Integrated Influence? Exploring Public Relations Power in Integrated Marketing Communication

Katie R. Place, Ph.D.
Quinnipiac University

Brian G. Smith, Ph.D.
Purdue University

Hyunmin Lee, Ph.D.
Saint Louis University

The rules of the game are changing. The trend to integrate communication functions at organizations today pits public relations and marketing in ongoing turf wars to determine ownership of new communication frontiers, including digital and social media (Delaria, Kane, Porter, & Strong, 2010; Kiley, 2011). This phenomenon, known as integrated marketing communication (IMC), prescribes that effective communication hinges on building consistent messaging around stakeholder needs through collaboration between public relations, marketing, advertising, and other communication functions (Kliatchko, 2008). However, recent studies show that marketing and public relations professionals remain entrenched in structural barriers and functional silos that hinder the effectiveness of integration (Delaria, Kane, Porter & Strong, 2010). This functional singularity has also plagued public relations research. Scholars have been reluctant to validate IMC as a research topic (some have even rejected it) based on the assumption that integration would lead to public relations sublimation to marketing—an assumption that has not been validated in research (Hallahan, 2007).

At the center of this debate is the concept of power. Some argue public relations has already lost power to marketing (Hutton, 2010), while others claim integration stands to increase public relations power and earn the function a seat at the table (Caywood, 1997). A recent study suggested that public relations practitioners earn power in IMC through expertise in digital and social media (Smith & Place, 2013). Despite this study, few, if any, other studies have identified the supposed power imbalance in IMC, or the influence of IMC on public relations power. This study builds on the exploratory research by Delaria, et al. (2010) and

Smith and Place (2013) to evaluate public relations power in IMC, and the role of social media expertise on that power. Findings suggest that public relations influence in IMC may be tied to practitioners' participation in the organization's top decision-making body, social media expertise and perceived public relations expertise.

Literature

IMC and Public Relations

The rise of integrated marketing communication (IMC) has been attributed to several developments, including economic constraints, public relations and advertising agency mergers, proliferation of media, and the imperative to cut through media clutter (Arens, Weigold, & Arens, 2013; Blakeman, 2009). However, at the heart of integration, and its consequent emergence, is the influence of communication technology that has granted publics more access to media channels, and greater influence over the conversations that determine the success or failure of an organization. Rather than a tactical move for communication efficiency, IMC is a strategic move for garnering stakeholder involvement and support.

IMC's strategic and tactical imperatives revolve around stakeholder interest, as communication strategy is built from the outside in and based on stakeholder perspectives (Duncan, 2005; Schultz, 2007). Kliatchko (2008) defines IMC as "an audience-driven business process" (p. 140). IMC addresses the influence of all stakeholders (including employees, community members, opinion leaders, the media, etc.) on the consumer decision-making process, and coordinates messaging through the various channels through which stakeholders

interact with consumers toward a purchase decision (Gronstedt, 1996). As such, IMC is a media matching process whereby communication activities from functions like advertising, public relations, and sales promotion, among others, are considered a tool in the marketing toolbox for targeting stakeholders based on specific needs (Gronstedt, 1996).

IMC's stakeholder first orientation reverberates through the theoretical foundation of the discipline—that an organization should build around a core message that reflects stakeholder needs in order to build long-term relationships. The development of IMC as a process was born of marketing efforts to build profitability through relationships, first known as frequency or loyalty marketing, and later known as relationship marketing (Blakeman, 2009). Relationship cultivation and management are at the foundation of the IMC assertion that to reach "the heart and mind" of consumers, firms must integrate all communications (Debreceny & Cochrane, 2004). The reasoning follows that integrated or synchronized messages create "linkages in a receiver mind as a result of messages that connect" (Moriarty, 1996, p. 333). Thus, relationships are born of IMC's focus on message consistency.

Despite the seemingly holistic approach to relationships in IMC, the unequivocal focus in IMC research is promotion and the employment of each communication function in a unified promotional front. The Advertising Agency Association of America (AAAA) originally defined IMC with a basis on the "maximum communication impact" of a program that combines the efforts of advertising, sales promotion, and public relations (Kerr, et al., 2008, p. 515).

From the promotional perspective, IMC is a coordinated promotional effort that emphasizes efficiency and media control in brand strategy (Madhavaram, et al., 2005).

Wickham and Hall (2006) argue that the basic premise of IMC is that "through the coordination of marketing communications efforts, the firm can reach diverse audiences with a consistent message, thus resulting in optimal market coverage and greater impact on the target market for the least amount of investment" (p. 95).

Public relations' has primarily been categorized in IMC literature under promotion (Kerr et al., 2008; Lawler & Tourelle, 2002; Schultz & Kitchen, 1997), sparking a wave of criticism from public relations scholars and a reluctance to validate IMC within the discipline. Though this criticism is not without foundation, the evidence is "hardly conclusive" (Hallahan, 2007, p. 309), and making such an assumption may be short-sighted because the concept of IMC actually favors a public relations approach to communication and stands to grant public relations practitioners a greater role in communication decision-making. Caywood (2012) and Duncan and Caywood (1997) have argued that IMC's focus on relationships with all stakeholders, not just consumers, grants public relations decision-making power. Caywood (2012) argued that public relations offer an organization the greatest communicative strength because of its "experience and skill in the use of various communications-based strategies and tactics" toward building stakeholder relationships (Caywood, 2012; p. 6). Public relations' expertise in stakeholder needs is particularly critical for IMC because of its recognized focus on reaching all stakeholders, not just customers (Duncan, 2002; Schultz, 2005).

Despite the opportunity for greater recognition of public relations in IMC, scholar reluctance to address the concept and add their voice to IMC's development has opened the door for marketing to fill in the gaps. Hutton (2010) has argued that marketing is reinventing

itself as public relations through its focus on stakeholder relationships. In doing so, the organization-stakeholder relationship becomes product-focused, further realizing scholar concerns about a marketing takeover of the public relations domain. To avoid this self-fulfilling prophecy of public relations sublimation, the onus falls on public relations scholars to apply and insert the unique concepts and theories of the field into the understanding of IMC. In doing so, we need to reverse the current trend whereby "public relations practitioners do not seem to be taking advantage of their specific skills to leverage their status within the organization" (Toledano, 2010, p. 236).

