Measuring Press Release Placement From Brigham Young University's Public Communications Office to Utah's Newspapers

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Measuring Press Release Placement From
Brigham Young University's Public Communications Office
To Utah's Newspapers

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of Communications
Brigham Young University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Gregory T. Kunde
December 1993
This thesis, by Gregory T. Kunde is accepted in its present form by the Department of Communications of Brigham Young University as satisfying the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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I especially thank my wife, Leslie, for her love, patience, support and encouragement throughout this long process.
PREFACE

My interest in press release placement was piqued by my overall interest in the news industry coupled with my interest in the public relations industry. I was initially interested to know how much of what I read in my local newspaper each day was generated from a press release. This interest evolved to wanting to discover why certain press releases are placed over the myriad of press releases that are sent to newspapers everyday. While investigating the matter and I discovered Dr. Morton's study and decided that a replication of this study would help satisfy my curiosity.

Further, when I broached the subject with Brent Harker of Brigham Young University's Public Communications Office he claimed that Brigham Young University successfully placed over 75% of press releases sent to some of Utah's newspapers. I found Mr. Harker's claim to be quite startling. A 75% successful placement rate would be almost unheard of within the public relations industry. By completing this thesis I hoped to be able to satisfy my own curiosity while making a significant contribution to the understanding of press release placement within the state of Utah.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Public relations practitioners have many avenues to choose when trying to establish a relationship with various publics. Historically, the press release has been one of the primary tools of the public relations industry and "...continues to be the most common form for communicating news about an entity to the media."¹ Perhaps one reason the press release is the most widely accepted communication in the public relations industry is that it "is organized according to fundamental principles for communicating news in any medium."²

While the press release is widely accepted by public relations practitioners it is disparaged by many newspaper editors. Newspaper editors say they publish few press releases yet most organizations claim a fair rate of success with regards to placement of their releases.³ What causes such a disparity of opinion?

²Ibid.
Literature that will be subsequently reviewed shows that although editors estimate that press releases amount to only about 5-10% of their news space, content reviews show that this figure may be closer to 50% or more. Given that editors do use public relations' press releases, it would be interesting to discover the factors that may contribute to their publication decisions. An examination of the relationship between public relations practitioners and the newspaper industry provides some insight into the editors' decision making process.

Public Relations and the Newspaper Industry

The history between the public relations industry and the press evolved during the past century. Public relations practitioners started out with the reputation as "hucksters" sometimes even trying to control the information flow using bribes and lies to accomplish their purposes. Another term often associated with early public relations practitioners was "press agent." Press agents would use any means at their disposal to promote the best interest of their clients. Journalists, with a specific set of ethics, scorned the public relations industry.

Nevertheless, while many journalists disdained the "press agent" part of public relations, many were drawn to the public relations profession by the fact that they could use their journalistic skills as advocates of things they
deemed important. These cross-over journalists, while mollifying their clients, still retained some of the ethics assimilated during their earlier journalistic days. Still, the "pure" journalist of the early twentieth century did not believe that public relations practitioners had any place in the news industry.

Public relations practitioners and journalists have long disagreed over the importance of public relations' role in the news industry. The animosity between the two industries can be traced to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to Marvin Olasky:

The first blunt step toward using the press for public relations purposes was the straightforward, modest bribe...A more sophisticated method of press agentry involved what was called "deadheading," or the provision of free tickets and passes [to journalists].

Ivy Lee, considered the founder of modern public relations, "found the appearance of truthfulness to be useful...listeners who believed him on small points, for good reason, were more likely to follow him to his collaborationist conclusions." Another notable public relations pioneer, Edward L. Bernays, was criticized by journalists of the day. Olasky reports:


*Ibid., 50.
Journalists consistently criticized the effect of Bernaysian manipulation on information flow. Their perspective is well represented by frequent, sarcastic editorials in Editor & Publisher attacking Bernays' "new and higher ethics" and his "synthetic news creations."

Early public relations practitioners may have damaged the credibility of their successors. Today's public relations practitioners have strived to overcome the "huckster" image that has been associated with their profession in the past. Although the public relations industry has gradually gained respect, their beginnings as press agents and publicists have made it difficult to persuade journalists that the profession has changed. In 1938, Lee Treholm observed:

A great many publicity workers obviously mistake indirectness for cleverness...Gross ignorance of editorial department requirements appears next among the main complaints of editors. One out of ten press agents...fully understands the importance of the time element.

Publicity copy generally is regarded as too discursive, little of it is as factually rich as newspapers and magazines demand.

Especially is this true when it comes to client mention. Names are dragged in by the heels apropos of nothing and great indignation is expressed if they are deleted.

Editors who warn with vigilance against their own errors, find inaccuracies in publicity material

*Ibid., 91.*
particularly irritating. Many errors arise from overstatement."

As a result of such perceptions, largely based on the original reality, gaining acceptance as a viable, and more skilled profession has not been easy. Part of the process was a call for the profession to police itself. In 1946, public relations practitioner Walter Belson said:

Not so very long ago, I heard a public relations man tell an audience of his peers that he firmly believed some form of licensing should be developed for those professing to offer advice and counsel on public relations...back of these declarations...is the feeling that too many persons who are incompetent and whose credentials will not bear inspection are now holding forth as experts."

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) was established in 1947 and a Code of Ethics was adopted by PRSA in 1950. In 1986, PRSA commissioned a blue-ribbon group to prepare a plan of action regarding professionalism within the industry. Recommendations included drafting sample law for discussion purposes, tracking recent legislation law passed in Canada and preparing a position paper for the PRSA to use for legislative purposes.


Additionally, the group felt that membership in the PRSA should be tied to a Code of Professional Standards. A "Code of Professional Standards for the Practice of Public Relations" was adopted in November, 1988.

The public relations industry and the press have developed a cooperative, although still not overly friendly, relationship based on the following reasons. First, public relations' professionals have advanced from the "huckster" image to become accepted as essential links in the communications flow. By adopting a "Code of Professional Standards" and by adhering to more "ethical practices," today's public relations professional has gained a modicum of respect from today's journalist. In fact, many former journalists are employed as public relations professionals. Second, there simply are not enough journalists to do a complete job of covering the news. The newspaper industry and the public relations industry must rely on each other to achieve their individual goals. Not only do their great numbers help more news and information to be funneled to the newspaper industry, but also, today's public relations professionals are very knowledgeable about their particular field and are good sources of information for journalists.

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As was previously noted, although there continues to be some animosity between the two professions, many public relations professionals started out as journalists. Kathleen O'Neill, in an historical perspective, reports, "The country's first publicity agency was the Publicity Bureau...the founders previously worked for newspapers."  

Agee, Ault and Emery point out:

More (public relations professionals) are being attracted every year from the mass media and from among graduates of journalism and public relations sequences in mass communication schools.

The problem that faces journalists who turn to public relations is overcoming journalistic objectivity in favor of client advocacy. Often, once they make the move there is no turning back. Robert L. Gildea says:

Some newsman are so deeply immersed in the spirit of telling all sides of an issue that they cannot adjust to the subjectivity required in PR. Objectivity is an admirable trait, especially in journalism, but in PR it must be put in proper perspective. Objectivity's place in PR lies in the behind-the-scenes analysis where an organization's virtues and vices are being sorted out. But in the communications work of PR, discretion takes priority over objectivity. It is not quite cricket to volunteer your employer's flaws to the world. The mission is to call attention to the client's good features, while working feverishly behind closed doors to eliminate the blemishes.

