

The Press Release: Do TV and Newspaper Editors See Eye to Eye?

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In an effort to expand and compare results with a 2008 study of newspaper editors, this research asked the following: Do TV assignment editors have similar preferences for writing style in press releases as do their newspaper counterparts, or are they inclined to respond differently, owing to the demands of TV audiences and the characteristics of the broadcast medium? Results of this experiment indicate that TV assignment editors are just as likely as newspaper editors to use all or part of press releases written in either the inverted pyramid style or narrative style. However, the two have mixed opinions as to which writing style produces a more interesting and enjoyable, more informative, clearer and more understandable and more credible press release. The author discusses how public relations students and professionals can benefit from this disparity of response between TV assignment editors and newspaper editors in the acceptance or rejection of news releases based on writing style.

The notion that newspaper editors are more likely to choose a press release written in a narrative style over one written in an inverted-pyramid style was mixed at best when viewed from the surface of an experiment conducted in 2008 of newspaper editors across the American heartland. Nonetheless, writing style was seen as having an unquestionable link to an editor's assessment of certain press release characteristics, such as whether a release was found to be more interesting and enjoyable, more informative, clearer and more understandable and more credible. In the newspaper editor's study, the narrative writing style was seen as providing those attributes much more effectively than the inverted pyramid writing style.

In an effort to expand and compare results with the 2008 newspaper study, the following research asked the following: Do TV assignment editors have similar preferences for writing style in press releases as do their newspaper counterparts, or are they inclined to respond differently, owing to the demands of TV audiences and the characteristics of the broadcast medium? Although studies have tested the effects of writing style on certain types of groups, none has measured the effects of writing style on TV assignment editors.

Understanding the intrinsic worth of one writing style over the other is important to public relations students if they are to gain a greater appreciation of the dynamics that shape press release acceptance in the electronic media. Such a study is also critical for public relations professionals who feel the clarity or the worth of the press releases they write may be at risk when utilizing either method.

BACKGROUND

This study is set against the theoretical framework of *gatekeeping theory*, first established by social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1947), and later applied to mass communication by several researchers (White, 1950; Bass, 1969; Gieber, 1964; McNelly, 1959; Dimmick, 1974). The major function of gatekeeping in news organizations is to reduce uncertainty about what *is* news and what *is not* (Dimmick, 1974).

According to Shoemaker (1996):

“Gatekeeping is the process by which countless messages are reduced to the few we are offered in our daily newspapers and television news programs. Gatekeeping is such an essential part of the news gathering and dissemination process because every potential news story cannot be gathered, and, from among those items gathered, they all cannot be disseminated.”

The definition of gatekeeping proposed in this article relies heavily on the one proposed by Karine Barzilai-Nahon (2008), which conceptualizes gatekeeping as “the process of controlling information as it moves through a gate. Activities include selection, addition, withholding, display, channeling, shaping, manipulation, repetition, timing, localization, integration, disregard, and deletion of information.”

According to Douglas McLeod (2009), the media do more than just provide a “conduit” for information. “They play an important gatekeeping role in determining the relative importance of events and issues by judging their potential impact on society” (McLeod, 2009).

David Manning White’s study (1950) was one of the first investigations of the gatekeeping process. His investigation examined the decision-making process of a single newspaper editor over a period of a week and found that editor’s method to be highly subjective. White’s research was furthered by Gieber (1964), who introduced additional considerations into his analysis, such as the effects of work routines and the frenzy of meeting deadlines as a factor in the selection or rejection of press communications. McNelly’s research (1959) introduced the idea of multiple gatekeepers---starting with the newspaper reporter---to help explain an additional factor in the selection or rejection of news. Bass (1969) concurred, saying a distinction needed to be made between “news gatherers” (reporters) and “news processors” (editors). If stories were not reported, he said, they would never reach the editor for processing.

