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**An exploratory study to conceptualize press engagement behavior with
public relations practitioners**

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Abstract

This study addresses how journalists respond to public relations (PR) practitioners in co-creating value for their audiences. The co-creation perspective is conceptualized by synthesizing extant literature from public relations and relationship marketing, including cultivation strategies in organization-public relationships studies, two-way symmetrical model in excellence theory, intereffication model, service-dominant (S-D) logic of co-creation in marketing, and customer engagement theories. Using long-interview technique with 18 journalists, the study investigates how journalists perceive media relations activities of PR practitioners from a value co-creation dimension. A new theoretical model titled *press engagement behavior (PEB)* with sub-dimensions in *press participation behavior (PPB)* and *press citizenship behavior (PCB)* is proposed. A thirty-item scale is proposed to guide future study on scale development and validation. The proposed new model can explain the context of journalist engagement, enriching the operational value of cultivation strategies in dyadic relationship settings.

Keywords: press engagement behavior, press participation behavior, press citizenship behavior, symmetrical model, organization-public relationships, excellence theory

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1. Introduction

Recent trends show that the source-reporter relationship has become closer than ever. Research shows that journalists now actively request information from public relations (PR) practitioners for specific content for news generation, a phenomenon called “media catching” (Waters, Tindall, & Morton, 2010). PR practitioners are developing vast amounts of rich-content information through their controlled media platforms to share and collaborate with reporters. The popularity of online e-news channels of communication and a 24-hour news cycle is putting further pressure on journalists to meet tight publishing deadlines by collaborating with PR practitioners through press materials provided by PR firms (Lewis, Williams, & Franklin, 2008). McManus suggested that the profit pressure on news rooms requires more reliance on public relations materials and a more collaborative approach towards the source-reporter relationship (McManus, 1994).

Botan and Taylor (2004, p.651-652) showed how public relations practitioners have moved from a functional role to playing a co-creation role with reporters, describing it as the “most striking trend in public relations” over the past 20 years. The co-creation view considers the key publics as “co-creators of meaning and communication as what makes it possible to agree to shared meanings, interpretations and goals”. This view is an extension of the organization-public relationships (OPR) perspective which considers relationships to be the center of public relations research (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997; Bruning & Galloway, 2003; Ferguson, 1984; Ledingham & Bruning, 1999). Through in depth interviews with 18 journalists, this study adopts a relationship marketing co-creation perspective (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilic, 2011; Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Vargo, 2008) to investigate how journalists perceive the media relations activities of PR practitioners. This study extends further Grunig’s call (2006) to develop symmetrical cultivation strategies in media relations.

We first examine the existing literature to provide the theoretical development process, next we describe the methodology, and then we report the results of the qualitative study, followed by discussion of the results. We conclude by discussing both the theoretical and managerial implications, limitations of the study, and an outline of the next phase of quantitative procedures for scale development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cultivation strategies in organization-public relationships studies

Extensive research has been conducted by scholars in exploring the trio-staged process in organization-public relationships (OPR) studies (Ki & Hon, 2008). First, the *antecedents* of OPR (Bowen, Hung-Baesecke, & Chen, 2016; Broom et al., 1997; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Huang, 2001a), addressing the question of *why* there is a need and *preconditions* required to establish relationships. Second, *maintenance* (Hon & Grunig, 1999) or *cultivation* strategies (Grunig, 2006) which address the question *how* to continue quality relationships. Finally, the *outcome* of OPR relationship quality (Grunig & Huang, 2000).

Scholars had developed several cultivation strategies, including access, positivity, openness, sharing of tasks, networking and assurances (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999). Cultivation strategies lead to higher relational outcomes such as control mutuality, satisfaction, trust and commitment (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Huang, 2001b), and behavioral intentions and evaluations (Bruning & Ralston, 2000; Bruning & Ralston, 2001; Bruning & Galloway, 2003).

The focus of our study is to develop a suitable measure to evaluate the success of the cultivation strategies by examining the level of journalist *engagement* with PR practitioners in the OPR framework.

2.2 Application of excellence theory in customer engagement/co-creation studies

In his seminal work on excellence study, Grunig postulates the value of public relations in an organization resides in the principle that PR should:

...behave in ways that solves the problems and satisfies the goals of stakeholders as well as of management... Then, organizations must communicate symmetrically with the different kinds of publics found within these stakeholder categories to develop high-quality, long-term relationships with them (Grunig, 2006, p.159).