Many significant adjustments must be made in the transfer from news to PR; for a variety of reasons some journalists simply can't acclimate to the new environment. To compound the problem, when some of

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12 O'Neill, 29.

those newsmen discover that PR is not their "promised land" and try to return to news, they may find that the door is closed. Some editors and news directors react bitterly to reporters who leave their ranks, especially if the new destination is the crass world of public relations.\textsuperscript{14}

Regardless of lingering animosity, former journalists bring important skills to the public relations industry. John Hulteng points out:

Persons who work in the public relations field are typically highly skilled, often former journalists. They frequently make the point that their efforts save reporters and editors valuable time, both because they dig out hard to locate facts and because they do at least part of the job of packaging the information for processing by the news media.\textsuperscript{15}

The Role of Public Relations in News Gathering

Research indicates today that public relations practitioners are recognized more than at any other time in public relations history as an essential part of the communications industry.\textsuperscript{16} The literature further shows the public relations industry is an important asset for the very basic reason that the press simply does not have the time nor resources to cover all newsworthy events.\textsuperscript{17}

Craig Aronoff notes that:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14}Robert L. Gildea, "From News to PR: The Precarious Leap!" \textit{Public Relations Journal} 36 (Summer 1979): 27-29.
  \item \textsuperscript{15}Hulteng, 336.
  \item \textsuperscript{16}Agee, Ault and Emery, 382.
  \item \textsuperscript{17}Scott M. Cutlip, "Third of Newspapers' Content PR-Inspired," \textit{Editor and Publisher} (May 1962): 68.
\end{itemize}
Public relations practitioners serve as extensions of a newspaper's staff, playing a specific, functional, cooperative role in the information gathering network which ultimately places newspapers at doorsteps and in racks on the street...\(^{13}\)

An indication of this need was cited in an early article about the small town press:

All in all, there never has been a time when it was more urgent for editors to give sober thought to the problem of publicity facing the small town press. Many contributions have been made to the subject. But most treatments lose sight of the fact that in a complex democratic society there is an obligation on the part of the democratic journalist to inform citizens of their national and state governments, educational institutions, improved methods of farming, and other worthwhile activities even though some stories come from publicity sources. Some publicity aids the press in providing more complete news coverage, for many stories are submitted to the newspapers on topics which most would not be able to cover because of lack of resources, staff, or time.\(^{19}\)

As the studies reviewed subsequently demonstrate, the relationship between public relations and the press is important. The newspaper industry does rely somewhat on public relations to subsidize the news and information that goes into the newspaper every day, and the public relations practitioner, in turn, is a valuable resource for information to the newspaper industry. As a valuable


\(^{19}\)Thomas Barnhart, "Newsy, Local Publicity Used by Most Editors," *Editor and Publisher* (April 18, 1953): 37.
resource, public relations professionals must keep in mind what is important to newspaper editors when they are developing potential news stories.

Most editors would agree that newsworthiness, timeliness and locality play a significant role in their decision making process. Essentially editors function as gatekeepers with regards to what is finally published in the newspaper. The gatekeeping theory provides some understanding of the editors' role with regard to public relations press releases.

**Theoretical Basis--Gatekeeping**

In 1947 Kurt Lewin introduced the term "gatekeeper." In discussing social channels, Lewin noted that food and news come to the family table through certain "channels." At various points in these channels, decisions are made that, in essence, perform the function of a "gate," letting some (in this case press releases) through and slamming shut on others. Lewin writes:

The constellation of the forces before and after the gate region is decisively different in such a way that the passing or not passing of the unit through the whole channel depends to a high degree upon what happens in the gate region. This holds not only for food channels but also for the traveling of a news item through certain communication channels.²⁰

Lewin theorized that social forces flow along certain channels such as the reporter-editor channel. What is passed along by each "gatekeeper" is dependent upon either impartial rules or personal bias or something as simple as newspaper space available.

Accordingly public relations "news" efforts, also pass through the gatekeepers. The initial decision of the news value of any story is sometimes made long before it actually gets to the copy desk or to a particular editor. For instance, in the case of reporter-pitched public relations stories, Phillips points out that the reporter may determine the particular slant of a story while the source determines the extent of the story.21

The David Manning White study in 1950 affirmed that the way editors view various news factors has an impact on the selection of stories for distribution through the news media.22 A study in 1989 concerning the gatekeeping role as it relates to the electronic media found that the role of the gatekeeping editor for print and electronic media were essentially the same.23

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As the research indicates, there are many participants in the gatekeeping role and personal bias, personal interest, organizational bias and interest do influence publishing decisions. In 1992 Tsan-Kuo and Jae-Won Lee found that "...editors as gatekeepers in the long chain of news flow undoubtedly hold a central and crucial position in providing news and information to the audience."  

Nevertheless, most gatekeeping decisions can be linked back to the standard editorial test of who? what? when? where? and why? After allowing for "gatekeeping bias," these questions essentially determine the success of press release placement. Lillian Lodge Kopenhaver summed up the decision making process quite well in the conclusions to her study:

Editors reject news releases for a variety of reasons, the most important of which is that they lack news value, followed closely by the fact that they lack a local angle. Lack of information ranked as a reason for rejection, followed by lack of timeliness, poor writing and mechanical and grammatical errors. There was agreement among editors surveyed that the public relations practitioners must consider the news value and local angle on any news release they send to the media. In addition, a common complaint from journalists is that important information is frequently missing, most notably time, place and date.

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While the gatekeeping theory and supporting studies examine the role of editors in the publication decision making process, other studies have been conducted that help identify the factors that the editor/gatekeepers use with regard to publication decisions. These include studies concerning press release placement and factors determining the type of press releases most likely to be published by the gatekeeper/editor. One such study was conducted in 1986 by Linda Morton at Oklahoma State University. Morton's study measured the number and type of press releases from Oklahoma State University's Public Information Office that were successfully placed in newspapers around the State of Oklahoma. Because of similar geographical characteristics, it would be interesting to determine if Morton's results could be validated in a similar study at Brigham Young University in Utah. Would a similar study in Utah produce results similar to those discovered in Oklahoma?

**Statement of Purpose/Problem**

Given that newspapers must depend somewhat on public relations practitioners for news and information, what

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26 Linda Morton, "How Newspapers Choose the Releases They Use," *Public Relations Review*, XII: 3 (Fall 1986): 22-27. This study examined how four newspaper characteristics and seven types of press releases related to successful placement in Oklahoma newspapers. The sample consisted of 408 releases to 19 Oklahoma newspapers from Oklahoma State University's Public Information Office.
factors govern their decision to print press releases? Morton categorized seven types of press releases by topic and purpose, and found that some categories were more likely to be published than were others. The Morton study also factored four newspaper characteristics—*frequency of publication, circulation, distance from the institution and news staff size*—into the publication equation. She found that *frequency of publication* was the only characteristic that affected publication decisions by Oklahoma newspaper editors.

**Brigham Young University and Utah -- A Unique Combination**

Unique factors surrounding the relationship between Utah's newspaper editors and Brigham Young University and its affiliation with The Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter-day Saints make replicating the Oklahoma State Study an interesting proposition.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) dominates the Utah landscape. Additionally, with their diverse media network, the LDS church is able to produce and distribute Mormon based values and cultural messages. Most people are familiar with the Mormon commercials, shown around the country, that promote family unity and other family value messages.

Utah has been widely accepted as a unique place. One religion (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints--
known as LDS or Mormons) dominates the state. The LDS Church's 1992-93 Deseret News Church Almanac reports that of Utah's 1,770,000 residents, 1,363,000 or 77% are Mormons. The influence of the Mormon Church affects both the economical and political atmosphere of the state and the dominance of the LDS Church makes Utah a modern day curiosity to the rest of the country. Brigham Young University's affiliation with the LDS Church makes it the dominant university in Utah. People in Utah are drawn to BYU because the status it has achieved as a strong cultural center and as a nationally recognized educational institution with a nationally ranked sports program.

Given Utah's unusual beginnings--established as a religious refuge by Mormons in 1847--the fact "that the rest of the country has cause to be jealous of Utah is an oddity." Nevertheless, Utah has prospered under the Mormon influence. Time magazine further reports:

Thanks largely to the influence of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints--The Mormons--Utah has become the envy of its neighbors. Other states are bogged down in recession, but Utah's economy is racing...Utah has lured such companies as Delta Air Lines, Fidelity Investments and Sear's Discover Card...it now boasts the nation's youngest, best-educated and most productive work force.

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27The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, The Deseret News Church Almanac (Salt Lake City, Deseret News, 1993): 166.

The church's strict morality (it forbids premarital sex, gambling and the use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs) reinforces the hardworking nature of Utah's people.29

The Mormon influence is not limited to the strength it brings to Utah's economy. The political atmosphere is also dominated by the Church. Forbes Magazine reports:

The Church Office Building...at 28 stories, is the tallest building in Salt Lake City, and looks as if, during the right season and time of day, its shadow could eclipse the Utah State Capital a few blocks to the north, it is a fair approximation of the political pecking order in Utah.30

Malise Ruthven in the Wilson Quarterly says about the Utah political arena:

In Utah, the Church's political influence is so pervasive that it does not even need to take a public stand on certain issues. The Utah state legislature, which is virtually all male and Mormon, recently passed the most restrictive antiabortion law in the United States. The church said nothing: The legislators knew where it stood.31

Brigham Young University is owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As such, it is also a unique part of Utah. The Mormon tradition of having young

29Ibid., 22.


men and women serve two-year "missions" has helped BYU become a center of foreign-language skills:

The country's highest density of foreign-language skills is not in Cambridge or Berkeley but on the BYU Campus. Brigham Young University, where 95 percent of the students are Mormon, teaches 46 languages. Of the 27,000 students, an astonishing 1,000 can speak Chinese, Korean, or some other Asian language. If the U.S. is worrying about how to cope with a confusing, multilingual, Asian-ascendant world, the Mormons are well equipped to help them.32

In addition to a strong language skills center, BYU is home to students from nearly every part of the world. There are many diverse cultures represented among the student body. The students at BYU also represent some of the best young minds in the LDS Church. Through BYU, the LDS Church is training future Mormon leaders.

