Measuring The Overall Satisfaction of Filipino Journalists on Public Information Officers

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ABSTRACT

The Philippine public relations industry's close connection with journalism has been one of the many riveting subjects' local researchers want to investigate. On the other hand, the government-run public information office (PIO), an industry functioning almost similarly to public relations, is slowly attracting scholars' attention. In recent years, they have seen the PIO's growing relevance in studying the Philippine press. However, the Public Information Office remains a blind spot in journalism studies, with previous studies focusing on the satisfaction of journalists on public relations practitioners. This paper is an attempt to look at the satisfaction of journalists reporting in department/ministry news beats on the public information officers who circulate news on their mother departments. This satisfaction survey of daily journalists from 12 news beats was based on the SERVQUAL model on service quality of service providers. General findings revealed that journalist-respondents are satisfied with the PIOs' overall efficiency. Journalists surveyed were more satisfied with their work relationship with PIOs than their provided services. This indicates that the working environment, the amount of press releases and facilities in the public information office, as well as the ways that PIOs interact with journalists, were the strong points of the information offices. Meanwhile, the reliability and empathy dimensions appeared to have lesser influence in journalists' overall satisfaction.

Keywords: Public information officers, journalist-source relationship, beat reporting, Philippines, satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

The government information officer (GIO) is a visible figure in the interface between "the bureaucracy" and "society" and can make a valuable contribution to societal well-being and public support for democratic institutions (Edes, 2000). Government information officers, also called referred to as public information officers (PIOs), function as the government's mouthpieces. They inform the public —directly (on their own) or indirectly (with the help of various media institutions)— of the plans, activities and overall performance of a government agency. These practitioners are also employed to improve the government's image —to make the government look good in the eyes of the public. The practitioner is employed to advance the interest of the employer by putting in the spotlight the institution's favorable news and softening or suppressing what would be unfavorable to the employer if it became known (Cutlip, 1994).

Despite the fact that they are grounded in raising public awareness for government agencies, PIOs are often mistaken as private sector-based public relations practitioners (PRPs). Like PR practitioners, PIOs often deal with journalists. Part of the PIOs job is to write and distribute press releases, to organize press conferences, to answer media inquiries and

to basically make sure their agency gains space in the newspapers and airtime in local news programs (Lee, 2012). Because of their vast knowledge about the agency or firm that they work for, both PRPs and PIOs are considered as sources for journalists. But it should be noted that PIOs are *neither* journalists nor PRPs, although they share educational experiences and occupational goals with the former and a degree of employer advocacy with the latter (White, 2012).

In the Philippines, several laws have been mandated to support the functions of public information offices. One of which is Executive Order 511, approved by former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in 2006. This executive order deals with the creation of the Presidential Communications Group. This communication group will be the head of all public information offices of the government and will be headed by the press secretary and shall have the Director-General of the Philippine Information Agency (PIA) and the Chairman of the government mass media organisations as members, as provided in the executive order. EO 511 also includes the function of the Communication Group that serves as a guide, as well as a supervisor, to various public information activities (including advertisements of all departments, bureaus, offices and agencies in the executive branch of the government).

Republic Act 6713 (the Philippines' Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees) deals with the norms of conduct of public officials and employees. In connection with the work of PIOs, RA 6713's provisions require a balancing act between releasing information for public consumption and withholding information deemed confidential. Section 4 of RA 6713 states that public employees must have "commitment to public interest, professionalism, justness and sincerity, political neutrality, responsiveness to the public, nationalism and patriotism, commitment to democracy, and a simple way of life."

Every government department, agency and local government office has its own public information office or communications group. Since PIOs in the Philippines belong to different divisions, bureaus and departments or ministries, PIOs are bound by the mandates of the department or agency where they are affiliated.

Since much of a PIO's time is typically spent working on media-related matters, particular attention is given to the relationship between information officers and journalists. PIOs and journalists have a give-and-take kind of relationship. According to Cutlip (1994): "in reporting today's news, one party cannot effectively function without the other." These practitioners need each other in order to do his/her work effectively. Information officers know more about a government agency than any media man or reporter (Lee, 2012). Whether it is a program, regulation, views on certain issues and even "not-to-be-made-public" kind of information, an information officer knows it (Lee, 2012). This explains the reliance of news media reporters to PIOs in government beats: By using or quoting the material given to them by PIOs, journalists in turn help the public information officers in disseminating information about the government programs and projects.

