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COMMENTARY
A conceptual model for public relations in museums

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to present a conceptual model for public relations specific to museums.

Design/methodology/approach – Based on relevant literature, a contingency model is developed for the public relations practices of museums.

Findings – The model offers the market orientation level of the management and the interest level of the publics as the major factors that influence the effectiveness of the public relations programs in museums. The interest level of the publics is offered as a moderating variable.

Practical implications – The model suggests that the effectiveness of the public relations programs of museums depends on two major factors. Although the interest level of the publics may seem to be uncontrollable at first glance, its negative impact can be largely controllable by managers by changing their own market orientation level – by adapting the public relations strategy to the targeted public depending on the interest level of that public.

Originality/value – The model is specifically designed for museums. It can be accepted as the first public relations model specifically offered for museums. The model here recognises the relationship between marketing and public relations.

Keywords Public relations, Modelling, Museums, Market orientation

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Since the 1970s, changes have been taking place in museums around the world (McLean, 1995; Ross, 2004). Kotler and Kotler (1998, p. xx) point out that today's museums are concerned not only with cutbacks in public funding, but also with increasing competition for private support. Such economic pressures have shifted museums' focus from collecting objects to serving audiences (Kotler and Kotler, 2000), and a new emphasis has been placed on museum-audience relationships (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994, p.1; 2000). Today the relationship between the museum and its many and diverse "publics" is as important as its collections (Hooper-Greenhill,

1994, p. 6). Accordingly, the International Council on Museums defines a museum as "a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment" (International Council of Museums, 2004).

This radical shift in museum function, purpose and priorities, influences the nature of museum management (Gilmore and Rentschler, 2002). Museums are increasingly using marketing tools and techniques to achieve greater visibility, to enlarge their offerings, to develop a broader audience, and to raise income (McLean, 1995; Kotler and Kotler, 2000; Yorke and Jones, 2001; Gilmore and Rentschler, 2002). McLean (1995, p. 601) says: "Although some museums may not consciously recognize it as such, they are being expected to develop a marketing orientation".

"Marketing orientation can be described as the implementation of the marketing concept" which is "basically a philosophy of business that places the customer at the centre of organizational activities" (Farrell, 2002, p. 1). Therefore, market orientation is defined as "the set of cross-functional processes and activities directed at creating and satisfying customers through continuous needs-assessment" (Deshpandé and Farley, 1998, p. 213), and thus is considered a core concept of marketing (Matsuno *et al.*, 2005). A number of research findings suggest that there is a positive relationship between market orientation and performance, not only in profit organisations (Narver and Slater, 1990; Deshpandé and Farley, 1998), but also in not-for-profit organisations (Cano *et al.*, 2004, Camarero and Garrido, 2008). McLean (1997, p. 41) suggests marketing orientation as the key to long-term survival and goal achievement for museums.

Kotler and Mindak (1978) point out that although marketing is an emerging issue in not-for-profit organisations such as hospitals, colleges and museums, public relations is a well-established function. Public relations is defined as "the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends" (Cutlip *et al.*, 1985, p. 4). Kotler and Kotler (1998, p. 236) say: "public relations and marketing are complementary functions"; the main function of marketing is to influence behaviour, while public relations is responsible for forming, maintaining or changing public attitudes, which in turn influence behaviour toward the organisation or its products. Kotler and Mindak (1978, p. 19) point out that "the neat and tidy divisions separating marketing and public relations are breaking down". Therefore, it is possible to solve a marketing problem by using public relations activities. It may be equally possible to solve a public relations problem by utilising the disciplined orientation in marketing (Kotler and Mindak, 1978).

Thus, the central argument of this paper is that marketing principles should be an integral part of the public relations practices of the museums. Accordingly, the present study aims to present a conceptual model for public relations in museums in which market orientation is offered as an antecedent of effectiveness in public relations programs.

In the following section, first relevant literature in "public relations and marketing in museums" and "models of public relations" will be reviewed. Second, the proposed model for museum public relations will be introduced. Our objective, in this paper, is to

build a foundation for the systematic development of a theory for museum public relations.

Public relations and marketing in museums

As pointed out by Lewis (1986, p. 8), "today's complex society, combined with a high public expectation of the services provided for them, demand that museums effectively promote their work like any other service". In this respect, McLean (1997, p. 152) emphasises public relations, media editorial and word of mouth as extremely important methods of communication for museums. Due to shrinking sources of income, museums started to depend on their publics for patronage and support, as a result, "public relations has grown its importance for museums" (Schoen, 2005, p. 25). However, little scholarly research specifically addresses public relations in museums (Schoen, 2005, pp. 18, 25).

Adams (1983, p. 1) says: "Successful public relations today means a relationship with, rather than simply to, the public – an exchange of information and ideas". The emerging concept of public relations requires firms to listen and communicate with their publics and be responsive to them (Adams, 1983, p. 1). Public relations is used to nurture dialogue with various groups whose interest is vital for the museum to achieve its objectives (Kreisberg, 1986a). Indeed, the survival of the museum depends on public understanding (Kreisberg, 1986b).

Parallel with the developing importance given to visitors and their experiences in the museum, museum public relations has developed from a communications function to a marketing function (Bellow, 1986). In this respect, Kotler and Kotler (1998, p. 236) define public relations as a management function that helps marketing to be effective by providing the conditions, atmosphere and environment through generating attention, visibility and news. Although public relations and marketing are complementary functions, they have separate, but linked, domains of responsibility. In the case of museums, while public relations is responsible for generating favourable publicity, images and attitudes in relation to patrons, sponsors, visitors and other stakeholders, marketing is responsible for attracting and satisfying the same publics.