In the key thesis of excellence theory, the two-way symmetrical model of communication suggests:

...individuals, organizations, and publics should use communication to adjust their ideas and behavior to those of others rather than to try to control how others think and behave (Grunig, 2006, p.156).

..the most productive relationships in the long run are those that benefit both parties in the relationship (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p.11).

The co-creation perspective viewed publics as long-term partners to establish relationships to fulfill and exceed organizational goals (Botan & Taylor, 2004). In relationship marketing literature, parallels can be drawn to customer relationship management by engaging them as partners in meaningful exchanges to create mutually beneficial relationships. The term *customer engagement* can be broadly defined as a multidimensional concept where it captures a psychological state in customers' interactive, co-creative experiences with other stakeholders in networked service relationships (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilic, 2011, p.260).

Vargo and Lusch (2004; 2008) synthesized marketing thoughts stretching back over a century to arrive at the service-centered dominant logic (S-D logic) view of marketing, which considers that all economic exchanges are “service” by nature, a combination of human knowledge, skills, and creative design embedded in goods and services. Therefore, value is co-created jointly between and among organizations and their partners or customers through “service” provision and use. The co-creation perspective considers stakeholders as partners and valuable resources which need to be engaged carefully for long-term beneficial results.

The significance of development of customer engagement was flagged by the Marketing Science Institute as a top research priority in 2014-2016 (Marketing Science Institute., 2014). One strand of PR research that is most relevant in this context of public relations-journalist engagement is business-to-business partner engagement (B2B-PE) (Vivek, Dalela, & Beatty, 2015). The B2B-PE concept acknowledges that apart from the end-customer, other key stakeholders are critical to an organization's success. B2B-PE is defined as “episodes of intense inter-organizational resource and social exchanges between two independent or interdependent entities, directed towards common outcomes” (Vivek et al., 2015, p.56).

Owing to the fact that the current 24-hour news cycle and the unrelenting presence of social media demand shortened response time, B2B-PE attempts to capture short-term “episodes”, referred as B2B partner engagement, during relationship encounters (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006). Examples include engaging journalists to report the latest company results through results announcements or responding to journalists during a crisis situation. It is hypothesized that in the long run, these series of episodic encounters could have positive or negative valences that will determine the

relationship quality over time (Vivek et al., 2015).

2.3 Journalistic theories and practices in the digital age

In the digital age, news has been produced, shared, and consumed anytime, anywhere by journalists, as well as by the general public on social media, creating an ambient journalistic environment (Hermida, 2010). The traditional fixed news deadline system has been replaced by a constant updating and dissemination of real-time news (Lee, 2015). The competition among journalists to gain audience traffic has driven them to place “timeliness” as the most important criterion in news production (Fention, 2010).

From the journalistic perspective, news selection has been affected by the commercialization of news. McManus (2009, p.219) defined it as “any action intended to boost profit that interferes with a journalist’s...best effort to maximize public understanding...that shape the community they claim to serve”.

As a result, the news departments of media companies need to compete for profits for investors or owners, for advertising dollars, for consumers’ attention of the news products they produce, and for news sources (McManus, 1995).

The “economic selection model” has become an influencing force to determine what news stories are constructed, and how (McManus, 2009). This model argues that an issue or an event will be more likely to become news if the cost of uncovering it or the cost of reporting it is low, the chance that the issue may hurt major advertisers or the parent company is low, or the issue is appealing to the target audience of the major advertisers (McManus, 2009). News departments are also under market economic pressure to create or report content that consumers are interested in, in order to attract advertising revenue (McManus, 2009). As PR practitioners can help to lower the cost of uncovering or the cost of reporting by providing ready-made press releases and other publicity materials, arranging interviews, or introducing leads, journalists may be more open to content co-creation in order to fulfill their organizational goals.

