Literature Review: Public Relations Sequence of the UNC School of Media and

Journalism

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The public relations sequence of the UNC School of Media and Journalism (formerly the School of Journalism and Mass Communication), hereinafter also referred to as "the client," is one of eight sequences in the School, hereinafter also referred to as "the MJ-School." The client introduces students to foundations and practices to build relationships and communicate effectively. As part of the School, the sequence shares in a responsibility to train the next generation of media professionals, holding true to core principles of media and journalism education while leading the transformation in the digital communications environment (*About the School,* n.d.).

The client pursues two research goals: one, measurement of how the public relations sequence is represented in the School's communication as compared to other universities, and two, how students in the public relations sequence perceive and discuss their experiences (A. Saffer, email, Sept. 20, 2015). This literature review focuses on the latter of the two research goals, specifically regarding correlations between social capital (refer to "Keywords," page 4) in public relations pedagogy and the effects of social capital on student perceptions of connectedness, community and belonging within their learning environment. The review informs the design and fielding of Jackobs Research's survey. The research instrument will detect whether social capital is present in students' experiences as well as survey any correlation between

presence of social capital and student perceptions regarding their sequence and the School at large. While this review explores specifically social capital and public relations pedagogy, the survey will be administered to students of the remaining seven sequences in the School to allow for comparative data.

The students who comprise the target audience of our research tool are men and women of the millennial generation, meaning the individuals were born between 1980 and 2000. Millennial media habits are driven by technology as well as content. Three out of four millennials own a smart phone. Millennials conduct the majority of their online activity on mobile devices via apps or mobile versions of websites. The average millennial consumes 2 hours and 15 minutes of online video per week and prefers image-sharing platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat. In a survey administered to 3044 millennials, 77 percent said it is important to be informed about current affairs and news. While many millennials frequent traditional news publications such as The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal, 60 percent of the sample size reported social media as their primary means of staying up-to-date on current affairs and news (Blatteberg, 2014, Dua, 2014).

In response to these media habits, university organizations such as the MJ-School employ a number of platforms to inform their students as well as engage them and encourage student-student and student-instructor communication. While using media like email, print and in-person messaging, university organizations often use social media like Facebook and Twitter to establish a constant stream of communication with students (Wynne, 2013). Twitter is often the means of choice in academic

endeavors to offer that constant stream of announcements. Rather than a one-way communication announcement style, other educational institutions employ social media to encourage students to connect and bridge networks through online conversation. If employed correctly, these forums have the ability to build community and engage individuals in conversations they may not otherwise be able to have (Acosta, 2014). In other words, social media are one of many means available to educational institutions to foster social capital.

It is important to note, however, that the social media approach to social capital is under a certain amount of scrutiny. According to a study in University Business, seven out of the top 10 universities had a less than 10 percent engagement rate with followers despite high follower counts. These universities used Twitter and other social media for one-way communication such as announcements rather than as means to facilitate two-way communication with and between followers (W., 2014). While it is possible to foster social capital through social media, many universities fail to exploit this opportunity to garner true engagement with and among students.

Similar problems in higher education communication practices relate back a basic inquiry of this literature review: how does social capital fit into higher education communication and pedagogy, specifically in the public relations context? Before reviewing current literature on the topic, this essay will first further explain social capital then present the research hypothesis.

Keywords

social capital

Social capital in the general sense is the instrumental value of building and maintaining relationships in order to create a community where all members belong and are valued (Condeluci, 2014). In the organizational context, social capital comprises both the network of relationships possessed by an individual and the many assets mobilized through that network, including actual and potential resources such as knowledge and a sense of organizational support (Yen, S. et al., 2014).

Hypothesis

In instances where a student experiences low levels of social capital, including both student-instructor and student-student relationships, that student will likely have comparatively negative perceptions regarding his or her sequence and the School. This includes a lesser sense of connectedness, community and belonging to the organization. Jackobs Research believes students of the public relations sequence in the MJ-School experience low levels of social capital and therefore have a lesser sense of connectedness, community and belonging as compared to other sequences with high levels of social capital (e.g. the reporting sequence).