Models of public relations

There are a number of public relations models in literature. In the following section, we review the major models developed for general public relations practices of organisations. Based on this review, we offer a public relations model for museums by recognising their specific context, issues and problems.

Four models of public relations

Considering the historical evolution of public relations, Grunig and Hunt (1984, pp. 21-3) define four models of public relations to explain public relations practices of organisations. The models are defined on two dimensions: the nature (one-way versus two-way) and purpose (asymmetrical/unbalanced versus symmetrical/balanced) of communication. The first model, *press agentry/publicity*, is propaganda, where telling the truth is not important (Grunig and Hunt, 1984, p. 22); it is the least effective and ethically most questionable model (Gordon and Kelly, 1998). The second model, *public information*, is a type of public relations whose aim is to disseminate truthful information. The third model, *two-way asymmetrical*, is defined as "scientific

persuasion", where the communication is two-way but unbalanced. The intention of the organisation is to persuade the publics to support it and behave as it wants them to behave. The fourth model, *two-way symmetrical*, is used to establish mutual understanding between the organisation and the publics; the organisation seeks to create a balanced effect by using dialogue (Grunig and Hunt, 1984, p. 23). The first two models are one-way, used to give information about the organisation to the public; the other two models are two-way and rely on research. They are therefore defined as more "sophisticated" models (Grunig *et al.*, 1995). Grunig and Grunig (1992) argue that the last model is the ideal one for the organisations to be both effective and ethical. As pointed out by Gower (2006), two-way symmetrical communication is described as an excellent model for the public relations practice and has therefore dominated the theoretical paradigm in the field. Research findings indicate that some organisations practise several of the models together. Given that organisations often combine the two-way asymmetrical model with the two-way symmetrical model, and press agentry with public information, the authors have further developed the four models as points on two continua (Grunig and Grunig, 1992; Grunig *et al.*, 1995).

Grunig and Grunig (1992) place the one-way models on one continuum labelled *craft public relations*, and the two-way models on another continuum labelled *professional public relations*. Based on research findings from Murphy (1991), Grunig and Grunig (1992) set up the professional continuum with asymmetrical purposes (i.e. persuasion) on one end and symmetrical purposes (i.e. collaboration) on the other; they call this *mixed motive public relations*. With their continuum, authors still argue that the most effective public relations will fall toward the symmetrical end of the continuum.

Later, using the qualitative research findings of their Excellence Study, Dozier *et al.* (1995, pp. 47-50) improve the model and reformulate it into a contingency model. They define each end of the continuum as asymmetrical with the middle of the continuum containing a symmetrical, win-win zone where both the organisation and its public can use negotiation and persuasion to find common ground (Sriramesh *et al.*, 1999; Grunig *et al.*, 2002, pp. 355-8). Most recently, Grunig (2001) argues moving beyond the typology of the four models to develop the dimensions underlying this new two-way symmetrical or dialogical public relations.

Although many scholars have embraced the models, some others (e.g. Leichty and Springston, 1993; Pieczka, 1996; Cancel *et al.*, 1997) reacted negatively (Grunig, 2001; Grunig *et al.*, 2002, p. 309). Leichty and Springston (1993) criticise the four models under two main headings as problems related to measurement and conceptualisation.

A lot of research has focused on developing measures for these models (Grunig and Grunig, 1992), but the observed reliability coefficients are lower than the minimum recommended (Leichty and Springston, 1993; Cancel *et al.*, 1997; Holtzhausen *et al.*, 2003). Leichty and Springston (1993) also criticise them on the criterion validity after recalculating the correlations between the four models and the criterion variables reported by Grunig and Grunig (1992). Since one-way and two-way models show similar patterns of relationship with all criterion variables, the authors claim that there are only two distinct public relations models, i.e. the one-way and two-way models.

Leichty and Springston (1993) argue further that the measurement problems cannot be solved with better measurement techniques, since the core problem is in the conceptualisation of the models. They argue first that organisations practice public relations in different ways across publics and across time. They assume that an

organisation differentiates between publics and interacts with them differently according to how that public is perceived by the organisation. These researchers suggest that the failure in the contingency formulation of the early works of Grunig and Grunig (1992) might be caused by the aggregation problem across publics and time, since they originally assumed that organisations vary their public relations model as a function of the overall environment of that organisation. In order to solve this problem, public relations style must be measured at the relational level instead of at the organisational level. Second, Leichty and Springston (1993) argue that since there is no one best way of doing public relations, an adequate theory of public relations should be situational and identify the most appropriate public relations approach for a given organisation-public relationship. They acknowledge Grunig and Grunig's (1992) public relations models as the first systematic attempt to explain the public relations practices of organisations and they suggest that the four models may be regarded as basic descriptive categories of public relations for different types of organisation-public relationships and different relational stages.

Contingency theory of accommodation in public relations

Cancel *et al.* (1997) and Yarbrough *et al.* (1998) also criticize the four models of public relations for offering two-way symmetrical public relations as the best and most effective model of communication. They argue for a contingency theory and propose a continuum ranging from *pure advocacy* (associated with asymmetrical orientations) to *pure accommodation* (associated with symmetrical orientations) to capture the complexity and multiplicity of the public relations environment. Cancel *et al.* (1997, p. 38) claim that "in spite of the statistical problems, the four models are remarkably robust and sound concepts", but instead of poles on two continua, they would work better as clusters of activities, techniques, and strategies. The continuum offered by Cancel *et al.* (1997, p. 35) represents a possible range of positions an organisation can take in dealing with its numerous publics; "true excellence in public relations may result from picking the appropriate point along the continuum that best fits the current need of the organization and its publics".

The findings of Yarbrough *et al.* (1998) and Cancel *et al.* (1999) support the contingency theory; public relations practitioners use varying amounts of advocacy and accommodation according to a number of variables. The most supported variables include corporation business exposure, the characteristics of the external public's claims or requests, and the characteristics of the external public (Cancel *et al.*, 1999).