2.4 The intereffication model

The interdependency of the dyadic relationship is also evident in the seminal work of Bentele, Liebert, and Seeling’s intereffication model (IE) (Bentele and Nothhaft, 2008). The IE model outlines the relationship as a co-dependent one, where the dyad (PR practitioner) adapts and induces the other (journalist) through three distinct dimensions, namely; object, temporal, and psycho-social dimensions. The object

dimension relates to the development of the PR content and materials, such as writing to suit the editorial style of a publication. The temporal dimension relates to PR adapting to the timelines required by news outlets. Finally, the psycho-social dimension is where the organizational structure of a PR firm is set up to suit the needs of the media (Bentele and Nothhaft, 2008). The IE model emphasizes the mutuality of the relationship; PR and journalism works hand in hand in a mutually influential, co-orientation, and co-dependent relationship (Wehmeier, 2008).

2.5 Commonalities

The extant literature in PR and marketing on organization stakeholder and customer relationship management indicates three commonalities.

First, long-term relationships among partners are based on continual, episodic, interactive exchanges. The symmetrical communication model of Grunig's excellence study, organization-public relationships (OPR), intereffication model (IE), and business-to-business partner engagement (B2B-PE) share common focus on interactive relationships between public relations practitioners and their key stakeholders, and, for this study, journalists in particular.

Second, partners in a successful relationship respect the symmetrical and mutually beneficial exchange relationship. In partnership engagement activity between public relations practitioners and journalists, public relations practitioners would aim to adjust each of the "episodic encounters" with journalists in order for both parties to benefit in the long run (Xie, Bagozzi, & Troye, 2008). The co-creation view in public relations considers publics as co-creators of meaning and communication to allow "shared meanings, interpretations and goals to be met" in the long run (Botan & Taylor, 2004; Grunig & Heath, 2001).

Third, relationship quality is the result of partners' conscious cultivation to actively engage the other and show commitment in the relationship. The aim of OPR studies is to develop cultivation strategies to generate long-term quality relational outcomes (e.g. Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Huang, 2001b). Similarly, B2B-PE also focuses on development partnership engagement strategies to generate positive valence outcomes, such as trust, commitment, word-of-mouth, and behavioral intentions (e.g. Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013; Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009; Kumar, Bhaskaran, Mirchandani, & Shah, 2013).

2.6 Cultivation strategies using a partnership engagement approach

Extant literature in public relations with focus on cultivating strategies through a partnership engagement perspective is sparse and with limited empirical support. In customer engagement studies, although the customer is the main focus of study, other stakeholders have been examined using the same theoretical framework, such as employee engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Roberts & Alpert, 2010), patient engagement (Verleye, Gemmel, & Rangarajan, 2013), investor relations (Chandler, 2014) and, recently, citizenship engagement (Bowden, Lay-Hwa J., Luoma-Aho, Vilma, & Naumann, 2015). To address the gaps mentioned by both public relations and marketing scholars mentioned above, engaging the press as an important stakeholder acts as a feedback loop in the organization-customer engagement relationship (Chandler & Lusch, 2015).

Two major behaviors from customer engagement have emerged: *customer participation behavior*, where the customer is involved directly in production of a service (Bendapudi & Leone, 2003), an in-role behavior; and *customer citizenship behavior*, where the customer volunteers to go the extra mile to facilitate successful value co-creation (Bettencourt, 1997; Podsakoff, Ahearne, & MacKenzie, 1997; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2007), an extra-role behavior. For the context of studying partnership engagement, the term “customer” is replaced by the term “stakeholder” and “press” interchangeably. It is worth noting that partnership engagement differs from cultivation strategies as it measures the state of engagement the journalist is in with the public relations practitioner, rather than self-reported constructs established by the public relations practitioner in cultivation strategies studies. This measure provides dyadic support to enrich the knowledge of cultivation strategies.

2.7 Press participation behavior (PPB)

Press participation behavior (PPB) refers to behavior in which the journalist is willing to perform in a co-creation relationship with the PR practitioner. It involves four behavioral dimensions; information seeking, information sharing, responsible behavior and personal interaction (Yi, Natarajan, & Gong, 2011; Yi & Gong, 2013).

2.7.1 Information seeking

Information seeking behavior (Kellogg, Youngdahl, & Bowen, 1997) refers to journalists proactively seeking information from public relations practitioners or from

third party sources to report the news.

2.7.2 Information sharing

Information sharing (Ennew & Binks, 1999) refers to where the journalist has furnished to the public relations practitioner clear requirements on what they need from them in order to report the news.

2.7.3 Responsible behavior

Responsible behavior is where the customer treats himself or herself as a partial employee of a company (Ennew & Binks, 1999). This refers to the behavior displayed by journalists when they have been responsible in responding to public relations practitioners' pitches, requests, and directives.

