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THE UTILIZATION OF THE LANSING PUBLIC SCHOOL  
SYSTEM'S PUBLIC RELATIONS RELEASES BY THE  
LANSING STATE JOURNAL FOR THE SCHOOL  
SYSTEM NEWS COVERAGE: A SYSTEMATIC  
CONTENT ANALYSIS  
presented by

Katherine Elizabeth Sanderson

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SYSTEM'S PUBLIC RELATIONS RELEASES BY THE  
LANSING STATE JOURNAL FOR THE SCHOOL  
SYSTEM NEWS COVERAGE: A SYSTEMATIC  
CONTENT ANALYSIS

By

Katherine Elizabeth Sanderson

A THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

### THE UTILIZATION OF THE LANSING PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM'S PUBLIC RELATIONS RELEASES BY THE LANSING STATE JOURNAL FOR THE SCHOOL SYSTEM NEWS COVERAGE: A SYSTEMATIC CONTENT ANALYSIS

By

Katherine Elizabeth Sanderson

The problem examined in this study was the pattern of utilization and nature of treatment of the press releases of the Lansing public school system as they appeared in the Lansing State Journal.

A content analysis was made of five years of the press releases and the results were analyzed in terms of descriptive and inferential statistics.

The press releases were used by the newspaper in some form more often than not used. Press releases about school board actions and student activities were the most frequent news stories resulting from the press releases.

Those press releases containing elements of a news story were used more frequently than those which were not timely, had no lead, or didn't flow well.

The stories resulting from the press releases generally cast the school district in a positive light.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Vishwa Mishra, for his guidance during this project. Without his expertise and assistance, this study would never have been completed.

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I would also like to thank Mark Cohen and Bill Donohue for their contributions to this paper and to my well-being.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, David and Ollie Sanderson, for their support of my endeavors over the years.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND ASSUMPTIONS AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

#### Introduction

One of the principal functions of both journalism and public relations is to provide the public with information. The process by which the information is disseminated to the public involves many decisions by many people. In some instances journalists and public relations personnel may be working with the same information. This is because newspapers, as well as other media, are one of the channels the public relations personnel can use to disseminate their information and public relations material. Public relations material, likewise, are one of the sources used by journalists in generating news stories. Therefore, one of the common links between the two professions is the press release.

The press release is a convenient way to send information from an institution to some member of the media. But while both public relations and journalism provide information, they have different goals in

providing and presenting that information. Journalists traditionally have striven to present information objectively. But some members of the profession have written that objectivity is impossible to obtain. "We should, I think, admit that a reporter must be subjective, opinionated, prejudiced, and biased," wrote John Merrill in his article "Objective Reporting: A Myth, However Valuable. . . ." <sup>1</sup> He writes that objectivity is impossible to achieve because a journalist is hampered by the weakness of language in recreating the news event and because conditioning forces the journalist to be selective in choosing subject matter. <sup>2</sup>

But even though the goal is unobtainable, it should not be abandoned. "The reporter must keep trying to be objective although it cannot be done; he must not despair of striving toward objectivity, or he is likely to slip forlornly into the slough of pure opinion and carelessness." <sup>3</sup>

While public relations may not necessarily promote carelessness, neither does it necessarily need to avoid pure opinion.

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<sup>1</sup>John Merrill, "Objective Reporting: A Myth, However Valuable . . . ," The Quill, July 1969, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

In an article in Editor and Publisher, Scott Cutlip states, "We frankly acknowledge the public relations officer as a partisan pleader who is interested in persuading people, not informing them contrary to any claims he may make about getting the 'truth' to the people."<sup>4</sup>

Cutlip does not condemn all public relations people as propagandists. He writes, "Ethical, honest public relations has made substantial contributions to our society and to our public information system."<sup>5</sup>

But there is always the danger that the persuasive element of the press release will somehow be incorporated into the "objective" news story if a journalist relies on press releases for a story. If there were no stories originating from press releases, then there would be no conflict of goals. But Cutlip writes, "I have made a few pilot studies that would indicate that some 35 percent of the content of today's newspapers comes from public relations practitioners."<sup>6</sup> He asserts, "There is a genuine public question involved in whether the 'handout reporting,' increasingly characteristic of American journalism, meets the citizen's need for accurate, complete information."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Scott Cutlip, "Third of Newspapers' Content PR-Inspired," Editor and Publisher, 26 May 1962, p. 68.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

Not all areas of journalism are subject to "handout reporting." Cutlip states that reporting is still done with the traditional sources of news. "But what about the new areas of news--business, science, health, religion, art, music, education, social welfare, etc. Study will show that these areas are covered in a large degree by the PR man, not the aggressive, investigative reporter."<sup>8</sup>

Politics is a traditional area of reporting but receives some press releases. The coverage of press releases was examined in a study of Congressional publicity in a Wisconsin district by Leslie D. Polk et al.<sup>9</sup> Fifty Wisconsin weeklies in a district served at the same time by Representative Vernon Thomson were examined from October 8 to 21, 1973. The study examined the coverage given to the press releases of Thomson, U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson and U.S. Senator William Proxmire, all of Wisconsin. Thomson received coverage of 6.6 percent of the possible total column inches, Nelson had .38 percent of the possible total inches, and Proxmire had .058 percent of the possible total inches.<sup>10</sup> Polk's study concludes that "office holders studied are minimally successful in mailings to weekly

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>9</sup>Leslie D. Polk, John Eddy, and Ann Andre, "Use of Congressional Publicity in Wisconsin District," Journalism Quarterly, 1975, p. 543.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

newspapers. Editors are not so gullible and do not passively accept Capitol Hill press releases."<sup>11</sup> It appears, then, that there is not a high degree of reliance on press releases insofar as news of political affairs is concerned.

Another political campaign was studied by Lynda Lee Kaid.<sup>12</sup> Her study concentrated on three research questions: "(1) To what extent do daily and weekly newspapers print news releases distributed by a political candidate? (2) Are some types of releases printed more frequently than others? And (3) How are the releases handled when they are printed?"<sup>13</sup> Of the 26 releases, 18 (69 percent) were carried by at least one paper. Eight of the 18 were carried by only one paper each. "Of the possible 650 stories that could have been generated by the 26 releases if used by all 25 papers, only 50 stories resulted."<sup>14</sup> Less than 8 percent of the press releases were used which also appears to be a low reliance on press releases in political reporting. Reliance on press releases may vary from newspaper to newspaper, however.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 546.

<sup>12</sup> Lynda Lee Kaid, "Newspaper Treatment of a Candidate's News Releases," Journalism Quarterly, Spring 1976, pp. 135-137.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



To answer her second research question, she divided the types of releases into three categories. Sixteen of the releases related to issues, seven related to campaign announcements, and three related to candidate information. She found that "issue releases made up 53 percent of the stories printed in dailies but only 42 percent of those in weeklies."<sup>15</sup> It appears, then, that subject matter contained in the press release may influence whether the release is used or not by the newspapers.

In answer to the third question of the study, "the tendency seemed to be that when a paper carried a release at all, it carried the release verbatim. Thirty of the 50 stories printed were verbatim from the candidate's release or verbatim with a few omissions here and there, usually dropping of the last paragraph(s)."<sup>16</sup>

In this instance, not only facts and ideas are used, but the actual language of the press release is used as well.

Kaid's study shows that press releases are used, but not heavily, in the reporting of political campaigns. When they are used, they are often used exactly as written by the public relations personnel, and subject matter may influence whether a press release is used or discarded.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



Use of press releases was given further examination in the Departments of State and HEW by Edward M. Glick.<sup>17</sup> He traced the flow of information from its beginnings within the agencies to its publication in various newspapers from around the United States. He found that much of the information never made it out of the agency because of such reasons as having no news value and having the potential to cause some domestic or political disturbance.<sup>18</sup> This indicates that information may be seen by many people before it is given to the press. If a press release does make it to the press, the press believes it has a limited role in their reporting duties. Glick found, however, that 22 percent of the foreign policy and HEW stories were traceable in some degree to an Executive agency handout.<sup>19</sup> It would appear, then, that reporters may not consciously know how heavy a reliance on public relations material they have. Again, reliance may vary from person to person and paper to paper and be influenced by such factors as individual bias, editorial policy, local interest, and local needs.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Edward M. Glick, "Press-Government Relationships: State and HEW Departments," Journalism Quarterly, Spring 1966, p. 49.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

The definition of news and who defines it is examined in F. Dennis Hale's "Press Releases vs. Newspaper Coverage of Californian Supreme Court Decisions."<sup>21</sup> The purpose of his study was "to determine if there were some types of state appellate court decisions that received significantly greater amount of coverage in the court-prepared press releases and if these same types of decisions were emphasized in the newspapers."<sup>22</sup> While the newspapers did not report as many decisions as the court releases, they ignored the same cases and there was a positive correlation between the length of the court release and the amount of space devoted to the item in the newspaper. This may indicate that press releases have some influence on the stories that are covered and the treatment they receive.

This and the previous studies have shown the use and influence of press releases on newspapers in some of the more traditional areas of reporting. But what about the newer areas of reporting such as business, science, and education? These are the areas Cutlip believed to be most vulnerable to the influence of press releases.

In looking at the content of the Wall Street Journal, Joanne Angela Ambrosio believed the articles

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<sup>21</sup> F. Dennis Hale, "Press Releases vs. Newspaper Coverage of Californian Supreme Court Decisions," Journalism Quarterly, Winter 1978, p. 696.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 697.

"read like rewritten press releases."<sup>23</sup> To find out if they were, she asked the companies mentioned in the articles to send her the press releases that had been sent before the articles appeared.