However, PIOs seem to be more invested in the relationship than journalists. In reality, it is the PIOs who strive hard to address the needs of journalists, and not the other way around. Information officers "must organise vast amounts of information and make it available to the press and the public in a manner which will secure their understanding and approval" (Cutlip, 1994).

In a democratic society like the Philippines, government transparency is required. It is the responsibility of government officials and public administrators — through the PIO — to be "responsive to the public". And because the government's response is mostly

amplified through the news media, transparency reports are achieved by responding to "media questions, inquiries and requests" (Lee, 2012). Public information officers, therefore, are obliged to cooperate and maintain a harmonious relationship with the media. They make sure that a reporter gets the information he/she needs at the time he/she needs it—in the most convenient way possible.

Despite their supposed harmonious relationship, a previous study showed that journalists are unsatisfied by public information officers' work quality and professional attitudes. Their complaints and frustrations, when narrowed down, basically point to the inaccessibility of information, the lack of experience and skills, and the poor work ethics of an information officer (Edes, 2000).

This current study aims to determine the satisfaction of journalists on public information officers' level of efficiency in terms of services and work relationship and which of these factors have the highest or lowest contribution in the overall satisfaction. Due to limited studies on this topic, this will be contributory in filling gaps on public information and its relation with journalism in general. It will also be helpful for government departments and agencies to determine which areas in public information practice need improvement.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

The public information officer (PIO)

The PIO's job description is seen to be generally expanding. But with the greatest expansion coming within the association membership ranks as those PIOs take on more of their agency communication responsibilities (Surette, 2001).

Some studies show that PIOs from transition or developing countries often lack access to basic equipment and supplies; they basically do not get what they need. According to Edes (2000), these PIOs lack computers and printers, which are practically necessary when dealing with media-related tasks. In addition, these PIOs "typically worked hard, [were] paid little, and [were] given minimal training or orientation" (Edes, 2000). This inefficiency can be traced to the shortcomings of their officials or agencies. After all, PIOs depend on those "making budget decisions for their offices to provide them with adequate resources" (Edes, 2000).

A public information officer's poor credibility is sometimes caused by the politicians themselves, or the agencies that they work for. Politicians also put pressure on GIOs to defend and promote their own standing or party positions, rather than factual information collected by state bodies and straight reporting of government activities (Edes, 2000).

PIOs and Journalists

A shift of focus by PIOs from media-related tasks will greatly affect their relationship with journalists. Findings in Surette's *Public Information Officers: A Descriptive Study of Crime News Gatekeepers* (1995) shows that the lesser time a PIO allots for the media and for media-related tasks in general, the poorer their relationship with journalists.

Work relationship is the professional interaction between journalists and public information officers that often deal with media ethics, with consideration to the PIO's level of competence that is determined by accuracy and fair treatment among journalists. It is one of the aspects looked into when measuring the journalist's satisfaction. The work relationship that exists between these two is the one wherein there is a "settler" and a

"reacher," and both use the other for their own benefit. The one that reaches works hard to address the needs of the settler just to be given even a little bit of recognition, for the "reacher" is the best, if not the only one, that could give the settler's needs. The settler, on the other hand, settles for what the "reacher" has to offer when the other choices are unavailable (Surette, 1995).

Their history, which serves as the building blocks of their work relationship, was rocky to begin with. Over the years, journalists tended to be skeptical of a PIO's motives (Wilson, 2012). This was caused by instances wherein PIOs bribed or "offered gifts" to journalists in exchange for positive coverage and "free advertising" (Wilson, 2012; Curtin, 2009; Sinaga & Wu, 2009). Journalists view the mere act of offering such gifts as "highly unethical," but for information officers, such an act is "less of a breach of ethics" (Kauri & Shauri, 2000).

Such distrust has a negative impact on their relationship. It hinders a PIO's "ability to transfer information between their organisations and journalists and influencing the mass media coverage agenda" (Wilson, 2012). According to Wilson (2012), PIOs must work their way to win the trust of journalists in order to improve their "media relations practices." Public relations practitioners must therefore follow a strategy of seduction and persuasion. They do this by attempting to gain credibility and by posing as journalistic allies (Charon, 1991).

In general, journalists and PIOs do not have a perfectly harmonious partnership. Just like in most relationships, it has its ups and downs which, in this case, is characterised by cooperation and conflict (Charon, 1991).