2.7.4 Personal interaction

Personal interaction (Yi & Gong, 2013) refers to the interpersonal relationships between journalists and public relations practitioners. Interpersonal relationships refer to attributes such as friendliness, courtesy, politeness, and kindness. It is considered that a more positive social environment aids in value co-creation behavior (Lengnick-Hall, Claycomb, & Inks, 2000).

2.8 Press citizenship behavior (PCB)

Customer citizenship behavior (CCB) was a framework developed from organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Podsakoff et al., 1997) where employees' voluntary extra-role behavior significantly impacts performance quality. The parallels between OCB, CCB and what we coined "press citizenship behavior (PCB)" are remarkably similar, and therefore it is of interest to study PCB lending theories from OCB and CCB literature. PCB involves four dimensions; feedback, advocacy, helping, and tolerance. Customer citizenship behavior refers to acts of voluntary behavior that go beyond what the service provider requires the customer to do (Yi et al., 2011). Applying our research context, this is where the journalist would volunteer to perform extra-role behavior in order to show goodwill to the public relations practitioner.

2.8.1 Feedback

Feedback (Bettencourt, 1997) refers to information the journalist shares with the public relations practitioner to improve the news creation process. Feedback is useful in partnership engagement to indicate better service quality for both parties. In this context, the public relations firm provides mutually beneficial content to the journalist in the news co-creation process.

2.8.2 *Advocacy*

Advocacy includes actions such as positive word-of-mouth (Markus, 2005). In this partnership engagement context, it is where the journalist would recommend the public relations practitioner to his/her associates, or where news is reported in a more positive light for the firm the public relations practitioner represents.

2.8.3 *Helping*

Helping behavior refers to the journalist in the partnership providing help to other journalists who need to report news about the firm the public relations practitioner represents (Markus, 2005).

2.8.4 *Tolerance*

Tolerance in this context refers to journalists' cooperation behavior when public relations practitioners fail to deliver during a service delivery situation (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2000), such as tolerating the public relations practitioner when he/she fails to provide the requested information required by the journalist before the news is reported.

The above literature review offers a new perspective of partnership engagement under a symmetrical setting in relationship cultivation. Based on this exploratory study, we propose the following research question:

How can we measure partnership engagement behavior between journalist and public relations practitioner?

3 Methodology

A qualitative approach was adopted using long-interview techniques (McCracken, 1988) to explore partnership engagement behavior between journalists and public

relations practitioners. In-depth interviews were conducted with 18 journalists in Hong Kong from October 2016 to January 2017 to examine press engagement behavior between journalists and public relations practitioners. The objective of the qualitative study was to develop a press engagement behavior measurement scale with reference to Yi and Gong (2013). The scripts were examined line by line, and categorized into eight press engagement constructs. The original scripts and categorized statements were then examined independently by another 2 academics in marketing and communications studies. Inconsistencies were discussed between the researchers before being reclassified.

3.1 First phase of scale development - item generation

This paper addresses the first phase of the scale development process. The aim of this phase is to generate items for scale development from a review of previous literature and exploratory in-depth interviews. The purpose is to discover specific characteristics of press engagement behavior. Exploratory and open-ended questions (Annex 1) are developed based on Yi and Gong's (2013) eight-dimensional customer engagement behavior scale. The original scale by Yi and Gong was tested and purified and has empirical support on its psychometric properties using multivariate analysis techniques.

Participants were asked to provide examples they could recall from their experience for each construct mentioned. Pretest of the questions was carried out with a senior editor of a local newspaper and two academics well versed in concepts of partnership engagement and cultivation strategies. The pilot test revealed a couple of questions related to customer engagement strategies to be not relevant in a partnership engagement context. For example, journalists would rarely give good recommendations about the organization they are reporting about (in consumer terms, positive word-of-mouth). Instead, wordings are fine-tuned to ask under what circumstances journalists would give positive word-of-mouth of a public relations practitioner.

In probing whether the news would be reported in a more positive light, a reverse-question technique is used: "are there any situations where you will not help a PR unit?"

