward social media bc I see the value in it, but it's not something that's been widely adopted,” said Survey Participant 149.

“We have a very active Facebook page and have a lot of followers for Ciudad Juarez. However, many people on social media are in the United States and not in Mexico. Mexico still lags behind in social media. Our U.S. citizen audience does not pay attention to social media. They prefer getting their message through traditional media,” said Survey Participant 83.

“I am new to my company and it does not use Social Media (yet), but I'm slowly convincing them of the benefits. I use Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn personally, which is helping the company become familiar and more comfortable with the idea. I probably will answer many of these questions differently after I can get a Social Media program operational for the company. Congratulations on your survey - best of luck to you in all your future endeavors,” said Survey Participant 104.

## **5.2 Implications of the Findings**

The study provides a valuable perspective to understanding and clarification of the role of social media as a tool for PR. Prior studies primarily focused in evaluating the perception of PR professionals of social media. Those studies recommended the use of social media in PR efforts, but lacked the theoretical framework to evaluate the richness of the communication medium. By using MRT, the investigator was able to evaluate the individual perceptions of 162 PR professionals who help shed light on the richness of social media as a communication tool and, most importantly, as an effective tool for the purposes of PR. While the investigation showcased that social media is not a fully “rich” communication outlet, based on the perception of survey participants, there are components that provide value to the work of PR professionals with the use of the new communication technologies. This study

suggests that social media not be compared to traditional media, but instead be used as a collaborative tool for PR efforts. Based on the perception of survey participants, social media is a rich outlet to develop a personal approach in the communication efforts of the target audience.

### **5.3 Limitations**

There are several limitations that might be worth addressing in future investigations. The survey was originally designed to discuss perception of PR professionals regarding the richness of social media focusing primarily on social networking sites and avoided the use of blogs, e-mail, web pages, instant messaging and applications available to smart phones and tables. The investigator also considered that additional time allotted for the compiling of responses as this might allow a larger sample for the investigation. The investigator also believes that earlier outreach to more diverse PR groups such as local, regional and state PR groups at an earlier stage might have produced a larger sample size.

The investigator believes that the research has the potential to expand on additional components and perhaps gather more information about the audience and their perceptions. She believes that it was important to focus on the perception of PR professionals through the industry angle, but future investigation might be able to highlight the role and perceptions of ethnicity, gender and age. The investigator leaned that it is preferable to label Likert scale from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree as it has the potential to deliver better results during the investigation.

### **5.4 Future Research Direction**

Technology is constantly changing and new innovations are surfacing constantly. New communication technologies have the potential to facilitate the role of PR professionals, but it is important to evaluate the richness of the communication outlet prior to jumping on board and using it. Among the advancements in technology are the mobile and portable devices that open a new opportunity for further investigation. It might be interesting to research the use of applications or “apps”

for PR purposes, or the PR efforts in reaching their mobile and partible audience. Another recommendation is based on the comments expressed by participants where the investigator might learn the reasons why companies are hesitant to embrace new technology communications, as well as the challenges and opportunities that these might present to the field of PR.

Additional topics for future investigation also include the measurement of how people use social media and portable communication outlets to keep connected and the shift of people's tendencies to rely more on online communication than on traditional communication, such as postal services and traditional mail. It would be interesting to study the tendencies among men and women from different ethnic backgrounds regarding their individual use of social media and new communication technologies.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix A IRB Approval to Conduct Research

IRBNet ID: 275066-3

**USER PROFILE** **LOGOUT**



Welcome to IRBNet  
Ana Gonzalez

My Projects  
Create New Project  
My Reminders (14)

**Project Administration**  
Project Overview  
Designer  
Share this Project  
Sign this Package  
Submit this Package  
Delete this Package  
Send Project Mail  
Reviews  
Project History  
Messages & Alerts (14)

**Other Tools**  
Forms and Templates

**Project Overview**

[275066-3] GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS: Message Dissemination through the Social Media Platform as a P

**You have Full access to this project.** ([Edit](#))

Research Institution	University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX
Title	GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS: Message Dissemination through the Social Media Platform as a Public Relations Tool - A Media Richness Perspective
Principal Investigator	Gonzalez, Ana, MA
Status	Approved
Lock Status	<b>Locked</b>
Keywords	Social Media, Public Relations, Communication in the 21st Century

The documents for this project can be accessed from the [Designer](#).

