

**AGENDA-SETTING: THE IMPACT OF THE FORT CAMPBELL
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE PRESS RELEASES
UPON A LOCAL NEWSPAPER**

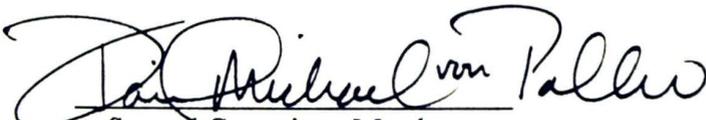
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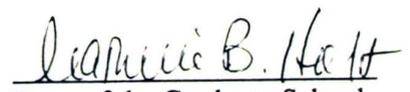

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AGENDA-SETTING: THE IMPACT OF THE FORT CAMPBELL

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE PRESS RELEASES

UPON A LOCAL NEWSPAPER

A Thesis

Presented to the

Graduate and Research Council of

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirement for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Emeka E. Clifford

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the number of news releases generated by the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office that was published by The Leaf Chronicle, in Clarksville, Tennessee. The study examined the agenda-setting function of the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office for The Leaf Chronicle in matters relating to the military and its public relations role in disseminating information pertaining to the 101st Airborne Division through The Leaf Chronicle to the Fort Campbell vicinity.

The study used content analysis to examine the manifest content of information generated by the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office, and how and why the information was published by The Leaf Chronicle.

The examination of thirty-four news releases covering the months of April, May, June, and July revealed that over 97 percent of the news releases from the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office were published by The Leaf Chronicle. Eighty-five percent of the news releases were published verbatim. The remaining thirteen percent published were published with minor grammatical and structural changes for accuracy and journalistic ethical reasons.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There are many studies on the overall function of the mass media. Various mass communication scholars have used different study groups and research techniques to investigate the impact of mass media, such as print media, on the society (Whitney, 1985). On the whole, there is a general consensus among scholars (Rubin, 1975) that the mass media is a valuable public spectrum, used to either inform, influence, advocate a social course, or unconsciously sell a social agenda with a tremendous and overarching amount of freedom. As Pember (1990) pointed out, the mass media are:

freer to broadcast important but controversial programming, freer to take stands on critical issues, freer to serve the needs it defines for the community. It is also freer to relegate public service to the back burner, freer to increase profits at the expense of quality programming, freer to ignore those portions of programming that does not meet the advertisers' demographic profiles. In the end, of course, that is what freedom is all about (p. 518).

As a result of these important functions performed by the mass media and since access to information source is highly controlled and monopolized by a privileged few, the public right to receive a suitable, well balanced reporting of any social, political, cultural, economic, or other prevailing issues that are of interest to the public becomes a crucial matter to the proper functioning of the society (Pember, 1990).

Rubin (1983) described the mass media as a tool to sustain a system. Many schools of thought believe that it is this system which established the mass media that dictates the tone of the media reporting style. The role of the mass media as an

information source is therefore dependent upon the ideological and economical philosophy of the media establishment that originates the newscast. The content of media news report is also influenced by the seriousness, frequency, and the urgency of the issue to the target population (Rubin, 1983). The audience need level dictates to a great extent how the communication message is perceived and interpreted.

Although there is no available empirical research evidence, but there is a common belief among the personnel of the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office that the Clarksville, Tennessee Newspaper, The Leaf Chronicle and its clientele are rooted in military related background and traditions. Its market audience, as with the rest of the Fort Campbell vicinity, is mostly military: composed of military retirees, dependents, workers, contractors, and reserve units. As a group, the demographic population is linked together by the common bonds of military experience, exposures, and training (Dunivin, 1994).

Military training, indoctrination, rules, and regulations are the primary cause of what some psychologists have called professional psychosis in the Army (Dunivin, 1994). In the military, training is virtually an everyday process, the primary focus being to indoctrinate the soldier in military preparedness, to influence the soldier's mind, thoughts, and actions, and to obligate them to perform duties which under all normal circumstances would not otherwise be accomplished.

These attributes remain indelible in the lives of the soldiers, making them function as a social group wherever they live and work as they leave the military (Dunivin, 1994). The Leaf Chronicle, as an economic entity, must adjust its editorial and reporting style to accommodate the military socio-cultural needs.

As a group, they possess powerful economic and political strength. Lumsden (1974) has surmised that the cohesion in issue agreement among group members helps them to be less opinionated and more objective in dealing with an issue-agenda.

Knutson (1972) concluded in his study of group communication patterns, consensus, and choice shift studies that orientation behavior is consistently found to be related to a group consensus achievement. He referred to orientation behavior as factual methods or steps used to facilitate goal achievement by a group.

If the type of social institution, organization and group we belong to, associate with, and trust affect our attitudes and belief system, then, the same analogy could be applied to the Fort Campbell military community. The group's dedication and consensus in a military issue-agenda building, the unity among members and the tremendous reservoir of military knowledge and experience members possess makes them a political force to be reckoned with by the Fort Campbell vicinity business establishments, such as The Leaf Chronicle, Clarksville, Tennessee (Dunivin, 1994).

