

**AGENDA-BUILDING: INFLUENCE OF A UNIVERSITY'S
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE ON THE LOCAL NEWSPAPER**

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PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE ON THE LOCAL NEWSPAPER

An Abstract
Presented to the
Graduate and Research Council of
Austin Peay State University

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

by
Diane Rourk
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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact the Austin Peay State University's Public Affairs Office had on the local daily newspaper, The Leaf-Chronicle, in Clarksville, Tennessee. The study looked at who built the agenda for The Leaf-Chronicle's content concerning Austin Peay State University.

A content analysis was used to compare the manifest content of information disseminated by the Public Affairs Office and the information published in The Leaf-Chronicle.

Out of a total of 81 news items printed, 50 came from press releases generated by the Public Affairs Office. Another seven items came from sources outside the Public Affairs Office, and 24 items were generated by the newspaper's reporters. All 50 Public Affairs press releases reflected positively on the university, all seven non-Public Affairs press releases were positive, 12 of the newspaper staff-generated articles were positive, for a total of 69 positive items published during the four-week period of study. The negative articles totaled 12 and were all generated by The Leaf-Chronicle staff.

The results indicated that the Public Affairs Office has a favorable impact on building, and ultimately setting, The Leaf-Chronicle's agenda concerning Austin Peay State University.

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To the Graduate and Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Diane Rourk entitled "Agenda-building: Influence of a University's Public Affairs Office on the Local Newspaper." I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content, and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, with a major in Speech, Communication, and Theatre.



Major Professor

We have read this
thesis and recommend
its acceptance:



Second Committee Member



Third Committee Member

Accepted for the Graduate
and Research Council:



Dean of the Graduate School

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The agenda setting function of news media has been researched extensively. Shaw and McCombs (1977) stated the press served a valuable societal function. It reduces the array of issues before the public, presents a manageable agenda, and helps bring about societal consensus. The impact of the mass media was felt by Shaw and McCombs (1977) to be the most important effect of mass communication as it function to "effect cognitive change among individuals" (p. 5). The mass media, and specifically in this study the newspaper, have the ability to structure our thinking and order and organize our world for us; this process has been labeled the "agenda setting function" of mass communication.

Shaw and McCombs (1977) found that considerable evidence has accumulated that editors play an important part in "shaping our social reality as they go about their day-to-day task of choosing and displaying news" (p. 5). In a classic study in 1950, David Manning White found that each news story passes through a series of "gates" before it is actually printed. The newspaper editors are described as "gatekeepers". This study seeks to determine how actively The Leaf-Chronicle editors exercised their roles as "gate-

keepers" in their interactions with the Austin Peay State University's Public Affairs Office. Each day, newspaper editors must decide which items to pass and which to reject. The editors also have the power to determine which items to use at length and which to cut and where to display the news items and how long in time or space they will be carried.

A great deal of information exists in the community for the local paper to write about each day. The reporters cannot write about everything; they must focus on certain areas. Cutlip (1962) stated the following:

Today's public news media do not have the manpower, in terms of numbers or in terms of mature specialists, to cope with the broadening spectrum of views and the deepening complexity of news subject matter. More and more the news gathering and reporting job is abandoned to the public relations man who supplies the information in neat, easy to use packages. (p. 68)

There is much of the world that we may talk about and think about, but it is out of sight and never directly experienced by the individual. The news media, therefore, have been described as our intellectual windows to the world. In a similar vein, the task of the news media also has been described as holding a mirror up to reality. Both metaphors imply that the proper role of the press is to

serve as conduit between its audiences and the vast current history of the world.

Shaw and McCombs (1977) found that many groups in our society are concerned with shaping the media's agenda. They state that "public relations is a whole field devoted to shaping the agenda from one point of view" (p. 28). In this study, it is hypothesized that the amount of material that a public relations person delivers to a newspaper can influence the newspaper's coverage content or agenda and the construction of reality of the particular thing, event or institution that the public relations person is representing.

The five hypotheses stated in this study are:

1. More of the articles printed in The Leaf-Chronicle concerning Austin Peay State University would be disseminated by the Public Affairs Office than were developed by the staff of the newspaper.

2. More than half (65%) of the Austin Peay State University Public Affairs press releases will be incorporated in whole or in part into published news stories.

3. At least 65% of the articles from the Public Affairs Office printed in the newspaper will be carried verbatim without wording changes being made by the newspaper staff.

