Research Journal of the Institute for Public Relations
Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter, 2015)

Joining the Movement?: Investigating Standardization of Measurement and Evaluation Within Public Relations

Authors

Kjerstin Thorson[1], David Michaelson[2], Emily Gee[3], Jun Jiang[3], Zijun Lu[3], Grace Luan[3], Kaylee Weatherly[3], Sha-lene Pung[3], Yihan Qin[3], Jing Xu[3]

1. Assistant Professor, Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism
2. Managing Director, Teneo Strategy
3. Master's student, Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, Strategic Public Relations

Joining the Movement?: Investigating Standardization of Measurement and Evaluation Within Public Relations

Abstract: This paper draws on a new survey of public relations professionals to explore (1) the extent to which respondents report adopting standardized measures recommended by professional organizations; (2) predictors of measurement standardization; and (3) links among measurement practices and self-reported influence of public relations within the broader organization.

Research Journal of the Institute for Public Relations
Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter, 2015)

Joining the Movement?: Investigating Standardization of Measurement and Evaluation Within Public Relations

Executive Summary

Recently, a number of scholars and practitioners have come together to identify standard approaches for measurement and evaluation in public relations. Their aim is to create a level of measurement consistency across the profession. Efforts toward standardization include work by the Coalition for Public Relations Research Standards—formed by PRSA, the Council of Public Relations Firms, the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, the Institute for Public Relations, and AMEC. Standards are defined as comparative evaluation measurements used to determine the performance of a public relations campaign in relation to prior or even competitive programs.

This article reports on the extent to which public relations professionals are adopting standardized measurement approaches as recommended by professional organizations, and investigates which factors explain why some organizations are standardizing and others are not. We draw on a 2013 survey of top communication professionals. One quarter of our respondents report adopting standardized measurement practices, a surprisingly high proportion given that the standardization movement got underway only recently. Organizations in the technology industry stand out, adopting standardized measurement at a rate higher than other industries.

In terms of predicting why some organizations are standardizing and others are not, we find that organizational culture is the most important variable. Communication professionals who see themselves as embedded in innovative and proactive organizations are also more likely to report standardization. In addition, positive attitudes toward the rise of social media are also correlated to standardization. This suggests that those who are experimenting with social media campaigns are eager to explore ways to monitor and measure their impact. On the other hand, the size of the organization, their revenue and the research expertise of the practitioner are not related to adoption of measurement standardization.

Finally, communicators who report measurement standardization are also more likely to report that public relations has a real impact within the organization. Results showing that those who standardize see themselves as taken seriously within the organization and as having a larger role in long-term strategic planning.

Research Journal of the Institute for Public Relations
Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter, 2015)

Joining the Movement?: Investigating Standardization of Measurement and Evaluation Within Public Relations

The measurement and evaluation of public relations effectiveness has been a subject of debate for quite some time. Public relations scholars and many practitioners have long argued that more sophisticated methods of measurement are needed to measure the actual outcomes and actions that organizations are seeking from their target audiences (Gregory, 2012). Yet a number of studies suggest that public relations professionals are sticking with the traditional—and much easier—measurement of *outputs* from their media relations strategy, such as counting clips or the number of press releases issued, rather than trying to ascertain broader *outcomes* of campaigns, such as audience engagement or behavior change.

Recently, a number of scholars and practitioners have come together to identify standard approaches for evaluating public relations efforts in an attempt to create a level of measurement consistency across the profession. Standards are defined as comparative evaluation measurements used to determine the performance of a public relations campaign in relation to prior or even competitive programs (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). Standards are important, because they can be used to determine whether or not a communications goal is being met or if a practitioner needs to change the course of a campaign to obtain a set objective. Efforts toward standardization include work by the Coalition for Public Relations Research Standards—formed by PRSA, the Council of Public Relations Firms, the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, the Institute for Public Relations, and AMEC—to develop and implement industry-wide standards for public relations measurement and evaluation. A series of best practices, frameworks and metrics are in development (IPR; Michaelson & Stacks). The movement toward standardization is an attempt to push back against the inconsistency of methodologies developed by in-house communication teams and the often proprietary measures packaged by public relations agencies. The standardization movement is therefore also an attempt to push the public relations practice toward use of more sophisticated metrics.

