



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***MEDIATING EFFECT OF WORK CATEGORY ON RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES' AND DECISION MAKING  
AMONG PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS IN GOVERNMENT -  
LINKED COMPANIES***

**KHAIRUL NIZAM BIN SAMSUDIN**

**FBMK 2020 50**



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By

**KHAIRUL NIZAM BIN SAMSUDIN**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,  
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**February 2020**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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**February 2020**

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Organizational success can only be achieved when each stakeholders mutually agrees in decision making process in which the decision made will benefit all parties and the organization will be able to operates effectively. For this reason, public relations (PR) plays an important role where the PR practitioners will be the middle person between each stakeholders to ensure that the decisions made will be valuable to the organization and stakeholders. This general objective of the study was to examine the mediating effect of work categories on the relationship between professional competencies and decision making among public relations (PR) practitioners in the government linked companies (GLCs). A survey was conducted and questionnaires were distributed to 157 PR practitioners and data were later analyzed using the SEM PLS technique. Results showed that the dimension of work categories do not influence the relationship between professional competency and decision making. Most importance essence was the involvement in decision making process by PR practitioners working in Malaysia's GLCs can be enhanced or improved through their level of professional competencies. The results supported the role of PR department to be part of the important sub-system in organization. Competencies acquired by PR practitioners were the main resource that can assist organization to survive. Meanwhile, the contribution of this study to the literature lies in its ability to illustrate the importance of PR competencies in influencing the decision-making process in an organization, which later can develop positive thinking among society on PR being one of the recognized and reputable professions.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**KESAN MEDIATING KATEGORI KERJA TERHADAP HUBUNGAN  
ANTARA KECEKAPAN PROFESIONAL DAN MEMBUAT KEPUTUSAN  
DIKALANGAN PEGAWAI PERHUBUNGAN AWAM DI SYARIKAT  
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Kejayaan sesebuah organisasi hanya boleh direalisasikan apabila setiap pihak yang berkepentingan mempunyai persetujuan dalam proses buat keputusan dimana akhirnya keputusan tersebut akan memberi manfaat kepada semua dan menjadikan sesebuah organisasi itu menjadi lebih efektif. Justeru, di sinilah perhubungan awam (PR) memainkan peranan utamanya iaitu menjadi perantara diantara setiap pihak berkepentingan menerusi perlaksanaan kerja-kerja mereka dengan mengaplikasikan kecekapan-kecekapan yang dimiliki bagi memastikan setiap keputusan yang dibuat memberi manfaat kepada organisasi dan setiap pihak yang berkepentingan. Justeru, objektif kajian ini secara umumnya adalah untuk mengenalpasti kesan pengaruh kategori kerja terhadap hubungan diantara kecekapan professional dan buat keputusan di kalangan pengamal PR yang bekerja di syarikat- syarikat berkaitan kerajaan (GLCs). Hasilnya, tinjauan soal selidik yang diperolehi daripada 157 pengamal PR dan data yang telah dianalisa menggunakan teknik SEM PLS telah membuktikan bahawa dimensi kategori kerja sememangnya tidak mempengaruhi hubungan diantara kecekapan professional dan buat keputusan. Asas paling penting adalah penglibatan dalam proses buat keputusan oleh pengamal PR boleh dikukuhkan atau ditambahbaik menerusi tahap kecekapan profesionalnya. Dengan ini, implikasi dari hasil kajian ini telah menyokong peranan jabatan PR sebagai sebahagian dari sub-sistem yang penting dalam sesebuah organisasi dan kecekapan-kecekapan yang dimiliki oleh pengamal PR adalah merupakan salah satu sumber yang dapat mengekalkan kelangsungan sesebuah organisasi. Pada masa yang sama, sumbangan kajian ini terhadap literatur adalah keupayaannya untuk menggambarkan tentang kepentingan kecekapan yang dikuasai oleh PR sehingga mampu mempengaruhi proses buat keputusan dalam organisasi, dimana akan membuat masyarakat akan lebih menerima dan mengadaptasi PR sebagai salah satu kerjaya yang diiktiraf dan bereputasi.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I am grateful to The One and The Almighty, ALLAH S.W.T for giving me the abilities to complete this thesis. I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Zulhamri Abdullah for his full support, guidance, understanding and encouragement throughout my study and research. Without his incredible patience and counsel, my thesis would have been a frustrating and overwhelming pursuit. I am very fortunate to work under his supervision.