The press release and public relations

The field of public relations has become a significant and powerful industry, particularly in a day when scandal has become the order of the day. Starting with Ivey Lee and Edward Bernays, early pioneers of the field, the influences of the PR industry can be

seen everywhere. PR's *publicity* function alone encompasses everything from traditional press conferences and press releases to an assortment of long-term, image-building activities.

Driving the publicity function of public relations is the *press release*---a pseudo-news story that attempts to show an editor the news significance of an individual, event, service or product. The press release is one of the most important instruments for distributing information to society, and has become an essential "information subsidy" for all mass media, including television.

TV's ability to create awareness and capture the attention of viewers numbering in the millions, gives the medium enormous power to mold public opinion. Although the key to writing an effective press release for TV is to write a release that is clear, engaging, interesting and adhering to basic news values, other factors may play an equally and significant role. One factor is "writing style."

Writing styles have evolved in newspapers, radio and television, owing to the unique nature of each medium and to the manner the audience consumes each medium. By tradition, journalists compose news stories either in a straight-news approach (the inverted pyramid writing style) or in a narrative format (a storytelling style). Hence, the inverted pyramid writing style answers the questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how. The narrative approach, in contrast, stresses settings, characters, plots, themes, climaxes, and scenes of a story. By practice, the inverted pyramid style is typically used for breaking news stories, while the narrative writing method is used for features and some soft news stories. Sometimes stories are written by combining facets from each style---the *hybrid* method.

The systematic order of the inverted pyramid writing style has been described as a skillful and timesaving way of displaying information for readers (Grabner, 1984). The reporter writes a catchy lead and then organizes materials in descending order of importance. The editor can shorten the story without ever reading it by eliminating sentences from the bottom. The first paragraph of the story---the lead---is viewed as the summary of the story. The paragraphs which follow simply expand the lead (Mott, 1950).

Although handy to readers who glimpse through stories, the inverted pyramid has been described as a hurdle to most readers. The newspaper industry's inexhaustible dependence on the inverted pyramid style of writing makes it tiring for readers (Green, 1979). The style has also been depicted as an "unwieldy and bewildering way of writing a news story, since it has little to do with the way people communicate" (Boyer, 1976). What's more, the inverted-pyramid style has been faulted with producing boredom (Lewis, 1994) and preventing readers from understanding what could be practical information (Thorndyke, 1979).

Journalism written in the narrative style, however, introduces liveliness into the five W's by crafting an "experience" for the reader (Connery, 1992). Almost any monotonous but

significant account can be re-energized by using a narrative writing style (Kramer, 2000). Narrative text is often said to be easier to manage and remember; it is basic to human communication (Farell, 1985). The narrative writing style, time and again, generates greater arousal and more positive reaction (Donohew, 1982). Narrative treatments trigger emotional responses and express drama in a personal sort of way (Beasley, 1998). Vare (2000) found that writers are ready to break free from inverted pyramids and are answering with unusually creative uses of the narrative approach.

That said, the narrative format may have a greater influence in the way news stories are actually produced in today's media environment, and preference for the format may be growing in an effort to keep current media consumers and reach a new generation of consumers. The more compelling and stimulating the writing style of a press release--- which the narrative format brings into being --- the more frequently it will be read and the more interesting, informative, understandable and more credible it will be considered by news editors (Moody, 2008).

Challengers to the narrative style, however, say the method fails with breaking news stories because the writing style does not get information to the reader or viewer quickly enough. Furthermore, the most frequently mentioned hurdle of adopting a narrative structure to a story---hard or otherwise---is a "lack of time to research the subject and a lack of time to write it" (Beasley, 1998).

Choosing a narrative style over straight-news objectivism has been associated with "dumbing down" or "tabloidization" of the news (Dunn, 2003). Editors worry that because of narrative writing's blend of facts and feelings, problems can come about, sometimes leading to mistruths in reporting. To Ricketson (2000), the cost of employing fictional techniques used in narrative writing is "keeping faith" with the audience; that is, being truthful and honest. Although some writers think that narrative writing gives them license to play with the facts, nothing could be further from the truth. Narrative journalism requires reporting that is every bit as faithful as straight news writing, and commands the same rigid standards of accuracy (Moody, 2008).

