

Public Relations Research for Planning and Evaluation

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Executive Summary

This paper outlines and describes the various tools and techniques that public relations practitioners ought to consider when designing and carrying out research projects for public relations planning and for public relations measurement and evaluation purposes.

The paper initially focuses on some of the needs that public relations/public affairs officers have for conducting public relations research, then lists and discusses various primary and secondary research data collection tools and techniques. When it comes to considering primary, or original research, the paper describes in detail both *qualitative* and *quantitative* methodologies. *Qualitative* techniques that are discussed include focus groups, depth interviews, convenience polling, ethnographic research and inquiry studies. *Quantitative* techniques cited include e-mail and fax polls, face-to-face interviewing, mail surveys, mall intercepts, omnibus polling, panels, telephone surveys and web-site studies.

The paper offers research suggestions for use in public relations strategic planning and program development, as well as outlining research ideas that might be considered when measuring and evaluating PR effectiveness. The document also offers suggestions for do-it-yourself research, includes a brief bibliography of key research references, and a selected glossary of research terms.

Building a Foundation for Sound Public Relations Research

Research is the key to any successful public relations, communications and/or marketing efforts, not only in the business world, but also in the non-profit and government sectors.

Without research, those who administer public relations, public affairs, promotional, and related communications programs and activities for their organizations would be operating in the dark, without any guidance or clear sense of direction.

Public Relations Research, as the name implies, focuses on the entire public relations process and examines the communications relationships that exist among and between institutions and their key target audience groups. For the public relations or public affairs officer, a useful definition of *public relations research* is that it is an essential tool for fact and opinion gathering -- a systematic effort aimed at discovering, confirming and/or understanding through objective appraisal the facts or opinions pertaining to a specified problem, situation, or opportunity.

Most public relations/public affairs officers have come to recognize the following as real “needs” for conducting public relations research:

- To collect information that public relations professionals need to have and to know to do their jobs more effectively.
- To obtain benchmark data regarding the views of key target audience groups.
- To plan, develop, or possibly refine a public relations, public affairs or marketing communications program or activity.
- To track or monitor programs, activities or events that are or can be important to the institution.
- To evaluate the overall effectiveness of a particular public relations or public affairs program or activity, by measuring outputs and outcomes against a predetermined set of objectives.

- When facing a sudden and unexpected crisis, to put the issues involved into proper perspective through emergency monitoring or polling.
- When circumstances allow, to provide appropriate support in publicizing or promoting a specific program, activity or event.

For truly effective public relations research, advance planning is necessary. Before you begin, clearly define your goals and objectives. Ask yourself what you want and need the research to do for you. Remember, finding out “why” things are the way they are or the reasons individuals feel and act the way they do are often much more important for public relations planning and evaluation than simply finding out “what” the facts are or “how” people feel.

A useful starting point when considering public relations research is to remember the classic one-sentence definition of the communications process first described by Harold D. Lasswell, the political scientist, more than 50 years ago. He said, if you can figure out *who* says *what*, *to whom*, *how*, *with what effect*, you will have come a long way in understanding how communications work.

The *who* refers to the sources, or disseminators, of information; the *what* to the messages that are being disseminated; the *to whom* to the targeted audiences or intended recipients of your messages; the *how* to the channels of communications; and the *with what effect* to the eventual outputs and outcomes of the communications effort.

As part of the communications research effort, most public relations and/or public affairs officers are interested in measuring the credibility and/or believability of the information sources ... the relevance and overall importance of the messages being disseminated ... finding out as much as they possibly can about the opinions, attitudes and behavior patterns of those in the target audience groups, as they respond -- or do not respond, as the case may be -- to the various

messages being disseminated ... and in pinpointing the best and most effective communications channels to use when disseminating messages.

Primary and Secondary Research

There are really only two types of public relations research -- *primary*, which involves doing an original study, and *secondary*, which involves examining data already available.

Secondary research ought *always* to come first. Don't reinvent the wheel. Any time you are considering a possible public relations research assignment, do not automatically assume that a completely new study is needed. There's a good chance that someone else has already done a similar study or gathered similar data.

Start out with a review of what's already been done. That's called doing a *literature search and secondary analysis*. There's more existing data out there than you may suspect.

With the growing wealth of data on the internet and in printed source books and periodicals, there are literally hundreds upon hundreds of places to which you can go to obtain background information. A logical starting point is academic, trade and professional journals. The federal government also is a rich source of information: the Census Bureau and the Departments of Commerce, Defense, Education, and Labor, to mention just a few.

Web site addresses are constantly changing, but some of the best sources of already available data include sites such as these: the Census Bureau (<http://www.census.gov>) ... *Ad Age's American Demographics* (<http://www.demographics.com>) ... the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (<http://www.aejmc.sc.edu>) ... the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago (<http://www.norc.uchicago.edu>) ... the Pew Research Center for the People & The Press (<http://www.people-press.org>) ... the Roper

Center for Public Opinion Research (<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu>) ... the Survey Research Laboratory at the University of Illinois (<http://www.srl.uic.edu>) ... and the site maintained by Survey Sampling, Inc. (<http://www.worldopinion.com>).