This type of socio-cultural underpinnings affect the press reporting and editorial content and style. Fico, Ku, and Saffin (1994) reported on fairness and accuracy on the Gulf War indicated strong media support for pro-war advocates despite an even split in public opinion poll over the war.

Studies by Gaziano and McGrath (1986), and Gaziano (1988) showed public aversion in the way the press covered the Vietnam War. Anderson and Leigh (1992) examined practices and attitudes concerning ethics at American daily newspapers and determined that newspaper editors in particular tended to be overly concerned that social,

economic and political pressures could compromise a newspaper reporting objectivity.

The study also revealed a second concern about a shrinking staff due to management budgetary cuts that could compromise needed quality standards and news reporters' ability to gather and edit news stories. Anderson and Leigh (1992) found that newspaper executives' advertorial formats possess great journalistic and ethical dilemma as stories and photos are published based on advertising projections.

The assistant editorial manager at the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office contended that The Leaf Chronicle saved money by depending on the news disseminated by the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office instead of relying wholly on their own news reporter covering Fort Campbell (Assistant Editorial Manager, personal communication, May 11, 1994). He stressed that news production is costly and time consuming. News gathering and editing costs are therefore effectively and efficiently controlled with the use of ready-packaged and synthesized news stories from the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office to The Leaf Chronicle through customized computer bulletin board and simultaneous multi-location fax transmission system.

During the period of this study, the researcher found that there was only one reporter covering Fort Campbell. Both the Public Affairs Office and the Newspaper editor said this was essential since news stories are transmitted instantly when needed and daily from the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office of The Leaf Chronicle.

In this study, it is hypothesized that the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office press releases determined the manifest content of what The Leaf Chronicle published news

stories concerning Fort Campbell. The following supporting statements were examined in this study:

1. Eighty percent of the news stories published by The Leaf Chronicle concerning Fort Campbell will originate from the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office. Over 75 percent of these news stories will be carried verbatim.
2. Fort Campbell news stories carried by The Leaf Chronicle are pre-packaged and transmitted by the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office.
3. Press releases from the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office will be favorable towards the military.

Definition of Terms:

The following terms and concepts used in this study are defined as follows:

Ethics - The reference here is to journalistic ethics. Merrill (1974) defines ethics as "That branch of philosophy that helps journalists determine what to do in their journalism; it is very much a normative science of conduct, with conduct considered primarily as self-determined, voluntary conduct" (p. 164)

The Fairness Doctrine - A Federal Communications Commission (FCC) broadcasting regulation requiring newsmen to insure a fair and balanced coverage of all contrasting views in reporting issues concerning the public (Pember, 1990, p. 612).

Content Analysis - According to Berelson, "Content Analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Stempel III & Westley, 1989, p. 125).

Cultural Environment - Wilensky (1967) defined cultural environment as cultural variables that relate to attitudes about organization uses of information, and patterns through which these information are used to influence public opinion.

Public - a group of two or more people that share some form of common interest with an organization.

Political Climate - In this study, political climate refers to all the socio-political and economic variables that influence public opinion and public policy decisions. The various publics of Fort Campbell and The Leaf Chronicle fall under this category.

Professional Psychosis - Refers to the idea that some professions like the military, due to its specialized nature, training and work rules and regulations, members become compulsively obsessed with their job, just like an alcoholic dependent.

Closed Organization - Henry (1995) has provided the principal characteristics of the closed model of organization using Tom Burns and G. M. Stalker topologies as consisting of routine tasks, task specialization, bureaucratic routines, organizational hierarchy, and vertical form of interaction among organization members.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Morton and Loving (1994) surmised in their study that in journalism, names and facts are news and that they add credibility to a story. The Fort Campbell Military Installation, as a governmental institution and employer of thousands of Clarksville residents, is a bonafide news source to The Leaf Chronicle. News sources and the validity, content and reliability of a news story are important ingredients to a newspaper credibility.

According to the Public Relations Society of America's Code of Professional Standards or PRSACPS (Morton & Loving, 1994), one major journalistic objective is how to balance societal collective needs to know versus an individual or organization's right to privacy. The job of a journalist is to disseminate news information fairly, impartially, correctly, and timely (Morton & Loving, 1994). According to PRSACP there is also the ethical demand on journalists to discern what publication or story is ethical or unethical (Morton & Loving, 1994).

The PRSACPS specifically relates to truthfulness in three of its seventeen articles, binding Public Relations Practitioners to:

Exemplify high standards of honesty and integrity while carrying out dual obligations to a client or employer and to the democratic process. Adhere to the highest standards of accuracy and truth, avoiding extravagant claims or unfair comparisons. Not knowingly disseminate false or misleading information and shall act promptly to correct erroneous communications for which he or she is responsible (Morton & Loving, 1994, p. 127-128).

The application of the fairness doctrine (Pember, 1990) in reporting military related events and issues tests a journalist's inculpability in disseminating news stories and dexterity in balancing the needs of the military establishment while ethically executing his journalistic duties. The decision to print or not to print an organization's press releases is imbued with a lot of ethical dilemma and questions. It is because journalists are not supposed to take sides or pass judgment on an issue agenda, according to PRSACPS guideline. It is the public duty and responsibility to know all sides to a problem before passing judgment (Morton & Loving, 1994). The problem of covering a closed organizational structure like the military is an intricate one that demands a lot of skillful journalistic and literal artistical dispositions (Henry, 1995).