Submitted to:  
University of Texas at El Paso IRB 03/08/2012 **Approved** 03/28/2012. [Review details](#).

The previous package (275066-2) has a status of **Approved**.

Shared with the following IRBNet users

IRBNet User	Organization	Access Type
<a href="#">Ana Gonzalez</a>	University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX	<b>Full</b>
<a href="#">Thomas E. Ruggiero</a>	University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX	<b>Full</b>

### Appendix B E-Mail Inform Consent

Greetings Ms. Barr,

My name is Ana Gonzalez and I am a PR professional of nine years as well as a graduate student at the University of Texas at El Paso. I am personally reaching out to you as a fellow PR professional for assistance in my research.

Below is a survey I've developed aimed at learning more about Public Relations Practitioners' use of social media in message dissemination. The survey is confidential and will only aggregate data for research purposes. Your participation is greatly appreciated.


If you choose to take the survey, please [click here](#) or go to **<http://survey.websurveycreator.com/s.aspx?s=378a5a40-3041-4ad9-a91b-8da3e07eed67>**.

If you have any questions about the project or would like clarification about the survey, please contact me at your convenience at 915-329-7196 or via e-mail at [aigonzalez5@miners.utep.edu](mailto:aigonzalez5@miners.utep.edu).

Thank you in advance for your support and help in this academic project.

Best regards,

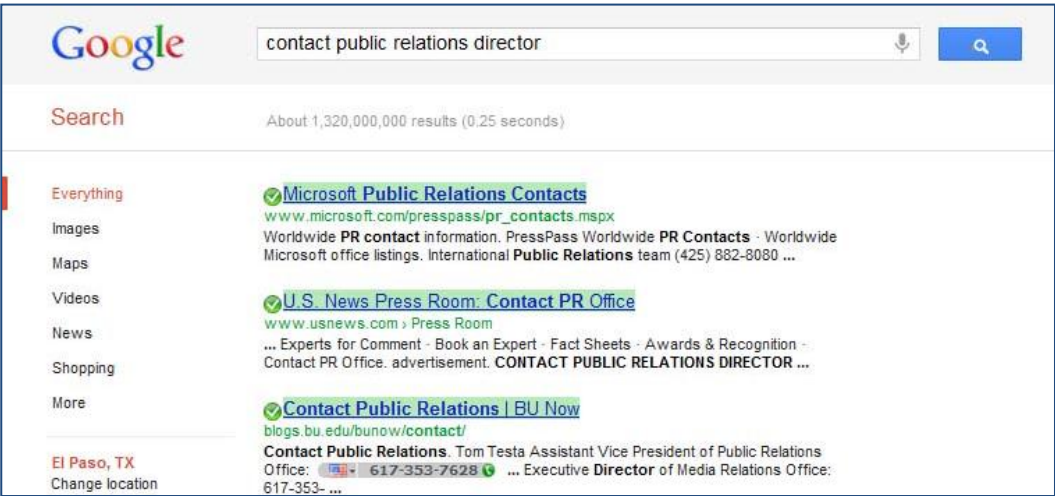
Ana Gonzalez  
Graduate Communication Student  
University of Texas at El Paso



Approved on: 01/09/2012  
 Expires on: 10/12/2012  
 Study Number: Gonzalez  
 275066-2