In addition, I would like to express my gratitude to all lecturers and staff in Faculty Modern Language and Communication who have either directly or indirectly given me significant knowledge and guidance. Sincere thanks are also due to all my friends and for their help and wonderful support. Finally, special thanks to my wife Liana Binti Mat Nayan, my son Muhammad Umar Zihan, my parents Mr. Samsudin Bin Muhammad and Mrs. Zabedah Binti Mat Yatim and my family. I would also like to record my appreciation to my aunt Siti Zaleha Binti Mat Yatim for supporting me throughout my study in UPM. I also would not accomplish this without my siblings who are my stress reliever and great supporter.

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of Study

The field of public relations (PR) contributes to the growth and development of businesses at local and international levels. Like many other staff and managers, PR practitioners need to adapt to the new and fast changing environments. However, the scope of PR works have been somewhat unclear to many. According to Mukhtar and Shahzad (2019), the PR roles have been associated to different activities in different organizations; which means different organizations will require PR practitioners to meet different job specifications.

Wu and Taylor (2003) stated that PR is a growing profession in Malaysia. However, as the global work environment is evolving at a fast pace, it is crucial for the PR practitioners in Malaysia to be equipped with the competencies needed in an internationally competitive economy. The latest report from Critical Skills Monitoring Committee (CSC) for 2016/2017, jointly led by Talent Corporation (TalentCorp) and the Institute of Labour Market Information and Analysis (ILMIA), which was developed under the 11<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan, concluded that PR manager is among the top ten professions. This in fact highlighted the PR practices are crucial for the Malaysian economy.

Many studies have indicated the shift of PR sector from the persuasive concepts to the modern PR concepts which are based on mediation and negotiations. There is neglect in term of the inherent right and professional status among the professionals and these factors are still in debate.

Professionals are categorized by their ability to show mastery and steadfastness when they meet their duties as prescribed by society (Broom, 2009). It is a common practice in workplaces for workers to learn at their jobs and doing tasks with work colleagues (Erault, 1997). Contemporary view of what is required of professionals is the ability to apply skills and expertise acquired into their various roles (Taylor, 2002).

As a profession changes to the needs of the society it is in, a single comprehensive definition of a contemporary profession is difficult to generalize (Brown, 2009). Generally a professional in the PR industry will meet the general requirements of having acquired the specific training, accreditation and certification for practice in the respective field (Cutlip, Center & Broom., 2006; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Thus, PR can meet one of the many criteria prescribed by various definitions from various regulatory bodies (Wylie, 1994).

## 1.2 Government Linked Companies and Public Relations

Government institutional investors, which are also known as government-linked investment companies (GLICs), are a strong feature of the Malaysian corporate sector. Currently, there are seven GLICs in Malaysia which are the Employee Provident Fund (EPF), Khazanah Nasional Berhad (Khazanah), Kumpulan Wang Amanah Pencen (KWAP), Lembaga Tabung Angkatan Tentera (LTAT), Lembaga Tabung Haji (LTH), and Menteri Kewangan Diperbadankan (MOF) and Permodalan Nasional Berhad (PNB) (Rahman et al., 2019). Jow et al., (2007) noted that companies controlled by GLICs represent approximately 40% of the market capitalization of the Malaysian stock market.

In Malaysia, government linked companies (GLCs) are defined as companies that have a primary commercial objective and in which the Malaysian Government has a direct controlling stake. Controlling stake refers to the government's ability (not just percentage 7 ownership) to appoint board members, senior management, and/or make major decisions (e.g. contract awards, strategy, restructuring and financing, acquisition and divestments, etc.) for GLCs, either directly or through their investment companies (Lau & Tong, 2008).

Meanwhile, government linked investment companies (GLICs) are defined as Federal Government linked investment companies that allocate some or all of their funds to GLC investments. These include GLCs, which the Government of Malaysia controls directly through Khazanah Holdings, the Employees' Provision Fund (EPF), Pensioner Trust Fund (KWAP), Pilgrim Fund (TH), Armed Forces Fund (LTAT), National Capital (PNB), and Ministry of Finance Incorporate (Lau & Tong, 2008).