The Commerce Department's 1,000-page reference book -- *Statistical Abstract of the United States* -- is a must for obtaining secondary data, as are such periodicals as *Research Alert* (a bi-weekly newsletter that summarizes recent public opinion polls, available from E.P.M. Communications in New York City) ... *The Polling Report* (a twice-a-month newsletter that summarizes recent public opinion polls, available from the Polling Report, Inc. in Washington, D.C.) ... *Quirk's Marketing Research Review* (a monthly magazine available from Quirk Enterprises Inc. in Bloomington, Minnesota -- www.quirks.com) ... and *Survey Research* (a quarterly newsletter that summarizes public opinion studies carried out by academicians and those in the non-profit sector, available from the Survey Research Laboratory at the University of Illinois).

Primary research is usually either *qualitative* or *quantitative* in form. *Qualitative* research usually refers to studies that are somewhat subjective, but nevertheless in-depth, using a probing, open-end, free response format. *Quantitative* research usually refers to studies that are highly objective and projectable, using closed-end, forced-choice questionnaires. These studies tend to rely heavily on statistics and numerical measures.

Qualitative Research

When communications researchers consider doing *qualitative* studies, the data collection methodologies that usually pop quickly into mind are *focus groups* and *depth interview studies*.

Focus groups are an exploratory technique in which a group of somewhere between 8 and 12 individuals -- under the guidance of a trained moderator -- are encouraged, as a group, to discuss freely any and all of their feelings, concerns, problems and frustrations relating to specific topics under discussion. Focus groups are ideal for brainstorming, idea-gathering and concept testing.

Depth interview studies are those that rely on a probing, open-ended, largely unstructured interviewing format, and usually are carried out in person or by telephone. As part of the exercise, respondents are encouraged to talk freely and in great detail about given subjects.

There are other forms of qualitative research that often do not come readily to mind, which also can prove to be quite useful forms of data collection. These include *convenience polling ... ethnographic research ... and inquiry studies*.

As the name implies, a *convenience poll* is a type of non-probability study in which who ever happens to be available at a given point in time is included in the sample. It sometimes also is referred to as a “haphazard,” “informal,” or “quick-and-dirty” poll.

As you might expect, *convenience polls* are viewed by most researchers as highly unscientific, unreliable and invalid and the findings are certainly not projectable to the total population under study. However, in our professional judgment, they could be of some value to the public relations officer -- and, thus, are worth considering -- if all you need at a given point in time is a “quick read” of people’s views, feelings or sentiments regarding a particular issue and if you recognize that the data you collect in this manner is little more than a rough, informal “sounding board” pertaining to a handful of people’s opinions.

Ethnographic research relies on the tools and techniques of cultural anthropologists and sociologists to obtain a better understanding of how individuals and groups function in their

natural settings. Usually, this type of research is carried out by a team of impartial, trained researchers who “immerse” themselves into the daily routine of a school setting, a neighborhood, or a community, using a mix of observation, participation, and role-playing techniques, in an effort to try to assess what is really happening from a “cultural” perspective.

For an academic institution that was having major student recruitment problems, here is how one researcher relied on *ethnographic* “role-playing” techniques to gain a better understanding of why prospective students were applying to other colleges and universities:

The researcher enlisted the services of his teen-age daughter, who happened to be a junior in high school, and had her play the “role” of a prospective student seeking information from various colleges and universities to which she might be considering applying. He had her write and mail the exact same letter on the exact same day, soliciting enrollment information and other background materials, *not only* from the academic institution that was having problems, but also from 10 of its principal competitors.

How the 11 different academic institutions responded to this teenager’s letters of inquiry were then carefully monitored and analyzed, to come up with a portrait of how different colleges and universities respond to the unsolicited inquiries they receive from prospective students.

An *inquiry study* is a systematic review and analysis -- using content analysis or sometimes telephone, mail and internet interviewing techniques -- to study the range and types of unsolicited inquiries that an organization may receive from key audience groups with which it frequently communicates.

For business establishments, for example, it could be of great benefit to conduct informal interviews with prospective customers who contact company officials for background

information and/or promotional materials. Although those who contact the institution on their own would, in effect, constitute an unscientific, self-selected sample, the mere fact that they are calling could provide the organization with a very useful source of *qualitative* information about target groups that are, obviously, very important to the company.

Quantitative Research

Quantitative studies can be carried out using a broad array of different data collection techniques, including the following: via e-mail ... fax ... face-to-face interviewing ... mail ... mall intercepts (or shopping center interviewing) ... omnibus polling ... panels ... telephone ... and web-sites.

Most of these techniques are self-explanatory and, therefore, will not be discussed in great detail in this paper. A few -- conducting surveys via e-mail and web-sites, through omnibus polling, and using panels -- warrant further comment.