Seventy of the 111 responded. She found that in 53 cases, or 72 percent of the responses, the news stories were based solely on press releases; in 32 of these examples "the releases were reprinted almost verbatim or in paraphrase"; in the other 21 cases, "only the most perfunctory additional reporting had been done"; and 20 of these stories, or 29 percent, "carried the slug 'By a Wall Street Journal Staff Reporter.'"<sup>24</sup> "Based on these returns, we project that 84 stories were based on press releases in the October 4 Journal--45 percent of the day's 188 news items and 27 percent of the papers' non-tabular news hole."<sup>25</sup>

Ambrosio's study indicates a fairly heavy reliance on public relations material in at least one instance of business reporting. David B. Sachsman looked at one area of science reporting--environmental news--in "Public

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<sup>23</sup> Joanne Angela Ambrosio, "It's in the Journal, But This Is Reporting?" Columbia Journalism Review, March/April 1980, p. 34.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



Relations Influence on Coverage of Environment in San Francisco Area." <sup>26</sup>

In this project Sachsman examined mass media behavior regarding environmental information to (1) determine how the media decided what news to carry about environmental issues, and (2) to examine the nature and influence of news sources on San Francisco Bay Area environmental coverage, among other things. <sup>27</sup>

Two hundred of the 474 items that were not wire service, network-supplied, or letters could be traced. Of these 200 stories, 105 "had been influenced by public relations efforts." Forty-six of the 105 were rewritten press releases, three came from Business Wire--a PR press service, and two of the 105 were films supplied by a news source. <sup>28</sup> Twenty-six of the 105 came from telephone calls or personal contact; 28 of the 105 were influenced by press releases but "in writing these stories, the reporters did further research." <sup>29</sup>

In answering the first research question, Sachsman found that reporters and editors found local environmental

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<sup>26</sup> David B. Sachsman, "Public Relations Influence on Coverage of Environment in San Francisco Area," Journalism Quarterly, Spring 1976, p. 54.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

issues and governmental action to be the most important environmental items; 78 of the 105 stories influenced by PR efforts were about local issues.<sup>30</sup>

As in the previous studies, public relations material played a role in the information published by the media. Sachsman estimated that about 40 percent of the environmental news content came from public relations sources and about 20 percent were rewritten press releases.<sup>31</sup> But Sachsman brings up an important point:

When a journalist uses a press release to help investigate a story, he or she should not be accused of abandoning the job to the public relations professional, but when the reporter simply rewrites a press release or uses a PR wire story or film (as did journalists in 51 of 105 stories) it is the PR practitioner who is really covering the story.<sup>32</sup>

The previous studies examining the role of press releases in the information flow have indicated that even though public relations personnel and journalists have different goals, they are interested in the same information and produce news stories in some instances. There are cases where the new areas of reporting use press releases more often than the traditional areas of reporting. But what about one new area of reporting--education?

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

Through the National Opinion Research Center, Richard F. Carter conducted a national sample survey of public opinion on education and local schools. It was conducted in May 1964 and used 1,500 citizens over the age of 21. Part of the results of Project CAST were reported by Steven H. Chaffee in "The Public View of the Media as Carriers of Information Between School and Community."<sup>33</sup> The respondents were asked, "how helpful would you say the newspapers have been in helping you learn what's going on in the local public schools?"<sup>34</sup> They were asked the same question of television, radio, school board, parents' organizations, local teachers, and school administrators. The results indicated that newspapers were "providing the public with more school information than any other source, and the mass media seem to be perceived as more neutral information sources than other agencies."<sup>35</sup>

This should remind newspaper reporters of the dual expectations of newspapers by the public. A newspaper should provide information in which case a reporter could rely chiefly on materials from the schools to accomplish

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<sup>33</sup> Steven H. Chaffee, "The Public View of the Media as Carriers of Information Between School and Community," Journalism Quarterly, Winter 1967, p. 730.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 731.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 733.

the job. But the public also believes the media to be neutral, in which case the reporter must remember that the material is coming from a not unbiased source. A press release is a useful aid, but no substitute for reporting.

Press releases might help alleviate some of the problems George Gerbner found in "Newsmen and Schoolmen: The State of Education Reporting."<sup>36</sup>

Gerbner sent out an informal inquiry to the "education editors" of 119 dailies with circulations over 100,000 in 1961, then conducted follow-up interviews. He sent a similar letter to information services directors in the school systems, colleges, and universities covered by those newspapers. The newsmen's major complaints about the schoolmen were (1) the newsmen's feelings of secretiveness, lack of confidence in newspapers on the part of the schoolmen; (2) the newsmen had problems with occupational jargon, obscure or abstract language; and (3) different conception of "newsvalue."<sup>37</sup> Some of these problems are not surprising considering the different goals of the institution and medium. One education editor of a metropolitan daily responded, "One thing is sure--no director

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<sup>36</sup> George Gerbner, "Newsmen and Schoolmen: The State of Education Reporting," Journalism Quarterly, Summer 1967, p. 211.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 218.



of public information is going to tell a newspaper something bad about the school district which employs him."<sup>38</sup>

A press release, however, might be able to provide definitions of obscure language, even if there may always be conflicts over "news judgment." This discrepancy in news judgment was given further examination by Roy Carter in "The Press and Public School Superintendents in California."<sup>39</sup> One of the questions asked in this study was "How closely do the news content areas he (public school superintendents) feels are important jibe with those the editor regards as newsworthy?"<sup>40</sup> The superintendents were given the categories used in the content analysis and asked "to rank them in two ways: (1) in terms of the importance to readers (what the public needs to know), and (2) according to the interests of readers (what the public wants to know) as perceived by the superintendents."<sup>41</sup> Carter found "the kind of school system news that most often gets into the papers seems to be regarded by schoolmen as an area of little interest to the public."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 220.

<sup>39</sup> Roy E. Carter, "The Press and Public School Superintendents in California," Journalism Quarterly, Spring 1954, p. 175.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

As might be expected, sports page news about the schools was believed by the superintendents to be least related to the needs of the citizen, yet most interesting to him. News of other student activities also was rated by the schoolmen as an area of more interest-value than importance to the reader. . . .

The citizens' chief need, the superintendents felt (as a group), is for news of the educational program of the schools, but the educators believed that readers were even less interested in this area than in administration (e.g., school finance) news. Similarly, the citizen was perceived by the superintendents as being less interested than he ought to be in news of student welfare activities in the schools.<sup>43</sup>

Neal Gross conducted a similar survey in New England and had superintendents and newsmen rank certain news areas on their importance and interest to the readers.<sup>44</sup>

The schoolmen and newsmen agreed on a ranking of the importance of news areas:<sup>45</sup>

	<u>Superintendent</u>	<u>Press</u>
School board activities	1	1
School program	2	2
Superintendent activities	3	3
Student activities	4	4
School personnel	5	5
School athletics	6	6

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>44</sup> Neal Gross, The Schools and the Press: A Study of the Relationship Between Newspapermen and School Administrators in New England (New England School Development Council, 1956), pp. 44-45.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

They had similar rankings of those newsworthy areas of school news:<sup>46</sup>

	<u>Superintendent</u>	<u>Press</u>
School board activities	2	2
School program	6	5
Superintendent activities	4	3
Student activities	3	4
School personnel	5	6
School athletics	1	1

Those categories which were ranked important may not necessarily be newsworthy and vice versa. A press release containing important information may not necessarily be newsworthy as well. But stories appear about both school athletics and school program, even though one is not seen as particularly important and the other is not seen as particularly newsworthy. Somewhere in the information channel, decisions must be made.

In "An Analysis of the School Content in Michigan Newspapers: Comparison with a Similar Study and Implications for School Press Relations," William Monahan found that slightly more than half of all school content space is devoted to athletics and athletic illustrations in daily newspapers.<sup>47</sup> This is ranked as an area of high interest

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>47</sup> William G. Monahan, "An Analysis of the School Content in Michigan Newspapers: Comparisons with a Similar Study and Implications for School-Press Relations" (Ed.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1960), Abstract, p. 2.

but low importance in the previous studies. "Other high ranking classifications of school content were curriculum items, financing, miscellaneous items (mostly dealing with the opening of school), general illustration, and student activities."<sup>48</sup> "Items accounting for small amounts of space in both daily and weekly newspapers were school operation, transportation, honor roll, adult education, and safety."<sup>49</sup>

While an item of interest gets the most coverage, other items receiving high coverage are important items like curriculum and finance. There may be reasons other than subject matter that determine whether an item is used or discarded. Public relations officers have different reasons for providing information. Elissa George found that all but two of the school districts in the thirty she sampled "engage in public relations to gain public confidence and appreciation. . . . At least half of the respondents also listed winning financial support and keeping the public informed" as reasons for public relations activities.<sup>50</sup> In order to do this, George found that nine of the 30 districts employ full-time public

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Elissa George, "A Survey of Public Relations Attitudes and Activities in 30 Public School Districts in Michigan" (M.A. thesis, Michigan State University, 1978), Abstract.

relations directors and only three of 30 devoted no time to public relations.<sup>51</sup> All but four provided the local media with press releases.<sup>52</sup> It appears, then, that press releases are frequently used in the information flow of Michigan education news to local media.

It is not surprising that public relations officers would want to use the media. As has been previously cited, the public sees newspapers as neutral. Hovland, Janis, and Kelley found that the effects of opinions depend on the expertness and trustworthiness of the communicator.<sup>53</sup> They found that low credibility sources tended to be seen as more biased and unfair than high credibility sources.<sup>54</sup> It would appear that newspapers would be seen as presenting messages with higher credibility than those messages produced by the public relations personnel.

Whether a message is purposive or non-purposive was studied by George Gordon.<sup>55</sup> Because the public relations personnel can state their reasons for providing press

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Carl I. Hovland, Irving L. Janis, Harold H. Kelley, Communication and Persuasion: Psychological Studies of Opinion Change (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), p. 35.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> George Gordon, Persuasion: The Theory and Practice of Manipulative Communication, 1st ed. (New York: Hastings House, 1971), pp. 37-53.

releases, their messages would be seen as having intent, or purposive. Newspapers are non-purposive.

But are public relations personnel successful in promoting their school districts? Robert Rings looked at the effect of public relations specialists in his study comparing school districts which had a PR specialist with those which did not.<sup>56</sup>

He asked, "Is there any difference between the nature and amount of news attention received by school districts with public relations specialists and those without the specialists?"<sup>57</sup> He found the "school districts with public relations personnel did receive significantly more news coverage than the districts without the public relations directors."<sup>58</sup> "In the comparison between the director and non-director systems, the director districts had significantly more stories and space on pages with higher probable readership."<sup>59</sup> But is the public becoming better informed or merely more informed on the information the schools want the public to know?