To inform Jackobs Research's survey, this essay has reviewed current literature on a number of themes related to the hypothesis. To begin, this essay will consider literature regarding the notion of social capital in general and social capital's place in the higher education context of pedagogy. Then the review will explore literature on the state of current public relations pedagogy. Finally, this essay will consider literature that combines theories on social capital pedagogy with practices in public relations education. In light of the review, this essay will then consider a number of research

questions to be explored by Jackobs Research's survey as well as offer concluding

remarks.

Literature Review

Social Capital and Pedagogy

Many studies consider social capital and its effects on organizations. To begin,

this section will discuss organizational social capital in general and why it is beneficial

for an organization to first establish social capital and then exploit resources made

possible by social capital. This section will then apply those ideas to the higher

education context, including general pedagogical practices.

According to "The effect of internal social capital on knowledge sharing," by Yu-

Fang Yen, Jung-Feng Tseng and Hsing-Kuo Wang, social capital is useful to

organizations because it drives positive behavior such as knowledge sharing. The ability

to share and integrate knowledge is often considered a competitive advantage for

knowledge-based organizations, whether a company was founded on innovation to

drive production (e.g. Apple Inc.) or is an intellectual institution such as a university. For

social capital to be present, however, a number of cultural expectations (culture is

meant in the organizational, not ethnic, context) must be established. The authors argue

social capital and a culture of knowledge sharing is established through *guanxi*, or a

willingness to cross boundaries in relationships in order to develop networks of mutual

dependence. *Guanxi* is often based on perceptions of closeness between agents and is

informed by trust—including trust in an organization, in one's supervisors and in the

capabilities of other employees—then encouraged through norms, or established

practices such as prioritizing organizational interest over personal interest. The authors

note that organizational benefit from social capital comes in two stages: first

establishing willingness to share knowledge through *guanxi,* trust and norms, and then

exploiting that willingness into actual shared knowledge and innovation. Note: this study

was conducted in Eastern organizations in Asia, and there are certain cultural

considerations, such as the concept of *guanxi,* that are very specific to ethnic culture

and may affect the study's applicability to Western contexts (Yen, Y. et al, 2015). There

are still, however, concepts significant to the public relations sequence of the MJ-School

and the client's understanding of why social capital may or may not be present in

student relationship within certain sequences in the School. This can be explored by

surveying student perceptions of trust and norms as well as inclinations to share

knowledge with others.

Having discussed factors necessary to establish social capital at the theoretical

level as well as considered its benefits such as knowledge sharing, this section will now

consider how to apply that theory to the higher education context. According to "Social

Capital and Organisational Commitment at Higher Education Instutions" by Slew Hwa

Yen, James K. Campbell, Augus Irianto and Zulyusrl and Muhyiatul Fadilah, social

capital is established, realized and reinforced in the university setting through day-to-

day interactions. When colleagues feel respect and support in their quotidian

experiences, including social interaction, social recognition and day-to-day functioning,

individuals are inclined to internalize and reciprocate knowledge-sharing values and

norms. Eventually, those daily interactions grow into relationships and network bonds

that aggregate to establish a positive learning community amongst professionals in

higher education settings. These individuals perceive belonging and commitment to

their organization, encouraging long-term organizational learning and performance

culture such as team orientation, cooperation and collective action. Cultures that

incentivize cooperative behavior are especially beneficial for higher education

organizations such as the public relations sequence of the MJ-School, for collective

action is key to innovation and profession building. It is noteworthy, however, that the

work of Yen, S. et al. explored instructor-instructor networks, not student-student or

student-instructor relationships, information critical to inform Jackobs Researchs' survey

of student perceptions of social capital. Still, the basic findings regarding daily

interactions to build learning networks can still be applied to student contexts.

A different study, "School social capital and secondary education plans," by

Claudia Schuchart, on the other hand, considers student-instructor relationships in

pedagogy and their impact on outcomes like student ambition. Schuchart inquires into

how students actively use resources (emotional support, information, guidance and

mentorship, etc.) from student-teacher relationships in order to meet academic goals

such as secondary education. Results indicated that a student relationship to teachers

characterized by higher levels of support and expectation (for example, asking a student

his or her higher education plans) correlate with a greater likelihood that said student

will advance to more challenging forms of higher education. Teachers are expected to

establish these high-support relationships by recognizing and improving on sensitivity to

student needs and ambition outside the classroom. This study offers insight into the

application of social capital to pedagogy and explains the dynamics of a high-support

relationship between students and their instructors. This idea is useful to the client's

understanding of concrete ways in which social capital between students and instructors

can take form. Further study in the higher education context is necessary, as

Schuchart's study was conducted in Germany for primary schools students. The study

also does not consider importance or effects of student-student social capital.