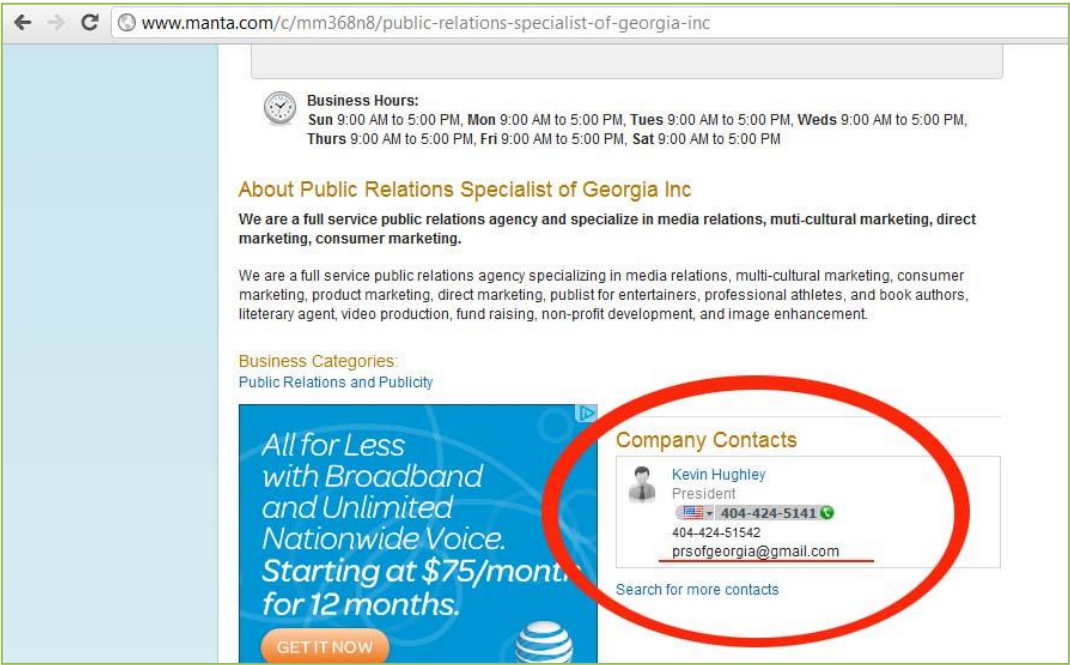
Appendix C

Sample Search of participants



Appendix C-1

The researcher would be able to find contact name and information in order to conduct the research.



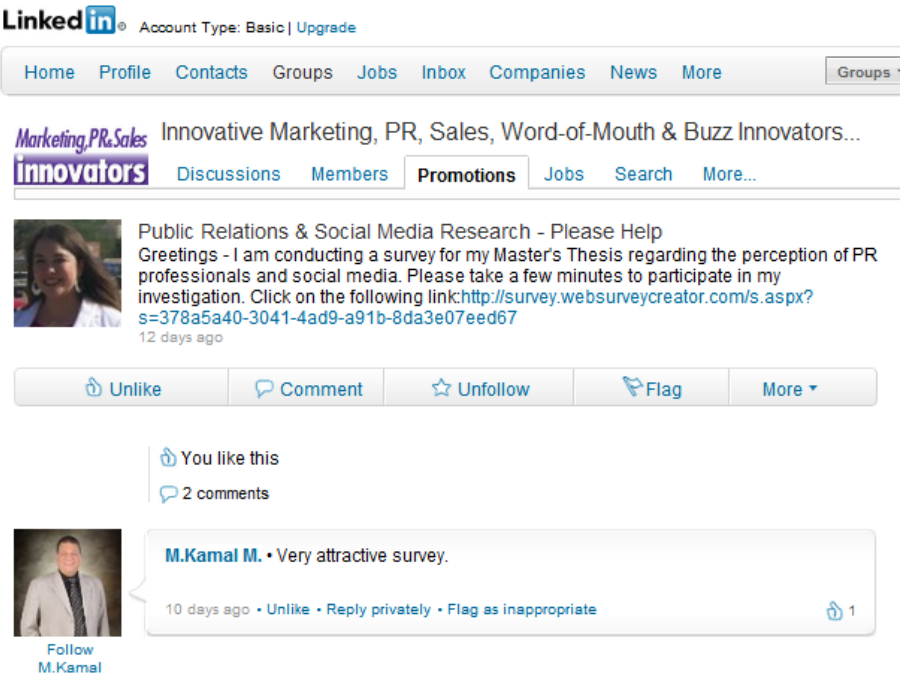
Appendix C-2

In the case that the website provides more than one contact, one PR professional would randomly be selected. The survey invitation is only sent to one survey participant per website.