The public relations director of a school district tries to promote a favorable image of the school system.

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<sup>56</sup> Robert Rings, "Public School News Coverage With and Without PR Directors," Journalism Quarterly, 1971, p. 62.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

Daniel J. Boorstin gives six characteristics of an image.

1. An image is synthetic. It is planned: created especially to serve a purpose, to make a certain kind of impression. "It is a studiously crafted personality profile of an individual, institution, corporation, product or service. . . . When we use the word 'image' in this new sense, we plainly confess a distinction between what we see and what is really there, and we express our preferred interest in what is to be seen."
2. An image is believable. It must stand for the institution imaged in the minds of people.
3. An image is passive. "Since the image (namely the corporation) is expected to fit into the image--rather than to strive toward it. The consumer of the image . . . is also supposed to somehow fit into it. "Because an image is essentially passive, it need have very little to do with the activities of the corporation itself." "In the beginning the image is a likeness of the corporation; finally the corporation becomes a likeness of the image."
4. An image is vivid and concrete.
5. An image is simplified to exclude undesired and undesirable aspects.
6. An image is ambiguous. "It floats somewhere between the imagination and the senses, between expectation and reality." In another way, too, it is ambiguous, for it must not offend.<sup>60</sup>

This image is how the public relations director would like to have an organization appear to the public. The press release is one of the tools used to promote the image.

Press releases also provide a means for a reporter to fill the daily newshole. "We expect the papers to be

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<sup>60</sup> Daniel J. Boorstin, The Image (Forge Village, Mass.: The Murray Printing Co., 1961), pp. 186-193.

full of news. If there is no news visible to the naked eye, or to the average citizen, we still expect it to be there for the enterprising newsman. The successful reporter is one who can find a story. . . . If he cannot find a story, then he must make one."<sup>61</sup>

The press release may help the reporter make a story. This may be especially true in the new areas of reporting where there may not be established channels of information. Press releases can help the reporter, even though they may be called pseudo-events instead of actual events. Boorstin describes pseudo-events as:

1. not spontaneous, but comes about because someone has planned, planted or incited it;
2. planted primarily (not always exclusively) for the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced;
3. its relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous; and
4. it is usually intended to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>62</sup>

But not all press releases are used and the journalist must somehow be persuaded to use the information contained in the press release. Language intensity may be one of the factors involved in a successful press release.

"Language intensity has been defined as the perceptual distance between a persuasive claim and some neutral

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 11-12.



position."<sup>63</sup> Burgoon says, "one way to manipulate language intensity is to insert qualifiers in a persuasive appeal."<sup>64</sup> Thus, "certainly" is stronger than "probably" and "extremely dislike" is stronger than "don't care for."<sup>65</sup> "Miller and Burgoon argue that people develop expectations about the nature of persuasive messages they will receive. When those expectations are violated in a positive manner . . . the effect of an initial persuasive message is enhanced. . . . When message expectancies are negatively violated . . . distraction from message content occurs."<sup>66</sup>

Burgoon also states that there are no studies revealing a preference for disorganized messages over organized ones.<sup>67</sup> Public relations personnel aware of these uses of the language may enhance or hamper the chances of their material being used by the newspaper.

But the public relations personnel, as well as journalists, must keep in mind the ultimate consumer of the information--the newspaper reader.

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<sup>63</sup> Michael Burgoon and Erwin P. Bettinghaus, "Persuasive Message Strategies," quoted in Persuasion: New Directions in Theory and Research by Michael Roloff and Gerald R. Miller (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, Inc., 1980), p. 151.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

Klapper states that the audience for mass communication is people who have developed predispositions before encountering the mass media.<sup>68</sup> His five generalizations are:

1. Mass communication ordinarily does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects, but rather functions among and through a nexus of mediating factors and influences.
2. These mediating factors are such that they typically render mass communication a contributory agent, but not the sole cause, in a process of reinforcing the existing conditions. . . .
3. On such occasions as mass communication does function in the service of change, one of two conditions is likely to exist. Either (a) the mediating reactors will be found to be inoperative and the effect of the media will be found to be direct; or (b) the mediating factors, which normally favor reinforcement will be found to be themselves impelling toward change.
4. There are certain residual situations in which mass communication seems to produce direct effects or directly and of itself to serve certain psycho-physical functions.
5. The efficacy of mass communication, either as a contributory agent or as an agent of direct effect, is affected by various aspects of the media and communications themselves or of the communication situation.<sup>69</sup>

A newspaper reader who has received some kind of reward from the newspaper will return to it for additional rewards. The newspaper reader can be looking for either immediate reward news or delayed reward news. Schramm defines immediate reward kinds of news as things like

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<sup>68</sup> Joseph T. Klapper, The Effects of Mass Communication (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1960), p. 50.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

crime, accidents, disasters, sports, recreation, social events, human interest.<sup>70</sup> The reader may vicariously enjoy the experience with no danger of him or herself.<sup>71</sup> The delayed reward stories deal with public affairs, economic matters, social problems, science, education, and health.<sup>72</sup> Schramm states these kinds of stories carry a "threat value."<sup>73</sup>

It is read so that the reader may be informed and prepared. When a reader selects delayed reward news, he jerks himself into the world of surrounding reality to which he can adapt himself only by hard work. When he selects news of the other kind, he retreats usually from the world of threatening reality toward the dream world.<sup>74</sup>

A reader may get both rewards from a story, however. "Therefore, while the division of categories holds in general, the predispositions of the individual may transfer any story from one kind of reading to another or divide the experience between the two kinds of reward."<sup>75</sup>

But the reader is the last of the gatekeepers in the information flow. The public relations personnel and

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<sup>70</sup> Wilbur Schramm, "The Nature of News," Journalism Quarterly, September 1949, p. 261.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

journalists also act as gatekeepers. Kurt Lewin describes the concept of gatekeeping:

A certain area within a channel may function as a "gate"; the constellation of the forces before and after the gate region is decisively different in such a way that the passing or not passing of the unit through the whole channel depends to a high degree upon what happens in the gate region. . . . Gate sections are governed either by impartial rules or "gate keepers." In the latter case an individual or group is "in power" for making the decision between "in" or "out." Understanding the functioning of the gate becomes equivalent then to understanding the factors which determine the decisions of the gate keepers. . . . The forces in the gate segment of the channel will vary considerably, depending on who the gate keeper is, and upon the total situation within the channel.<sup>76</sup>

David Manning White applied Lewin's concept to journalism. He examined the gate keeping function of the position of wire editor and found "the process of choosing and discarding is continuously taking place."<sup>77</sup>

It is a well known fact in individual psychology that people tend to perceive as true only those happenings which fit into their own beliefs concerning what is likely to happen. It begins to appear (if Mr. Gates is a fair representative of his class) that in his position as "gate keeper" the newspaper editor sees to it (even though he may never be consciously aware of it) that the community shall hear as a fact only those events which the newsman as the representative of his culture believes to be true.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Kurt Lewin, "Channels of Group Life," Human Relations 1 (No. 2): 145-146.

<sup>77</sup> David Manning White, "The 'Gate Keeper': A Case Study in the Selection of News," Journalism Quarterly 27 (1950): 384.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 390.

The information passes through many gatekeepers. Bruce Westley and Malcolm MacLean included gatekeepers in their conceptual model.<sup>79</sup> Objects of orientation may be transmitted to the receiver directly, through an advocacy communicator or through a gatekeeper, or a combination. "The effect of the addition of the C (gatekeeper) role is to provide B (receiver) with a more extended environment."<sup>80</sup>

Information about an institution may be given directly to the receiver, come through the public relations personnel, go through the public relations personnel to the newspaper and then to the receiver, or go directly from the institution through the newspaper to the audience.

The newsman can give guides on what information should be important to the reader through such things as the item's placement in the newspaper, headline size, etc.

Both the content of the news and its context contribute stimuli that combine into the cue which the reader perceives. One important element of context is the physical presentation of the news. . . . Position, headline size, color, timing, voice (if any) are important to the choice. A reader is more likely to select a story which has a large headline and accompanying pictures, because these constitute a personal endorsement from the editor; by such display, the editor says, "this story is one you had better read."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Bruce H. Westley and Malcolm S. MacLean Jr. "A Conceptual Model for Communications Research," Journalism Quarterly, pp. 31-38.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>81</sup> Schramm, p. 260.

### Background Assumptions

It is assumed that public relations has a different objective than journalism. The objective of public relations is to present an organizational image. This image is not necessarily a reflection of what is really there. It may accentuate the positive aspects of the organization while glossing over the negative aspects. Material which presents the image may not be acceptable to a journalist who pursues the goals of objectivity and fairness in reporting the news events.

It is assumed, therefore, that some school districts have realized the discrepancy in goals and have hired someone who can devote time to understanding media needs. These people may be sensitive to a newspaper's needs and they may produce material with acceptable subject matter and form. Those school districts with public relations directors get better coverage than those school districts without public relations directors. One way to initiate coverage is through press releases.

It is assumed that press releases can aid reporters. Because of the differing goals, however, press release material is not necessarily a substitute for reporting. The public sees newspapers as the most helpful source in learning about education. They also see the media as a neutral source. But a high reliance on public relations

material can jeopardize that neutrality and a newspapers' credibility with the public. Estimates vary on how often press releases are used, but it has been stated that new areas of reporting such as education are particularly vulnerable to "handout journalism."

It is assumed that material must go through several gatekeepers before it is read by the public. Public relations directors act as gatekeepers. So do reporters and editors. But not all gatekeepers are alike. They may have purposive or non-purposive reasons for communicating.

Gatekeepers help the reader expand his or her environment. Without gatekeepers the reader would be limited to his or her immediate sensory field.

But gatekeepers are not objective. They are subject to predispositions as a result of past experience and personal bias. Gatekeepers must also consider the predispositions of the next gatekeepers in preparing the message. The public relations personnel must consider the predispositions of the journalists. The journalists must consider the predispositions of the audience.