4. The majority of the articles and pictures printed in the newspaper regarding Austin Peay State University

would be positive since the Public Affairs Office would be disseminating positive, favorable, and upbeat information representing the college in their press releases.

5. When the newspaper requested information from the Public Affairs Office and then received a press release from the Public Affairs Office regarding the information, the press release would be more likely to be printed in the paper than if no request had been made.

This study investigated the impact that the Public Affairs Office of Austin Peay State University had upon the local daily newspaper, The Leaf-Chronicle, in Clarksville, Tennessee. The study investigated who built the agenda for the newspaper and ultimately, who set the agenda for the newspaper's content concerning the university.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

The following review of literature concerning public relations and their role in building, and ultimately setting the agenda for the mass media, was organized around the five hypotheses laid out in Chapter 1.

Klapper (1960) in his attempt to collate and integrate the findings of published research on the effects of mass communication found in his influential book that mass communication had a limited effect.

Political scientist, Bernard Cohen, (1963) found in his studies that what people think may not be easily separable from what they think about, as the various formulations of agenda-setting have implied. Cohen maintained that the "press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion" (p. 13). He stated, "It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling people what to think about" (p. 13).

Weaver, Graber, McCombs, and Eyal (1981) found through their studies of the mass media the following:

Through their day-by-day selection and presentation of the news, the mass media influence our perceptions of what the important topics of the

day are. This influence gives them a major role in setting the public agenda of thought and discussion. (p. 4).

Shaw and McCombs (1977) stated that the concept of agenda-setting function of the press "redirects our attention to the cognitive aspects of mass communication, to attention, awareness, and information" (p. 6).

Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang (1981) used secondary analysis of opinion data and news coverage of the Watergate scandal to develop an argument for transforming the agenda-setting function into a larger framework of the agenda-building process. They argued that issues have special attributes and were not just topics or concerns covered by media. They defined "an issue as whatever is in contention among a relevant public" (Lang & Lang, 1981, p. 451)). They found from their investigations that the mass media force attention to certain issues by suggesting what individuals should think about, know about, and have feelings about. Lang and Lang concluded from their studies that if only agenda-setting by the press was studied then the power of the press was being overstated. If the press can set the public agenda, then who builds the press agenda?

Roger Cobb and Charles Elder (1972) in their book, Participation in American Politics: The Dynamics of Agenda-Building, asked some basic questions. "Where do public policy issues come from, how are issues created, what are

the determinants of the agenda, how is an agenda built, how does an issue gain access to it, and who participates in this process?" (p. 14). In their study of agenda-building, they were concerned with the "identification and specification of the types of issue conflicts that receive the attention and action of government decision-makers" (Cobb & Elder, 1972, p. 63). They focused on the issue conflict before the issue became part of the agenda: they concentrated exclusively on agenda-building in the American political setting. The study of agenda-building requires more than careful analysis of issue conflicts; therefore, the attitudes and beliefs of the participants are found by Cobb and Elder to be conditioned by events antecedent to the particular issue involved" (p. 167). In this study, the Public Affairs Office would be distributing information about the university to the newspaper about current events, situations, faculty, and students about which the newspaper readers may have already formed certain attitudes and beliefs.

This study investigated who builds the press agenda concerning Austin Peay State University in The Leaf-Chronicle. It is one of the Public Affairs Office's primary goals to build the newspaper's agenda concerning the university in a positive and informative manner. This study will determine the success of the Public Affairs Office. The overarching hypothesis of this study stated that the

material the Public Affairs Office delivered to The Leaf-Chronicle could influence the newspaper's coverage content or agenda and construction of reality concerning Austin Peay State University.

Cutlip (1962) has made pilot studies that would indicate that some "35 percent of the content of today's newspapers comes from public relations practitioners" (p. 68).

Olasky (1985) stated in his paper that public relations departments were responsible for over half of all stories in the New York Times in the 1920s. During this era of the public relations boom, Ivy Lee, the "father of modern public relations," had great success in dealing with the press. Lee was seen as the "proponent of the economics of the future, and his liberalism proved influential" (Olasky, 1985, p. 22). Lee knew that effective propaganda contains only information which can be verified; unfortunately, he became adept at creating "dishonest impressions from factual statements" which did not always give public relations representatives a good reputation during that time (Olasky, 1985, p. 22).

Aronoff (1975) in his study of credibility of public relations specialists among journalists found that "source reliability was an important factor in successful communication" (p. 45). He also found that "knowledge and emulations of journalistic values would be valuable assets for the public relations writer" (Aronoff, 1975, p. 53).