Negotiation serves as the middle ground between these two extremes, and is primarily manifested in a journalist's and PIO's exchange of resources. The journalist seeks information from the public relations practitioner, while the latter seeks publicity from the journalist. This exchange consists of an adjustment between the public relations practitioner's supply of information and the journalist's demand for information and, conversely, between the journalist's supply of publicity and the public relations practitioner's demand for it (Charon, 1991).

Charon (1991) looks at the basic concept of negotiation from an "inside-out" kind of perspective. Negotiations in the relationship can only be elevated if "both have the same room to maneuver in their respective organizations". Hence, if there seems to be a problem or conflict within their respective organizations, negotiations between journalists and PIOs are also most likely to fall into conflicts. The same thing applies to a positive set up in an organization. If it has order within itself, the objective kind of relationship will manifest in the external relationship (Charon, 1991).

Senior information officers and senior journalists, even with the years of experience and practice in the field, still have different views towards their contributions to the other's work. Senior journalists have a lesser bearing of satisfaction when it comes to the contributions made by their counterparts (Kauri & Shauri, 2000).

Journalists and PIOs also have different perceptions regarding one being more "conflictual" than the other. "Conflictual," here, is mainly characterized by incompatibility and certain acts of opposition. Journalists believe that information officers are more "conflictual," and that PIOs perceive them as less "conflictual" (Shin, Lee & Park, 2011). Public information officers take it the other way around. They perceived themselves as less "conflictual" than journalists, but "journalists assessed the other profession as more conflictual than themselves on the conflict dimension" (Shin, Lee & Park, 2011).

Ideally speaking, the two are mutually dependent on one another (Kauri & Shauri, 2000; Charon, 1991). This dependence, however, is limited. A certain resource may be vital to one, but only partial and/or optional to the other (Charon, 1991). Thus, realistically speaking, journalists appear to be a lot more independent than the PIOs. According to Surette (1995, 2001), "PIOs are often held as reserve organisational resources, frequently used for other functions, but available to serve when needed." Therefore, in a journalist's pool of sources, information officers are not viewed as a priority, but rather only as an option—who may or may not affect a journalist's overall news production (Wilson, 2012).

As revealed in the studies conducted by Curtin (2009) and Charon (1991), journalists felt that it is a must to dominate information officers, particularly when it comes to news content. They resented practitioners whom they perceived as threatening that control (Curtin, 2009; Charon, 1991). On the other hand, there were plenty of journalists who appreciated information officers that gave their feedback, suggestions and ideas —provided that the decision of what information to include in an article still lay solely upon the discretion of the journalist (Curtin, 2009; Charon, 1991).

Journalists have no problem whatsoever in "indicating that practitioners are deficient in certain aspects of media relations" (Wilson, 2012). PIOs, in turn, acknowledge the fact that journalists have more power in the "game of information exchange" (Charon, 1991). According to Charon (1991), public information officers use a "selective approach" for their media campaigns. Information is made and given in a way that would perfectly fit the preference of journalists; PIOs basically pattern their media campaigns to what the journalists want. The selective approach consists of seeing to it that the message is as consonant as possible with what each medium is looking for or, better yet, what each journalist is looking for, thereby increasing the journalistic value of the information he has to offer (Charon, 1991).

Satisfaction
In the words of Chirag Tulsiani (n.d.), "in a world where competition thrives, comparison reigns and wants endlessly, satisfaction becomes infeasible lacking clarity." Satisfaction, therefore, plays a vital role in every relationship —including professional ones such as the journalist-PIO relationship. Satisfaction is a function of the magnitude of the discrepancy between expected and perceived performance that can be determined by subjective (e.g. customer needs, emotions) and objective factors (e.g. product and service features) (Anderson, 1973). There are various factors to consider when measuring the satisfaction of journalists on the overall service performance of public information offices. However, the latter's level of efficiency is so far the best quantifiable determinant that one may look into.

Level of efficiency is the degree of satisfactory performance of PIOs as measured by the quality of their service and their work relationship with journalists. PIOs, just like any other professional, will find it hard to function efficiently if face constraints, like limited resources.

Service — another determinant of satisfaction — is the disposal of a PIO's useful labor that caters to the needs of journalists such as useful information, references and materials in the form of, but not limited to, press releases and press kits.

One study shows that the complaints journalists commonly have towards an information officer's services point to basic and managerial tasks. Journalists comment that PIOs must "remain sensitive to reporter's time limitations and deadlines (do not ramble on

when speaking with a reporter, and send advance information about key events); always return calls and e-mails promptly; make more of an effort to find answers to questions posed by reporters; provide information in a clear, succinct, and easily digestible format (e.g., summarize long documents); and call press conferences only when there is real news to report" (Edes, 2000).