The audience is predisposed to expect newspapers to carry news. If there is not any highly visible news, then the reporter must fill the newshole with something else. The newshole may be filled with such pseudo-events as press releases and public relations material.

It is assumed that press releases can contain information that is interesting or important to the reader. This will satisfy the reader's need for either immediate reward or delayed reward news. The newspeople must decide which the reader wants. The newspeople may also use criteria such as proximity and timeliness. Readers will return to those suppliers of information who satisfy their needs. Gatekeepers who negatively violate the expectations of their readers may be without an audience.

Because of these predispositions, mass media reinforce the reader's view rather than change it unless the reader is predisposed toward change.

It is assumed, however, that even though the audience has predispositions regarding what to read, an editor can influence reader choice to a certain degree by assigning the play of a given story. It is assumed the editor's choice is based on what he or she believes the reader wants or needs. Thus, the editor or reporter is looking for material to help accomplish that goal.

A press release that contains material fulfilling the needs of the newspeople may be considered by them for a longer period of time than that material not fulfilling their needs. Based on these assumptions, the central proposition of this story is that a press release that is written like a news story is likely to be used.



However, the tenability of the foregoing proposition and related assumptions must be tested and established.

#### Rationale for the Study

There have been published articles on the use of press releases in such areas as governmental and political reporting. There have been studies on the flow of information in educational reporting. But there have been no published studies on the use of press releases in educational reporting. This study will look at that relationship.

The purpose of this study is to help fill that gap in knowledge, build a middle-ground theory, and formulate testable propositions for future research.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITION OF TERMS

#### Statement of the Problem

What is the pattern of utilization and nature of treatment accorded to the press releases of the Lansing public school system as they appear in the Lansing State Journal?

Specifically, the purpose of this study is

1. to examine the nature and pattern of utilization of the press releases of the Lansing public school system by the Lansing State Journal;
2. to delineate the nature of treatment accorded to the press releases issued by the Lansing public school system by the Lansing State Journal;
3. to identify certain predictors in the utilization of treatment by the Lansing State Journal; and
4. to draw some conclusions and generalizations.

#### Concerns of the Study

1. What are some of the characteristics of the nature and pattern of covering of press releases of the Lansing school system by the Lansing State Journal?

2. To what extent are there seasonal variations in the aforesaid coverage?
3. What is the nature of treatment assigned to press releases as they appear in the Lansing State Journal? Is the treatment subjective or objective? Is the coverage positive, negative, neutral, or of mixed direction? Are the press releases used verbatim or paraphrased? Are the stories based on press releases played up or played down?

#### Definition of Terms

*Gatekeepers:* those people who make decisions on what material is included or excluded from the information channel.

*Information channel:* the process by which an items travels from a source to a receiver.

*Press releases:* those items originating in the office of the Information Services Director for the Lansing public school system and intended for newspaper use.

*Pattern of selection:* a systematic approach to choosing material from the information channel.

*Nature of treatment:* the positive, negative, neutral, or conditional (if \_\_\_\_\_ was true, then \_\_\_\_\_) slant given to the information.

*Schoolpeople:* those people employed by a school system including administrators, teachers, and public relations personnel.

*Newspeople:* those people employed by a newspaper including reporters, editors, and publishers.

*Hard news:* timely material which has already occurred, is issue- or policy-centered and has an effect on the entire school district.

*Soft news:* not necessarily timely but can be, the news has already occurred, the material is people-centered, and may be of particular interest to one segment of the school district but can be district-wide.

*Announcement:* notification of an event which will occur in the future.

*Interpretative story:* information explaining the "why's" in a particular occurrence.

*Roundup story:* a summation of events and information in one subject area, usually issue- or policy-centered, usually district-wide, not timely.

*Feature:* a story with no news lead, not necessarily timely, may be local or district-wide material.

*Lead:* usually one sentence at the beginning of a press release or news story containing some if not all of the following things: who, what, when, where, how, and why.

*Bridge:* can be a paragraph, a sentence, or a single word which connects the lead to the body of the press release or news story without disrupting the flow of words.

*Body:* an elaboration of material contained in the lead, usually several paragraphs.

*Column inch:* because of difference resulting from copy-fitting, there were 225 typewritten characters per column inch and 240 printed characters per column inch. The standard newspaper column inch was 14 picas wide, the most common width in the Lansing State Journal during the time of the study.

*Objectivity:* the degree to which a slant could be found in a press release or news story. A completely objective story or press release would present no qualifiers or interpretation of information presented; a completely subjective press release or news story would be opinion.

#### Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter III will deal with theoretical and methodological considerations for the study. Chapter IV will relate the findings of the study, and Chapter V will offer the conclusions. A Bibliography, including those studies cited in the introduction, as well as the research instruments, can be found at the conclusion of the report.

## CHAPTER III

### THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE STUDY

#### Theoretical Considerations

There are many messages that people may be exposed to in their environment. They have a way to select certain messages over others, however, due to predispositions. These predispositions may be based on past experience, personal bias, etc. But the messages they acknowledge meet some kind of need.

The mass media helps receivers extend their environment beyond their immediate surroundings. The receivers are still subject to predispositions, however. They will not select all messages. Thus, the mass media tends to reinforce the receiver's viewpoints rather than change them.

Not all information is available to the receiver, however. Along the line, decisions have been made regarding which items will be allowed to continue in the information channel. These decisions are made by gatekeepers.

Not all gatekeepers are alike, however. They have different goals in disseminating information. They may have

purposive or non-purposive reasons for communicating. Those people in the mass media generally have non-purposive reasons for communicating.

Media people must get their information from sources. Some of those sources may be advocating a position. Whether or not this information is used, however, depends on if it meets the needs of the receivers. A message that meets the needs of the sender but not the needs of the receiver may find itself without a receiver.

If a message satisfies a need, then the receiver may return to the source for additional messages. The sender must not negatively violate the expectations of the receivers or the receivers may not return to the sender or source for additional information. Elements in the message such as slant and intensity are some of the reasons why a message is or is not selected.

Messages may or may not use media gatekeepers. Some messages may go directly from the advocate to the receiver. But those messages that go through the media may be perceived as more accurate or objective by the receiver. This is because advocates and channel members are perceived to have different goals. Advocates who get the messages through the mass media have a better chance of having their messages believed than by sending the message themselves. They may also have a bigger audience.

Advocates must have two receivers in mind--the media gatekeepers as well as the ultimate consumer of the media material. In order to ultimately persuade the media consumer, the advocates must first present the message in a format that meets the needs of the media gatekeepers. Those public relations personnel who prepare press releases like a news story will be more likely to persuade the newspeople to accept their messages than those who don't.

#### Methodological Considerations

In the five years studied in this paper, approximately 170 press releases were issued by the Lansing public school system's office of information services. All of these press releases will undergo a content analysis. Copies of the Lansing State Journal will be examined for five days following the issuance of each press release.

The method. The principal method of analysis in this study will be a qualitative and quantitative content analysis. Berelson says that the technique yields reliable results.<sup>1</sup> It is assumed that inferences about the relationship between intent and content can be validly made. It is also assumed that a study of manifest and latent content is meaningful and that the quantitative description of communication content is meaningful.

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<sup>1</sup>Bernard Berelson, Content Analysis in Communication Research (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1952).



The category to be studied in this content analysis is educational news. This is operationally defined as news of the Lansing public school system. Only the news emanating from the Office of Information Services for the school system are included in the category.

A sub-category is the subject matter of these press releases. The indicants of this sub-category are hard news, soft news, feature, announcements, and roundup dealing with sports, curricula, personnel, school board, student activities, physical facilities, special programs, and miscellaneous.

Another sub-category used is structure of the news stories. The indicants for this are: lead, bridge, and body.

A third set of categories is the direction, play, and treatment accorded the news stories based on press releases. The measures of direction are pro, con, neutral, and mixed. The specific measure of play assigned to stories are headline point size and page position. The specific measure of treatment is the degree of perceived objectivity or subjectivity in published stories based on press releases.

A fourth category covers miscellaneous items which do not fit into the above categories. These units of analysis are:

1. items measured in terms of frequency with which press releases appear in news item forms;
2. space devoted to these items, measured in terms of regular as opposed to tabloid newspaper column inches; and
3. amount of press releases utilized measured in terms of various divisions of the press releases.

### Hypotheses

A set of relational hypotheses were formulated for the study.

- H<sub>1</sub>: The more a press release is written like a news story, the more it is used by the newspapers than the press releases not written like a news story.
- H<sub>2</sub>: The more a press release is written like a news story, the better treatment, operationally defined here as a higher degree of objectivity, it will receive than press releases not written like a news story.
- H<sub>3</sub>: Press releases containing information of low importance, operationally defined as personnel and student activities, will appear more often than those press releases containing information of high importance, operationally defined as curricula and school board activities.

H<sub>4</sub>: Press releases containing information of high importance, operationally defined here as curricula, school board activities, physical facilities activities, will be played up more than those press releases containing information of low importance, operationally defined here as personnel, student activities, sports, and special programs.

#### Data Analysis Scheme

The content analysis of the data was conducted on the Michigan State University computing system. The data were analyzed in terms of descriptive as well as inferential statistics.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

#### Setting of the Study

Lansing became the capital of Michigan in 1847. The City derived its name from Chancellor John Lansing of New York who was one of the early developers. It received its charter as a city in 1907.

The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce reports a population of 135,509 in 1980. The population in 1970 was 131,546 and the projected population level for 1990 is 138,325 and for 2000 is 140,157.

The population for the metropolitan region which includes Ingham, Eaton, and Clinton Counties for 1980 is 423,241. The metropolitan population for 1970 was 368,423. The projected population for the three counties in the year 1990 is 475,750 and for the year 2000 is 527,999.

Lansing is in Ingham County but its western boundary borders Eaton County and part of its northern boundary borders Clinton County.

According to the 1980 Census, Ingham County has a population of 272,437. There are 239,869 whites;

21,084 blacks; 1,515 American Indians, Eskimos or Aleuts; 2,720 Asians and Pacific Islanders; 10,523 of Spanish origin; and 7,249 other. There are 99,517 households in the county.