Public relations process model

As stated by Liu and Horsley (2007, p. 382), the public relations process model offered by Hazelton and Long (1988) "has predominantly been used as an educational tool in public relations courses". According to the model, public relations process is about goal-driven communication strategies used by organisations to interact with their target publics in the environment. Through communication, these public relations goals help firms to achieve their own organisational goals. However, attributes of publics must be examined beforehand to choose the most appropriate public relations strategies for the specific audience segments (Liu and Horsley, 2007).

According to the model, the organisation's strategy selection is guided by its perception regarding the audience; therefore, the model assumes that an organisation's

public relations behaviour is situational. During the research and analysis phase of the public relations decision process, the organisation identifies the attributes of publics to select the most appropriate and effective public relations strategies in achieving its organisational goals. In this way, public relations strategies serve as a functional link between organisational goals and publics (Werder, 2005).

The communication grid
Van Ruler (2004) proposes a model made up of basic communication strategies based on communication theory and public relations approaches practised in The Netherlands. By reviewing 50 years of Dutch professional public relations literature, he produces a typology of possible roles in public relations, and hence communication models in use. Equating communication management with public relations, the author recognises Grunig and Hunt's (1984, p. 22) one-way asymmetrical, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models as the distinct concepts of communication.

By analysing differences in communication theory, first van Ruler (2004) identifies six possible communication models based on two dimensions in relation to the concept of communication in public relations. These two dimensions are defined as "the degree of involvement of the other party in the communication process" and "the view of meaning". Under the involvement dimension, the author further identifies three positions:

(1) communication as an undirected emission process;

(2) communication as a controlled one-way process; and

(3) communication as a two-way process.

As suggested by van Ruler (2004), when these dimensions are placed into a 3×2 matrix, at least six different communication models can be identified.

Second, the author explores whether these models can be found in the professional literature by conducting a survey of Dutch professional sources published between 1950 and 2000. His search reveals seven public relations roles that can be associated with seven public relations approaches. However, he discards the three models of communication defined as an undirected emission process that does not concern what is expressed. As stated by the author, since these models suggest that there is no need for research and therefore no need to segment target groups, let alone different publics, they cannot be taken seriously. Although there is "no empirical or logical evidence that any one of the four remaining communication models alone could outclass the other three models", the author focuses on the four remaining models and argues that rather than models they can be used as strategies for public relations practice under different circumstances (van Ruler, 2004, p. 138). According to the author, no single perspective is right or wrong; in fact, communication involves all four perspectives.

On the basis of these four strategies, the author proposes his communication grid. By placing four models in a matrix, he identifies four possible public relations strategies – information, persuasion, dialogue and consensus-building – based on two dimensions. While the degree of involvement of the other in the communication process forms one axis, the dominant view of meaning forms the other. A strategy can be chosen to resolve a specific communication problem. Therefore, the matrix is defined as a situational diagram.

Professional values, practice, and pragmatics (3Ps) model of public relations
Recognising symmetry as the hallmark of professional public relations, David (2004) proposes a three-dimensional model based on professional values, practice and pragmatics. According to the author, the model is offered as a framework for the practice of public relations practice and decision making by integrating the core values of symmetry – professional values and professional practice – with situational pragmatics. Therefore, the original contribution of this model is the integration of the situational pragmatics to the excellence ideals of symmetry.

David (2004) recognises the relationship between public relations and marketing and presents entrepreneurship and citizenship as the dual functions of an organisation in the market. While marketing and integrated marketing communications are more applicable to establish ties between corporate entrepreneurship and consumers, public relations is preferable to foster relationships between the citizenship side of corporations and publics. In this framework, marketing and public relations are not independent of each other; they are recognised as dynamic interrelated parts. However, according to the author, there are differences between markets and publics. The author defines target markets as "a selected group of individuals who are alike on certain key geographic, demographic, psychographic, lifestyle, or benefit segmentation variables". On the other hand, "publics have been defined as groups of individuals who realize that there is a common issue, who feel that their collective efforts can influence the issue and who in turn participate in collective action to influence the outcome" (David, 2004, pp. 188-9). Therefore, while marketing is associated with only target markets and consumers, the public definition of the author is limited to activist groups who act when there is a common issue.

A three-dimensional framework for analysing public relations theory and practice
Hutton (1999, p. 199) states that "in terms of both theory and practice, public relations has failed to arrive at a broadly accepted definition of itself in terms of its fundamental purpose, its dominant metaphor, its scope, or its underlying dimensions". In addition to these, according to the author, its most basic premises; "relations" or "relationships" have not been fully articulated. Consequently, the author proposes a definition and offers a three-dimensional cube composed of three candidate variables – i.e. "interest", "initiative", and "image" to provide a framework to analyse various definitions of public relations.

Interest dimension is similar to "balance of intended effects" identified by Grunig and Hunt (1984, p. 48) and Cancel *et al.* (1997) and captures the extent of the public relations function that can focus on the interests of the client versus the public. The initiative dimension, on the other hand, is about the extent of the public relations function, which may be reactive versus proactive. The third dimension, image, refers to the extent of the organisation's focus on perception versus reality. Further, Hutton (1999) uses these dimensions to provide a framework in which current definitions of public relations may be situated. Accordingly, by designing a three-dimensional space, he identifies the following relatively distinct orientations or models of public relations practice:

- persuasion;
- advocacy;

- public information;
- cause-related public relations;
- image/reputation management; and
- relationship management.