The following section will describe current public relations pedagogical practices,

remarking the lack of emphasis on social capital in public relations education.

Public Relations Pedagogy

The previous section explored organizational social capital and its application to

pedagogy in general. With that topic considered, this review will now discuss literature

on current practices in public relations pedagogy to understand widespread norms in

public relations education. The final section of this review will consider social capital's

place in public relations pedagogy.

Few pedagogical studies specific to public relations explore or report on social

capital as an established practice in public relations education. In many studies on

public relations curricula, such as the study conducted by Wonjun Chung and Jinbong

Choi in "Professionalism in Public Relations Pedagogy: A comparative Analysis of

Public Relations Curricula among the United States, the United Kingdom, and South

Korea," researchers and curriculum designers alike discuss curricula through the

evaluation of course topics (for example, comparing theoretical courses to skill-based

courses). Chung and Choi's explanatory study, which describes public relations

curricula on a national scale in the United States, in the United Kingdom and in South

Korea, restricts pedagogical considerations to course description and design rather than

including practices outside coursework such as relationship building between students

and between students and their instructors. The study found that in general, not one of

the three countries' curriculum standards fully establishes an ideal version of

professionalism in the public relations field. Professionalism, as Chung and Choi

describe it, requires a number of criteria such as education standards and well-

developed networks (otherwise known as social capital, the aspect of professionalism

that public relations pedagogy lacks!). Understanding low perception levels of

professionalism in public relations pedagogy is useful to Jackobs Research's

endeavors, as it may be connected to results indicating low levels of satisfaction with a

sequence and low levels of perceived pride regarding a sequence.

The next section of this literature review explores research on elevating the

public relations profession by combining social capital theory with public relations

pedagogy.

Social Capital in Public Relations Pedagogy

Adam Saffer's essay, "Applying a Social Network Perspective to Public Relations

Pedagogy: Examining the Relationships that Will Build the Profession," offers a

solution to Chung and Choi's finding of low professionalism in public relations. Saffer

argues relationship building (establishing social capital) is central to advancing public

relations' status as a profession. He proposes that if public relations instructors convey

to students one, that relationships and positioning in networks grants access to

resources and two, that student-to-student relationships have value, then public

relations students will have a greater ability to achieve objectives in the classroom and

in their professional careers. Building the profession is not, however, restricted to

establishing just student-student relationships; faculty and staff have a role as well.

When educators bridge relationships and connect networks across departments, they

are able to broker information between groups and create vast knowledge pools that

help connect students with a wider range of expertise as well as with a wider range of

networks in the professional field. As Saffer notes, there are few studies that integrate

social capital into public relations pedagogy or that study their effects on learning

outcomes and the profession. Saffer's essay itself does not contain an empirical study

to demonstrate its theoretical prescriptive analysis.

　　　　While few other studies combine public relations pedagogy and social capital at a

theoretical level, there are some observational studies exploring practical aspects of

social capital such as instructor-student mentorship. It is important to note that these

instances of social capital in practice were not instituted via formal pedagogy in public

relations programs. For example, in "Each one, reach one: An autobiographic account

of a Black PR professor's mentor-mentee relationships with Black graduate students,"

author Damion Waymer considers the benefits of mentor-mentee relationships to both

the public relations profession and the individuals who engage in mentorship. He

reiterates throughout his essay that mentorship in public relations education is most

often coincidental—mentor-mentee relationships are rarely if ever the product of

standards set by public relations research or pedagogy. Consequently, there is little

discussion in the field about how "good" mentors in public relations come into being. While Waymer's autobiographical study is in the context of Black public relations professor mentors and Black public relations graduate students, many concepts in the essay are applicable to public relations students on a wider scale. Just as Saffer's essay stresses, social relationships between students and instructors benefit not only the parties involved but the public relations profession in general. Waymer highlights many benefits specific to mentorships, including career advancement, psychosocial support and perceptions of belonging among mentees as well as increased confidence and knowledge sharing among mentors. As most literature on social capital acknowedges, Waymer's study asserts a need for "grand-scale trust" when establishing social relationships and knowledge-sharing environments such as mentor-mentee relationships in public relations. Waymer's work will inform Jackobs Research's research tool instances when drawing correlations between student perceptions of strong student-instructor relationships and perceptions of psychosocial support and connectedness within the School.