IMC Levels and Public Relations Power

The concern about public relations ceding power and a management position in IMC may be based on an incomplete understanding of IMC and its levels of development within organizations. Though the concept of IMC prescribes coordinated communication for enhanced communicative effect and return on communication investment, the practice of IMC varies along a developmental continuum in which priorities and functional coordination change.

Duncan and Caywood (1996) originally suggested that IMC develops from awareness of the need to integrate communications to message coordination efforts, functional coordination, and eventually, stakeholder need integration. The first two phases represent low levels of IMC, and comprise communication technician efforts to synchronize and unify communication messaging to imbue communications with one-look and one-voice (Caywood, 1997; Duncan & Caywood, 1996). The high levels of IMC comprise functional coordination,

whereby integration is accomplished through collaboration between marketing, public relations, advertising, and other groups responsible for communication activities, and stakeholder integration, in which the needs of the variety of stakeholders are strategically prioritized and relationship management with the organization's most important stakeholders becomes the basis for communication decisions (Caywood, 1997).

Based on this framework of low and high communication integration, it may be natural to assume public relations relegation to technical activities because of the function's recognized strength in messaging. However, it is at the highest levels of IMC where public relations practitioners should see the greatest level of power because of their expertise in stakeholder relationship management. Duncan and Caywood (1996) and Caywood (2012) argued as much. Duncan and Caywood (1996) said that practitioner expertise in relationship management would grant public relations a "seat at the management table with traditional marketers" (Duncan & Caywood, 1996, p. 26). Caywood (2012) argued that integration's dependence on the broad array of a firm's stakeholders (i.e. employees, shareholders, media personnel, non-government officials, social media content generators, etc.) requires public relations "experience and skill in the use of various communications-based strategies and tactics" including boundary spanning, environmental scanning, and stakeholder management in order for the organization to effectively "operate in a complex social setting" (p. 8).

Identifying Public Relations Power in IMC

Public relations power has been both questioned in the overall structure of IMC and assumed in the highest levels of IMC, and yet few studies have empirically examined public relations roles in IMC. Research is needed to understand how public relations and other communication functions work together to produce the communication effectiveness and synergy that scholars and practitioners assume are attainable in an IMC structure (Ewing, 2009; Hallahan, 2007). Furthermore, research is needed to understand "the best ways of integrating the marketing communication operations" (Gurau, 2008, p. 172), including the imperative for effective public relations and marketing interaction.

Though few studies have explored public relations roles in IMC, Smith and Place (2013) initiated the empirical examination of public relations power through a qualitative investigation of public relations practitioner experiences in IMC. Their research concluded that the social media in communication management grants public relations practitioner power because expertise in social media use requires skills in stakeholder interaction. This assumption was in line with the original contention by Duncan and Caywood (1996) that IMC's priority on "direct response mechanisms" for relationship cultivation (p. 28) should lead to public relations power in IMC. Smith and Place (2013) reasoned that public relations would earn power through social media in IMC because of IMC's explicit focus on measurable relationship management, which is attainable through digital social media. Their qualitative research among public relations professionals suggested just that. Practitioners who used social media for their organizations reported an empowerment based on their knowledge and ability in social media use, expertise that other organizational members did not have.

Social Media and Public Relations

Social media is defined as a group of Internet-based applications built on the foundations of Web 2.0 that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Web 2.0 is the platform, whereby content is no longer created and distributed by selected individuals or institutions, but is instead continuously modified by all users in a collaborative and participatory nature. This content, often referred to as user-generated content, is marked by its public availability and the influence of end-users on its creation.

The interactive nature of the current media landscape is both compelling and challenging to public relations practitioners. Publics are empowered to generate and distribute content via various online communication channels such as blogs, social networking sites, and content communities (Lee, Lee, Park, & Cameron, 2010). From the practitioners' side, social media offers added value by allowing direct engagement with the public, and also by providing opportunities to adopt and leverage these new technology into their practice. Several studies (Curtis et al., 2010; Eyrich, Padman, & Sweester, 2008; Lariscy, Avery, Sweetser, & Howes, 2009; Wright & Hinson, 2009) have documented how public relations practitioners utilize social media in the work place, and they uniformly agree that practitioners are becoming more sophisticated and knowledgeable about adapting different social media tools into their strategies and tactics. For example, Curtis and colleagues (2010) reported that not only are social media tools

becoming beneficial tools for organizations to communicate, practitioners are also more likely to use social media tools if they find them to be credible.

From a theoretical perspective, a line of research has focused on testing the dialogic features of social media as a tool for fostering and maintaining relationships (Kelleher, 2009; Sweester, 2010), and for increasing organizational reputation (Lee & Park, 2013). These studies have concluded that social media is an excellent platform to build positive relationships and reputation. For crisis communication, social media has been examined as a tool for instilling and correcting information, and repairing reputation (Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2011), and as a potential platform for second-hand crisis information (Sweetser & Metzger, 2007). Meanwhile, Waters and Jamal (2011) applied the four models of public relations to examine how nonprofit organizations were using Twitter to communicate, and found that the public information and press agentry models were used more often than asymmetrical two-way or symmetrical two-way communication.

Contrary to the active research that examines social media as a toolset for excellent public relations practice, less is known regarding the role of social media for empowering public relations practitioners. Certainly, trade reports and anecdotal evidence suggests that social media has allowed practitioners to take a more active role to reaching out to the public. However, it still remains an important empirical question as to whether the advent of social media has empowered practitioners to have a more salient presence within the dominant coalition.