GLCs and their controlling shareholders constitute a significant part of the economic structure of the nation. GLCs account for approximately RM260 billion or approximately 36% and 54% of the market capitalization of Bursa Malaysia and the benchmark Kuala Lumpur Composite Index, respectively.

Additionally, GLCs account for an estimated 5% of the national workforce (Lau & Tong, 2008). Even with active divestment and privatization, GLCs remain the main service providers to the nation in the strategic utilities and services comprising electricity, telecommunications, postal services, airlines, airport, public transport, water and sewerage, banking, and financial services (Ang & Ding, 2006).

Khazanah Nasional is an example of a GLC that is prominent in Malaysia. The founding idea for the company came from the Companies Act 1965. It was established on 3 September 1993 and became a public listed company in 1994. It began operations soon after it had acquired the status of a public listed company. The majority of the company's share is held by the Federal Land Commissioner while the stewardship is by the Minister of Finance (Khazanah Nasional, 2015).



There are more than 80 organizations under its wing and its investment portfolio is diversified either by the respective geographical location or the specific industries that it ventures into globally. Its main shares are in Malaysia at 55% RAV (Realisable Asset Value) while overseas markets account for 45% (Khazanah Nasional, 2015).

In The Khazanah Report 2015, Khazanah Nasional listed their 14 industries which are Agrifood, Aviation, Creative & Media, Financial Services, Healthcare, Infrastructure & Construction, Innovation & Technology, Life Sciences, Leisure & Tourism, Others, Power, Property, Sustainable Development, and Telecommunications. Given the pertinent roles of GLCs to the nation's economic well-being and their status to the public, PR through the practitioners' competencies is highly relevant to ensure their operations operate efficiently.

Organizational objective achievements are dependent on the competencies of PR professionals in a particular sector. This can be seen in the UK FTSE 350 that lists publicly listed companies (Gregory, 2008). Malaysia is a unique country in terms of its GLCS which is very different from the private sector in many industries (Ting & Lean, 2011).

In relation to this, PR can be considered as the ability to create strategies and develop strength to develop and sustain relationship and mutual understanding between GLCs and its public. Edward Bernays defines PR as "a management function which tabulates public attitudes, defines policies, procedures and interests of an organisation followed by executing a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance" (1945; cited in Breakenridge, 2008). At its meeting in Mexico in 1978, the world assembly of Public Relations Associations agreed that: "Public relations is the art and science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisation leaders and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organizations and the public interest" (Theaker & Yaxley, 2018).

In 1991, the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) in the UK defined PR practice as "the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and understanding between an organisation and its publics" (Orakwue, Hammond & Gyambrah-Adaefie, 2006, p. 30). Ideally, PR plays a significant role within a given organization by facilitating a connection between the company as the organization and the outsiders, mostly the general public, customers, competitors, and other stakeholder. However, PR is typically confused with marketing and the importance of public relations is hence overlooked.

Nonetheless, PR is significant towards enhancing sales and consumer base within a given GCL companies. In addition, the primary objective of PR is to inform the public, including the potential customers and business partners (Ang & Ding, 2006). Notably, GLC companies in Malaysia are companies, which can be public or private where the Malaysian government has controlling interest or shares.

This implies just like any other publicly or privately owned entity the corresponding PR ought to have significant benefits irrespective of the controlling interest of the government.

According to Sha (2011a), competencies are specific attributes or qualities that an individual harbour intrinsically that enables them to perform effectively in given work or employment. Ideally, professional competency implies the specific qualities or characteristics that steers an individual to pursue a given professional with excellence and competence (Fuller et al., 2018).

Particularly, there are various professional competencies that employers or organizations typically seek to identify in a given employee or potential recruit, which may include teamwork, career motivation, commercial awareness, and responsibility, commitment, communication and leadership traits among others (WikiJob, n.d).

With specific respect to PR competencies, it can be observed that there is a change in the field which traditionally, PR is heavily associated to skills and competencies such as excellent writing and media relations. However, with the increasing evolving nature of businesses, there has been an increased need among GCL companies to acquire new PR competencies to meet the needs of the organization. According to Stuart, (2017) there are multiple professional competencies, which defines the attributes of public relations officer working for a given organization.

The latter noted that monitoring and evaluation, organizational skills, leadership and management, event panning, interpersonal skills, leadership, and communication skills forms the basis of a PR officer professional competencies.