Appendix C-3

The researcher also extended an invite for PR professionals to participate in the questionnaire in various communication and PR professionals group in LinkedIn.





PRwise

Discussions Members Promotions Jobs Search More...



### Public Relations & Social Media Research - Please Help

Greetings to all... I am conducting a survey for my Thesis regarding Public Relations Professionals and their Perception of Social Media. If you are a PR Professional that uses social media, please take a few minutes to take my survey.

<http://survey.websurveycreator.com/s.aspx?s=378a5a40-3041-4ad9-a91b-8da3e07eed67>



Welcome and Instructions: [survey.websurveycreator.com](http://survey.websurveycreator.com)

This survey is designed to obtain information from current public relations practitioners regarding their perception of social media as a professional tool. Social media is defined as interactive communication media that allows...

12 days ago

Unlike Comment Unfollow Flag More

You, Inge Drucker, Laurel Kelly and 1 other like this

11 comments



Follow Bree

Bree Simmers • Happy to help!

10 days ago • Unlike

1



Follow Cathie

Cathie Ericson • Hope everyone helps you out! It only took about 4 minutes, if that...

8 days ago • Unlike

1



Ana Gonzalez • Thank you Cathie. I really appreciate your input.

8 days ago • Delete



Follow Mike

Mike Ingberg • Anna, please keep us posted on the results.

8 days ago • Like

1



Follow Rachel

Rachel Heller • I'm interested to hear about the results as well, Ana! Best wishes for continued success always!

7 days ago • Unlike

1



Follow Mark

Mark Boyer • Done. Please keep us posted on the results.

8 days ago • Unlike

1

## Appendix D Instrument

Web Survey from WebSurveyCreator.com, Page 1

<http://survey.websurveycreator.com/s.aspx?s=378a5a40-3041-4ad9-a91b-8da3e07eed67>

## How Rich is Social Media?

Progress 14%

**Welcome and Instructions:**

This survey is designed to obtain information from current public relations practitioners regarding their perception of social media as a professional tool.

Social media is defined as interactive communication media that allows for two-way online interaction and feedback based on real-time interaction. Traditional media is defined as radio, television and print.

The survey is comprised of five sections and it should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. By clicking on the next button you are volunteering to take the survey. You are free to leave the survey at any time by exiting this page.

Your feedback is very important and it will be used for academic research conducted at the University of Texas at El Paso and your answers will be confidential.

Let's Begin!

Next

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# How Rich is Social Media?

Progress 29%

Demographic Information

Gender:

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Other

What is your ethnic background?

☐ African-American

☐ Native American

☐ White

☐ Asian

☐ Latino/Hispanic/Chicano

☐ Other

What industry do you work in?

☐ Agency

☐ Education

☐ Government

☐ Small to Mid-Size Business

☐ Corporation

☐ Freelance/Independent

☐ Non-Profit

What is your age range?

☐ 21 and under

☐ 35 to 44

☐ 55 to 64

☐ 22 to 34

☐ 45 to 54

☐ 65 and over

Please include your years of professional P.R. experience:

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## How Rich is Social Media?

Progress 43%

In an eight hour workday, what percentage of your day do you rely on social media as a PR tool?

What outlet of social media do you use most often?

☐ Facebook

☐ Google +

☐ Twitter

☐ Other

☐ Foursquare

☐ LinkedIn

☐ YouTube

I use social media for the following functions  
(please rank in order of preference from top to bottom)

Unranked Choices

New Releases

Customer Feedback

Find New Trends

Product Recall

Arrange Promotion Schedule

Ranked Choices

Don't Use

Based on your experience and perception, please select the choice that you agree most with (1 if you strongly agree / 7 if you strongly disagree)

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

Strongly Agree

Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neutral

Somewhat Disagree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

I think social media are in conflict with traditional mainstream media (newspapers, magazines, radio and television)

I think social media complements traditional mainstream media (newspapers, magazines, radio and television)

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## How Rich is Social Media?