There were 6,411 births; 1,894 deaths; and 3,266 marriages in Ingham County in 1980.

The City of Lansing is 33.94 square miles. There are 113 parks and playgrounds covering more than 2,750 acres. There is a zoo, 12 public golf courses, three private country clubs, four racquetball clubs, one indoor tennis club, a private ski club, many indoor and outdoor theaters, Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A., bowling alleys and two year-round ice-skating rinks. Opportunities for fishing, water skiing, boating, and hunting exist within the region.

The average mean temperature in the Lansing area is 69 degrees F. for Summer and 27 degrees F. for Winter. The humidity is moderate. The average annual rainfall is 30.72 inches. The average growing season is 154 days.

There are five hospitals, with a total of 1,328 beds, plus the Michigan State University Health Center in East Lansing which has a total of 52 beds.

The Lansing State Journal is a Gannett newspaper with a daily circulation of 74,025 and a Sunday circulation of 80,586. It publishes noon and evening editions Monday through Friday. Saturday and Sunday editions are

distributed in the morning. It is the only daily newspaper in Lansing. The Michigan State News published at the university in neighboring East Lansing is published Monday through Friday. There are also weekly newspapers and shoppers published in the area.

The education editor at the Lansing State Journal is Sharon Bertsch. Yolanda Alverado is the most recent reporter of the activities in the Lansing public school system. Others who have written byline stories about the Lansing schools during the time frame of this study have been Ute Aule, Dennis Knickerbocker, and Trudy Westfall.

Ninety-six percent of the households in the Lansing area have televisions. There are four TV channels: WJIM (CBS), WILX (NBC), WKAR (PBS), and WJRT (ABC) located in Flint. There are three CATV companies (Cablevision).

The radio stations in the area are: WFMK (FM), WILS (AM/FM), WITL (AM/FM), WJIM (AM/FM), WKAR (AM/FM), WUNN (AM), WMMQ (FM), WGWY (AM), and WRBJ.

There are over 40,500 employees in over 300 industrial establishments in the metropolitan area. The major industrial firms are GMC: Oldsmobile Division (home plant), Fisher Body Division, G.M. Parts Division; Motor Wheel Corporation. There are five drop forge companies and a variety of other manufacturing and processing firms. The

major industrial products in the area are automobiles, conveyor systems, and auto-related products.

There were 65,800 people working in government in September 1980. There were 28,600 people working in retail and 27,000 working in service occupations that same month. There was also a 10.5 percent unemployment rate.

The Lansing area has eleven major banks with 62 offices. There are three Savings and Loan Associations with 17 offices, 34 Credit Unions, and 15 Brokerage Houses.

The City is also headquarters for many state associations. Michigan State University is located in East Lansing.

The Lansing Area Market Report states that the median household income in 1980 was \$23,307 in the Lansing area. Twenty-seven point six percent of the occupations were managerial/professional; 21.5 percent were clerical; 14 percent were operative; 13.5 percent were service; 12 percent were craft; 8.1 percent were sales; 3.1 percent were laborer; and 0.2 percent were farm.

The median age in the Lansing area in 1980 was 22.9 years. The Michigan Department of Management and Budget estimated that there were 76,100 children between the ages of 5 and 19 in Ingham County.

In 1980, the Lansing Public School System had 41 elementary schools, 5 junior high schools, and 4 senior

high schools. The total enrollment for K-12 was 25,396 with an additional 2,854 participants in the adult education program.

Judy Brown succeeded John D. Marrs as information service director for the school district in September 1980. She has a B.A. degree from Ohio University and an M.A. degree from Northwestern University. She worked for the Athens Messenger and the Dayton Journal Herald and has been both a reporter and copy editor. She joined the Lansing State Journal in 1968 and covered public and private schools in greater Lansing as well as social service agencies.

She joined the Lansing school system in 1976 and worked as an information specialist until succeeding Marrs. Marrs went on to work with the Michigan Association of School Boards.

The parochial schools in the Lansing area have an enrollment of 4,103 at 11 grade schools, 7 junior high schools, and 5 senior high schools.

The Beekman Center offers special programs for the handicapped.

Post-secondary schools in the area include Michigan State University with an enrollment of 44,940; Lansing Community College with an enrollment of 21,912; and Thomas M. Cooley Law School with an enrollment of 1,052; Lansing



Business Institute with an enrollment of 232, and Great Lakes Bible College with an enrollment of 214.

### The Findings

The characteristics of the nature and pattern of covering of press releases of the Lansing school system by the Lansing State Journal. Over twice as many of the press releases were used by the Lansing State Journal than were not used. There were 168 press releases issued by the office of information services for the Lansing public school system during the time of this study. Of that number, 61 percent (N = 103) were used and 29 percent (N = 50) were not used (see Table B.1).

This supports Cutlip's observation that much of what is read in the newspaper comes from a public relations source.<sup>1</sup> The results of this study of the press releases of the Lansing public school system are surprisingly high, however, when compared to previous studies of the use of press releases in political reporting.<sup>2</sup> Rings had found in education reporting, however, that a school district with a director of public information had a better chance of getting articles into the newspaper than those school

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<sup>1</sup>Scott Cutlip, "Third of Newspapers' Content PR-Inspired," Editor and Publisher, 26 May 1962, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup>Leslie D. Polk, John Eddy, and Ann Andre, "Use of Congressional Publicity in Wisconsin District," Journalism Quarterly, 1975, p. 543.

districts without a director of public information.<sup>3</sup> The Lansing public school district has such a position and this may help explain why so many of the press releases were used.

The product turned out by the people occupying that position was generally high in quality. The information was printed on "News from the Lansing Public School System" stationary, the color of which was usually bright orange or yellow. The information was typed, never handwritten, and the spelling and grammar were correct.

The information service director for the latter portion of the study had worked for the Lansing State Journal before coming to the Lansing school system. Her familiarity with reporting and with the Lansing State Journal may have helped her in her decisions on the information to provide.

She also had communication responsibilities within the school system and her contact with many people within the school district may have kept her aware of news within the school system.

That inside knowledge of the school system possessed and presented to the press by the information service

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<sup>3</sup>Robert Rings, "Public School News Coverage With and Without PR Director," Journalism Quarterly, 1971, p. 62.

director may have been valuable to the education reporter who might not have the access to those people in the school system.

The education reporter for the Lansing State Journal also had other school districts to cover and may have found press releases as ready-made news items. The information in the press releases may have been in areas the education reporters would have covered had they had the time to do so.

The publisher and editorial staff of the newspaper usually feels some obligation to help the community. Publishing things like school orientation schedules and school opening dates provide a public service to the community. Some of these types of press releases were issued annually but did not necessarily receive the same coverage each year.

The usage rate for all press releases ranged from a high of 72 percent (N = 26/36) in the school year 1977-78 to a low of 42 percent (N = 14/33) in 1979-80.

One explanation for the low figure in 1979-80 may be that there was a teacher's strike in the fall of 1979. News from the school district during that period would probably be about the strike and the education reporter may have preferred relying on other sources or doing her own investigations during that time.

While the numbers of press releases issued varied from season to season over the five-year period (47 in Winter, 121 in Spring, 73 in Summer, and 21 in Fall) the usage rate stayed about the same for all seasons (62 to 66 percent). This would seem to indicate that quality of the press release was more important than quantity. Inundating the newspaper with press releases did not guarantee a better percentage of their utilization by the newspaper.

Fifty percent of the news stories resulting from the press releases issued by the Lansing school district were about school board and student activities (see Table B.2). This was followed by personnel, curricula, buildings, sports, special programs, and other businesses.

The fact that school board activities is the most frequently used subject matter in news stories resulting from press releases is not surprising. School board activities was rated most important and second most newsworthy in Gross's study.<sup>4</sup> The school board is the policy making body for the school system and its decisions have an impact on the entire district and on how the taxpayer's dollar is spent. A newspaper is almost certain to cover this area of educational activities to assure the reader all is well or to perform a watchdog function.

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<sup>4</sup>Neal Gross, The Schools and the Press: A Study of the Relationship Between Newspapermen and School Administrators in New England (New England School Development Council, 1956), pp. 44-45.

Press releases from the school district can put important information at the reporter's fingertips and perhaps present the information in a manner which is favorable to the school district. Since there will almost undoubtedly be a story on a school board meeting, a press release on a school board meeting will probably be considered if not used in writing a news story, so there are many releases issued.

The relatively high frequency of news stories from press releases on student activities is even more surprising. That category is no higher than third in either importance or newsworthy areas in Gross's listing.<sup>5</sup> But stories about students make good human interest stories and localize news to a neighborhood level. Subscribers may want to see their children's names in the newspaper if the student has done something particularly well. The newspaper may also feel an obligation to reward an outstanding student for a job well done.

The newspaper may also be able to help the school district continue to receive grant money by publicizing the activities done with that grant money. Local businesses may be encouraged to grant scholarships if their name is listed under student awards.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

The office of information services can act as a resource for stories of this kind. It is much easier for the information services director to accumulate all the information from the various schools and then send it to the newspaper than for the reporter to call all the different schools on the right day to get the information.

Personnel stories have much the same human interest appeal as the student stories. The newspaper is evidently interested in this type of story but may not have the resources to know the activities or retirement plans of every teacher in the district. The information services director can provide that information.

Curricula stories make up only 10 percent of the news stories resulting from press releases. Curriculum was rated at the bottom of Gross's newsworthy scale but was second in terms of importance.<sup>6</sup> This may indicate that important stories are not necessarily used by the newspapers or information about curricula issued by the office of information services. Curriculum is more difficult to cover than a meeting and perhaps more difficult to evaluate and as a result may be neglected by both public relations and newspaper gatekeepers. Press releases containing readily decipherable state test scores were issued by the school district and used by the Lansing State Journal all five years.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

Press releases containing information on buildings closing and offices moving were issued infrequently but printed often, perhaps as a public service to the readers. School closings because of snow were also issued infrequently but used often, perhaps for the same reason.

Press releases on special programs in the schools were issued infrequently and their usage may have depended on whether or not there was room in the newspaper that day.