Fico, Ku, and Saffin (1994) examined how nine prestigious national newspapers and nine Michigan local daily newspapers covered pro- and anti-war advocacy groups during the Persian Gulf War in 1992. The authors found enormous evidence of an imbalance of opinion in favor of anti-war advocates in excess of more than six in ten stories dominated by anti-war advocacy stories. There was also an indication that stories ran on the front page of these newspapers tended to be more balanced, but generally still favored anti-war advocates. The study showed a propensity of larger circulation newspapers to be more likely to favor anti-war advocates than smaller ones.

The placement and editorial style of a newspaper is influenced by the prevailing cultural environment the news media operates (Dunivin, 1994). There are distinct variables that differentiate military culture and its public from any other forms of organization. Dunivin (1994) has summarized these unique variables into ideal types,

models, and cultural paradigm. He characterized the ideal types of military culture as a social phenomenon that instill some kind of order in a complete and dynamic socio-cultural environment. Levin (1991) characterized it as a systematic learned and shared way of life which is symbolic in nature and adaptive to the changing life style of the people involved.

The model characterization of military cultural environment depicts the military culture and its publics as a conservative entity dominated by male forces, masculine values, norms and exclusionary dogmatic laws and policies (Dunivin, 1994). The cultural paradigm of military organization embodies a broad spectrum of beliefs, attitudes, values, and notions which "influence the kinds of ideal types and models we create to explain a social phenomenon" (p. 532).

Dunivin (1994) surmised that these theoretical constructs of ideal types, models, and paradigms of military cultural environment are important and useful in thinking, studying and analyzing a complex social organization. He agreed with Stiehl (1989) that the military socio-cultural environment remains socially, ethnically, and culturally conservative, and it remains opposed to most social changes.

Roser (1990) examined audience attention and their perception of message relevancy and found people with a strong emotion laden message involving high pride and ego to be less admittant and tolerant of other opposing view points. On the other hand, Sherif, Sherif, and Nebergall (1965) found in their study that when individuals are less involved in a communication message, they are less committed about other viewpoints and therefore more receptive and open to attitude change.

Gilbert, Krull and Malone (1990) conceptualized communication message as a two stage process in which information is initially accepted by the audience and then evaluated for unacceptance. Cacioppo and Petty (1989) distinguished between central and peripheral message appeals. They associated narrative message as central appeal and peripheral as emotion laden and provocative messages. Newhagen and Reeves (1992) found these two types of messages to possess the elements of message distraction and either can result in inhibition and enhancement of message appeal.

Salmon (1986) contended that message relevancy determines the type of audience involvement in a communication process. He concluded that audience involvement in a communication process is dependent upon message impact on the audience. Salmon (1986) believed that this impact entails a mixture of affective and cognitive responses involving perceived risk, attention to message relevancy, salience, elaboration, and the type of activity in which the audience is engaged.

Petty, Cacioppo, and Goldman (1981) surmised that strong communication involvement will be in response to a heightened persuasive message appeal. Their studies indicated persuasive messages to engender involvement and the tendency for individuals to process information more carefully. They showed that when people think, analyze, and take positions on an involving issue, they take a carefully thought and irreversible position. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) found the level, scope, and standard of change exhibited by a media message receiver to depend on the intensity of thoughts and involvement level in the message. Houston and Rothschild (1978) referred to these behavioral tendencies as "enduring involvement" (p. 185) which are issues that the people had high interest and

thought, attitudes that are mature, well-informed and established.

Cohen (1983) concluded that attention and involvement are more likely to correlate to a high degree since attention is inversely related to involvement. McGuire (1989) contended that the effectiveness of persuasion is dependent upon listening and learning the manifest content of the persuasive appeal. Grunig (1982) described involvement as an individual's strong connection to an appealing issue which existed before the message was disseminated. Batra and Ray (1985) regarded involvement as the product of message exposure and activation.

Chaffee and Roser (1986) study of the relationship of involvement to knowledge, attitude and behavior proved that the consistency and intensity of involvement depended on the nature on an issue in question. In a study of the involvement literature, Chaffee and Roser (1986) found three broad categories of involvements as follows:

1. The first category of involvement characterized as affective is grouped into interest, salience and message relevance (Perloff, 1985);
2. Attitude and emotional reactions involvement group (Batra & Ray, 1983; Batra & Ray, 1985);
3. Cognitive type of involvement categorized under attention, kind of cognitive responses and strong held belief system (Levy & Windahl, 1984).

Petty and Cacioppo (1984) surmised that high involvement is measured by a responsiveness to the argument and by the kind of thoughts the message relates to the individual's personal life. Thus, according to Petty and Cacioppo, people's need level and

personal idiosyncratic variables influence their orientation and believability of a media message.