Social Media and Power

Social media offers dynamic roles for public relations practitioners. On one hand, the sheer amount of content generation and social media monitoring involved with social media may call for a technician role to manage the medium. On the other hand, because social media offers opportunities for relationship management and issues management, managerial roles that make policy decisions for public relations campaign outcomes may have more involvement with social media than technicians. Few studies have examined the relationship between social media competence and perceived power. Diga and Kelleher (2008) surveyed 115 PRSA members, and found that public relations practitioners who were frequent users of social network sites and social media tools had greater perceptions of their own structural, expert and prestige power. Specifically, perceived structural power was the greatest among the three types of power, suggesting that the opportunity to build relationships through social network sites helps build a practitioner's social capital, which may lead to boost status or prestige. In addition, there were no significant differences between managers and technicians in their social media use frequency: At the time of the study, both managers and technicians were learning how to adopt it into their everyday practice. In a similar vein, a survey among Turkish public relations practitioners found that they believe social media will help improve the professions' qualification, as well as function as a cost-effective tool for public relations activities (Alikilic & Atabek, 2012).

Power

Power in organizations has traditionally been theorized as a capacity for influence (French & Raven, 1959, 1968; Raven, 1965; 2008) or a function of organizational structure (Astley & Sachdeva, 1984; Kanter, 1977; Pfeffer, 1991). From a social influence perspective, power is the potential to change the beliefs, attitudes or behaviors of others, using available resources (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 1965; Raven, 2008). It is a context- and relationship-specific force of influence among social actors (Pfeffer, 1981, p.3), as well as efficacy, capacity, and the ability to mobilize resources to accomplish tasks (Kanter, 1980, p. 69).

French and Raven (1959, 1968) and Raven (1965, 1992, 2008) have developed and tested six bases of power to describe influence among actors in an organization: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, expert power, and informational power. Reward power describes one's capacity to offer positive incentive, such as pay or privileges (Raven, 2008, p. 2). Coercive power is an individual's expectation that he or she will receive punishment if he or she fails to conform to another's influence attempt. Legitimate power is defined as an individual's title or position of authority that is "accepted by the individual, by virtue of which the external agent can assert his power" (French & Raven, 1968, p. 265). French and Raven (1968) described referent power as one's attractiveness or personal charisma (p. 267). Expert power is one's extent of knowledge in comparison to his or her abilities or to an "absolute standard" (p. 267). Lastly, informational power wields persuasive reasoning and explanation to invoke change or acceptance (Raven, 2008, p. 2).

A structural approach to power, however, holds that power is the function of a social system involving division of labor (Pfeffer, 1981), position within a hierarchy (Astley & Sachdeva, 1984; Kruckhart 1984; Pfeffer, 1992), control of resources (Astley & Sachdeva, 1984; Kanter, 1997; Pfeffer, 1992), centrality within an organization's network (Astley & Sachdeva, 1984; Pfeffer, 1992), and patterns of social interactions (Pfeffer, 1991). Those with higher, more formal positions in an organizational hierarchy often hold more perceived authority, which translates to power (Kruckhart, 1984). Likewise, those who share rewards, opportunities, and resources may wield more power (Kanter, 1977). In terms of departments within an organizational structure, they may possess "power" when they become or are perceived as "irreplaceable" (Pfeffer, 1981). Therefore, by demonstrating, controlling or sharing knowledge, resources, or tools, departments, teams or individuals may also wield power within an organizational system.

Power and Public Relations

The study of power in public relations has drawn upon multiple epistemological and theoretical approaches. Definitions of power in the public relations industry have ranged from "the capacity to exert influence" (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995), "shifting relations of power that both constrain and create opportunities" (Berger, 2005), "empowerment" (Place, 2012), and "systems of language and meaning" (Holtzhausen, 2012). From a managerial, structural and influence-based perspective, the excellence theory (Grunig, 1992; Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995) posits that public relations is most powerful when the communication department has

access, membership, and influence within an organization's group of key decision-makers, or

dominant coalition (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995). From this management position, public

relations professionals can best educate organizational players about the value of the public

relations function (L.A. Grunig, 1992) and contribute to strategic planning (Dozier, Grunig, &

Grunig, 1995). This assumption of power has persisted among public relations professionals.

Berger and Reber (2006) found, for example, that public relations professionals defined

influence and power as "gaining a seat at the table" of key decision-makers (pp. 5-6), whereas

Edwards (2009) found that practitioners' occupation of exclusive positions generated greater

symbolic power for public relations, improving their "expert" status (p. 264).

Recent public relations scholarship has contributed new interpretations that promote

the study of power and public relations as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon

(Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002, p. 79) involving complex relations, structures, and social contexts

(Berger, 2005, p. 23). Critical and postmodern scholars, for example, perceive public relations as

the employment of discursive and strategic tactics to facilitate hegemonic power, elicit consent

(Motion & Weaver, 2005,p. 50) and shape perceptions of "truth" (Holtzhausen, 2012, p. 116;

Motion & Weaver, 2005, p. 64). Discourse is used by public relations professionals to promote,

sustain or resist political and economic ideologies (Motion & Weaver, 2005, p. 64) and to prove

their value, normalize understandings, and define what is "symbolically valued" within an

organization (Edwards, 2009, pp 266-267). Postmodern approaches to public relations,

however, critique managerial interpretations of power while advocating for professional

activism, resistance to organizational norms, stigmas and discourses, as well as independence

from dominant coalitions (i.e. Holtzhausen, 2000, 2012; Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002).

Drawing upon the literature regarding IMC, social media, and power, the following

hypotheses and research questions were posed:

H1: Public relations practitioners at higher levels in their organizational structure report higher levels of power.

H2: Social media expertise empowers public relations practitioners in IMC environments.

RQ1: What is the relationship between types of IMC environments and public relations practitioner perceptions of power?

RQ2: What factors contribute to public relations role typologies in IMC environments?

Method

In order to examine the relationship between integrated marketing communications

efforts, public relations power, and perceptions of social media competency, an online survey

was administrated and distributed to public relations professionals.

