

Online media in source-reporter relations between PR professionals and journalists - Case: Online Press Conference

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Objective of the study

The objective of this Master's Thesis was to examine the role of online press conferences as online media services in creating media coverage and supporting the source-reporter relations between public relations (PR) professionals and journalists.

Methodology and the theoretical framework

The study used a single-case approach consisting of five qualitative interviews and a quantitative online survey with 108 respondents. The Online Press Conference (OPC), eLehdistötilaisuus, offered by Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy was chosen as the case service, as it provided PR professionals and journalists with a new communication channel by using online media. The analysis of the data was based on the theoretical framework, which was formed on the basis of a literature review and focused on PR and media relations, news value and newsworthiness in journalism, relations between PR professionals and journalists, media richness, and media coverage.

Findings and conclusions

The findings of the empirical study did not reveal a definite answer to the main research question, as the findings differed slightly across journalists. The findings of the study were, however, able to support the preset hypothesis that online press conferences had a role in creating media coverage and supporting the relationship between PR professionals and journalists. With regard to online press conferences in the relations between PR professionals and journalists, four main findings were identified. (1) Online press conferences required relevant and useful topics to attract journalists. (2) Online press conferences offered PR professionals a chance to differentiate among their competitors. (3) Promoting an organization's interests and not trying to affect journalists directly had to be in diplomatic balance. (4) The saving of time and ease of use were the decisive factors of online press conferences in building media coverage. Finally, practical recommendations were given on how the Online Press Conference (OPC) could be further developed to increase media coverage and better support the relations between PR professionals and journalists.

Key words

Online media, online communication, public relations, PR, media relations, journalism, news value, newsworthiness, media coverage, media richness, corporate communication, international business communication

Verkkomedia PR-ammattilaisten ja toimittajien välisessä lähde-raportoiija - suhteessa – eLehdistötilaisuus

Tutkimuksen tavoitteet

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää sähköisten lehdistötilaisuuksien merkitys Internet-pohjaisina viestintäkanavina medianäkyvyyden luomisessa ja PR-ammattilaisten ja toimittajien välisten lähde-raportoiija -suhteiden tukena.

Tutkimusmenetelmät ja teoreettinen viitekehys

Tutkimus toteutettiin tapaustutkimuksena hyödyntäen sekä kvalitatiivisia että kvantitatiivisia tutkimusmenetelmiä. Empiirinen aineisto muodostui viidestä puolistrukturoidusta haastattelusta ja sähköisestä kyselystä 108 toimittajan kanssa. Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy:n tarjoama eLehdistötilaisuus valittiin tapaustutkimuksen kohteeksi, koska se tarjosi PR-ammattilaisille ja toimittajille uuden viestintäkanavan hyödyntäen sähköistä mediaa. Tutkimusanalyysi perustui kirjallisuuskatsauksen perusteella laadittuun teoreettiseen viitekehukseen, joka keskittyi suhdetoimintaan ja mediasuhteisiin, journalistiseen uutisarvoon, PR-ammattilaisten ja toimittajien väliseen suhteeseen, median ilmaisuvoimaan sekä medianäkyvyyteen.

Tutkimuksen tulokset

Toimittajakohtaisten erojen vuoksi empiirisen tutkimuksen tulokset eivät tarjonneet yksinkertaista vastausta tutkimuskysymykseen. Tutkimustulokset tukivat kuitenkin ennakko-oletusta, jonka mukaan sähköisillä lehdistötilaisuuksilla on merkitys medianäkyvyyden luomisessa ja PR-ammattilaisten ja toimittajien välisten suhteiden tukena. Tutkimusaineiston analyysistä nousi esiin neljä päätulosta. (1) Sähköiset lehdistötilaisuudet vaativat olennaisen ja hyödyllisen aiheen houkuttellakseen toimittajia. (2) Sähköiset lehdistötilaisuudet tarjosivat PR-ammattilaisille mahdollisuuden erottautua kilpailijoistaan. (3) Toimittajiin kohdistuvien suorien vaikutusyritysten välttämisen ja organisaation etujen ajamisen tulisi olla diplomaattisessa tasapainossa. (4) Ajansäästö ja sähköisten lehdistötilaisuuksien helppo käytettävyys olivat ratkaisevia tekijöitä medianäkyvyyden luomisessa. Lopuksi tutkimus tarjosi käytännön ehdotuksia eLehdistötilaisuuden kehittämiseksi vastaamaan aiempaa paremmin toimittajien tarpeita, edistämään medianäkyvyyttä ja tukemaan PR-ammattilaisten ja toimittajien välisiä suhteita.

Avainsanat

Verkkomedia, sähköinen media, verkkoviestintä, suhdetoiminta, PR, mediasuhteet, journalismi, uutisarvo, medianäkyvyys, median ilmaisuvoima, yritysviestintä, kansainvälinen yritysviestintä

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1. INTRODUCTION

Public relations (PR) is a concept that includes the functions and practices from management and media to communication and psychology, and which draws on as many theories (Fawkes, 2008, p.5). Several researchers have attempted to describe the essence of public relations with a simple definition – a few with better success than others. As Fawkes (2008, p.5) summarizes the recent definitions of PR, “public relations is about reputation – the result of what you do and what others say about you”.

The concept of public relations is in this presents study used to refer to all corporate communication. This decision was made as the main audience of the case service of the present study consisted of journalists and as most of the relevant communication literature in the study focused on public relations. The decision seems justified as the same themes are, on the one hand, discussed in journals such as the Public Relations Review and Journal of Public Relations Research, as well as the International Journal of Strategic Communication and Corporate Communication: An International Journal, on the other. Even though the concepts of PR and corporate communication may be used to discuss the same themes with emphasis on slightly different aspects, in many contexts these concepts seem to be somewhat synonymous to each other. Furthermore, for instance Cornelissen (2011, pp. 141-162, 179-198) places PR and media relations under the umbrella concept of corporate communication.

PR professionals and journalists are often in collaboration with each other. At the heart of the relations between PR professionals and journalists lie the one party’s need for media space, which is served by satisfying the other party’s need for information and material for news stories (Larsson, 2009, p. 145). In the present study the concept of media coverage is used to refer to the mutual aim of both parties, i.e. creating publicity. PR professionals have, however, not always been liked by all journalists. In the late 20th century the relations between PR professionals and journalists were challenged by an image of PR professionals’ somehow dishonest and immoral operations. The name of

the PR industry was smeared in Finland especially in the 1960s and 1970s because of somehow questionable actions, but also misunderstandings (Siukosaari, 2012, pp. 124-128). During the recent years the industry has, however, been steadily getting back its trust among journalists and undergone significant growth.

With an increasing number of online media in the market, public relations (PR) as a form of corporate communication has become an increasingly important topic in today's changing media sphere. Nowadays journalists are able to access information from a number of sources, which is why the threshold to leave one's office to attend a press conference has become higher. As argued by Gurton (1998, p. 80), traditional press conferences require a lot of time and resources to be organized and are likely to attract journalists only with a major piece of news.

New media have, however, increased the number of communication channels available to PR professionals (Hitchins, 2008, p. 215). Online media channels and networks are taking space from the more traditional ones, which creates new challenges for the relations between public relations professionals and journalists. As journalists have access to great amounts of information on the Internet, public relations professionals have to adopt new strategies and methods for building and maintaining successful relations with them.

The reasons why online media might answer some of the current challenges in the relations between PR professionals and journalists have to do with the way they operate. Online media offer PR professionals a channel to spread information to journalists more easily and quickly than before while building online relations with them at the same time (Shin & Cameron, 2003, p. 586). They offer every individual with an Internet connection the opportunity to participate in conversation (Argenti, 2009, p. 168). Among journalists online media are not considered as a replacement for face-to-face communication but rather as a way to strengthen the existing relations between PR professionals and journalists (Shin & Cameron, 2003, pp. 586-587). Indeed, online media offer journalists a channel for easily asking questions from PR professionals also

themselves and turning the roles between PR professionals and journalists from media pitching to media catching (Waters et al, 2010, p. 242). All of these definitions circle around building long-term relationships by maintaining two-way communication between the two parties. Thus, in this thesis, online media are understood as publication platforms designed to disseminate information and knowledge and share opinions through dialogue in online social interactions.

Through online media the world becomes smaller, in a way, and it becomes easier for also international journalists to participate in press conferences. Besides the increasing number of online media channels available, the role of the entire public relations industry has gained importance in organizations through the globalization of businesses. The growth of public relations means that PR professionals are increasingly involved in international projects and accounts (Theaker, 2008, p. 183) and have to think global but act local (Howard & Mathews, 1995, p. 137). Online media may play a significant role in bringing international PR professionals and journalists closer to each other than with the traditional communication channels. Therefore, the importance of online media in source-reporter relations between PR professionals and journalists is also well justified in the field of international business communication.

Online communications allow people to share information, opinions and ideas more widely and thus have the possibility to affect more people than with traditional media. But what is important to remember in terms of relationships between PR professionals and journalists is the fact that it is still people who are affecting people with communication, regardless of the tools or channels in use.

To date of the present study there seems to be quite a lot of research on public relations (Fawkes, 2008; Theaker, 2008), online media (Powell, 2009; Scott, 2009), and the relations between PR professionals and journalists (Hitchins, 2008; Larsson, 2009), also referred to as source-reporter relations (Shin & Cameron, 2003) in this study. However, the aspect of how online media, especially online press conferences, can best be used to create media coverage and support the relations between PR professionals and

journalists has not been thoroughly studied yet. Furthermore, as Erra and Scanniello (2010, p. 134) point out in relation to their study on communication media richness, the comparison between face-to-face communication, such as traditional press conferences, and synchronous structured text-based chats as online media, has not been thoroughly studied yet.

Therefore, there has been very little academic research on the possibilities and changes that online media bring to the relations between PR professionals and journalists in relation to creating media coverage. Based on the literature review, there appears to be a need for further research in this area. This Master's Thesis thus fills a research gap as it is positioned between the two topics: online media and the relations between PR professionals and journalists. The present study concentrates on the use of online media in building and maintaining profitable relationships between organizations' public relations professionals and journalists representing different media and thereby creating media coverage.

In order to introduce the present study, the following sections include a more detailed description of the objectives, key concepts and case service of the thesis. Section 1.1 discusses the research objectives and research questions set for this present study. Section 1.2 defines the key concepts used in this study and section 1.3 describes the case service of the study, the Online Press Conference (OPC). Finally, section 1.4 outlines the structure of this thesis in more detail.

1.1. Research objectives and questions

The main objective of this Master's Thesis is to examine the role of online press conferences as online media services in creating media coverage and supporting the source-reporter relations between public relations (PR) professionals and journalists. The research objective is approached in two steps, by

1. exploring the Online Press Conference (OPC) as an online media case service, and
2. identifying the best practices and expectations regarding online press conferences as perceived by journalists.

The study was conducted as a case study of a service called eLehdistötilaisuus that is an online press conference offered by a Finnish communication agency for its clients and targeted to the media. In this present study the English name and its abbreviation, Online Press Conference (OPC), written with capital letters, are used to refer to the case service. Written with small letters, however, online press conferences also refer to other online services offering press conferences.

The present study focuses on the views of journalists to identify their needs and expectations for online media such as the Online Press Conference (OPC) to increase the number of news stories and thus create media coverage. More specifically, the aim of the present study is to identify how journalists perceive the role and added value of online press conferences in their journalistic work and how they perceive the possibilities and challenges of these services in their relationships with PR professionals.

The main research question is therefore the following:

What is the role of online press conferences in creating media coverage and supporting the relationship between PR professionals and journalists?

In order to answer the main research question, the following five sub-questions related to the three themes of online press conferences are set:

- 1a. *How do journalists perceive the technical functionality, process and content of the Online Press Conference (OPC)?*

- 1b. *What do journalists expect from the technical functionality, process and content of online press conferences?*
- 2a. *How do journalists perceive the Online Press Conference (OPC) as adding value to their work?*
- 2b. *What do journalists expect from online press conferences to add value to their work?*
3. *What do journalists expect from online press conferences so that they would support the relations with PR professionals?*

1.2. Definitions of key concepts

This section provides definitions for the key concepts of this present study. More profound definitions for these concepts are provided in the literature review in chapter 2.

Online Press Conference (OPC)

The case service of this present study, the Online Press Conference (OPC), is an online service offered by a Finnish communication agency Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy. The original Finnish name of the service is eLehdistötilaisuus. The idea of the OPC is to offer journalists the possibility to attend a press conference regardless of their physical location and thereby increase the likelihood of media coverage for a certain story. To make a difference between online press conferences in general and the case service offered by Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy, this study uses the name Online Press Conference written with capital letters and the abbreviation OPC to refer to the specific service. Written with small letters, on the other hand, online press conferences also refer to other online services offering press conferences.

Public relations (PR)

Fawkes (2008, p.5) summarizes the recent definitions of public relations (PR) as the following: “Public relations is about reputation – the result of what you do and what others say about you.” Several academic journals discuss, however, the very same themes under the concepts of both public relations and corporate communication, which is why in many cases these concepts seem to be somewhat synonymous to each other. Thereby, public relations is in this present study used to refer to all corporate communication.

Media relations

Media relations is a form of public relations defined as a specialist area of corporate communication (Cornelissen, 2011, pp. 143-162) that focuses on collaborating with the media. Due to the special characteristics of the case service, and to avoid confusion, the concept of PR is used also to refer to media relations in this present study. This decision seems justified as, with regard to the Online Press Conference (OPC), public relations is media relations. Indeed, as Hitchins (2008, p. 205) defines, for many organizations public relations equals media relations.

Journalists and the media

This study refers to journalists as professionals creating informative material for various media types. According to Gurton (1998, p. 2), “journalists are professionals whose primary objective is to educate, entertain and inform”. In the present study media refers to both traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television, and new online media such as the Internet, blogs and virtual online media.

Online media

The concept of online media equals digital Internet- and Web-based communication media to distribute information and audiovisual material. Thereby, online media

include, for instance, Web sites, blogs and Webcasts (Cakim, 2007, p. 140) as well as e-mail, instant messaging and social media (Hazleton et al, 2007, pp. 91-103). In this thesis, online media are understood as all publication platforms and services designed to disseminate information and knowledge and share opinions through dialogue in online social interactions.

Media richness

Daft and Lengel (1986, p. 560) define media richness as a medium's ability to provide feedback and check interpretations. Face-to-face communication is traditionally considered one of the richest communication media as it provides the possibility for immediate feedback. According to the media richness theory, online media, such as the Online Press Conference (OPC), however, are often considered media of lower richness as they lack several implicit messages and, thereby, the ability for rapid feedback.

Media coverage

In the present study the concept of media coverage is used to refer to the mutual aim of both PR professionals and journalists, i.e. creating publicity. The one party's need for media space is served by satisfying the other party's need for information and material for news stories (Larsson, 2009, p. 145). PR professionals aim for publicity for their organizations' or clients' stories in the form of media coverage. According to Theaker (2008, p. 168), measuring the amount of media coverage gained through a PR campaign is, indeed, one of the easiest and most commonly used ways of evaluating the success of public relations in organizations. Journalists, on the other hand, aim for media coverage with stories that they have valued as newsworthy.

1.3. Case Online Press Conference (OPC)

Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy is a Finnish communication agency that was established in 2005. During its few years of operation the company has grown to be one of the biggest communication agencies in Finland (Markkinointiviestinnän Toimistojen Liitto MTL, 2010). According to the study conducted by MTL (2010), in terms of sales margin, Deski was the fifth biggest communication agency in Finland in 2010. The company has experience in collaborating especially with the Finnish media representatives.

The vision of Deski involves providing unique and innovative communication services for both internal and external communication purposes (Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy, 2011). On the company's website (www.tiedottaja.fi) Deski is described as a tactical actor whose main aim is to implement the communication strategies of its clients in a productive and creative manner. The company provides, for instance, an idea site (www.deski.fi) on the Internet where journalists can search for news, background information and story ideas. In addition, the company helps organizations in using, for instance, social media, cartoons and video materials for strategic communication purposes.

In the fall 2010 Deski launched a new service called Online Press Conference (OPC), or eLehdistötilaisuus in Finnish, for organizing online press conferences. The main idea of the service is to reach journalists by using online media. The OPC is organized on the professional site for journalists on <http://elehdistotilaisuus.deski.fi>. The OPC is usually built only online, but if a client wishes, a traditional press conference may also be additionally streamed online. By organizing a press conference online, journalists are able to participate in a press conference even though they might not be able or, in many cases, willing to come to the physical location. The OPC appears a new and unique service in the Finnish market, and presumably a fairly new concept in the international market as well. Reportedly, to date of the present study, only one other Finnish communication agency had launched a similar type of service as the OPC offered by Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy.

The process of organizing the OPC goes as follows: After consulting a client Deski's communication professionals create a video and possibly other type of promotional material of the client's topic to be provided for journalists at the OPC. The journalists are invited by Deski to attend the press conference online at a given date and time. At the beginning of the OPC they will have time to get to know the promotional material provided at the online media site, after which a question and answer session will follow. The journalists participating in the OPC will be able to type in their questions through a chat forum and there will be specialists from the client organization answering the questions. In other words, interaction between journalists, PR professionals and specialists at the event takes place through writing. The session will be moderated by a communication consultant from Deski.

The OPC appears a new type of service in the field of corporate communication and public relations that shows potential. From 2010 to date of the study the OPC had received a lot of interest among organizations and Deski had received an increasing number of new clients for the service. By the end of the year 2011 Deski had organized around 20 Online Press Conferences for their clients (Online Press Conference, 2011). However, as it was still a fairly new service with basically no predecessors to learn from, further research on the needs and desires of the press was required.

1.4. Structure of the Thesis

The present study is structured into six chapters. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature on the focal theoretical themes of this study. Chapter 3 outlines the empirical data collection and analysis methodology, i.e. semi-structured interviews and a quantitative online survey. Chapter 4 outlines the findings of the present study while chapter 5 discusses these findings in the light of previous studies and literature. Finally, chapter 6 concludes the study, suggests practical implications, and presents the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews previous literature that is relevant for studying the role of online press conferences in creating media coverage and supporting the relations between PR professionals and journalists, and develops a theoretical framework for the study. To do that, section 2.1 describes the special characteristics and development of both PR and media relations. Section 2.2 focuses on the relationship between PR professionals and journalists, while section 2.3 discusses the concepts of news value and newsworthiness in journalism. Section 2.4 discusses the use of online media in communication from the perspective of the media richness theory. Section 2.5 focuses on media coverage as the mutual aim of both PR professionals and journalists. Finally, section 2.6 presents the theoretical framework created for this study.

2.1. PR and media relations

The term public relations is in this presents study used to refer to all corporate communication. Since the main audience of communication in the present case study consisted of journalists and most of the relevant literature focused on public relations, and media relations in particular, corporate communication was chosen to be referred to as PR in this study. This decision seems justified as the same themes are, on the one hand, discussed in journals such as the *Public Relations Review* and *Journal of Public Relations Research*, as well as the *International Journal of Strategic Communication and Corporate Communication: An International Journal*, on the other. Even though the concepts of PR and corporate communication may be used to discuss the same themes with emphasis on slightly different aspects, in many contexts these concepts seem to be somewhat synonymous to each other. Furthermore, Cornelissen (2011, pp. 143-162, 179-198) places PR and media relations under the umbrella concept of corporate communication.

Public relations, including the field of media relations, has become a significant and powerful industry especially during the recent years. The influence of the PR industry nowadays appears in various ways and places in the daily life. According to Larsson (2009, p. 132), today's PR activities may involve anything from traditional press conferences and press releases to various more or less successful long-term agenda-setting related activities.

The news media are going through changes and an increasing proportion of published articles originate from sources external to the media. Due to financial cutbacks in recent times, the media have become increasingly dependent on external sources and, hence, the material provided by, for instance, PR professionals. According to Larsson (2009, p. 132), this type of news material is sometimes referred to as information subsidies contributing to journalistic work by cutting cost. Thereby, producing and serving the media with material promoting the client's interests, referred to as news management, is one way for the PR industry to control the news agenda today (Larsson, 2009, p.132).

With regard to PR and media relations the following subsection 2.1.1 offers in-depth definitions of the concepts of PR and media relations. Subsection 2.1.2 discusses PR in relation to other communication fields while subsection 2.1.3 focuses on PR in international contexts.