Conducting surveys via e-mail or through web-sites is growing in popularity.

E-mail surveys are exactly what the name implies: They are self-administered questionnaires that are sent directly to potential respondents, electronically. Their major advantage: speed. Since e-mail questionnaires are sent to potential respondents' electronic mailboxes, they get immediate attention. Their major shortcomings: An inability to appropriately format the questionnaires ... problems regarding "skip" questions ... and the fact that lots of times, the questionnaires are sent back with incomplete or missing data.

Web-based surveys differ in that a specialized software program or system is needed to construct a questionnaire and to collect and eventually process the results. The benefit is that survey instruments can be attractively designed (with audio, video, and graphic concepts added,

if desired) and can contain complex, built-in skip patterns. Survey responses are collected in databases, which eliminates the need for manual data entry.

However, unlike e-mail surveys -- which are attention-demanding -- Web-based surveys are many times more passive, relying on respondents to seek out the on-line questionnaire. This can have a major effect on respondent eligibility and on overall representativeness.

There are in the U.S. a growing number of organizations that now offer on-line polling services, at extremely low cost. Here are several that offer quick, do-it-yourself on-line polls: e-surveys (www.guidestarco.com) ... Esearch (www.esearch.com) ... InfoTek On-Line (www.infotekonline.com) ... InsightExpress, an affiliate of NFO Worldwide, Inc. (www.insightexpress.com) ... Knowledge Engine, which offers a do-it-yourself service called SurveyBuilder (www.informative.com) ... Survey Monkey, another do-it-yourself survey service (www.surveymonkey.com) ... and Zoomerang, a division of MarketTools (www.zoomerang.com). For a complete list of organizations that offer on-line polling services, you may wish to click on the Web Survey Methodology Web Page (www.websm.org).

These are the major advantages of e-mail and web-based surveys: large samples are possible in a short amount of time ... usually studies can be carried out much more quickly and far more cheaply than using other methods ... data can be analyzed continuously; that is, one can “port” directly into statistical tools and databases as the completed questionnaires are returned.

These are the major disadvantages of e-mail and web-based surveys: respondents usually are self-selected; thus, there is limited or often no control over sample design and selection ... probability sampling is not yet (and may never be) achievable ... and, identity validation can be a problem.

An *omnibus survey* is an “all-purpose” general public, consumer poll, usually conducted nationally on a regular schedule -- once a week or every other week -- by major market research firms. Organizations are encouraged to “buy” one or several proprietary questions and have them “added” to the basic questionnaire. Those adding questions are usually charged on a per question basis.

There are also many organizations that conduct *omnibus* polls in individual states, usually among a representative sample of adults residing in that state. State *omnibus* polls are usually conducted far less frequently than are national *omnibus* polls, with some organizations going into the field only once a month, every other month, or only two or three times a year.

For public relations officers, the major advantage to using an *omnibus* poll service comes if you would like the answers to a small number (let’s say two or three) short, closed-end questions, directed at the general public. For costs that typically range from a low of \$500 to up \$800 per question, you can complete a survey of a representative sample of up to 1,000 adults in a matter of only a week or two, and have data available without going through the hassle of worrying about sample design specifications ... interview quality and control ... and data processing and tabulation issues.

Panels are a type of research study in which a group of individuals are deliberately recruited by a research firm, because of their special demographic characteristics, for the express purpose of being interviewed more than once over a period of time for various clients on a broad array of different topics or subjects.

The best time to consider fielding a *panel* study is if you are trying to survey a hard-to-reach or hard-to-find audience segment. For example, let’s say you wanted to survey a sample of adult African-Americans. The proportion of Blacks in the total U.S. population in 2000 was

about 13 percent. Therefore, if you were to conduct a traditional telephone poll of a representative sample of adult Americans and “screen” for those who are Black, you would need to place 100 phone calls for every 13 Blacks you wanted to contact.

That can end up as a very expensive proposition. An alternative approach might be to rely on the services of a market research supplier that maintains a “panel” of known potential respondents, broken down by their demographic characteristics. Not only are there cost savings, but also savings in time, since the audience segment you are targeting can quickly be identified and found. There are “panels” available for practically every different type of potential respondent that you might imagine -- from membership in certain types of organizations ... to various age categories ... broken down by various education, income, household size, and product use variables.

Of the various *quantitative* data collection techniques that we have listed above, if your primary consideration is keeping your research costs down, the best methodologies to consider are *e-mail polls, fax polls, mail surveys, omnibus polls, panels*, and simple *telephone polls*.

If your primary consideration is quick-turnaround of the study from start to finish, the best methodologies would be *e-mail polls, omnibus polling, telephone polls*, and *web-site surveys*.

If your study is involved and complex and involves showing potential respondents a set of promotional materials or other items, we suggest considering *face-to-face interviewing* and *mall intercept studies*.

Research for Strategic Planning and Program Development

All of the various data collection tools and techniques that we have described in the previous pages are appropriate to use when designing and carrying out public relations research,

both for strategic planning and program development purposes, and for measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of your various marketing and communications and activities.