Previous researches provided an overview of the relationship of journalists and PIOs, including their perceptions on each other. Most of these researches focused on the journalists' point of view. These studies lacked information as to whether journalists were satisfied by the services rendered and the overall efficiency of PIOs. There was inadequate information regarding the quality of services coming from government information offices. On one hand, studies that discussed a PIO's efficiency only focused on a single agency and, thus, do not have a broader application. Moreover, majority of the literature discussed the status of the Western media; a few were looked at Asian journalism.

Although earlier studies delved into the foundation of the journalist-PIO relationship, none were able to fully neither look into nor measure the satisfaction of the journalist. This study will focus on the "freest press in Asia": the Philippines.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The *Hypothesis Testing Theory* served as one of two theoretical frameworks for this research. This framework was introduced by Deighton (1983, in Deighton, 1989) as a two-step model for satisfaction. Deighton associated satisfaction as a learning process for the consumer of a certain good or service in a four-stage process of learning from experience namely: hypothesizing, exposure, encoding and integration.

In conjunction with the process of learning comes three moderating factors, the familiarity with the domain, motivation to learn and the ambiguity of the information environment (Deighton, 1989). In Deighton's theory, it is suggested that a consumer starts setting down a hypothesis or expectation even before he consumes the product or service.

Consumer expectation generally comes from outside factors such as advertising or internal attributions about personal experiences from other consumers. The consumer hypothesising about a certain product or service more likely assumes that the consumer who shares the same perception as his has a more credible testimony on the product or service, than the consumer who does not share similar perception. Moreover, the hypothesis may also come from the consumer's own personal experience with similar products. These presumptions and testimonials serve as moderating factors of the consumer's hypothesis. Given these, the consumer develops a somewhat trivial familiarity with the product and pursues to find a motive to expose him/herself with it.

Part of the moderating factors, in the process of the learning, is motive. With motive, the consumer finds a reason for him to expose himself with the product or service. The consumer also gauges the intensity of his want and need to test the specific product or service. Another moderating factor is the ambiguity of the information environment where the unfamiliarity of the product plays a vital role in manipulating the magnitude of need or want of the customer to test his hypotheses.

Once a hypothesis is formulated, the consumer then proceeds to expose himself to the product in order to test his expectations. With this framework, the consumer will tend to confirm rather than disconfirm his expectations (Vavra, 1997). He encodes a level as to whether the product has reached his expectations and integrates and idea of how the product has satisfied him or not.

In this current research, the hypothesis testing theory applies to how journalists gauge their level of satisfaction with the services offered by public information offices. By using this framework, researchers presume that a journalist's ability to tell whether the services PIO offers are efficient and satisfactory comes from the journalist's experience and prior knowledge on PIO's job description (which in turn directly affected her/his established expectations). From his/her knowledge of PIOs, the journalist will formulate a certain expectation, and by applying the hypothesis testing theory, s/he will confirm this expectation rather than disconfirm it.

Meanwhile, the *SERVQUAL model* was also used to measure the level of service public information officers offer to their consumers. Parasuraman, Zeithamal and Berry (1988) addressed many dimensions of service quality (where the contracted acronym came from) and divided these dimensions into four: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness and empathy.

Tangibility refers to the physical characteristics associated with the service encounters. This includes the appeal of the surroundings to the consumer as well as the presentation of the product and service. This may also include the appearance of the employee handing out the product or rendering services to the consumer. Reliability refers to the ability to provide consumers with dependable and accurate products and services. This also includes the amount of time before a product was served with direct relation to the quality of the product. Responsiveness refers to the willingness to attend to the customer's needs by providing them with efficient performance. Lastly, empathy refers to the readiness of the service provider to cater to the consumer's needs (Asad & Chris, 2005).

In this study, the dimensions of the SERVQUAL model may be applied to the services offered by the public information offices and their officers. The working environment, the number of press releases issued, and the efficiency of the facilities in the office serve as the tangible dimension of their services. The accuracy of the press releases and the length of time they need to attend to the needs of the press fall under the reliability dimension. Responsiveness comes from the work relationship between the journalists and the PIOs and how it directly affects the quality of service the PIOs provide to each of them with. The readiness or being well-equipped of PIOs as news sources for journalist falls under the empathy dimension.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES / SIMULACRUM

This study looks at four variables: satisfaction of journalists (SOJ), level of efficiency (LOE), services (S) and work relationship (WR). The SOJ variable is dependent on the level of efficiency. The LOE variable, on the other hand, is dependent on both the services and work relationship. The conception of research questions and hypotheses are based on these variables and their relationship.