Work category generally justifies the existence or classifications of various types of jobs or professions that exist within a given business environment or a given profession.

Notably, there are multiple work categories that exist within the public relations department such as editors, advertising and promotions, market research analyst, media editor, and public relations managers among others. These specialized categories depended on the needs and operational nature of the company (Abran & Nguyenkim, 1991).

Therefore, the objective of this study was to examine the mediating role of work categories in respect to the relationship between professional competencies and decision making within public relations in GLCs across Malaysia. The thesis hopes to foster understanding among people working in PR by enabling them to appreciate the professional values and skills that attributes to PR in respect to decision making.

### 1.3 Problem Statement and Research Gap

Government Linked Companies (GLCs) play a prominent role in the evolution of Malaysia's economy ever since its post-independence industrialization (Khoo, 2018). As emphasised by Hassan, Karbhari, Isa and Razak (2017), the presence of more members on GLCs board with appropriate executive background, relevant knowledge, skills and varied expertise could enhance investors and shareholders' confidence on the company's business sustainability. Companies with board members who are competent and equipped with knowledge in their firm's business environment are found to perform better monitoring job make sound decision which subsequently lead to better firm performance (Hassan et al., 2017).

Meanwhile, as evident in the previous studies, the participation of employees in the decision- making process of an organization can further improve the quality of decision-making and generate more and more diverse strategic ideas (Splitter, Seidl, Whittington & Street, 2019). This is due to the fact that an involved employee is aware of the business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization (Barik & Kochar, 2017).

Undeniably, Khazanah Nasional (2015) has long valued the employee as crucial entity in the organisation to meet the demand of the business in GLCs. By identifying the potential employees, Khazanah Nasional believes that it will motivate GLCs to focus and predict what skills, attitudes and behavior they will need to drive the organization's future success. This, might be one of the reasons as to why some of the GLCs under Khazanah Nasional managed to be listed in the Bursa Saham. However, it is still questionable if employee competencies can influence the decision-making process in an organization.

Furthermore, study by Garcia, Munduate, Elgoibar, Wendt and Euwema (2017) found that HR- directors and managers indicate they appreciate competent and strong employee representatives in the discussion, but many of them define this as only cooperative. Meaning that, the involvement of competent employee is more to sharing information, but not until influencing the decision making. The study that was conducted in 11 European countries also suggested that future studies could test if this also holds in other organizations, mainly for those with different conducts of participation in organizational decision-making.

Both employees and the organization should equally understand their responsibility to implement the win-win philosophy. Therefore, organizations are required to lend a hand to its employees, to boost up their competency, whereas at the same time, employees are also required to perform optimally by implementing their competencies (Dwivedi & Chaturvedi, 2020).

Mykkänen and Vos (2015) stated that PR as a function of organizations is viewed as one of important parts of organizational decision making, and organizations that fail to “keep up with emerging trends” in the field of PR may experience challenges associated with poor decision making. However, the specific tasks related to decision making processes sometimes remain ambiguous. Mantel, Tatikonda and Liao (2006) said that decision makers use cues from the task to help identify which information to consider.

According to Adnan (2016), “the practice of public relations is becoming more sophisticated than ever with increasing areas of specializations and functions” (page number). Meaning, the nature of work category in PR is changing hence decision-making processes and professional competences are bound to experience significant change. Coherently, since there are minimal literatures or studies that have been committed towards understanding such relationships.

Most of the literature which have been undertaken to understand the significance or influence of competency, in respect to PR were mostly centred to benefit of particular professions that were deemed as “important.” However, such notions are changing because according to Anderson (2013), “every person matters in a company, and there is no such thing as an insignificant position” (page number).

PR can be defined as the ability to maintain a favourable image or position towards the consumers or stakeholders. Ideally, mediating effect is used to elaborate on the relationship between independent and dependent variables (Abdul Adis & Kim, 2013). In essence, work category is identified as the “mediator” to be used in the study to elaborate on the effects of professional competencies and decision making in respect to PR among the GLC. Moreover, attaining PR competency would require professionalism in the management of crucial factors that upholds the image and reputation of a given organization. The paper seeks to establish a mediation model that explains and identifies the effects towards GLCs that underlines professional competency and decision making by incorporating work category as a hypothetical variable.