For public relations research to provide support and assistance to the *strategic planning and program development process*, a mix of both qualitative and quantitative research is preferable.

Usually, qualitative research (e.g. focus groups, depth interviews, etc.) ought to be carried out first, to obtain “exploratory” information, to be followed by some type of quantitative research (e.g. a telephone, mail, or internet survey, etc.) with representatives of key constituent groups, to obtain information that is both more “descriptive” and “explanatory” in nature.

The two together -- qualitative research followed by quantitative research -- will give you a good mix of in-depth information that will tell you not only “how” and “what” people think, but also something about “why” they hold the views they do. This in-depth information can then be effectively utilized for strategic planning and program development purposes.

Research for Measurement and Evaluation

For public relations research to provide support and assistance in the *measurement and evaluation of communications and marketing effectiveness*, although qualitative research can provide useful information, it is better to put far more emphasis on quantitative data collection, since it is important to obtain statistically reliable and valid numbers to clearly pinpoint and substantiate any changes that have taken place, as a result of the communications effort.

Interest in measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of an organization’s communications effectiveness has grown in importance in recent years. In the business sector, CEOs are more and more demanding of their public relations and public affairs subordinates that

they “justify” their existence and be accountable for their various programs and activities. Top corporate executives insist that their communications officers document -- through research -- that the communications programs they have designed and implemented really work; that the “needle has moved” in a particular direction.

The same pressures are now being put on the public relations and public affairs officers employed by non-profit institutions and by government agencies.

For any *communications measurement and evaluation research* to be credible, four major components of the process need to be taken into consideration. They are:

1. Setting Specific Measurable Communications Goals and Objectives

This has to come first. No one can really measure the effectiveness of anything, unless they first figure out exactly what it is they are measuring that something against.

So, to begin, the public relations/public affairs officer ought to ask: What are or were the goals or objectives of our communications, marketing and development activities? What exactly did our program hope to accomplish -- through its communications component?

2. Measuring Communications Outputs

Outputs are usually the short-term, or immediate, results of a particular communications program or activity. More often than not, *outputs* represent what is readily apparent to the eye. *Outputs* measure how well an organization presents itself to others, the amount of attention or exposure that the organization receives.

In media or press relations efforts, *outputs* can be the total number of stories, articles, or “placements” that appear in the media ... the total number of “impressions” -- that is, the number of those who might have been exposed to the story ... as well as an assessment of the

overall content of what has appeared. Media content analysis is one of the principal methodologies used to measure media *outputs*.

For other facets of communications, *outputs* can be white papers, speaking engagements, the number of times a spokesperson is quoted, specific messages communicated, or specific positioning on an important issue or any number of quantifiable items that are generated as a result of the effort.

Outputs also might be an assessment of a specific event, a direct mail campaign, the number of people who participated in a given activity, how an organization's top executive handles himself or herself at a press conference, or the appearance and contents of a given brochure or booklet.

In any event, both the quantity and quality of *outputs* can be measured and evaluated. Media can be evaluated for their content; an event, as to whether the right people were there; a booklet or brochure for its visual appeal and substance; and so on.

3. *Measuring Communications Outtakes and Outcomes*

As important as it might be to measure communications *outputs*, it is far more important to measure communications *outtakes* and *outcomes*.

These measure whether target audience groups actually *received* the messages directed at them ... paid *attention* to them ... *understood* the messages ... and *retained* the messages in any shape or form. They also measure whether the communications materials and messages which were disseminated have resulted in any *opinion*, *attitude* and/or *behavior* changes on the part of those targeted audiences to whom the messages were directed.

It is usually much more difficult and, generally, more expensive, to measure communications *outtakes* and *outcomes* than it is to measure communications *outputs*. This is because more sophisticated data-gathering research tools and techniques are required.

Research techniques often used to measure communications *outtakes* and *outcomes* include quantitative surveys (face-to-face, by telephone, by mail, by fax, via e-mail, via the Internet, in malls, etc.) ... qualitative depth attitude surveys of elite audience groups ... pre-test/post-test studies (e.g. before-and-after polls) ... experimental and quasi-experimental research projects ... and multi-variate studies that rely on advanced statistical applications such as correlation and regression analyses, Q-sorts, and factor and cluster analysis studies.

4. *Measuring Institutional Outcomes*

Whatever steps public relations/public affairs officers take to measure the effectiveness of what they, themselves, do in connection with their communications and/or marketing programs and activities, it is imperative that they also take steps to seek to link their public relations accomplishments to the ultimate goals, objectives, and accomplishments of the institution as a whole.

What we are talking about here is seeking to relate communications *outtakes* and *outcomes* to such desired institutional *outcomes* as increasing market penetration, improving market share, meeting recruitment expectations, successfully completing a fund-raising campaign, and the like.

It needs to be recognized that this is not easy to do. It requires a careful delineation of what the communications program seeks to accomplish in concert with what the institution as a whole seeks to accomplish. It also requires a good understanding about how and why the two processes are supposed to work together.