2.1.1. Definitions of PR and media relations

Public relations is a concept that includes the functions and practices from management and media to communication and psychology, and which draws on as many theories (Fawkes, 2008, p.5). Several researchers have attempted to describe the essence of public relations with a simple definition – a few with better success than others. As Fawkes (2008, p.5) summarizes the recent definitions of PR, “public relations is about reputation – the result of what you do and what others say about you”. However, the

objective of the PR function is not to promote an organization for popularity or approval, but to ensure that the public has an honest and accurate view of an organization (Fawkes, 2008, p.5). Media relations, on the other hand, is a form of public relations and defined as a specialist area of corporate communication (Cornelissen, 2011, pp. 143-162).

In other words, the objective of public relations lies in reaching and affecting desired target audiences and, hence, creating publicity. In this study the concept of media coverage is used to refer to this publicity. As Larsson (2009, pp. 131-132) points out, PR agencies and professionals nowadays work mostly through the media to spread information, persuasion and opinions to the public on behalf of their clients. PR professionals seek to affect the media because of their rather high credibility and ability to reach wide audiences in a short time. Therefore, effective PR and media relations often come from knowing what makes a good news story, and targeting publications and journalists who share similar interests to their clients (Gurton, 1998, pp. 19-27, 55-57). Indeed, as Hitchens (2008, p. 205) defines, for many organizations public relations equals media relations. For simplicity, to refer to both disciplines, i.e. PR and media relations, the concept of public relations (PR) is used in this present study.

Public relations may be handled either by an organization's own public relations department or an external PR agency. Thereby, the concept of PR professionals is used in this study to refer to both the communication professionals working for external communication or PR agencies as well as the in-house communication professionals taking care of public relations and collaboration with the media. There are pros and cons for both alternative solutions. As Argenti (2009, pp. 165-168) argues, using external PR consultants and agencies may be beneficial, for instance, with a major story, crisis or wide audiences. Furthermore, Seletzky and Lehman-Wilzig (2010, p. 258) support the use of external PR professionals by describing external PR agencies as agents for others with their only personal agenda to satisfy their clients' needs and perhaps even get

recommendations for others. According to other views, however, building and maintaining lucrative relations with the media require both expertise and experience, which is why having also in-house PR professionals is likely to pay off in the long run (Argenti, 2009, pp. 165-168).

2.1.2. PR in relation to other communication fields

The concept public relations (PR) is in this present study used to refer to all corporate communication. As discussed at the beginning of section 2.1, this decision seems justified as the same themes are discussed in academic journals under the concepts of PR and corporate communication. Furthermore, for instance, Cornelissen (2011, pp. 143-160) places media relations as a form of PR under the umbrella concept of corporate communication.

The nature of public relations and its role among other communication fields has, however, changed tremendously over the recent decades. According to Argenti (2009, pp. 46-47), for decades the typical public relations efforts focused on preventing the media from getting too close to the organization management. By the 1970s, however, the business environment had gone through massive changes and this type of public relations was no longer enough to maintain the privacy. As Argenti (2009, pp. 46-47) describes, the information about organizations and entire industries had become increasingly open and organizations were forced to answer to a wider set of questions from journalists. Nowadays the role of public relations is constantly increasing and, as Larsson (2009, pp. 131-132) emphasizes, PR agencies and professionals work mostly through the media to spread information, persuasion and opinions to the public on behalf of their clients.

During the recent years, the corporate communication function has continued to evolve to meet the demands of the changing business environment (Argenti, 2009, pp. 46-47). Public relations has also taken a central role within the corporate communication

function and gained increasing importance in various organizations. Furthermore, as the news business is changing through the increasing number of new communication channels and technologies available, the ways of approaching and working with the media are also faced with the forces of change. Although PR started as a service for managers in response to requests from the news media, as Argenti (2009, p. 58) describes, today the best corporate communication departments actively set discussion agenda of the organization in the media themselves, as well.

Changes in how PR as a field of communication is measured in organizations, describes the growth and development of the industry, as well. As Argenti (2009, p.159) describes, the traditional measure of success in public relations has been the quantity and efficiency of communication output, such as the amount of media coverage created for an organization or the changes created in the audience's attitudes. Today, however, the business is also increasingly focusing on the specific value added to an organization through its public relations efforts.

2.1.3. PR in international contexts

"The essence of PR is cultural context."

(Lerbinger, 2001, retrieved from Theaker, 2008, p. 191)

As discussed in the previous sub-section, public relations as a corporate communication function is growing constantly. Besides the increasing number of communication and information channels available and the new challenges of collaborating with the media, the role of public relations has also gained more importance in organizations through the globalization of businesses. As Theaker (2008, p. 183) points out, globalization means that PR professionals are also increasingly involved in international projects and accounts. Thereby, globalization has massive effects on public relations and occurs both in the internationalization of the PR profession and planning and implementation of international PR programs (Theaker, 2008, p. 185).

One of the key challenges of PR professionals nowadays is to understand how public relations is understood and practiced in different countries and cultures. Global organizations require global PR strategies including jointly agreed objectives, target audiences and messages (Howard and Mathews, 1995, p. 136). However, they will also have to put time and effort in getting to know the local business culture, its customs and target audiences. Thereby, one may argue that the key to success in the global market lies in finding the balance between local and global business customs (Howard & Mathews, 1995, p. 137). Even though there are a number of similarities between cultures and people, and many public relations techniques and practices may be successful around the world, understanding and respecting cross-cultural differences is crucial when implementing public relations programs in foreign countries.

Thereby, dealing with clients and audiences in different countries and cultures requires sensitivity and understanding of cross-cultural differences in communication, manners and conventions. As the quotation by Lerbinger (2001, retrieved from Theaker, 2008, p. 191) at the beginning of this sub-section describes, communication between people always takes place in a cultural context where certain values, customs and interpretations exist. Successful dialogue can only take place when these boundaries are taken into consideration, while keeping the global perspective in the core strategy.

To conclude, PR and media relations are central concepts of this present study and the Online Press Conference (OPC) can be described as an effort of PR and media relations aiming to communicate an organization's message to journalists. Therefore, understanding the various definitions of PR and media relations as well as their roles in relation to other communication fields and in international business communication is essential for this study.

2.2. Relations between PR professionals and journalists

In many countries the PR industry has undergone significant growth in recent years and PR professionals appear to be in increasing collaboration with journalists. As Larsson (2009, p.145) argues, it may well be said that the PR industry and the media collaborate in line with the logic of traditional exchange theory where one party's need for media space is served by satisfying the other party's need for information and material for news stories. In many cases, the parties have also become mutually dependent on each other and have developed a common interest in the relationship, i.e. creating media coverage. It seems that the two parties are in collaboration, even if the relationship might sometimes be perceived as unequal (Larsson, 2009, p. 145).

The views of PR professionals and journalists towards the mutual relationship may sometimes be divided. According to a study conducted by Larsson (2009, p. 144), PR professionals commonly show a high level of respect for the norms of journalistic conduct and for the media's role in a democratic society. They also perceive their relations with the media as functioning fairly well. Furthermore, PR professionals often state that their efforts lie in delivering news ideas for journalists and feel that their efforts, indeed, often pay off and that they succeed in getting media coverage. Journalists, however, fairly often express less respect for people working in the PR industry and sometimes even claim that these types of relations do not exist at all. Journalists agree that they often receive promotional material from various sources, but claim that they hardly ever decide to use this material. (Larsson, 2009, p. 144)

In reality, however, these contacts, mainly initiated by the PR industry, may well form a two-way process. Several studies indicate that the PR industry is highly successful in achieving its goals, which proves that the media do publish material originating from PR professionals to quite a large extent (Larsson, 2009, pp. 144-145). PR professionals network with journalists through a number of public relations activities and offer the story ideas. According to Larsson (2009, pp. 144-145), while various media are faced

with financial cutbacks and constraints for doing research, public relations efforts result in a constant flow of story ideas for journalists.

PR professionals have not, however, always been liked by all journalists, and quite likely still are not. As explained by Gurton (1998, p. 183), this is due to the image of their loyalties being divided between different parties, i.e. their clients, the media and the general public. Even though professional PR agencies work for their client organizations, they work with the media to get their messages through to their target audiences in the general public. In the 20th century the PR industry gained an image of somehow dishonest and immoral operations. Also in Finland the name of the PR industry was smeared to some extent especially in the 1960s and 1970s – partly because of misunderstandings and partly because of somehow questionable actions (Siukosaari, 2012, pp. 124-128).

This cannot, however, be generalized to the whole industry and today the image of PR is steadily on the mend. During the recent years the industry has been slowly getting back its trust among journalists. As Gurton (1998, p. 183) reminds, excellent PR professionals are there to help journalists in getting good stories and can, indeed, be invaluable for them. Thereby, experience and professional reputation of PR professionals and agencies are crucial factors affecting the relations between PR professionals and journalists. According to Seletzky and Lehman-Wilzig (2010, p. 258), experience and reputation of PR professionals enable the use of interpersonal relations with journalists and contribute to the amount of media coverage created.

With regard to the relations between PR professionals and journalists, the following subsection 2.2.1 discusses the role of PR professionals in the media. Subsection 2.2.2 describes the concept of source-reporter relations between PR professionals and journalists.

2.2.1. Role of PR professionals in the media

As Gurton (1998, p. 183) describes, PR professionals work with journalists on behalf of their clients to create media coverage. This communication with journalists requires an enormous amount of discretion from PR professionals. As described by Hitchins (2008, p. 206), the creation of news is one of the most important roles of the public relations industry. PR professionals offer stories and ideas for the media and thus make working in many cases easier for journalists, as well. Today, however, merely reacting to the media's requests is seldom enough but PR professionals also have to adopt a proactive role with journalists to create media coverage (Hitchins, 2008, p. 217).

Even though today's PR may involve any media relations activities from traditional press releases to various online activities, the effectiveness of all communication depends on understanding the factors influencing the message receivers', i.e. journalists', behavior and attitudes. Therefore, as Arora (2007, p. 383) argues, it is crucial to consider the different variables of a message that influence the receivers' attitudes and opinions. This involves the concept of framing, which may be defined as the study of selection and importance of certain aspects of messages by exploring images, stereotypes, metaphors, actors and messages (Matthes, 2009, p. 349).

The issue of framing and its implications may be considered important in all communication and persuasion. Therefore, message framing is also an important topic affecting the relationship between PR professionals and journalists. For social media, for instance, the message has to be framed differently from stage one. As Fernando (2011, p. 12) argues, for social media the message has to be multimedia-rich and conversational, and the content has to be modified for different audiences. Thereby, in order to have an effect on journalists and to get them write a news story, PR professionals have to frame their messages in a way most effective for each case in question. However, several researchers agree on the fact that the main focus of public relations should not be in framing a shiny portrait of an organization at any cost.

Instead, it is widely agreed that providing journalists with honest, reliable and quotable information is likely to result in lucrative relations (Gurton, 1998, p. 155).

PR professionals want to communicate information to the public. Most journalists, however, believe that they have the responsibility to communicate the right information, which is why some of them resist any efforts of those who seek to affect them. As Jempson (2005, p. 268) points out, these perceptions represent the prejudiced views that some journalists still throw at the public relations industry. Some journalists still dislike PR professionals but realize that they need them (Gurton, 1998, p. 183). Even though many of the previous communication studies have indicated that journalists prefer information from sources whom they perceive as having no obvious self-serving economic purpose, public relations materials have still been considered offering more utility for journalists than any other sources of information (Curtin & Rhodenbaugh, pp.179-180). Thereby, if an open and trusting relationship between journalists and PR professionals can be achieved, it is likely to be valuable and productive for both parties.

2.2.2. Source-reporter relations

“Any worthwhile relationship is founded on trust.”

(Jempson, 2005, p. 269)

As Shin and Cameron (2003, p.583) argue, the relationship between PR professionals and journalists has traditionally been discussed as a love-hate relationship. Regardless of the great amount of cooperation they do, the conflict between these two groups of professionals is rooted in the so-called source-reporter relationship. PR professionals act as sources of information while journalists take the role of reporters of the news (Shin & Cameron, 2003, p.583). Public relations professionals have information to offer for sources of news and, even though journalists may depend on this information, they also value their role as the so-called defenders of the public’s right to balanced and unbiased

news. Thereby, in this present study the concept of source-reporter relations is used to refer to the relations between PR professionals and journalists.

Even though PR professionals and journalists may sometimes have different goals, values and desired outcomes, the main conflict in the source-reporter relations often comes from how each occupation is perceived by the other (Shin & Cameron, 2003, pp. 587-588). Indeed, as Larsson (2009, pp. 131-132) argues, in reality it seems that PR professionals and media representatives often establish close relationships in order to fulfill a mutual need – the need for publicity, which is in this present study referred to as media coverage. PR professionals aim for close and continuous relationships with journalists in order to secure this publicity (Larsson, 2009, pp. 131-132). In practice, however, today this works often both ways. Even though nowadays information is easily accessible on the Internet, journalists build relationships with PR professionals to stay tuned about what is happening in organizations, look for story ideas and gather more in-depth information. Finally, as the citation of Jempson (2005, p. 269) at the beginning of this sub-section points out, mutual trust is one of the fundamental elements in productive source-reporter relations between PR professionals and journalists.

To conclude, PR professionals work with journalists on behalf of their clients to build publicity for their messages and create media coverage (Gurton, 1998, p.183). This makes their job challenging as they have to take into account both parties' needs and desires at all times. On the one hand, PR professionals have to try and create publicity for their clients' messages while, on the other hand, in order to accomplish this task they have to be able to collaborate with the media. Therefore, understanding the PR professionals' controversy role in the media and the challenges and complexities of the source-reporter relations between PR professionals and journalists is crucial for understanding the role of online press conferences in these relations and in building media coverage.

2.3. News value and newsworthiness in journalism

In today's society the media are often seen as the most outstanding and important channel for organizations to get their messages out and influence their audiences. News media operate through a number of different channels from newspapers to the Internet and social media. As Argenti (2009, p. 155) describes, through the media, various audiences from investors and employees to consumers receive information about an organization and build their images of the organization on this knowledge.

After analyzing the other side of the public relations model, i.e. the public relations (PR) profession, this section focuses on journalism and, more specifically, what is considered newsworthy in the media. Understanding what the journalists look for in a story is crucial for organizations to create media coverage. What journalists want for a story is, however, rarely what PR professionals want them to see in an organization. Indeed, journalists may be looking for exactly the things that organizations want to hide or have left out in a story, or they may merely see things from a completely different point of view.

According to most communication literature, what is newsworthy in the media depends on whether a story is genuinely new or somehow significant for the audience. Stories about organizations' routine activities are not likely to get media coverage. As Hitchins (2008, p.206) describes, journalists want excitement, drama, novelty and controversy. In other words, journalists look for newsworthy angles and snappy comments in a story through which they can surprise or even shock their audiences (Gurton, 1998, pp.19-26). Furthermore, Curtin and Rhodenbaugh (2001, p. 182) refer to newsworthiness as the primary news value that is effected by the story's timeliness, impact, proximity, conflict and uniqueness, to name but a few.

Most executives today recognize that the media are typically more interested in the bad than the good things organizations do (Argenti, 2009, p. 157). Thereby, the worse the message, the more news value it may have in the eyes of the media and the more likely

it is to become a major news story. Furthermore, as Gurton (1998, p. 19) argues, from a journalistic point of view, anything a person or an organization does not want to publish is often newsworthy and, hence, likely to get media coverage. The fulfillment of this argument may, however, depend on the type of media, industry and organization in question and the overall images and history linked to it.

The sense of newsworthiness may, however, be influenced by various factors. Besides the journalistic mindset that is affected by the background and characteristics of an individual journalist, newsworthiness is often also affected by the professional requirements of journalism, such as the immediacy, novelty and dramatization, as well as personalization and simplification of stories (Pang, 2010, p. 196). In addition, the sense of newsworthiness is often influenced by a number of context and cultural related elements, legal constraints and ideologies, but also overall journalistic and newsroom routines (Pang, 2010, pp. 197-199). Here the journalistic routines refer to, for instance, meeting deadlines whereas newsroom routines refer to the culture, schedules and structure of the entire news organization.

Therefore, by getting to know these various elements affecting the journalists' work and understanding their needs and desires, PR professionals can use this knowledge in framing their messages to support their persuasive communication efforts. As Gurton (1998, p.26-27) sums up, the key elements of making a story newsworthy to the press include first of all its relevance to the audience, interesting informational content, and solid facts and statistics. However, in order to get news value, a story will also need opinions and respected views, controversies and differences, and, perhaps even most importantly, the right timing.

To conclude, the case service of this present study, the Online Press Conference (OPC), is an online service targeted from PR professionals to journalists. Therefore, understandings what the journalists look for in a story and what they consider newsworthy is central to this present study. In order to attract the interest of journalists,

the message of the OPC has to be considered newsworthy, i.e. offering new, interesting and significant information to the public at the right time.

2.4. Media richness

This section discusses the role of media richness theory in this present study. As the number of online media and technologies available, such as e-mail, blogs and social networking sites, is increasing constantly, organizations and people are faced with an increasing selection of ways to send and receive messages. Opinions on the selection and use of various media in communication differ, however, among researchers. Media richness theories have emerged from the need to understand the effects of using different media in communication.

As Kelleher (2001, p. 305) describes, the basic idea behind the media richness theory is that people match communication tasks with the media they perceive to be most efficient for accomplishing these tasks. In other words, according to the media richness theory, communication media vary in their ability to process rich information and people tend to choose richer media to handle more complex communication tasks (Kelleher, 2001, p. 305). Thereby, core concepts in relation to the media richness theory include both information and media richness.

Founders of the media richness theory, Daft and Lengel (1986, p. 560), define information richness as the ability of information to change understanding within a certain time frame. Thereby, communication that can clarify and explain challenging issues in a relatively short time is considered rich. Furthermore, media richness can be defined as a medium's ability to provide feedback and check interpretations (Daft and Lengel, 1986, p. 560). For instance, face-to-face communication is often considered one of the richest media as it offers a personal touch and the possibility for immediate feedback. Media of lower richness, such as many forms of online media, on the other

hand, lack personality and the possibility for immediate feedback but are often effective in processing standard data and simple messages.

As Timmerman (2002, p.112) describes, the theory of media richness divides communication media into rich and lean according to four criteria: 1) possibility for immediate feedback, 2) capacity for multiple cues from audio to visual, 3) ability to express natural language, and 4) personal focus. Face-to-face communication is an example of extremely rich communication media that fulfills all of these criteria whereas, for instance, e-mail and many other online media represent much leaner media.

Even though several studies support the media richness theory, it has also been criticized for its inconsistencies with empirical data. Not all studies have been able to support the predictions of the theory. Thereby, as Timmerman (2002, p. 111) points out, besides media richness, in many cases the media selection process has been found to be affected by other factors, such as social and contextual influences, as well.

With regard to the topic of media richness, the following subsection 2.4.1 discusses the use of online media tools and channels in source-reporter relations between PR professionals and journalists. Based on prior literature, in subsection 2.4.2 a comparison is made between traditional press conferences and the use of online media in public relations.

2.4.1. Online media in source-reporter relations

“Reporters and editors use the Web to seek out interesting stories, people and companies.” (Scott, 2009, p.9)

Online media have a strong influence on corporate communication and, with constantly new services in the market, this impact is likely to gain even more importance in the

future. Through online, media wider audiences, including bloggers, group influencers and clients, are available to PR professionals than in the old days with merely the traditional press releases targeted to journalists. As Avery et al (2010, p. 190) point out, PR professionals and journalists are now faced with new challenges in the form of having to determine how and which of the new tools are accessible, appropriate, and useful for their purposes.

In the times of the changing media sphere, the mutual need for creating media coverage and the desire to build relationships are increasingly important aspects to take into consideration in the PR and media relations business. As Shin and Cameron (2003, p.586) highlight, more and more public relations professionals today use the Internet to spread organizational information to journalists more easily and quickly than before while building an online relationship with them at the same time. Compared to the old days with only traditional press releases, online media have also made larger groups of people available to PR professionals. Thereby, online media has an effect on the source-reporter relations between PR professionals and journalists.

Even though the number and variety of social networking tools and channels is increasing rapidly, online media seem to be no substitute for face-to-face communication. Rather, they offer new opportunities for communication. According to a study conducted by Shin and Cameron (2003, pp. 586-587), PR professionals and journalists do not perceive online media as a replacement for face-to-face communication, but rather a way to strengthen the pre-existing source-reporter relations. As Powell (2009, p. 13) argues, the new technology reveals the hidden or lost relationships and helps getting back to the pre-existing social connections. It also allows people to easily expand their networks to people who they share mutual friends, colleagues or ideas with. In other words, online media provide the tools and channels for communication, and help people in yielding more from their social networks and relationships than before (Powell, 2009, p. 13).