The LDS Church and Brigham Young University are also interested in sharing world cultures through events sponsored by the University. BYU sends many entertainment groups on world tours to share the Mormon culture with various people. They also sponsor many cultural events at BYU that would usually be unavailable in such a rural community. The cultural events at BYU include, but are not limited to historical museum exhibits, music, dance and theater groups from all over the world. Additionally, many diverse people from around the world are invited to address the community and BYU students about their particular

32 Ibid., 41.
society. Because of the many events sponsored by the University, BYU has become a cultural gathering place within the state of Utah.

BYU has also developed the leading sports program in the state and many LDS church members (and non-members) flock to BYU to watch BYU's nationally recognized football team. In fact, when BYU plays football in Provo, Cougar Stadium holds more people (65,000) than there is population in Provo (45,000).

The range of the LDS Church influence is not limited only to Utah. The LDS Church has also developed a large satellite network throughout the United States. Forbes reports:

Brigham Young University's football games are carried on Saturdays during the fall, but the satellites also serve a much higher calling. In case of an apocalyptic emergency, the Church General Authority can notify 3 million members in North America in less than an hour.33

It must be pointed out that the satellite system is not used only in times of an "apocalyptic emergency" but is used as a forum to address LDS Church members throughout the year about various religious topics. In addition to the satellite network, the LDS Church also owns other large media outlets. The *Wilson Quarterly* reports:

Besides the Salt Lake City Deseret News, which serves as a "house" newspaper, the church owns two major television stations in the West,

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33Rapaport, 76.
KSL-TV in Salt Lake City and KIRO-TV in Seattle, and profitable radio stations in Salt Lake City, Seattle, New York City, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas and San Francisco.³⁴

As one can see, Utah, and by association, Brigham Young University, are considered a unique place affected by varying cultural differences. BYU is considered a cultural gathering place within the state of Utah and many people in Utah come to BYU to enjoy cultural events that would otherwise be unavailable to them. Whether or not these cultural differences affect Utah editors' publication decisions will be determined in this study. For the purposes of this study, it is assumed, based on cultural factors and BYU's affiliation with the LDS Church, that Brigham Young University will be more successful than Oklahoma State University with regards to press release placement.

Brigham Young University and Oklahoma State University

There are many similarities between Brigham Young University and Oklahoma State University. Brigham Young University and Oklahoma State University are both major universities within their respective states. Both universities have nationally-recognized education programs that offer bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in many areas.

³⁴Ruthven, 43.
BYU has 27,000 students and is located in an average size community (Provo--Population, 45,000) that sits 50 miles south of the Utah’s largest city--Salt Lake City. Oklahoma State University has 26,000 students and is also located in an average size community (Stillwater--Population, 37,000). OSU is located about 60 miles from Oklahoma’s largest city--Tulsa. Both communities’ dominant industry is the University--although Provo is also home to several large computer related industries. Both states are also dominated by one religion--Mormon in Utah and Southern Baptist in Oklahoma. However, the Mormon influence is much more pervasive in Utah than is the Southern Baptist religion in Oklahoma. Both Utah and Oklahoma are relatively rural states, with the population clustered heavily in several communities and the rest of the state devoted to agricultural and ranching interest.

The main difference between the two universities is that Brigham Young University is privately owned while Oklahoma State University is part of Oklahoma’s public educational system.

**Research Question**

Given that, for the most part, the two universities share similar circumstances, conducting a study similar in size and scope to the Morton study should produce similar results with regards to Brigham Young University and the
Utah Newspaper industry. Nevertheless, unique religious and cultural factors surrounding Brigham Young University need also to be examined as possible influences on Utah newspaper editor's publication decisions. The following four questions outline the issues that will be addressed by this study:

1. Does Brigham Young University have more, less or the same rate of success in placing press releases as was enjoyed by Oklahoma State University in the Morton study?

2. Do the newspaper characteristics used in the Morton study--frequency of publication, circulation, distance from the institution and news staff size--correlate to a high rate of publication in Utah?

3. Are the press release categories outlined by Morton--coming events, institutional, past events, consumer information, timely topics and features--applicable to the Utah newspaper industry. What type of press releases are Utah newspaper editors' most likely to publish?

4. What effect do culture and religious affiliation have on what Utah editors' choose to print?

After carefully examining the various issues associated with this study, it was determined that answering these research questions would provide a thorough understanding of press release placement from Brigham Young University to the Utah newspaper industry.

This study will use the same methodology as was used in the Morton study to measure the success rate that Brigham Young University's Public Communications Office had in placing their press releases in newspapers around the state of Utah in 1989.
Morton's study, questionably titled "How Newspapers Choose the Releases They Use," actually measures the percentage of press releases placed and the types of press releases Oklahoma newspapers are most likely to publish. This study answers Oklahoma State University questions with regard to the Utah newspaper industry and Brigham Young University.

Interestingly, during the initial phase of the research process, Brent Harker of Brigham Young University's Public Communications Office indicated that the office enjoyed an exceptionally high success rate of press release placement. Mr. Harker provided an in-house analysis of BYU's press release placement (see APPENDIX A). He said, "The Deseret News and Daily Herald are our most stalwart friends. Their acceptance rates exceed 100% occasionally because they hold some of the releases sent one month and use them the next. To have 94% acceptance in our business is incredible. Most often the rates are much lower." It will also be interesting to note if this study produces similar results as were projected from BYU's in-house analysis.

Research questions two, three and four were addressed by qualitative personal interviews conducted among Utah's newspaper editors. These interviews were conducted to discover why Utah's editors published press releases from

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Brigham Young University. If the Mormon cultural tie to Utah communities is indeed a factor, the personal interviews should reveal this tendency.

Morton suggested that research similar to her original study should be useful in helping organizations arrive at some decisions about selective mailing of press releases. Additionally, it is hoped that this study will be enlightening with regards to the gatekeeping theory by keeping in mind the question, "why do newspapers choose to print one type of press release over another?" Other considerations in this study are the traditional gatekeeping criteria editors use when selecting press releases for publication--newsworthiness, timeliness and locality.

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*Morton, 22.*
CHAPTER TWO
SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the evolution of the press release as a primary tool of public relations practitioners. Additionally, this review looks at the relationship between the public relations industry and the newspaper industry. It was further designed to explore how other factors, such as the gatekeeping functions of the newspaper editors, affect the press release selection process. This study also required that literature dealing with specific newspaper characteristics be examined. A review of literature, referred to earlier, also highlights the uniqueness of Utah and the influence of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The Press Release

The first and foremost rule of a press release is that it must be newsworthy. To be considered viable, the release must answer the basic news questions who, what, when, where, why and how. The press release supposedly had its origins during the Civil War. Reporters would transmit their stories by telegraph. Because of the unreliability of the telegraphs during the war, the reporters began including all the important information in the first paragraph. Thus, if
the telegraph went dead, as was often the case, the newspaper editor would have still received all the essential information.  

The press release continues to be the chosen vehicle of the public relations person with regard to the newspaper industry. Benn Reports:

The printed news release continues to be the most common form for communicating news about a company to the media. The form has changed little over the years, partly because of its familiarity. Even radio and television are used to the form...The old style press release is organized according to fundamental principles for communicating news in any medium.

Public Relations' and the Newspaper Industry

The history of the public relations industry and the newspaper industry is intertwined. These two industries have generally been at odds with each other. Although today the two industries work together to each other's mutual benefit, public relations and the newspaper industry, as was explained previously, still retain some animosity stemming from their early experiences.

According to Olasky, this animosity between the public relations industry and the newspaper industry has been ongoing since the late nineteenth century. Olasky reports that the difficulties between the two industries can be

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38 Ibid.
traced back to corporate public relations involving first the railroad industry and later public utilities. Early public relations practitioners were not above bending the truth or bribing newspapermen to get their story out to the public.

Journalists have long been bound by a code of ethics, based on objectivity, that involves reporting the truth of all sides of an issue. Many journalists cannot abide by public relations' advocacy ethics and their presenting only the positive side of a story. Interestingly, although early journalists in general looked down upon the public relations profession, many ended up working in the public relations field themselves.

Public relations professionals adopted their own Code of Ethics in 1950. From 1950 to today, the public relations industry has worked diligently to upgrade their ethical standards.