When one has a good understanding of the impacts that are desired, as well as a good understanding of how the process is supposed to work, many of the research tools and techniques that we have reviewed in this paper can then be employed to reliably and validly measure the impacts that are desired.

Can Research Be Done In-House, Or Should Outside Specialists Be Hired?

A good deal of the public relations research that has been reviewed and discussed in this paper can be done efficiently and effectively in-house, with a modest amount of internal training.

By relying on the services of marketing professors and statisticians who work at nearby academic institutions, as well as on your own internal computer staff members, and on members of your support staff, it is possible for you to set up and conduct studies that involve some of the following methodologies: *depth interviewing ... convenience polling ... some ethnographic research ... inquiry studies ...* and quantitative surveys via *e-mail, fax* and *regular mail*.

An obvious problem in conducting in-house public relations research is that internal studies sometimes lack credibility. People sometimes tend to be skeptical about the objectivity of a research project created and analyzed by staff members who may have a vested interest in the outcome.

If you do choose to design and carry out public relations research in-house, there are a number of excellent books that you may wish to examine: *Using Research In Public Relations: Applications to Program Management*, by Glen M. Broom and David M. Dozier ... *The Practice of Social Research*, by Earl P. Babbie ... *Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*, by Don A. Dillman ... *Asking Questions: A Practical Guide To Questionnaire Design*,

by Seymour Sudman and Norman Bradburn ... and *The Advertising Research Foundation's Compendium of Guidelines to Good Advertising, Marketing and Media Research Practices*.

You should rely on the services of an outside research supplier whenever you need to do sophisticated research involving specialized data analysis procedures (e.g. factor and cluster analysis) ... when you do communications measurement and evaluation research projects ... and whenever you consider doing studies involving the following methodologies: *focus groups . . . mall intercepts (or shopping center studies) . . . omnibus polling . . . panel studies . . . telephone surveys . . . web-site surveys . . . pre-test/post-test studies (e.g. before-and-after polls) . . . experimental and quasi-experimental research projects . . . and multi-variate studies that rely on advanced statistical applications such as correlation and regression analyses*.

Two reference sources you may wish to turn to when “shopping” for a research supplier are:

- **THE GREEN BOOK** (The International Directory of Marketing Research Companies and Services, published annually by the New York Chapter of the American Marketing Association, 116 East 27th Street, New York, NY 10016)
- **THE BLUE BOOK** (A listing of more than 200 research agencies and organizations published by the American Association for Public Opinion Research, P.O. Box 14263, Lenexa, Kansas 66285-4263)

For more detailed information on communications measurement and evaluation, you may wish to review the various papers on measurement that have been prepared by the Institute for Public Relations Commission on Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation, all of which have been posted on the Institute's website: www.instituteforpr.com.

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SELECTED GLOSSARY OF RESEARCH TERMS

Advertising Value Equivalency: A means of converting editorial space in the media into advertising costs, by measuring the amount of editorial coverage and then calculating what it would have cost to buy that space, if it had been advertising. Most reputable researchers contend that advertising equivalency computations are of questionable validity, since in many cases the opportunity to “buy” advertising in space that has been specifically allocated to editorial coverage simply does not exist.

Attitude Research: Consists of measuring and interpreting the full range of views, sentiments, feelings, opinions and beliefs which segments of the public may hold toward given people, products, organizations and/or issues. More specifically, attitude research measures what people say (their verbal expressions), what they know and think (their mental or cognitive predispositions), what they know and think (their mental or cognitive predispositions), what they feel (their emotions), and how they’re inclined to act (their motivational or drive tendencies).

Benchmarking: A technique that involves having an organization learn something about its own practices ... learn something about the best practices of other organizations, either in the same field or in somewhat related fields ... and then making changes for improvement that will enable the organization to meet or beat the best in the world.

Benchmark Study: An initial measurement against which all subsequent measurements are compared.

Bivariate Analysis: Examination of the relationship between two variables.

Causal Relationship: A theoretical notion that change in one variable forces, produces, or brings about a change in another.

Census: Collection of data from every person or object in a population.

Central Tendency: Any statistic that describes the typical or average case in the distribution of a variable.

Chi Square: A test of statistical significance used to determine the likelihood that an observed bivariate relationship differs significantly from what might have occurred by chance.

Circulation: Refers to the number of copies sold of a given edition of a publication, at a given time or as averaged over a period of time.

Clustered Sample: A type of probability sample that involves first breaking the total population into heterogeneous subsets (or clusters), then selecting the potential sample at random from the individual clusters.

Cohort Study: A type of longitudinal study in which some specific group is studied over time, although data may be collected from different members in each set of observations.

Communications Audit: A systematic review and analysis -- using accepted research techniques and methodologies -- of how well an organization communicates with all of its major internal and external target audience groups.

Communications Research: Any systematic study of the relationships and patterns that are developed when people seek to share information with each other.