Survey Participants

Public relations professionals who were practicing public relations in the US were the

population for our study. In order to recruit a representative sample of practitioners across the

US, the researchers applied for an academic research request to use the Public Relations

Society of America (PRSA) membership list. Upon approval of the study by the participants'

respective institutional review boards (IRB), a recruitment letter that included the link to the

survey was sent out to PRSA members via email by the PRSA Research Committee. Simultaneously, the recruitment letter and survey link were shared with public relations professionals via the researchers' Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook accounts. The survey was available from March 7, 2015 to June 1, 2015.

One hundred and eighty one public relations professionals participated in the survey, and 150 practitioners completed the survey, making an approximately 84% completion rate. Survey participants were compensated with a chance to win a $50 Amazon gift card for their participation. After deleting missing data and outliers, 113 cases were used for the analysis.

Measurement Instrumentation

The survey focused on three main sets of variables: IMC level, public relations power, and social media expertise. Participants were also asked to answer questions related to their PR roles, level of decision making ability, perceived PR expertise, perceived PR accountability, and the type of organization they work for to obtain a better understanding of the data. The measurement items were mostly adopted and developed from previous research (e.g., Duncan & Caywood, 1996; French & Raven, 1968; Smith & Place, 2013).

IMC level. The measures for integrated marketing communication level were adapted from Duncan and Caywood (1996). Seven-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (= Strongly Disagree) to 7 (= Strongly Agree) were used to measure the following five items: "At my organization, we integrate communication through methods such as using the same messages, logos, or imagery in our communications," "At my organization, we view cooperation between

16

functions (i.e. public relations, marketing, and advertising) as necessary," and "At my organization, we expand communications to include all stakeholders," "At my organization, the needs of a variety of stakeholder are the focal point of our communication," and "At my organization, communication functions converge around building relationships with the full range of the organization's stakeholders." (α = .89).

Public relations power. Public relations power was measured using 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (= Not At All) to 7 (= Very Much So). The items were developed based on the literature of French and Raven (1959, 1968), Smith and Place (2013), and Edwards (2009). Participants were asked to rate their response for the following eight items: "I have a "seat at the table" (or participate in decision-making) when it comes to determining my organization's communication strategy" (dominant coalition power), "I have the ability to reward colleagues' behavior" (reward power), "I have influence in my organization because of my job title" (legitimate power), "I have the ability to make employment status decisions, such as firing an unproductive colleague" (coercive power), "I am sought after for my ability to provide career-related social support, such as mentoring others" (mentoring power), "I am sought after for my personality and charisma" (referent power), "I am sought after for my professional skills and knowledge" (expert power)," and "I have an equal voice with other decision-makers in my organization (discursive power).

Social media expertise. Items for social media power were derived from the qualitative findings from Smith and Place (2013). Public relations practitioners' perceived social media power were measured using 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (Not At All) to 7 (Very Much

So) for the following items: "I am the social media expert in my organization," "I am expected to have social media expertise in my organization," "I am valued for my social media expertise in my organization," and "I am able to influence people within my organization because of my social media expertise" (α = .93).

Public relations practitioners' decision making level. Practitioner's level of being in the dominant coalition was created using two items (1= Not at all; 7 = Very Much So): "I am considered a member of the decision-making body of my organization's communications function," and "I usually carry out the mechanics of generating communication products based on the decisions of others (reverse coded)." (α = .97).

Public relations roles. Participants were asked rate whether they fulfilled public relations-related duties in the following areas on a 7-point Likert scale (1= Not at all; 7 = Very Much So): Media relations, research, social media management, event planning, community relations, issues management, reputation management, crisis communication, government relations, and digital design.

Perceived PR expertise. Participant's self-perception of expertise was measured by asking whether they consider themself an expert in public relations on a 7-point Likert scale ((1= Not at all; 7 = Very Much So).

PR accountability. "I am accountable for public relations program outcomes," "I am responsible for making decisions regarding our public relations program activities." (α = .89).

Department responsible for IMC. Participants were asked to respond to whether the marketing department is responsible for communication management decisions or the PR

department is responsible for communication management decisions on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree).

Demographic information. Participants were also asked to provide information about their gender (female/male), years of experience in public relations (categorical), and the type of organization they work for (corporation/government/not-for-profit or association/PR agency or consultation/educational institution/professional association/other).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Participant's years of experience ranged from less than a year to 50 years, with 0 to 5 years of experience being the median. In addition, female participants (n = 68, 60.2%) outnumbered male participants (n = 42, 37.2%), which accurately reflected the gender distribution within the public relations profession. The majority of the participants worked for a non-profit organization (n = 26, 23%), followed by corporation/PR agency (n = 23, 20.4%), educational institution (n = 17, 15%), and government and military (n = 13, 6%). Approximately 5% of the participants (n = 6, 5.3%) responded as "other", and specified that they worked for a law firm, healthcare practice, think tank, a fully integrated marketing firm, etc.

In terms of public relations roles, participants in this study generally reported that they spend the majority of their time on reputation management (M = 5.50, *S.D.* = 1.74), followed by crisis communication (M = 5.30, *S.D.* = 1.97), social media management (M = 5.23, *S.D.* = 1.83), community relations (M = 4.85, *S.D.* = 2.05), issue management (M = 4.83, *S.D.* = 1.93), research

(*M* = 4.74, *S.D.* = 1.86), event planning (*M* = 4.45, *S.D.* = 2.08), digital design (*M* = 3.29, *S.D.* = 2.29), and government relations (*M* = 3.36, *S.D.* = 2.26).

Participants generally agreed that the PR department is responsible for communication management decisions (*M* = 5.34, *S.D.* = 1.79) rather than the marketing department (*M* = 4.19, *S.D.* = 2.08), and the mean difference was statistically significant *t*(109) = 4.53, *p* < .01.