The first hypothesis (H_1) posits that the higher level of service will positively affect the level of efficiency of PIOs. The second hypothesis (H_2) indicates that the higher level of work relationship will yield to positive LOE. Finally, the third hypothesis (H_3) states that a positive level of LOE will lead to positive satisfaction of journalists (see Figure 1).
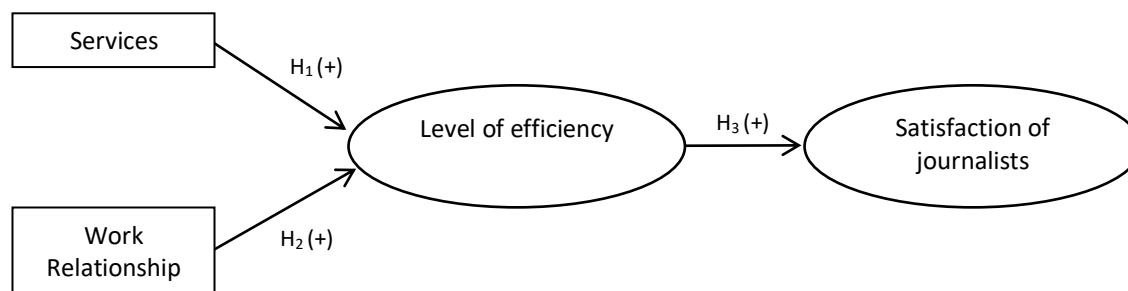
Figure 1: Research simulacrum / hypothesized model.

METHODS

This quantitative survey research focused on the satisfaction of journalists on the overall performance (services and work relationship) offered by public information officers. Researchers aimed to answer this central question: *Are journalists satisfied with public information officers' level of efficiency in terms of services and work relationship?*

A survey questionnaire was distributed to journalists assigned in government department beats. Each respondent was given a satisfaction survey based on the service quality (SERVQUAL) model. The SERVQUAL model, through its four dimensions, can further inspect the different aspects that constitute the overall performance of public information officers.

a)   Subjects

Respondents for this study are composed of various professional journalists from different beats in Metro Manila, particularly beats lodged at departments or ministries. These respondents came from different media outlets (tabloid, newspaper, radio, television and online newssites). Researches asked for prior approval to public information offices before administering the survey.

Out of the 22 departments in Philippine government, the researchers were able to administer the survey in 12 departments (whose heads of their PIOs approved the survey's conduct), yielding with a total of 54 journalist-respondents. The most respondents came from the Department of Foreign Affairs (n=7). Other respondents came from departments of justice, interior and local government (6 apiece); national defense, agriculture (5 apiece); labor and employment, health, trade and industry (4 apiece); environment and natural resources, energy (3 apiece); and transportation and communications (2).

b)   Instruments

Each respondent was asked to answer a survey questionnaire (administered January to March 2014) to gauge their satisfaction with the services offered by PIOs. The questions covered the variables that make up this research study: the satisfaction of journalists, the services offered by public information officers, the work relationship between the journalists and the PIOs, and the efficiency of service of public information offices.

The questionnaire was also divided into the four dimensions of the service quality model: tangibility, empathy, reliability and responsiveness. An additional set of questions were also included, labeled "overall satisfaction". Using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree), each respondent was asked to rate if they agree or disagree to each statement in the questionnaire.

c)   Data Collection Procedure
Prior to data collection, the researchers sent letters of request for approval to the public information office of every department in Metro Manila. Out of the 22 Cabinet departments, the researchers got approval from 12 public information officers. Upon approval, the researchers administered the survey by personally visiting the press offices. Visits were done in major Metro Manila cities like Manila, Quezon City, Makati City and Pasay City. Due to time constraints, researchers requested for a list of names of journalists (per department) with their contact information to gather more respondents. Researchers also sent out survey questionnaires by postal mail to collect more samples. There is also no total per beat how many journalists are covering the said department (News organizations may also assign reporters from other beats to cover a certain beat due to reasons such as reporter reshuffling of beat assignments, or being a reliever).

d)   Data Analysis
Regression analysis was done to analyze the hypotheses (refer to Figure 1). Using the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Windows version 20 (SPSS 20), the data was first grouped and computed per department. The means or averages of the four dimensions — with the averages of all departments combined — were computed to determine the level of satisfaction. Standardized beta coefficients of the four dimensions, as well as the level of efficiency were also computed to determine the effects or the relationship of each dimension to the level of efficiency (LOE), and the LOE to the overall satisfaction of journalists.

e)   Ethical Consideration
The confidentiality of the survey results and certain possible points of conflict with individual respondents — who may present a threat to the objectivity of data gathering — were protected by the use of a random and anonymous departmental grouping of the gathered raw data.