Community Case Study: An in-depth look at one or several communities – or sub-sections of communities – in which an organization has an interest by impartial, trained researchers using a mix of observation, participation, role-playing, secondary analysis, content analysis, formal and informal interviewing techniques.

Confidence Interval: In a survey based on a random sample, the range of values within which a population parameter is estimated to fall. For example, in a survey in which a representative sample of 1,000 individuals is interviewed, if 55% express a preference for a given item, we might say that in the population as a whole, in 95 out of 100 cases, the true proportion expressing such a preference probably would fall between 52% and 58%. The plus or minus 3% range is called the confidence interval. The fact that we are using 95 out of 100 cases as our guide (or 95%) is our confidence level.

Content Analysis: The process of studying and tracking what has been written and broadcast and translating this qualitative material into quantitative form through some type of counting approach that involves coding and classifying of specific messages.

Contingency Question: A survey question that is to be asked only of some respondents, determined by their responses to some other questions.

Contingency Table: A table for displaying the relationship among variables in terms of frequencies (actual numbers) and percentages. Also known as a “cross tabulation” table, or “cross tab.”

Convenience Sample: A type of non-probability sample in which who ever happens to be available at a given point in time is included in the sample. Sometimes also referred to as a “haphazard” or “accidental” sample.

Correlation: Any association or relationship between two variables.

Correlation Coefficient: A measure of association (symbolized as r) that describes the direction and strength of a linear relationship between two variables, measured at the interval or ratio level (e.g. Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient).

Cost Per Thousand (CPM): The cost of advertising for each 1,000 homes reached by radio or television, for each 1,000 copies of a publication, or for each 1,000 potential viewers of an outdoor advertisement.

Cross-Sectional Study: A study based on observations representing a single point in time.

Deduction: The logical model in which specific expectations or hypotheses are developed on the basis of general principles.

Delphi Technique: A method of trying to forecast the future that relies on successive waves of interviews with a panel of experts in a given field as a means of building a “consensus” of expert opinion and thought relating to particular topics or issues.

Demographic Analysis: Consists of looking at the population in terms of special social, political, economic, and geographic subgroups, such as a person’s age, sex, income-level, race, education-level, place or residence, or occupation.

Depth Interview: An extensive, probing, open-ended, largely unstructured interview, usually conducted in person or by telephone, in which respondents are encouraged to talk freely and in great detail about given subjects.

Descriptive Study: Consists of collecting, in quantitative form, basic opinions or facts about a specified population or sample. In layman's language, the typical public opinion poll.

Environmental Scanning: A technique for tracking new developments in any area or field by carrying out a systematic review of what appears in professional, trade, or government publications.

Ethnographic Research: Relies on the tools and techniques of cultural anthropologists and sociologists to obtain a better understanding of how individuals and groups function in their natural settings. Usually, this type of research is carried out by a team of impartial, trained researchers who "immerse" themselves into the daily routine of a neighborhood or community, using a mix of observation, participation, and role-playing techniques, in an effort to try to assess what is really happening from a "cultural" perspective.

Evaluation Research: Determines the relative effectiveness of a public relations program or strategy, measuring outputs, outgrowths and outcomes against a predetermined set of objectives.

Experiment: Any controlled arrangement and manipulation of conditions to systematically observe specific occurrences, with the intention of defining those criteria that might possibly be affecting those occurrences. An experimental, or quasi-experimental, research design usually involves two groups – a "test" group which is exposed to given criteria, and a "control" group, which is not exposed. Comparisons are then made to determine what effect, if any, exposures to the criteria have had on those in the "test" group.

Explanatory Study: Any sophisticated research effort that seeks to come up with the reasons why people say, think, feel and act, the way they do. The explanatory study is concerned chiefly with the development of theoretical statements about relationships and processes.

Exploratory Study: Consists of collecting, in qualitative and largely unstructured form, basic opinions, attitudes, behavior patterns or facts about a specific population or sample. Exploratory studies are inductive, rather than deductive in form, and involve extensive probing.

Factor Analysis: A complex algebraic procedure that seeks to group or combine items or variables in a questionnaire based on how they naturally relate to each other, or “hang together,” as general descriptors (or “factors”).

Focus Groups: An exploratory technique in which a group of somewhere between 8 and 12 individuals – under the guidance of a trained moderator – are encouraged, as a group, to discuss freely any and all of their feelings, concerns, problems and frustrations relating to specific topics under discussion. Focus groups are ideal for brainstorming, idea-gathering, and concept testing.

Frequency: The number of advertisements, broadcasts, or exposures of given programming or messaging during a particular period of time.

Gross Rating Point: A unit of measurement of broadcast or outdoor advertising audience size, equal to 1 percent of the total potential audience universe; used to measure the exposure of one or more programs or commercials, without regard to multiple exposure of the same advertising to individuals. A GRP is the product of media reach times exposure frequency. A *gross rating point buy* is the number of advertisements necessary to obtain the desired percentage of exposure of the message. In outdoor advertising, GRPs, often used as a synonym for showing, generally refer to the daily effective circulation generated by poster panels, divided by market population. The *cost per gross rating point* (CPGRP) is a measure of broadcast media exposure comparable to the *cost per thousand* (CPM) measure of print media.