The paper has identified a gap, which seeks to utilise various work category that exists within PR in order to find more knowledge and inter-relationship that exists and how it influences the relationship between professional competency and decision making within Malaysia’s GLCs.

This is because most of the studies, which relates to PR competence and decision making provides faint information of how these two variables are related in respect to GLCs (Mukhtar & Shahzad, 2019). Moreover, PR in most GLCs has evolved into small specialized units; as stated by Bright Network (n.d), “there are dozens of viewpoints and almost as many types of PR.” Such evolvement has brought changes in various PR work categories, which influences the levels of professional competencies and decision-making processes in Malaysia’s corporate structure. This resonates with

Rahim et al. (2019) who suggested the field of PR has experienced tremendous changes over the last two decades, where traditional roles have been disintegrated and subdivided into new and specialized niche.

The Indiana University School of Journalism (2005) published a PR guide, which outlined the importance of PR students to expound their knowledge towards understanding other fields, which can be directly or indirectly related to public relations. Such in-depth knowledge and understanding can improve competency and foster decision-making techniques in respect to a PR practitioner. Most of the GLCs are publicly owned and controlled by the Malaysian government; thus, large and complex volumes of data and information is typically processed routinely.

Harris (2016) stated that PR officers are increasingly required to process immense information before making decisions on how to ensure sustainability, brand, and image of a given GLC organization. There is a need to ascertain the effects of PR competency and decision-making tenets in GLCs primarily because of the underlying macro factors, which have significant influence of the reputations of government owned companies in Malaysia (Ahmed et al., 2002; Yunus et al., 2015).

These comments resonate with Komodromos (2017) who suggested that companies that incorporate sound PR competency in facilitating proper decision-making frameworks tend to create a sustainable brand, image, and reputation in the long run. Therefore, this current study attempts to study the effects of competency among PR officers toward decision making channels utilised by most Malaysia's GLCs.

The traditional role of PR in any organization has always been to enable the latter to boost and expand its brand (Byrum, 2017). However, the contemporary economic structure has evolved especially due to the advancement of technology; this has facilitated growth and categorization of the PR departments.

This implies that there is a growing need for PR practitioners to focus on particular niche such as social publicist (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012); therefore, such evolution in PR departments can enhance the productivity and efficiency of GLCs.

There is small number of studies which have analysed the various work categories undertaken by PR professions in GLCs especially in Malaysia. This is primarily because the evolvement and expansion currently taking place in the field of PR in the twenty-first century is still relatively new. Therefore, this thesis intends to employ multiple research simulations and techniques to provide new perspective on the various work categories in PR profession and their impact on Malaysia's GLCs.

The thesis aims to analyse the impact of work category on the relationship between professional competencies' and decision making among public relation officers in most Malaysian GLC companies. The study will be conducted within Malaysia for a number of reasons: 1) Malaysia's

GLC is ranked fifth globally, in terms, of economic influence (Knight Frank, 2018); 2) GLC comprises of almost a half of Kuala Lumpur Composite Index; 3) PR is among the fastest growing profession in Malaysia hence there is a need for competency (CITE); and 4) for sampling analysing cost since the researcher resides in Malaysia.

The findings will document practical recommendations that would be incorporated to enhance PR competencies in various work category when making decision in respect to Malaysia's GLC.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

In line with what has been mentioned, the following research questions are developed:

- 1) What are the professional competencies of the PR practitioners?
- 2) What are the work categories of PR Practitioners?
- 3) What are the decision makings made by PR practitioners?
- 4) Is there any relationship between professional competencies of PR practitioners and decision making?

#### **1.5 Research Objectives**

The general objective of this study was geared towards examining the mediating effect of work category on the relationship between professional competencies' and decision making among public relation in GLC companies. Hence, the specific objectives of this thesis are:

To determine the level of professional competencies, work categories and decision making

- 1) To determine the level of professional competencies, work categories and decision making
- 2) To determine the relationship between professional competencies and work category
- 3) To determine the relationship between work category and decision making
- 4) To determine the relationship between professional competencies and decision making
- 5) To examine work category mediates relationship between professional competencies and decision making in public relations

## 1.6 Scope of Study

The present thesis has been geared towards analysing the public relations departments in government-controlled companies within Malaysia.