3.2 Participants' profile

The participants (journalists) were recruited through snowballing technique (Creswell, 2013). The initial participants were former graduates referred by the

journalism school of the researchers, and subsequent referrals by the participants. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face with the exception of 2 interviews where participants' schedules could not be met, and phone interviews were conducted. The journalists represented different Hong Kong press outlets of varying size, nature of news coverage, and format. There were 6 females and 12 males, 3 with 1-5 years of experience, 6 with 5-10 years of experience, 3 with 10-15 years of experience and 6 with over 20 years of experience. The profiles of the participants are outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Demographic profile of the participants

Participant	News Beat	Channel	Job Title	Years of Experience	Gender
1	Business	Newspaper	Deputy News Editor	20+ years	Female
2	Classified	Newspaper	Editor	10-15 years	Male
3	Global news	E-News	Editor	5-10 years	Male
4	Global news	E-News	Editor	5-10 years	Male
5	Global news	Newspaper	Editor	5-10 years	Male
6	Politics	Newspaper	Reporter	1-5 years	Female
7	Legal	Newspaper	Editor	20+ years	Male
8	Lifestyle	E-News	Reporter	1-5 years	Male
9	Local news	E-News	Editor	5-10 years	Male
10	Local news	Newspaper	Chief Editor	20+ years	Male
11	Local news	Radio	Reporter	5-10 years	Male
12	Local news	Radio	Editor	10-15 years	Male
13	Local news	TV	Assistant Director	20+ years	Female
14	Local news	Newspaper	Senior News Editor	20+ years	Female
15	Sports	Newspaper	Reporter	1-5 years	Male
16	Sports	TV	Editor	20+ years	Male
17	Sports	E-News and Magazines	Editor	10-15 years	Female

4 Results

4.1 Classifications

A total of 518 statements were identified from the 18 interviews, with each statement categorized into one of the four PPB or four PCB dimensions. Table 2 below refers to the number of statements categorized into each construct.

Table 2 – Categorization of statements

Press Participation Behavior	Number of Statements	Press Citizenship Behavior	Number of Statements
Information Seeking	118	Feedback	104
Information Sharing	48	Advocacy	36
Responsible Behavior	82	Helping	27
Personal Interaction	59	Tolerance	44

4.2 Press participation behavior

Based on the results of the qualitative study, press participation behavior can be expressed in an overall statement: *“I [journalist] believe it is important to work with public relations specialists in order to generate news”*. We use three guiding questions to explore this construct and its sub-dimensions in information seeking, information sharing, responsible behavior, and personal interaction:

1. Please describe your history with this PR unit e.g. how it began and what it is that makes you feel good to work with it?
2. Please talk more about the nature of your participation and interaction with this PR unit, e.g., in terms of frequency of information exchange, number of individuals you have interacted with, types of activities in which you have participated, compliance with its company policy.
3. Describe what motivates you to decide whether to participate or not in such activities when you are invited.

4.2.1 Information seeking

When it comes to information seeking, the majority of journalists followed a standard routine to seek information. Typical answers are:

“We will check the company’s mailbox every day and sort out the types of news the PR / source provider has sent to us. We will post it to the reporters group and our editors will choose what news we will cover for the day.”

The issue of information seeking behavior generated the most responses from participants. Aligned with the nature of the journalist to seek information for news reportage, it is a utility function required by reporters. It is of notable interest that journalists sought to refer to social media tools, such as Facebook and Whatsapp groups, to seek information.

“I will notice John Tsang’s (the Hong Kong government’s financial secretary) Facebook posts. His posts are very lively, approachable, and appeal to young people...” (Daily-news sector, political news reporter)

4.2.2 *Information sharing*

Responses for information sharing came back in two categories. One category is related to sharing of information through news articles. The premise of sharing is to provide additional information in order for the audiences to better understand the nature of the information disseminated by PR specialists. An example of a reporter reporting an advertorial posted online with high page views:

“We came across an advertorial on renovating a public estate flat. A renovation job that costs (HKD)90,000 (USD eqv ~12,000) is very cheap, so we will look at it, and find out they save money by avoiding some built-in wiring works. We will list out the benefits in detail to let readers understand how the renovators could help our readers.” (E-news sector, smart shopping reporter)

The other category of information sharing is instances where journalists share information with PR specialists on what is required for the journalist to report the news or to join an event:

“I have told PR specialists many times I do not know if I could attend a press event until the morning of the event.” (Radio news, local news reporter)