Lastly, participants generally agreed that they had a say in the organization's decision-making body for communication strategies (*M* = 5.43, *S.D.* = 1.89). Interestingly, participants reported that co-workers considered them as a PR expert (*M* = 6.05, *S.D.* = 1.93) more so than they considered themselves a PR expert (*M* = 5.85, *S.D.* = 1.31), and the mean difference was different in a statistically meaningful way; *t*(109) = -2.31, *p* < .05.

Hypotheses testing and research questions

H1 proposed that there would be a positive relationship between public relations practitioners' decision-making level in an organization and levels of power. Series of bivariate correlation analyses were conducted to test the hypothesis. Public relations practitioners' level was positively correlated in a statistically meaningfully way with dominant coalition power *r* = .85, *p* < .01, legitimate power *r* = .74, *p* < .01, coercive power *r* = .52, *p* < .01, expert power *r* = .47, *p* < .01, reward power *r* = .43, *p* < .01, and mentoring power *r* = .38, *p* < .01, but not for referent power *r* = .16, and discursive power *r* = -.11.

To gain a better understanding of the data, we further conducted an independent samples t-test using a median split of the public relations practitioner's decision-making level. The results of independent samples t-tests showed a significant difference between those who

had high decision making ability (n = 48) and low decision making ability (n = 64) for dominant coalition power $t(110)$ = 1.78, $p < 0.001$, reward power $t(110)$ = -5.85, $p < 0.001$, legitimate power $t(101)$ = -10.32, $p < 0.001$, coercive power $t(110)$ = -7.99, $p < 0.001$, mentoring power $t(107)$ = -4.16, $p < 0.01$, and expert power $t(90)$ = -5.42, $p < 0.001$, but not for referent power $t(110)$ = -1.48, p = .14 and discursive power $t(110)$ = 1.78, p = .09. Table 1 displays the means and standard divinations for H1.

Table 1: *Means and standard deviations for power typology among decision making level*

Dependent Variables	Independent Variable: Decision Making Level	
	High	Low
Dominant coalition power	6.83***	4.38***
	(.38)	(1.91)
Reward power	5.67***	3.64***
	(1.87)	(1.77)
Legitimate power	6.45***	3.97***
	(.88)	(1.62)

Coercive power	5.60***	2.52***
	(1.99)	(2.02)
Mentoring power	5.88***	4.60***
	(1.28)	(1.93)
Referent power	5.38	4.94
	(1.39)	(1.66)
Expert power	6.62***	5.59***
	(1.35)	(.57)
Discursive power	4.33	4.89
	(1.81)	(1.50)

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent standard deviations.

***p < .001*

H2 proposed that there would be a positive relationship between social media expertise and perceptions of power in IMC environments. Similar to H1, series of bivariate correlations tests were conducted, followed by an independent samples t-test for further examination.

Public relations practitioners' social media expertise was positively correlated in a statistically meaningfully way for dominant coalition power $r = .34$, $p < .01$, legitimate power $r = .32$, $p < .01$, expert power $r = .29$, $p < .01$, reward power $r = .27$, $p < .01$, referent power $r = .22$, $p < .05$, and coercive power $r = .19$, $p < .05$, but not for communicative power $r = .10$, $p = .27$ and mentoring power $r = .15$, $p = .13$.

The results of independent samples t-tests showed a significant difference between those who had high social media expertise ($n = 58$) and low social media expertise ($n = 45$) for

dominant coalition power $t(74)$ = -3.16, p < 0.01, reward power $t(102)$ = -2.62, p < 0.05,

legitimate power $t(81)$ = -2.85, p < 0.01, coercive power $t(101)$ = -2.12, p < 0.05, and expert

power $t(101)$ = -2.48, p < 0.05, but not for referent power $t(102)$ = -1.89, p = .06, mentoring

power $t(101)$ = -1.54, p = .13, and discursive power $t(102)$ = -.88, p = .38. In sum, H2 was also

partially supported. Table 2 displays the means and standard divinations for H2.

Table 2: *Means and standard deviations for power typology among social media expertise*

Dependent Variables	Independent Variable: Social Media Expertise	
	High	Low
Dominant coalition power	5.88**	4.71**
	(1.54)	(2.23)
Reward power	4.98*	3.93*
	(2.03)	(2.01)
Legitimate power	5.41**	4.36**
	(1.62)	(1.99)
Coercive power	4.25*	3.20*
	(2.52)	(2.42)
Mentoring power	5.37	4.82
	(1.72)	(1.93)
Referent power	5.39	4.80
	(1.49)	(1.67)
Expert power	6.62**	5.59**
	(1.35)	(.57)

Discursive power	4.49	4.78
	(1.58)	(1.75)

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent standard deviations.

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

RQ 1 asked the relationship between the degree of IMC environment and perceptions of public relations power. The results of independent samples t-tests showed a significant difference between those who worked in highly integrated organizations (*n =57*), and hardly integrated organizations (*n = 56*) for dominant coalition power $t(111) = -3.16, p < 0.05$, reward power $t(111) = -1.97, p < 0.05$, legitimate power $t(110) = -2.84, p < 0.01$, coercive power $t(107) = -2.65, p < 0.01$, mentoring power $t(110) = -2.27, p < .05$, and expert power $t(101) = -2.48, p < 0.05$, but not for referent power $t(111) = -1.47, p = .15$, and discursive power $t(102) = 1.68, p = .10$.. Table 3 displays the means and standard divinations for RQ1.

Table 3: *Means and standard deviations for power typology among IMC level*

	Independent Variable: Level of IMC	
Dependent Variables	High	Low
Dominant coalition power	5.98*	4.89*
	(1.77)	(1.88)
Reward power	4.89*	4.14*
	(2.14)	(1.92)

Legitimate power	5.51**	4.56**
	(1.84)	(1.70)
Coercive power	4.45**	3.23**
	(2.28)	(2.60)
Mentoring power	5.54*	4.79*
	(1.71)	(1.80)
Referent power	5.34	4.91
	(1.48)	(1.61)
Expert power	6.62*	5.59*
	(1.35)	(.57)
Discursive power	4.38	4.89
	(1.41)	(1.85)

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent standard deviations.