In any case, magazines and non-fiction writers have used some form of narrative writing for years. The narrative story is generally written to bring greater notice to a story; to stir up emotion. Such is seen in the writings of Thomas Wolfe, Gay Talese, Truman Capote, Hunter "Gonzo" Thompson, literary pioneers of the form, who brought a sense of excitement and passion to their roles as writers (Mak & Geert, 1998).

Narrative writing and TV news

The view of TV as a narrative news medium has been extended to TV in the last several years. Scannell (1996) saw radio and TV news as descendants of the great historical novels of the nineteenth century. Graddol (1994) suggested that TV news stories shared the traditional features of literary practicality. The use of the narrative format clearly plays a significant role in attracting TV viewers. The fight for "audience share" has become progressively more important to TV journalism, and has driven those who control news production to seek more appealing tactics to imparting the news.

Study hypotheses

Accordingly, this study sets forth the following hypotheses in support of the narrative writing style in press releases for the TV newsroom:

H1: TV assignment editors prefer using press releases written in the narrative style over press releases written in the inverted-pyramid style.

H2: TV assignment editors find press releases written in the narrative style more interesting and more enjoyable than those written in the inverted-pyramid style.

H3: TV assignment editors find press releases written in the narrative style more informative than those written in the inverted-pyramid style.

H4: TV assignment editors find press releases written in the narrative style clearer and more understandable than those written in the inverted-pyramid style.

H5: TV assignment editors find press releases written in the narrative style more credible than those written in the inverted-pyramid style.

METHOD

The methodology for this study was modeled after a similar study conducted of newspaper editors in 2008, whereby newspaper editors across the American heartland participated in an online experiment. Similar to that study, TV assignment editors in the current study were required to read news releases written in a straight-news approach (the inverted pyramid) and news releases written in the narrative format. Respondents were divided into two groups. Each group read four brief fictional press releases covering a variety of stories TV news editors would typically receive from public relations professionals. One release announced an upcoming community event to benefit the American Red Cross---the Chili Cook-Off. A second release publicized results from the National Residency Matching Program for medical students at the local university. A third release introduced an innovative use of the iPod for police training. A fourth release announced a local energy company's purchase of a new natural gas storage operation. Two of the releases were written in a narrative format, and two were written in an inverted-pyramid format. Releases written in the narrative format for one group were written in the inverted-pyramid format for the second group. Similarly, releases written in the inverted-pyramid format for the second group were written in the narrative format for the first group. Once the releases were read, respondents were asked to give a simple "yes" or "no" to the question: "Assuming this release has direct impact on your readers, are you inclined to use all or part of this news release?" A five-point Likert-type scale also measured to what extent participants found the press release interesting and enjoyable, informative, and whether the release was clear and understandable, and credible----story qualities that writing style may influence. Editors

were told they were participating in an experiment to help public relations students write more usable press communications.

SURVEY

GROUP 1-American Cancer Society announces the agency’s 19th Annual Chili Cook-Off (Inverted Pyramid Version)

The local branch of the American Cancer Society announces the agency’s 19th Annual Chili Cook Off event will be held Saturday, February 23, from 11 a.m. – 3 p.m. in Johnson Square. Tickets are \$10 in advance and \$15 at the door. Tickets can also be purchased at the local American Cancer Society office. All proceeds from the Chili Cook-Off go towards helping fund the American Cancer Society’s local support programs and services, as well as life-saving research. Last year’s 85 teams raised \$160,000 and was voted the best charity fundraiser by the (your city’s) newspaper. "We had somewhere around 13,000 people come through last year," said event coordinator, Bob Haskins. The cook-off begins at 5:30 a.m. when all teams start cooking. At 10:30 a.m., the judges narrow it down to the top 20 teams, and the public is allowed in at 11. There is a first place winner in each category (all meat, meat and beans, vegetarian and wild game), an overall winner and a people's choice winner...