Online media are, however, changing the role of what has been traditionally considered an audience and are transferring an enormous amount of power into the hands of the general public. According to Powell (2009, p. 96), through the rise of the Internet, the roles of a content provider and a consumer of information have become increasingly muddled. As Theaker (2008, p. 354) describes, through online media, communication has changed from the top-down model to a networking system where distributing messages to audiences is no longer enough but one has to interact with them. Online communication platforms, such as social media networks and virtual worlds, have offered every individual with an Internet connection the opportunity to participate in conversation (Argenti, 2009, p.168).

In the old days the only way for PR professionals to get publicity was through the news media. As Scott (2009, pp. 10-12) argues, organizations and PR professionals communicated almost solely through press releases targeted exclusively to journalists and editors hoping that the media would give them coverage. The Internet has, however, changed the rules of PR and offered organizations several new ways to tell their stories to the world. The Internet has, in a way, made public relations public again. As Scott (2009, p.11) points out, blogs, online news releases, and other forms of online content let organizations communicate directly with their clients, as well. If organizations handle this well, also the media are likely to give them coverage.

Online media are changing the entire practice of public relations. Even though the traditional PR efforts are likely to retain their role in many organizations, in many cases the roles between PR professionals and journalists are turning from media pitching to media catching (Waters et al, 2010, p. 242). As Waters et al (2010, p. 243) describe, from now on, rather than having PR professionals contacting a number of journalists, broadcasters, and bloggers in hopes of creating media coverage, journalists are also contacting PR professionals themselves in their search of material.

Online media may also have an effect on the conflicts in source-reporter relations between PR professionals and journalists. Even though some journalists still lack of

knowledge of or interest in engaging in online activities, online media technologies are widely considered reducing conflicts in source-reporter relations and enhancing, for instance, self-efficiency and personal sense of professionalism (Shin & Cameron, 2003, pp. 583-586). The study conducted by Shin and Cameron (2003, p. 594) shows that the conflicts between PR professionals and journalists are smaller in online than offline source-reporter relations. Thereby, online media represent a potential solution for reducing the conflicts between PR professionals and journalists.

During the recent years several studies have discovered journalists turning to online media when gathering information for their stories. The study conducted by Cision Europe and Canterbury Christ Church University (2011), for instance, suggests that journalists throughout Europe have started to accept social media as part of their work. According to the study (Cision Europe & Canterbury Christ Church University, 2011, pp. 1-2), most journalists (96%), regardless of the media they worked for, used various social media channels at least on a weekly basis. However, social media seemed to be supplementing the existing media and communication channels, not replacing them. According to the study (Cision Europe & Canterbury Christ Church University, 2011, p. 7), social networks and blogs were the most frequently used social media tools to publish and promote journalists' work. In addition, journalists perceived social media as the most important tools and channels to publish, promote and distribute their work (74%), as well as for networking (71%) and monitoring what was published (70%) (Cision Europe & Canterbury Christ Church University, 2011, p. 8).

However, despite the considerable use of social media by journalists, personal contacts, PR professionals, press releases and other traditional news sources are still used to gather information for stories. According to Cision Europe and Canterbury Christ Church University (2011, p.5), 89% of all European journalists preferred personal contacts as sources of stories and 85% preferred personal contacts by phone, email or face-to-face to verify stories. Based on the study (Cision Europe & Canterbury Christ Church University, 2011, p. 2), Finnish journalists used most social media tools and

engaged in most channels, but did, however, actually rely on the more traditional and established resources in their work. Finnish journalists also appeared to be more critical of the social media tools than their European colleagues.

Technology has helped organizations communicate through the various online media services available. Especially the Internet provides the public relations industry with several new tools from webcasts and blogs to wikis and podcasts. Based on prior research, online media have taken their place in source-reporter relations and journalists often prefer working with PR professionals who are using social media tools (Avery et al, 2010, p. 203). However, as Argenti (2009, p. 59) emphasizes, despite the technological developments, the relationship between PR professionals and journalists remains contradictory.

2.4.2. Traditional press conferences in relation to online media

Attracting journalists to press conferences is nowadays a challenge. Press conferences represent one of the most commonly used forms of public relations techniques for seeking the media's interest. They are good events for journalists and PR professionals to meet each other and share information. However, as Gurton (1998, p. 80) points out, traditional press conferences are productive only when there is a major piece of news to be announced. In addition, press conferences take a lot of time and money to be organized, which is why especially in the era of online media they may be risky. One can never know beforehand who will show up at the press conference and how people are going to react to the message announced.

As Hitchins (2008, p. 215) describes, new media have increased the channels of communication available to public relations. During the recent years the Internet, for instance, has offered PR professionals an increasing number of new channels and ways to reach journalists and deliver their messages. According to Hitchins (2008, p. 216), the significance of using online media as part of public relations is, however, twofold.

First, online media make reaching more targeted specialist audiences possible. Second, audiences of these segmented media are no longer passive receivers of messages but they actively look for information themselves, respond and even create media of their own.

Online media offer tools and channels for easy and rapid communication. According to the media richness theory presented at the beginning of section 2.4, these media are, however, often described as lean, or low in richness, as they in many cases lack the ability to make use of implicit messages, such as expressions, gestures and tones. As an example of a rich medium, face-to-face communication in traditional press conferences, however, offers access to all these before mentioned messages but may lose to online media in efficiency. Thereby, an important aspect to consider while selecting an appropriate medium for a communication situation is to consider, whether using online media instead of face-to-face communication would leave out important information of the topic.

Deciding on the appropriate medium for each communication situation requires careful consideration of what is expected from the communication and what the desired information consists of. When planning a press conference the first step, according to Gurton (1998, p. 80), is to consider what the message would be and whether there could be a more effective and cost-efficient way of telling the story. In case a press conference is chosen to be organized, there are a number of issues to consider. Many of these topics apply, however, also for organizing online press conferences. As Hitchins (2008, p.216) points out, regardless of the media, there are three issues to consider when planning a public relations campaign: (1) Will the chosen media reach the target audience? (2) Will the audience find it a credible source of information? (3) How will the chosen media respond to the media relations approaches?

To conclude, deciding on the appropriate medium for each communication situation is crucial for achieving the desired goals. Here the media richness theory plays an important role. According to this theory, online media usually represent leaner media

with less possibility for immediate feedback and personal touch as for instance face-to-face communication. According to Shin and Cameron (2003, p. 594), however, online media seem to reduce the source-reporter conflict between PR professionals and journalists compared to traditional media. Understanding the role of online media in both PR professionals' and journalists' work, and in their mutual relationship, is central to the present study of the Online Press Conference (OPC). Prior research on the use of traditional press conferences compared to for instance online media in the relations between PR professionals and journalists creates an important basis for this case study.

2.5. Media coverage

“Media relations is about relationships. A reporter needs to know who you are.” (Henderson, 2006, p. 26)

This section discusses the main target of both public relations (PR) and journalism, i.e. creating media coverage. Even though evaluation and measuring of business functions has become everyday life in today's economy, many areas of business still experience challenges in finding the appropriate measures for their effectiveness. Finding methods and measures for evaluating qualitative data may be especially challenging. As Theaker (2008, p. 168) describes, counting the amount of media coverage gained through a PR campaign is one of the easiest and most commonly used ways of evaluating the success of public relations in organizations.

Getting coverage for a story in the news media is always a challenge. As Argenti (2009, pp. 155-156) describes, in the early part of the 20th century organizations enjoyed a lot of privacy and were thus unaccustomed to dealing with the news media. During that time, business news received virtually no coverage in the media. However, as argued by Argenti (2009, pp. 155-156), in the latter part of the 20th century organizations were forced to rethink their approach to the media and the business coverage started to change especially in the 1970s.

PR professionals and journalists may, however, often have different needs and even conflicting views to a story. As Pang (2010, p. 196-197) argues, journalists always view stories in the light of their newsworthiness. PR professionals have also become increasingly aware of this and admit that understanding the journalists' needs is crucial in getting coverage for a story in the news media. Furthermore, good relations with the media may be of great help in receiving media coverage. Therefore, building and maintaining a network of contacts with the media is considered an important for organizations to create media coverage today.

Understanding what journalists look for in a story will help public relations professionals in offering journalists the information they want and, hence, creating the publicity, i.e. media coverage, the both parties aim for. As Gurton (1998, p. 19) argues, PR professionals can make the news by positioning their stories so that they meet the media's requirements. In other words, through persuasive communication PR professionals can frame their messages to fit the specific mold journalists look for in a story, so to speak. The elements of news value and newsworthiness were discussed in section 2.3.

Building and maintaining a network of contacts with the media is considered a prerequisite for organizations to create media coverage today. As the citation of Henderson (2006, p. 26) at the beginning of this section states, having good contacts and relationships with journalists is as important for successful PR and media relations as having an interesting message. Good connections are a way of getting an organization's message through to the audience. Therefore, devoting resources to creating successful PR programs and building and nourishing relationships with the media are likely to contribute to media coverage (Argenti, 2009, p.158).

The journalistic environment of today is filled with information coming from a variety of sources, such as the Internet and its various online media channels. Thereby, investing in thorough research for targeting the right media and reporters is also likely to pay off (Argenti, 2009, pp. 159-161). In this case right refers to the media and

reporters who are shown to share similar views about the topic in question, who have covered stories about similar topics before or to whom PR professionals have created good relations with. Therefore, instead of loosely using mass-mailed releases, Argenti (2009, pp.159-161) recommends PR professionals to find out which journalists would best cover the industry or organization in question and focus on them. As journalists logically tend to write stories with a certain point of view, ongoing research pays off to easily find out what angle a certain journalist has taken before and, hence, who would be likely to write a positive or balanced piece of news of the organization's story (Argenti, 2009, pp.159-161).

To conclude, interest in creating media coverage is mutual to both parties in the source-reporter relationship, i.e. PR professionals and journalists. As Theaker (2008, p. 268) highlights, counting the amount of media coverage for a story is, indeed, one of the most commonly used ways of measuring the efficiency of a PR campaign. Thereby, media coverage is also one of the most important concepts of this present study. Through the Online Press Conference (OPC) both PR professionals and journalists aim for publicity in the form of media coverage.

2.6. Theoretical framework

This section combines the five core theoretical areas discussed before in sections 2.1-2.5 of the literature review: 1) PR and media relations (e.g. Fawkes, 2008; Larsson, 2009), 2) news value and newsworthiness in journalism (e.g. Argenti, 2009; Hitchins, 2008), 3) relations between PR professionals and journalists (e.g. Shin & Cameron, 2003; Larsson, 2009), 4) media richness (e.g. Kelleher, 2001; Shin & Cameron, 2003), and 5) media coverage (Argenti, 2009; Theaker, 2008).

Figure 1 depicts the theoretical framework designed for this study.

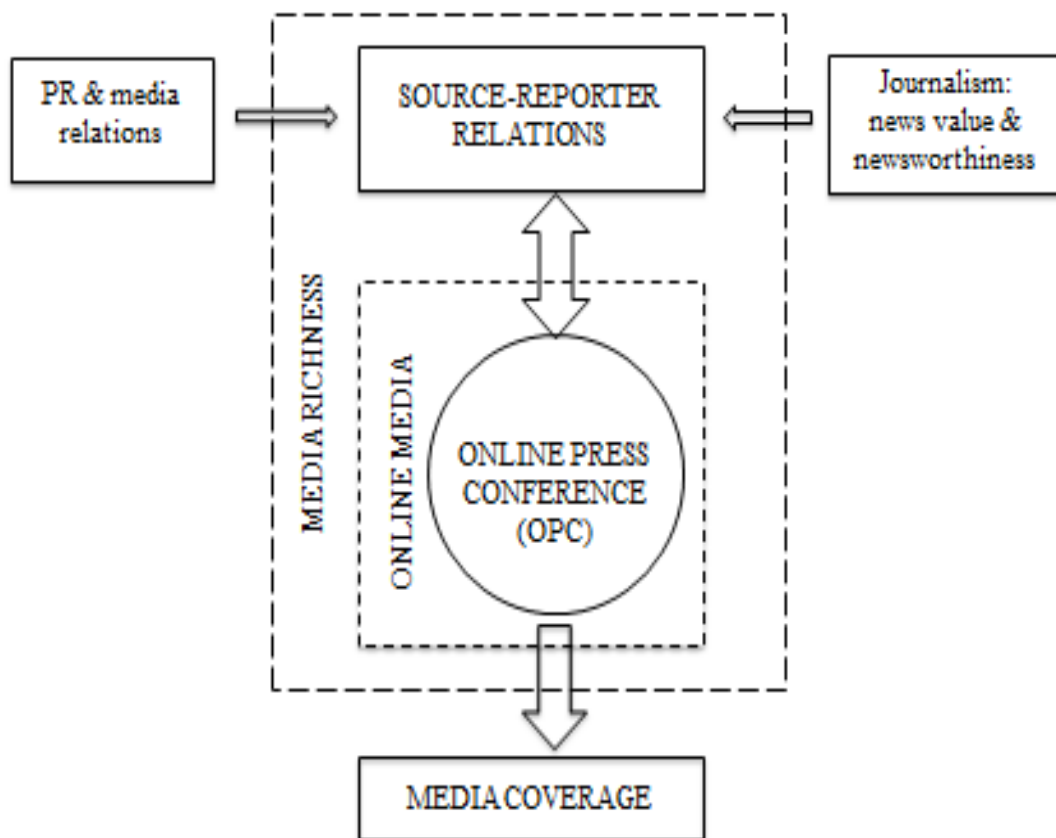


Figure 1. Theoretical framework

As the theoretical framework in Figure 1 shows, PR and media relations have a strong link to journalism. PR and media relations professionals and journalists build relationships to fulfill a mutual need to create media coverage. In this study these relationships are referred to as source-reporter relations where PR professionals act as sources of information and journalists take the role of reporters of news. These relations

are affected by the journalistic views of news value and newsworthiness as well as the chosen communication media.

As Figure 1 shows, in the case of the Online Press Conference (OPC) communication between PR professionals and journalists takes place through online media. According to the media richness theory, the chosen communication media are affected by their richness. The media richness theory is central to the present study as it traditionally categorizes online media into lean media, where the parties of communication may not be able to take advantage of the rich, implicit messages of communication. Thereby, it is important to carefully consider the selection of online media for the communication between PR professionals and journalists as it is likely to have an effect of some kind on the results, i.e. written news stories and media coverage.

3. DATA AND METHODS

This chapter outlines the research methods used for the collection and analysis of data in this present study. In addition, it describes the reasons that have led to these methodological decisions and discusses the trustworthiness of the study in the light of these choices. Accordingly, section 3.1 presents the data collection methods used in the study. Section 3.2 focuses on the methods applied for data analysis, and section 3.3 discusses the trustworthiness of the study.

3.1. Data collection methods

This section outlines the methodology applied for collecting data to examine the role of online press conferences in the relations between PR professionals and journalists. For this purpose a single case study was conducted. As Gomm et al (2000) argue, a case study is an investigation of a relatively small number of naturally occurring cases – in this case only one.

The present case study was conducted by using both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, i.e. semi-structured interviews and an online survey. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994, p. 2), qualitative research creates narrative or descriptive analysis of situations experienced by people in social environments. Therefore, in qualitative research, such as interviews, the role of people's perceptions plays a central role and the focus is in analysing people's words and actions. In quantitative research, on the other hand, observations are converted into numerical units that can be compared to other similar units through statistical analysis (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p. 2). Hence, using a quantitative online survey for collecting data provides the study with the possibility for statistical analysis, as well.

Through qualitative and quantitative data collection methods the phenomenon of online press conferences could be studied and analyzed from two different perspectives. The

main aim of the qualitative interviews was to study the role of the Online Press Conference (OPC) in the relations between PR professionals and journalists. Main focus of the quantitative online survey, on the other hand, was to find out how widespread and strong the studied phenomenon was.

The Online Press Conference (OPC) offered by Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy was chosen as the case service for this present study. This particular service was chosen for the study as it represents a new solution for using online media in public relations. By using online media the service also shows a lot of potential for the purposes of international business communication. The case study focuses on the views of media representatives for the service. This perspective was selected to find out what journalists expect from online press conferences, what kind of an online service would support the relations between PR professionals and journalists and, hence, encourage journalists in writing a news story of a press conference they have attended.

The methods used for preparing and conducting data collection in this study are summarized in the following subsections. The two methodologies of qualitative semi-structured interviews and the quantitative online survey are described in chronological order to alleviate the understanding of the two-step empirical process design.

3.1.1. Semi-structured interviews

The qualitative part of the study was conducted through semi-structured interviews. In order to collect profound ideas, thoughts and expectations for online press conferences, a decision was made to interview only journalists familiar with the case service. As the role of the interviews was, besides offering data for answering the research questions, to provide a basis for a widespread online survey, the number of interviews was kept fairly small. Therefore, in total five interviews were held with journalists representing different media.

The interviewees invited for the study were selected from the list of users of the case service according to the following two criteria: First, they had to do journalistic work and therefore represent some media or work as freelance journalists. Second, they had to have participated in at least one Online Press Conference (OPC) offered by Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy and, hence, have some previous experience of the case service.

The interview invitations (See Appendix 1 and 2) were emailed to 12 journalists who were known to have previous experience of the case service. The invitation explained (1) the purpose of the study, (2) its importance in the field of international business communication and (3) the high value of participating in the study. Out of those 12 invitees, 5 journalists replied and were selected to participate in the interviews.

Table 1 shows background information of the five semi-structured interviews, i.e. the date, duration, language and method.

Table 1. Semi-structured interviews

Interview	Interview date	Invitation date	Duration	Language	Method
1	24 Nov 2011	23 Nov 2011	25 min	Finnish	Telephone
2	28 Nov 2011	24 Nov 2011	35 min	Finnish	Telephone
3	28 Nov 2011	24 Nov 2011	25 min	Finnish	Telephone
4	30 Nov 2011	29 Nov 2011	20 min	Finnish	Telephone
5	7 Dec 2011	25 Nov 2011	30 min	Finnish	Telephone

As Table 1 shows, the interviews were carried out within less than two weeks in November and December 2011. All the interviews were agreed upon and carried out

already from the next day to approximately one and a half weeks from the date the invitations were sent. The interviews lasted from 20 to 35 minutes.

All the interviews were carried out in Finnish. By the time of the interviews only a few international journalists had attended the OPC. Unfortunately, however, none of the international journalists invited were willing to participate in the interviews, which is why all the interviews were held with Finnish journalists, in Finnish. Decision about the language was based on pragmatic reasons and the assumption that expressing ones true emotions, thoughts and desires is always easiest in one's own mother tongue. Due to varying language skills, conducting the interviews in English could have made some journalists reject from participating in the study or affected their answers. However, translating the interview responses for the study was also likely to encompass challenges. With translations there is always the risk of not being able to communicate all the original emotions, tones or hidden values and expressing them in exactly their original light.

All the interviews were carried out over the telephone. As the interviewees represented journalists from all over Finland, organizing personal meetings would have been challenging. With the consent of the interviewees all the interviews were recorded and transcribed within ten days after each interview.

Table 2 presents the most important demographics of the interviewees participating in the study, i.e. their gender, age and education, represented mediatype and their position in the media, as well as the pseudonyms used for each interviewee in the text.

Table 2. Interviewee demographics

Interviewee pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Education	Media type	Position
Interviewee 1 (I1)	Male	40	BA	Magazine	Sub-editor
Interviewee 2 (I2)	Female	36	MA	Newspaper	Journalist
Interviewee 3 (I3)	Female	24	BA (student)	Online media	Journalist (trainee)
Interviewee 4 (I4)	Female	39	High-school graduate	Magazine	Sub-editor
Interviewee 5 (I5)	Female	47	BSc	TV	Journalist

As can be seen from Table 2, the group of five interviewees consisted of one male and four female Finnish journalists in the ages of 24 to 47. Hence, the average age of the interviewees was 37. The interviewees represented various media, i.e. magazines, newspapers, TV and online media. All the interviewees were doing journalistic work and held positions of journalists and sub-editors in the represented media. The interviewees shared different educational levels from a high-school graduate to a Master's degree. The pseudonyms Interviewee 1 - Interviewee 5, or their abbreviations I1-I5, are used in the text to refer to the five interviewees.

The interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews based on a framework of selected themes. The four main themes selected for the interviews included, in addition to the background information of the interviewees, the role of online and social media in the relations between PR professionals and journalists, the role of the case service, i.e. the Online Press Conference (OPC), in the relations between PR professionals and journalists; and finally the source-reporter relations between PR professionals and

journalists. The framework with more detail of the interviews can be found in Appendices 3 and 4.

3.1.2. Online survey

Based on the interview results a fairly short but widely distributed quantitative online survey was drafted to collect quantitative data. To be able to reach the largest number of journalists possible, it was decided to conduct the quantitative survey by publishing the questionnaire online, using the Webropol tool, and distribute the link through email.

Invitations (See Appendix 5 and 6) to respond to the online questionnaire were sent to 886 Finnish journalists via email. As in the case of the interviews, the invitation for the online survey explained (1) the purpose of the study, (2) its importance in the field of international business communication and (3) the high value of participating in the study.

The invitees of the online survey consisted of stakeholders of Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy, the communication agency offering the OPC, and were selected according to the following two criteria: First, their contact information was received from the agency. Second, they were doing journalistic work. Thereby, the group of invitees covered both journalists who had used the OPC before and media representatives who were not familiar with the case service yet and, hence, had no previous experience of the OPC.

Table 3 shows the main characteristics of the online survey, i.e. the language and tool used, number of questions in the questionnaire, the time the survey was available for responses online and the received response rate.

Table 3. Characteristics of the quantitative online survey

Survey characteristics	
Language	Finnish
Tool	Webropol - Online survey and analysis software
Number of questions	21
Open ended	8
Multiple choice	13
Availability of the survey	12 - 26 December 2011
Response rate	12%

Since it was possible to contact only a very limited number of international journalists, a decision was made to target the online survey only to Finnish journalists, in Finnish. As can be seen from Table 3, the survey consisted of 21 questions including 8 open-ended and 13 multiple-choice questions (See Appendix 7 and 8). Most of the survey questions were targeted to all the respondents. However, in order to receive information from both previous users of the OPC and journalists new to the OPC, a few questions were also targeted only to the respondents familiar with the case service and a few to those respondents who had no previous experience of the service.

Consequential to the time constraints of the study the time for responding to the online survey was limited to two weeks in December 2011. Even though this seemed like a short time at first, the survey received a good sample of data to be analyzed. Out of the 886 invited journalists 108, i.e. 12%, responded to the online survey. No reminders of the online survey were sent to the invitees. Thereby, the topic of the study seemed to interest journalists and as an interesting detail, the survey received a few responses even during the Christmas holidays. However, if the online survey could have been open for responses for longer or the invitees would have been reminded of the survey, it might have been possible to get even a larger sample for the study.

Table 4 shows the most important demographics, i.e. gender, age, education level and type of media, represented by the 108 online survey respondents involved in this study.

Table 4. Demographics of the online survey respondents

Characteristics	Number of online survey respondents
Respondents (n)	108
Gender	
Female	71
Male	37
Average age	45
Age groups	
24-30	10
31-40	28
41-50	34
51-60	32
61-70	3
71-73	1
Highest level of education	
Secondary school	21
Bachelor's degree	86
Master's degree	
Doctoral degree	1
Represented media types	154 ¹
Magazine	31
Special or trade journal	24
Local newspaper	20
Radio	4
Newspaper	25
Television	5
Online publication	19
Freelance journalist	21
Other	5
Respondent pseudonyms	R1 - R108

As can be seen from Table 4, in total 108 journalists out of the 886 invited responded to the online questionnaire corresponding to a response rate of 12%. The sample consisted

¹ Number refers to the total amount of responses for the question of represented media types. Respondents (n=108) were allowed to select multiple represented media types, which is why the total number of responses is bigger than the number of respondents.

of 71 (66%) female and 37 (34%) male respondents. The oldest respondent was born in 1938 and the youngest in 1987 making the age distribution from 24 to 73. However, 87% of the respondents were between the ages of 31 and 60. Online survey respondents are referred to with pseudonyms R1-R108 in the text.

Education of the respondents was asked in the online survey with an open-ended question, which is why the responses differed in many ways. One of the 108 respondents had a doctoral degree as the highest level of education and 21 had secondary school degrees. Hence, the remaining 86 respondents, i.e. 79.6%, had either a Bachelor's or a Master's degree. Therefore, it may well be said that the majority of the online survey respondents were academically educated and had a college degree.

In addition, 13 of the respondents mentioned journalism, communication or media studies in their educational information. However, due to the open format of the question, this may not give the correct information of the level of communication or journalism studies among the respondents. If the respondents had been asked the exact major or field of their studies, it is likely that communication and journalism would have risen substantially higher among the fields of study. Unlike the interviews, the online survey did not, however, include a question of positions in the represented media. Therefore, the results of the online survey and the interviews are not comparable in the respect of the professional positions of the journalists.

Most of the respondents (n=31) worked for magazines, which corresponds to 29%. Newspapers (n=25), special or trade journals (n=24), local newspapers (n=20) and online publications (n=19) were each represented by approximately 20% of the online survey respondents. Nearly a quarter of the respondents (n=21) were working as freelance journalists. The overall response rate for the question was 154 compared to the overall 108 respondents for the survey, which means that quite a few journalists answering the survey worked for more than one media type.

3.2. Data analysis methods

This section describes the phases and methods of the qualitative and quantitative data analysis applied in the present study. The qualitative data analysis focused on the data assembly, selection and presentation, whereas the quantitative data analysis concentrated on the grouping and coding of the data. The results from the qualitative interviews and the quantitative online survey were analyzed separately and compared to each other.

Through the interviews and the online survey a great amount of data was collected. On the one hand, the interviews resulted in 2.5 hours of qualitative data. The analysis of the qualitative data focused on the role of online press conferences in the studied context, i.e. the relations between PR professionals and journalists. The online survey with its 21 questions, on the other hand, offered mostly statistical data of the 108 respondents. In addition, the open-ended questions of the online survey provided the researcher with some qualitative data to be analyzed. However, the main focus in the analysis of the data of the quantitative online survey was to analyze how widespread online press conferences were as the studied phenomenon and how strongly or importantly the respondents valued various characteristics of the service.

With regard to the qualitative part of the study, the analysis of the interview material was based on the following formula presented by Wengraf (2001, p. 225), where ‘IM’ refers to the interview material, ‘ATQs’ answers to the theory questions, i.e. the three sub-questions set for the study, and ‘ACRQ’ answer to the central research question, i.e. the main research question set for the study.

$$\text{IM} \rightarrow \text{ATQs} \rightarrow \text{ACRQ}$$

The presented formula was also applied for the analysis of quantitative data from the online survey by referring to the survey material with the abbreviation ‘SM’.

$$\text{SM} \rightarrow \text{ATQs} \rightarrow \text{ACRQ}$$

The qualitative interviews were taped and the data were transcribed within one to ten days of each interview. First interpretations of the qualitative data were made already during the interviews. When analyzing the interviews, the data were organized and coded according to the research questions set for the present study limiting the amount of data for the analysis. Thereby, only the most valuable quotations for answering the research questions were translated.² Finally, the translated quotations were included in the presentation of the interview findings, increasing the trustworthiness of the study.

Analysis of the data collected through the quantitative only survey, on the other hand, included the following steps. First, the data were carefully summarized in an Excel sheet. Following Fowler (2009), once the quantitative data had been collected and filed, the next step was to analyze the data to make statistical estimates and reach conclusions. Thereby, the data were organized according to the research questions set for the study and elements of the data identified as the most relevant for answering these questions were coded to have a better foundation for presenting the statistics. Then, responses for the questions of the online survey were translated and the most valuable quotations were included in the presentation of the survey findings.³ Finally, visualizing graphs were designed from the key results of the online survey and included in the presentation of the survey results, increasing the readability of the study.

3.3. Trustworthiness of the study

This section discusses the trustworthiness of the present study by evaluating the applied research methods. Trustworthiness of the qualitative interviews and the online survey are discussed through four aspects in this section: (1) reliability, (2) validity and (3)

² Any defects made in the translation process of the data from the interviews are responsibility of the researcher and the researcher alone.

³ Any defects made in the translation process of the data from the online survey are responsibility of the researcher and the researcher alone.

generalizability of the applied research methods and findings as well as (4) the objectivity of the researcher.

First, reliability is a core aspect evaluating the trustworthiness of a study. Reliability is usually referred to as the consistency of measures in a studied concept (Bryman & Bell, 2003, pp. 74-79). Even though there are various aspects of reliability to a study, the evaluation of this present study focuses on the external validity of the data collection procedure.

According to Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 288), external reliability refers to the degree to which a study can be replicated. In other words, reliability, or stability, ensures that a data collection can be repeated creating the same findings and conclusions all things equal. One of the most obvious ways of testing the reliability of a measure is without a doubt the test-retest method. However, in the present study including interviews and an online survey replicating the study, or even parts of the study, was hardly possible. Therefore, reliability of the study was ensured by creating the possibility to replicate the data collection and analysis procedures.

To ensure the reliability of the present study records were kept of all phases of the research process. This report describes the conducted study phase to phase from developing the research problem to the content and processes of the data collection and analysis providing all the essential information for replicating the study. Frameworks for the interviews and the online survey in English are attached in Appendices 4 and 8. All interview and survey answers were saved and documented. Thereby, all phases of the research process are open for possible auditing and replication.

With regard to the interview situations, reliability of the interview data was assured by trying to keep the situations as similar to each other as possible. Thereby, all the interviews were conducted over the telephone. The researcher adopted a social role that was kept during all interviews. Furthermore, all interviews followed the same framework of themes set for the qualitative data collection.

Second, to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the validity of the study was evaluated. As Bryman and Bell (2003) describe, the reliability and validity of a measure are usually related. Hence, if a measure is reliable, it can be valid, as well. According to Bryman and Bell (2003, p.287), validity refers to the issue of whether an indicator of a concept really measures, identifies or observes the concept it is supposed to measure. Even though the validity of a study may be measured from a number of different perspectives, in this present study the evaluation focuses on the internal validity of the research methods and findings.

Internal validity is also often referred to as the credibility of the study. As Bryman and Bell (2003, pp. 288-289) describe, internal validity ensures that the research is carried out according to the principles of good practice and that there is congruence between the researcher's observations and theoretical concepts. First, to assure the validity of the present study a theoretical framework was established based on prior literature before the data collection process to predict the outcome of the research questions set for the study. Second, findings of the interviews and the online survey were compared to and discussed in the light of the prior literature. Furthermore, the level of congruence between concepts and observations in this study was increased by discussing the interview themes together with the interviewees and revising the survey questions based on these discussions.

The third measure of trustworthiness evaluated in this present study was generalizability. According to Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 288), external validity of qualitative research refers to the degree to which the findings of the study can be generalized or transferred to wider contexts. Especially in a single case study like the present this places an imminent challenge for the trustworthiness of the study.

As the Online Press Conference (OPC) appears to be a fairly new service concept, generalization to other exactly similar services is challenging. However, in order to be able to generalize the results of this single case study to other online media services, the target case is described in great detail in chapter 1.3. Furthermore, the findings of the

case study are discussed in the context of international business communication providing the basis for generalizations. As highlighted by Stake (2000, p. 23), recognizing essential similarities to other cases creates the basis for naturalistic generalization for the readers of a study.

Finally, trustworthiness of this present study is ensured by the objectivity of the researcher. As Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 289) point out, even though complete objectivity is impossible in business research, the study should assure that the researcher has acted in good faith.

With regard to the present study, the researcher had no personal ties to the communication agency offering the case service and was familiar with the case service before starting the research project. Thereby, it should be evident that the researcher was not influenced by personal values or experiences during the research process but acted in good faith.

4. FINDINGS

This chapter introduces the key findings of the study based on the interviews and the online survey conducted with Finnish journalists.

As presented in section 1.1, the objective of this present study is to identify the role of online press conferences as online media services in creating media coverage and supporting the source-reporter relations between public relations (PR) professionals and journalists. The research objective is approached in two steps: (1) exploring the Online Press Conference (OPC) as an online media case service, and (2) identifying the best practices and expectations regarding online press conferences as perceived by journalists.

The main research question set for the study is:

What is the role of online press conferences in creating media coverage and supporting the relationship between PR professionals and journalists?

In order to answer the main research question, the following five sub-questions related to the three themes of online press conferences are set:

- 1a. *How do journalists perceive the technical functionality, process and content of the Online Press Conference (OPC)?*
- 1b. *What do journalists expect from the technical functionality, process and content of online press conferences?*
- 2a. *How do journalists perceive the Online Press Conference (OPC) as adding value to their work?*
- 2b. *What do journalists expect from online press conferences to add value to their work?*

3. *What do journalists expect from online press conferences so that they would support the relations with PR professionals?*

Findings for sub-questions 1a and 2a are based on the five interviews and the online survey responses of those journalists with experience of the OPC. Findings for sub-questions 1b and 2b, on the other hand, are based on the online survey responses of journalists with no experience of the OPC. Finally, findings for sub-question 3 are based on both the five interviews and all the survey responses.

Before reporting on the findings for the research questions, this section depicts two aspects of the study: (1) the level of previous experience of the OPC and familiarity with other similar services among the interviewees and the survey respondents, and (2) their perceptions on the relations between social media and the OPC.

First, figure 2 presents the level of previous experience of the OPC among the 108 online survey respondents participating in the study.

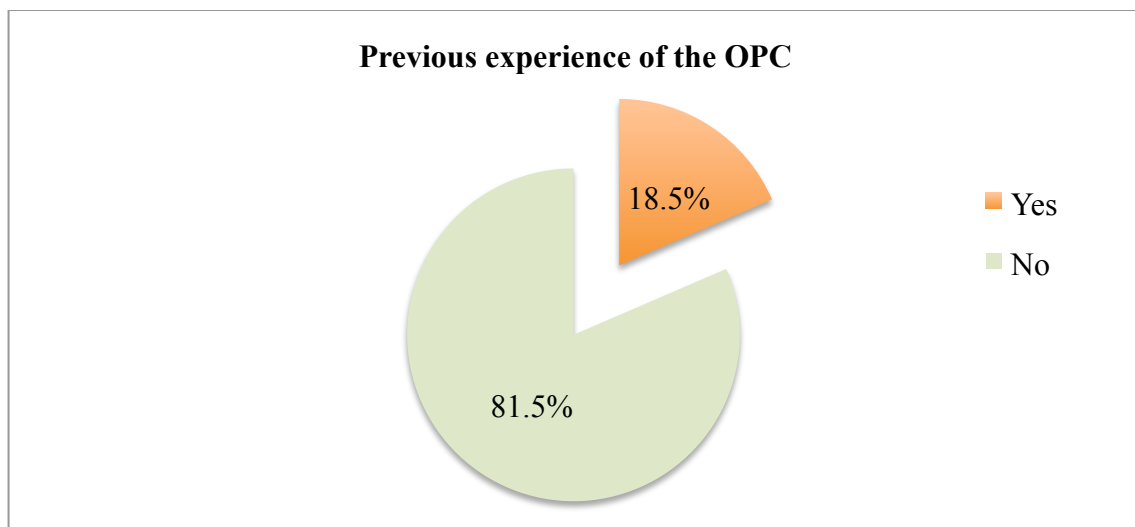


Figure 2. Previous experience of the OPC

As can be seen from Figure 2, 81.5% (n=88) of the total number of 108 journalists responding to the online survey had no previous experience of the OPC. This means that the majority of survey respondents were new to the case service and only 18.5% (n=20) of the 108 respondents had used the case service before. As described in chapter 3, the five interviewees of the study included only journalists with at least some previous experience of the OPC.

Online press conferences, in general, were a new concept to most survey respondents. Figure 3 shows how unique a service the OPC was considered in the field of public relations and corporate communication in international contexts among the 108 respondents of the online survey.

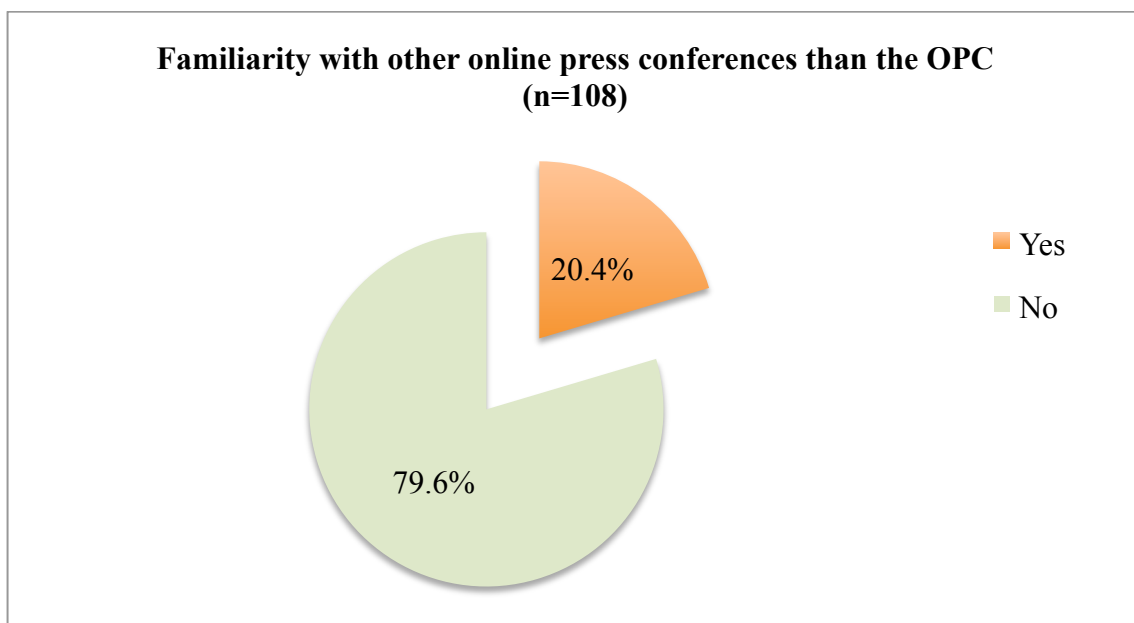


Figure 3. Familiarity with other online press conferences than the OPC

As can be seen from Figure 3, the OPC was considered a fairly unique service both in Finland and abroad by the survey respondents. The level of familiarity with other online press conferences than the OPC was very similar to the level of familiarity with the case service OPC depicted in Figure 2. Only 20.4% (n=22) of the 108 respondents were aware of similar services to the OPC either in Finland or abroad, whereas as much as 79.6% (n=88) of the survey respondents were not familiar with other online press conferences than the OPC. In addition, the interview results support the dispersion of these results as only one of the five (20%) interviewees of the study had come across with somewhat similar services to the OPC.

The services that were described as somewhat similar to the OPC by the survey respondents had a number of common characteristics. Such services all represented online briefings, webinars or international conferences with somewhat similar online concepts organized by, for instance, governmental institutions, the European Commission and other organizations. As described by the survey respondents, some of these services included the possibility to send questions to the specialists through email, while in some events journalists were able to call the desired specialists to ask their questions afterwards. It became, however, soon clear to the researcher that some of these results were biased, as those respondents new to the OPC were not quite familiar with its real characteristics. To some extent, online press conferences were, for instance, compared to companies' trendsetting online press briefings or result reports streamed online by the organizations themselves. None of the respondents had, however, heard of exactly the similar concept of an online media service to the OPC, with a communication agency as the organizing quarter. This proves the new, unique and trendsetting nature of the OPC both in Finland and in the international market.

Second, as the importance of social media among the current media trends is increasing, the present study touched on this field of research, as well. The interviewees and the survey respondents were asked how they perceived social media, for what purposes they used social media in their work and how they perceived the OPC in relation to social

media. Based on these results one might then be able to draw conclusions whether the OPC could - or even should – also represent social media for journalists.

According to the five interviewees and the 108 survey respondents, social media were used quite actively in journalistic work and, in the order of their importance, especially for (1) information retrieval, (2) search of ideas, (3) networking and (4) telling about written stories as well as (5) distributing photos and video material.

The interviewees and survey respondents raised the following three characteristics as the key elements of social media: (1) communication in real time, (2) interactivity and (3) sense of community. As the OPC takes place in real time, the service fulfills at least the first of these criteria. However, analyzing the level of interactivity and collectivity in the OPC was not as straightforward.

Figure 4 shows how the users of the OPC perceived the level of interactive and collective elements in the service on a scale 1-5, 1 being the lowest (1=Very bad) and 5 being the highest score (5=Very good).