However, problems in PR measurement and evaluation remain, and new challenges continue to emerge. Even as the movement toward standardization picks up steam, it is not yet known the extent to which organizations are paying attention to or actually adopting recommended measures. In addition, the growth of social media and the rise of "big data" approaches offer new challenges to standardized measurement and evaluation. Social media measurement remains in its infancy, and it is also largely unknown how and to what extent public relations departments are attempting to measure their performance across these newer digital platforms.

This paper draws on a new survey of top public relations professionals to explore the extent to which measurement standardization has been adopted, and to identify the characteristics of organizations that are more likely to adopt standardized measures. Our second goal is to test a series of hypotheses concerning potential obstacles to measurement standardization. Finally, we report data showing positive connections among standardization, the quality of measurement programs and (self-reported) influence of public relations within the broader organization.

Literature Review

Evolution of PR Measurement and Evaluation

Approaches to measurement and evaluation of public relations effectiveness have evolved since the practice was in its infancy (Watson, 2012; Michaelson & MacLeod, 2007). In the first half of the 20th century, practitioners focused on polling and analyses of media stories. In the second half of the century, as the practices of public relations expanded, greater emphasis was given to media analysis but evidence also suggested that measurement and evaluation were more discussed than actually undertaken. Even at the earliest stages of PR measurement, studies of practitioner attitudes and behavior showed widespread reluctance to engage in measurement practices (Watson, 1994) Measurement of PR effectiveness was often seen as simply too complex to be integrated into the workings of everyday practice.

Beginning in the 1980s, academics began to take part in these conversations about the role and importance of measurement, as did sophisticated research departments at agencies like Burson-Marsteller, Ketchum, and Edelman (Watson, 2012; Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). In addition, professional organizations such as Institute for Public Relations (IPR) and Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) also played a critical role in the evolution of PR measurement and evaluation (Lindenmann, 2005). In 1999, the U.S. Commission on Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation was formed with an aim to become "the inclusive, authoritative arbiter of accepted standards for research and measurement relating specifically to public relations, as well as for research and measurement in related communications disciplines that may apply, or be linked in some way, to public relations programs and activities." The Coalition for Public Relations Research Standards was formed in 2012 to create a platform of standards for research and measurement, consisting of organizations such as PRSA, IPR and International Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communications (AMEC).

However, the tensions between those advocating best practices and evidence that practitioners were not practicing in this way have continued (Gregory, 2008). The rise of digital and social media has amplified the volume of this concern. New tools for the practice of PR and strategic communication have opened up new possibilities for measurement and evaluation—many of them relatively "easy," quantitative metrics—yet their appropriate application has remained elusive in much of the practice (Pestana & Daniels, 2011; Watson, 2012). In sum, as Watson (2012) frames it, it is widely believed that "practitioners still talk more about evaluation than actually practice it" (p. 396).

Best Practice and Standardization Approaches to Measurement and Evaluation

In response to concerns over effective use of measurement by public relations practitioners, a number of scholars and practitioners have proposed collections of best practices (e.g., Michaelson & MacLeod, 2007; Pestana & Daniels, 2011; AMEC, 2010; Wippersberg, 2009). The focus of many of these approaches is not simply to recommend a list of useful metrics—that is, a laundry list of pre-approved tactics for measurement and evaluation. Instead, best practice approaches emphasize development of high quality measurement programs from goal setting through final application of research tactics. For example, Michaelson and MacLeod propose nine best practices that can serve as the foundation for establishing a standardized set of measures for public relations activities. These practices are divided into two interrelated activities: 1) the use of specific research methods and procedures, and 2) the application of measures that examine both the quality and the substance of public relations activities.