An audience interpersonal character and the time an issue occurs are two strong variables that affect how people think in relation to a communication message, according to Perloff (1985). People's perception and conception of an issue is often skewed if the time naturally required for a feedback stimulus to a problem is inhibited (Perloff, 1985).

Many researchers have long voiced the opinion that communication is the vehicle for overcoming uncertainty in any situation (Kimberly, 1987). Fidler and Johnson (1984) and Gardner, Durham, Cummings and Pierce (1983) have found that interpersonal communication channels provide social support and confidence necessary to support adoption and implementation of behavior. Kimberly (1987), examining the impact of uncertainty in organizational changes, found that uncertainty is strikingly high in a variety of domains and created decision contexts that are different from those that one observes when uncertainty is relatively lower.

Coleman (1957), in his study of the ways in which communities deal with controversial issues, concluded that the media, despite their informative messages and usefulness in crisis moments such as floods, fire disaster or other catastrophes when people need to know what to do, are much less helpful in community disputes when people need to know what to think.

Wartella and Middlestadt (1991) defined the influence of media in public communication as the "intentional attempt to influence someone else's beliefs or behavior through communicated appeals" (p. 205). Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956)

contend that media role in a democratic society is to provide the citizenry with a rotating and competing views on a public issue agenda.

Wartella and Middlestadt (1991), relying on the findings of DeFleur and Ball-Rokeah (1982) concerning the indirect effects of the media, doubted its ability to influence a societal agenda. They questioned the ability of the mass media such as radio and the print media of their capability to influence profoundly, important socio-political issues. They contended that the media has very limited persuasive influence. These studies affirmed that the media is incapable of changing or converting people's beliefs, but only reinforcing people's already held beliefs. This reinforcement, these studies pointed out, (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeah, 1982) are the results of audience selectively attending to media message that equates with their attitude towards the media subject-matter.

Wartella and Middlestadt (1991) concluded that the media, in whatever domain of human endeavor where persuasive communication is used, only provides people with important knowledge and varying points of views about a social agenda. Newman (1982) characterized media effects to include the promotion of social integration and cultural uniformity.

Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) suggested that the mass media predominates in disseminating information news topic, such as population problems, but more personal sources are used when personal, professional, or consumer topic is involved, such as birth control. Lemert (1969), and Stone and Eswara (1969) in their different but related communication studies showed evidence that media sources of information are best

evaluated in terms of personal attributes and that these personal factors influence media believability.

Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) believed that people who have similar roles will find themselves in a similar place. This fact was demonstrated also by Carter and Chaffee (1966). Their analysis of information channels using the school system found that people who have attended college are more likely to use interpersonal channels of communication to find out about school activities than the less educated, who have socio-information disadvantages in conversation with the highly educated school personnel. The 1968 Chapel Hill agenda-setting study of mass media (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) concluded that the press may not tell us what to believe, but they do suggest and influence what we may collectively agree to discuss and act upon by unconsciously providing us with a limited and rotating set of public issues through which the political and social system can engage in a dialogue.

Shaw and Martin (1992) voiced the same sentiment by adding that one major function of the mass media was to enhance group consciousness within the larger social system. This was accomplished by providing issue agenda options more attractive than just those historically learned and espoused as an aspect of one's gender, race, age, level of education, or wealth (Shaw & Martin, 1992).

Cromwell (1950) surmised that behavior can only be interpreted within the context of the larger system. He stated that individual behaviors, for example, must be interpreted in the light of the relationship in which it occurs and where the relationship is located in the society and culture. Cromwell identified six levels of meaning that are created as a

result of communication message. They are:

1. Content of the communication, the verbal and nonverbal symbols used to convey a message;
2. Speech acts, the things the communicator says;
3. The episodes, recurring types of situations we encounter;
4. Relationship between the people involved in the communication, how they define themselves within the context of the communication message;
5. Life scripts, patterns of episodes, which provided expectations for people about the type of communication that will occur, based on past experiences and composed of beliefs; and
6. Cultural patterns, beliefs, and values we share with each other, transmitted from generation to generation (Cromwell, 1950).

Petty, Kramer, Haugtvedt and Cacioppo (1987) contended that attitude is relatively enduring, hesitant, and predictive of behavior. Apparently, the inference here is that the more involved people are with a topic, the more messages may be required to get them to change their minds (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984).

Whorf (1956) developed a language structure hypothesis in which he argued that the world view of a society is determined by the lexicon and grammar the mass media uses, limiting the capacity of people to structure reality appropriately. Thus, the mass media as a socio-political and economic propaganda instrument, can be used to positively or negatively impact upon people's lives by directing and redirecting the course of their belief system.

Coleman (1957) argued that the mass media are bound by schedules and delays in processing information and that in a truly catastrophic situation, the need to inform people rapidly, can outrun the media's capacity to discharge its function as they ordinarily would. Rubin (1983) believed that audience social economic structure determine the type of media message they receive and retain. He contended that understanding this audience social economic activity is important in explaining the concept of media effects within a population variable.