The Public Affairs Office would be distributing factual, informative press releases that would be from a creditable and reliable source using a clear, concise journalistic style. Hence, when the Public Affairs Office provides factual, interesting information to the newspaper in a clear, concise manner, the newspaper may choose to use the information from the Public Affairs Office rather than using a newspaper reporter to obtain the information. Therefore, the first hypothesis stated that more articles printed in The Leaf-Chronicle concerning Austin Peay State University would be disseminated by the Public Affairs Office than were developed by the staff of the newspaper.

The University could, of course, bypass the newspaper altogether in getting out information to benefit its image, but having this information disseminated through an independent newspaper has distinct advantages.

V. O. Key (1942) in his book, Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups, told of the verbal magic that "transmutes private advantage to the public good" (p. 103). Gandy (1982) described journalists garbed in a "cloak of objectivity" that were valued as channels through which to deliver an information subsidy without having to pay a credibility tax (p. 65).

Ryan and Martinson (1988) studied antagonism between the journalists and public relations practitioners. "It is quite clear from empirical and anecdotal evidence that the

antagonism many journalists feel toward public relations is firmly embedded in journalism culture and the antagonism influences the mass communication process" (Ryan and Martinson, 1987, p. 139). The study concluded that practitioners apparently are concerned too often about their own needs or those of their organizations and not about the journalists's need for clear, concise, and accurate information. How well the public relations practitioner understands the system of the reporting process can affect and influence the amount of information the public relations professional gets into the printed media. The manner that the material is delivered to the newspaper by the public relations person may influence the newspaper's coverage content or agenda concerning Austin Peay State University. For instance, The Leaf-Chronicle may choose to use the information from the Austin Peay State University Public Affairs Office rather than using a newspaper reporter to gather the information. The importance of the delivery of the press release in a clear and concise manner to the newspaper would need to be fully understood by the Public Affairs Office.

In an interview, Mrs. Jean Holloway, Public Affairs Office personnel stated that they understood the style that is used by the newspaper since they use the Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual that the staff reporters for the newspaper use. This allows the Public Affairs

Office to write their press releases in the style and manner that is required by the newspaper.

Because the Public Affairs Office at Austin Peay seems well attuned to the needs and style of The Leaf-Chronicle, the second and third hypotheses propose that more than half (65%) of the Austin Peay State University Public Affairs Office press releases would be incorporated in whole or in part into published news stories and of those Public Affairs articles run by The Leaf-Chronicle more than half would be carried verbatim without wording changes being made by the staff of The Leaf-Chronicle.

Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., (1982) states, "It is the public relations (PR) specialists' job to generate unpaid publicity" (p. 64). It was his conclusion from his studies in the field of agenda-setting that it was the public relations specialist who was most relied upon to deliver the under cover subsidy, where the source and the source's self-interest were skillfully hidden from view. Since the public relations specialist's objective is to create a favorable impression a fourth hypothesis stated the majority of the articles and pictures printed in the newspaper regarding Austin Peay State University would be positive. The Public Affairs Office would be disseminating positive, favorable, and upbeat information about the university in their press releases.

Heeter, Brown, Soffin, Stanley, and Salwen (1989)

found in their research "the value of agenda setting is to focus public attention on a limited set of issues. This can be dysfunctional as it limits the amount and types of information available to the public" (p. 102). Judy Van Slyke Turk (1987) stated in her article "Between President and Press: White House Public Information and Its Influence on the News Media" that agenda setting presumed that as the mass media, through their reporters select which events and information to include in media content, they also evaluate the salience of those events and information: information that "makes the media's agenda is important, and information that doesn't is not" (p. 14).

Gandy (1982) suggested that we had to go "beyond agenda setting to determine who sets the media agenda, how, and for what purposes it is set, and with what impact on the distribution of power and values in society" (p. 14).

Turk (1986) found from her study of public relation's influence on the news that there were multiple influences on the media agenda but journalists from her study state that "newsworthiness" was a factor in using public relations information (p. 26). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, when the newspaper staff thought something was newsworthy and requested specific information from the Public Affairs Office the fifth hypothesis stated that the newspaper would print specifically requested and received information from the Public Affairs Office.