To be effective, public relations professionals understand they must have a working relationship with the newspaper industry. Agee, Ault and Emery report:

Although admittedly it is possible for public relations people occasionally to take advantage of the media, over the long range it is imperative that public relations communicators establish their in-

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3° Olasky, 7-32.
4° Olasky, 19.
4° O'Neil, 30.
tegrity with media people. Public relations people cannot risk ending their usefulness by duping journalists. Most journalists recognize this fact, and over a long period of time come to know which public relations people can be trusted. Thus, mutually honest and beneficial relationships can be developed.42

Despite what many editors may say publicly, newspapers today, for the simple reason that they cannot afford it and because they do not have enough people to cover all the news, do rely on the public relations industry to help supplement what the public reads in their newspaper. Again, Agee, Ault and Emery:

No newspaper—not even the New York Times or the Wall Street Journal—nor any magazine, news service, or broadcasting station or network can afford to support a staff large enough to have experts in every field of human endeavor. Even the largest media rely heavily upon the public relations persons representing companies and institutions to provide the expertise, the background and the explanations and translations from the language of the experts to the language of the lay person that enable journalists to write about complex and arcane subjects with understanding.

In one sense, then, public relations practitioners provide a necessary link between the media and many specialized areas of activity in our society. A link that the media usually could not afford to provide for themselves.43

42Ault, Agee and Emery, 391.

43Ibid.
Press Release Placement History

Many newspaper editors still do not trust the public relations industry as a whole. Newspaper editors nationwide seem loath to admit any reliance upon the public relations industry for any significant amount of their news. A survey of editors conducted by Honaker elicited numerous responses similar to those that follow.

* Keith Ashley, assistant to the executive editor of the Wichita Eagle and Beacon: "We receive several hundred news releases each week and use perhaps five percent."

* Bill Bondurant, Editor of the Ft. Lauderdale News: "Much of it is thrown away unopened. I only wish public relations people would send me the postage in cash instead of the release."**

Many other responses in the Honaker survey lead one to believe that such attitudes seem to be fairly common throughout the nation's newspaper industry.*

Nevertheless, a look at some past studies measuring press release placement seems to show that editors err in believing they use only a small amount of public relations material. Historically, public relations has played an ever


*Honaker, 17.
increasing role in what the public hears and reads. A study in 1962 by Scott M. Cutlip concludes:

Today's public news media do not have the manpower, in terms of numbers or in terms of mature specialists, to cope with the broadening spectrum of news and the complexity of new subject matter. More and more the news gathering and reporting job is abandoned to the public relations man who supplies the information in neat, easy-to-use packages. I have made a few pilot studies that indicate that public relations material is responsible for about 35% of what we read in the newspaper.46

In the ensuing years, public relations has enjoyed great success in getting its message to its particular publics. Commenting on public relations influence on the news, Turk has stated:

There is no denying the power of the deadline or the size of the news hole in influencing what is included in media content...It's clear that journalists do use the information contained in news releases and other public information handouts.47

Numerous studies indicate that, despite what editors may say publicly, newspapers do rely heavily on the public relations industry. Sandman, Rubin and Sachsman say:

"Only a small percentage of the news covered by the mass media comes from on-the-scene reporting. The vast majority must be obtained from news sources--

46Scott M. Cutlip, "Third of Newspapers' Content PR-Inspired," Editor and Publisher (May 1962) 68.
often through interviews, even more often through...press releases and the like."

The amount of news space filled by press releases has varied from study to study. The Blyskals, along with others, estimate that 45-50 percent of the business news appearing in the Wall Street Journal is made up of press releases or stories initiated by public relations people. The Blykals also say, "overall, maybe half of a newspaper's contents, including hard news as well as softer feature news, is initiated by a press release."

Most studies of press releases seem to show that successful placement depends on the same gatekeeping factors; editors nationwide believe a good press release is first and foremost, newsworthy. Additionally, editors are more apt to use releases that are "aimed...at specific media and localized for individual newspapers...well researched, concise--as near ready for publication--as possible.""""


The gatekeeping theory that first set forth the gatekeeping factors examined in this review was originated by Kurt Lewin.\(^1\)

Regardless of the perceptions of newspaper editors, these press release placement studies indicate that press releases do seem to play an important role in what the public reads in its daily or weekly newspapers.

Other studies have been conducted that examine how different newspaper characteristics, like those found in the Morton study, may also affect press release publication decisions. A 1976 study conducted by Stone and Morrison tested the relationship between newspaper circulation and the percentage of content devoted to each category of news. Additionally, they were looking for relationships between frequency of publication and newspaper content. They found that smaller circulation papers contained more society correspondents' copy, less national advertising and few local photographs. They also found a significant ratio of news was garnered from public relations sources.\(^2\)

A 1977 study by Whitlow found that four factors--local proximity, timeliness, newsworthiness and news space available--accounted for 52% of the differences 36 editors


\(^2\)Gerald C. Stone and Janet Morrison, "Content as a Key to The Purpose of Community Newspapers," *Journalism Quarterly*, 53 (1976), 494-498.
gave for their publication decisions. One of the factors--local proximity--relates closely to the distance from the institution characteristic used for both this study and the Morton study. Nearly half of the editors Whitlow studied listed local proximity as a factor influencing their decision making.\textsuperscript{53} No studies relating to news staff size and publication rates were found in this literature search.

In summary, editors do use press releases to fill space in their publications and convey information to their readers. They are influenced in what they print by the ready-to-print style of today's press releases. Today's public relations professionals make sure they answer the essential who, what, when, where, why and how questions when submitting their press releases. Further, they know that they must maintain an "honest" relationship with journalists in order to have their press releases published on a consistent basis. Additionally, editors are handicapped by the sheer numbers of reporters it would take to gather all the news. They simply must rely on public relations professionals as a source of news.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Methods and Procedures

This study is designed to replicate the Morton study at Oklahoma State University.\(^3\) Press releases from Brigham Young University's Public Communications Office released during the months of February/March and June/July of 1989 will be used in this study. Each BYU press release for these months will be categorized and cross-tabulated according to seven press release categories and four newspaper characteristics outlined in the Morton study.

Additionally, personal interviews with Utah newspaper editors have been conducted to assist in determining possible cultural factors that may account for the difference in publication success rates between Brigham Young University and Oklahoma State University.

Characteristics and Categories

The Morton study tracked 408 press releases from the Oklahoma State University's Public Information Office.

Morton classified each release based on the following seven categories:

\(^3\)Linda Morton, "How Newspapers Choose the Releases They Use," Public Relations Review XII: 3 (Fall 1986): 22-27.
Institutional—This type included all releases that relate to the entire institution as well as those about specific parts of the institution. It included reports of activities, services, and accomplishments of such units.

Coming Event—This type included all releases that announce and/or promote events sponsored by the institution. These articles were all written and released before the event.

Past Events—This type included all articles summarizing or based upon past events. They covered the same types of activities as coming events but were released after the event.

Consumer Information—This type included all articles that provided information to aid consumers. Much of this information told consumers how to do something.

Timely Topics—This type included all articles dealing with topics in the news.

Feature—This type included all articles about people of interest associated with the institution. (Features are tracked only when they are printed in newspapers other than the subject's hometown newspaper).

Research Stories—This type included all articles summarizing or based upon research projects conducted at the institution or by the institution's personnel.55

Each release was categorized according to the above standard and its publication cross-tabulated against four newspaper characteristics—frequency of publication, circulation, distance from the institution and news staff size. 56 These newspaper characteristics are defined as follows.


56Ibid.
**Frequency of Publication**--This refers to the number of times a newspaper is published per week--daily, twice weekly or weekly.

**Circulation**--Refers to the average number of newspapers that are distributed per newspaper printing.

**Distance from the Institution**--This characteristic refers to the number of miles that each newspaper is located from Brigham Young University's campus in Provo, Utah.

**News Staff Size**--Refers to the number of people--reporters and editors--working on the staff of a particular newspaper.

Both the press release categories and the newspaper characteristics would account for most of the factors one would associate with newspaper publication rates. BYU's Public Communication's Office agreed that the seven categories would essentially cover all the types of press releases sent out by their office. The press releases were categorized into one of the seven categories and tracked to see if they were actually published. The releases were then cross-tabulated using the four characteristics of newspapers defined above and used by Morton. As in the Morton study, hometown articles--those about students, faculty, staff and administrators of interest only to the person's hometown newspaper--were not included. Such articles are expected to be published at a substantially higher rate than would the seven categories of press releases.
Press Release Selection, Tracking and Statistical Analysis

With the assistance of Brigham Young University's Public Communications Office, a computer search produced a listing of each article sent out from the Public Communications Office for the 1989-90 school year. Representative months (February/March and June/July 1989) were determined to suffice for the purposes of this study. These separate two-month periods during the school year would account for both the time period when the greatest number of press releases were sent out and for the summer period when there are fewer releases sent out.