Blumler (1979) and Blumler and Gwevitch (1981), however, questioned if audience activity actually determines the texture of a media message since a socially active audience is found to be less likely affected by a media message. Rubin (1983) agreed that media audiences are active communication participant but believed that understanding audience motivation and behavior is important in studying media effect. Relying on the findings of Palgreen, Wenner, and Rosengreen (1985), Rubin (1983) came up with the following assumptions to explain the uses, functions and purposes of media messages:

1. Communication behavior such as media use is typically goal-directed or motivated. Such behavior is functional for people and society;
2. People select and use communication sources and messages to satisfy felt needs and desires; and
3. Social and psychological factors mediate communication behavior. Behavior is a response to media only as filtered through one's social and psychological circumstances such as the potential for interpersonal interaction, social categories and personality (Rubin, 1983).

An audience socio-political and demographic variables affect media behavior.

Lacy (1992) writing on the problem facing the media market stated, "Newspapers exist in markets that are difficult to define and save. Market structures are beyond their control, but not beyond their understanding and their survival will depend on how well newspapers understand" (p. 55).

Giles (1993) re-echoed this sentiment in his view that "the market-driven approach, which increasingly characterizes the path newspapers are taking means they are rethinking news coverage, advertising and hiring" (p.32). The press social responsibility and obligation according to Lacy (1992) requires journalists to search for news source environment for an issue in a pattern that will result in news stories that reflect proportionately upon the level of opinions and issue perspectives in the society.

Giles (1993) contended that a "strengthening of core journalistic values through a sinking deeper roots into the communities newspapers serve and re-establishing the credibility of the news report in the minds of readers and advertisers" (p. 33) will be one of the factors that will influence changes in the ways newspapers manage their business.

"Over time the failure of newspapers to report with greater authority and knowledge has eroded their role as the communities' most reliable source of news and information"

(p. 39). Simon (1993) surmised that, "Not only are newspapers faced with rapidly changing and segmenting markets, but they must also learn to deal with a variety of legal and regulatory issues which will continue to become more complex" (p. 40). Greenberg and Barnett (1971) believed that newspaper readers' defined topologies in editorial decisions are, theoretically, a very appealing way to establish program types that caters to

a uniquely dominant culture such as the military.

A free and responsible press must show fairness and balance in news reporting (Larson, 1992). The responsibility of any media organization, according to Larson, lies in its professional performance and its social responsibility obligations and these determines the type of public credibility the media enjoys. Larson (1992) in his persuasion and responsibility of media study commented:

Whether the persuaders are politician, corporation or organizations, they all have an image or ethos, and it is based on their reputation as well as the delivery of their message. Thus, credibility is a shifting quality that sometimes depends upon circumstances as well as on the traditional elements of sincerity, expertise and dynamism (p. 57).

Hartung (1981) contended that the media and journalists are supposed to be professionally aggressive, fair, unbiased, accurate, and complete in covering a news story. Bogart (1981) and Hartung (1981) studies of editorial quality proved accuracy, fairness, impartiality, and news balance to be a major newspaper and editorial concern.

Fico, Ku and Soffin (1994) asserted that unbalanced news stories are more likely to prevail in an issue where the reporter is knowledgeable on only one side of a controversy and with a greater workload than necessary. But they added that "editors apparently did balance more of the front-page stories, which were likely to receive public scrutiny" (p. 40).

Jones (1993) study on the ways news staff view their audience in the process of determining their newspaper content concluded that the news staff were "able to

accurately predict its audience news selection preference" (p. 41). Ettyma, Whitney and Wackman (1987) found feedback from media message receivers as a requisite to establishing good communication rapport between news reporters and the audience. Their studies indicated that feedback is source driven or is deliberately ignored due to the complex demanding editorial and organizational procedures of the news room.

Jones (1993) used the coordination model concept of mass communication of message congruency, agreement, and accuracy as developed by McLeod and Chaffee (1973) to explain the interplay between audience members and news reporters.

Shoemaker and Reese (1991) mentioned the impact of journalists' experience and educational background on the content selection and editing of news stories. Jones (1993) confirmed Martin, O'Keefe, and Nayman (1972) earlier studies of the perception of newspaper editors that "higher educated editors perceive their audiences more accurately, while thinking they agree with them less" (p. 468).

Shoemaker and Reese (1991) and Gans (1979) concluded in their media-audience relationship studies that there is a low value placed in this relationship wherever matter of news content production is concerned. They enumerated and attributed this low value to the following factors: physical distance between newsmen and their audience, professional and bureaucratic work procedural requirements and newsmen mistrust of the use of audience research result finding (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). Larson (1992) talked about media-audience "sincerity, trustworthiness, expertise, and dynamism or potency problem. Taken together, they might be what we call credibility or charisma" (p. 56).

There are various studies on why newspapers use Public affairs Office Press

Releases in building their news content. This is because, by the very nature of their specialization in managing news releases relating to an organization and its multiple publics, public relations professionals are in a better position to supply efficient and effective news story to newspapers than any other source of news gathering medium.