Such researchers as Cutlip (1962), Gandy (1982), and Turk (1986) had found in their investigations that government officials attempted to set the press agenda and corporations' public relations attempted to set press agenda. This investigation determined if the Austin Peay State University Public Affairs Office had an impact upon The Leaf-Chronicle newspaper's agenda of higher education coverage. This study examined the success of the efforts by the Austin Peay State University Public Affairs Office in influencing The Leaf-Chronicle's agenda.

Definitions

Several terms used in the study will be defined:

Public Relations Person or Specialist: The person that is responsible for gaining the public support for an activity, cause, movement, or institution. (Collier's Encyclopedia, 1986, p. 489). Public relations is varied in both purpose and method. It includes, among other things, all varieties of communication designed "to raise funds, make someone or something better known, build public support for or against a piece of legislation or otherwise affect public opinion about a person, organization, product, or idea" (Becker, 1987, p. 364). The public relations person will be defined as gaining the support of the public for the institution of Austin Peay State University through the medium of mass communication, specifically, articles printed in The Leaf-Chronicle newspaper.

The Leaf-Chronicle: The Leaf-Chronicle is Tennessee's oldest newspaper as it was established in 1801. The Leaf-Chronicle had a daily circulation including rack sales of 18,000 and a week-end circulation including rack sales of 22,000 at the time of the study.

Agenda: It is defined as a "list or outline of things to be covered or a plan of procedure or program to follow" (Collier's Dictionary, 1986, p. 800).

Agenda-Setting Function: Agenda-setting establishes the salient issues or images in the minds of the public. "The impact of the mass media - the ability to effect cognitive change among individuals, to structure their thinking - has been labeled the agenda-setting function of mass communication" (Shaw and McCombs, 1977, p. 5). Agenda-setting occurs because the press must be selective in reporting the news. "The news outlets as gatekeepers of information, make choices about what to report and how to report it" (Littlejohn, 1989, p. 272).

Agenda-building: Cobb and Elder (1972) describe agenda building as the broader process of how press, public and government agendas are formed and how they influence each other. (cited in Kanervo & Kanervo, 1986, p. 308).

Information Subsidy: Gandy (1982) in his investigations defined information subsidies as an "attempt to produce influence over the actions of others by controlling their access to and use of information relevant to those

actions (p. 61). This information is characterized as a subsidy because the source of that information causes "it to be made available at something less than the cost a user would face in the absence of the subsidy" (Gandy, 1982, p. 61). A direct subsidy is defined by Gandy as a visit or personal contact, letters, analyses or the like mailed or otherwise delivered directly to policy actors. A direct subsidy is testimony in hearings, investigations, etc., advertisements placed in media to which policy actors are known to attend. An indirect subsidy is defined by Gandy where the identity of the source is purposely hidden such as anonymous leaks, off-the-record statements, messages delivered by those surrogates seen as acting independently, such as independent research organizations and unsolicited testimonials. An indirect subsidy as Gandy describes, can also be where the identity of the source may be known, but the subsidy is delivered in such a way as to disguise the self interest. These indirect subsidies would be delivered in press conferences, news releases, and pseudo-events designed to win media attention as being legitimately newsworthy. Gandy states that "It is the public relations firm that plays the central role in design and implementation of information subsidy efforts by major PA's (policy actors)" (Gandy, 1982, p. 64).

Content Analysis: The formal system used to draw the conclusions from observations of content will be the

content analysis. A content analysis will be used in re-searching The Leaf-Chronicle newspapers studied. A classic definition of content analysis was provided in 1952 by Bernard Berelson. It defined content analysis as a "research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). Guido H. Stempel III states that the "key to understanding content analysis and performing it competently lies in understanding the meaning of objective, systematic, quantitative, and manifest content" (Stempel & Westley, 1989, p. 125).

Manifest Content: The manifest content means the apparent content, which means that content must be coded as it appears rather than as the content analyst feels it is intended.

Cutline: The sentence used under a photograph to describe or explain the photograph.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

The method of investigation for this study was a content analysis used to compare the manifest content of the press releases disseminated by Austin Peay State University's Public Affairs Office to The Leaf-Chronicle newspaper with the information actually printed in the newspaper about the university. The study also included the press releases that were generated to the newspaper by telephone calls from the newspaper to the Public Affairs Office requesting specific information. Public Affairs Office provided, for the purpose of the study, a copy of every press release sent to The Leaf-Chronicle and every article that was considered telephone generated, which means the information that was requested by telephone from Austin Peay State University by The Leaf-Chronicle staff, during a four-week time frame. The Public Affairs Office kept a log of telephone requested information from the newspaper staff. The telephone log gave the name of the caller and the information requested. This log was shared with the researcher during the four-week time frame of the study. This information provided the researcher with the number of phone requested press releases.