The Lansing State Journal contains many stories on Lansing school district sports, but sports information evidently does not come from the office of information services. Only six press releases on sports came from that office during the five-year period and none of them were about a specific game.

Of the news stories resulting from the press releases, 63 percent were seven inches or longer (see Table B.3). This apparently indicates that most press releases that were used were written as a news story and not as a brief announcement (assuming the minimum length of a news story is about seven or eight column inches. This may also indicate that the material coming from the press releases was interesting or important enough to be used as a news story.

The nature of treatment assigned to press releases as they appear in the Lansing State Journal. The play of the news stories resulting from the press releases of the Lansing public school system was relatively high.

The headline point sizes ranged from 18 point to 48 point (see Table B.4). The bigger the size of the headline, the more noticeable the story is in the newspaper. Sixty of the stories had a headline point size of 36 points or more while 33 of the stories had a point size headline of less than 36 points.

The editors evidently thought that the stories coming from the press releases were interesting or important enough for the reader to notice. The press releases contained material that should not only be contained in a news story but in a news story that receives good play.

The alignment of page position to the news stories based on the press releases was also optimal. Six stories appeared in the first section of the newspaper, some on the front page (see Table B.5). The Lansing State Journal is set up in such a way, however, that the local news is generally not in the front or first section but in the second section. Obviously, if a big news story comes out of the school district either from a reporter or a press release, it will be played on page one. Usually, however, the local stories will go in section B, the Metro Section.



The most frequent page position was that of B-1, the front page of the local section. This is the best play a local story would usually get. School news, whether initiated by a reporter or public relations person, is apparently information important enough or interesting enough for the editors to think the reader should be aware of it.

The next most frequent page position was that of B-2. This is also close to the front of the local section and indicates good play. On this page is the Metro Roundup section where brief stories on personnel retirements, buildings, etc. are placed. Occasionally the information services director would indicate on a press release that the information should go into Metro Roundup. When that happened, the item was never used in Metro Roundup, and sometimes not in the newspaper at all. It would appear then, that the information services director has no power on the play of the press release and instructions on where the item should play may be resented by the editorial staff of the newspaper.

Fewer stories appeared on page B-3 of the newspaper and the number decreased even more toward the back of the section. Some of the longer stories of student awards appeared toward the back of the section, perhaps indicating a lesser importance or interest to the reader.

Another reason might be, however, that they could not be cut down to fit the confines of the news space on pages B-1 to B-3.

Only one article appeared in section C and that was an article that was featurized. Section C was the "Living" Section at the time of the article.

The direction of the news stories resulting from the press releases tended more toward the positive than the negative end of the spectrum (see Table B-6). This is not surprising since most of the press releases from the school district would tell positive information about the school district or put somewhat negative information in a positive light. Other press releases containing informational material such as building changes were neutral.

Any news stories that were critical of the school district probably did not originate with the information services director. Of course, the newspaper could have ignored any material casting a favorable light on the school district, but it chose to print many of them. This may indicate the newspaper's willingness to help the school maintain a positive image in the community when the situation warrants it. The newspaper does not print only bad news about the school district; it prints good news as well.

Most of the news stories based on press releases used either the press release in paraphrase or verbatim form (see Tables B.7 and B.8). It would appear, then, that not only what the school district has to say is appearing in the newspaper, but how they are saying it as well. Of the news stories resulting from the press releases, 51 percent (N = 53) had no other source but the press releases. Only 41 percent (N = 42) had some kind of additional source.

While it is true that only 36 percent (N = 37) of the stories originating with press releases had bylines, the reader may not be aware that those stories were influenced by a public relations source. The reader may also not realize that those stories without bylines may come from a public relations source or that they are not initiated by a reporter.

While the amount that is paraphrased or taken verbatim from a press release may not be important in an informational item, it may make a difference in material on the test scores of the school district.

News stories resulting from press releases still tend to be objective to neutral, but 13 percent of the stories were subjective to some degree (see Table B.9). While this subjectivity can be in favor of the school district or against the school district, it does seem to contradict the goal of objectivity in journalism.

Soft news stories were the most frequent type of news story resulting from press releases (see Table B.10). It might have been expected that announcements would be the most prominent type of news story, but it appears that the gatekeepers were looking for more than basic information to pass along in the information channel. The newspaper gatekeepers might have been looking for material that could be turned into a news story, not just material that would be printed as a brief announcement.

The predictors in the utilization of treatment of the Lansing public school system's press releases by the Lansing State Journal. Earlier findings of empirical research has established that the writing of press releases in the news story format is a significant predictor of their utilization by newspapers. Therefore, it was hypothesized that the more a press release is written like a news story, the more it is used by the newspapers than the press releases not written like a news story. The hypothesis was found tenable. This is indicated in Table 1.

Additional support for the aforesaid hypothesis comes from the C (correlation coefficient) value contained in Table 1.<sup>7</sup> The C value of .41 which is relatively high

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<sup>7</sup>For a detailed discussion on C as a test of association, please refer to Quinn McNemar, Psychological Statistics, 3rd ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1962).

Table 1. The relationship between writing of press releases in news story form and their utilization by the Lansing State Journal

Press Releases Writing	Utilization of Press Releases	
	Not Used	Used
	(%)	(%)
Story form	38 (N = 19)	65 (N = 67)
Non-story form	<u>62</u> (N = 31)	<u>35</u> (N = 36)
	100 (N = 50)	100 (N = 103)

$$\chi^2 = 32.71; C = .41; p < .001.$$

here, not only indicates a positive association between writing of the press releases in news story format, but it also shows the predicted direction in which this relationship exists.

Those press releases written in news story form had a better chance of being used by the newspaper than those which had some story element missing. As has been noted before, the overall quality of the press releases was generally quite high. Those press releases written in non-story form generally had something minor lacking, they didn't flow well or were not timely. Since all the press releases came from the same office and were written in a similar style, it was difficult to find differences in the press releases.

It does appear, however, that those press releases containing the elements found in a news story had a better chance of being used than those without. Those press releases may have been easier to use by the newspaper reporter because they were close to final form. The information was presented in a format familiar and easy to ready by the reporter. Because they required less work to finish, they may have been easier to use.

Because they were written in the acceptable format they also may have appeared more important or newsworthy than those not written in complete compliance with news story formats. Those press releases looking like a news story may have been read as news stories.

Earlier findings of empirical research also has established that the relationship between news story format of writing press releases and objective treatment assigned to it. Hence, the following hypothesis was formulated. The more a press release is written like a news story, the better treatment, operationally defined here as a higher degree of objectivity, it will receive than press releases not written like a news story. The hypothesis held up as evidenced in Table 2.

Additional support for the aforesaid hypothesis comes from the C value contained in Table 2. The C value of .57 which is relatively high here not only indicates a

Table 2. The relationship between press release writing and the treatment assigned to the news story

Press Releases Writing	Treatment Accorded		
	Subjective	Neutral	Objective
	(%)	(%)	(%)
Story form	100 (N = 13)	57 (N = 34)	70 (N = 16)
Non-story form	<u>0</u> (N = 0)	<u>43</u> (N = 26)	<u>30</u> (N = 7)
	100 (N = 13)	100 (N = 60)	100 (N = 23)

$$\chi^2 = 48.125; C = 57; p = < .001$$

positive association between writing of the press releases and the treatment received in the news story but it also shows the predicted direction in which this relationship exists.

The treatment accorded to press releases written in story form is pretty much as would be expected; however, the high frequency of neutral treatment may be explained by the professional detachment with which they were written as well as edited.

Earlier findings of empirical research have established that the importance of the subject matter in a press release is a significant predictor of those press releases utilized by newspapers. Therefore, it was hypothesized that press releases containing information of lower

importance and generally higher human interest value, will be used more often than those press releases with higher importance and lower human interest value. The hypothesis was found tenable. This is indicated in Table 3.

Table 3. The relationship between the subject matter of press releases and their coverage scope.

Press Release Subject	Coverage Scope	
	Low	High
	(%)	(%)
High importance	43 (N = 19)	43 (N = 37)
Low importance	<u>57</u> (N = 25)	<u>57</u> (N = 50)
	100 (N = 44)	100 (N = 87)

$$\chi^2 = 17.24; C = .34; p < .001.$$

Additional support for the aforesaid hypothesis comes from the C value contained in Table 3. The C value of .34 which is still relatively high here, not only indicates a positive association between low importance of the press releases and their utilization in the newspaper, but it also shows the predicted direction in which this relationship exists.

Based on Gross's scale, more of the stories resulting from press releases were of low importance



(student and personnel activities and sports) than of high importance (school board, curricula, and superintendent activities). There were more press releases issued concerning items of low importance.

This is not surprising considering the role of public relations personnel. The information service director is obliged to present the school district in a favorable light to the community. Materials on students and personnel are generally favorable toward the school district. Their accomplishments reflect well on the school district.

Information regarding the school board and curricula may not necessarily show the school district favorably. The school district may not want to bring attention to any shortcomings it might have in curricula or budget problems of the school board. The reporters, in turn, may recognize that and prefer to get their own information in these areas. They may wish to have the opportunity to question sources like the superintendent, instead of relying on a press release. Reporters may also automatically investigate these areas and are better informed on these issues than on student and personnel activities. They may not need the director of information services in this area. It is beyond the scope of this study, however, to determine if stories about curricula or school boards which are investigated by

the reporter appear in the newspaper. It is possible that stories on curricula never get written at all. It is apparent, however, that these stories do not originate with the director of information services.

Earlier findings of empirical research have established that the higher importance the subject matter of the press release is, the better play it will receive. Therefore, it was hypothesized that those press releases containing information of high importance rather than low importance will be given better play. The hypothesis was found tenable. This is indicated in Table 4.