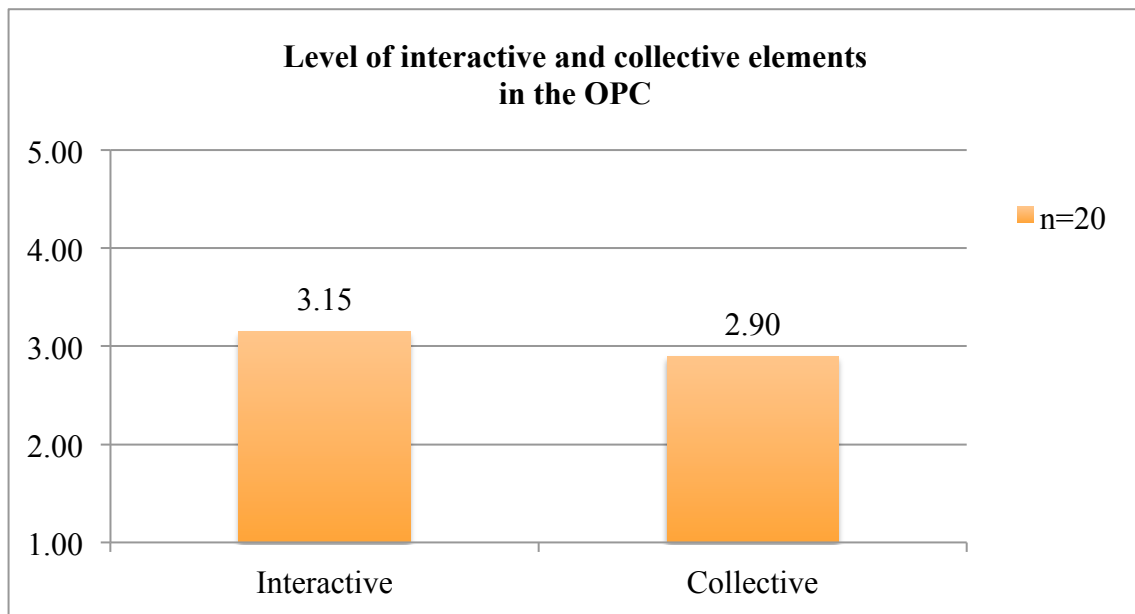


Figure 4. Level of interactive and collective elements in the OPC

As can be seen from Figure 4, both interactive and collective elements in the OPC scored quite close to each other and the fairly neutral score of 3. With an average score of 3.15 the survey respondents (n=20) perceived the level of interactivity in the case service as somewhat neutral. Collective elements of the case service, on the other hand, scored slightly lower staying at 2.9, i.e. barely under the neutral score of neither good nor bad (3). Thereby, referring to the key elements of social media evaluated by all the 108 respondents of the online survey, the OPC may be considered fulfilling the most important characteristics of social media only to some extent. According to the survey respondents, even though the service took place in real time, the current technology and content left room for improvement in, for instance, interactivity and collectivity of the service.

Supporting the survey results, the interviewees' (n=5) perceptions of the OPC as a social media service turned out to be interestingly twofold, as well. A few interviewees pointed out that, even though social media was not the first thing that had come into

their minds when thinking of the OPC, it certainly did contain a few characteristics often linked to social media. These interviewees perceived the OPC as a service of social media most importantly because of its availability for everyone, the need for registration and the possibility to tell about oneself at the service. The following quotations summarize these perceptions of the OPC as a social media service:

”Having to register for a user and being able to share information of oneself at the service, makes it [the OPC] a part of social media.” (I3)

“As the OPC is, at least in principal, also open for the general public, it represents social media.” (I5)

Many of the interviewees and survey respondents had, however, opposing views of the OPC as a service of social media, as well. Interviewee (1), for instance, argued that the OPC does not fulfill the key idea of social media as equal and multidirectional communication to wide audiences. Many respondents of the online survey criticized the social aspects of the OPC as, for instance, lacking personal contact and space for criticism, being more about listening making questions than interaction, and offering little chance for linkages to other online media. The following quotations summarize the opposing arguments of the OPC as a social media service:

”For me this [the OPC] does not seem like a collective alternative as it lacks personal contact.” (R74)

”From my perspective the OPC does not represent social media as the service seldom is very public but limited to only a few people and the information is rarely linked straight to other audiences from there.” (I1)

It was, however, also stated by Interviewee (1) that, as does any other concept, social media might also be defined and perceived very differently by different people. Thereby, the line between online press conferences and social media may be seen as far

beyond clear or straightforward. With regard to the interactive and collective elements of the OPC, one might also argue that, despite the format or medium, some participants will always remain followers while others take a more active role at press conferences. Nevertheless, the results indicated that there was still a lot of work to do to make the case service seem more interactive and social, and thus also represent more social media, for its users.

To summarize, with regard to the social elements of the Online Press Conference (OPC), however, the interviewees and the survey respondents perceived the case service as fulfilling the most important characteristics of social media, i.e. real time, interactivity and collectivity, to some extent. Even though the service took place in real time, the current technology and structure left room for improvement in, for instance, interactivity and collectivity of the service.

In what follows, the findings of the study will be reported in the order of the five sub-questions after which the main research question will be answered. Section 4.1 presents how journalists have experienced the OPC. Section 4.2 introduces the expectations of journalists for online press conferences in general. Section 4.3 presents the experiences of the added value of the OPC to journalistic work and the expectations for the added value of online press conferences in general. Section 4.4 presents the findings on the role of online press conferences in the relations between PR professionals and journalists. Finally, section 4.5 outlines the findings for the main research question set for this study.

4.1. Experiences of the Online Press Conference (OPC)

This section outlines the findings related to the first sub-question (1a) set for this study:

1a. How do journalists perceive the technical functionality, process and content of the Online Press Conference (OPC)?

Key findings of the experiences of the Online Press Conference (OPC) indicate that three technical aspects of the OPC were currently perceived as functioning the best: (1) registration and creating a user profile, (2) logging in to the service and (3) the functionality of the available material during the online event. The survey respondents also valued three aspects of the process and content of the OPC as the most important and affecting their user experience the most. (1) Topicality of the subject, (2) professionalism of the specialists at the panel, and (3) the duration of the event each scored close to good among the survey respondents. Compared to traditional press conferences, the interviewees considered that the OPC suited especially for press briefings and other informational topics with fairly straightforward and limited content providing mostly background information.

Findings for the first sub-question are based on the five interviews and survey responses of the 20 respondents with previous experience of the OPC. Subsection 4.1.1 outlines the experiences of the technical functionality of the OPC. Subsection 4.1.2 presents the experiences of the process and content of the OPC. Finally, subsection 4.1.3 introduces the experiences of the topics of the OPC.

4.1.1. Technical functionality of the OPC

This subsection outlines the findings of the experiences of the technical functionality of the Online Press Conference (OPC). Findings of the present study indicate that technical functionality is one of the key elements of the case service. Figure 5 shows the experiences of the 20 survey respondents with regard to the technical functionality of the OPC on a scale 1-5, 1 being the lowest (1=Very bad) and 5 being the highest score (5=Very good).

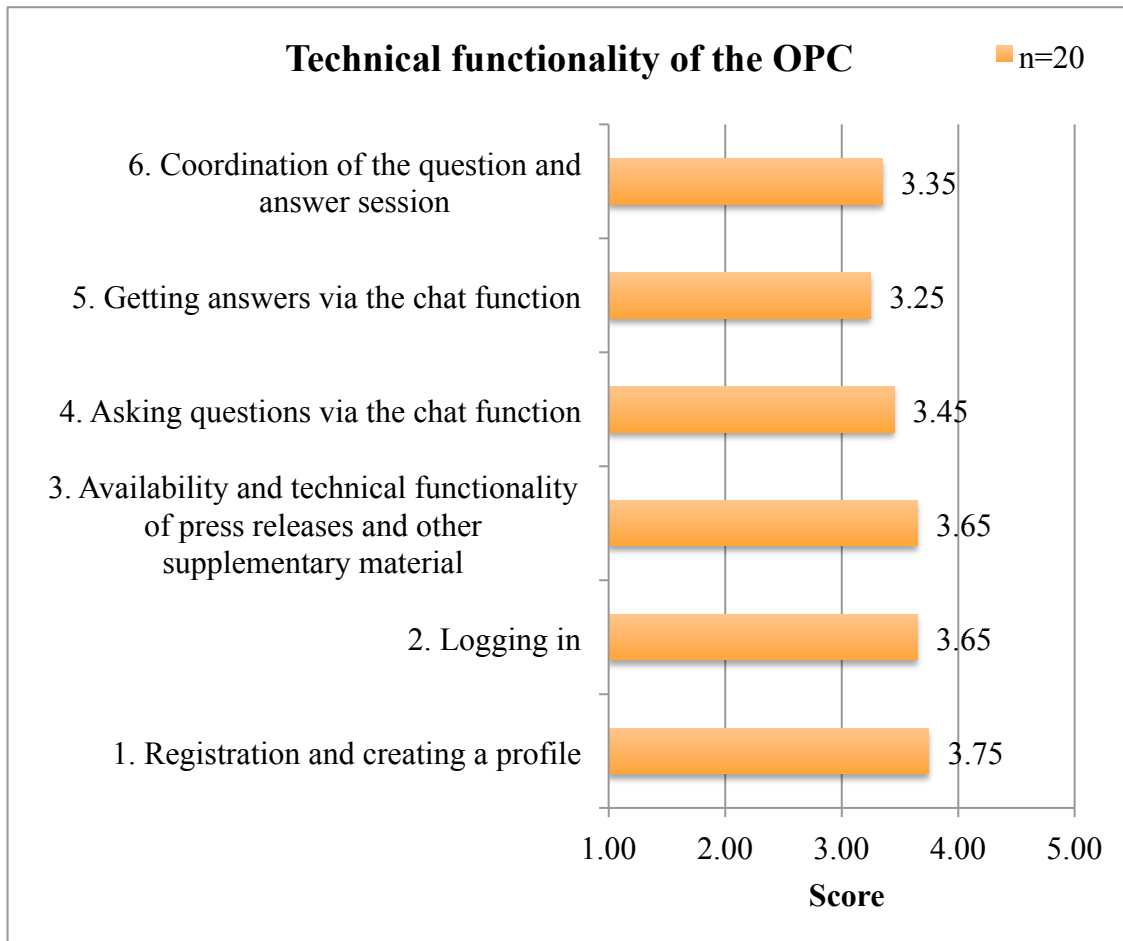


Figure 5. Technical functionality of the OPC

As can be seen from Figure 5, the technical functionality of the OPC was evaluated from six perspectives: (1) registration and creating a profile, (2) logging in, (3) availability and technical functionality of press releases and other supplementary material, (4) asking questions via the chat function, (5) getting answers via the chat function, and (6) coordination of the question and answer session. All studied elements affecting the technical user experience of the OPC received an average score of over 3 (3=Neither good nor bad) from the respondents who had used the OPC before. The results indicate that, even though some users were pleased with the functionality, others

might have had some technical challenges with the service. The five interviewees' perceptions of the technical functionality of the OPC supported these results.

Out of the six technical aspects studied, three aspects of the service turned out to be technically functioning better than others: (1) registration and creating a user profile, (2) logging in to the service and (3) the functionality of the available material during the online event. Each of these elements scored close to good, i.e. the average score of four. Interviews supported these results, as only one of the five interviewees mentioned having had some minor challenges with logging into the service. According to the other four interviewees, registration and logging into the service had been fairly straightforward.

As presented in Figure 5, the respondents of the online survey also evaluated the functionality of the question and answer session as somewhat neutral. Asking questions and receiving answers via the chat function as well as coordination of the question and answer session each scored little over three, i.e. neither good nor bad. The five interviews also indicated similar results in relation to the question and answer sessions at the OPC.

Especially the coordination of the question and answer session and difficulties in asking follow-up questions for incomprehensive responses were raised as minor challenges at the service by the interviewees. Some of the interviewees also noted that, even though there had been someone distributing the questions and moderating the event, in case of an interesting topic, the blizzard of questions would have needed to be controlled more effectively. The specialists' risk of missing a question at the event was currently considered too high.

According to most journalists taking part in the study, technical challenges were considered common in many online services and, to some extent, in the case service, as well. As none of the aspects of the technical functionality received an average score of good or very good, it seems that there is still a number of aspects to improve regarding

the functionality of the service. Giving guidance on the functionalities of the service such as logging into the service and asking questions during the press conference were, however, considered functioning somewhat well at the service by the previous users of the OPC responding to the online survey.

To summarize, three technical aspects of the OPC were currently perceived as functioning the best at the case service: (1) registration and creating a user profile, (2) logging in to the service, and (3) the functionality of the available material during the online event.

4.1.2. Process and content of the OPC

This subsection depicts the findings in relation to the previous users' experiences of the process and content of the Online Press Conference (OPC). Similar to the aspects of technical functionality, the findings of the study indicated certain elements of the process and content as having stronger effect on the user experience of the OPC than others. Figure 6 presents the survey respondents' (n=20) perspectives and level of satisfaction with the process and content of the OPC on a scale 1-5, 1 being the lowest (1=Very bad) and 5 being the highest possible score (5=Very good).

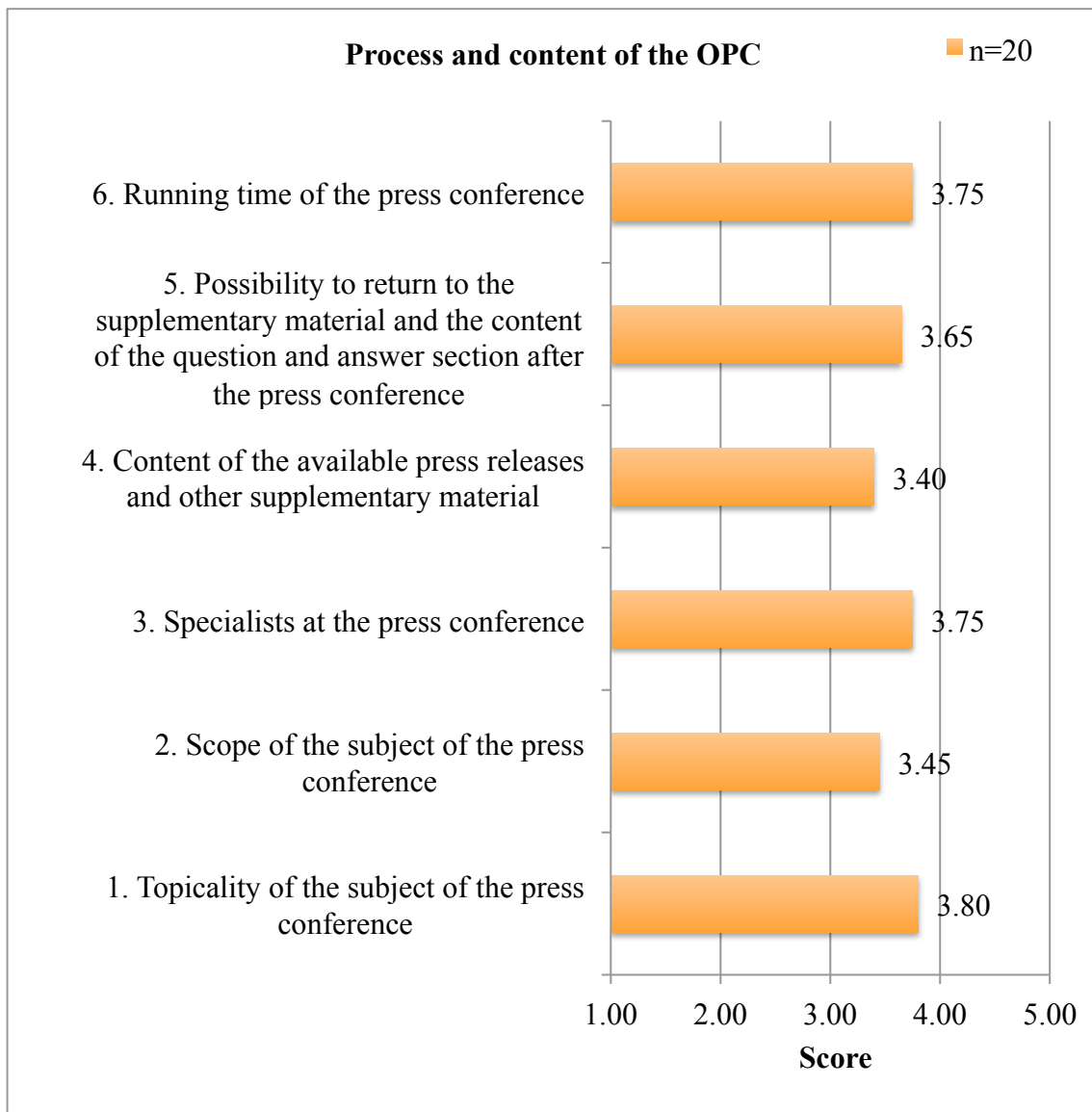


Figure 6. Process and content of the OPC

As can be seen from Figure 6, the process and content of the OPC were evaluated from six perspectives: (1) topicality of the subject of the OPC, (2) scope of the subject of the OPC, (3) specialists at the OPC, (4) content of the available press releases and other supplementary material, (5) possibility to return to the supplementary material and the content of the question and answer section afterwards, and (6) running time of the OPC.

All elements studied affecting the satisfaction with the process and content of the case service received an average score of over 3 (3 = Neither good nor bad) from the respondents of the online survey. The interviewees (n=5) shared similar user experiences and, hence, supported these survey results.

With regard to the process and content of the OPC, all the studied aspects scored slightly higher than the experiences of the technical functionality of the service. Three aspects affecting the user experience scored slightly higher than the others: (1) Topicality of the subject, (2) professionalism of the specialists at the panel and (3) the running time of the event each scored close to good, i.e. the average score of four. Scope of the topics and the possibility to respond to the material of the Online Press Conference (OPC) afterwards were also evaluated slightly above neutral, i.e. around 3.5. Finally, out of the six aspects studied, content of the available press releases and other supplementary material received the lowest average score of 3.40.

As can be seen from Figure 6, the journalists responding to the online survey were somewhat pleased with the process and content of the OPC. Even though both the survey respondents and the interviewees evaluated the process and content of the OPC as somewhat good, the findings of the study indicate there are still aspects to improve with the content of the case service. The results indicate that, even though most users were pleased with the overall process and content of the OPC, others might have also experienced the service as lacking, for instance, topicality, personal relevance or supplementary material. The respondents shared differing views about a number of issues. One journalist argued, for instance, that the OPC was a quick and efficient medium for organizing briefings whereas, according to another opinion, the service contained unnecessary content that took a lot of time to absorb. One journalist was also hoping for more linkages to background information outside the material prepared for the OPC. Overall, the specialists at the OPC were perceived as professional and offering high-quality information.

To summarize, with regard to the process and content of the OPC, the interviewees and survey respondents perceived the ease of use and compact content as the most important with the case service. The survey respondents valued three aspects of the process and content of the OPC as the most important and affecting the user experience of the service the most: (1) Topicality of the subject, (2) professionalism of the specialists at the panel and (3) the running time of the event each scored close to good among the survey respondents.

4.1.3. Topics of the OPC

This subsection outlines the findings related to the previous users' experiences of the topics of the Online Press Conference (OPC). As presented previously in Figure 6, the respondents of the online survey were not fully pleased with the topicality and scope of the subjects chosen for the Online Press Conference (OPC). During the interviews it also became clear that the OPC might not be the best solution for informing about all types of subjects. In fact, the five interviewees were fairly unanimous about online press conferences suiting some kind of topics better than other.

Compared to traditional press conferences, the interviewees thought that the OPC would suit especially for press briefings and other informational topics with fairly straightforward and limited content providing mostly background information. The following quotation summarizes this view very well:

“Online press conferences are good when you need short stories, facts or flash news. Traditional press conferences, however, are for more profound and serious investigation and stories.” (R80)

According to the interviewees, topics of online press conferences would have to be clear, informing and well structured for the discussion to stick to the point at the events.