There were 1,468 press releases sent from BYU's Public Communications Office during this time and it was assumed that the greater number of releases would produce sufficient data for a statistical analysis and comparison. Further, the hard copy data files of the Public Communication's Office were examined in order to validate the computer listing. Each of the 1,468 press releases were similarly read, categorized and tracked to the various Utah newspapers.

The Utah newspaper industry involves many different types of publications. Brigham Young University's Public Communications Office sends out press releases to all segments of the Utah newspaper industry. These include all Utah dailies, weeklies-northern Utah, weeklies-southern Utah, weeklies-Salt Lake City Metro, weeklies central Utah
and weeklies-Utah County. A copy of this newspaper office list (see Appendix B) is provided.

After gathering the data from the various Utah newspapers it was then statistically analyzed and compared with the aid of Brigham Young University's Statistical Department. The industry-accepted Statistical Analysis System or SAS was used to process the data. As with the Morton study, each analysis cross-tabulated a newspaper characteristic with the seven types of press releases. Dr. Gil Hilton of BYU's Statistic Department advised that non-weighted means would provide the best statistical analysis and comparison.

**Personal Interviews**

At each newspaper office a physical inspection of the newspaper archives determined whether or not each press release was published. Additionally, a list of questions (see Appendix C) was discussed with each of 30 newspaper editors during a personal interview. The purpose of the list of questions was twofold. First, it was designed to uncover any possible cultural factors that may account for Brigham Young University having a greater success rate than Oklahoma State University. Second, questions were included that were necessary to gather the pertinent data for replicating the Morton study as closely as possible with
regards to the statistical analysis and comparison. This would include questions about the newspaper characteristics—frequency of publication, news staff size, distance located from the institution and news staff size.

As mentioned previously, it is believed that Brigham Young University would be more successful than Oklahoma State University with regards to press release placement. The personal interviews gathered opinions from Utah's newspaper editors concerning press release publication among Utah's colleges and universities—particularly Brigham Young University. It was hoped the personal interviews would discover possible factors that could account for Brigham Young University having a greater success rate than Oklahoma State University.

**Limitations of Study**

Some limitations of this study include that while press release placement can be measured, readership of these releases cannot be determined. Additionally, it is believed that because of Brigham Young University's tie to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the results probably cannot be generalized to other communities.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This data is the summary of four months of Brigham Young University press releases collected during the same calendar year--1989. Every effort was made to replicate the Morton study as closely as possible. In consultation with Dr. Gil Hilton and graduate assistant Spence Grant of Brigham Young University's Statistics Department, it was determined that the Morton study essentially relied on mean data. The mean being the "sum of the scores in a distribution divided by the number of scores." 

Accordingly, this study is modeled after the Morton model for data analysis.

There has been some slight alterations made to the statistical groupings, these alterations can be attributed to demographic differences between Utah and Oklahoma.

This analysis consists of several different comparisons. First, the overall publication percentage rate of Brigham Young University--including all press release categories and newspaper characteristics--is examined and compared against the Oklahoma State University findings. Second, the individual mean scores for all the categories of

Brigham Young University are analyzed and compared with the mean scores in the Oklahoma State University study. Third, the individual percentage rate for each of the seven categories is examined and compared with the Oklahoma State University results. Finally, similar results of the newspaper characteristics for each university are discussed and compared.

Additionally, the personal interviews conducted for this study will be analyzed and discussed. The personal interviews represent a census of opinions offered by Utah newspaper editors. First, the editors reveal opinions about which college or university they are most likely to publish press releases from. Second, the most likely category of press release to be published is discussed. Third, the editor's opinions about the cultural influence of Brigham Young University and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is discussed in relation to its affect on publication decisions. Finally, a comparison of actual results of this study and the Utah newspaper editor's opinions is examined.

**Differences Required for Statistical Accuracy**

For statistical purposes it was necessary to alter slightly the groupings used to determine newspaper circulation, distance located from the institution and news staff size. These changes are due to differences between
Utah and Oklahoma in population distribution, the geographic distances of cities in which newspapers are published from each university and differences in news staff sizes. For example, the Morton study separated circulation numbers as under 1000, 1000 to 2,999, 3,000 to 5,999, 6,000 to 19,999 and over 20,000. This study separated the circulation numbers as under 2,899, 2,900 to 5,499, 5,500 to 7,999 and 8,000 and beyond. Using the same groupings as the Morton study would skew the data because there needs to be a near equal number of newspapers in each grouping for statistical analysis. These minor alterations did not significantly affect the statistical analysis because the comparison is not between groups, but between publication rates. If, for example, we compared Oklahoma's group A to Utah's group A then changes to the groupings would have altered the statistical comparison. The groupings under the "staff size" and "distance from source" categories also had to be altered slightly to balance that data for an accurate statistical analysis.

**Combined Overall Publication Rate**

Table 1, on the following page, provides the overall publication rate for each of the three types of newspaper publications—weekly, twice-weekly and daily. As one can see, Brigham Young University enjoys substantially greater success rates regardless of frequency of publication.
Utah daily newspapers publish Brigham Young University press releases 12.1% of the time. Utah twice-weekly newspapers publish BYU press releases 43.5% of the time and Utah weeklies publish BYU press releases at a 46.5% rate.

Table 1 also shows that in Utah, weekly newspapers are the least likely to publish press releases (12.1%) while in Oklahoma, daily newspapers are the least likely to publish any type of press release (7.6%).

While Oklahoma's twice-weekly newspapers publish press releases more often then any other type of Oklahoma newspaper, Utah dailies publish BYU press releases 46.5% of the time. This is followed closely by Utah twice-weeklies at 43.5%.

Table 1.--Overall Average Press Release Publication Percentage for Weekly, Twice-Weekly and Daily Newspapers for Brigham Young University and Oklahoma State University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Twice-Weekly</th>
<th>Daily</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BYU</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>43.5%</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSU</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It must be noted that of the four Utah daily newspapers analyzed in this study, two--the Daily Herald and the Deseret News--would both be expected to publish BYU press releases at a much greater rate then would the other dailies. The Daily Herald would tend to publish more simply because Brigham Young University is a central part of the
community and the Daily Herald is Provo's local newspaper. The Deseret News, of Salt Lake City, also publishes Brigham Young University press releases at an unusually high rate. The Deseret News, like Brigham Young University, is affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This may account for higher press release placement rates enjoyed by Brigham Young University with this newspaper.

Excluding both the Daily Herald and the Deseret News from the results causes the Utah daily newspaper success rate to drop from 46.5% to 37%. The two remaining Utah dailies— the Salt Lake Tribune and Ogden Standard Examiner—publishing press releases at a 37% rate would still represent a four times greater publication rate than the daily newspaper rate discovered in the Oklahoma State University study.

It is interesting to note that both the Salt Lake Tribune and the Ogden Standard Examiner have no affiliation to BYU or the Mormon church. Thus, the combined 37% publishing rate discovered for these two newspapers may be closer to the actual rate one would find among other unaffiliated newspapers. The twice-weekly and weekly results are not affected by this high publication phenomenon.
Comparing Mean Results by Frequency of Publication

As in the Morton study, the seven types of categories were cross-tabulated with the four types of characteristics. A regression test weighted by the inverse of the variance was run on the data to look for significance between the categories and characteristics.

Subsequently, given that all four newspaper characteristics among the Utah newspapers studied are in a constant state so that they behave the same way today as they would in the future (for example, the distance from a particular newspaper to Brigham Young University will not change) non-weighted means were determined to provide the most accurate analysis and comparison data for replicating the Morton study.

Because frequency of publication was the only factor showing significance when compared with publication rates, tables 2 and 3 reflect the cross-tabulation between categories of press releases and frequency of publication.

An examination of the these tables (Table 2.--Brigham Young University) and (Table 3.--Oklahoma State University), indicates that Brigham Young University enjoyed greater mean press release publication rates for nearly all categories (the exceptions being past event press releases, coming event releases published weekly, timely topic press releases published weekly and twice-weekly and consumer information
Table 2.--Means of the Percent of Press Release Publication by Frequency of Newspaper Publication for Brigham Young University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>WEEKLY</th>
<th>2-WEEKLY</th>
<th>DAILY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( \bar{X} )</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>( \bar{X} )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coming event</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past events</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely topics</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer info.</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.--Means of the Percent of Press Release Publication by Frequency of Newspaper Publication for Oklahoma State University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>WEEKLY</th>
<th>2-WEEKLY</th>
<th>DAILY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( \bar{X} )</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>( \bar{X} )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coming events</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past events</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely topics</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Information</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
releases published twice-weekly) whether a newspaper was classified as a weekly, twice-weekly or a daily.