Please answer the following assuming this release has direct impact on your readers:*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
This release was interesting and enjoyable	9.9	33.6	37.4	14.5	4.6
This release was informative.	0.8	5.3	12.2	70.2	11.5
This release was clear and understandable	0.0	12.2	10.7	61.1	16.0
This release was credible	3.1	5.3	28.2	50.4	13.0
Assuming this release has direct impact on your readers, are you inclined to use all or part of this news release?	67.2 Yes				
*In percentages					

**GROUP 1-National Residency Matching Program Places Medical Students
(Narrative version)**

Next Wednesday will be a very important day for Eric Jensen, Kaye Smitherman, and Harley Womack. On that date, they and other anxious medical students from the University in (YOUR CITY) will learn where they will begin their residency training as results from the National Residency Matching Program (NRMP) are simultaneously released to all senior medical students across the United States. The minutes, hours and days leading to the moment that the envelopes are handed out have been stressful for Jensen, Smitherman, and Womack. They deal with the pressure the best they can. Womack plays racquetball in her church’s gym. Smitherman cleans her apartment for the third time in one week. Womack works on his car. On “results” day, they’ll meet at the Magnolia Ballroom on campus, where they will receive a sealed envelope containing the location of their residency. When a small bell sounds, they will tear into their envelopes to find out the news. The suspense is called “Match Day,” an annual event that is the culmination of a process that begins in the fall when senior medical students start applying to residency programs through a national computer system. Depending on a student’s chosen specialty, a residency will last from three to six years...

Please answer the following assuming this release has direct impact on your readers: *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
This release was interesting and enjoyable	18.5	31.1	18.5	23.5	8.4
This release was informative.	11.0	28.0	18.6	36.4	5.9
This release was clear and understandable	11.9	28.8	16.9	37.3	5.1
This release was credible	4.2	14.4	37.3	39.0	5.1
Assuming this release has direct impact on your readers, are you inclined to use all or part of this news release?	33.6 Yes				
*In percentages					

GROUP 1- EnergySouth announces completed acquisition of Mississippi Hub, LLC. (Inverted-Pyramid Version)

Locally-owned EnergySouth today announced that its wholly-owned subsidiary, EnergySouth Midstream, Inc., has completed its previously announced acquisition of a 60% interest in Mississippi Hub, LLC. Mississippi Hub is developing a natural gas storage facility in Simpson County, Mississippi. EnergySouth Midstream, Inc. will be the exclusive operating entity for the development, construction, and operation of the facility, and funds managed by affiliates of Fortress Investment Group LLC will hold a 40% interest in the project. Approximately \$140 million was paid for the entire acquisition. EnergySouth, Inc. and EnergySouth Midstream, Inc. was advised by Bryant Park Capital with respect to the acquisition. The company said the Mississippi Hub facility is under construction at the Bond Salt Dome Structure near Jackson, Mississippi, a location that allows access to traditional gas supplies in the Gulf of Mexico and along the Gulf Coast as well as emerging production from east Texas and northern Louisiana. Mississippi Hub’s storage operations will also be in close proximity to interstate pipelines and pipeline expansion projects accessing major natural gas markets...

Please answer the following assuming this release has direct impact on your readers: *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
This release was interesting and enjoyable	25.2	36.5	24.3	10.4	3.5
This release was informative.	7.8	13.9	21.7	48.7	7.8
This release was clear and understandable	16.5	27.0	25.2	24.3	7.0
This release was credible	3.5	5.3	38.6	43.0	9.6
Assuming this release has direct impact on your readers, are you inclined to use all or part of this news release?	43.5 Yes				
*In percentages					

**GROUP 1- Police Academy to make use iPods for training
(Narrative Version)**

Members of the (your city's) Police Academy have broken tradition. They've told recruits to put down their textbooks and use a "company issued" iPod to do their studying. Michael Justin, a police recruit who is slated to take his exam next week, finds the approach fresh and unique. "At first I said 'someone's lost it'. Then I realized that using a newer technology like the iPod was the only way to go," he said. To help with exam preparation, the academy has given recruits, like Justin, iPods fully loaded with police academy coursework and classroom instruction. Each iPod includes video downloads of the courses taught at the Academy during the recruit's six months of training. Justin and his buddy will study various categories of classroom instruction, which will include such topics as criminal procedure, penal law, warrants, ethics and community policing. What happens after each recruit successfully passes the exam. "Maybe they'll let us keep the iPods as a reward," said Justin. "I've got this album that..."