RESULTS
Table 1 reveals the mean scores of each dimension, which are to be rounded off to the nearest whole number in order to determine whether journalists were highly dissatisfied, dissatisfied, neutral, satisfied or highly satisfied. More or less, the mean scores reveal that respondents are (nearly) neutral in their assessments of the PIOs.

Table 1: Mean scores of the different dimension work relationship and level of efficiency of PIOs.

Dimension	Tangibility	Empathy	Reliability	Work relationship	Level of efficiency	Overall satisfaction
Mean	3.44	3.39	3.46	3.89	3.52	3.47

The questions comprising the tangibility dimension pertain to the working environment: e.g., if the press office is organized and clean), if press releases are available, and if PIOs give press releases when needed. Questions under the empathy dimension (EDA) cover items such as the information offices' readiness to cater to the needs of journalists. The reliability dimension (RDA) covers the accuracy, comprehensiveness and newsworthiness of press releases; the way press conferences were held only when

necessary and the PIOs' assistance in acquiring documents or records and getting interviews from key officials.

The mean scores for these dimensions (*M* = 3.44, 3.39 and 3.46 for tangibility, empathy and reliability, respectively), which equates to "neither agree nor disagree," show that journalists were neutral.

The work relationship dimension is composed of questions pertaining to the efforts of the information officers to keep a positive working environment by being friendly, approachable, and free of any bias within the different media outlets whatsoever. This dimension got the highest mean (*M* = 3.89), stating that journalists were (nearly) satisfied with the PIOs efforts when it comes to work relationship.

Table 2, meanwhile, shows the impact of the independent variables in terms of standard deviation units to the dependent variable. The four dimensions (TDA, EDA, RDA and WRA) as independent variables, while the level of efficiency of public information officers (LOE) is the dependent variable.

Findings of Table 2 supported the first hypothesis: the high level of services will positively affect the level of efficiency of public information officers. TDA and RDA have standardized coefficients of 0.42 and 0.18 respectively, with both variables even significant (although the tangibility dimension is more influential at $p < 0.01$ level than the reliability dimension which is at $p < 0.05$ level). Thus, the two dimensions have moderate-to-high influence in determining the effectiveness of services rendered by information officers on journalists.

Table 2: Standard beta coefficients of the four dimensions.

Dimension	Standard coefficient	Sig.
Tangibility dimension	0.42	0
Empathy dimension	0.15	0.08
Reliability dimension	0.18	0.02
Work relationship dimension	0.38	0

Dependent variable: Level of efficiency

Despite the affirmative results on the tangibility and reliability dimensions, the empathy dimension yielded an opposite outcome. It appears that empathy is not significant ($\beta = 0.15$, that being higher than $p < .05$ level). This, in turn, shows the low-to-nil influence of the empathy dimension in terms of the level of efficiency.

The results above likewise supported the second hypothesis: the high level of work relationship will yield to positive levels of efficiency. WRA or the responsiveness dimension, which represents work relationship, has a 0.38 standardized coefficient significant at $p < .01$ level. WRA, like TDA, is highly influential.

The third hypothesis — positive level of efficiency will lead to high level of satisfaction on journalists — was also supported. In testing this hypothesis, the level of efficiency became the independent variable (after the results from the four dimensions were merged), while satisfaction of journalists (SOJ) became the dependent variable. The level of efficiency ($\beta = 0.84$) is highly significant at $p < .01$ level. Hence, the level of efficiency is a factor that can be look further into when measuring the satisfaction of journalists on the overall performance of public information officers.

Respondents were also asked a few qualitative questions in the survey. A look at the qualitative comments would show that reporters were "highly concerned" over the general condition of press offices, the place where they often stay to write their stories. One news reporter commented: "I hope they (department A) will revive the press office." This suggests that some of these reporters think that an existence of media office is crucial and important, especially given the nature of journalists' work. Journalists' work is deadline-driven so respondents think the press office will be of much help if government agencies provide conducive and accessible offices where the journalist-respondents can work. This qualitative observation can be tied to the beta coefficient of the tangibility dimension (β = 0.42), stressing its above average significance in determining the work efficiency of PIOs.