The time frame for the study was a four-week period between February 18, 1990, and March 17, 1990. A total of 28 issues of The Leaf-Chronicle were studied. There were four Sundays, four Mondays, four Tuesdays, four Wednesdays, four Thursdays, four Fridays, and four Saturdays studied in the content analysis. The guiding principle was to give every day of the newspaper an equal opportunity of being used in the content analysis. The unit of analysis was entire articles, articles including a photograph or photographs, and photographs with only a cutline printed concerning the university.

The content analysis was conducted considering entire articles and photographs printed during the four-week period about the in The Leaf-Chronicle. The content analysis focused on who built the agenda for the newspaper and ultimately, who set the agenda for the newspaper's content.

All items that were printed regarding Austin Peay State University in The Leaf-Chronicle during the four-week time period were coded for analysis except those items relating to sports, paid advertising, and letters written to the editor. Sports, paid advertising, and letters written to the editor were excluded because the information was not sent through the Public Affairs Office before it was disseminated to The Leaf-Chronicle. All coding was performed by one individual. Both intra and intercoder reliability checks were made upon a one week sample of the

articles published concerning Austin Peay State University in The Leaf-Chronicle newspaper. The researcher had a second person work with her initially and also had the assistant do some spot checking for reliability. Using the formula developed by Holsti (1969), intercoder reliability was calculated at 99% agreement.

A comparison was made to determine the number of articles sent to The Leaf-Chronicle newspaper by the Office of Public Affairs and what percentage of these articles were printed in the newspaper during the four-week time frame. When a newspaper staff person telephoned a specific request to the Public Affairs Office concerning an article that they were in the process of writing and would carry the staff person's byline, this type of request was coded as a staff written article. If the staff person requested and received information by phone from the Public Affairs Office about a specific event and did not have the article written with a byline, the article was coded as from the Public Affairs Office.

The study investigated the number of press releases that included photographs from the Public Affairs Office compared to how many photographs were printed with only a cutline under the photograph and no article. There was a category to show if a photograph was sent to the paper with an accompanying article but only the article was used without the photograph.

In the compilation of the content analysis, the press releases were divided into categories that were pertinent to the study. The categories were divided into: (1) articles printed without photographs, and (2) articles printed including a photograph, and (3) photographs used with only a cutline under the photograph.

The articles were evaluated and coded as favorable and positive or unfavorable and negative concerning Austin Peay State University. Any information concerning an event at the university was considered positive, therefore, there was no neutral code. This was determined by the apparent content of the articles as they appeared rather than as the content analysis researcher interpreted the articles' intent. The favorably coded articles were those which enhanced the reputation of the university in the community. These articles were positive, upbeat and informative, and affected the perception of Austin Peay State University in the local area in a favorable way. An example of this type of press release from the Public Affairs Office would be the positive information sent to the paper concerning the photograph of Dr. Solie Fott, conducting the University Orchestra in a rehearsal for the upcoming concert in the Clement Auditorium. The articles that were coded unfavorably were those that were negative representations of Austin Peay State University. The unfavorable coded articles had a negative impact on the perception of the

university and its students in the local community. An example of a negative article would be the staff written article that had the headline, "APSU Second Highest In Crime of Middle Tennessee Schools" which described burglaries and larcenies reported at the University.

The Austin Peay State University Public Affairs Office kept records of how many press releases they had sent out to the media in the form of print, radio, and television releases but they had no record of the number actually used. This study examined the success of the Austin Peay State university Public Affairs Office concerning their influence on The Leaf-Chronicle's media agenda. Specifically, the study examined and determined whether information provided to the news media by the Public Affairs Office was used in published news articles.

CHAPTER 4

Results

The results of the investigation were obtained from the completion of the content analysis of the 28 issues of The Leaf-Chronicle which were studied during the four-week time frame.