Please answer the following assuming this release has direct impact on your readers: *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
This release was interesting and enjoyable	2.7	4.5	12.7	55.5	24.5
This release was informative.	1.8	8.2	16.4	60.0	13.6
This release was clear and understandable	1.8	15.5	15.5	51.8	15.5
This release was credible	3.7	10.1	29.4	45.0	11.9
Assuming this release has direct impact on your readers, are you inclined to use all or part of this news release?	79.1 Yes				
*In percentages					

GROUP 2- American Cancer Society announces the agency’s 19th Annual Chili Cook-Off. (Narrative version)

Jean Simon and Bill Russell will fight cancer with chili. They’ll sprinkle their unique blend of spicy seasonings into a 15-gallon black cauldron of steaming chili Saturday, hoping their tasty concoction will help raise funds for research. They and members of the university’s cancer institute will compete with over 150 area teams in a race for the best chili in the 19th annual American Cancer Society’s Chili Off to be held Saturday, February 23 from 11 a.m. –3 pm in Johnson Square. The event, a fundraiser for the American Cancer Society’s fight against cancer, has become one of the most popular charity events in (your city). “We’ll be using a new recipe. ...a meat and bean chili with kind of a sweet-tangy taste...very hearty and just spicy enough,” said Simon, coordinator of the University team, “but, we have to cook 15 gallons of chili in order to compete.” Tickets are \$10 in advance and \$15 at the door...

Please answer the following assuming this story has direct impact on your readers: *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
This release was interesting and enjoyable	9.9	14.9	31.7	37.6	5.9
This release was informative.	4.0	7.9	11.9	65.3	10.9
This release was clear and understandable	4.0	12.0	21.0	52.0	11.0
This release was credible	3.0	3.0	32.0	51.0	11.0
Assuming this release has direct impact on your readers, are you inclined to use all or part of this news release?	66.0 Yes				
*In percentages					

**GROUP 2: National Residency Matching Program Places Medical Students
(Inverted pyramid version)**

March 15, 2007, at 11:00 a.m. CST, Anxious medical students from the University of (your city) will learn where they will begin their residency training as results from the National Residency Matching Program (NRMP) are simultaneously released to all senior medical students across the United States. Senior medical students will gather at the Magnolia Ballroom on campus, where results will be distributed in sealed envelopes. At the sound of a small bell, the members of the class of 2008 will tear into their envelopes simultaneously and then proceed to the podium, as their names are called, to announce the result. This annual event, known nationwide as "Match Day," is the culmination of a process that begins in the fall when senior medical students start applying to residency programs through a national computer system. Depending on a student's chosen specialty, a residency will last from three to six years...

Please answer the following assuming this release has direct impact on your readers: *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
This release was interesting and enjoyable	10.4	26.0	32.3	26.0	5.2
This release was informative.	1.1	12.9	20.4	55.9	9.7
This release was clear and understandable	7.4	12.8	22.3	45.7	11.7
This release was credible	1.1	4.3	30.1	57.0	7.5
Assuming this release has direct impact on your readers, are you inclined to use all or part of this news release?	51.0 Yes				
*In percentages					