Both Brigham Young University results (see Table 2) and Oklahoma State University (see Table 3) results provide a mean score—where \( \bar{x} \) = mean and a standard deviation—where \( sd \) = standard deviation.

For Utah weekly newspapers, coming event press releases provided a mean score of .10. Oklahoma weeklies had a mean score of .16 for coming event press releases. Utah weeklies did not publish any past event press releases while Oklahoma weeklies had a mean score of .16 for this category of press release. BYU's timely topic press releases produced a mean publication rate of .06 in Utah weeklies. This mean score compares favorably with Oklahoma weeklies mean publication rate for timely topics of .08. The second lowest mean score of .03 for Utah weekly newspapers was in the feature category of press releases. This matches the .03 mean score for Oklahoma newspapers. Consumer information press releases provided the highest mean publication rate in both Utah and Oklahoma dailies—.34 for BYU to .23 for OSU. Research press releases provided a mean score of .18 in Utah compared to .11 in Oklahoma daily newspapers.

While the mean scores for Utah and Oklahoma weekly newspapers are fairly close for all categories the twice-weekly publication mean scores for Utah and Oklahoma newspapers provide many contrasts. In Utah, coming event
press releases in twice-weekly newspapers provide a mean score of .79, this is more than three times the mean for Oklahoma twice-weekly newspapers--.23. Utah twice-weeklies did not publish any past event press releases while Oklahoma twice-weeklies had a mean score of .05 for this category of press release. Utah twice-weeklies published less timely topic press releases--.20 then Oklahoma twice-weeklies--.31. Utah's twice-weeklies published institutional releases at a mean rate of .34 while Oklahoma's twice-weeklies did not publish any of this category of release. Feature press releases were published at a mean rate of .26 in Utah--five times more than the mean score of .05 in Oklahoma twice-weeklies. Both Utah and Oklahoma twice-weeklies published consumer information press releases at a very substantial mean rate--.66 for BYU and .82 for OSU--the .82 for OSU represents the highest mean score for all categories of press releases and all three frequencies of publication. Research press releases from BYU provided a mean score of score of .80. The .80 mean score represents a marked difference between Utah and the Oklahoma twice-weeklies that produced a mean score of only .05 for OSU's research press releases.

Comparisons of mean scores of Utah dailies and Oklahoma dailies, like twice-weeklies, also provided a stark contrast between the two studies. Utah daily newspapers provided the
highest overall mean scores for the three frequencies of Utah newspapers studied--weekly, twice-weekly and daily. The Oklahoma State study reveals that Oklahoma daily newspapers provided the lowest overall mean scores for the three types of newspaper publications studied.

In Utah dailies, coming event press releases yielded a mean score of .34--more than three times the mean score in Oklahoma dailies--.09. Past event press releases were published at a nearly identical rate by both Utah and Oklahoma dailies--.05 to .07. Timely topic press releases published by Utah dailies represented the highest mean score--.93--for all other categories and all times published. The .93 mean score is four times greater than the .23 reported in the Morton study for timely topic press releases. The .23 mean result for Oklahoma newspapers was the highest mean score reported for Oklahoma daily newspapers. Institutional press releases from BYU were published at mean rate of .36, while in Oklahoma, institutional releases resulted in a .05 publication rate. Feature press releases in Utah were published six times more often than the same type of release in Oklahoma--.53 to .08. BYU's consumer information and research press releases--.47 and .31 respectively--far outdistanced the mean scores reported in the OSU study--.15 and .08.

As is evidenced, the mean scores in this study show that Brigham Young University is far more likely to have
nearly all categories of press releases published more often than is Oklahoma State University. This is true regardless of how often a newspaper is published--weekly, twice-weekly or on a daily basis.

**Combined Percentage of Publication of All Categories and All Times Published**

Table 4, on the following page, provides the combined publication percentage for all seven categories of press releases and all times published for both studies.

With the exception of past event press releases--where OSU had a better percentage rate, 4.6% to BYU's 1.6%--Brigham Young University's percentage of successful press releases far outdistanced Oklahoma State University in all other categories.

Brigham Young University had a more than three to one edge in the coming event category--50% for BYU to OSU's 15%. BYU had a 39.6% success rate for timely topic press releases compared to 15.3% for OSU. There was a large discrepancy in the institutional category where BYU enjoyed a 28% success rate compared to OSU 1.6%. Feature press releases also provided a large difference, BYU had a 27.3% success rate compared to OSU's success rate of 4.3%. Consumer information press releases provided the closest comparison of success for the two universities--BYU had 49% of their consumer information press releases published, while OSU was able to publish 40% of this category of release. BYU
published more than five times as many research press releases than OSU--43% for BYU compared to 8% for OSU.

Table 4 also shows that the strongest preference among Utah editors was for coming event press releases--50%.
The strongest preference among Oklahoma newspaper editors was for consumer information press releases--40%. The category of press release least likely to be published by Utah editors was past events--1.6%. In Oklahoma, institutional press releases were the least likely to be published--1.6%.

Looking at the seven categories strictly from a practical publishing standpoint, Morton concluded:

Three types of releases were published so infrequently that their value to public relations practitioners should be seriously questioned. These...
releases are past events (4 percent), feature (3 percent) and institutional (less than 2 percent).

However, the results of this study negate Morton's conclusion. Unlike Morton's study, with the exception of past event press releases--1.6%--all categories of press releases from Brigham Young University's Public Communications Office were published at a rate exceeding 25 percent. The high success rate enjoyed by BYU would be considered exceptional by public relations' standards.

Similar Results Found In Four Newspaper Characteristics

As mentioned previously, the four newspaper characteristics included--frequency of publication, newspaper circulation, distance newspaper located from institution and news staff size.

As in the Morton study, only one newspaper characteristic, frequency of publication, interacted significantly with the different types of press releases to influence publication decisions. The interactions are expressed in statistical terms of $f$ and $p$ scores displayed in table 5. The results of this study found for frequency of publication that $f=3.97$ and $p=.0001$.

In the Morton study, the cross-tabulation between types of releases and characteristics found that for frequency of publication $f=2.33$ and $P=.007$.

**Morton, 27.**
In other words, as it interacts with the seven different types of releases for both this study and the Morton study, only the newspapers' frequency of publication (whether once, twice or seven days a week) affects successful press release placement. The f value and p value are statistically significant and indicate an interaction. (P-values that measure greater than .05% are not considered to be significant). All possible pairwise tests were made and the only results of significance were associated with frequency of publication (see Table 5).

Table 5.—F-Table for Interaction for Seven Categories of Press Releases and Four Different Newspaper Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction</th>
<th>d.f.</th>
<th>F-value</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 Categories by Staff</td>
<td>24,134</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>.8741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Categories by Circulation</td>
<td>18,141</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>.1271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Categories by Distance</td>
<td>11,149</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>.0735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Categories by Frequency</td>
<td>12,148</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>.0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the other characteristics—circulation, distance located from institution, news staff size—were cross-tabulated against the seven categories the results showed that none of the other characteristics interacted significantly with the seven types of press releases to affect publication rates.
Morton provided only a reference to the significant interactions of $f=2.33$ and $p=.007$ discovered in the Oklahoma State University study, but did not report insignificant results.

**Personal Interviews--A Qualitative Analysis**

It was very interesting to discover that only one newspaper characteristic, *frequency of publication*, had any effect on the publication rates among both Utah and Oklahoma newspapers, however, logic dictates that *frequency of publication* alone would not account for Brigham Young University having a higher rate of publication than did Oklahoma State University. More releases were tracked in this study than in the Morton study and this fact may also account for some of the difference in placement rates, but these two points collectively cannot account for the large discrepancy in press release publication rates found between the two universities.

As stated previously, it is believed that Brigham Young University enjoys a higher rate of publication than Oklahoma State University because of different cultural factors and BYU's tie to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. With this in mind, qualitative personal interviews were conducted to determine possible factors that may account for higher press release publication rates in Utah. The list of questions (see Appendix C), designed to identify
possible publication factors, guided the interviews of Utah newspaper editors.

The following tables—six thru nine—reflect a census of opinions offered by Utah's newspaper editors. Although Yes/No answers are recorded in some instances, answers from the editors included qualifying statements. Generally, the editors' opinions seem to point to the fact that Brigham Young University is given more consideration than are other Utah colleges or universities with regard to press release publication. It must be pointed out that these results reflect opinions of editors and may differ somewhat with the actual publication results reported earlier in this chapter.