Perhaps most importantly, however, as Interviewee (5) pointed out, to attract the media, the topic should offer journalists and the public new information:

“There has to be something genuinely new to tell [at an online press conference], otherwise it won’t attract journalists.” (I5)

However, for topics requiring action or, for instance, trying a service or a product oneself, getting visual material or talking to someone personally, online press conferences were considered suiting quite poorly by the interviewees. Hence, for situations where it is necessary to try for instance a new product before writing a story, traditional press conferences were still considered an effective solution. As Interviewee (4) commented:

“Good thing about the traditional press conferences is of course that one usually gets all the material, product samples and that sort of things from there.” (I4)

It was, however, stated that, in case it is possible to, for instance, send the product samples to the willing journalists either before or after an online event, online press conferences might still work for product launches. Hence, the availability of products samples was not perceived as a key factor in the decision-making process between traditional and online press conferences by the interviewees.

For person-specific subjects, on the other hand, when it is important to get visual material or to be able to make an interview in person, traditional events with face-to-face communication were still considered more effective solutions than online press conferences. As for instance Interviewee (5) noted:

“As a TV journalist, my motive for attending a press briefing or a press conference is mostly in being able to do the specialists’ interviews in front

of the camera at the same time. At an online press conference I won't have that opportunity.” (I5).

Therefore, the interviewees seemed quite unanimous about the fact that, at least with the current concept of the Online Press Conference and the journalists' needs, the online solution should be applied selectively according to the topic in question.

To summarize, compared to traditional press conferences, the interviewees considered that the OPC suited especially for press briefings and other informational topics with fairly straightforward and limited content providing mostly background information.

4.2. Expectations for online press conferences

This section outlines the findings related to the sub-question (1b) set for this study:

1b. What do journalists expect from the technical functionality, process and content of online press conferences?

After the experiences of the previous users of the case service, this section presents the expectations for online press conferences described by the online survey respondents new to the case service (n=88). In order to find out what they would wish from such a service, the respondents of the online survey who had not used the case service before were presented a brief description of the Online Press Conference (OPC) offered by Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy and asked about their ideas for a successful online press conference. Some of the respondents figured they could not offer any ideas for the service as they had never participated in one and figured they would not be interested in participating an online press conference of any kind, while others, on the other hand, seemed to be extremely interested in the service and showed clear ideas about what kind of a service would benefit them the most.

Several journalists answering the survey considered that the description of the OPC by Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy sounded a well functioning concept, while some respondents could not imagine online press conferences of any kind meeting their professional needs. The idea of being able to participate a press conference from practically any physical location online was considered especially exciting and interesting by many of the survey respondents new to the case service. The following quotations summarize these perspectives very well.

“The given description seems like a model for a well structured press conference – whether taking place face-to-face or online.” (R36)

“The concept of not having to be present at all times makes the online press conference a fun idea!” (R103)

“The given description seems good - at least in theory - as long as the technology works.” (R62)

Not all survey respondents were, however, for the idea of online press conferences but wanted face-to-face communication instead. The key perceptions of the supporters of traditional press conferences are captured in the following quotations.

“...Regardless of the event, I like going on the spot. I become distressed of merely the thought of not getting contact to people but having to write questions on the computer. This may be a trend of today and tomorrow but I hope otherwise.” (R38)

“I would prefer oral communication instead of written questions and answers.” (R23)

Key findings of the expectations for online press conferences indicate that, with regard to the technical functionality of online press conferences, the online survey respondents new to the case service were expecting online press conferences to be as clear and easy

to use as possible. While lacking face-to-face communication, online press conferences were expected to provide journalists with functional technology, fast connection and an open platform. With regard to the process and content, the survey respondents expected online press conferences to be compact, interactive and include only information that was relevant for journalists. The respondents' needs for material differed according to their represented media. In general, the respondents of the online survey did, however, raise the case-specific manners of representation, clear visual elements and comprehensive and carefully designed supplementary material as important elements to consider when organizing online press conferences. Finally, with regard to the question and answer sessions at online press conferences, respondents expected them to show the true views and opinions of the specialists present at the events. It was also perceived as highly important to be able to follow who is talking at the event at all times. According to some views, the open platform of the question and answer session was also considered a minor challenge for the competition of news between various media.

The findings for the second sub-question are presented in the following subsections according to the survey respondents' (n=88) expectations. Subsection 4.2.1 outlines the expectations for the technical functionality of online press conferences. Subsection 4.2.2 presents the expectations for the process and content of online press conferences while section 4.2.3 introduces the expectations for the question and answer sessions in online press conferences.

4.2.1. Technical functionality of online press conferences

This first subsection discusses the findings of the present study related to the survey respondents' expectations for the technical functionality of online press conferences. With regard to the technical functionality of online press conferences, a common expectation among the survey respondents (n=88) was that the services should be as clear and easy to use as possible. As following and concentrating on information is

often harder in an online environment than in face-to-face interaction, time should not have to be wasted on figuring out the technical aspects and ways of working at the service.

Several survey respondents also expressed their expectation of video connection to online press conferences. The respondents noted that even a one-way video connection to the service with enough cameras could bring the service on the next level offering the audience a chance to see which of the specialists is talking throughout the event. It was especially pointed out that, even though the current model may work for purely writing journalists, it is likely to cut down the representation of the visual media. Therefore, the following quotation summarizes the respondents' desires quite well:

“Real time and high audiovisual quality are important elements of online press conferences as the speakers also communicate through their being.”

(R92)

One journalist answering the online survey pointed out that an online press conference should be able to offer journalists clearly more than what traditional press releases have to offer. In other words, the survey respondents were expecting online press conferences to have functioning technology, fast connection and an open platform. A few journalists also mentioned not having to sign up or log in to the service as possible improvement for the service to make it friendlier for its users. In addition, according to one idea, the event could be saved, for instance, in YouTube to be watched afterwards.

To summarize, with regard to the technical functionality of online press conferences the online survey respondents new to the OPC were expecting online press conferences to be as clear and easy to use as possible. While lacking face-to-face communication, online press conferences were expected to provide journalists with functional technology, fast connection and an open platform.

4.2.2. Process and content of online press conferences

This subsection outlines the survey respondents' expectations for the process and content of online press conferences. According to the survey respondents, the process and content of an online press conference should be compact, interactive and include only information relevant for journalists. As Respondent (6) noted:

“No advertisement slogans but precise information for journalists to be used as the basis for a story” (R6).

In other words, the survey respondents expected the content of online press conferences to be substantially and clearly linked to a precise piece of news keeping the running time of the event fairly short. In addition, the possibility to get specialized answers to one's questions was considered an important motivational factor of participating in an online press conference. Therefore, as several journalists were hoping, the participants of an online press conference should be given contact information of specialists who they could contact afterwards in case of need for more detailed information or to express more specific questions.

Journalists responding to the online survey were also hoping for online press conferences to be interactive and informative and, hence, as similar to traditional press conferences as possible. The following quotation describes this finding very well:

“In general, an online press conference would be good with the same criteria as traditional press conferences: good speaker, clear outline, short addresses and the possibility to ask questions.” (R86)

The informational content of online press conferences did, however, receive interestingly two-fold answers from the survey respondents. On the one hand it was argued that the main problem with press briefings, in general, was the lightness and even inadequacy of their content. According to this view, many traditional briefings were organized without a real reason as, in many cases, the issues could had been easily

read from a press release, as well. Quite the contrary, for instance Respondent (77), on the other hand, argued that online press conferences would work especially well for *somehow light subjects*. The results may be seen as expressing the lack of relevant information about the case service or merely different needs and opinions between different journalists.

Three aspects of the content were raised as important elements to consider when organizing online press conferences: (1) case-specific manners of representation, (2) clear visual elements and (3) comprehensive and carefully designed supplementary material. The respondents' needs for the material differed, however, according to their represented media. While one journalist perceived the supplementary material more important than seeing the speakers' faces and suggested on showing the supplementary material during the event and playing only the speakers' voices, another journalist highlighted the importance of expressions, gestures and other visual elements in the speakers' communication.

It was commonly agreed among the survey respondents that all briefings and visual material published at the online site should be designed with careful thought. Especially regarding the written material, journalists seemed fairly unanimous that all text has to be short, clear and easily understandable. Views on the informational depth of the supplementary material, on the other hand, differed between the respondents to some extent. While some journalist wished for very detailed information, some journalists preferred material offering information in multiple ladders first telling about the subject only briefly, yet also offering a wider set of background information for those interested.

Receiving photos or video material from an online press conference was also raised a challenge for the service by the survey respondents. The possibility for the event organizer to hand out high quality photos of the event was puzzled over by the journalists and several journalists were hoping for photos of excellent quality and printable form. It was, however, also noted that in reality this might show multiple

challenges as different media often have different needs for the quality and format for the photos. Sending a photographer at the location, on the other hand, would vitiate the core possibilities of an online press conference.

Views on the availability of the supplementary material were interestingly two-fold among the survey respondents, as well. While one journalist emphasized the hectic nature of journalism and the need for material as early as possible to be able to get ready for the event and design questions in good time, another pointed out that the material should also be available online preferably for even a few weeks after the event as the working rhythm is very different with a magazine than with the daily media. In addition, for instance Respondent (86) pointed out that,

“Having the possibility to download the supplementary material on one’s own computer before an online press conference would make it possible for journalists to follow the material during the event.” (R86)

It was also reminded by the journalists that, in case the material was not available when needed, a story was likely to stay unwritten or it would only be written on a very superficial basis.

To summarize, the survey respondents expected the process and content of online press conferences to be compact, interactive and include only information that was relevant for journalists. The respondents’ needs for material differed according to their represented media. In general, the respondents of the online survey did, however, raise the case-specific manners of representation, clear visual elements and comprehensive and carefully designed supplementary material as important elements to consider when organizing online press conferences.

4.2.3. Question and answer session in online press conferences

This subsection depicts the findings for the survey respondents' expectations for the question and answer session in online press conferences. With regard to the question and answer session and the specialists' comments at online press conferences a few of the survey respondents noted that it would be crucial to get the true views and opinions of the specialists out in the open instead of being presented merely in the official language of press releases. As Respondent (21) pointed out, the best offering of traditional press conferences usually comes from the specialists' spontaneous comments and funny answers to unexpected questions from the audience:

“The more the specialists give of their personality, the more certain it is that a journalist will get interested in the subject and find a unique tag for the story.” (R21)

Furthermore, in order to follow who is talking at all times, it was also considered crucial that all the specialists would be precisely presented with names and titles.

Some journalist responding to the online survey, however, noted that journalists often feel quite possessive about their questions, which is why the open visibility of the written questions and answers may not be a merely positive thing. As the media are competing with each other, some of the respondents considered the need for placing questions on view of everybody as a minor challenge for the service. The following quotation describes the situation very well:

“I never ask questions in front of other journalists at info sessions so that they can't steal my possible scoop.” (R60)

Furthermore, the survey respondents argued that the best qualities of press conferences, i.e. the possibility for asking spontaneous questions and being able to reach specialists without the other journalists listening, should not be wasted at online events. The following quotations summarize these perspectives:

“Journalists should be able to ask also spontaneous questions raised during the event – not just the ones prepared beforehand.” (R70)

“Every journalist wants to make a story looking their own and protect their own point of view.” (R26)

To summarize, the survey respondents expected the question and answer sessions in online press conferences to show the true views and opinions of the specialists present at the events. It was also perceived as highly important to be able to follow who is talking at the event at all times. According to some views, the open platform of questions and answers was also considered as a minor challenge for the competition of news between various media.

4.3. Added value of online press conferences to journalistic work

This section outlines the key findings related to sub-questions 2a and 2b set for this study:

- 2a. *How do journalists perceive the Online Press Conference (OPC) as adding value to their work?*
- 2b. *What do journalists expect from online press conferences to add value to their work?*

Key findings of the added value of online press conferences indicate that the professional possibilities of online press conferences perceived by the interviewees and the survey respondents resulted in somewhat similar findings among the respondents new to the Online Press Conference (OPC) and the previous users of the OPC. Especially the two aspects that were considered most valuable turned out to be the same in both groups: (1) saving of time and (2) easily accessible information. The previous

users of the OPC valued the possibility of attending an online event without leaving one's office as the third most important element of the OPC adding value to their work. The possibility to return to the service and check information afterwards was, whoever, valued the third most important element of online press conferences adding value to journalistic work by the respondents new to the OPC. The open format of the question and answer session was considered offering journalists the possibility to benefit from the answers to other journalists' questions but also increasing the competition between journalists for the same reason. The bigger risk of errors and misunderstandings compared to traditional events was considered a disadvantage of online press conferences while the possibility for having material available on the site also after an event was considered a benefit of online events.

First, subsection 4.3.1 presents how the interviewees (n=5) and the survey respondents familiar with the case service (n=20) perceived the added value of the Online Press Conference (OPC) to journalistic work providing answers for the sub-question 2a. Second, subsection 4.3.2 presents the expectations for online press conferences' added value to journalistic work by those survey respondents new to the case service (n=88) providing answers to the sub-question 2b.

4.3.1. Experiences of the added value of the OPC

This subsection discusses the findings of the present study related to the Online Press Conference's (OPC) added value to journalistic work experienced by the interviewees (n=5) and the respondents of the online survey (n=20) and provides answers for the sub-question 2a set for the present study. In order to find out about the professional value of online press conferences to journalists compared to traditional ones, the journalists who had used the case service before were asked to select three (3) most important elements they thought attending an online press conference offered them professionally. Figure 7

shows how the value of online press conferences was considered among the respondents.

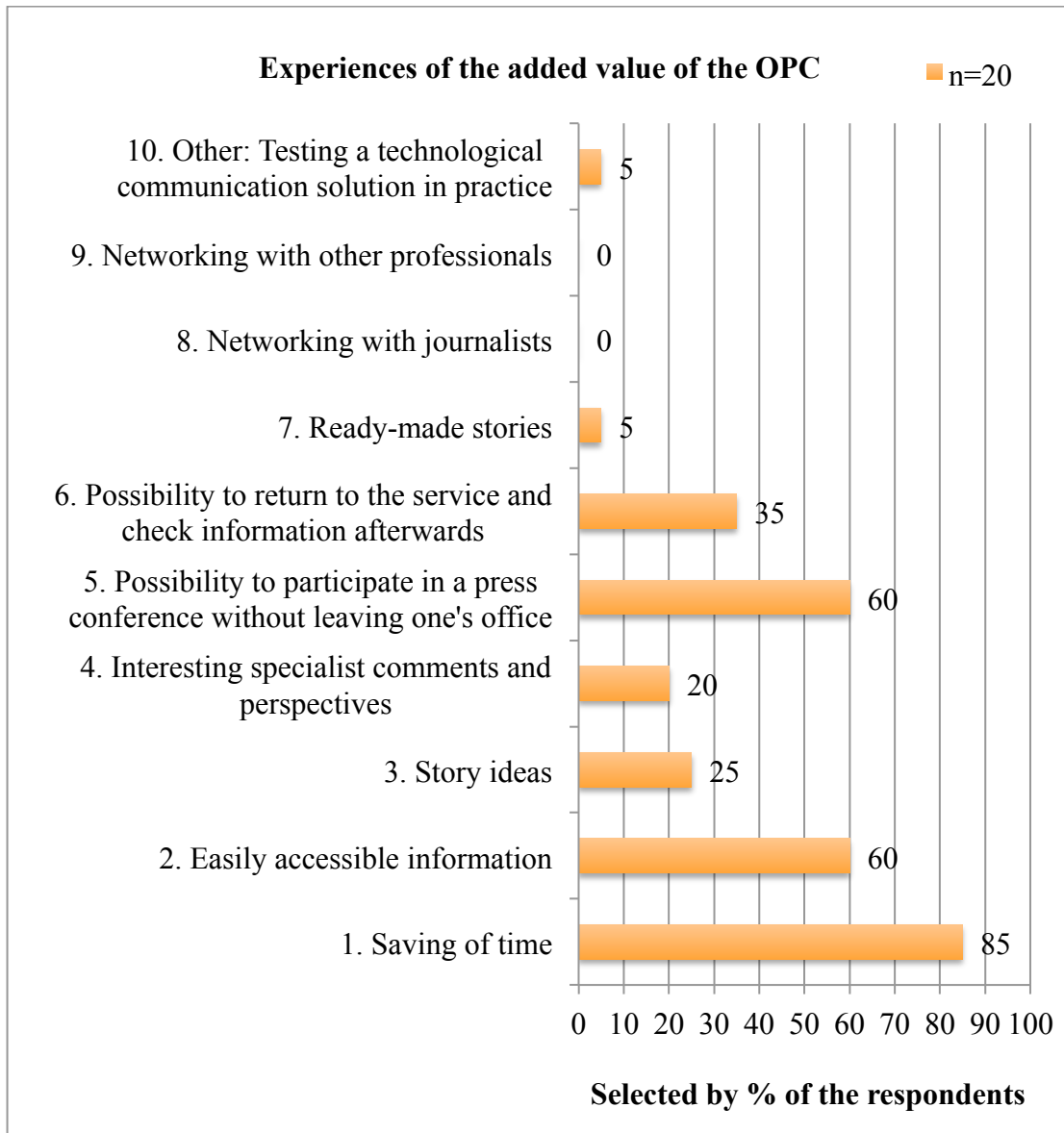


Figure 7. Experiences of the added value of the OPC

As can be seen from Figure 7, the professional value of attending an online press conference was evaluated from ten different perspectives in the survey: (1) saving of time, (2) easily accessible information, (3) story ideas, (4) interesting specialist comments and perspectives, (5) possibility to participate in a press conference without leaving one's office, and (6) possibility to return to the service and check information afterwards, (7) ready-made stories, (8) networking with journalists and (9) networking with other professionals, and (10) other aspects. The survey respondents (n=20) were asked to select three aspects that they considered as adding most value to their work.

As Figure 7 shows, the respondents of the online survey valued three professional possibilities above the rest: (1) saving of time, (2) easily accessible information and (3) the possibility to participate in a press conference without leaving one's office. As expected, the saving of time was valued the highest among the listed motives and professional possibilities of attending the OPC by the survey respondents. Out of the 20 journalists answering the question, altogether 85% valued the time aspect as one of the three most important possibilities the OPC offered them professionally. Easily accessible information and the possibility to participate in a press conference without leaving one's office were considered highly important possibilities of the service with scores of both being valued by 60% of the respondents.

Possibility to return to the service and check information afterwards, new ideas for stories as well as interesting specialist comments and perspectives were also valued by a number of respondents as important professional possibilities of the OPC. As can be seen from Figure 7, ready-made stories, on the other hand, received only one vote from the 20 respondents, whereas networking with journalists or other professionals at the OPC weren't considered important by the respondents at all. Referring to the user experiences regarding the interactivity and collectivity of the service discussed at the beginning of chapter 4, the lack of importance of networking as a professional possibility for journalists may indicate that the online environment of the case service was not considered hospitable enough for networking. However, it may also be the case

that networking was in general considered more efficient in face-to-face communication than in online environments. Furthermore, networking might not have been the thing journalists were looking for in a press conference at all.

The online survey results were supported by the findings of the interviews. Similar to the online survey respondents, making one's job easier was also highly valued among the five interviewees participating in the study. Like the survey respondents, the interviewees considered the time saving aspect of the service and the facilitation of work, such as the easily accessible information and possibility to participate in a press conference from a remote location, as the most important value adding aspect of the OPC. Saving of time was considered valuable as, as Interviewee (1) pointed out:

"Time is always short in journalism." (I1)

One of the five interviewees noted that the collective nature of the OPC offered journalists the possibility to benefit from the answers to other journalists' questions, as well. Most journalists considered the saving of time from reaching multiple specialists at one time a clear benefit compared to having to call each and every one of them individually. Regarding the interactive and collective elements of the OPC, a few of the twenty respondents who had used the case service before noted, however, that the current concept and online environment did not leave space for criticism or encourage in asking questions, even though it had been technically easy. One might, however, argue that, despite the format or media, some participants will always remain followers while others take a more active role at a press conference. A few journalists participating in the study also perceived the lack of personal contact as a slight weakness of the case service.

Despite the fairly positive overall atmosphere towards the case service, a few interviewees and survey respondents also criticized, for instance, the practical challenges regarding the question and answer session at the OPC. As Interviewee (2) pointed:

“When there are a lot of questions presented at the same time one may have to wait for the specialists’ responses for some time or even ask some questions again.” (I2)

Another respondent of the survey also criticized the technology for offering a chance to reject certain questions or hiding behind the possibly dysfunctional technology.

The material available and the possibility to download it from the site were, however, considered strengths of the OPC by the interviewees. As a weakness of the case service, on the other hand, the interviewees raised the higher possibility for errors and misunderstandings compared to traditional press conferences. Therefore, there seemed to be a common interest among the interviewees in having the press material available online for checking facts for some time also after the press conference. Ideally, the specialists could also have been contacted for a short time after the OPC if necessary. This was considered likely to improve the possibility for checking facts and decrease the possibility for informational errors related to the content of the OPC.