Table 4. The relationship between coverage scope and play assigned

Coverage Scope	Play Assigned		
	Low	Medium	High
	(%)	(%)	(%)
High importance	23 (N = 7)	35 (N = 14)	87 (N = 27)
Low importance	<u>77</u> (N = 24)	<u>65</u> (N = 26)	<u>13</u> (N = 4)
	100 (N = 31)	100 (N = 40)	100 (N = 31)

$$\chi^2 = 29.88; C = .47; p = < .001.$$

Additional support for the aforesaid hypothesis comes from the C value contained in Table 4. The C value of .47 is relatively high here, which not only indicates a positive association between the importance of subject matter and play position, but it also shows the predicted direction in which this relationship exists.

The more important press releases may receive better play than those not as important because of the seriousness or significance of the subject matter contained in those press releases. The material may be of more consequence to the community and the newspaper may feel an obligation to put that material in a position where it is more likely to be noticed by the reader.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS, GENERALIZATIONS AND TESTABLE PROPOSITIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Press releases from the Lansing public school system are a viable source of educational news for the Lansing State Journal. These press releases may provide information the education reporter cannot obtain or does not have the time to gather. Some of the material may be announcements which are published as a community service.

The most frequent stories resulting from press releases are about school board and student activities. School board items are considered to be high importance news while student activities are considered to be low importance news. There are more low importance items issued in press releases and there are more low importance new stories resulting from press releases, which may indicate the role of the public relations director in the educational information process.

High importance stories resulting from press releases receive better play than low importance stories, however. Stories originating with press releases are

usually written as news stories and not announcements. This shows that the newspaper thinks of the material in the press releases as news story material. The stories generally appear on the first three pages of the local section.

The stories are generally positive, which reflect well on the district and may create a positive image in the minds of the readers. The stories may contain the same words as the press release and the same slant. This favorable image may help the school district obtain millage increases to expand its program.

Public relations personnel can increase the chance of their press releases being used by the newspaper by continuing news story elements in the press release. This may also help in getting subjective treatment for the story, for the findings indicate the news story form of writing press releases is a significant predictor of their usage and objective treatment assigned to them. Also, press releases dealing with low importance are significant predictors of their usage. However, the findings indicate that when it comes to news of curricula and school board and other high important items, which have higher than usual serious and important consequences, they are more likely to get prominent play.

Possible areas of future research include testing the hypotheses generated in this study in other school districts, studying the use of educational press releases from non-local sources, monitoring social control in the newsroom, and studying the relationship between public relations personnel and newspeople.

Other hypotheses than those presented in this study might include:

1. Those press releases from non-local sources will have a lower usage rate than those press releases from local sources.
2. Those press releases arriving on a heavy news schedule day will be used less often than those arriving on a light news schedule day.
3. Those public relations personnel who communicate with newspeople by phone or in person as well as by press release will have a greater chance of having their press releases published by the newspaper than those who only communicate by press releases.

APPENDIX A

THE CODEBOOK FOR THE STUDY

APPENDIX A  
THE CODEBOOK FOR THE STUDY

Column

1-3	NEWS RELEASE NUMBER 001-168
4-5	MONTH OF RELEASE 01 = January 02 = February 03 = March 04 = April 05 = May 06 = June 07 = July 08 = August 09 = September 10 = October 11 = November 12 = December 99 = missing data
6-7	DAY OF RELEASE 01 = 1st 02 = 2nd 03 = 3rd . . . 31 = 31st 32 = don't know 33 = missing data
8	YEAR OF RELEASE 1 = 1976-77 school year (July-June) 2 = 1977-78 school year 3 = 1978-79 school year 4 = 1979-80 school year 5 = 1980-81 school year
9-10	PRESS RELEASE COLUMN INCHES 01 = one inch or less 02 = more than one inch, two inches or less 03 = more than two inches, three inches of less . . . 99 = missing data



Column

11-12

## SUBJECT MATTER

## SPORTS

- 01 = sports program
- 02 = summer swim program

## PROGRAM

- 03 = classes begin
- 04 = orientation
- 05 = kindergarten registration
- 06 = summer school
- 07 = opinion poll
- 08 = test scores

## PERSONNEL

- 09 = appointments
- 10 = awards
- 11 = workshops
- 12 = conventions
- 13 = resignations
- 14 = retirements
- 15 = retirement receptions

## SCHOOL BOARD

- 16 = superintendent activities
- 17 = school board meetings
- 18 = school board negotiations
- 19 = school board contracts
- 20 = school board elections
- 21 = school budget
- 22 = school bonds
- 23 = school millage
- 24 = appointments of citizens working  
with school board
- 25 = citizen groups working with school board
- 26 = PTA

## STUDENT ACTIVITIES

- 27 = senior scholastic dinner
- 28 = senior awards assembly
- 29 = student awards from outside school  
district
- 30 = student competitions
- 31 = advanced placement
- 32 = student conferences
- 33 = adult education program
- 34 = adult education commencement
- 35 = special education reception
- 36 = Speical Olympics

Column

## LAWSUITS

37 = lawsuits

## SNOW

38 = snow days

## PHYSICAL FACILITIES

39 = public library

40 = dedications

41 = changes

42 = future use studies

43 = future use hearings

44 = closings

## SPECIAL PROGRAMS

45 = outside groups

46 = hosting conferences

47 = district festivals

48 = Year of the Child

49 = Parent Education forum

50 = spelling bee

51 = Calbery awards

52 = food program

53 = health program

54 = fun day

55 = other

56 = don't know

99 = missing data

13

## TYPE OF STORY

1 = feature

2 = hard news

3 = soft news

4 = announcement

5 = interpretative

6 = roundup

7 = other

8 = don't know

9 = missing data

14

## LEAD

1 = news lead

2 = no lead

3 = no news lead

4 = don't know

9 = missing data

Column

- 15            BRIDGE  
              1 = successful bridge  
              2 = unsuccessful bridge  
              3 = no bridge attempted  
              4 = don't know  
              9 = missing data
- 16            BODY  
              1 = yes  
              2 = no  
              9 = missing data
- 17            AUTHORITY  
              1 = none  
              2 = one source  
              3 = two sources  
              4 = three sources  
              5 = four sources  
              6 = five sources  
              7 = six or more sources  
              8 = other  
              9 = missing data
- 18            DIRECT QUOTE  
              1 = none  
              2 = one  
              3 = two  
              4 = three  
              5 = four  
              6 = five  
              7 = six or more  
              8 = other  
              9 = missing data
- 19            INDIRECT QUOTE  
              1 = none  
              2 = one  
              3 = two  
              4 = three  
              5 = four  
              6 = five  
              7 = six or more  
              8 = other  
              9 = missing data

Column

- 20            PARAPHRASE  
1 = none  
2 = one  
3 = two  
4 = three  
5 = four  
6 = five  
7 = six or more  
8 = other  
9 = missing data
- 21            SUMMARY QUOTE  
1 = none  
2 = one  
3 = two  
4 = three  
5 = four  
6 = five  
7 = six or more  
8 = other  
9 = missing data
- 22            DIRECTION  
1 = pro  
2 = positive  
3 = neutral  
4 = negative  
5 = con  
6 = mixed  
7 = conditional  
8 = other  
9 = missing data
- 23            OBJECTIVITY  
1 = very objective  
2 = objective  
3 = neutral  
4 = subjective  
5 = very subjective  
6 = other  
7 = don't know  
8 = missing data

Column

24	<p>LOCALITY</p> <p>1 = local angle, local school district</p> <p>2 = local angle, state</p> <p>3 = local angle, national or international</p> <p>4 = no local angle</p> <p>5 = other</p> <p>6 = don't know</p> <p>9 = missing data</p>
25	<p>TIMELINESS</p> <p>1 = date mentioned within week</p> <p>2 = date mentioned greater than week</p> <p>3 = no date mentioned</p> <p>4 = other</p> <p>5 = don't know</p> <p>9 = missing data</p>
26	<p>PRESS RELEASE USED</p> <p>1 = yes</p> <p>2 = no</p> <p>3 = used, but past date allowed in sample</p> <p>4 = don't know</p> <p>9 = missing data</p>
27-28	<p>MONTH OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLE</p> <p>01 = January</p> <p>02 = February</p> <p>. . .</p> <p>12 = December</p> <p>99 = missing data</p>
29-30	<p>DATE OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLE</p> <p>01 = 1st</p> <p>02 = 2nd</p> <p>. . .</p> <p>31 = 31st</p> <p>99 = missing data</p>
31	<p>YEAR OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLE</p> <p>1 = 1976-77 school year</p> <p>2 = 1977-78 school year</p> <p>3 = 1978-79 school year</p> <p>4 = 1979-80 school year</p> <p>5 = 1980-81 school year</p> <p>9 = missing data</p>

Column

- 32 HEADLINE POINT SIZE  
 1 = 18  
 2 = 24  
 3 = 30  
 4 = 36  
 5 = 42  
 6 = 48  
 7 = 60  
 8 = 72  
 9 = missing data
- 33 COLUMN WIDTH  
 1 = 19 picas, 54 characters/line  
 2 = 21.5 picas, 61 characters/line  
 3 = 14 picas, 40 characters/line  
 4 = 13 picas, 37 characters/line  
 5 = 18 picas, 51 characters/line  
 6 = 17 picas, 48 characters/line  
 7 = 12 picas, 34 characters/line  
 8 = 9.5 picas, 27 characters/line  
 9 = missing data
- 34 HEADLINE WIDTH  
 1 = one column wide  
 2 = two columns wide  
 3 = three columns wide  
 4 = four columns wide  
 5 = five columns wide  
 6 = six columns wide  
 7 = other  
 8 = don't know  
 9 = missing data
- 35-36 HEADLINE LINES  
 01 = one line headline  
 02 = two line headline  
 03 = three line headline  
 04 = four line headline  
 05 = one line headline with kicker  
 06 = two line headline with kicker  
 07 = three line headline with kicker  
 08 = four line headline with kicker  
 09 = other  
 10 = don't know  
 99 = missing data