DISCUSSION

This study focused on examining whether journalists are satisfied with public information officers' level of efficiency in terms of services and work relationship. This research also sought to explain which aspects of PIOs' work have a greater contribution on their level of efficiency. The results showed that journalist-respondents were satisfied in the overall level of efficiency of government department information officers (M = 3.89 [nearly 4 or "agree"]). When examined individually, results suggested that journalists were neutral when it came to the tangibility, empathy and reliability dimensions—the areas that pertain to the services of public information officers. On one hand, journalists were satisfied when it came to their work relationship with information officers.

Regression results revealed that the tangibility and responsiveness dimensions were highly influential in determining the level of efficiency and were counted as big contributors in the general satisfaction of journalists. But the reliability dimension (content and accuracy of press releases) and the empathy dimension (competence and readiness of the PIOs) were the least contributors to the overall satisfaction respondents gave to the PIOs. However, the tangible dimension (work environment) and the responsiveness dimension (professional relationship with the media) appeared to be PIOs' strong points. Tangibility and responsiveness dimensions got the highest standardized beta coefficients, and thus were highly influential in the PIOs' overall level of efficiency.

Contrary to what Aronoff (1975) and Kopenhaver et al. (1984) found that journalists ranked public relations practitioners low in terms of professional prestige, findings of this study showed that journalists were satisfied with the professionalism and work ethics of information officers. There was some indication that journalists surveyed "agreed" that public information officers were friendly, approachable and unbiased. This finding also contrasted Aronoff (1975) and Kopenhaver et al. (1984) whose studies said journalists and public information officers appear to have an antagonistic relationship. The satisfaction of journalists, particularly on the work relationship variable, stated otherwise. In general, journalists have a positive perception or view of their relationship with PIOs. Journalists and information officers appear to have a harmonious professional relationship, at least for the scope of this research.

According to White (2012), journalists and PIOs differ significantly in attitudes toward job performance and how they view one another. However, general satisfaction varies if viewed individually (component-based result of level of efficiency) and as a whole (result of overall satisfaction). Journalists tend to have neutral or slightly negative attitudes toward the PIOs' work, if they are to rate it in general terms or as a whole.

Compared with the results of level of efficiency, which indicated a positive response, overall satisfaction results indicated that journalists were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the PIOs' job performance. When journalist rated the PIOs' work individually or by dimension, a positive response was elicited. Thus, journalists surveyed may have a better judgment of the PIOs' efforts, looking at the different aspects of their services individually.

Whether journalist-respondents had a negative or positive attitude towards the work of information officer really depended on the journalist's manner of evaluation. This shows how PIOs have largely been misunderstood, which could be caused by the preconceived notions of journalists on PIOs: that is, the main concern of information officers is to persuade and get more publicity for their agency. This observation may affirm Deighton's (1983) theory that a consumer will tend to confirm rather than disconfirm his or her expectations or preconceived judgment on a particular product or service.

The difference of these two findings also shows that journalist-respondents tend to put their pre-conceived notions about PIOs aside, if s/he is not to rate the PIOs service as a whole. Journalists do not just report anything or everything that happens any time of the day. They are called to cover specific beats ranging from executive department beats to even police beats. Important public and even private entities have acknowledged the needs of these reporters and in response have provided press rooms to accommodate them. Press offices may have to be designed in a way that would be suited to the needs and demands of reporters.

Contrary to what Edes (2000) found that PIOs were often lacking when it comes to computers, printers and organized workplaces, results in this study show that PIOs are equipped enough with "tangible" resources, enough to get the highest contribution in the overall satisfaction of journalists.

Responsiveness likewise posted a high bearing in the level of efficiency of information officers. It is important for these journalist-respondents that PIOs are positive, friendly and unbiased. Both tangibility and responsiveness dimensions were highly significant, but it appears that tangibility was more influential. Matters regarding fair media treatment could be the cause of the lower rating for this dimension. On one hand, reliability seems to be not a major concern of journalist-respondents. It appears significant but only to a certain extent. The findings of the study affirm what Surette (2001) and Wilson (2012) stated in their studies: PIOs are held as "reserve organizational resources" or options of journalists when it comes to their pool of resources, by showing the independence of journalists when gathering information. Look at the comment below of one television reporter:

> If I need any information for my story, I go directly to the secretary, to undersecretaries and to the agency's directors. The main purpose of the PIO is to send us press releases and invitations to pressers (press conferences). [Journalist 3]