However, while each of these alternative metaphors has strengths, the author claims
that only one – i.e. relationship management – has the power to define and serve as a
paradigm (organising philosophy or model) for public relations. Consequently, he
defines public relations as "managing strategic relationships" (Hutton, 1999, p. 208).
According to the author, the three-word definition may have potential weaknesses.
However, since relationships should be the central and organising theme of public
relations theory and practice, the definition is important to advance both theory and
practice in public relations.

The communication wheel
As stated by Harrison (1995, p. 43), the communication wheel offered by Bernstein
(1985, p. 118) may be regarded as an abstraction, since it is offered as a tool or a
checklist to plan public relations activities. Bernstein (1985, p. 124) offers a wheel
consisting of five layers to explain how companies can communicate with their
audiences. The author places the company at the centre of the wheel and the audiences
at the rim. In between, he identifies the means of communicating or the channels
available to the company when communicating with its audiences. The wheel identifies
nine channels to communicate with nine different publics; by rotating the inner circle of
the wheel, one can identify 9×9 options to consider, with a total of 81 combinations of
medium and audience. Further, Bernstein (1985, p. 123) adds two inner rings at the
centre of the wheel. The first inner ring is "industry" and the other is "country of
origin". In this way, the company "is set in the context of its sector and country of
origin" (Harrison, 1995, p. 44). Therefore, with this model, the organisation's public
relations is recognised as dependent on its industry and geographic context. Although
the wheel offers channel options available to the communicator, it does not answer
"why" and "when" questions.

Models of organisation-public relationships
Relationships have been acknowledged as the appropriate framework for public
relations theory (Schoen, 2005, p. 14). As stated by Bruning and Ledingham (1999,
p. 157), "an increasing number of scholars are adopting the perspective that public
relations should be viewed as the management of a relationship between organization
and publics". "Relationship management theory specifies how to build toward
symmetry (managing organizational-public relationships among common interests
and shared goals) and when to apply that approach (over time)" (Ledingham, 2003,
p. 192).

There are several models of organisation-public relationships (Schoen, 2005, p. 17).
In this area, Broom *et al.* (1997, p. 86) investigate the concept of relationships in public
relations theory and practice. In order to define organisation-public relationships,
drawing on systems theory, the authors develop a three-stage model consisting of
antecedent conditions for relationships, relationships, and consequences that can be
evaluated.

Noting the absence of a useful definition of relationships in public relations, Bruning and Ledingham (1999, p. 160) first define relationships as "the state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economy, social, political, and/or cultural well-being of the other entity" and then design a multiple-item, multiple-dimension organisation-public relationship scale. According to Bruning and Ledingham (1999, p. 161), "the organization-public relationships scale can be used to determine the status of the relationships between an organization and the organization's key publics". Their analyses reveal that organisations and key publics have three types of relationships – i.e. professional, personal, and community – and therefore "strategies should be designed to maximize the benefit experienced by both parties in each of these types of relationships" (Bruning and Ledingham, 1999, p. 165). Schoen (2005, p. v) utilises the scale to measure member perceptions of an art museum and concludes that the relationship management theory of public relations is a viable framework for museum public relations practices.

Contributions of the present model

By recognising the value of the previous models in literature, we present a conceptual model of public relations for museums. However, the proposed model here differs in a number of ways from earlier work. Although the literature identifies marketing and public relations as related fields, this relationship has been ignored in previous models (Hutton, 1999, 2001). Although David (2004) recognised this relationship, his model concentrates on symmetry and therefore it is limited to understanding public relations directed at activist groups. Therefore, first, we consider the relationship between marketing and public relations and examine market orientation as an antecedent of effectiveness in public relations in museums. Second, as stated by Vleuten (1986), in the case of museums, public relations is directed to various publics. Therefore, by recognising "publics" as in the definition of McLean (1997, p. 152), we take into account "all the groups of people and organizations that have an interest in the museum". Third, as suggested by Leichty and Springston (1993), the inspiration for this model came from the "leadership studies", particularly from Fiedler's contingency model (Fiedler, 1978), which recognises non-linearity, and Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory (Hersey and Blanchard, 1996), which recognises followers as being as important as leaders. Fourth, in order to overcome the aggregation problem pointed out by the same authors, the proposed model is designed to accommodate the various relationships of museums. It addresses the fact that museums deal with multiple publics with whom they have different relationships. Fifth, we argue for a contingency theory; however, the contingent model here should be measured at the relational level instead of the organisational level. We suggest that two-way symmetrical public relations is not the best practice in all times. Indeed, there is no one best method of practising public relations. In a similar approach to the public relations process model, we argue that the strategy must be chosen according to the public/relationship in consideration. Reber and Cameron (2003) argue that there may be times when two-way symmetry *cannot* be used due to some regulatory or legal problems. However, we argue that two-way symmetry is not the best practice, since it is not *required* at all times. It is only required when the relationship between the museum and the target public is complex. Sixth, the model is specifically designed for museums; it can be

accepted as the first public relations model offered for museums. Consistent with Bernstein (1985), we argue that one of the most important contingencies is the organisation itself. Nevertheless, the study conducted by Cancel *et al.* (1997) has shown that a corporation's business exposure (e.g. what a corporation produces, who its customers are, etc.) is one of the highly supported variables that influence a corporation's relations with its external publics. Seventh, based on the recommendations of Cancel *et al.* (1997) and Leichty and Springston (1993), we incorporate the models in the "four models of public relations" into our model as public relations strategies.

Proposed model

We develop a model in Figure 1 for the public relations practices of museums. Briefly, the model consists of three dimensions:

(1) "*market orientation level of the management*" as an antecedent;

(2) "*effectiveness*" as a consequence of public relations strategies chosen based on the basis of the interest level of the publics; and

(3) "*interest level of the public*" as a contributing factor, which is proposed as a moderating variable.