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

RQ2 asked what additional factors contribute to public relations for power typologies. For this study, perceived PR expertise and PR accountability were tested as additional factors using multiple regressions.

Results from the multiple regression showed that both perceived PR expertise ($\beta = .30$, $p < .01$) and PR accountability ($\beta = .33$, $p < .01$) predicted dominant coalition power and coercive power (perceived PR expertise: $\beta = .26$, $p < .05$, PR accountability: $\beta = .28$, $p < .01$). Specifically, the model explained approximately 33% of the variance for dominant coalition power $R = .33$, $F(2,110) = 26.50$, $p < .01$, and 23% of the variance for coercive power $R^2 = .23$, $F(2,110) = 17.50$,

$p < .01$. For reward power and legitimate power, perceived PR expertise was the only variable that predicted reward power (β = .26, $p < .05$), and legitimate power (β = .38, $p < .01$). Specifically, the model explained approximately 15% of the variance for reward power R^2 = .15, $F(2,110)$ = 11.10, $p < .05$, and about 26% of legitimate power R^2 = .26, $F(2,110)$ = 20.57 $p < .01$. Meanwhile, only perceived PR expertise statistically significantly predicted mentoring power (β = .47, $p < .01$), and the model explained about 21% of the variance R^2 = .21, $F(2,110)$ = 15.75, $p < .01$, and expert power (β = .31, $p < .01$), explaining about 17% of the variance R^2 = .17, $F(2,110)$ = 12.66, $p < .01$. Finally neither perceived PR expertise nor PR accountability significantly predicted referent power (perceived PR expertise: β = .08, $p = .50$, PR accountability: β = -.07, $p = .58$) or discursive power (perceived PR expertise: β = .09, $p = .46$, PR accountability: β = -.12, $p < .31$).

Discussion

This exploratory study surveyed 110 public relations professionals working in integrated communication environments about their perceptions regarding the role of public relations, power, and social media influence. Results suggest that public relations' influence in IMC is situated at the nexus of structural power and traditional influence-based notions of power, depending on practitioners' public relations and social media expertise, as well as level of IMC integration. Additionally, practitioners working in an IMC environment perceived the public

relations department as having more responsibility for communication management decisions compared to the marketing department. This finding echoes Caywood's (1997) point that integration ultimately increases public relations power and decision making abilities.

Consistent with previous literature (L.A. Grunig, 1992; Berger & Reber, 2006), professionals in higher levels of an organizations' structure, often occupying a "seat at the table" in the dominant coalition, perceived a greater sense of power associated with the public relations function. In turn, practitioners associated their structural power within the IMC hierarchy (i.e. Astley & Sachdeva, 1984, Krackhardt, 1984; Pfeffer, 1992) with their capacity to leverage PR knowledge (expert power), offer incentives (reward power), influence using their title or position (legitimate power), punish (coercive power), or guide others (mentoring power). Applying Kanter (1977) and Kruckhardt (1984), it seems quite natural that public relations professionals higher in an integrated structure or decision-making group would perceive more authority and control of rewards or opportunities. Findings illustrate a multi-faceted landscape of public relations' power and influence (Berger, 2005) in integrated communication structures, invoking French & Raven's (1959, 1968) bases of interpersonal influence and structural power rather than discursive, charisma, or value-based notions of power (Edwards, 2009; Smith & Place, 2013). Professionals seeking to maximize the influence of public relations in integrated environments should not rely on capacity-based notions of power alone, but should strategically utilize discourse to shape perceptions (Holtzhausen, 2012), demonstrate public relations' value, and further define how public relations is valued in an organization (Edwards, 2009, p. 266-267).

This study complemented previous research by Smith and Place (2013), suggesting that social media expertise affects public relations power in integrated environments. Additionally, findings support previous studies (i.e. Diga and Kelleher [2009]) that found a positive association between social media use and prestige power, structural power, and expert power. Social media expertise was particularly important to respondents' perceptions of legitimate, expert, reward and referent power, but had little effect on notions of discursive or mentoring power. Social media may facilitate public relations power in IMC environments through value creation (Smith & Place, 2013), as practitioners leverage tangible results, such as website hits, tweets, or Facebook "likes," in fulfillment of organizational objectives. Thus, social media expertise may afford public relations practitioners with expertise power that may lead to higher levels of power within the organization. However, at the same time, the lack of correlation with discursive and mentoring power demonstrates that social media expertise may not be enough to grant practitioners an equal voice with other decision-makers within the organization. This suggests a number of possible explanations that are worthy of further investigation: 1) social media remain a technical consideration reserved for those with expertise rather than a managerial consideration 2) social media may present an in-group, out-group effect whereby those "in the know" (i.e. practitioners) may be separate from those who are not, keeping public relations practitioners disconnected from broader organizational decisions and mentorship opportunities. Either way, the empowering effect of social media bears further investigation, and this research points to the need to explore the topic more broadly using interpersonal and organizational theories to understand group effects. Furthermore, as organizations increasingly

recruit, retain, and employ millennials' and younger "digital natives'" social media expertise (Joos, 2008; Jue, Marr & Kassotakis, 2009; Williams, Crittendon & Keo, 2012), organizations should further explore how mentoring may be utilized to empower public relations professionals to succeed in IMC environments.

Theoretical and practical implications -

This study offers several theoretical and practical implications that warrant further exploration, both quantitatively and qualitatively:

- Public relations practitioner power in integrated communication structures is related to structural and influence-based (reward, legitimate, expert and coercive) power.

- Social media expertise significantly mediates public relations practitioners' personal influence through legitimate, expert, reward, coercive, and referent forms of power.

- Maximum levels of power are associated with public relations practitioners in highly integrated environments who display social media and public relations expertise.