Sophisticated research methods and procedures begin with setting clear and well-defined research objectives, applying rigorous research design that meets the highest standards of research methods and ensures reliable research results, and providing detailed supporting documentation with full transparency. In addition, best practice approaches tend to emphasize the need for an understanding of how persuasion works within the context of public relations and strategic communication (Kim & Ni, 2013). Those advocating best practice approaches frequently cite various versions of the "communication funnel" from awareness to action as a model, arguing that practitioners must understand how the goals of their communication programs and of measurement programs should be aligned to the processes through which audiences move from knowing about a brand (or candidate, product, etc), learn details about it, come to desire or at least like it, and finally make a purchase decision (or vote, donate money, or whatever the desired behavioral outcome may be) (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011; Pestana & Daniels, 2011).

Best practices approaches also recommend increased attention of practitioners to measurement of *outcomes* rather than solely *outputs* resulting from public relations programs. Output measures—quantitative counts of what PR practitioners create—have long been the most common among practitioners (Watson, 2012; Wright et al., 2009). According to a survey of 520 public relations professionals worldwide (Wright et al.), the most preferred standard used for evaluating public relations effectiveness is placement in target media. It is much easier to measure the number of press releases written, or updates to the website or Twitter, than it is to measure the impact of these practices. Hon (1998) quotes a public relations professional saying, "it's real easy to measure things that don't matter and very difficult to measure things that do matter" (p. 23). Outcome measures, on the other hand, focus on end results. These vary widely depending on the communications program, but may include awareness (unaided and aided), audience knowledge, engagement, purchase behavior, and brand advocacy (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011).

What is preventing improvement in measurement and evaluation?

If extant research is correct and development of measurement programs in public relations has been more talk than action (Gregory, 2001; Watson, 2012; Wright, Leggetter, &

Zerfass, 2009), what is standing in the way? Research and measurement plays a more central role in other communication fields such as advertising and marketing, and throughout business fields there has been a highly visible turn toward data-driven decision making (Duhigg, 2012). Existing scholarship suggests that the first and most important reason for the lag in attention to measurement and evaluation in PR is that practitioners cannot agree on what constitutes success from measurement (Gregory & Watson, 2008; Wright et al.). A survey of practitioners in multiple countries found that large majorities of respondents agreed that measurement should be integral to the process of public relations, and even that accurately measuring return on investment (ROI) is an "achievable goal" (Wright et al., 2009). Even so, counting clips remained the most popular measurement approach among this group.

A survey by Gaunt and Wright (2004) and the more recent Wright et al. (2009) study explored what practitioners perceive as the barriers to improving the quality of measurement programs. In the 2004 study, respondents listed cost, lack of time, lack of expertise, and questionable value of results as the most important barriers. Cost, lack of expertise and lack of time remained among the most important obstacles in the 2009 study as well. Qualitative responses in the study suggested that practitioners are deeply concerned about the availability of "right ways" to do research. In addition, pressure from clients wanting to see proof of creation of value has made for continued reliance on metrics that have already been vetoed from an academic viewpoint. Examples include poorly thought out measures of effectiveness such as advertising value equivalency (AVE). Unfortunately, these measurements really are often appreciated by clients and can bring in bigger budgets, making them particularly difficult to leave behind (Gregory & Watson, 2008; Watson, 2012).

Advocating for standardization

In general, surveys of practitioners tend to show a great deal of excitement about the future of PR measurement, but they also show that this excitement is not translating into action over time. It is out of this tension that a diffuse movement toward standardization emerged. The potential values of standardization are multiple. Consensus on a set of practices and measures would enable comparisons across campaigns, not only within a given organization but across different organizations (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). Further, they would simplify the requirements of expertise in measurement and evaluation, potentially putting quality measurement programs within the reach of even those organizations that lack in-house specialization or the resources to outsource their research to specialized agencies. Michaelson & Stacks found that two thirds of public relations professionals agreed that a common set of standards for PR measurement are necessary and useful. This suggests both enthusiasm for standardization as well as a continued lack of consensus.