Progress 57%

Based on your experience and perception, please select the choice that you agree most with (1 if you strongly agree / 7 if you strongly disagree)

	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Neutral	5 Somewhat Disagree	6 Disagree	7 Strongly Disagree
I am actively engaged in social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My audience is actively engaged in social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social media is a useful tool to communicate with clients and audiences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My peers use social media as a tool to communicate with clients and audiences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Based on your experience and perception with social media, please select the choice that you agree most with (1 if you strongly agree / 7 if you strongly disagree)

	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Neutral	5 Somewhat Disagree	6 Disagree	7 Strongly Disagree
I identify with my audience well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can communicate with my audience comfortably	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can communicate with my audience regarding issues that affect my client(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Next

## How Rich is Social Media?

Progress 71%

Based on your experience and perception, please select the choice that you agree most with. Choices are compared to traditional media. (1 if you strongly agree / 7 if you strongly disagree)

	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Neutral	5 Somewhat Disagree	6 Disagree	7 Strongly Disagree
Social media allows me to disseminate my message with ease of use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sending the message through social media is simple	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social media allows me to communicate with my audience by using established procedures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social media allows me to send the message in a clear manner	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Based on your experience and perception, please select the choice that you agree most with. Choices are compared to traditional media. (1 if you strongly agree / 7 if you strongly disagree)

	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Neutral	5 Somewhat Disagree	6 Disagree	7 Strongly Disagree
Social media allows me to provide my audience fast feedback	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Delivery of multiple messages can be carried out concurrently	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Message delivery on social media can be carried out on a real-time basis	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social media pressures organizations to respond quickly to customers' comments and critiques	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Previous

Next

## How Rich is Social Media?

Progress 86%

Based on your experience and perception, please select the choice that you agree most with. Choices are compared to traditional media. (1 if you strongly agree / 7 if you strongly disagree)

	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Neutral	5 Somewhat Disagree	6 Disagree	7 Strongly Disagree
Social media allows me to use various forms of cues like written, visual images, audio and symbols to deliver a clearer and more understandable message	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An effective message delivery through social media requires the use of various electronic cues like sounds, written symbols, videos, images	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Based on your experience and perception, please select the choice that you agree most with. The following choices are compared to traditional media (1 if you strongly agree / 7 if you strongly disagree)

	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Somewhat Agree	4 Neutral	5 Somewhat Disagree	6 Disagree	7 Strongly Disagree
A message sent via social media is more likely to influence the behavior and attitude of my audience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My audience expects to receive honest and truthful information through social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social media delivers the intended message to my target audience more effectively than traditional media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social media is changing how I respond to information from my audience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The feedback received from my audience enhances the way I practice PR	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please feel free to include additional feedback:

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## How Rich is Social Media?

Progress 100%

**Thank You for completing the survey!**

Thank you very much for completing the survey. Your feedback is greatly appreciated and will be used for research purposes only.

Have a Great Day!

**Appendix E**  
**Coding Book**

Variable	SPSS Variable ID	Type	Level of Measurement	Code - Value
ID Number	IDNO	Numeric	RATIO	(1-3)Self Coding
<i>Demographic- Gender</i>	V1	Numeric	Nominal	1-Male 2-Female 9-Other 0=MISSING (FOR ALL VARIABLES)
<i>Demographic- Ethnic Background</i>	V2	Numeric	Nominal	1-African American 2-Asian 3-Native American 4-Latino/Hispanic/Chicano 5-White 9-Other 0-Missing
<i>Demographic-Industry</i>	V3	Numeric	Nominal	1-Agency 2-Corporation 3-Education 4-Freelance/Independent 5-Government 6-Non-Profit 7-Small to Mid-Size Biz 0-Missing
<i>Demographic-Age</i>	V4	Numeric	INTERVAL	1-21 & Under 2-22 to 34 3-35 to 44 4-45 to 54 5-55 to 64 6-65 & Over
<i>Demographic-Years of Experience</i>	V5	Numeric	Ratio	Self Coding
<i>Usage of Media- Percentage of Use in Workday</i>	V6		Ratio	Self Coding