Sumpter and Tankard (1994) contended that public relations are useful to other media organization for presenting news stories:

1. In the best possible light, attempting to head off prospective difficulties;
2. With the use of new technology facsimile transmission and cellular telephones;
3. That stresses mutual interests of corporation or government and public;
4. That targets specific publics;
5. That places emphasis on ethics and truth; and,
6. That stresses indirect or direct contracts with editors and publishers, (Sumpter & Tankard, 1994).

Hallahan (1994) contended that "journalism and public relations are intricately wedded to one another" (p. 17). Lindenburg (1994) explored what he regarded as an excellent communication pattern. He contended that an excellent communication is communication that is "managed strategically, meets its objectives, and balances the needs of the organization and the needs of key publics with two-way symmetrical communication" (p. 5). He defined symmetrical public relations as a communication that is effective, ethical and socially responsible to organization needs and its publics needs.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study investigated the influence of the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office upon The Leaf Chronicle. The study investigated who built and set the agenda for The Leaf Chronicle, Clarksville, Tennessee in matters concerning Fort Campbell, Kentucky, military post.

This study utilized content analysis research techniques to compare, contrast and analyze the manifest communication content of the press releases generated by the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office to The Leaf Chronicle newspaper. The study involved comparing, contrasting, and analyzing the manifest content of the press releases disseminated by the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office on behalf of Fort Campbell and The Leaf Chronicle newspaper, with the news story actually published by The Leaf Chronicle.

The study included the compilation and analysis of all the telephone calls, letters of inquiry, and reports of personal interviews by The Leaf Chronicle field reporter in Fort Campbell, press releases faxed directly to The Leaf Chronicle office from the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office, and news stories generated by The Leaf Chronicle field reporter in Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

The Leaf Chronicle office, Clarksville, Tennessee, kept a yearly log of all incoming press releases generated by the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office and all news stories generated by The Leaf Chronicle. The researcher used this log to do his content analysis of the information contained in these press releases with the actual news stories published by The Leaf Chronicle. The researcher compared, contrasted and analyzed the type of

communication messages that were contained in the press releases to what was actually published in The Leaf Chronicle concerning Fort Campbell.

The study covered a period of 150 days, from March 1, 1994 to July 31, 1994. All days in the week were covered; Sunday through Saturday. The objective of the researcher was to ensure the probability of all press releases and news stories which were counted as being used in the study. The method of analysis was by counting how many press releases were sent out compared with the number of press releases actually published by The Leaf Chronicle.

The unit of analysis was the entire press release and news stories, photographs, graphic depiction, or photographs with any form of outline published in relation to Fort Campbell. There were 34 press releases and news stories published during this study period concerning Fort Campbell.

The researcher used content analysis research method to find out who built the agenda for The Leaf Chronicle concerning Fort Campbell. The researcher's primary goal was to discover who built and set the agenda for The Leaf Chronicle newspaper's content. The content analysis study covered all press release disseminated by the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office, photographs, and news stories published by the newspaper for the 150 days period of study.

Every press release, photograph, and news story published relating to Fort Campbell during the 150 days period were assigned a coded symbol or identifier for analysis. The research performed internal and external coding validity and reliability checks on 50 days sample of the press releases, using Holsti (1969) intra and intercoder

reliability formula and it was calculated at .01 confidence level.

The percentile rating scale was used to determine the percentage of articles that were printed in The Leaf Chronicle during the 150 days research period. All direct electronic faxed press releases from the Public Affairs Office to The Leaf Chronicle were assigned a coded number with an identifier as favorable or unfavorable. Newsletters and press releases published due to direct inquiry from The Leaf Chronicle office were coded with a number with an identifier as favorable or unfavorable.

When The Leaf Chronicle field reporter for Fort Campbell wrote a news story concerning Fort Campbell, the news story was regarded as originating neither from The Leaf Chronicle's office nor from the Public Affairs Office and therefore were coded neutral. The researcher coded the field reporter neutral because the report neither originated from the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office nor from The Leaf Chronicle's office to be valid for analysis in this study. All news photographs and printed materials in The Leaf Chronicle within the study period concerning Fort Campbell were classified and coded according to the above format.

In this study, the articles were analyzed and evaluated and a code assigned to them as favorable, unfavorable or neutral concerning Fort Campbell. The classification and coding mechanism was determined by the manifest content of the articles, as they actually appeared rather than the way the researcher saw and interpreted them.

The articles that were classified as positive and coded favorable were articles that enhanced the image and reputation of Fort Campbell. These articles were very positive and favorable towards Fort Campbell, but the news stories were unbalanced and biased in

favor of Fort Campbell. Two examples of positive and favorable press releases sent to The Leaf Chronicle were: A civilian awards luncheon honoring civilians who have contributed positively towards the well-being of Fort Campbell; and, an Honor Eagle ceremonies that recognized distinguished soldiers for exemplary conduct, selfless service, personal achievements or who have distinguished themselves in a line of duty.

The articles that were classified as negative and coded unfavorable were those which portrayed Fort Campbell in an unfavorable way. An example of such a negative article was a helicopter accident involving three soldiers who were on what the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office press released called a routine training mission.