**GROUP 2: EnergySouth announces acquisition of Mississippi Hub, LLC.
(Narrative version)**

The unprecedented idea of buying natural gas at a time when it is cheap and “parking it” in an old Civil War salt dome for later use when prices are high, has created a boon for locally-based EnergySouth Midstream. Company officials “went out on a limb,” CEO Mark Thompson said, when the idea of storing natural gas in such an unlikely place was first marketed to the industry. In only six years, EnergySouth has grown from a “who’s that” to the fourth largest owner of natural gas storage facilities in the U.S. The company employs nearly 400 in the (YOUR CITY) area. Today’s news that EnergySouth has acquired 60 % of Mississippi Hub, LLC, a natural gas storage company, brought another round of applause from investors and other members of the business community. “This Mississippi Hub site allows EnergySouth access to traditional gas supplies in the Gulf of Mexico and along the Gulf Coast, as well as emerging production from east Texas and northern Louisiana,” said Thompson. “Storage operations will also be in close to interstate pipelines and pipeline expansion projects that feed major natural gas markets.” Thompson beamed with pride of the announcement and shook hands heartedly with members of both companies and the media during today’s press conference...

Please answer the following assuming this release has direct impact on your readers: *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
This release was interesting and enjoyable	12.4	20.2	23.6	32.6	11.2
This release was informative.	4.5	8.0	23.9	53.4	10.2
This release was clear and understandable	11.4	29.5	19.3	30.7	9.1
This release was credible	4.6	8.0	33.3	44.8	9.2
Assuming this release has direct impact on your readers, are you inclined to use all or part of this news release?	61.8 Yes				
*In percentages					

**GROUP 2: Police Academy to use iPods for training
(Inverted pyramid version)**

(Your police department) announced Friday that the department will issue recruits iPods fully loaded with police academy coursework and classroom instruction. Each iPod includes video downloads of the courses taught at the Academy during the recruit’s six months of training. Classroom instruction covers a range of complex subject matter inherent to law enforcement including criminal procedure, State Penal Law, warrants, ethics and community policing...

Please answer the following assuming this release has direct impact on your readers: *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
This release was interesting and enjoyable	1.1	12.6	20.7	48.3	17.2
This release was informative.	0.0	14.9	11.5	58.6	14.9
This release was clear and understandable	0.0	8.0	9.2	66.7	16.1
This release was credible	0.0	10.3	17.2	60.9	11.5
Assuming this release has direct impact on your readers, are you inclined to use all or part of this news release?	80.5 Yes				
*In percentages					

ANALYSIS

This investigation invited 760 TV assignment editors in the U.S. to participate in the online experiment. Three-hundred-fourteen elected to participate.

H1: TV assignment editors prefer using press releases written in the narrative style over press releases written in the inverted-pyramid style.

Support for this hypothesis was mixed at best. TV assignment editors were just as likely to use all or part of the *Chili Cook-Off* and *iPod* press releases, regardless of writing format. However, TV assignment editors who read the narrative version of *Energy South's acquisition* of a natural gas storage company were more apt to use all or part of that release (61.8) than were editors who read the inverted pyramid version (43.5). Likewise, TV assignment editors who read the inverted pyramid version of the *National Residency Matching Program* for medical students were more prone to use all or part of that release (51.0) than were TV editors who read the narrative version (33.6).

Support for this hypothesis was also mixed in the earlier newspaper study, but the influence of writing style varied by press release. Newspaper editors who read the inverted pyramid version of the American Red Cross Chili Cook-Off release were more likely to use all or part of that release than were editors who read the narrative version. Editors who read the inverted-pyramid version of Energy South's acquisition of a natural gas storage company were similarly likely to use all or part of that release than were editors who read the narrative version. Then again, editors who read the narrative version of the National Residency Matching Program for medical students were slightly more prone to use all or part of that release than were editors who read the inverted-pyramid version. Similarly, editors who examined the narrative version of the iPod release were more likely to use all or part of that release than were editors who read the inverted-pyramid version.

H2: TV assignment editors find press releases written in the narrative style more interesting and more enjoyable than those written in the inverted-pyramid style.