<i>Usage of Media - Preferred Social Media Outlet</i>	V7	Numeric	Ordinal	1-Facebook 2-Foursquare 3-Google + 4- LinkedIn 5- Twitter 6-You Tube 9- Other 0-Missing
<i>Usage of Media - I use social media for the following functions - <b>News Release</b></i>	V8	Numeric	Ordinal	1-First Choice 2-Second Choice 3-Third Choice 4-Fourth Choice 5-Last Choice 0-missing
<i>Usage of Media - I use social media for the following functions - <b>Customer Feedback</b></i>	V9	Numeric	Ordinal	1-First Choice 2-Second Choice 3-Third Choice 4-Fourth Choice 5-Last Choice 0-missing
<i>Usage of Media - I use social media for the following functions - <b>Find New Trends</b></i>	V10	Numeric	Ordinal	1-First Choice 2-Second Choice 3-Third Choice 4-Fourth Choice 5-Last Choice 0-missing
<i>Usage of Media - I use social media for the following functions - <b>Product Recall</b></i>	V11	Numeric	Ordinal	1-First Choice 2-Second Choice 3-Third Choice 4-Fourth Choice 5-Last Choice 0-missing
<i>Usage of Media - I use social media for the following functions - <b>Arrange Promotion</b></i>	V12	Numeric	Ordinal	1-First Choice 2-Second Choice 3-Third Choice 4-Fourth Choice 5-Last Choice 0-missing

<i>Use of Media-</i> I think social media are in conflict with traditional mainstream media	V13	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Use of Media-</i> I think social media complements traditional mainstream media	V14	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Social Influence-</i> I am actively engaged in social media	V15	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Social Influence-</i> My audience is actively engaged in social media	V16	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Social Influence-</i> Social media is a useful tool to communicate	V17	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Social Influence-</i> My peers use social media as a tool to communicate	V18	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree

<i>Social Affinity-</i> I identify with my audience	V19	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Social Affinity-</i> I can communicate with my audience comfortably	V20	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Social Affinity-</i> I can communicate with my audience regarding issues affecting my client	V21	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Task Analyzability-</i> Social media allows me to disseminate my message with ease of use	V22	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Task Analyzability-</i> Sending the message through social media is done simply	V23	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Task Analyzability-</i> Social media allows me to communicate with my audience by using established procedures	V24	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree

<i>Task Analyzability-</i> Social media allows me to send the message in a clear manner	V25	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Task Urgency-</i> Social media allows me to provide my audience fast feedback	V26	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Task Urgency-</i> Delivery of multiple messages on social media can be carried out concurrently	V27	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Task Urgency-</i> Message delivery on social media can be carried out on a real-time basis	V28	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Task Urgency-</i> Social media helps to pressure organizations to respond quickly to customer's comments and criticism	V29	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Task Complexity-</i> Social media allows me to use various forms of cues like written visual images, audio and symbols to deliver a clearer and more understandable message	V30	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree

<i>Task Complexity-</i> An effective message delivery through social media requires the use of various electronic cues like sounds, written symbols, videos, and images	V31	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Task Performance-</i> A message sent via social media more likely to influence the behavior and attitude of my audience	V32	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Task Performance-</i> My audience expects to receive honest and truthful information through social media	V33	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Task Performance-</i> Social media delivers the message to my target audience more effectively than traditional media	V34	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Task Performance-</i> Social media is changing how I respond to information from my audience	V35	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
<i>Task Performance-</i> The feedback received from my audience enhances the way I practice PR	V36	Numeric	Interval	1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Somewhat Agree 4- Neutral 5-Somewhat Disagree 6-Disagree 7-Strongly Disagree
Additional Feedback	V37	String	Nominal	Self Coding

## Appendix F

The Complete list of questionnaire items adapted from Koo et al., 2011 and Wright and Hinson, 2009.