Interest level of the public

In the area of museum marketing, a substantial amount of research focuses on audience research to help managers profile their visiting publics (Harrison and Shaw, 2004). Research has shown that visitors look for a variety of experiences (e.g. amusement, excitement, learning, etc.) and different types of visitors look for different
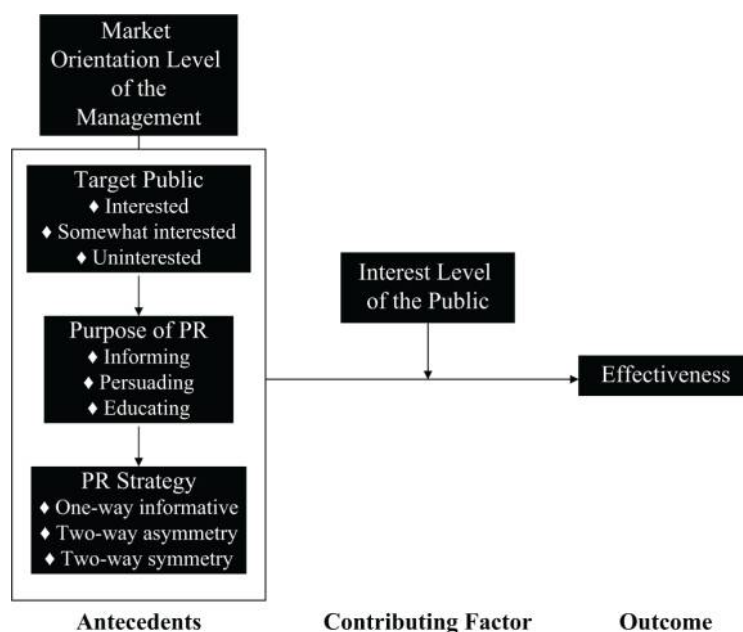

Figure 1.
The contingency model of public relations for museums

experiences (Kotler and Kotler, 1998, p. 34). In a study of the reasons behind frequent attendance and non-attendance at museums, Hood (1983, 2000) found out that museum publics are divided into three groups – i.e. frequent participants, occasional participants and non-participants – based on their leisure values, interests and expectations. This differs from the two groups of participants and non-participants as traditionally assumed. Frequent visitors, who go to museums at least three times a year, are a minority in the community, and value having an opportunity to learn, having the challenge of new experiences, and doing something worthwhile in their leisure time. Non-participants, on the other hand, represent almost the opposite pole; they value being with people, participating actively, and feeling comfortable and at ease in their surroundings. Occasional participants, who go to museums once or twice a year, more closely resemble the non-participants since they also value socialisation patterns and leisure values. Regarding the different publics of the museum and their values, McLean (1995) emphasises that since the values of the museum professionals tend to be more in line with frequent visitors, they are emphasising those qualities that are least appealing to the occasional and non-visiting publics.

Like Hood (1983, 2000), Strang and Gutman (1980) identify three groups of target audiences for arts organisations. In terms of the role and objectives of promotion programs, target audiences may be classified as enthusiasts, the interested, and non-attenders. Enthusiasts are those people with a strong interest in a specific art form, who seek out information about future performances without the benefit of extensive promotion. The interested are those with a lesser level of commitment who may be persuaded with incentives. Non-attenders are those members of the community who have little knowledge of a particular art form but may become active if they learn to appreciate its value. Accordingly, Strang and Gutman (1980) determine the objectives of promotional activities to be *informing* the enthusiasts, *persuading* the interested and *educating* the non-attenders. Informing involves providing basic information on the event itself, its location, date, time, and cost of tickets and how they may be obtained. Such information helps patrons to make their decision whether to attend or not. Persuasion involves the additional incentives that may encourage prospective patrons to attend. Educating, on the other hand, involves educating the prospective patrons about the value of the art form, and therefore most likely requires personal contact, though it has high cost. According to Strang and Gutman (1980, p. 226), "For most people an appreciation of the performing arts is learned and acquired over time. This means that the expansion of the audience for the arts requires the development of a level of understanding sufficient to arouse the desire to attend an arts event".

Prentice *et al.* (1997) investigated the generic reasons for visiting and not visiting a museum, and found that visitors have various reasons to visit museums. Besides gaining general knowledge, visitors come to museums out of curiosity, as part of a general day out, to escape from the routine and be with family and friends. Similarly, Fitchett (1997, p. 233) found that "different visitors have different reasons and motives for visiting museums" and concluded that they have complex and diverse reasons for attending. There are potentially many reasons for visiting museums, and learning is rarely one of them. Visitors have various needs, wants and expectations and they are more interested in the activity of visiting a museum itself; just being able *to do* something in their leisure time, rather than seeing and learning anything in particular. That is why, while one visitor may find the museum experience very rewarding,

another finds it of little interest. On the other hand, as pointed out by Thyne (2001), it was found that one-third of museum-goers never enter a gallery; they spend all their time in the museum shop or the café. In fact, a large number of citizens are uninterested in museums (McLean, 1995).

Based on large scale research findings (e.g. Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, 2004; MORI, 2001), Lin (2006) states that the barriers that discourage people from visiting museums include "lack of interest", "lack of time", "lack of understanding" and "cost". However, among these barriers, the most significant is lack of interest. The researcher emphasizes that the general public perceives museums as places for education and learning, and thus they are boring and dull places, not suitable for leisure purposes. Such perceptions prevent non-visitors from visiting museums.

Besides visitors, other museum publics such as donors, members and volunteers who provide resources to museums are also diverse and are categorized into three groups. Based on their enthusiasm and involvement, members can be high actives, moderate actives and inactives. High actives are those members who contribute most of the time, money and energy to the museum. Moderate actives are those members who participate frequently but with less involvement. Inactives are those members who continue to be members but participate infrequently (Kotler and Kotler, 1998, pp. 287-8). In addition, when the mass donor market is examined based on their motives, the one-third who donate without being asked may be classed as responsible, the one third who donate when asked are responsive, and the final third react to compulsion and pressure (Seymour, 1966; quoted in Kotler and Kotler, 1998, p. 297).