4.2.3 *Responsible behavior*

This construct measures whether the journalist responds to requests from the PR unit. In a sense, the journalist acts like an employee of the PR unit. One example displaying such behavior is as below:

“When the PR agency calls again, we will let them know we have read their email [pitch].” (E-news sector, local and international news)

4.2.4 *Personal interaction*

This measure explores the interpersonal relationship between the PR specialist and the journalist. One financial reporter describes her relationship with the PR unit as follows:

“I need to be friends with all levels of the PR department, even become friends with the one who sweeps the floor.” (Print news, financial news)

4.3 *Press citizenship behavior*

Based on the results of the qualitative study, press citizenship behavior can be expressed in an overall statement: “*Press citizenship behavior is important in working with public relations practitioners*”. The main lines of enquiry into the constructs of feedback, advocacy, helping and tolerance are covered by these five questions:

1. Following your participation in a PR event, what kind of clients’ information or behavior would likely motivate you to put in extra effort and coverage for the event? Please provide an example.
2. Please describe occasions in which you would not ‘help’ this PR unit or help each other. For example, to not provide advice/feedback, to not speak positively, to not give advance warning in case of bad publicity or upcoming crisis, to not share the news with other news reporters? (reverse coded question)
3. What kind of information or behavior would motivate you to be put through a bad experience but still put effort into covering the news?
4. In the Internet world, information is so convenient to obtain and generate. Does this change the interdependent relationship between the journalist and PR professional? How does it differ from before?

5. What are the perceived advantages or disadvantages to working closely with a PR unit? Is this the trend?

4.3.1 Feedback

The reporters we interviewed informed us that it is in their duty to seek responses from the organization/PR representative in order for the piece of news to be reported comprehensively. Below is an example of when feedback is not obtained and the reporter includes the lack of feedback in the news article:

“We often will question [the public relations officer] face-to-face. If you don’t let me follow up, if we have many questions on the topic, I will report it on the news along the lines of ‘*there are lots of questions that were not answered, what have you got to hide, and you should reveal to the public*.’” (TV and radio station, Local news)

4.3.2 Advocacy

The original question is “*Please describe occasions in which you would ‘help’ this PR unit or help each other*”. Given journalists have a high sense of professional morality, most would take this question to be addressed towards influencing editorial input. Therefore, the question is reversed coded as “*Please provide occasions in which you not ‘help’ this PR unit*”. This generated both positive and negative replies. An example of negative advocacy:

“[In a press conference], the CEO just read from a script: “*We deeply apologize for the event*”, bowed, then left. The PR specialist replied we will not answer any questions...in these situations the report will be written very negatively because the issue is of public interest, your attitude is poor as you won’t respond. On the contrary, if you freely let me ask the questions, if you are less defensive, I will be less suspicious of you...as a reporter, I shouldn’t put my personal feelings to what I write, but in reality I am also a human being, I will get agitated.” (TV station, local news)

An example of positive advocacy:

“Company A gave me 60 tickets and asked me to give the tickets to our readers. We organized a competition for our readers in our newspaper to give away the tickets.” (E-news sector, local news)

4.3.3 *Helping*

Questions were addressed to whether journalists help each other. The majority of the journalists mentioned they are very willing to help each other. To illustrate the extent of their cooperation, this journalist said:

“I see journalists [reporting the same news category] more than I see my family and colleagues.” (Print news, local news)

With the exception of exclusive news, reporters showed strong citizenship behavior:

“When there is breaking news, for example, how did an accident happen, who got hurt, if we have the information, the reporters who have the news will share the information with us if we call them or will share on the Whatsapp chat group.” (Print news, local news)

4.3.4 *Tolerance*

Below is an example of where reporters are more tolerant of the PR unit when bad news is about to break out:

“The PR will arrange lunch/dinner to ask what areas we would like to find out more about, so that they could clarify or provide us the background information for the communication work beforehand, not after the bad news had broke out...in those instances, when we report, we will give more background information to explain why the company is doing this.” (TV station, local news)

Results of the qualitative study show that press engagement behavior is established as “press participation behavior (PPB)” and “press citizenship behavior” (PCB)”. Table 3 below shows proposed generated itemized statements for a press engagement scale with thirty items measuring 8 constructs that describe the multidimensional measures of press engagement. This will form the basis to empirically validate these items as next steps.