Data results supported this hypothesis. TV assignment editors agreed or strongly agreed that three of the four press releases written in the narrative format were more interesting and enjoyable than releases written in the inverted pyramid format. As a matter of fact, eighty percent of the assignment editors who read the narrative version of the *iPod* release agreed or strongly agreed that release was more interesting and enjoyable. The fourth release, the *Medical Residency* press release, was found equally interesting and enjoyable by assignment editors regardless of format.

The newspaper editor survey, taken two years earlier also found support for this hypothesis. Newspaper editors who read the narrative versions of press releases relating to the American Red Cross's Chili Cook-Off, the use of iPod technology in police training, and Energy South's acquisition of a natural gas storage company, found

those versions to be more interesting and more enjoyable than releases written in the inverted-pyramid style. Neither group of newspaper editors found the press release about the National Residency Matching program for medical students to be interesting or enjoyable to any extent.

H3: TV assignment editors find press releases written in the narrative style more informative than those written in the inverted-pyramid style.

This hypothesis was not supported by the data. TV assignment editors who read the inverted pyramid versions of the *Chili Cook-Off*, *Medical Residency*, and *EnergySouth* press releases agreed or strongly agreed that those versions were somewhat more informative than assignment editors who read the narrative versions of each release. The *iPod* release, however, was found equally interesting and enjoyable by TV assignment editors, regardless of format.

On the other hand, findings in the newspaper editor's study found just the opposite. In this earlier study, newspaper editors who read the narrative versions of press releases relating to the American Red Cross's Chili Cook-Off, the use of iPod technology in police training, and Energy South's acquisition, responded that those releases were more informative than the inverted-pyramid versions of the same releases. Editors who read the inverted-pyramid version of the National Residency Matching Program for medical students, however, found that version to be more informative.

H4: TV assignment editors find press releases written in the narrative style clearer and more understandable than those written in the inverted-pyramid style.

Support for this hypothesis was not fully supported by the data. TV assignment editors who read the inverted pyramid versions of the *Chili Cook-Off*, *Medical Residency*, and *iPod* press releases agreed or strongly agreed that those versions were somewhat clearer and more understandable than assignment editors who read the narrative versions of each release. However, assignment editors agreed or strongly agreed that the narrative version of the *EnergySouth* release was clearer and understandable than the inverted pyramid versions.

On the other hand, findings in the newspaper editor's study found just the opposite. In that study, newspaper editors who read the narrative versions of press releases relating to the American Red Cross's Chili Cook-Off, the use of iPod technology in police training, and Energy South's acquisition, found those releases to be clearer and more understandable than those written in the inverted-pyramid style. Neither group in the newspaper study found the press release relating to the National Residency Matching Program for medical students as being particularly clearer and more understandable than the other.

H5: TV assignment editors find press releases written in the narrative style more credible than those written in the inverted-pyramid style.

Support for this hypothesis was mixed at best. TV editors who read the inverted pyramid versions of the *Chili Cook-Off*, *Residency Matching Program*, and *iPod* press releases were more likely to find those releases more credible than editors who read the narrative versions. Yet, TV editors who read the narrative version of the *EnergySouth* release were more likely to find that release more credible than editors who read the inverted-pyramid version.

Support for this hypothesis was also mixed in the study involving newspaper editors, and also varied depending on the news release read. Editors who read the inverted pyramid version of the National Residency Matching Program for medical students and Energy South's acquisition were more likely to find those releases more credible than editors who read the narrative versions of the releases. Yet, newspaper editors who read the narrative version of the iPod release were more likely to find that release more credible than editors who read the inverted-pyramid version. Neither group in the newspaper editor's study found the press release relating to the American Red Cross's Chili Cook-Off as being particularly more credible than the other.

DISCUSSION

The idea that TV news assignment editors are more likely to choose a press release written in a narrative style over one written in an inverted-pyramid was mixed at best when viewing the results of this experiment. Such findings mirrored results found in the newspaper poll of editors in 2008. Writing style was also mirrored between the two studies as having an unquestionable link to reader assessment of certain story characteristics, such as whether a story was found to be interesting and enjoyable, informative, clear and understandable and credible. As a whole, TV news assignment editors in the current study who read narrative versions of the press releases found those releases as being more interesting and enjoyable. But, unlike editors in the newspaper study, TV assignment editors found press releases written in the inverted pyramid format as more informative, and clearer and more understandable than releases written in the narrative format.