In Malaysia, GLCs are defined as companies that have a primary commercial objective and in which the Malaysian Government has a direct controlling stake. GLCs and their controlling shareholders constitute a significant part of the economic structure of the Malaysian economy. GLCs account for approximately RM260 billion or approximately 36% and 54% respectively of the market capitalization of Bursa Malaysia and the benchmark Kuala Lumpur Composite Index (Ab Razak, Ahmad & Aliahmed, 2008).

Though there is an increasing empirical evidence on the impact of government ownership and company performance in developed markets, little attentions have been given in these modern developing economies such as Malaysia to examine what constitutes governance structure and its impact on company's performance. It is imperative to note that GLCs, which account for 36% of the market capitalization of the Malaysian stock market, play a significant role in the development of the country's economy (Mokhtar, 2005).

This implies that these organizations have employed diverse and specialised department such as the PR in order to facilitate growth and profitability. The twenty first century has observed multiple and dynamic changes in the field of PR especially in Malaysia (Cernicova, 2016).

According to Cernicova (2016), this has been attributed to the intensifying technological advancement currently being experienced globally. For instance, the emergence of social media has cultivated new forms of changes that influence the work category among traditional PR roles (Sriramesh, 2003).

Notably, the wide variety of traditional and social media platforms now available to influence opinion, PR professionals can help organisations to stay vigilant on the "new" news cycle, which has become a 24-hour continuous cycle where everyone can capture and make news, and be central to the discussions that impact the overall reputation of a brand, organisation or industry.

The social and business phenomena have given rise to different form of work category within the PR in most GLC firms in Malaysia; where companies are geared towards hiring individuals with specialised competencies that would enable the GLC organizations in Malaysia to make adherent decisions that would enhance profitability and productivity.

Furthermore, organizations that fail to “keep up with emerging trends” in the field of PR may experience challenges associated with poor decision making. Correspondingly, there are dozens and hundreds of companies which are either owned or partially owned by the Malaysian government; hence these organizations are observed to have varying levels of competency in respect to the relationship between competency and decision making, which is attributed to the mediating effect of work category emerging as a result of technological and other forms of development (Ang & Ding, 2006).

Social media seems to be emerging into a new part of public sphere (Waltz, 2005). Scholars acknowledged the power of social media in shaping today’s society as they have argued that its impact on the political arena of countries around the world is undeniable. Example is blog, where previously, Nardi, Schiano and Gumbrecht (2004) stated that “blogs have been featured extensively in the popular media and have entered political campaigns, news organizations, businesses, and classrooms” (page number).

Head, Van Hoeck and Hostetler (2017) found that despite the media’s signals about the end of the blogosphere, almost two-thirds of the respondents which is 62%, had read blogs to fulfil their learning needs during the past 12 months. Blogs were affordable sources of information to these readers, especially for acquiring additional knowledge and closing skill gaps in their personal lives after college. Social media provides a medium that can boost the public voice which is beginning to alter the public discourse (Taylor & Kent, 1999).

The changing pattern of communication in society today makes it necessary for PR practitioners to adapt and engage more in asymmetrical or two-way communication. The new forms of specialised skills require enhanced competencies that would proportionately enhance the level of decision-making processes with the GLCs companies in Malaysia.

The scope of this study incorporates analysing the mediating effects and relationship between professional competencies and decision making in the field of PR within companies that are partially owned by the Malaysian government. The thesis will focus to examine the antecedents of PR competency that influences the decision-making while observing the mediating effect of work category, which is perhaps, attributed to the increased specialised forms of PR experienced in the modern corporate world.

## **1.7 Significance of Study**

Previous studies have provided understanding on the correlation between decision-making and professional competencies. Following this, the thesis intends to new information on the mediating effect of job or work category in regards to underrating the correlation between professional competency and decision-making among PR officers or departments.



In respect to learning institution, these institutions can utilise the findings of this study to create, develop, and enhance educational framework that would assist in equipping and training of future PR officers especially in matters decision making and competency within the multiple specialization of PR.

This is due to the fact that most contemporary scholar, academics, and online blogger are increasingly demystifying the field of PR from the perspective that it lacks professional competency and practices that can influence informed decision-making for organizations or any other business entity (Ang & Ding, 2006).