Public relations professionals in IMC structures must remain keenly aware of how years of experience, social media prowess, and position within an organizational hierarchy or structure affect their ability to wield influence and advocate for the value of public relations. Because IMC is increasingly focused on fostering and strengthening stakeholder relationships (Duncan, 2008; Duncan & Moriarty, 1997; Schultz, 2007), public relations professionals may best create value and empower themselves by discursively constructing their social media knowledge and expertise as "relationship management" to sustain a political and economic "edge" within an integrated structure (i.e. Edwards, 2009; Motion & Weaver, 2005).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study is admittedly limited by its small sample size, and findings here may not represent, fully, the picture of public relations influence in IMC. For this reason, we can neither confirm nor deny claims by scholars that IMC stands to reduce public relations power. However, the value of this study is that it is the first study to move beyond debating assumptions to quantitatively examine the influence of IMC on public relations power. As such, this study's value is as an exploratory study, and the findings call for additional research into IMC's effect.

First, future research should replicate this study to explore the explanatory and predictive power of the variables identified in the present study. Second, the influence of social media as a mediating factor on public relations practitioner power in IMC bears further investigation, including the difference between the consideration of social media as a tactic rather than as a relationship management tool in an organization. Future research may also benefit from developing and validating a social media power scale.

In conclusion, this study's findings show that assumptions of a marketing takeover and public relations relegation to technical roles in IMC are hardly conclusive, consistent with Hallahan's (2007) argument. It may be the case that analyzing public relations power primarily on working with marketing in an integrated structure is not enough to define IMC's effect. Further investigation is needed to uncover the complex influences on public relations

practitioners in IMC, including the level of IMC implementation and the consideration of social

media as a relationship management tool.

References

Alikilic, O., & Atabek, U. (2012). Social media adoption among Turkish public relations professionals: A survey of practitioners. *Public Relations Review,38*(1), 56-63.

Arens, W. F., Weigold, M. F., & Arens, C. (2013). *Contemporary advertising & integrated marketing communications (14 ed).* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Astley, W.G. & Sachdeva, P.S. (1984). Structural sources of intraorganizational power: A theoretical synthesis. *Academy of Management Review, 9*(1), 104-113.

Berger, B. (2005). Power over, power with, and power to relations: Critical reflections on public relations, the dominant coalition, and activism. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 17(1)*, 5-28.

Berger, B. K., & Reber, B. H. (2006). *Gaining influence in public relations: The role of resistance in practice*. Routledge.

Briones, R. L., Kuch, B., Liu, B. F., & Jin, Y. (2011). Keeping up with the digital age: How the American Red Cross uses social media to build relationships. *Public Relations Review*, *37*(1), 37-43.

Blakeman, R. (2009). *The barebones introduction to integrated marketing communication*. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield.

Caywood, C. (2012). *The Handbook of Strategic Public Relations and Integrated Marketing Communications (2*nd *ed).* New York: McGraw Hill.

Caywood, C. (1997). *Handbook of Strategic Public Relations & Integrated Communication*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Curtis, L., Edwards, C., Fraser, K. L., Gudelsky, S., Holmquist, J., Thornton, K., & Sweetser, K. D. (2010). Adoption of social media for public relations by nonprofit organizations. *Public Relations Review*, *36*(1), 90-92.

Delaria, K., Kane, J., Porter, J., & Strong, F. (2010). *Blurring the lines, turf battles and tweets: The real impact of integrated communications on marketing and PR.* Retrieved from

http://img.vocus.com/white-papers/integratedcomsurvey.pdf

Diga, M., & Kelleher, T. (2009). Social media use, perceptions of decision-making power, and public relations roles. *Public Relations Review*, *35*(4), 440-442.

Dozier, D. M., Grunig, L. A., & Grunig, J. E. (1995). *Manager's guide to excellence in public   relations and communication management*. Routledge.

Debreceny, P., & Cochrane, L. (2004). Two disciplines on same road. *Advertising Age, 75*(45), 28.

Duncan, T.R. (2005) IMC in industry: more talk than walk. *Journal of Advertising, 34*(4), 5–6.

Duncan, T. R. & Caywood, C. (1996). The concept, process, and evolution of integrated marketing communication. In E. Thorson and J. Moore (Eds.), *Integrated communication: Synergy of persuasive voices.* (pp. 13-34). Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Edwards, L. (2009). Symbolic power and public relations practice: Locating individual practitioners in their social context. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 21*(3),   251-272.

Ewing, M. T. (2009). Integrated marketing communications measurement and evaluation. *Journal of Marketing Communications, 15*(2), 103-117.

Eyrich, N., Padman, M. L., & Sweetser, K. D. (2008). PR practitioners' use of social media tools and communication technology. *Public relations review,34*(4), 412-414.

French, J.R.P., & Raven, B. (1968). The bases of social power. In D. Cartwright and A. Zander (Eds.), *Group dynamics: Research and theory* (pp. 259-269). New York: Harper & Row.

Gronstedt, A. (1996). Integrating marketing communication and public relations: A stakeholder relations model. In E. Thorson & J. Moore (Eds.), *Integrated communication: Synergy of persuasive voices.* (pp. 287-304). Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Grunig, L. A. (1992). Power in the public relations department. In J. E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communications management* (pp. 483-501).

Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Gurau, C. (2008). Integrated online marketing communication: Implementation and management. *Journal of Communication Management, 12*(2), 169-184.

Hallahan, K. (2007). Integrated communication: Implications for public relations beyond excellence. In E. L. Toth (Ed.), *The future of excellence in public relations and communication management (pp. 299-336).* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Holtzhausen, D. R. (2000). Postmodern values in public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 12*(1), 93-114.

Holtzhausen, D. R. (2002). Towards a postmodern research agenda for public relations. *Public Relations Review*, *28*(3), 251-264.

Holtzhausen, D. R., & Voto, R. (2002). Resistance from the margins: The postmodern public relations practitioner as organizational activist. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *14*(1), 57-84.