Based on previous research studies, the present model assumes that there are various museum publics and different publics have different levels of interest in museums. Utilising the idea suggested by Strang and Gutman (1980), we group museum publics into three:

(1) "interested";

(2) "somewhat interested"; and

(3) "uninterested".

Different models/strategies must be used to reach them. There is no one best method of public relations. A strategy should be chosen according to the degree of complexity between the museum and the target public. In this model, we incorporate "complexity theory" to understand different "relationships" between the museum and its publics. Rathunde (1997, p. 670) studies communication between parents and adolescents and defines complexity as in the systems theory where "the notion of complexity refers to an optimally functioning system that is integrated and differentiated". She says, "when family members listen to each other (integration) and speak as individuals (differentiation), communication can be said to manifest greater complexity". Grunig (2001, p. 28) defines symmetry as "dialogical public relations" and quotes from Baxter that the essential quality of dialogue is the simultaneous fusion or unity of multiple voices while each voice retains its differentiated uniqueness.

Drawing on the similarities on these definitions, we propose that when the level of complexity between museum and public is high, more sophisticated models of public relations will be required. At the highest level, dialogical two-way symmetrical public relations is most appropriate. When the level of complexity in the relationship between

museum and public is low, the relationship is relatively simple and less sophisticated models of public relations are more appropriate, such as the "press agentry" and "public information" models (Grunig *et al.* 1995), here called "one-way informative" models. Therefore, we offer a continuum that ranges from the least sophisticated to the most sophisticated model as the complexity of the relationship increases (see Figure 2).

What determines the level of complexity in the relationship between the museum and the target public? The answer forms an important pillar of this model. This level is not the same at all times or may not stay the same across the relationship. It is determined by the "maturity" of the target public, here labelled the "interest level of the public". We refer to publics with a high level of interest towards the museum as mature publics, inspired by Hersey and Blanchard (1996), who argued that an effective leadership style should fit the followers' level of "maturity". Here in the proposed model, we use "maturity" not only for publics, but also for managers.

Market orientation level of the museum managers
As mentioned before, economic pressures on museums over the past 20 years forced or encouraged museums to generate their own income, which brought a radical reorganisation in the whole museum culture. The change in function and the purpose of the museums turned the focus on the needs of the audience and their learning (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994, p. 1; McLean, 1995; Kelly, 2004). This shift in focus has challenged previously traditional custodial directors to become market-responsive, and to emphasise entertainment as much as education (Gilmore and Rentschler, 2002).

However, there is resistance, even hostility, to this new role from curators (Fitchett, 1997). McLean (1995) and Ross (2004) imply that some museums resist becoming market-oriented; they see it as a threat to their traditional role of preserving objects. As a result, museum managers have different management styles – what Gilmore and Rentschler (2002) refer to as custodial management and market-focused management. The emphasis in custodial management is on preserving collections, but market-focused management emphasises the visitor experience. In their study on the different management styles for museum directors, Gilmore and Rentschler (2002) found that although museum managers recognise the need to be more market-oriented, their emphasis focuses on their traditional custodial role.

Similarly, according to Camarero and Garrido (2008, p. 15), the custodial or product-oriented museum assumes that visitors are interested in the artistic quality of the exhibitions, and therefore offers temporary exhibitions, new programs and services without recognising visitor requirements. For such museums, "satisfying the entire market is not a primary objective". In contrast, market-oriented museums give first

Complexity of the relationship

Figure 2.
Continuum of strategies in the contingency theory of public relations

priority to the visitors when designing exhibitions, programs and activities. Such museums initiate, maintain and develop relationships with their visitors. Authors report that both product and market orientation were found to have a positive influence on museums' economic and social performance. Therefore, they conclude that considering the various objectives and multiple targets of the museums, it is "highly advisable for museums to adopt a pluralist view that includes both market and product orientation" (Camarero and Garrido, 2008, p. 23).

Thus, we suggest that museum managers have both product and market orientation. However, we propose that as museum managers become more market-oriented, their understanding of the differences between their various publics will increase, and therefore their use of various public relations models/strategies will diversify. We refer to these managers as "mature managers". We expect managers with high market orientation to identify their target publics and then determine the purpose of their public relations programs and design their messages accordingly. As Strang and Gutman (1980) determine the objectives of promotional strategies to be informing the enthusiasts, persuading the interested and educating the non-attenders, we expect highly market-oriented managers to inform their "interested" publics, to persuade their "somewhat interested" publics and to educate their "uninterested" publics (see Figure 3).

Focusing on the "interested publics", while managers inform them about the events, collections and other offerings of the museums, they mainly use "one-way models" of public relations. Grunig and Grunig (1992) define both "press agentry" and "public information" as one-way informative models but "press agentry" was described as propaganda, where telling the truth is not important; therefore it is the least ethical model (Grunig *et al.*, 1995). Besides Kotler and Kotler (1998, p. 29), who state that misinformation does not suit with the realities of museums, Edson (1997) addresses the role of ethics and emphasises the importance of them as a guidance concept for museums. He says museum ethics is about more than a code of ethics; it is about

Figure 3.
Management and publics
maturity grid

responsible stewardship, honesty and doing the right thing. Whether public or private, as the basic concept of museum is public trust, in the *ICOM Code of Professional Ethics*, it is stated that "in all activities museum employees must act with integrity and in accordance with the most stringent ethical principles as well as the highest standard of objectivity" (Edson and Dean, 2007, p. 248). Therefore, we believe that for museums, the definition of "press agentry" should be revised and then it can be combined with the "public information" model to produce "one-way informative" public relations in our model.