Moreover, anecdotal evidence suggests that PR graduates in Malaysia are not meeting the industry's standards or expectations, and this is not a situation limited to Malaysia. Ahmad, Putra and Nguah (2012) found that previous studies on public relations education and cultural issues in Thailand (Ekachai & Komolsevin, 1996; 1998), India (Sriramesh, 1992), Malaysia (Jamilah, 2008; 2005), and Japan (Nakane, 1988) indicates that various cultures and environments engender vastly differing roles and methods of public relations.

In other words, countries in Asia should consider developing their own PR education curricula, tailor-made to suit their own needs, cultures, and political environments and practices. This will enhance professional competency among PR officers in Malaysia hence improving the decision- making processes.

In addition to that, the government of Malaysia plays a crucial role in influencing general operations and functionality of GLCs companies within Malaysia. Therefore, the findings can be adopted by the Malaysia government to formulate policies and frameworks, which can be proposed to the management of GLCs in respect to proficiency in decision making among PR departments or officers by moderating of the multiple work category existing with a given company owned or controlled by the government.

Continuously, it has been noted that GLCs are controlled by the Malaysian government via the Federal Government-Linked Investment Companies (GLICs). GLICs are investment arms of the government that allocate government funds to the GLCs (Lau & Tong, 2008). In addition to having ownership in GLCs, the Malaysian government also has the authority to appoint members of the board of directors and senior management positions.

This implies that the study will provide in-depth literature, which can be adopted by the government to hire or promote public relations managers in senior positions. This study that has looked into the relationship between professional competency and decision-making among PR officers can provide information on qualities of good practitioners.

Besides, this study can contribute to theory building of PR by testing the relationship of PR competencies and decision making with the influence of various work category related to an organization.

## 1.8 Definition of Terms

**GLC companies:** These are companies that are partially or entirely owned or controlled by the government. The term GLC is an abbreviation of government linked company. Furthermore, Lau and Tong (2008) stated that a company is classified as a GLC if the government owns an effective controlling interest of more than 50%, while the second definition suggests that any corporate entity that has the government as a shareholder is a GLC. In the context of the paper the GLCs are government controlled or owned entities in Malaysia.

**Public relations:** It has been defined as “the management function that identifies, establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip & Center, 2000). Moreover, Shamsan and Otieno (2015) defines public relations (PR) as a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.

**Competency:** Ideally, competency is the characteristics or attributes that defines the skills of an employees in respect to their area of specialization. Furthermore, competency is the combination of observable and measurable knowledge, skills, abilities and personal attributes that contribute to enhanced employee performance and ultimately result in organizational success (Hensley, Smith, & Thompson, 2003). In order to identify competencies, the process must be developed with those who work in the field (Irigoin et al. 2002).

**Work category:** Sha (2011a; 2011b) defined work category as groupings of tasks that practitioners do on the job, whereas professional competencies are the qualifications practitioners need to execute those tasks. Sha (idib.) used the term of work category as referring to role, and competencies are needed by PR practitioners in order to carry out the tasks assigned to their role (Gregory, 2008). In this current study, four work categories have been identified through previous studies that are always involved PR practitioners which are project management, community relations, strategic planning, and internal communication.

**Professional competency:** Sha (2011a; 2011b) defined professional competency as the capability to perform the duties of one's profession generally, or to perform a particular professional task, with skill of an acceptable quality such as leadership, commitment, measurement and evaluation, and communication skills among other competencies. However, for the purpose of this study, only four professional competencies have been focused which are advanced writing skills, handling PR issues, managing PR programs, and advanced communication skills.

**Decision making:** According to Eisenfuhr (2011), decision making is the process of making a choice from a number of alternatives to achieve a desired result. Moreover, Al-Tarawneh (2012) defined decision making as the science of choosing and identifying alternatives in respect to preference and values of the decision maker.

## 1.9 Summary

This chapter provides a general overview of the research and outlines the problem statement, which details the rationale for undertaking the study. The researcher has detailed the reason or the research gap that was identified to satisfy the reason to undertake the study. With these explanations, the application of theories, selection of data collection methodology and respondent's identification will be reasonable and effective.



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Samsudin, K.N., Abdullah, Z. & Osman, M.N. (2020). The mediating effect of work category on the relationships between professional competencies` and decision making among public relations in government-linked companies. *Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 36(4), 211-229.







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