Hypothesis: An expectation about the nature of things derived from theory.

Hypothesis-Testing: Determining whether the expectations that a hypothesis represents are, indeed, found in the real world.

Image Research: Any systematic study of people’s perceptions toward an organization, individual, product, or service.

Impressions: The number of those who might have had the opportunity to be exposed to a story that has appeared in the media. Sometimes referred to as “opportunity to see.” An “impression” usually refers to the total audited circulation of a publication or the audience reach of a broadcast vehicle

Incidence: The frequency with which a condition or event occurs within a given time and population.

Induction: The logical model in which general principles are developed from specific observations.

Inquiry Study: A systematic review and analysis, using content analysis or sometimes telephone and mail interviewing techniques, to study the range and types of unsolicited inquiries that an organization may receive from customers, prospective customers or other target audience groups.

Inputs: (1) Everything that is involved upfront within the organization in the design, conception, approval, production and distribution of communications materials aimed at targeted audience groups. (2) Also, the research information and data from both internal and external sources that are applied to the initial stage of the communications planning and production process.

Interval Measures: Variables for which the actual distance separating their attributes has meaning (e.g. temperature scale, standardized intelligence test scores).

Issues Research: Any systematic study of the public policy questions of the day, with the chief focus on those public policy matters whose definition and contending positions are still evolving.

Judgmental Sample: A type of non-probability sample in which individuals are deliberately selected for inclusion in the sample by the researcher because they have special knowledge, position, characteristics or represent other relevant dimensions of the population that are deemed important to study. Also often referred to as a “purposive” sample.

Likert Scale: Developed by Rensis Likert, this is a composite measure in which respondents are asked to choose from an ordered series of five responses to indicate their reactions to a sequence of statements (e.g., strongly agree ... somewhat agree ... neither agree nor disagree ... somewhat disagree ... strongly disagree).

Longitudinal Study: A research design involving the collection of data at different points in time.

Mall Intercept: A special type of in-person interview, in which potential respondents are approached as they stroll through shopping centers or malls. Most mall intercept interviews are based on non-probability sampling.

Market Research: Any systematic study of buying and selling behavior.

Mean: A measure of central tendency which is the arithmetic average of the scores.

Measurement: A way of giving an activity a precise dimension, generally by comparison to some standard. This is usually done in a numerical or quantifiable manner.

Median: A measure of central tendency indicating the midpoint in a series of scores, the point above and below which 50 percent of the values fall.

Mode: A measure of central tendency which is the most frequently occurring, the most typical, value in a series.

Multivariate Analysis: Examination of the relationship among three or more variables.

Nominal Measures: Variables whose attributes have only the characteristics of exhaustiveness and mutual exclusiveness (e.g. a person's sex, religion, political party).

Omnibus Survey: An "all-purpose" national consumer poll usually conducted on a regular schedule -- once a week or every other week -- by major market research firms. Organizations are encouraged to "buy" one or several proprietary questions and have them "added" to the basic questionnaire. Those adding questions are usually charged on a per question basis. Also, sometimes referred to as "piggyback," or "shared-cost" surveys.

Ordinal Measures: Variables whose attributes may be logically rank-ordered. (e.g. social class, conservatism, alienation, prejudice.)

Outcomes -- A long-term measure of the effectiveness of a particular communications program or activity, by focusing on whether targeted audience groups changed their *opinions*, *attitudes* and/or *behavior patterns* as a result of having been exposed to and become aware of the messages directed at them.

Outgrowths: (1) The culminate effect of all communication programs and products on the positioning of an organization in the minds of its stakeholders or publics. (2) For some, the term used to describe the *outtakes* of a communications program or activity (see that definition).

Outputs: (1) The short-term or immediate results of a particular communications program or activity, with a prime focus on how well an organization presents itself to others and the amount of exposure it receives. (2) For some, the final stage in the communication product production process, resulting in the production and distribution of such items as brochures, media releases, websites, speeches, etc.

Outtakes: (1) A measure of the effectiveness of a particular communications program or activity, by focusing on whether targeted audience groups *received* the messages directed to them ... paid *attention* to the messages ... *understood* or comprehended the messages ... and *retained* and can *recall* the messages in any shape or form. (2) Initial audience reaction to the receipt of communications materials, including whether the audience heeded or responded to a call for information or action within the messages.

Panel Study: (1) A type of longitudinal study in which the same individuals are interviewed more than once over a period of time to investigate the processes of response change, usually in reference to the same topic or issue. (2) Also, a type of study in which a group of individuals are deliberately recruited by a research firm, because of their special demographic characteristics, for the express purpose of being interviewed more than once over a period of time for various clients on a broad array of different topics or subjects.