One journalist responding to the online survey (n=20) also mentioned that being still a fairly new service the OPC did not seem routine-like yet. It was also noted by Respondent (R17) that,

“Through online press conferences journalists may need to adopt a whole new perspective towards press briefings” (R17).

Therefore, the novelty and unique nature of the OPC were also considered challenges of the case service in the market. A whole new solution for organizing – and attending – press conferences was likely to meet resistance, as well. Indeed, it may well have been the case that at that point only the trendsetters in their field had found the case service and taken it as their own, so to speak. For the wider public getting used to a new concept might take a little longer time.

To summarize, with regard to the sub-question 2a, respondents of the online survey who had used the OPC before valued three professional possibilities of the service above the rest: (1) saving of time, (2) easily accessible information and (3) the possibility to participate in a press conference without leaving one's office.

4.3.2. Expectations for the added value of online press conferences

Expectations for online press conferences' added value to journalistic work were also studied among those respondents of the online survey that were new to the case service (n=88). These respondents were first presented a brief description of the service offered by Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy after which they were asked how they perceived the professional value of online press conferences compared to traditional events. This subsection presents the professional possibilities these respondents considered valuable in online press conferences and provides answers for the sub-question 2b set for the present study.

Figure 8 shows what kind of professional value journalists new to the case service expected from online press conferences.

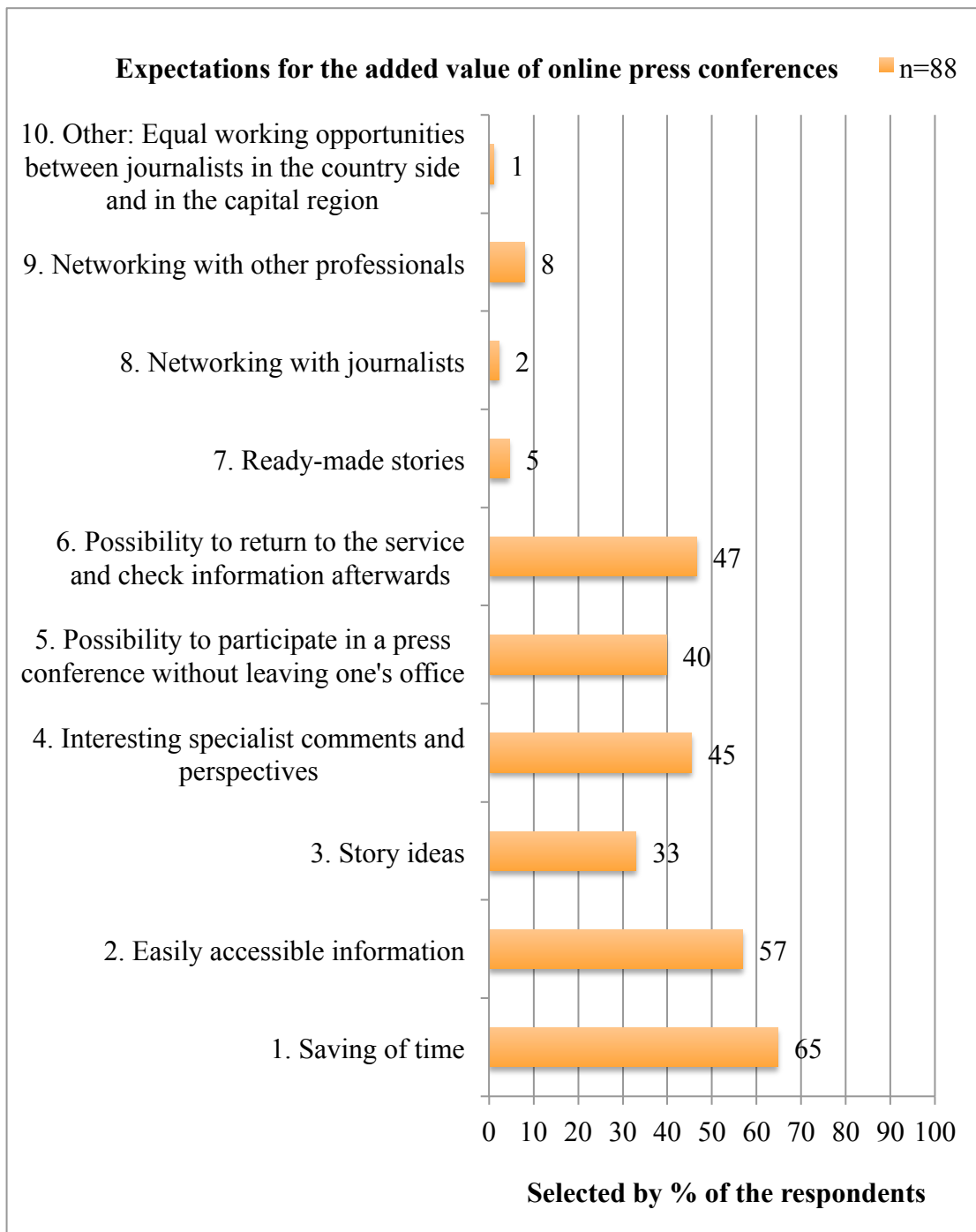


Figure 8. Expectations for the added value of online press conferences

As can be seen from Figure 8, the survey respondents new to the case service were asked to evaluate the same ten aspects of online press conferences that were adding value to their work as the group of previous users of the OPC in the previous subsection: (1) saving of time, (2) easily accessible information, (3) story ideas, (4) interesting specialist comments and perspectives, (5) possibility to participate in a press conference without leaving one's office, and (6) possibility to return to the service and check information afterwards, (7) ready-made stories, (8) networking with journalists and (9) networking with other professionals, and (10) other aspects.

Respondents of the online survey new to the OPC considered (1) saving of time, (2) easily accessible information and (3) the possibility to return to the service and check information afterwards as the three most important possibilities of online press conferences adding value to their work. The two most valuable aspects turned out to be, in fact, the same as the ones considered most valuable among the previous users of the OPC. Saving of time was selected by in total of 65% of the respondents as a possibility they would wish an online press conference to offer them professionally. Easily accessible information was valued by 57% of the respondents and the possibility to check information afterwards at the service by 47% of the respondents.

Besides the three most highly valued professional possibilities of online press conferences three additional aspects were considered especially valuable among the survey respondents: (4) interesting specialist comments and perspectives, (5) possibility to participate in a press conference without leaving one's office and (6) story ideas. Interesting specialist comments and perspectives were valued important by 45% of the survey respondents, whereas the possibility to participate in a press conference without leaving one's office was valued by 40% of the respondents. For comparison's sake, among the previous users of the case service the latter possibility was valued important by as many as 60% of the 20 respondents. Hence, the possibility to participate in a press conference without leaving one's office was not considered quite as important by the

respondents who were not familiar with the case service beforehand as it was by the journalists with previous experience of the OPC.

The possibility for story ideas was considered a valuable possibility by 33% of the survey respondents new to the case service. Ready-made stories and networking with journalists or other professionals, on the other hand, were each valued important by only a few respondents. One respondent also raised the topic of equality into the discussion of valuable possibilities by mentioning the equal working opportunities between journalists in the countryside and in the capital region as valuable aspects of online services.

As Figure 8 shows, the professional possibilities of online press conferences perceived by the survey respondents resulted in somewhat similar findings as in the case of previous users of the OPC. As mentioned, especially the two aspects that were considered the most valuable turned out to be the same in both groups: saving of time and easily accessible information. Despite the slight differences between groups, the results indicate that the information of the OPC offered to the newcomers' group of survey respondents had provided them with a fairly realistic idea of what an online press conference would be like and were able to do evaluations of the various possibilities the service could offer them professionally.

It was also pointed out that online press conferences were especially useful in cases where distances were long, for instance when regionals wished to report on national topics. The following quotations elaborate these perspectives in more detail.

“In a good online press conference remote participants can also ask questions and get answers without an intermediary quarter.” (R23)

“All in all the online press conference seems like a good concept ‘cause it saves time: One doesn’t have to waste precious hours on travelling from

place to place but one can follow for instance part of an event and take care of other tasks at the same time” (R86)

Furthermore, it was also mentioned by several respondents that, at the time of easy access to practically unlimited information from the web, social media and other digital channels, journalists were quite often lacking of interest in attending traditional press conferences. As the following quotation outlines, in order to attract journalists to press briefings organizations had to be able to offer really interesting news, scoop or fresh information:

“Organizing traditional press conferences is very often pointless as journalists don’t have time to come to these events. In order to show up, the topic of a press conference should also be extremely interesting.” (R99)

A few of the survey respondents new to the case service were, however, reluctant of asking their questions in front of other journalists and worried about the competition doing so would increase.

Many of the opponents of online press conferences in general, however, considered the service not meeting the requirements of the working schedule or topics of their media. One journalist noted that, while online service usually released people from time constraints, this did not happen in the case of online press conferences. As summed up by Respondent (23), some journalists still preferred traditional face-to-face communication to technology:

“In a good online press conference distant participants would also be able to questions and receive answers without intermediaries such as moderators. I would prefer oral communication instead of written questions and answers.” (R23)

One journalist new to the case service also raised an interesting question of online press conferences threatening professional journalists' jobs:

“When attending a press conference is really not necessary, professional journalists are likely to stay out of them. This will, however, increase the employment level of less professional journalists when, in principal, questions and answers are available for everyone to copy and paste in their own respective media. In addition, it's far too easy to pass over uncomfortable questions when journalists are not present to restate or define them further.” (R77)

To summarize, with regard to the sub-question 2b set for the study, findings among the online survey respondents new to the OPC were very similar to those of the respondents familiar with the service. Respondents of the online survey new to the OPC considered (1) saving of time, (2) easily accessible information and (3) the possibility to return to the service and check information afterwards as the three most key possibilities of online press conferences adding value to their work in the order of their importance.

4.4. Online press conferences and source-reporter relations

This section presents the main findings for the final sub-question set for this study:

3. *What do journalists expect from online press conferences so that they would support the relations with PR professionals?*

The key findings of the interviews and the online survey indicate that journalists valued their relations with PR professionals. The interviewees and the survey respondents perceived that they (1) got information from PR professionals rather easily, (2) the information from PR professionals was rather good service for journalists, that (3) the information received from PR professionals was often the type that journalists wanted, and that (4) online press conferences brought PR professionals and journalists

somewhat closer to each other. Findings for sub-question 3 also show that the role of online press conferences to support the relations with PR professionals and journalists was perceived to lie in (1) bringing PR professionals and journalists closer to each other, (2) making the cooperation between these two parties easier, and (3) trying and fulfilling the needs of both parties. Online services themselves did not, however, bring PR professionals closer to journalists as the personal contacts were, indeed, created and the social work done elsewhere, but they could offer journalists and PR professionals a new medium for collaboration.

Findings for this question are based on the interviews (n=5) and the online survey (n=108) conducted for this study. First, subsection 4.4.1 discusses the findings for the perceived relations between PR professionals and journalists among the interviewees and the survey respondents. Second, subsection 4.4.2 discusses the role of online press conferences in the source-reporter relations between PR professionals and journalists.

4.4.1. Relations between PR professionals and journalists

This subsection discusses the relations between PR professionals and journalists in the light of the interviews (n=5) and the online survey (n=108) conducted for this study. Based on the interviews it seemed fairly clear that the relations between PR professionals and journalists had become somewhat closer during the recent years. According to the interviewed journalists these relations seemed, in fact, quite straightforward at the time and journalists did not feel like they were being affected by the PR professionals. On the contrary, journalists often felt like PR professionals were helping them with their work by offering them information and story ideas. However, the final decision of using the provided information and responsibility of reporting different perspectives equally was considered remaining in the hands of the journalists.

All the interviewees (n=5) felt positive about the source-reporter relationship with PR professionals. Depending on the represented media type, some of the interviewees were

in contact with PR professionals even daily, some slightly less frequently. One of the five interviewees mentioned that doing collaboration with PR agencies and professionals might, in fact, have been more common in some type of media than others. Another added that, even though the relationship had been working quite well in general, some occasional challenges might have occurred due to the lack of knowledge of the other party's work. In addition, it was noted by one interviewee that perceptions of the collaboration with PR professionals might still have differed across generations. While young journalists might have felt very positive about the collaboration, older journalists might have sometimes felt a little prejudiced about the motives of PR professionals. The following quotations describe the interviewees' overall perceptions of the source-reporter relations very well:

"Personally I cooperate with PR professionals almost daily and it would be a lot harder to do this job if these professionals did not exist. They are specialists in their own area of expertise and offer good tips and information for journalists." (14)

"PR professionals know quite well nowadays what journalists want. Even though it is difficult to please all journalists with different needs depending on their represented media, the need for information remains common to all journalists." (15)

"Collaboration with all parties is possible but one has to bear in mind that there is always a power behind the throne trying to get its message further." (15)

"If we think of PR professionals, I think they do come closer than before. As a journalist I find collaboration with PR professionals quite straightforward, as I have never felt I would have been sold something or imposed with false information. These people give me information and

help me with my job but it is my responsibility to make sure I get information from both sides, not just what they tell me.” (I1)

Figure 14 shows how the respondents of the online survey perceived the relationships between PR professionals and journalists.

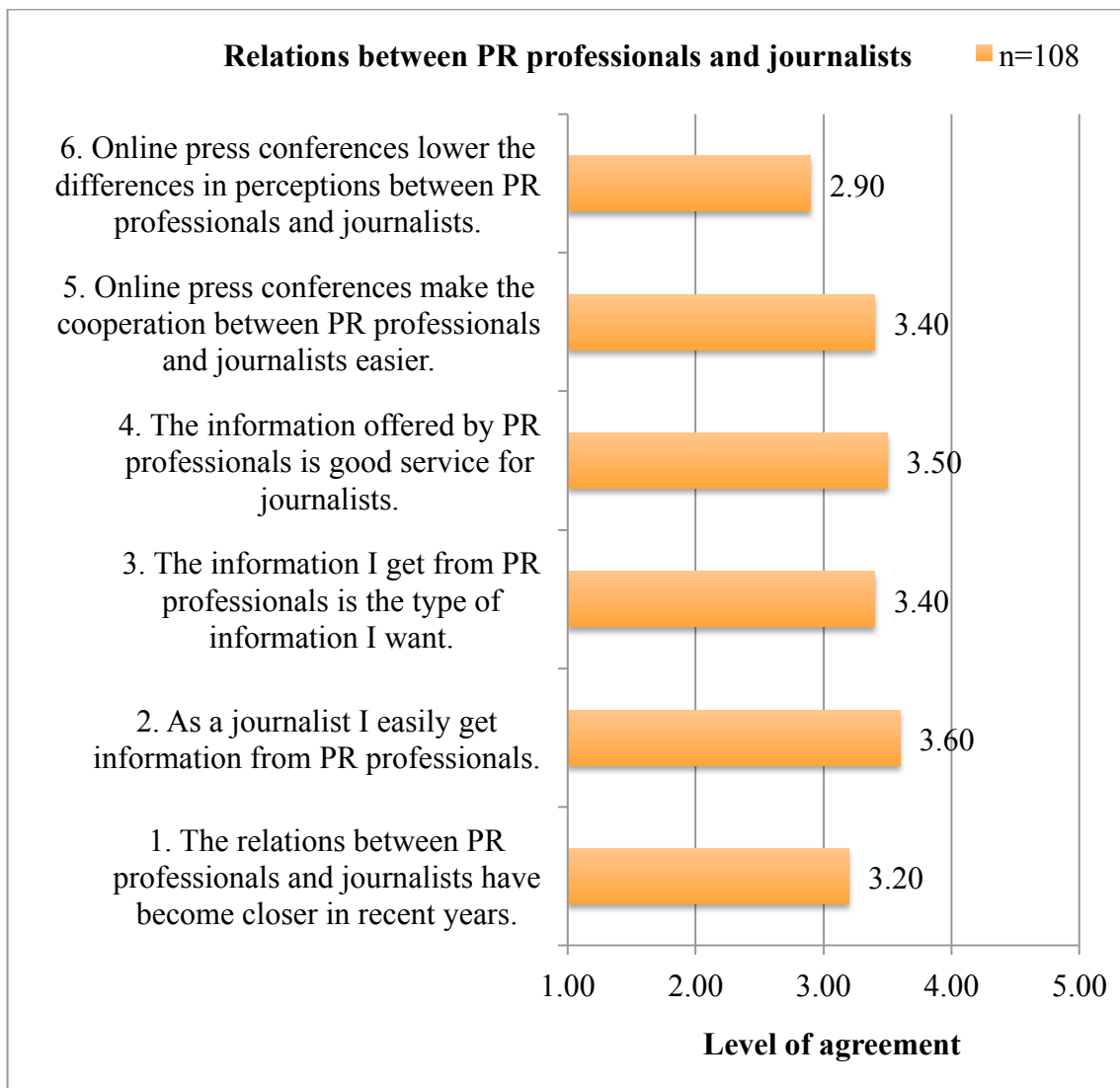


Figure 9. Relations between PR professionals and journalists

As can be seen from Figure 9, to study journalists' perceptions on their relations with PR professionals, the respondents of the online survey (n=108) were asked to evaluate six statements and how well they met their personal experiences on a scale 1-5, 1 being the lowest (1=Very poorly) and 5 being the highest score possible (5=Very well). With regard to Figure 9, this subsection outlines the more detailed findings for the first four statements while the results for the last two statements are depicted in the next subsection 4.4.2.

As Figure 9 shows, all the positively formulated statements of the relations with PR professionals were perceived as meeting the journalists' views better than the average score (3=Neither well nor poorly) or even close to well (4=Well). With average scores around 3.5 the results of the online survey indicate that journalists did get information from PR professionals rather easily and perceived this information as a rather good service from the PR professionals. Furthermore, the information received from PR professionals was also considered more or less of the type journalists usually wanted. As one of the journalists noted, even though the views of PR professionals might have still sometimes collided with those of journalists, the biggest challenges had lied in the flow of information. According to this view, misunderstandings were likely to occur because of lack of information on the other party's way of handling things.

As can be seen from Figure 9, with regard to the development of the relations between PR professionals and journalists, the perceptions of the interviewees and the survey respondents were not, however, completely consistent. With an increasing number of communication agencies and PR professionals in the field, most interviewees felt that PR professionals had at the time become closer to journalists than before. Respondents of the online survey, on the other hand, were not as unanimous about this aspect. As can be seen from Figure 9, with an average score of 3.2 the respondents of the online survey argued that the relations between PR professionals and journalists had not become significantly closer or more distant to each other than before, but had stayed more or

less unchanged during the recent years. However, as the overall relations between PR professionals and journalists were perceived fairly positive by the interviewees, the relations may also be interpreted as having been somewhat close already before.

To summarize, the findings of the interviews and the online survey indicate that journalists valued their relations with PR professionals. The interviewees and survey respondents perceived that (1) they got information from PR professionals rather easily, (2) the information from PR professionals was rather good service from PR professionals to journalists, that (3) the information received from PR professionals was often the type journalists wanted, and that (4) online press conferences brought PR professionals and journalists somewhat closer to each other.

4.4.2. Roles of online press conferences in source-reporter relations

This subsection outlines the findings on how the OPC and online press conferences in general were perceived by the interviewees and the survey respondents in the relationship between PR professionals and journalists and what was expected of the service to support this relationship. As presented in Figure 9 in the previous subsection, respondents of the online survey perceived the role of online press conferences in the relations between PR professionals and journalists as somewhat neutral. With an average score of 3.4 online press conferences were perceived to make the cooperation between PR professionals and journalists somewhat easier. With regard to the possibilities of online press conferences in lowering the perceptual differences between PR professionals and journalists the respondents were not, however, as like-minded as with the other aspects studied. The slightly lower average score of 2.9 for may indicate either the lack of perceptual differences in the relationship or reflect some specific characteristics of the case service.

Even though the interviewees perceived the relations between PR professionals and journalists as fairly close and well functioning, the OPC was perceived as lowering the

threshold for collaboration with PR professionals even further. The OPC was considered offering good service with free and easily accessible information from PR professionals to journalists. As one of the most important roles of the OPC in the relations between PR professionals and journalists the interviewees perceived the PR professionals' possibility to profile themselves in the eyes of journalists as ambassadors of certain brands or specialists in certain areas of expertise.