Table 3 – Proposed itemized statements for press engagement scale

Press Participation Behavior	Press Citizenship Behavior
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I. I believe it is important to work with public relations specialists in order to generate news.	II. Press citizenship behavior is important in working with public relations practitioners
<p>Information seeking</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I asked the PR practitioner for information to write my news. 2. I searched for additional information other than that provided by the PR practitioner(s) to report the news. 3. I paid attention to the PR event/materials to report my news 4. I spent time on understanding how PR works. <p>Information sharing</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. I clearly explained what I wanted the PR practitioner to do in order to report the news. 6. I gave the PR practitioner my requirements on what I need to report the news. 7. I provided necessary requirements for the news so that the PR specialist could perform his or her duties. 8. I answered all the questions the PR practitioner may encounter to provide the information for my news reporting. <p>Responsible behavior</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. I responded to all the news pitches provided by the PR practitioner. 10. I adequately completed all the behaviors expected by the PR practitioner. 11. I fulfilled responsibilities to the PR unit. 12. I followed the PR practitioners' directives or orders. <p>Personal interaction</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. I was friendly to the PR practitioner. 	<p>Feedback</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 18. If I have a useful idea on how to improve the news, I let the PR specialist know. 19. When I receive a good response from the PR unit, I incorporate it into the news report. 20. When I experience a problem in reporting the news, I let the PR specialist know about it. <p>Advocacy</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 21. I said positive things about the firm the PR specialist represents in my news report. 22. I recommended the firm the PR specialist represents to my associates. 23. I reported positive news about the firm the PR specialist represents. 24. I balanced negative news about the firm the PR specialist represents. <p>Helping (<i>In reporting about the firm the PR specialist represents...</i>)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 25. I assist other reporters if they need my help. 26. I help other reporters if they seem to have problems. 27. I share information with other reporters to accurately report the news. 28. I give advice to other reporters. <p>Tolerance</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 28. If the PR unit's work is not delivered as expected, I would be willing to put up with it.

14. I was kind to the PR practitioner.	29. If the PR specialists makes a mistake during PR service delivery, I would be willing to be patient.
15. I was polite to the PR practitioner.	30. If I have to wait longer than normally expected to receive information to report the news, I would be willing to adapt.
16. I was courteous to the PR practitioner.	
17. I didn't act rudely to the PR practitioner.	

5. Discussion

The primary purpose of this study is to generate items for the future development of a measurement scale. The development of the scale could help both researchers and practitioners to provide empirical support when developing media relations through the use of press engagement strategies.

It echoes Grunig's call by providing an evaluation tool for dyadic symmetrical cultivation strategies in media relationship maintenance and the need to assess the quality and success of the relationship. The establishment of the online news platform with ubiquitous access by the public has provided the setting for both public relations practitioners and press journalists to become more interdependent and motivated to "use communication to adjust their ideas and behavior to those of others... (for) the most productive relationship in the long run", a state described in excellence theory (Grunig, 2006, p.156). Our qualitative data provide supportive evidence in two way symmetrical communications in media relations.

5.1 Theoretical implications

We have tried to pull together literature from public relations and marketing with similar focus in relationship management in two different contexts – media relations and customer relations. In so doing, we are able to address a few research gaps. First, this study uses media relations to address Grunig's symmetrical model of communication (Grunig and Hunt, 1984) with empirical evidence. Second, the study also operationalizes the relationship cultivation strategy in the organization-public relationship framework and the intereffication model with new dimensions. Finally, the research enriches customer engagement theory in relationship marketing by extending it to other stakeholders, in this case, to journalist engagement in media relationships.

We hope that by theorizing and operationalizing press journalist engagement behavior into an empirical measurement scale it will enable a larger theoretical framework to be established with antecedents, process and relationship outcomes for media relationship management.

5.2 Practical and managerial implications

During the in-depth interviews, several journalists especially requested us to communicate the need for a better understanding of how the press operates, of how PR specialists should provide relevant and timely information to journalists in order for a win-win relationship to occur.

Journalists are of the view that PR should develop more meaningful measurement metrics in light of changes in the media and technological landscape. For example, journalists mentioned that corporate senior management are interested in the number of journalists present at a press conference whereas journalists consider that news can be reported without their physical presence. Some senior management of well-established corporations do not measure the performance of social media and only measure publications in print. We hope the antidotes mentioned here constitute the first step in developing a press engagement measurement scale that can help senior management to digress from measuring tacit outputs such as column size and names mentioned in print to measuring changes in attitudinal and engagement behavior by journalists.