Probability Sample: A process of random selection, in which each unit in a population has an equal chance of being included in the sample.

Psychographic Analysis: Consists of looking at the population in terms of people's non-demographic traits and characteristics, such as a person's personality type, life-style, social roles, values and beliefs.

Q-Sort: A personality inventory introduced in the 1950's in which respondents are asked to sort opinion statements along a "most-like-me" to "most-unlike-me" continuum. Q-Sorting allows researchers to construct models of individual respondents' belief systems.

Qualitative Research: Usually refers to studies that are somewhat subjective, but nevertheless in-depth, using a probing, open-end, free response format.

Quantitative Research: Usually refers to studies that are highly objective and projectable, using closed-end, forced-choice questionnaires. These studies tend to rely heavily on statistics and numerical measures.

Quota Sample: A type of non-probability sample in which individuals are selected on the basis of pre-specified characteristics, so that the total sample will have the same general distribution of characteristics as are assumed to exist in the population being studied.

Range: A measure of variability that is computed by subtracting the lowest score in a distribution from the highest score.

Ratio Measures: Variables for which the attributes are based on a true zero point. (e.g. age, length of residence in a given place, number of friends, number of children.)

Reach: Refers to the range or scope of influence or effect that a given communications vehicle has on targeted audience groups. In broadcasting, it is the net unduplicated radio or TV audience -- the number of different individuals or households -- for programs or commercials as measured for a specific time period in quarter-hour units over a period of one to four weeks.

Regression Analysis: A statistical technique for studying relationships among variables, measured at the interval or ratio level.

Reliability: The extent to which the results would be consistent, or replicable, if the research were conducted a number of times.

Screening Question: One or several questions usually asked in the beginning of an interview to determine if the potential respondent is eligible to participate in the study.

Secondary Analysis: A technique for extracting from previously conducted opinion studies new knowledge on topics other than those which were the focus of the original studies. It does this through a systematic re-analysis of a vast array of already existing research data.

Semantic Differential: A measure in which respondents are asked to mark a point on a seven-point scale that positions themselves somewhere between two adjectives having directly opposite meaning. The resulting semantic spaces can be defined statistically.

Simple Random Sample: A type of probability sample in which numbers are assigned to all of the units that make up a population, a set of random numbers is then generated, and only those units having the random numbers are included in the sample.

Situation Analysis: An impartial, often third-party assessment of the public relations and/or public affairs problems, or opportunities, that an organization may be facing at a given point in time.

Snowball Sample: A type of non-probability sample in which individuals who are interviewed are asked to suggest other individuals for further interviewing.

Standard Deviation: An index of variability of a distribution. More precisely, it is the range from the mean within which approximately 34% of the cases fall, provided the values are distributed in a normal curve.

Statistical Significance: Refers to the unlikeliness that relationships observed in a sample could be attributed to sampling error alone.

Stratified Sample: A type of probability sample that involves first breaking the total population into homogeneous subsets (or strata), then selecting the potential sample at random from the individual strata.

Survey: Any systematic collection of data that uses a questionnaire and a recognized sampling method. There are three basic types of surveys: Those conducted face-to-face (in-person) ... those conducted by telephone ... and those that are self-administered (usually distributed by mail, but some also may be distributed by e-mail, fax or through on-line computer services.)

Systematic Sample: A type of probability sample in which units in a population are selected from an available list at a fixed interval after a random start.

Trend Study: A type of longitudinal study in which a given topic or subject is examined over a period of time through repeated surveys of independently selected samples of the same population.

Univariate Analysis: The examination of only one variable at a time.

Validity: The extent to which a research project measures what it is intended, or purports, to measure.

Variance: A measure of the extent to which individual scores in a set differ from each other. More precisely, it is the sum of the squared deviations from the mean divided by the frequencies.

Dr. Walter K. Lindenmann

Dr. Walter K. Lindenmann is an independent consultant, specializing in public relations research, measurement and evaluation services. He retired from Ketchum, the international public relations counseling firm, in 2000 after creating its Research and Measurement Department and serving for 12 years as the company's Senior Vice President/Director of Research. Prior to that, he spent two years as manager of the New York City office of Opinion Research Corporation and 10 years as president of Group Attitudes Corporation, the research subsidiary of Hill and Knowlton, Inc.

During his career, he has supervised the conducting of more than 1,500 public relations, public affairs, marketing, and advertising research projects, most of them for large corporations, financial service organizations, trade associations, government agencies, utilities, education and health groups and charitable organizations. He also has had an extensive amount of experience in designing and carrying out research projects aimed at measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of public relations programs and activities.

A sociologist by training with a Ph.D. from Columbia University, Dr. Lindenmann is a former public relations executive and newspaper reporter and editor. He is a frequent lecturer on public relations research. Dr. Lindenmann can be reached at his home address at 4 Wren Court, Lake Monticello, Palmyra, Virginia 22963-2126. His telephone number is: 434/589-5822. His e-mail address is: lindenmann@cstone.net.

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