As noted in the introduction, the standardization movement picked up steam with the formation of the Coalition for Public Relations Research Standards in 2012. The international group has developed standards for measurement not only of traditional media impact, but also for digital and social media as well as a variety of goals inherent to the communication lifecycle (e.g., awareness, intent, advocacy) (Institute for Public Relations, *nd.*). Over the past two years, a number of high profile organizations have announced adoption of the coalition standards, including McDonald's USA, Southwest Airlines, General Motors, and General Electric.

Another important reason for interest in standardization is the rise of new communication platforms—social media in particular. Increasing use of social media within communication programs has also raised interest in figuring out the best way to measure social media impact. DiStaso, McCorkindale and Wright (2011) interviewed 25 top corporate communication and public relations executives, and found that the majority believed social media was important in driving business results. In addition, social media measurement was a topic where many participants felt they had more questions than answers, including how to measure behavioral outcomes and not just reach, how to connect media metrics to corporate communication strategy, how to measure credibility and calculate return on investment.

In what follows, we build on existing research in public relations measurement to investigate the extent of adoption of measurement standardization among U.S.-based organizations, and to test a series of hypotheses concerning (a) factors that aid or impede progress toward standardization, and (b) linkages among standardization, measurement of communication outcomes, and the role of public relations within the organization.

Research questions and hypotheses

We begin by asking about the extent of standardization:

> RQ1: What is the extent to which U.S.-based organizations report standardizing their research practices according to recommendations from major professional associations?
>
> RQ2: Is the rate of standardization different across types of organizations (corporations, non-profits, government agencies) or industries?

Next, we developed a series of hypotheses about the rate of standardization based on what is currently known about perceived obstacles to quality measurement programs among public relations professionals. Extant research suggests three broad categories of variables that may explain how practitioners make decisions about research programs: (1) Cost and time, (2) expertise, and (3) general attitudes related to the organizational culture, such as a commitment to innovation. We also consider an additional factor that emerges from the literature: The attention paid to social media within the PR practice.

H1a (cost): Larger organizations by revenue and those with higher PR budgets will be more likely to adopt standardized measures.

H1b (expertise): Practitioners who have higher levels or education or specialized executive training in PR will be more likely to adopt standardized measures.

H1c (culture): Practitioners who consider their organizations to be more innovative are more likely to take up standardization.

H1d (social media): Practitioners who embrace social media within their communication programs will be more likely to engage in measurement standardization.

Next, we test a hypothesis linking reported measurement standardization to specific measurement programs, predicting,

H2: Organizations that adopt measurement standardization will be more likely to measure outcomes—as recommended by the Coalition for Public Relations Research—than organizations that do not adopt measurement standardization.

Finally, we hypothesize that measurement standardization will be linked to greater influence of public relations within broader organizational strategy.

H3: Organizations that standardize measurement will also report higher levels of influence across the organization.

Methods

This paper draws on data from an online survey of 347 senior-level communication practitioners in the United States. The sample was drawn from contact lists of four leading public relations professional organizations (IPR, PRSA, The Page Society and IABC). Each organization filtered its list in an attempt to identify only the most senior members. Potential respondents were emailed multiple invitations to participate in the survey. To ensure the validity of the sample, respondents included in the final sample had to pass a rigorous screening process.

The 347 practitioners included in this analysis were those who completed the full survey and reported that they were either a) the most senior communication professional in their organization or b) that they reported directly to the most senior communication professional. Further, respondents had to score more than 50 points by responding whether they had any of the following responsibilities: Planning department budgets; Managing department budgets; Determining communication goals for your organization or unit; Counseling C-Suite executives (e.g., Chairman, CEO, CFO, Partner, etc.) on communication issues facing your organization or unit; Determining staffing needs for your department or function; Hiring staff for your department or function; Primary role in selecting public relations agencies to support your department; Developing overall communication strategy for your organization; Developing and implementing crisis response strategy for your organization; Contributing to your organization's overall strategic direction; Managing relationships with public relations agency/agencies; Leading change management and related initiatives; Monitoring employee morale; Developing strategies for enhancing employee performance.