Hutton, J. G. (2010). "Defining the relationship between public relations and marketing: Public relations' most important challenge". In R. L. Heath (Ed), *The Sage Handbook of Public Relations (pp. 509-522).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kanter, R. (1977). *Men and women of the corporation*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.

Mintzberg, H. (1983). *Power in and around organizations* (Vol. 142). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Motion, J., & Weaver, C. K. (2005). A discourse perspective for critical public relations research: Life sciences network and the battle for truth. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *17*(1), 49-67.

Joos, J. G. (2008). Social media: New frontiers in hiring and recruiting. *Employment Relations Today*, *35*(1), 51-59.

Jue, A. L., Marr, J. A., & Kassotakis, M. E. (2009). *Social media at work: How networking tools propel organizational performance*. John Wiley & Sons.

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business horizons*, *53*(1), 59-68.

Kelleher, T. (2009). Conversational voice, communicated commitment, and public relations outcomes in interactive online communication. *Journal of Communication*, *59*(1), 172-188.

Kerr, G., Schultz, D., Patti, C., & Kim, I. (2008). An inside-out approach to integrated marketing communication: An international analysis. *International Journal of Advertising, 27*(4), 511-548.

Kiley, D. (2011). What lurks behind Chrysler F-bomb? Social media turf war. *AdAge*. Retrieved from http://adage.com/article/news/social-media-turf-war-chrysler-f- bomb-twitter-dustup/149368/

Kliatchko, J. (2008). Revisiting the IMC construct: A revised definition and four pillars. *International Journal of Advertising, 27*(1), 133-160.

Krackhardt, D. (1990). Assessing the political landscape: Structure, cognition, and power in organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 342-369.

Lariscy, R. W., Avery, E. J., Sweetser, K. D., & Howes, P. (2009). An examination of the role of online social media in journalists' source mix. *Public Relations Review*, *35*(3), 314-316.

Lawler, A. & Tourelle, G. (2002). Public relations: The integrated communication tool in the launch of a new software operating system—A case study. *Journal of Communication Management, 7(2),* 156-159.

Lee, H., & Park, H. (2013). Testing the impact of message interactivity on relationship management and organizational reputation. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *25*(2), 188-206.

Lee, H., Park, S. A., Lee, Y., & Cameron, G. T. (2010). Assessment of motion media on believability and credibility: An exploratory study. *Public Relations Review*, *36*(3), 310-312.

Madhavaram, S., Badrinarayanan, V., & McDonald, R. E. (2005). Integrated marketing communication (IMC) and brand identity as critical components of brand equity strategy. *Journal of Advertising, 34*(4), 69-80.

Moriarty, S. E. (1996). The circle of synergy: Theoretical perspectives and an evolving IMC research agenda. In E. Thorson & J. Moore (Eds.), *Integrated communication: Synergy of persuasive voices.* (pp. 333-353). Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Pfeffer, J. (1981). *Power in organizations.* Marshfield, MA: Pitman Publishing, Inc.

Pfeffer, J. (1991). Organization theory and structural perspectives on management. *Journal of Management*, *17*(4), 789-803.

Pfeffer, J. (1992). *Managing with power: Politics and influence in organization*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Place, K. R. (2012). Power-control or empowerment? How women public relations practitioners make meaning of power. *Journal of Public Relations   Research*, *24*(5), 435 450.

Place, K. R., & Vardeman-Winter, J. (2013). Hegemonic discourse and self-discipline: Exploring Foucault's concept of bio-power among public relations professionals. *Public Relations Inquiry*, *2*(3), 305-325.

Raven, B.H. (1965). Social influence and power. In I.D. Steiner & M. Fishbein (Eds.), *Current studies in social psychology* (pp. 371-382). New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Raven, B.H. (1992). A power/interaction model of interpersonal influence: French and   Raven thirty years later. *Journal of Social Behavior & Personality, 7*(2), 1992,   217-244.

Raven, B.H. (2008). The bases of power and the power/interaction model of interpersonal influence. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy, 8*(1), 1-22.

Schultz, D. E. (2007). Northwestern University's Don Schultz, the ''father of integrated marketing communications. Retrieved from http://www.medill-imc.podomatic.com.

Schultz, D. E. (2005). IMC research must focus more on outcomes. *Journal of Advertising, 34*(4), 6-7.

Schultz, D. E. & Kitchen, P. J. (1997). Integrated marketing communications in U.S. advertising agencies: An exploratory study. *Journal of Advertising Research, 37*(5)*,* 7-18.

Smith, B. G., & Place, K. R. (2013). Integrating Power? Evaluating Public Relations Influence in an Integrated Communication Structure. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *25*(2), 168-187.

Sweetser, K. D. (2010). A losing strategy: The impact of nondisclosure in social media on relationships. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *22*(3), 288-312.

Sweetser, K. D. and Metzgar, E. (2007). Communicating during crisis: Use of blogs as a relationship management tool. Public Relations Review, 2007, 33, 340-342.

Toledano, M. (2010). Professional competition and cooperation in the digital age: A pilot study of New Zealand practitioners. *Public Relations Review, 36,* 230-237.

Waters, R. D., & Jamal, J. Y. (2011). Tweet, tweet, tweet: A content analysis of nonprofit organizations' Twitter updates. *Public Relations Review*, *37*(3), 321-324.

Wickham, M. and Hall, L. (2006). An examination of integrated marketing communications in the business-to-business environment: the case of the Tasmanian light shipbuilding cluster. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, *12*(2), 95-108.

Williams, D. L., Crittenden, V. L., Keo, T., & McCarty, P. (2012). The use of social media: an exploratory study of usage among digital natives. *Journal of Public Affairs*, *12*(2), 127-136.

Wright, D. K., & Hinson, M. D. (2009). An updated look at the impact of social media on public relations practice. *Public Relations Journal*, *3*(2), 1-2.