On the other hand, we expect highly market-oriented managers to primarily use a "two-way asymmetrical" model to persuade their "somewhat interested" publics and a "two-way symmetrical model" to educate their "uninterested" publics. As Strang and Gutman (1980) point out, educating is a difficult task requiring personal contact. Therefore, dialogical two-way symmetrical public relations would be the best strategy for educating and developing some level of understanding, which is required by most people to arouse their desire to visit a museum (see Figure 2). In short, we argue that the effectiveness of public relations programs will be contingent on the public relations model/strategy chosen according to the interest level of the specific public in consideration.

In contrast, we expect managers with a high product orientation to use a "one-way informative" model for their publics. As these traditional managers are unable to identify – or are uninterested in identifying – the varying needs of their different publics, we expect them to use the least complicated models (one-way models). However, managers with a medium market orientation would be expected to use not only "one-way" models but also more sophisticated models, particularly "two-way asymmetrical" public relations (see Figure 3).

Maturity of the management and the publics
Up to this point, the maturity of the management and of the publics have been discussed separately; that effectiveness may vary depending on different combinations of maturity levels in managers and publics. When we consider the maturity levels of management and publics together, we may observe different effectiveness levels. For example, when the maturity of management is low, we expect the manager to be product-oriented, and therefore to use "one-way informative" models primarily; if the interest level of the public is high, i.e. they require only the right kind of information about exhibitions and events, it is the correct strategy and will be effective. When the maturity of management is medium, we expect the manager to use "two-way asymmetry"; if the public interest level is also medium, this will be effective, since "two-way asymmetry" is the effective strategy for this public (see Figure 3). Even if the maturity level of management is low, public relations still may be effective, depending on the maturity level of the public. Therefore, we argue that the relationship between the level of management's market orientation and the effectiveness of the museum's public relations programs would be moderated by the interest level of the publics.

Effectiveness of public relations
Quoting from Loomis (1987), Schoen (2005, p. 27) claims that "museums should employ methods to measure a public relations plan's effectiveness". Accordingly, she suggests that museum public relations can be tailored to specific public needs and their

effectiveness can be measured. Hon (1997) claims that there is no widely accepted definition of effectiveness of public relations in the literature, and suggests that effectiveness in public relations can be conceptualised at four different levels. These levels are:

(1) individual;

(2) program;

(3) organisational; and

(4) societal.

Since the model here is concerned with the effectiveness of public relations programs for the different relationships of museums, effectiveness can be measured at the program level. Hon (1997) also states that effectiveness in public relations may be defined in 12 different ways; among those, goal achievement can be chosen as the effectiveness definition for this public relations model for museums. We believe that rather than looking at how many visitors visited the museum, the quality of what various publics of the museum received should be of concern. After determining the various publics of the museum and their needs, public relations program objectives should be determined and the effectiveness of each program should be measured based on those objectives. Although measuring performance based on the perceptions of managers is common practice in marketing and management studies (Chang and Chen, 1998), we believe that for the present model it would not be appropriate, since the model questions the maturity of the managers. Therefore, in this model, while interested publics should be questioned about the effectiveness of the *informative* programs directed towards them, somewhat interested publics should be questioned about the effectiveness of the *persuasive* programs directed towards them, and uninterested publics should be questioned about the effectiveness of the *educative* programs directed towards them.

Suggestions for testing the model

Although several studies may actually be needed to test the proposed model here, we believe that it is worth the effort. The first stage of the proposed research program may include a research method known as Delphi, including museum managers to validate the main assumptions in the model. These assumptions are:

(1) museum publics are different based on their interest level, and therefore they need to have different public relations programs directed towards them;

(2) as the management's market orientation level increases, their use of public relations strategies varies in accordance with the interest level of the public; and

(3) traditional managers with product orientation primarily use one-way models to reach their interested publics and they may be limited or uninterested in attracting the other groups.

In addition, by using the Delphi method, although it is rather a benign concept, a consensus on the definition of the interest level of the public may be created so that different individuals interpret it in the same way.

Based on the findings of this qualitative research, the second stage of the research program may include in-depth interviews with managers and various publics of the

museum to determine the effectiveness of public relations programs. At this stage, museums from different countries and with different orientations should be included so that not only the effect of market orientation, but also culture, if any, can be observed accurately. As part of this stage, non-visitors should also be investigated. They may be investigated by employing methods previously applied in other studies (e.g. Prentice *et al.*, 1997).

Future studies may also test the model as a normative rather than a positive one.

Managerial implications

The model has direct managerial implications. The model suggests that effectiveness of the public relations programs of the museums depends on a number of factors. In this framework, the market orientation level of the managers may be regarded as the first and most important factor in the effectiveness of the public relations programs. However, the model suggests that the interest level of the publics may strengthen the effect of this major factor on effectiveness. As pointed out by Gilmore and Rentschler (2002, p. 758), "successful museum management may require a combination of different management styles". The model suggests that both product and market orientation can bring effectiveness, however, while product orientation primarily works with highly interested publics whose values seem to be more in line with museum curators. Market orientation works with all publics.

Though the interest level of the public may seem to be uncontrollable at a first glance, it can be largely manageable by managers, by changing their own market orientation level – or, in other words, by adapting the public relations strategy to the targeted public depending on their interest level. The model suggests that when managers have a high market orientation level, effectiveness can always be achieved. Although the interest level of the public is introduced as an important moderating variable, the model suggests that effectiveness does not suffer due to the low interest level of the publics. Managers can always achieve effectiveness by adapting their public relations strategy according to the interest level of their publics. In contrast, when the managers do not have a high market orientation level, effectiveness can still be achieved with the help of the high interest level of the publics. On the other hand, when the museum has a disadvantage concerning the interest level of its publics, the management's market orientation level is expected to become more important in achieving effectiveness (see Figure 3).