### **Demographic Information**

Gender:

What is your ethnic background?

What industry do you work in?

What is your age range?

Please include your years of professional P.R. experience:

### **The Usage of Media**

In an eight hour workday, what percentage of your day do you rely on social media as a PR tool?

What outlet of social media do you use most often? (Facebook, Google+, Twitter, Foursquare, LinkedIn, YouTube, Other)

I use social media for the following functions (Please rank in order of preference from top to bottom) (news releases, customer feedback, find new trends, product recall, arrange promotion schedule)

I think social media are in conflict with traditional mainstream media (newspapers, magazines, radio and television)

I think social media compliments traditional mainstream media (newspapers, magazines, radio and television)

### **Social Influence**

I use social media actively

My audience uses social media actively

Social media is a useful tool to communicate with clients and audiences

My peers use social media as a tool to communicate with clients and audiences

### **Social Affinity**

I know my audience well

I can communicate with my audience comfortably

I can communicate with my audience regarding issues that affect my client(s)

### **Task Analyzability**

Social media allows me to disseminate my message with ease of use and standard formats

Sending the message through social media is done simply

Social media allows me to communicate with my audience by using established procedures and practices

Social media allows me to send the message in a clearly known manner

### **Task Urgency**

Social media allows me to provide my audience fast feedback

Message delivery on social media should be carried out concurrently

Message delivery on social media is carried out on a real-time basis

Social media pressures organizations to respond quickly to customers' comments and criticism

### **Task Complexity**

Social media allows me to use various forms of cues like written, visual images, audio and symbols to deliver a clear and understandable message

Message delivery through social media requires the use of various forms of message delivery (sound, written, video, image)

### **Task Performance**

The message sent via social media is more likely to influence the behavior and attitude of my audience

My audience expects to receive honest and truthful information through social media

Social media delivers the intended message to my target audience more effectively than traditional media

Social media is changing how I respond to information from my audience

The feedback received by my audience enhances the way I practice PR

## Appendix G

Original Scales from Koo et al., 2011 p. 457-458

### **Social Influence (adapted from Trevino et al., 2000)**

My colleagues in the office use current media actively

My colleagues in the office confirm that the current media is a useful tool to communicate

My seniors in the office use current media actively

My seniors in the office confirm that the current media is a useful tool to communicate

### **Social Affinity (adapted from Carlson & Zmud, 1999)**

I know my communication partner well

I can communicate with my colleagues comfortably

I can communicate with my colleagues about public as well as private issues

I can communicate with my colleagues in familiar situations

### **Task Analyzability (Rice, 1992)**

I usually do my work on the basis of standardized formats

The way to do the major types of work I normally encounter is clearly known

I simply achieved my task performance

To do my work, I actually rely on established procedures and practices

### **Task Urgency (adapted from Kahai & Cooper, 2003)**

My task should be carried out concurrently

My task should be carried out on a real-time basis

My task is always accessible at any time

### **Task Complexity (adapted from Dennis & Kinney, 1998)**

My task can be done on the basis of breadth and depth of knowledge

My task requires a variety of information

My task requires various kinds of experience

My task is linked to several other tasks

### **The Usage of Media (Javernpass & Staples, 2000; Murry & Peyrefree, 2007)**

I usually use social computer technologies to discuss an idea, procedure, and policy

I usually use social computer technologies to arrange schedule and share information

I usually use social computer technologies to find some difficult solution and to solve sensitive issues in the organization

### **Task Performance (Rice, 1992)**

I can increase my task performance over social computer technologies efficiently

I can increase my task performance over social computer technologies effectively

Overall, I can increase my task productivity over social computer technologies

**Appendix H**  
**Correspondence with Participants**  
Sample of e-mail lost in inbox

Hi Ana,

Please forgive me for not responding sooner. When you sent this email I was out of the country and I am STILL digging out from my In Box. ☺

I saw that this survey is still available, so it has been completed.