Column

37-38

## JUMP

01 = no jump  
02 = jump to A-2  
03 = jump to A-3  
04 = jump to A-4  
05 = jump to A-5  
06 = jump to A-6  
07 = jump to A-7  
08 = jump to A-8  
09 = jump to A-9  
10 = jump to A-10  
11 = jump to A-11  
12 = jump to A-12  
13 = jump to A-13  
14 = jump to A-14  
15 = jump to A-15  
16 = jump to A-16  
17 = jump to B-1  
18 = jump to B-2  
19 = jump to B-3  
20 = jump to B-4  
21 = jump to B-5  
22 = jump to B-6  
23 = jump to B-7  
24 = jump to B-8  
25 = jump to B-9  
26 = jump to B-10  
27 = jump to B-11  
28 = jump to B-12  
29 = jump to B-13  
30 = jump to B-14  
31 = jump to B-15  
32 = jump to B-16  
33 = jump to C-2  
34 = jump to C-3  
35 = jump to C-4  
36 = jump to C-5  
37 = jump to C-6  
38 = jump to C-7  
39 = jump to C-8  
40 = jump to C-9  
41 = jump to C-10  
42 = jump to C-11  
43 = jump to C-12  
44 = jump to C-13  
45 = jump to C-14

Column

46 = jump to C-15  
 47 = jump to C-16  
 48 = other  
 49 = don't know  
 99 = no article

39

## BYLINE

1 = no byline  
 2 = Ute Aule, Ute Von Der Heyden  
 3 = Dennis Knickerbocker  
 4 = Yolanda Alvarado  
 5 = Sharon Bertsch  
 6 = Trudy Westfall  
 7 = don't know  
 9 = no article

40-41

## LENGTH IN COLUMN INCHES/NEWSPAPER

01 = one inch or less  
 02 = more than one inch, two inches or less  
 03 = more than two inches, three inches or less  
 04 = more than three inches, four inches or less  
 05 = more than four inches, five inches or less  
 06 = more than five inches, six inches or less  
 07 = more than six inches, seven inches or less  
 08 = more than seven inches, eight inches or less  
 09 = more than eight inches, nine inches or less  
 10 = more than nine inches, ten inches or less  
 11 = more than ten inches, eleven inches or less

. . .  
 97 = more than ninety-six inches, ninety-seven inches or less

98 = don't know

99 = no article

42-43

## FIRST PAGE LENGTH

01 = one inch or less  
 02 = more than one inch, two inches or less  
 03 = more than two inches, three inches or less

. . .  
 99 = no article



Column

44-45

## SECOND PAGE LENGTH

01 = one inch or less

02 = more than one inch, two inches  
or less03 = more than two inches, three inches  
or less

. . .

97 = doesn't jump

98 = don't know

99 = no article

46-47

## PAGE POSITION

01 = A1

02 = A2

03 = A3

04 = A4

05 = A5

06 = A6

07 = A7

08 = A8

09 = A9

10 = A10

11 = A11

12 = A12

13 = A13

14 = A14

15 = A15

16 = A16

17 = B1

18 = B2

19 = B3

20 = B4

21 = B5

22 = B6

23 = B7

24 = B8

25 = B9

26 = B10

27 = B11

28 = B12

29 = B13

30 = B14

31 = B15

32 = B16

33 = C1

34 = C2

35 = C3

36 = C4

37 = C5

Column

38 = C6  
 39 = C7  
 40 = C8  
 41 = C9  
 42 = C10  
 43 = C11  
 44 = C12  
 45 = C13  
 46 = C14  
 47 = C15  
 48 = C16  
 50 = don't know  
 99 = no article

48

CREASE  
 1 = item above crease  
 2 = item below crease  
 3 = don't know  
 9 = no article

49-50

SUBJECT MATTER/NEWSPAPER  
 see 11-12  
 99 = no article

51

TYPE OF STORY  
 1 = feature  
 2 = hard news  
 3 = soft news  
 4 = announcement  
 5 = interpretative  
 6 = roundup  
 7 = other  
 8 = don't know  
 9 = no article

52

AMOUNT OF LEAD USED AS LEAD  
 1 = none  
 2 = some paraphrased  
 3 = all paraphrased  
 4 = some verbatim  
 5 = all verbatim  
 6 = combination of paraphrased and verbatim  
 7 = other  
 8 = don't know  
 9 = no article

Column

- 53            AUTHORITY USED  
 1 = none  
 2 = one authority used  
 3 = two authorities used  
 4 = three authorities used  
 5 = no authority to begin with in  
       press release  
 6 = no authority to begin with, but  
       added  
 7 = don't know  
 9 = no article
- 54            ATTRIBUTION  
 1 = none to begin with  
 2 = none used  
 3 = press release  
 4 = director of Lansing public school  
       system's information services  
 5 = person mentioned in press release  
 6 = someone not mentioned in press  
       release specifically  
 7 = combination  
 8 = other  
 9 = no article
- 55-56        COLUMN INCHES VERBATIM  
 01 = less than one inch  
 02 = more than one inch, two inches or  
       less  
 03 = more than two inches, three inches  
       or less  
 . . .  
 98 = none  
 99 = no article
- 57-58        COLUMN INCHES PARAPHRASED  
 01 = less than one inch  
 02 = more than one inch, two inches or  
       less  
 03 = more than two inches, three inches  
       or less  
 . . .  
 98 = none  
 99 = no article

Column

- 59 METRO ROUNDUP  
 1 = for Metro Roundup, used in Metro Roundup  
 2 = for Metro Roundup, not used there  
 3 = not for Metro Roundup, used there  
 4 = not for Metro Roundup, not used there  
 5 = other  
 6 = don't know  
 9 = no article
- 60 SOURCES USED  
 1 = no other source used  
 2 = other source used, press release  
 3 = other source used, not press release  
 4 = other sources used, both press release  
 and outside source  
 5 = other source used, don't know which  
 6 = don't know  
 9 = no article
- 61 DIRECTION  
 1 = pro  
 2 = positive  
 3 = neutral  
 4 = negative  
 5 = con  
 6 = mixed  
 7 = conditional  
 8 = other  
 9 = no article
- 62 OBJECTIVITY  
 1 = very objective  
 2 = objective  
 3 = neutral  
 4 = subjective  
 5 = very subjective  
 6 = other  
 7 = don't know  
 9 = no article
- 63 LOCALITY  
 1 = local angle, local subject  
 2 = local angle, state subject  
 3 = local angle, national or international  
 area  
 4 = no local angle  
 5 = don't know  
 9 = no article

Column

64-65

AMOUNT USED, TOTAL (ADD 55-56, 57-58)

01 = less than one inch

02 = more than one inch, two inches or less

03 = more than two inches, three inches or  
less

. . .

98 = don't know

99 = no article

66-67

DIRECT QUOTES

01 = none to begin with

02 = none used

03 = some used, verbatim, partial

04 = some used, verbatim, complete

05 = some used, paraphrased, partial

06 = some used, paraphrased, complete

07 = all used, verbatim, partial

08 = all used, verbatim, complete

09 = all used, paraphrased, partial

10 = all used, paraphrased, complete

11 = none to begin with, but paraphrased  
in article12 = none to begin with, but quoted in  
newspaper story13 = some to begin with, didn't use,  
but added own14 = some used verbatim, both partial  
and complete15 = some used paraphrased, both partial  
and complete16 = all used verbatim, both partial and  
complete17 = all used, paraphrased, both partial  
and complete

18 = some used verbatim, added

19 = some used paraphrased, added

20 = all used verbatim, added

21 = all used paraphrased, added

22 = some used, both, partial

23 = some used, both, complete

24 = other

25 = don't know

99 = no article

68-69

INDIRECT QUOTES

see 66-67

Column

70-71

PARAPHRASED QUOTES  
see 66-67

72-73

SUMMARY QUOTES  
see 66-67

74

## TIMELINESS

1 = date mentioned within week  
2 = date mentioned greater than week  
3 = no date mentioned  
4 = other  
5 = don't know  
9 = no article

APPENDIX B

SELECTED SET OF MARGINALS

APPENDIX B

SELECTED SET OF MARGINALS

Table B.1 Frequency of press release use

	Number	Percentage
Press release used	103	61.3
Press release not used	50	29.8
Used, but not in time span	7	4.2
Unused data	8	4.8
	<u>168</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Table B.2 Frequency of subject matter use

Subject	Issued	Used	Not Used	Percentage Used	Percentage Not Used
Sports	6	4	2	67	33
Personnel	29	21	8	75	25
Students	40	25	15	62.5	37.5
Special programs	8	4	4	50	50
Buildings	9	8	1	89	11
Curricula	17	10	7	59	41
School board	39	27	12	69	31
Other business	5	4	1	80	20
Unused data	15	0	15		
	<u>168</u>	<u>103</u>	<u>65</u>		



Table B.3 Length of news stories resulting from press releases

Length	Number	Percentage
Brief (1-6)	39	37
Long (7+)	62	63
Unused data	67	100
	<u>168</u>	

Table B.4 Headline point size

Point Size	Number
18 point	1
24 point	17
30 point	15
36 point	16
42 point	23
48 point	21
Unused data	10
	<u>103</u>

Table B.5 Page position of news stories resulting from press releases

Page position	Number	Percentage
High play (sec. A,B1)	31	30.0
Medium play (B2,B3)	40	39.5
Low play (B4-16,C)	31	30.5
Unused data	66	100.0
	<u>168</u>	

Table B.6 Direction of news story resulting from press releases

Direction	Number	Percentage
Positive	49	48.5
Neutral	43	42.5
Negative	8	8.0
Mixed	1	1.0
Unused data	67	100.0
	<u>168</u>	

Table B.7 Objectivity of news stories resulting from press release

Objectivity	Number	Percentage
Objective	23	24.0
Neutral	60	62.5
Subjective	13	13.5
Unused data	72	100.0
	<u>168</u>	

Table B.8 Type of news story resulting from press releases

Type	Number	Percentage
Feature	1	1
Hard news	30	30
Soft news	43	42
Announcement	25	25
Other	2	2
Unused data	67	100
	<u>168</u>	

Table B.9 Paraphrasing of press release in news story

Paraphrase	Number	Percentage
Paraphrase	86	83
No paraphrase	17	17
Unused data	65	100
	<u>168</u>	

Table B.10 Verbatim of press release in news story

Verbatim	Number	Percentage
Verbatim	70	68
No verbatim	33	32
Unused data	65	100
	<u>168</u>	

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