In all, 582 respondents passed this screener. We include here analyses only of the 347 participants who completed the entire questionnaire. The final sample included respondents from public companies (32%), private companies (19.6%), non-profits (20.2%) and government agencies (15.3%). It is worth noting that we do not claim that this sample is representative of all top public relations practitioners in the United States, a category for which no clear sampling frame exists. However, the distribution of respondents in consistent with previous studies of the same population (e.g., Michaelson & Stacks, 2011) and the rigorous screening procedure gives us confidence that respondents reflect the core of organizations with a PR/communication function in the U.S.

Measures

The extent to which the organization reported using standardized approaches to measurement and evaluation was measured via a question that allowed respondents to check multiple responses: "Which of the following describes your organization's approach to the measurement and evaluation of public relations activities? Select all that apply." The answer categories and percent responding to each are reported in Table 1.

Specific approaches to measurement and evaluation were measured with a list of 15 possible tactics: Unaided awareness among stakeholders, total impressions, reputation, share of discussion, social or online media, aided awareness among stakeholders, knowledge levels among stakeholders, relevance to stakeholders, total circulation, total number of clips, intent to take actions by stakeholders, willingness to advocate by stakeholders, social or online media metrics, ROI, content analysis of clips, and advertising value equivalency. For each, respondents were asked "By selecting a number from 1 (No Usage) to 7 (Extensive Usage) indicate the degree to which each of the following measures is included in your measurement and evaluation programs."

A factor analysis with promax rotation revealed four underlying factors. Factor loadings are reported in Table 2. The first factor reflects attention to outcome measurement (M=3.36, SD=1.89), the second emphasizes measurement of public relations outputs (M=4.19, SD=1.92), the third indicates measurement of outtakes from communication campaigns (M=4.18, SD=1.65), and the final factor reflects measurement of return-on-investment (ROI) (M=3.41, SD=2.14).

These categories of measurement have strong face validity, particularly as they track quite well with categories of measurement in the literature cited above.

We measured company size using an open-ended question that asked for gross revenues (for corporations) or gross operating budget (for non-profits and government agencies). Total public relations budget was measured with a single item that asked, "What is your estimated, all inclusive PR/COM budget (including all costs, i.e. staff salaries and related costs, agency fees, program execution, etc.) for the current fiscal/financial year?" Allocation of public relations budgets was measured by asking respondents to estimate what percent of their budget for the year was allocated to "staff salaries and related costs," "measurement and evaluation," "outside agency fees," and "program execution." All allocations had to add to one hundred percent.

Two measures of education were used as proxy measurements for expertise. First, we measured overall level of education on a scale from one to five. Answer categories ranged from "did not complete high school" to "postgraduate degree." All but one respondent had at least a college/university degree. We also asked whether the respondent had "undertaken any formal, executive-level training in PR/Communication, Business or a related field?" Sixty percent of the sample had received such training.

Perceptions of organizational culture were measured using two semantic differential items, on a scale from 1 to 7: "reactive: proactive" and "conservative: innovative." The question wording stated, "For each of the dimensions below, please select the number closest to the term that best describes your company/organization as a whole, not just your PR/Communication function alone." We measured attitudes toward social media within the public relations practice using five likert-type items, on a scale from 1-7. Question wordings and means are reported in Table 4.

Finally, we measured influence of public relations within the broader organization via three likert items, on a scale from 1 to 7 ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Question wordings and means are reported in Table 6.

Results

Our first research question asked about the extent to which measurement standardization has been adopted among public relations/communication departments in the United States. As Table 1 shows, a quarter of respondents report using standardized measures recommended by professional organizations within the field. Another 13 percent report they are thinking about adopting such measures. On the other hand, nearly half the respondents say they use measures developed in house. However, it is worth noting that in some cases this practice co-exists with standardization: A third (32.2 percent) of those who use measurement developed within their own department *also* report adopting standardized measures. That pattern is replicated somewhat for those who use measures developed by outside agencies (20.5 percent of respondents). Of these, 16.7 percent also report adopting standardized measures.