A second instance of social capital used practically in the public relations setting is observed in Jensen Moore's study, "Effects of Online Interaction and Instructor Presence on Students' Satisfaction and Success with Online Undergraduate Public Relations Courses." The study examines the impact of both student-instructor and of student-student interaction on course completion in online public relations courses. While frequency of instructor-student interaction did not significantly affect completion or passing of the online public relations course studied, the quality of communication

between instructions and students did affect students success. Applying Social Learning

Theory, Moore concludes that in order to encourage positive behavior that leads to

student success in online public relations courses, instructors must establish positive

student-instructor relationships, including praising, reinforcing and correcting students,

via quality interactions and not necessarily through frequent communication. In regards

to student-student relationships, Moore's findings connect student-student

communication with perceptions of an online "community" in which students feel

supported and connected and therefore encouraged to complete the course. While

these findings are relevant to other literature in this review, it is noteworthy that Moore's

study inquires into a very basic level of relationship between students—the presence of

communication—in an online, not in-person, course and employs a basic measure of

success: course completion. Moore suggests further studies ought to evaluate quality of

interactions more in-depth as well as consider online students' counterparts in face-to-

face courses. Clearly, it is still necessary to conduct research regarding effects of

student-student relationships on larger-scale outcomes than course completion such as

professional success, graduation rates and student perceptions regarding their

education and profession as a whole. Despite these shortcomings, Moore's information

will inform the Jackobs Research's survey by explaining connections between learning

outcomes, even conceptual outcomes such as perceptions of community, and the

presence and frequency of student-instructor and student-student communications.

As a whole, while the studies reviewed in this section are lacking comprehensive field study, they are important beginning steps for exploring theories of social capital in the context of public relations curricula.

This literature review has explored social capital pedagogy in general, reviewed the current state of public relations pedagogy and considered some of the first studies to place social capital pedagogy in the public relations context. In light of this literature and in light of the many reasons to call for further research in the realm of social capital pedagogy in public relations, a number of research questions emerge when applying this information to the client.

Research Questions

The target audience for Jackobs Research's survey is students enrolled in the seven non-public relations sequences of the MJ-School. The data collected will be compared to another survey considering solely students in the public relations sequence. The following research questions are designed to gauge presence of social capital and the impact of social capital on student perceptions of connectedness, community and belonging within MJ-School sequences and within the School at large.

RQ 1: What instances, if any, of social capital are present in student experiences within the MJ-School (e.g. student-instructor or student-student relationships, knowledge sharing practices, etc.)?

RQ 2: Are notions of social capital related to pedagogical strategy designed by the School?

RQ 3: What correlation does student experience of social capital have with student perceptions of connectedness, community and belonging to the School?

RQ 4: How do results compare between sequences in the School?

<div align="center">Conclusions</div>

In general and as many research studies acknowledge, there has been inadequate research concerning connections between social capital in public relations pedagogy and the outcomes social capital has on public relations education and the profession. In addition to some literature reviewed in this essay, however, there are emerging discussions in publications like trade magazines acknowledging the benefits of social capital in public relations and considering concrete approaches to facilitate social relationships in education and the profession. For example, "Keeping PR-fit throughout the academic year" by Marc Whitt notes the value of instructors who employ social capital to stay "fit" in public relations, much how Saffer wrote in his essay that instructors should bridge networks to offer students more access to a variety of expertise. Whitt applies the ideas of many academics reviewed in this paper, writing the key to important social relationships is daily in-person contact. Instructors must dedicate time each day to connect one-on-one with those within their networks. While pieces like Whitt's are encouraging to the acknowledgement of social capital's place in public relations, the subject matter is still underrepresented in public relations academic theory and study and therefore not yet supported by empirical data. Study of the public relations sequence and other sequences of the MJ-School at UNC may be one of the first academic attempts to close the research gap between social capital in public

relations pedagogy and student experiences and perceptions regarding their education and profession. Once this research is completed, however, there will still be a need for research on the impact of social capital on more concrete outcomes such as job opportunities and perceptions regarding the profession of public relations.

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