The first table will reveal Utah editors' opinions about which college or university they are most likely to publish press releases from. Second, the most likely category of press releases to be published in Utah newspapers is discussed. Third, editors' opinions about the influence on publication rates and the tie between Brigham Young University and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is discussed. Finally, a comparison of actual results of this study and Utah's newspaper editors' opinions is examined.

The personal interviews did reveal that newspapers located in the area of any college or university tend to service that university more readily than any of Utah's other colleges or universities. However, when asked to
choose which of any other colleges or universities, other
than local institutions, would be more likely to have a
press release published in their newspaper, Utah editors
overwhelmingly named Brigham Young University (see Table 6).

Table 6.--What College or University, Other than Local
Institutions, is Most Likely to Have its Press
Release Published?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BYU</th>
<th>University of Utah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

David Bern, editor of the twice-weekly Tooele Bulletin &
Transcript, said:

We have no wire service and rely heavily on press
releases to fill available news space. BYU sends more
releases than any of the other universities. A lot of
our readers are interested about (sic) what goes on
there.

Mr. Bern's comments about Brigham Young University sending
more releases than any other Utah college may indicate one
of the reasons that BYU does have a greater success rate
than does Oklahoma State University.

Mary Corral of the weekly Beaver Press said that her
newspaper publishes a large number of BYU press releases
simply because a lot of people from Beaver, Utah, travel

---

David Bern, Tooele Bulletin & Transcript, personal
interview, Toole, Utah, March 25, 1990.
north to "Provo for shopping or to attend events unavailable in their own town."60

Lloyd Call of the weekly *Manti Messenger*, said that members of his community attend many cultural events that are sponsored by BYU and so he tends to publish most of the cultural *coming event* press releases. Mr. Call, like most Utah editors, responded that he is always looking for stories of local interest.61

Table 7, on the following page, indicates that, according to Utah editors, *coming events* are the most likely type of release to be published from all categories for both Brigham Young University and other Utah colleges and universities (see Table 7). Several editors indicated that people in their communities are always interested in annual events such as the Brigham Young University Women's Conference and also in annual cultural activities such as dance festivals. Bruce Keyes of the weekly Box Elder News\Box Elder Journal indicated that he particularly enjoyed press releases about *research* or *consumer information* that may be interesting or important to his readers. Several editors also mentioned that *timely topics* are one of the key factors in their publication decision making process.

Table 7.--Of the 7 Categories, What Category of Press Release From BYU vs. Other Utah Colleges and Universities Are You Most Likely to Publish?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>From BYU</th>
<th>From Other Utah Colleges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coming Event</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely Topics</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feature</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Information</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Brigham Young University and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The answers to questions about the influence on press release publication rates and Brigham Young University's affiliation with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints elicited a variety of responses (see Table 8). Ten out of 30 editors said that BYU's religious affiliation had no bearing on their decision making process. Six editors were not sure if BYU's religious affiliation affected their decision making process. However, 14 editors said that

Table 8.--Does Brigham Young University's Affiliation With The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Affect Publication Decision Making?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BYU's affiliation with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had some, if only a small effect, on their publication decisions (see Table 8). Several of these editors mentioned that a lot of their readership is made up of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and releases such as those announcing or reporting on the annual Women's Conference are important to a certain segment of their readership. No editors indicated that Brigham Young University's religious affiliation had a major impact on their decision making process.

Editor's Opinions vs. Actual Results

It is interesting to note that the results of the statistical study do not coincide with the opinions expressed by Utah's newspaper editors. Table 9, on the following page, reflects the opinions of Utah's editors and the statistical publication results uncovered in this study. The percentage under editor's opinion reflects the number of editors interviewed--30 divided by the number of times BYU was mentioned in each press release category (see table 7). The actual results give the overall publication percentage for each category of press releases reported earlier in table 4.

With the exception of the coming events category of press releases, the comparison of percentages indicates that editors believe they publish far fewer press releases than are actually published.
Table 9.--Utah Editor's Publishing Opinions vs. Statistical Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Editor's Opinion</th>
<th>Statistical Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coming Event</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Event</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely Topic</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>39.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feature</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer info.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Editor's opinions and the actual results of the coming event category are fairly close—57% to 50%. Additionally, editor's opinions that they publish none of the past event press releases is understandable considering that the actual results show they publish only 1.6% of this category of press release.

The editor's opinions about the rest of the categories indicate a large discrepancy. Editor's believe they publish only 23% of timely topic press releases, while this study shows that they published over 39% of this category of press release. Editor's opinions about the institutional and feature press releases indicated that they believe that they published very few, if any, of this type of press release from Brigham Young University—the editors said they did not publish any of these categories of press releases. However,
the actual results show that Utah's newspapers published institutional press releases 28% of the time and feature press releases 27.3% of the time. Where editors believed they only published 10% of the consumer information and research press releases, in actuality, Utah newspapers published these two categories of press releases 49% and 43% of the time respectively.

Interestingly, Utah's editor's opinions coincide with the findings reviewed earlier in Chapter Two of this study. As Honaker pointed out, most editors do not like to admit any reliance upon the public relations industry for any significant amount of their news.\textsuperscript{62} This reluctance to admit to reliance upon public relations for any amount of news may account for the large discrepancy between Utah editor's opinions and the actual results of this study.

The data analyzed for this study combined with the results of the personal interviews point out that Brigham Young University did indeed succeed in getting a higher percentage of press releases published than did Oklahoma State University.

\textsuperscript{62}Honaker., 16-19.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

Initial Expectations

During the initial phase of this study, it was expected that Brigham Young University would have a higher publication rate than Oklahoma State University. The basis for this assumption was derived from meetings with members of BYU's Public Communications Office. The office provided an in-house analysis of press release publication rates that showed that BYU enjoyed an exceptional success rate.

Additionally, it was believed that BYU's tie to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints would result in a somewhat higher publication rate. Nevertheless, the large difference between the results of this study and the Morton study was not anticipated.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to compare the success rate Brigham Young University experienced with regard to press release placement among Utah's newspaper industry through replicating a similar study conducted at Oklahoma State University. Seven categories of press releases were cross-tabulated with four newspaper characteristics. The
seven categories of press releases included coming events, past events, timely topics, institutional, features, consumer information and research. The four newspaper characteristics were frequency of publication, circulation, distance from the institution and news staff size.

The results of the accumulated data show first that Utah newspapers do publish far more press releases than do Oklahoma newspapers. Second, the results demonstrate that BYU has higher mean publication scores for nearly all categories of press releases when cross-tabulated against one newspaper characteristic--frequency of publication. Third, BYU published a far superior percentage of press releases in all but one category--past events--where both this study and the OSU study confirmed that past events are rarely published in any instance. Finally, it was discovered that of the four newspaper characteristics used in this study and the Morton study, only one--frequency of publication--had any effect upon publishing decisions.

In addition to the quantitative analysis, qualitative personal interviews among Utah's newspaper editors were conducted to discover any possible factors why Brigham Young University would enjoy a greater press release publication rate than would Oklahoma State University.

The personal interviews discovered that first, Utah's editors believe BYU is more likely to have a press release published than any other Utah college or university and,
interestingly, that BYU sends out more press releases than other Utah colleges and universities. Second, it was found that editors believe coming event press releases are the most likely press release category to be published in Utah newspapers. This opinion was verified by the results of this study showing that 50% of coming event press releases were published by Utah's newspapers. Third, it was established that Utah's editors believe BYU's tie to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does have some effect, although minimal, on their publishing decisions.

Finally, it was demonstrated that, like other editors around the country, Utah editors believed they published far fewer press releases than they actually published.

Conclusions

Conclusions Based on Data Analysis and Comparison

The results of the statistical data and the personal interviews lead to the conclusion that Utah newspaper editors are far more receptive to publishing press releases from Brigham Young University than Oklahoma newspaper editors are to publishing press releases from Oklahoma State University.

The results demonstrate first that Utah newspapers published more press releases than Oklahoma newspapers. Two of the three frequencies of Utah newspapers studied—twice-
weekly and daily—published BYU press releases at a much higher rate than did Oklahoma newspapers. Utah twice-weekly newspapers published BYU press releases more than twice as often as Oklahoma twice-weeklies published OSU press releases. Utah daily newspapers published BYU press releases over six times more often than Oklahoma dailies published OSU press releases. Interestingly, Utah weeklies and Oklahoma weeklies both published press releases at nearly the same rate.