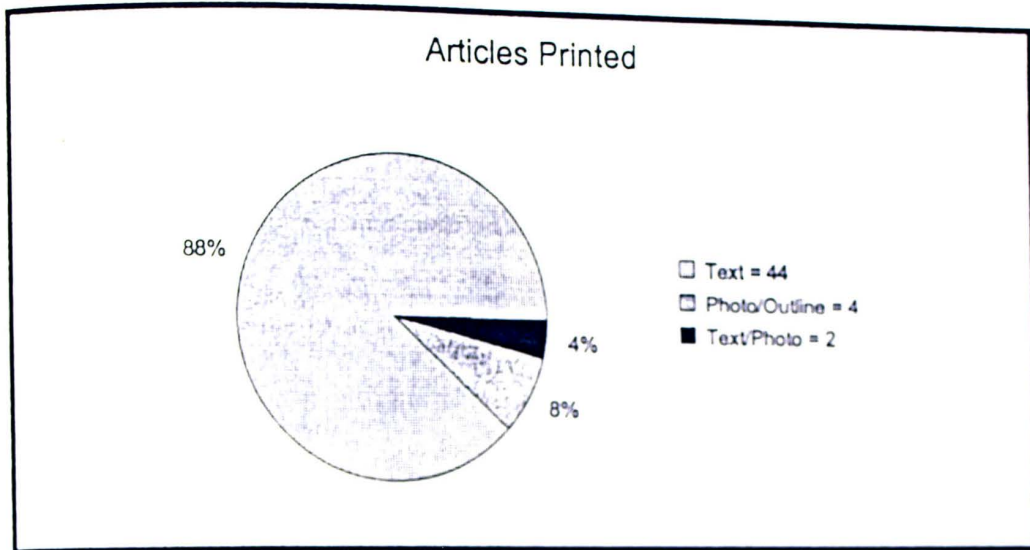
The Austin Peay State University Public Affairs Office sent a total of 55 press releases to The Leaf-Chronicle during the four-week time frame. Fifty press releases from the Public Affairs Office were printed by The Leaf-Chronicle. Five press releases that had been sent by the Public Affairs Office to the newspaper were not used during the four-week time frame.

The first hypothesis states that more articles printed in The Leaf-Chronicle concerning Austin Peay State University would be disseminated by the Public Affairs Office than were developed by the staff of the newspaper. This hypothesis was supported during the four-week study. More of the articles printed in The Leaf-Chronicle concerning Austin Peay State University were disseminated by the Public Affairs Office than developed by the newspaper staff. The staff written articles totaled 24 compared to 50 press releases from the Public Affairs Office.

The second hypothesis states that more than half (65%) of the Austin Peay State University Public Affairs Office press releases will be incorporated in whole or in part into published news stories was supported. Actually, 89% of the press releases were incorporated in whole or in part into published news stories. A total of 55 press releases were sent to the newspaper by the Public Affairs Office; there were 50 press releases printed in the newspaper. Although there were five press releases not used, that would not indicate that they were not used after the time frame of this study.

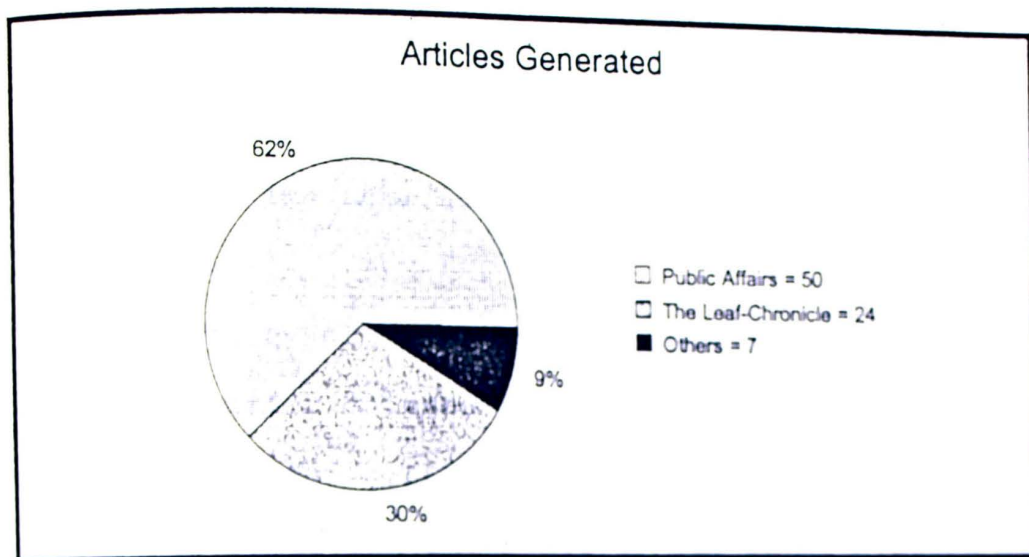
There was a total of 13 photographs sent to the newspaper. A total of six photographs were printed. Of the six, four of the photographs were printed with only a cutline and two were photographs printed with accompanying articles. There was a total of seven photographs that were not used. Of the seven not used, two photographs were sent with press releases and five were sent with only a cutline. There was a total of 50 press releases disseminated and printed. Of these, 44 (88%) were press releases without photographs, four (8%) were photographs with a cutline, and two (4%) were press releases with an accompanying photograph. (see Figure 1)