The press engagement behavior concept can help public relations practitioners and journalists to work in harmony with each other to generate quality news outputs where the same target audience (end-customer) will be intrigued. The measurement scale can be used to determine if media relations are improved, and whether that leads to better news quality.

From a managerial perspective, it is known that firms such as MasterCard and Gallup have adopted customer engagement strategies with their customers to deepen their loyalty to the firm (Patterson, Yu, & De Ruyter, 2006). Equally, public relations departments can apply stakeholder engagement strategies with their journalists using the supporting framework developed in this paper and apply the three-step customer engagement behaviour (CEB) management process (Van Doorn et al., 2010): 1) identifying what are the drivers of press engaging behaviors; 2) evaluating press engaging behavior of journalists; and 3) acting on journalists' engaging behavior. This would reap possible outcomes that commonly exhibit in engaged customers, such as

positive news coverage, commitment, trust, and positive valence, which in turn would increase brand reputation and brand equity of the firm the public relations practitioners represent.

6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study is based on a study of 18 Hong Kong journalists using a convenience sampling methodology with potential sampling bias. Journalists may be affected by Asian cultural norms of face, favor and power (Huang, 2001a). Results may not be applicable across different cultures and press environments and study should be replicated in different culture environments. The second limitation is that the categorization of the scripts is based on the 8 press engagement constructs pre-determined to be used in this study. A further study using grounded theory can help to discover alternate themes arising from the co-creation paradigm.

This study lays the foundation for future scale development. Items proposed in this study would need to go through the standard scale validation process (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). First, item generation, which has been developed in this study. Second, item purification, where the factor structure of press engagement behaviour and the measurement tool would need to be purified based on its psychometric properties through quantitative survey methodology. Third, the scale would need to be evaluated based on its dimensionality, reliability and construct validity. These quantitative methods are required to provide statistical empirical support for the proposed scale.

In summary, this article examines how journalists perceive the media relations activities of public relations practitioners from a press engagement perspective. Evidence shows that press engagement behavior is an unexplored phenomenon in both public relations and relationship marketing studies and this study provides qualitative data support to the phenomenon. The conceptualization and proposed scale provides a framework for further research in providing dyadic support to enrich knowledge of cultivation strategies.

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Annex 1

In-depth interview questions guide for journalist

OBJECTIVE: This interview examines the working relationship between journalists and PR professionals.

Think about a Public Relations (PR) unit (can be a department of a company, a PR agency, or an independent PR professional) which you feel most comfortable to work/interact with over the past 12 months. Answer our 'specific' interview questions by drawing your experience with the PR unit you have in mind. .

General questions

1. How would you describe the duty of a journalist and how is that related to the PR profession? (Perception, role, and identity)
2. Please describe your perception and feeling of the PR profession in general. (Perception, role, and identity)
3. Describe your area(s) of focus in your job e.g. News (local, world), entertainment, education, health, life style (beauty, travel, food and wine, fashion...), politics, finance... (Job nature of journalist)

Specific questions

4. Please describe your history with this PR unit e.g. how it begins and what makes you feel good to work with? (History and background of relationship)
5. Please talk more about the nature of your participation and interaction with this PR unit. E.g. in terms of frequency of information exchange, number of individuals you have interacted, types of activities which you have participated, compliance with their company policy. (Nature of participation behavior)
6. Describe what motivates you to decide whether to participate or not in such activities when you are invited. (Antecedents of engagement)
7. Following your participation in a PR event, what kind of client's information or behavior would likely motivate you to put extra effort and coverage on the event. Please provide an example. (Relational investment and return, engagement outcome)
8. Please describe occasions which you would 'help' this PR unit. For example, to provide advice/feedback, to speak positively about, to give advance warning in case of bad publicity or upcoming crisis. (Citizenship behavior)

9. In the Internet world, information is so convenient to obtain and generate, does this change the interdependent relationship between the journalist and PR professional? How does it differ from before? (Rationale for collaboration and co-creation of value)
10. What are the perceived advantages or disadvantages for working closely with a PR unit? Is this the trend? (Nature of engagement 'incentives')