It was also interesting to discover, as expected, that two Utah dailies—the Deseret News and the Daily Herald—have strong ties to BYU and publish BYU press releases at a higher rate than the other two Utah dailies—the Ogden Standard Examiner and the Salt Lake Tribune—which have no ties to BYU. Nevertheless, by excluding the Deseret News and the Daily Herald from this study—the remaining two Utah dailies still published BYU press releases almost four times more often than Oklahoma daily newspapers published OSU press releases.

The second conclusion is that Utah weeklies and Oklahoma weeklies more closely resemble each other than do the other two frequencies of newspapers studied. The mean scores for both Utah weeklies and Oklahoma weeklies are very close in all categories.

The mean scores reported for the other two types of newspapers vary significantly between Utah and Oklahoma.
Both Utah twice-weeklies and dailies publish press releases at a consistently higher mean rate than Oklahoma twice-weeklies and dailies.

Third, past event press releases are published so rarely that their effectiveness should be seriously questioned. It was found that Utah editors published past event press releases less than 2% of the time. The OSU study found that past event press releases were published less than 5% of the time.

This study also demonstrated that almost all categories of BYU press releases are published at a very substantial rate. BYU has the most success with coming event, consumer information, research and timely topic press releases—each enjoying a percentage rate of 39% or higher. BYU also has good success with both institutional and feature press releases—each published more than 25% of the time.

OSU, on the other hand, had very little success with three categories—past events, institutional and features—each published less than 5% of the time. OSU also only enjoyed moderate success with three other categories—coming event, timely topics and research—published 15%, 15.6% and 8% of the time respectively. OSU's most successful category was consumer information press releases. The percent of publication for this category compared favorably with BYU's consumer information press releases—40% to BYU's 49%.
The final conclusion one may draw, based on the statistical analysis, is that of the four newspaper characteristics only one--frequency of publication--had any effect on publication rates. In both Utah and Oklahoma only one newspaper characteristic, *frequency of publication*, had any statistical significance on the press release publication rates. None of the other characteristics--*circulation, distance from institution or news staff size*-- interacted significantly with the seven types of releases to affect publication rates.

**Conclusions Based on Personal Interviews**

The personal interviews were conducted to discover possible factors for the large discrepancy in publication rates and, in fact, they do shed some light on the differing results. First, the results of the personal interviews conclude that Brigham Young University was more likely to have their press releases published in Utah newspapers than were other Utah institutions of higher learning. Editor's comments seem to indicate that Brigham Young University tends to send out more press releases than do other Utah colleges or universities. Editors also indicated that Brigham Young University is an attractive cultural center for their readership and so they tend to keep their readers informed of events at Brigham Young University.
The second conclusion one may draw, based on the personal interviews, is the fact that Utah editors' believe that more coming event press releases are published from Brigham Young University than for any other Utah college or university. This opinion was verified by the statistical results which reveal that Utah newspapers published 50% of the coming event press releases they received from BYU. Some press releases announcing events such as the annual Brigham Young University Women's Conference are published among a great many of Utah's newspapers.

Third, the personal interviews revealed that Brigham Young University's affiliation with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does have some small effect on the successful press release placement rate enjoyed by BYU. The newspaper editors recognized that a fairly large percentage of their readership are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and that particular segment of readership is interested in events sponsored by or involving Brigham Young University.

Finally, it may be concluded that Utah newspaper editor's opinions about press releases compare favorably to opinions expressed by newspaper editors throughout the country. Like other newspaper editors, Utah's newspaper editors admit to publishing far fewer press releases than are actually published in their weekly, twice-weekly or daily newspapers.
Possible Further Studies

While the number of press releases studied for BYU vs. OSU were more than three to one--1468 vs. 408--a majority of the BYU press releases were categorized as coming events, institutional or features. It would be useful to study additional months from a different year and see if the mean percentages of publication would hold up across all the categories.

Brigham Young University does in fact place more press releases than Oklahoma State University. It also appears that Brigham Young University's press release publication rate is greater than that of other Utah colleges or universities. However, a study comparing Brigham Young University and other Utah colleges and universities would have to be conducted to verify this observation.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Barnhart, Thomas "Newsy, Local Publicity Used by Most Editors." Editor and Publisher. April 18, 1953.


Cutlip, Scott M. "Third of Newspapers' Content PR-Inspired." Editor and Publisher, May 1962. 38.


APPENDIX B
Weeklies North

BOX ELDER NEWS
BOX ELDER JOURNAL
55 SOUTH 100 WEST
BRIGHAM CITY UT  84301

THE CACHE CITIZEN
PO BOX 703
LOGAN, UT 84321

THE MORGAN COUNTY NEWS
PO BOX 190
MORGAN, UT  84050

THE TREMONTON LEADER
GARLAND TIMES
119 EAST MAIN
TREMONTON, UT  83337
WEEKLIES SL-METRO

MURRAY EAGLE
155 E. 4905 S.
MURRAY, UT 84107

THE SALT LAKE TIMES
751 S. 200 W.
SLC, UT 84101

THE ENTERPRISE
PO BOX 11778
SLC, UT 84147-0778
WEEKLIES CENTRAL

NEPHI TIMES NEWS
96 SOUTH MAIN
NEPHI, UT 84648

TOOELE BULLETIN & TRANSCRIPT
58 N. MAIN
TOOELE, UT 84074

WASATCH WAVE
PO BOX 128
HEBER CITY, UT 84032

DAVID HAMPSHIRE
PARK RECORD
PO BOX 3688
PARK CITY, UT 84060
WEEKLIES UTAH COUNTY

MARK HADDOCK
NEWTAH INC. (CITIZEN, PLEASANT GROVE REVIEW, LEHI FREE PRESS)
PO BOX 7
AMERICAN FORK, UT 84303

PAT CONOVER
SPRINGVILLE HERALD
161 S. MAIN ST.
SPRINGVILLE, UT 84663

J.C. HENDERSON
SPANISH FORK PRESS
PO BOX 190
SPANISH FORK, UT 84660

PAYSON CHRONICLE
PO BOX 385
PAYSON, UT 84651
WEEKLIES SOUTH

BEAVER PRESS
40 EAST CENTER
BEAVER, UT 84713

MANTI MESSENGER
35 SOUTH MAIN
MANTI, UT 84642

SALINA SUN
60 EAST MAIN
SALINA, UT 84654

SAN JUAN RECORD
PO BOX 879
MONTICELLO, UT 84535

GAZETTE
PO BOX 908
FILLMORE, UT 84361

MOAB TIME INDEPENDENT
PO BOX 129
MOAB, UT 83532

SOUTHERN UTAH NEWS
40 EAST CENTER
KANAB, UT 84741

GARFIELD COUNTY NEWS
115 NORTH MAIN
PANGUITCH, UT 84759

MT. PLEASANT PYRAMID
49 WEST MAIN
MT. PLEASANT, UT 84647

EMERY COUNTY PROGRESS LEADER
PO BOX 475
CASTLE DALE, UT 84513

RICHFIELD REAPER
43 SOUTH MAIN
RICHFIELD, UT 84701
DAILIES

DAILY HERALD
PROVO, UT

SALT LAKE TRIBUNE
SLC, UT

DESERET NEWS
SLC, UT

OGDEN STANDARD EXAMINER
OGDEN, UT
Personal Interview With Utah Newspaper Editors

List of Guide Questions

1. What is the approximate circulation of your newspaper?

2. What is your news staff size?

3. Is your newspaper a daily, weekly, twice-weekly, other?

4. What is the nearest college or university to your publication?

5. You have examined the categories that press releases from colleges or universities tend to fall into. Would you accept these categories as accurate? Would you include any additional categories?

6. Of the seven categories, which are the most important criteria you use when deciding whether or not to publish a press release?

7. Have you ever published press releases from Brigham Young University? If yes, why and what type?

8. Have you ever published press releases from any of Utah's other major colleges or universities? If yes, why and what type?

9. Does your newspaper tend to service the nearest college or university?

10. What type of university or college press release are you least likely to publish in your newspaper? Why?
11. Do you see yourself giving any preference with regards to publication to one college or university? If yes, why?

12. Does BYU's affiliation with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints affect your publication decisions? If yes, why?
Measuring Press Release Placement From
Brigham Young University's Public Communications Office
To Utah's Newspapers

Gregory T. Kunde
Department of Communications
M.A. Degree, December 1993

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a replication of a study conducted at Oklahoma State University in 1986. This study measures the percentage of Brigham Young University press releases published in Utah newspapers during a four month period in 1989. The results of the two studies are analyzed and compared.

Additionally, personal interviews were conducted with thirty Utah newspaper editors to help determine any additional factors that may affect publishing decisions among Utah's newspaper editors.

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