Figure 1. Austin Peay State University Public Affairs Office Press Releases Printed by The Leaf-Chronicle



During the four-week time frame, the total number of articles printed in The Leaf-Chronicle concerning the university was 24 (30%) by the newspaper's staff compared to 50 (62%) disseminated by the Public Affairs Office, and seven (9%) from press releases disseminated by sources other than the Public Affairs Office and the newspaper staff. This number represents a total of 81 articles printed about the university during this time frame. (see Figure 2)

Figure 2. Austin Peay State University Public Affairs Office Impact on News Agenda.



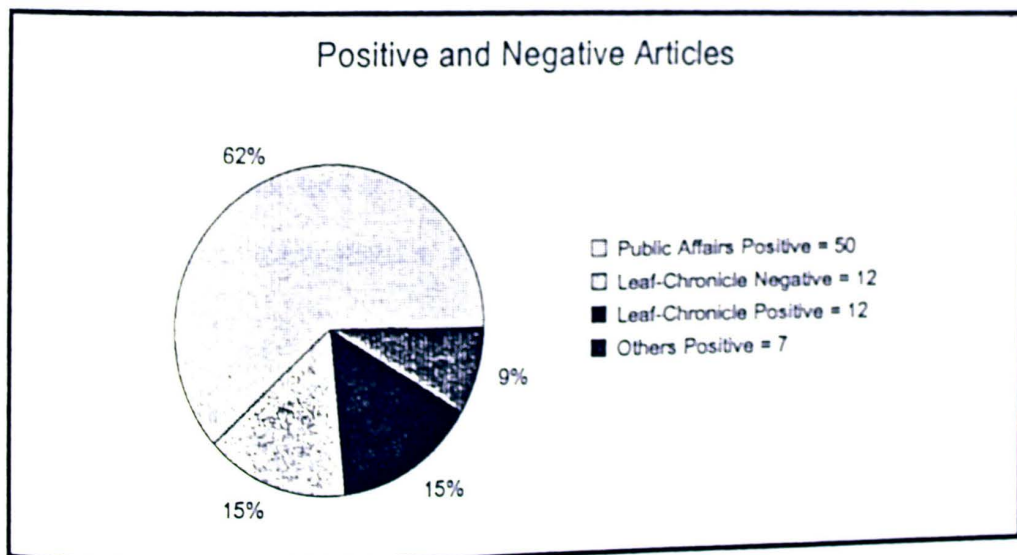
A third hypothesis that was supported stated the articles distributed by the Public Affairs Office concerning the school would be carried verbatim, without wording changes being made by the newspaper staff. Of the total of 50 articles printed in the paper written by the Public Affairs Office, 44 press releases were printed in the newspaper word for word and seven had been edited. However, the information was not changed. The press releases were condensed to be used in the paper.

A fourth hypothesis was that the majority of the articles and pictures printed in the newspaper regarding Austin Peay State University would be positive, since the Public Affairs Office would be disseminating positive, favorable, and upbeat information representing the

university in their press releases. This hypothesis was supported as all 50 (62%) press releases printed in the newspaper disseminated by the Public Affairs Office were coded as positive. All seven (9%) miscellaneous press releases were positive. There were 12 of the 24 staff written articles that were positive (15%) and 12 that were negative (15%). (see Figure 3)

A fifth hypothesis was that when the newspaper requested specific information from the Public Affairs Office and then received a press release from the Public Affairs Office regarding the information, the press release would be more likely to be printed in the paper than if no request had been made. This hypothesis was not supported, as

Figure 3. The Leaf-Chronicle Positive and Negative Articles Concerning Austin Peay State University.



in the time frame of my study there were no examples of this particular situation.

There were telephone transactions between the newspaper staff and the Public Affairs Office regarding information. The situations in the time frame of this study focused on particular questions to the Public Affairs Office regarding articles that staff were already in the process of writing.