Our second research question and the first set of hypotheses were designed to explore the who and why behind measurement standardization. We began by looking across types of organizations, comparing the rate of standardization among corporations, non-profits and government agencies. A chi-square test revealed no differences by organization type (chi-square=1.04, *ns).* Approximately one quarter to a third of organizations of all kinds report measurement standardization. We next considered whether industry type and size of organization affects the rate of standardization[i]. Table 3 reports the rate of adopting standard measures for industries where we have sufficient sample size for analysis. This analysis shows that the finance and healthcare industries are adopting standard measures at a rate somewhat lower than average, while the technology industry is standardizing at a rate slightly higher than the overall average. H1a predicted that larger organizations and those with bigger PR budgets were more likely to standardize. The results of independent samples t-test reveal no significant differences between larger and smaller organizations (measured by total revenue) in standardization. Nor are the PR budgets of those than standardize significantly higher than those of organizations that do not standardize. However, organizations that standardize do allocate a significantly higher percentage of their budget to research (M=9.11 percent) than those that do not standardize (M=5 percent; t=4.49, p=.000).

H1b predicted that those with higher levels of education and/or specialized executive training would be more likely to standardize. Neither education level (t=.36, *ns*) nor having taken executive training (*chi-square*=2.11, *ns*) differentiate those who standardize from those who do not. H1b received no support.

Next, we explored a series of cultural variables and their relationship to standardization. H1c received clear support: those who use standardized measures are also more likely to view their organizational culture as more innovative (M=4.93) and more proactive (M=4.63) than non-standardizers ($M_{innovative}$=4.54, t=2.08, p=.04; $M_{proactive}$=4.24, t=2.05, p=.04). Further, as shown in Table 4, rates of standardization are higher among practitioners who are relatively more engaged in communicating with various stakeholders across social media. In addition, those whose departments focus on more traditional media relations campaigns are much less likely to adopt standardized measures. This provides strong support for H1d.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that organizations that standardize will also be more likely to engage in measuring *outcomes* of communication programs, perhaps the most challenging (and rewarding) form of evaluation. Table 5 shows that this is indeed the case. Standardizing organizations are significantly more likely to measure outcomes (*M*=4.01) than are non-standardizing organizations (*M*=3.12). Additional analyses show that standardizing organizations are more likely to engage in all forms of measurement than are non-standardizing organizations (Table 5). Indeed, when we step back from the factor analysis and look at rates of usage of each individual measurement item, we find that those who standardize are more likely to use every form of measurement than are the non-standardizers. Unfortunately, this includes not only measurement of outcome-type measures, but also of discredited metrics like advertising value equivalency.

Finally, H3 predicted that public relations professionals who adopted standardized measurement programs would also be more influential over strategy within the broader organization. This is indeed the case. Practitioners who report standardizing their measurement programs also report they are more taken seriously in the c-suite, are more likely to take part in long-term organizational planning, and are more likely to believe that the CEO or other top executive think that public relations contributes to financial success (Table 6).

Discussion

The findings in this paper shed a great deal of light of the rate and predictors of measurement standardization within the profession. Perhaps of greatest note is the extent to which we find professionals reporting they have adopted standard measures: Fully a quarter of our sample fit this category. This rate of standardization seems quite remarkable given that the standardization movement got underway relatively recently. If this result holds up in future studies, it suggests that the call for standardization has had a quite powerful impact on the day to day practice of the profession, perhaps because measurement standardization resonates with a broader shift within organizations of many kinds toward at least an interest in data-driven decision-making. Further, our evidence—though only correlational in nature—that standardization is linked to influence in the organization may suggest an additional hypothesis, namely that standardized measures are beginning to receive support from management and therefore additional funding.

That said, we cannot rule out the possibility that at least some of the reported standardization is the result of a social desirability bias in responding to the question. Evidence for this possibility can be found in our analyses of how standardizers measure. The standardizing group is characterized by more measurement of all kinds. It is not simply that they are more likely to measure campaign outcomes. They are more likely to take up all available forms of measurement—even those that have been roundly dismissed by research professionals and scholars. We do not find that the composition of research programs undertaken by standardizing organizations is a perfect fit with the specific recommendations made by the professional organizations leading the charge for standardization.