One other important implication is that since due to economic and social pressures, museums need to take account both their visiting and non-visiting publics, this paper offers public relations as an important tool to reach various publics of the museums. Considering the publics of the museum under three separate groups classified as "interested", "somewhat interested" and "uninterested", museums can prepare appropriate public relations programs for them. The model especially offers persuasive two-way asymmetrical public relations for the "somewhat interested" publics and two-way symmetrical dialogical public relations for the "uninterested" publics of the museum. When persuaded with the right blend of incentives, somewhat interested publics may become active participants. Similarly, when the negative perceptions of the uninterested publics about the museum are changed with educative programs that promote museum-going as a valuable and rewarding experience while recognising the needs of those people, they may become interested and actively

involved. Meeting the needs of these people, who look for relaxing, enjoyable and pleasurable experiences in their leisure activities, is extremely important to make them interested. As stated by Bellow (1986), after recognising the extent of the public the museum wishes to communicate to, it must decide what it wishes to communicate. In this respect, the model offers a practical solution to managers on segmenting their publics and what they must communicate to them.

Limitations

Conduit and Mavondo (2001) point out that the positive relationship between market orientation and performance is found to be moderated by some environmental factors. In the case of museums, we offer the interest level of the public as the moderating factor in the relationship between market orientation and performance. However, rather than the interest level of the public, the model does not incorporate any other internal or external factors. Since the study findings suggest that most museum participants have a high income and educational level (Lin, 2006), "culture" and "development level of the country where the museum is located" may influence the relationship between market orientation and effectiveness. Besides these macro environmental factors, some organisational and relational factors may have their own role.

Conclusion

Today, due to economic and social pressures, museums need to take account of both their visiting and non-visiting publics. This paper offers public relations as an important tool to reach the various publics of the museums and proposes a conceptual model specific to them. The model suggests a positive effect of market orientation on the effectiveness of museum public relations. As stated by Fitchett (1997, p. 250), since "the museum exchange involves two separate parties, visitors and museum professionals", the model recognises the influence of both of these parties on the effectiveness of public relations programs in museums. Accordingly, it particularly suggests "market orientation level of the management" and "interest level of the publics" as the determinants of effectiveness in public relations programs in museums. We offer the interest level of the public as the moderating factor in the relationship between market orientation and performance. When the interest level of the public is highest, the positive influence of the management's market orientation on the effectiveness of public relations programs is expected to be highest.

The proposed model assumes that to be effective in public relations, museums vary their public relations strategies as a function of the public in the relationship. In addition, the model assumes that as managers' market orientation level increases, their use of public relations strategies will vary in accordance with the interest level of the publics. More specifically, we believe that as the managers' market orientation level increases, they will use one-way informative models towards their high interested publics to *inform* them, two-way asymmetrical model towards their moderate interested publics to *persuade* them, and two-way symmetry towards their low interested publics to *educate* them – to *change their perceptions and help them to appreciate the value of the museums*. In contrast, when the management's market orientation level is low, we expect them to be uninterested or limited in understanding the differences between their publics and in the required approaches to them. Therefore, we suggest that an adequate theory of public relations in museums should be situational. There is no one best method of

practising public relations, but there are both external and internal contingencies that influence the effectiveness of museum public relations.

The model has two major contributions. First, based on previous empirical research findings, as in other organisations (whether profit or non-profit, service or manufacturing), in museums, it introduces management's market orientation level as an important factor in the effectiveness of public relations programs. However, in the museum context, the influence of the management's market orientation level is assumed to be moderated by the interest level of the publics. Second, it assumes that effectiveness in public relations programs changes as a function of the public relations strategy chosen based on the interest level of the targeted public. Thus, we offer the interest level of the public as a useful segmentation variable for museums.

Finally, it is important to emphasise that rather than theory testing, our objective is to build a foundation for the systematic development of a theory for museum public relations. Recognising the previous public relations models in literature, an effort has been made to propose a public relations model specific to museums while recognising their special context, issues and problems. Although we aim to contribute in developing theory in museum public relations, we also intend to provide practical solutions to managers to help them understand the complexity of their publics and the required public relations strategies that should be directed at them to be effective. We acknowledge the importance and value in previous public relations models in literature in advancing theory and practice in the field; however, as suggested by Bernstein (1985), with the proposed model, the importance of the organisation and its context become evident. We believe that depending on the organisation, determinants of effectiveness in public relations may change. In the museum context, we propose that there are two important determinants of public relations effectiveness:

(1) the market orientation level of the management; and

(2) the interest level of the publics.

Therefore, future research should consider the context of the organisation when proposing major variables that could determine effectiveness in public relations. Future research should also consider the influence of possible moderating factors that would introduce non-linearity into the relationships between the variables.

Gower (2006, p. 180) states that although relationship building is also a prominent feature in the field, a review of the literature can reveal that two-way symmetrical communication still dominates. However, "there is growing research into international issues, diversity, and publics". As a result, the field is at a crossroads. As she emphasises, since "today's public relations practice is fluid and complex", new theories from other disciplines need to be brought into the public relations literature, not only to enhance conceptual understanding in the field, but also to explore the implications of post-modern theories for the practice. According to the author, complexity as a post-modern approach developed from natural science's chaos theory helps in studying the simultaneous interactions of multiple variables between organisations and their publics. As the characteristics of complexity theory include adaptivity and non-linearity, complexity theory may provide the necessary theoretical framework for public relations. In this paper, by using complexity theory, an effort is made to explain various relationships of the museum and the required public relations strategies for these relationships.

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