

MASTER'S THESIS

External communication of non-government social welfare agencies in Hong Kong

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**External Communication of Non-Government Social Welfare Agencies
in Hong Kong**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Philosophy**

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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to investigate the current external communication practice of non-government social welfare agencies in Hong Kong. In the first stage of analysis, an empirical survey of 279 non-government social welfare agencies in Hong Kong, which were agency members of The Hong Kong Council of Social Service in December 2001, was completed by the end of February 2002 with a response rate of 33%.

Using J. Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models of public relations, this study showed that the models were inadequate to describe the external communication practices of non-government social welfare agencies in Hong Kong. The reliability of the public information model ($\alpha=0.30$) was very low. Hence, a re-examination of models was needed. According to results of a factor analysis, three re-examined models were generated: the asymmetrical model, the two-way research model and the one-way model. Most of the sampled organizations (35.9%) belonged to the asymmetrical model, followed by the two-way research model (33.7%) and the one-way model (30.4%). The re-examined models had limited relationships with purposes of external communication, publics, external communication activities and organizational characteristics (organizational size, history and number of paid public relations staff) respectively. In other words, generally, the uses of these re-examined models were not related to these variables.

The quantitative analysis can tell us what the current practices are, but cannot tell us why the sample has such practices as described by the re-examined models. In the second stage of analysis, the underlying reasons why sample organizations had external communication practices were investigated in the interviews. Altogether, 18 organizations from the first stage of analysis were selected to represent the three re-examined models. All interviews were conducted from mid December 2002 to mid

January 2003.

Results from the qualitative analysis showed that the lack of resources was the main reason determining an organization's current practices of external communication. Other factors, such as a lack of professional knowledge and a dependence on experience, were raised. The ideal practice for most of the respondents was to have a team of specialized manpower handling external communication. Their ideal picture of external communication was associated with expectation on organizations themselves, rather than expectation on their publics. The majority believed that an increase in resources, including manpower and budget, could help to actualize the ideal practices.

Most of the respondents did not conduct or seldom conducted research on external communication. The main reason for not conducting research was the limitation of resources, including manpower.

The current practices of the sample had little relationship with the worldviews of external communication. Respondents rarely described their practices in terms of their worldviews on external communication. Only a few of them mentioned their practices related to asymmetrical communication. Respondents rarely talked about communication in a symmetrical nature.

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