When we turn to our hypotheses concerning predictors of standardization, we find that the obstacles perceived by practitioners as getting in the way of quality measurement programs are not necessarily the obstacles that seem to matter in reality. Characteristics of organizations such as size (by revenue) and budget are not different among those that have chosen to standardize and those who have not. Using education as proxy for expertise—and admittedly it is an imperfect proxy—seems to suggest that expertise is also not the key differentiator between those that standardize and those that do not. Instead, the most important predictors of standardization have to do with organizational culture. Practitioners who see themselves as embedded in innovative and proactive organizations are also more likely to report standardization. Perhaps this is why the technology industry stands out as an adopter of standardization. Technology companies also report higher than average levels of innovation (though they rate themselves just at the mean for proactive culture).

Further, those practitioners who are excited and energized by the possibilities of social media are also more likely to standardize. This suggests perhaps that those who are experimenting with social media campaigns are eager to explore ways to monitor and measure their impact. That is just what the standardization movement provides. Visitors to the website run by The Coalition for Public Relations Research Standards (IPR) can access accepted measurement standards not only for traditional media impact but also for measurement of digital and social media.

Finally, we find there are powerful linkages between the practice of standardizing and the impact of public relations in the organization. Of course, our measures are limited to the self-reports of practitioners themselves, but even so we find there is a wide degree of variability in the extent to which top communicators view themselves as influential. Results showing that those who standardize see themselves as taken seriously and as having a larger role in long-term strategic planning set the stage for future studies of the role of measurement in the arsenal of the practitioner who wishes to have a seat at the table.

References

AMEC International Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communications. (2010). Barcelona declaration of measurement principles. London: AMEC. Available from: http://amecorg.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Barcelona_Principles.pdf. Accessed March 15, 2014.

DiStaso, M. W., McCorkindale, T., & Wright, D. K. (2011). How public relations executives perceive and measure the impact of social media in their organizations. *Public Relations Review, 37(3)*, 325-328.

Duhigg, C. (2012). How companies learn your secrets. *The New York Times*.

Gaunt, R., & Wright, D. (2004). PR measurement. London.

Gregory, A. (2001). Public relations and evaluation: does the reality match the rhetoric? *Journal of Marketing Communications, 7(3)*, 171-189.

Gregory, A. (2012). Reviewing public relations research and scholarship in the 21st century. *Public Relations Review, 38(1),* 1-4.

Gregory, A., & Edwards, L. (2004). Pattern of PR in Britain's 'most admired'companies.

Gregory, A., & Watson, T. (2008). Defining the gap between research and practice in public relations program evaluation–towards a new research agenda. *Journal of Marketing Communications, 14(5)*, 337-350.

Hon, L. C. (1998). Demonstrating effectiveness in public relations: Goals, objectives, and evaluation. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 10(2)*, 103-135.

Institute for Public Relations. Coalition for Public Relations Research Standards microsite. http://www.instituteforpr.org/researchstandards/. Accessed March 15, 2014.

Kim, J. N., & Ni, L. (2013). Two Types of Public Relations Problems and Integrating Formative and Evaluative Research: A Review of Research Programs within the Behavioral, Strategic Management Paradigm. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 25(1),* 1-29.

Lindenmann, W. K. (2005). Putting PR measurement and evaluation into historical perspective. The Institute for Public Relations, Gainsville, FL.

Michaelson, D., & Macleod, S. (2007). The application of "best practices" in public relations measurement and evaluation systems. *Public Relations Journal, 1(1*), 1-14.

Michaelson, D., & Stacks, D. W. (2011). Standardization in public relations measurement and evaluation. *Public Relations Journal, 5(2)*, 1-22.

Pestana, R., & Daniels, M. (2011). Lisbon summit valid metrics workshop 3. In 3rd European Summit on Measurement Lisbon, Portugal, June 8–10,

Watson, T. (1994). Public relations evaluation: Nationwide survey of practice in the United Kingdom. Paper presented to the International Public Relations Research Symposium, Bled, Slovenia.

Watson, T. (2012). The evolution of public relations measurement and evaluation. *Public Relations Review, 38(3)*, 390-398.