This study examined the impact of the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office upon a local newspaper: The Leaf Chronicle. It explored the success or failure of the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office in setting the agenda for The Leaf Chronicle concerning Fort Campbell. The study determined how the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office press releases was used by The Leaf Chronicle newspaper, Clarksville, Tennessee.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The result of this study was based on the examination of 34 press releases disseminated by the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office to The Leaf Chronicle, Clarksville, Tennessee. The study used content analysis to compare, contrast and analyze the manifest content of the 34 press releases over the period of four months: April, May, June, and July, 1994.

While the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office sent a total of 34 press releases to The Leaf Chronicle during the study period, thirty-two of these press releases were printed by The Leaf Chronicle.

The first hypothesis stated that 80 percent of the news stories published by The Leaf Chronicle concerning Fort Campbell will originate from the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office. This hypothesis contended that over 75 percent of these news stories would be carried verbatim by The Leaf Chronicle. The study supported this hypothesis. The articles published by The Leaf Chronicle regarding Fort Campbell were disseminated by the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office. The study revealed that over 97 percent of the press releases from the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office were published by The Leaf Chronicle. Of the 97 percent articles published, 85 percent were printed verbatim. There were no staff written articles that originated from The Leaf Chronicle office concerning Fort Campbell in the period covered by this study.

The second hypothesis stated that any news story carried by The Leaf Chronicle concerning Fort Campbell had to be pre-packaged and transmitted by the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office. This hypothesis was supported by the study. There were 34 press

releases disseminated by the Public Affairs Office during the study period. Thirty-two or 98% of these press releases were published by The Leaf Chronicle. Among the 32 press releases published, 25 or 79% of the articles were published verbatim.

The remaining seven or 13% of the articles published were printed with minor structural changes for accuracy and journalistic ethical reasons. There was a total of ten photographs incorporated into 12% of these 13 articles. Nine percent of these articles were printed with changes in grammatical structure, but the press release headlines and subject-matter remained the same (See Figure 1).

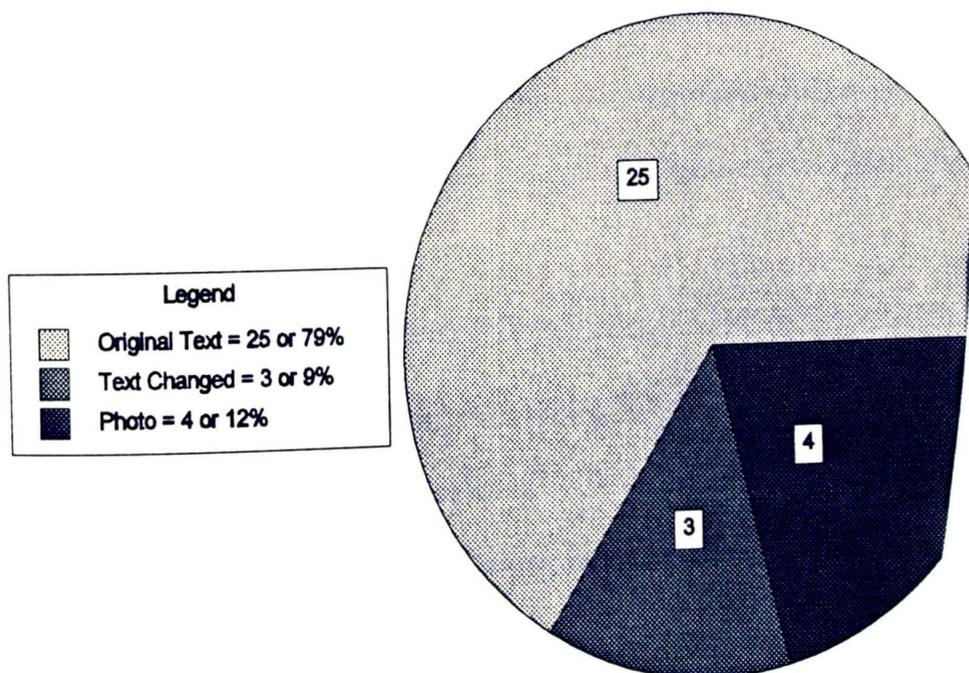


Figure 1. Published press releases.

The third hypothesis stated that press releases from the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office would be favorable towards the military since the Public Affairs Office would not send out any unfavorable press releases concerning Fort Campbell. This hypothesis was supported by the study.

There was only one negative press release among the 34 press releases disseminated by the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office to The Leaf Chronicle in the time frame of this study. All the remaining 33 articles disseminated to The Leaf Chronicle were positive and favorable towards Fort Campbell and the military. The negative press release such as the helicopter accident involving three Fort Campbell Soldiers was very brief, without detailed information concerning the actual incident.

In the period covered by this study, there was only one reporter representing The Leaf Chronicle in Fort Campbell. All important news events in Fort Campbell were pre-planned in advanced and the reporter was notified accordingly by the Public Affairs Office through press releases.

The Leaf Chronicle Fort Campbell field reporter took pictures of important events at Fort Campbell to be included in the press release published by The Leaf Chronicle relating to Fort Campbell. This was because the Public Affairs Office only disseminated articles to The Leaf Chronicle, but not photographs in the period covered by this study. As a result, The Leaf Chronicle Fort Campbell reporter included an on-site photograph in eight of the 32 press releases to either substantiate a news event or to give visual credibility to a news story.