There was one situation of the newspaper staff requesting specific information about an event. The Public Affairs Office gave the staff member the requested information in a phone conversation and the staff put the information in the paper. This article was counted as information disseminated by the Public Affairs Office, although it was not a written, but an oral press release, and the article did not have a newspaper staff by-line.

This study indicates that the Public Affairs Office was successful in building the agenda of The Leaf-Chronicle in their presentation of Austin Peay State University in a positive and favorable manner.

CHAPTER 5

Analysis and Conclusions

The study supported, through a content analysis, that the Austin Peay State University Public Affairs Office had a positive impact on the agenda of The Leaf-Chronicle during the four-week time frame concerning the Austin Peay State University. Since the Public Affairs Office presented the university in a positive manner, the implication from the research is that a public affairs department could influence the media, specifically in this research, the newspaper, in a positive manner concerning whatever agency or firm they were representing.

The first hypothesis was supported. The newspaper did use the Public Affairs Office's interpretation of the school news through press releases rather than use a staff reporter. More of the articles printed in The Leaf-Chronicle concerning Austin Peay were disseminated by the Public Affairs Office than developed by the newspaper staff. This was easier for the paper as information was readily available on current events and placed promptly and conveniently at the newspaper office. The staff writer did not have to discover or track down the current news at the university since information was delivered timely and by the Public Affairs Office press releases.

The content analysis gives the researcher a formal system in communication research to relate content to communicator, audience, and the effects. By doing a content analysis using the newspaper concerning other businesses or organizations, the researcher could determine if the printed media were presenting the particular organization to the public in a positive or negative or even neutral manner.

In this study, contrary to White's groundbreaking study in 1950, this research did not find active "gate keeping." This study determined that the gates were indeed left open and seemingly unattended as the flow of information from the Public Affairs Office to the newspaper flowed effortlessly without the obstacle of "gates." The Public Affairs Office regularly delivered the up-to-date news and current campus events to the newspaper. Information flowed freely from the Public Affairs Office to the office of The Leaf-Chronicle. The newspaper in turn passed the information on to their readers concerning the happenings at the university.

This might be the case in this study because of the information source being an institution of higher education that is considered respected in the community and interested in upgrading and positively influencing society. Similar studies could be done concerning private industries, health care facilities, and government agencies with a

content analysis conducted using the local newspaper. Further study would have to be done concerning other institutions and groups such as profit-making industries, political groups, and other special interest organizations. It would have to be determined through research if they would receive the same degree of information flow that the Public Affairs Office experienced.

The second hypothesis that more than half (65%) of the Austin Peay State University Public Affairs Office press releases will be incorporated in whole or part into published news stories was supported. There were 55 press releases sent to the paper, 50 were printed. The newspaper took the information and incorporated it into the paper about the university rather than having a staff member canvas the campus for newsworthy information. The Public Affairs Office could strongly influence the newspaper agenda regarding Austin Peay State University.

The third hypothesis also was supported that at least (65%) of the articles from the Public Affairs Office printed in the newspaper will be carried verbatim without word changes being made by the newspaper staff. Each press release was used as it was sent; there were no word changes. Of the 50 press releases used, only seven were condensed. The information was not changed but shortened to be used in the space available in the paper. The grammar, the wording, the meaning of the press release were

used in print just as they were written.

The fourth hypothesis was also supported as only positive upbeat information was distributed by the Public Affairs Office to the newspaper. The paper used 50 of the 55 press releases sent to the paper, thus disseminating positive information about the university.

The fifth hypothesis was not supported by the study as the newspaper did not request specific information that the Public Affairs Office shared with the newspaper in the form of a press release. The newspaper telephoned, according to the telephone log in one instance, requesting specific information concerning a specific event. The Public Affairs Office answered the staff writer's question and the staff member used the information in the article. This article was counted as information disseminated by the Public Affairs Office, although it was not a written but an oral press release and the article did not have a newspaper staff by-line. There were no other examples of this type of sharing specifically requested information that led to the Public Affairs Office submitting a specifically requested press release.

We have always been aware that the press is a messenger, but as Shaw and McCombs (1977) have pointed out "we are just beginning to obtain a glimpse of how that messenger himself can shape the message" (p. 29). That glimpse,

of course, is the major challenge of agenda-setting research of the future.

perhaps future studies could continue to research how effective the various industries, businesses, and groups with public relation departments influence and ultimately, have an impact on setting the newspaper agenda for their particular organizations.

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