Wippersberg, J. (2009). Change in Progress: On the Relationship of Goals and Measurement of Public Relations, Public Affairs and Advertising and its Influence on Characteristics of Quality. *Romanian Journal of Journalism & Communication/Revista Romana de Jurnalism si Comunicare-RRJC, 4*(4).

Wright, D. K., Leggetter, B., Executive Director, A. M. E. C., Daniels, M., & Zerfass, A. (2009). Global survey of communications measurement 2009–Final report.

Tables

Table 1: Percent agreement with standardization items (respondents could check multiple)

	Percent Yes
We use the standard measures that have been recommended by professional organizations within the field (e.g. Institute for Public Relations)	25.9
We are considering adopting recommended standard measures but have not yet implemented these measures.	13.0
We use proprietary measures recommended by our agencies and communication consultants.	20.5
We use measurement and evaluation methods developed by our in-house communication team.	49.3
We do not measure or evaluate public relations activities.	11.2
None of the above	2.9
I don't know/unsure	2.9

Table 2: Factor loadings of measurement types based on principal axis factoring with promax rotation

	Outputs	Outtakes	Outcomes	ROI
Content analysis of clips		.609		
Reputation (corporate, brand, etc)		.463		
Share of discussion		.655		
Total circulation	.839			
Total impressions	.798			
Total number of clips	.782			
Unaided awareness among stakeholders			.964	
Aided awareness among stakeholders			.991	
Knowledge levels among stakeholders			.939	
Relevance to stakeholders			.727	
Intent to take action by stakeholders			.734	
Willingness to advocate			.676	

Return-on-investment (ROI)	.873

Note: Advertising value equivalence cross-loaded between ROI and outputs and was deleted; social or online media cross-loaded between outputs and outtakes and was deleted.

Table 3 Percent Reporting Standardization, by Industry

Percent Standardized by Industry							
	Colleges	Finance	Government and Public Administration	Health care	Consumer Products	Non-Profits (501c3)	Technology
Percent reporting standardization	30.0	12.5	32.4	21.2	33.3	25.0	37.0
N	30	24	34	33	12	24	27

Table 4: Attitudes toward social media, mean comparisons between standardizers and non-standardizers

	Overall mean	Mean for standardizers	Mean for non-standardizers	*p*
My department uses social media to engage in conversations with members of the public.	5.32	5.73	5.17	.015
We use social media to organize online events with our stakeholders.	3.77	4.31	3.58	.005
Social media pervade every aspect of our business (e.g. customer relations and support, technical support, management, internal com, etc.).	3.66	4.23	3.47	.001
PR/COM campaigns in my organization are primarily focused on traditional media relations.	4.20	3.82	4.34	.012
We are tracking and analyzing the conversations our stakeholders are having among themselves.	3.77	4.52	3.51	.000

Table 5: Means on measurement factors, standardizing organizations vs. non-standardizing organizations

Type of measurement	Mean for standardizers	Mean for non-standardizers	
Outcomes	4.01	3.12	*t*=3.84, *p*=.000
Outputs	4.66	4.02	*t*=2.65, *p*=.01
Outtakes	4.88	3.90	*t*=4.80, *p*=000
ROI	4.04	3.17	*t*=3.23, *p*=.001

Table 6: Means of organizational influence, standardizing organizations vs. non-standardizing organizations

Influence within the organization	Overall mean	Mean for standardizers	Mean for non-standardizers	
PR/COM recommendations are taken seriously by senior management (CEO, Chairperson, COO) in my organization.	5.24	5.69	5.09	t=2.81, p=.005
PR/COM actively participates in long-term organization-wide strategic planning.	4.69	5.36	4.45	t=4.07, p=.000
Our CEO/top executive believes that PR/COM contributes to our organization's financial success.	4.99	5.41	4.84	t=2.83, p=.005

[i] Note that the sample sizes for the industry and revenue based analyses are substantially smaller. We only have sufficient cases for analyses across seven industries. The number of organizations reporting total revenue is 263.