There were telephone conversations between the newspaper editorial staff and The

Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office concerning news events and information clarification.

Often times, the press releases were too short and too brief to be easily comprehensible.

The newspaper editorial staff had to place telephone calls to obtain detailed information on any specific subject-matter contained in the press release.

When such calls were made by the newspaper staff, the resultant article was classified as originating from the Public Affairs Office. This classification was because the telephone call resulted from the initial press release, not the press release originating from the telephone call.

This study proved that the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office set the agenda for The Leaf Chronicle regarding issues relating to Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

The study supported the premise that the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office had enormous impact in The Leaf Chronicle's formulation and setting of agenda concerning Fort Campbell. The study showed that the Public Affairs Office successfully represented Fort Campbell in a positive and favorable way by defining, building and setting the agenda for The Leaf Chronicle regarding Fort Campbell.

This study supported the first hypothesis. Almost all news stories published by The Leaf Chronicle about Fort Campbell originated from the Public Affairs Office. A higher percentage of these news stories than was hypothesized were incorporated into the articles published by The Leaf Chronicle verbatim.

This study confirmed the finding of an earlier research by Anderson and Leigh (1992) who examined the practices and attitudes of American newspaper proprietors and their staff in matters relating to ethics. They concluded that the type of a newspaper's political climate and cultural environment could compromise its ethics and reporting objectivity. We could deduce from the result of this study that the tremendous socio-economic and cultural impact of Fort Campbell has, in some way, directly or indirectly influenced the reporting objectivity of The Leaf Chronicle.

This assumption is further reinforced by the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office Assistant Editorial Manager's contention that the social, economic and political context The Leaf Chronicle operates within is deeply military (personal communication, May 11, 1994). He suggested that many of Clarksville's population and businesses are military related. Although there has been no available research study done in this area to

substantiate his claim, but the sheer huge size of Fort Campbell, its large number of military retirees who settle in Clarksville and the large number of the soldier's dependents gives some credibility to this claim. It makes economic sense, therefore, for The Leaf Chronicle to serve the interests of one of its publics by utilizing the existing media forum of Fort Campbell in formulating and setting the policy agenda for its Fort Campbell interest.

It is also prudent for The Leaf Chronicle to use news information disseminated by the Public Affairs Office due to credibility reasons. As in all aspects of journalism, names and facts are news. As a news source, the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office specializes in the processing, managing, and marketing of military related news stories only. They are more reliable in getting hard factual news stories from such a closed organizational structure as the military.

This study will enable other prospective media institutions to consider the services of the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office while dealing with military-related news stories. The paramount national importance of the military institution, its secrecy of operation, and the problems associated in covering and reporting military-related news stories, (Dunivin, 1994) makes the Public Affairs Office a gateway between the military establishment and its clientele publics.

The second hypothesis that Fort Campbell news stories carried by The Leaf Chronicle had to be pre-packaged and transmitted by the Public Affairs Office was supported. In fact, over 97 percent of the press releases disseminated by the Public Affairs Office was printed as news stories by The Leaf Chronicle. Anderson and Leigh (1992)

revealed in their research a concern about today's newspaper shrinking staff due to management budgetary cuts that could compromise needed quality standards and news reporter's ability to gather and edit news stories. There was only one reporter covering Fort Campbell in the duration of this study.

Anderson and Leigh (1992) have found that newspaper executives advertising formats possess great journalistic and ethical dilemma as stories and photos are published based on advertising projections. The Leaf Chronicle saved money by depending on the news disseminated by the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office instead of relying wholly on their own news reporter covering Fort Campbell. News gathering and editing costs are effectively and efficiently controlled with the use of ready-packaged and synthesized news stories from the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office to The Leaf Chronicle through customized computer bulletin board and simultaneous multi-location fax transmission system.

The third hypothesis was also supported in this study. Almost all press releases from the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office were favorable and positive towards the military. This confirms the researcher's contention that the Public Affairs Office will not send out any negative or unfavorable press releases regarding Fort Campbell. Indeed, there was only one negative press release disseminated by the Public Affairs Office. This negative press release was worded vaguely and poorly at such that the message was not explicit. The Leaf Chronicle office had to place some telephone calls for the clarification and specification of the incident. The case was a road accident involving some soldiers and their military trucks while returning from an out of state field training mission.

This study has demonstrated the impact of the Fort Campbell Public Affairs Office in formulating and setting the policy agency for The Leaf Chronicle concerning Fort Campbell. The 1968 Chapel Hill Study (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) concluded that the press may not tell us what to believe, but they do influence what its publics agree to discuss. Mr. Ivy Lee, the father of Modern Public Relations Practition (Seiter, 1993), whose public relations philosophy was "The public be informed" would have applauded the honesty, accuracy, openness, cooperation, and the management strategies of the Public Affairs Office which resulted in influencing and building the agenda for The Leaf Chronicle pertaining to Fort Campbell.

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