Journalist-respondents do consider press releases as sources of information, but journalists surveyed may prefer to look for their own stories. This is because journalist-respondents are skeptical at the newsworthiness and the editorial quality of press releases that come from government agencies. Says a broadsheet reporter:

> This depends on how an article is written. A press release could sometimes contain information but has an unappealing angle. [Journalist 7]

Nevertheless, journalist-respondents are also well aware of the nature of job of the information officers:

> It's the duty of public information officers to supply information from the agencies they represent. But journalists should not fully rely on them to accomplish their job. Also, journalists should maintain their independence, even if the agencies they cover provide them with facilities. [Journalist 3]

Given the beta coefficient of the reliability dimension (β = 0.18), press releases and press conferences issued and organized by information officers were not as efficient as other services since the reliability dimension had minimal effect or contribution to the overall satisfaction of journalists. In the end, journalists are still the ones who decide what stories are worth the editorial space or the airtime.

Meanwhile, the empathy dimension did not establish any traceable influence in the level of efficiency and therefore did not affect the overall satisfaction of journalists on PIOs. This only suggests that journalist-respondents do not mind if public information officers came to work late or have inadequate staff. However, some reporters demand that PIOs should at least have knowledge on how media operates. One reporter suggested:

> PIO officers should at least have a media background so they know how best to handle the journalistic media.

Looking for respondents was the main difficulty researchers faced. Researchers also acknowledge the limited number of respondents. Researchers also experienced that journalists do not regularly go to the department they are covering given the fluidity of the news assignments handed out to them by their editors and executive producers. Television reporters were mostly the ones unavailable. Almost all radio and television broadcast reporters are general assignment reporters (meaning, they are not stuck to one news beat — unlike some newspaper journalists), making it more difficult for the researchers to seek them. The disapproval of some ten departments' public information offices to conduct the survey also proved a constraint, so researchers resorted to social networking sites to contact beat reporters. The researchers also did not visit the attached agencies of these departments, which may have their own press offices. It is acknowledged that some of these attached agencies (e.g., bureau) had more stories to offer than their mother departments or ministries.

Researchers also did not consider the number of years a reporter has been covering the beat, as well as how often the reporters go to the press offices allotted for them. These things could have had an effect on journalist-respondents' perceived performance of public information officers.

Results gathered in the study are not generalizable for each department, or even for all the journalists who are assigned in these departments or ministries as beat reporters. Nevertheless, this study gives indications at the current situation of the journalist-PIO

relationship in the Philippines' major news locale (Metro Manila or the National Capital Region) where the national government agencies/departments are found.

CONCLUSION

This study's findings showed that Filipino journalist-respondents surveyed were satisfied with the overall performance of public information officers in government department beats (as predicted by PIOs' levels of efficiency). The tangible and responsive aspects of the PIOs' level of efficiency had the most influence in the overall satisfaction. This shows that the working environment, the amount of press releases and the efficiency of the facilities in the office, as well as the way PIOs interact with journalists, were the strong points of the information offices. The reliability and empathy dimension of their service were not quite effective.

The findings of the study are useful in adding to the knowledge on the public information office as a growing discipline (and as a form of government relations) and a PIO's close association with news media practice. The results are also helpful in assessing if information officers are doing their job, at least in terms of media relations, effectively. This is in the context that Philippine journalism is among the freest press systems in Asia.

Relations between PIOs and journalists in these department-attached news beats can be further improved. It is recommended that Filipino journalists surveyed carry a more open view about information officers in general. This can reciprocate what a reporter said: PIOs should at least have a strong media background in order to better understand and cater to the needs of the news media. With public information growing as a profession, job descriptions of PIOs may have to be clearly stipulated, to include dealing with mainstream news journalists.

As for future studies, the researchers recommend analyses on the satisfaction of journalists to the PIOs at local government levels (i.e., provinces, cities, municipalities) since reporters — especially provincial and community journalists (i.e., outside of Metro Manila) go to these local governments for stories. It is also recommended that the performance of public information officers in attached bureaus of the departments or ministries be studied.

As for data interpretation, especially if samples are bigger, future researchers can use second-level statistical tests like structural equation modeling (SEM). This statistical technique can further examine the relationship of dependent and independent variables and the strength of the impact/s of one variable to another. But this would entail having a larger sample of respondents (n=300), and a longer period of survey fieldwork. Ethnographic research on how reporters deal with PIOs can also yield interesting findings.

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