Without question, a number of factors affect the acceptance or rejection of a press release, according to comments made by editors in both surveys. Writing style is only one. To this end, much remains to be learned about the news reading process of both TV and newspaper editors and their preference for writing styles in a press release. According to comments made in the TV survey, when a TV assignment editor receives a press release, he or she may ask: How much news do I have today? Do I have a photographer to shoot that story? Is there video for the story? For example, a TV assignment editor may have inquired "did the Chili Cook-Off press release come with still pictures or video from last year's event? Will the police academy let us shoot the recruits using their new technology?"

The release on EnergySouth's natural gas salt-dome storage company may have been of greater interest to the TV professional had the public relations professional provided broadcast-quality video of the array of above-ground pipes feeding the salt-dome, according to comments made by some of the TV assignment editors in this study. The more a public relations professional can think like a television reporter (meaning: pictures first, words second), the better, respondents also stated.

Timing is also a factor in the acceptance or rejection of a press release for TV. "If you want coverage, don't have your event at 4 p.m. when most reporters and photographers are tied up getting ready for a live broadcast," said one TV assignment editor who participated in this study. A second editor commented: "When following up on press releases sent to newsrooms via e-mail, it is best to call a half hour after you send them. Don't call me today about something you sent last week about something happening next week."

Some respondents argued in the comments section of the survey that the traditional press release itself may be a dying art owing to the impact of company websites and social media, like Twitter, which send news directly to the consumer, bypassing news media altogether.

CONCLUSION

Future studies could perhaps move this experiment out of the lab (online) into a more genuine setting, like the newsroom, or perhaps be conducted without TV assignment editors knowing they were taking part of an experiment. Perhaps a more hybrid model of writing— a style blending a stronger dose of the narrative with a lesser amount of the inverted-pyramid news approach--- could be tested to see if that style is a more suitable and valuable to TV news editors. Research could perhaps test directly the effects of writing style on those who ultimately consume the information.

Although similarities exist between the needs of newspaper and broadcast journalists, this research suggests that editorial decisions made in TV news are clearly based upon differing conceptual and procedural standards. Based on respondent feedback, the unique character of TV and the way its audiences consume and utilize media content require the public relations professional to take a second look when distributing press communications to that medium. As an example, readers of newspapers have the time to read and re-read, to contemplate and reflect on their way to understanding a story. Broadcast journalism does not assume such a notion. Broadcast journalists fit stories into tightly defined formats, while newspapers may run many more stories within its pages. TV presents information visually and writes in the present tense in order to create a sense of immediacy. Unlike print, broadcast news and information is presented only once. Consequently, stories must be written in simple, to the point, "for the ear" language.

Without question, what is considered appropriate writing style differs from editor to editor, particularly in television news. What may have high impact and relevance to one

assignment editor may have low impact and relevance to another. A press release considered attention-grabbing and pleasing, instructive, and comprehensible to one editor may be regarded as tedious, dull, un-informative, and unintelligible by another. Comments made by assignment editors in the current study suggest that even if an editor decides to use a press release, his or her inclination or prejudice toward a company, person or event may be a primary factor in whether a release is considered for publication regardless of writing style.

Nevertheless, writers of press release must follow the basics of good writing. An engaging press release must have an interesting 'hook' or angle; must capture the attention of the audience, and must educate the audience about a company, its products and services. Inaccurate, poorly written or unedited press releases will not be read. They become a waste of time to journalists who are already snowed under with press releases from other organizations.

Taken as a whole, caution must be used not to interpret these findings too literally. This study, conducted under conditions which do not represent the true setting in which a TV news editor might read and decide on the merits of a press release, serves only to open a channel of understanding into the many factors that may influence the acceptance or rejection of press releases.

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