I would be happy to help a student from UTEP. Between 1980 and 1989, I lived on Cincinnati Avenue in El Paso just up the street from the UTEP president's home, wrote for the *El Paso Herald Post* (the no-longer existing evening newspaper) and the no-longer existing *Westside Today*. UTEP is close to my heart. ☺

Please let me know how else I can help you.

Regards,

Beth Ann

**weaver**  **Beth Ann Black**

PR Strategist

Marketing

**D:** 817.882.7712   [BethAnn.Black@WeaverLLP.com](mailto:BethAnn.Black@WeaverLLP.com)

2821 West Seventh Street, Suite 700

Fort Worth, TX 76107

**P:** 817.332.7905   **F:** 817.429.5936

Sorry your email got buried but I just did the questionnaire – hope it is not too late. ST

Susan M. Tellem, APR, RN, BSN

Tellem Grody PR, Inc.

[www.tellemgrodypr.com](http://www.tellemgrodypr.com)

310-313-3444 (o)

310-613-3504 (m)

twitter: @susantellem

## Appendix H-1

### Samples of snowballing

Hi Ana—

My name is Rebecca Gough and I am the president of the Austin chapter of PRSA. Becky forwarded your email to me. I've filled out your survey and encouraged the rest of the PRSA-Austin Board to do the same. Good luck with your findings!

Thanks!  
Rebecca

Hi Ana,

Marc passed along your survey information. He thought it may be appropriate to have myself and my other colleagues who manage social media for our accounts on a daily basis to assist you in your research.

How many respondents would you need? I can have up to three people from our office here take the survey.

Thanks,  
Lindsay

**Lindsay Southwick**  
The Ehrhardt Group  
504.558.1830 | desk  
225.939.3119 | mobile

Thank you for contacting the Philadelphia Black Public Relations Society (PBPRS).

We will forward this information to our entire list serve and encourage them to take this survey.

Thank you again,  
Shalimar Blakely, President  
The Philadelphia Black Public Relations Society (PBPRS)  
[www.pbprs.com](http://www.pbprs.com)

## Appendix H-2

### Samples of participants interested in the investigation results

Hi Ana,

I've completed your survey. I look forward to receiving the full analysis for all of your results.

Best,

Lindsey Carnett, CEO & President  
Marketing Maven Public Relations, Inc.  
Main: (310) 994-7380  
Direct: (310) 341-7350  
Mobile: (805) 405-3966  
Fax: (310) 868-0222  
Email: [Lindsey@marketingmavenpr.com](mailto:Lindsey@marketingmavenpr.com)  
[www.MarketingMavenPR.com](http://www.MarketingMavenPR.com)  
Twitter: MarketingMaven2

"If I only had two dollars left, I would spend one on PR." -Bill Gates

best of luck with your study!

Will you share results with the participants?

## CURRICULUM VITA

Ana Isabel Gonzalez Michel was born in Mexico City, Mexico as the eldest of four children of Hector Xavier Gonzalez De Koster and Ana Isabel Michel Sanchez. Upon the migration of her family United States during her youth, Gonzalez embraced her *Fronteriza* identity and is proud to count with a rich multicultural heritage founded in her Mexican ancestry and to participate in the American tradition of dreams and opportunities. In 2002 Gonzalez attained her Bachelor's degree of Arts with a focus in Modern Foreign Languages and Communication from Loyola University, New Orleans. Although Gonzalez found delight in the learning of ways people communicate in other places through foreign languages, upon graduation she decided to practice the field of communication through the branch of public relations.

From 2002 to 2012 Gonzalez took delight in practicing public relations in New Orleans, Louisiana and El Paso, Texas under the sport, agency, education and non-profit sectors. Although the experience and opportunities attained from her employment were great, Gonzalez had a longing to attain the education, professional skills and unique challenge of a Master's Degree. In 2008 she was accepted to the Masters in Communication program at the University of Texas at El Paso. It is her goal to obtain her this, her most important and professional goal by graduating in 2012, ten years after attaining her first professional milestone.

Permanent address: 11019 Sam Snead  
El Paso, Texas

This thesis/dissertation was typed by Ana Isabel Gonzalez Michel.