Finally, while one respondent of the online survey argued that there was a lot to improve with the interactivity of the case service, another considered it a fresh and promising possibility for the interaction between PR professionals and journalists. A common view among the survey respondents was, however, that, as in all press conferences, interaction was also necessary in online events to support the relations between PR professionals and journalists. As discussed in previous sections, this places, however, requirements for the technology and functionality of the online environment.

To summarize the findings for the sub-question 3 of this study, the role of online press conferences in the relations between PR professionals and journalists was considered to lie in (1) bringing PR professionals and journalists closer to each other, (2) making the cooperation between these two parties easier and (3) fulfilling the needs of both parties. However, as one interviewee noted, service themselves did not bring PR professionals closer to journalists as the personal contacts were, in fact, created and the social work done elsewhere. Online services could, however, offer journalists and PR professionals a new medium for collaboration.

4.5. Online press conferences and media coverage

This section outlines the findings of the present study in the light of the main research question set for this study:

What is the role of online press conferences in creating media coverage and supporting the relationship between PR professionals and journalists?

The key findings of the present study indicate that, similar to traditional press conferences, journalists perceived that the topics of online press conferences had to be relevant and useful to journalists in order to have them participate in these events. Journalists also considered that, by using online press conferences instead of traditional events, PR professionals were offered a chance to differentiate among their competitors and profile themselves as forerunners of applying new media in public relations. The interviewees and survey respondents argued that, in order to increase the number of written stories and created media coverage of an online press conference, there had to be a diplomatic balance in the source-reporter relationship between promoting an organization's interests and not trying affecting journalists directly. Finally, as one interviewee noted, the essence of the informational content in traditional and online press conferences was very often the same. Thereby, through online press conferences the possibility to save time and participate in a press conference regardless of the physical location became often the decisive factor in building media coverage.

By offering a new medium for collaboration, the interviewees and survey respondents perceived the OPC and online press conferences in general as unique, innovative and interesting possibilities for supporting the source-reporter relations between PR professionals and journalists. Online press conferences were considered to support the relations between PR professionals and journalists to some extent, and thus increase the likelihood for the creation of media coverage. By using online press conferences instead of traditional events PR professionals were offered a chance to differentiate among their

competitors and profile themselves as forerunners of applying new media in public relations. As discussed in the previous section, because of online press conferences' ease of use, the interviewees and survey respondents perceived the information offered through online press conferences as good service from PR professionals to journalists.

The interviewees and survey respondents argued that, in order to increase the number of written stories and created media coverage of an online press conference, there had to be a diplomatic balance in the source-reporter relationship between promoting an organization's interests and not trying affecting journalists directly. The following quotation of Interviewee (2) describes the challenging role of public relations in promoting a new story in the efforts of creating media coverage:

“It is ok for PR professionals to offer ideas, tips and interviewees for journalists but trying to get a story written from a certain point of view is not wise. If so, a story will not be written at all.” (I2)

Indeed, the topics of online press conferences were considered a crucial factor affecting their success. As one journalist noted, similar to traditional press conferences, the topics had to be relevant and useful to journalists in order to get them participate in online press conferences. Relevant topics were considered likely to result in written stories and media coverage while online events with irrelevant topics for journalists were considered likely to lack participants.

Online press conferences were perceived as a possible new channel for information retrieval by the interviewees. As one journalist noted, the culture of public relations might be changing as, on the one hand, journalists found these new services and learned how to use them in their everyday work and, on the other hand, organizations and their PR professionals learned what kinds of topics online press conferences were, in fact, best suited for. As Interviewee (1) pointed out, in case of online press conferences, often *less was actually more* in the content. Thereby, according to this view, online press

conferences might, in fact, work as intermediaries between the differing interests of journalists and PR professionals, and thereby help in creating media coverage.

Finally, as one interviewee noted, the essence of the informational content in traditional and online press conferences was very often the same. Thereby, through online press conferences the possibility to save time and participate in a press conference regardless of the physical location became often the decisive factors in building media coverage. Even though there were a few survey respondents still somewhat reluctant to participate in online press conferences, in general the services were perceived as time saving alternatives for traditional events. Thereby, as more journalists were able and willing to participate a press conference, the likelihood of written stories and media coverage for the content of the online press conferences would increase. Findings for the main research question are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

To summarize, similar to traditional press conferences, journalists perceived that the topics had to be relevant and useful to journalists in order to have them participate in online press conferences. Journalists also considered that, by using online press conferences instead of traditional events, PR professionals were offered a chance to differentiate among their competitors and profile themselves as forerunners of applying new media in public relations. The interviewees and survey respondents argued that, in order to increase the number of written stories and created media coverage of an online press conference, there had to be a diplomatic balance in the source-reporter relationship between promoting an organization's interests and not trying affecting journalists directly. Finally, as one interviewee noted, the essence of the informational content in traditional and online press conferences was very often the same. Thereby, through online press conferences the possibility to save time and participate in a press conference regardless of the physical location became often the decisive factor in building media coverage.

5. DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the main findings of this study and links them to the literature reviewed in chapter 2. The objective of this study was to examine the role of online press conferences in creating media coverage and supporting the source-reporter relations between PR professionals and journalists. In more detail, this study examined how journalists perceived the role of online press conferences in journalistic work, what they required from the service to help them write a news story and how they perceived the service in relation to other online media services and networks.

The findings of the empirical study did not reveal a definite answer to the main research question: *What is the role of online press conferences in creating media coverage and supporting the relationship between PR professionals and journalists?* This means that findings of the study differed to some extent across journalists. While most journalists perceived online press conferences as improving the efficiency of journalistic work, making collaboration with PR professionals easier compared to traditional press conferences and, hence, also contributing to the amount of media coverage created, others preferred traditional events with face-to-face communication. Even though the study was not able to provide highly surprising research findings, the findings of the study were for the most part able to support the preset hypothesis that online press conferences had a role in creating media coverage and supporting the relationship between PR professionals and journalists.

Even though both research methods resulted in fairly similar results in many respects, they showed significant differences, as well. The five semi-structure interviews resulted in approximately 2.5 hours of qualitative data of the Online Press Conference (OPC) and its role for the creation of media coverage and the relationship between PR professional and journalists. This data was not as well structured as the results of the online survey.

For the most parts, however, findings of the present study supported the theoretical framework constructed for the study and presented in Figure 1 in section 2.6. The literature review created a clear link between PR professionals and journalists, media richness and online media, as well as media coverage. The findings indicated that PR professionals and journalists were in close collaboration - both aiming for creating media coverage. According to the journalists participating in the study, most of the challenges in these relations had to do with the lack of information – even misunderstandings – of the other party's work. These findings support the results reported by Shin and Cameron (2003, pp. 587-588) that, even though PR professionals and journalists may sometimes have different goals, values and desired outcomes, the main conflict in the source-reporter relations often comes from how each occupation is perceived by the other.

With regard to the case service of this present study, none of the survey respondents or the interviewees had come across with exactly the similar type of concept as the Online Press Conference (OPC) with a communication agency as the organizing quarter. This may be interpreted to prove the unique and trendsetting nature of the OPC both in Finland and in the international market.

All communication professionals were referred to as PR professionals in this present study. One of the online survey respondents participating in the study was, however, worried that this might provide the communication profession with false images. This journalist expressed happiness that the concept of public relations (PR) that was widely used in, for instance, the United States had not landed in the Finnish communications industry as it, according to the respondent's view, did not describe the profession fully enough. This concern seems understandable as, discussed by Siukosaari (2012, pp. 124-128), the name of the PR industry was also smeared through questionable and immoral actions in Finland during the 1960s and 1970s. Using the term PR instead of corporate communication in this present study seemed, however, justified in the international business context of the case service. Furthermore, due to the characteristics of the case

service, most of the relevant communication theories and literature used in this study focused on public relations, and media relations in particular. In communication literature, such as Cornelissen (2011, pp. 141-162, 179-198), PR and media relations are often discussed under the concept of corporate communication, or vice versa.

As Hitchins (2008, p. 206) argues, journalists value excitement, drama, novelty and controversy in stories. Thereby, attracting a good number of journalists to a traditional press conference would require an enormously interesting story. The findings of the present study supported this argument as online press conferences make attending press conferences easier. However, online press conferences also require a relevant topic to attract journalists. Compared to traditional press conferences, the interviewees considered that the OPC suited especially for press briefings and other informational topics with fairly straightforward and limited content providing journalists with background information. Online press conferences were, however, considered likely to reach more journalists and result in greater media coverage than traditional press conferences as all journalists, despite their location, were able to participate in them just by using their own computers.

The case service, Online Press Conference (OPC), contained a form of online chat room where journalists were able to ask questions and specialists answered them in real time. As Theaker (2008, p. 363) points out, real time online communication requires always staff and technical resources for the service to function effectively and organized. Organizing the Online Press Conference (OPC) required prior work from the PR consultants to organize the event, time and effort from the specialists from the client organization to answer to journalists' questions, technical support and a PR consultant to moderate the event, to name but a few. Thereby, using online media in organizing press conferences does not necessarily come cheaper than organizing traditional events at a physical location. Instead, according to the communication agency offering the OPC, the use of technology in the service may cost a client even more than a traditional press conference as a whole. However, by using new media, online press conferences

are likely to attract a lot more journalists than through the more traditional methods. Therefore, in online press conferences the cost per journalist is likely to be much lower than with traditional press conferences attracting only a few members of the press and, hence, resulting in less media coverage.

With respect to the richness of communication media, findings of the present study supported the media richness theory presented by Daft and Lengel (1986, pp. 554-571) and other previous research in the area to some extent. Some journalists participating in the study supported the core idea of the media richness theory stating that communication through online media, such as the Online Press Conference (OPC), lacked possibility for immediate feedback and implicit messages compared to face-to-face communication such as traditional press conferences. While some journalists were pining for more personal touch, audiovisual communication and possibility for immediate reaction, others were quite happy with the OPC offering more effective communication compared to traditional events.

Findings of the present study were, however, contradicting with the study conducted by Erra and Scanniello (2010, 134-148). While they identified that time required for communication was in favor of face-to-face communication, journalists in this present study considered the saving of time as one of the key benefits of using online media instead of face-to-face communication in press conferences. While according to Erra and Scanniello (2010, pp. 134-148), the quality of communication does not depend on the used communication media and its richness, findings of the present study indicated that perceptions regarding the quality of communication were divided among the journalists contributing to the study. While some of them considered online media as improving the quality of communication in press conferences, others perceived face-to-face communication in traditional press conferences offering communication of better quality. Even though these results cannot, due to their differing communication situations and purposes, be thoroughly compared to each other, they indicate differences with the basic theory at least to some extent.

Even though the number and variety of social networking tools and channels is increasing rapidly, online social networks seemed to be no substitute for face-to-face interaction. Rather, they offered new opportunities for communication. Findings of the study indicated that, even though majority of journalists participating in the study considered online press conferences as effective media for receiving information and story ideas and simplifying the journalistic job in many ways, they worked only for well-structured and compact topics and face-to-face communication was still highly valued. These results supported Powell's (2009, p. 13) arguments of online media allowing people to easily expand their networks and control the information flow very well.

The study conducted by Cision Europe and the Canterbury Christ Church University (2011, p. 2) on the use of social media among European journalists suggested that Finnish journalists used most social media tools and engaged in most channels, but did, in fact, actually rely on the more traditional and established resources in their work. According to the study, Finnish journalists appeared also to be more critical of the social media tools than their European colleagues. The findings of this present study were, however, somewhat contradicting to these results. According to the five interviewees and the 108 survey respondents, social media were used quite actively in journalistic work, and in the order of their importance, especially for (1) information retrieval, (2) search of ideas, (3) networking and (4) telling about written stories, as well as (5) distributing photos and video material. The journalists did, however, still value personal contacts as part of their work and did not perceive online media as replacing face-to-face communication.

The findings of the study supported the arguments by Waters et al (2010, p. 243) about the trend in public relations turning from merely PR professionals' efforts to pitch stories to the media into journalists trying to catch these stories from PR professionals, as well. Most journalists participating in the study perceived the information from PR

professionals as good service and some of them even reported that they were contacting the PR professionals for material themselves on a regular basis.

With regard to sub-question 3, journalists perceived online press conferences as fairly positive media and supporting the source-reporter relations between PR professionals. These results may indicate that the respondents of the online survey perceived the relationships with PR professionals fairly neutral and functioning without eminent challenges or success stories either. It may, however, also be the case that the relationships with PR professionals as such were considered somewhat neutral in their role for journalists by the survey respondents. Despite the chosen interpretation, the results indicated that, even though there seemed to be no great problems in the relations between PR professionals and journalists, there were still many issues to consider to accelerate the source-reporter relations between these two professional groups.

With regard to the added value of the OPC, and online press conferences in general, to journalistic work, findings of the study were very similar both among the online survey respondents familiar with the case service and those respondents new to the case service. On the one hand, respondents of the online survey who had used the OPC before valued three professional possibilities above the rest: (1) saving of time, (2) easily accessible information and (3) the possibility to participate in a press conference without leaving one's office. On the other hand, respondents of the online survey new to the case service considered (1) saving of time, (2) easily accessible information and (3) the possibility to return to the service and check information afterwards as the three most important possibilities of online press conferences adding value to their work in the order of their importance.

Perhaps the most important outcome of this study, however, was the new line of questioning it forwards. Existing literature and research were unclear on questions that probe further into the topic of online media, and online press conferences in particular, in creating media coverage and supporting the relations between PR professionals and journalists. The literature left interesting areas of inquiry still unexplored.

When analyzing the findings of the study it was, however, important to bear in mind that words and actions do not always match. Especially in relation to the conflicting interests of PR professionals and journalists this aspect was relevant for this study. It will be discussed further in relation to the limitations of the study in section 6.4.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter concludes this study of online press conferences in the relations between PR professionals and journalists. First, section 6.1 summarizes the conducted research. Second, section 6.2 outlines the main findings of the study. Third, section 6.3 provides practical implications and recommendations for the use of online press conferences in the relationship between PR professionals and journalists. Fourth, section 6.4 discusses the limitations of the study. Finally, section 6.5 provides suggestions for future research projects within the area.

6.1. Research summary

The main objective of this Master's Thesis was to find out the role of online press conferences in creating media coverage and supporting the source-reporter relations between public relations professionals and journalists. Research in the area was conducted through a single-case study of an online media service called the Online Press Conference (OPC), or eLehdistötilaisuus in Finnish, and offered by Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy. The research objective was approached in two steps, by

1. exploring the Online Press Conference (OPC) as an online media case service, and
2. identifying the best practices and expectations regarding online press conferences as perceived by journalists.

The main research question set for the study was therefore the following:

What is the role of online press conferences in creating media coverage and supporting the relationship between PR professionals and journalists?

In order to answer the main research question, the following five sub-questions related to the three themes of online press conferences were set:

- 1a. *How do journalists perceive the technical functionality, process and content of the Online Press Conference (OPC)?*
- 1b. *What do journalists expect from the technical functionality, process and content of online press conferences?*
- 2a. *How do journalists perceive the Online Press Conference (OPC) as adding value to their work?*
- 2b. *What do journalists expect from online press conferences to add value to their work?*
3. *What do journalists expect from online press conferences so that they would support the relations with PR professionals?*

The present case study was conducted by using both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, i.e. semi-structured interviews and an online survey. For the qualitative part of the study five journalists with previous experience of the OPC were interviewed. The quantitative part of the data collection was conducted through an online survey with 108 respondents. Out of these respondents 18.5% were familiar with the OPC before while as many as 81.5% of the respondents were new to the service.

For the study a theoretical framework was created to describe the links between the core theoretical themes of the study: (1) PR and media relations, (2) journalism, (3) relations between PR professionals and journalists, (4) media richness, and (5) media coverage. As outlined in the theoretical framework presented in Figure 1 in section 2.6, PR professionals and journalists build relationships to fulfill a mutual need for media coverage. In this study these relationships were referred to as source-reporter relations where PR professionals act as sources of information and journalists take the role of

reporter of the news. Furthermore, these relations are affected by the journalistic views of newsworthiness and the chosen communication media. In the case of the OPC communication between PR professionals and journalists took place through an online medium. As discussed in section 2.4, media richness theory categorizes online media, such as the OPC, into lean media, where the parties of communication may not be able to provide immediate feedback or take advantage of the rich, implicit messages of communication. Thereby, it is important to carefully consider the selection of online media for the communication between PR professionals and journalists as it is likely to have an effect of some kind on the results, i.e. written news stories and media coverage.

6.2. Main findings

This section outlines the main findings of this present study. As there is a lack of research on the use of online media in source-reporter relations, the present study may represent an important starting point to understand the role of online press conferences in creating media coverage and supporting the relations between PR professionals and journalist.

The findings of the empirical study did not reveal a definite answer to the main research question: *What is the role of online press conferences in creating media coverage and supporting the relationship between PR professionals and journalists?* This means that findings of the study differed to some extent across journalists. Even though the study was not able to provide the researcher with highly surprising findings or a definite answer to the research question, most of the findings were able to support the preset hypothesis that online press conferences had a role in creating media coverage and supporting the relationship between PR professionals and journalists. The findings of the present study supported the theoretical framework constructed for the study and presented in Figure 1 in section 2.6.

With regard to sub-question 1a, i.e. *“How do journalists perceive the technical functionality, process and content of the Online Press Conference (OPC)?”*, the key findings of the experiences of the OPC indicated that three technical aspects of the OPC were currently perceived as functioning the best: (1) registration and creating a user profile, (2) logging in to the service and (3) the functionality of the available material during the online event. The survey respondents also perceived three aspects of the process and content of the OPC as functioning the best and affecting their user experience the most. (1) Topicality of the subject, (2) professionalism of the specialists at the panel, and (3) the duration of the event each scored close to good among the survey respondents. Compared to traditional press conferences, the interviewees considered that the OPC suited especially for press briefings and other informational topics with fairly straightforward and limited content providing mostly background information.

The key findings for sub-question 1b, i.e. *“What do journalists expect from the technical functionality, process and content of online press conferences?”*, were somewhat similar to the findings for the first sub-question. The findings of the expectations for online press conferences indicated that, with regard to the technical functionality of online press conferences, the online survey respondents new to the case service were expecting online press conferences to be as clear and easy to use as possible. While lacking of face-to-face communication, online press conferences were expected to provide journalists with functioning technology, fast connection and an open platform. With regard to the process and content, the survey respondents expected online press conferences to be compact, interactive and include only information that was relevant for journalists. The respondents’ need for material differed according to their represented media. In general, the respondents of the online survey did, however, raise the case-specific manners of representation, clear visual elements and comprehensive and carefully designed supplementary material as important elements to consider when organizing online press conferences. Finally, with regard to the question and answer sessions, the respondents expected them to show the true views and

opinions of the specialists present at online press conferences. It was also perceived as highly important to be able to follow who is talking at the event at all times. According to some views, the open platform for questions and answers was also considered as a minor challenge for the competition over news between various media.

With regard to sub-questions 2a and 2b, i.e. “*How do journalists perceive the Online Press Conference (OPC) as adding value to their work?*” and “*What do journalists expect from online press conferences to add value to their work?*”, the study revealed somewhat similar findings for both questions. The findings of the added value of online press conferences indicate that the professional possibilities of online press conferences perceived by the interviewees and the survey respondents resulted in somewhat similar findings among the respondents new to the OPC and the previous users of the OPC. Especially the two aspects that were considered most valuable turned out to be the same in both groups: (1) saving of time and (2) easily accessible information. The previous users of the OPC valued the possibility to attend an online event without leaving one’s office as the third most important element of the OPC adding value to their work. On the other hand, the possibility to return to the service and check information afterwards was valued the third most important element of online press conferences adding value to journalistic work by the respondents new to the OPC. The open format of the question and answer session was considered offering journalists the possibility to benefit from the answers to other journalists’ questions but also increasing the competition between journalists for the same reason. The bigger risk of errors and misunderstandings compared to traditional events was considered a disadvantage of online press conferences while the possibility for having material available on the site after the online events was considered a clear benefit.

The key findings of the interviews and the online survey indicated that journalists valued their relations with PR professionals. With regard to sub-question 3 set for the present study, i.e. “*What do journalists expect from online press conferences so that they would support the relations with PR professionals?*”, findings of the study were

somewhat similar among previous users of the OPC and the respondents new to the OPC. The interviewees and the survey respondents perceived that they (1) got information from PR professionals rather easily, (2) the information from PR professionals was rather good service for journalists, that (3) the information received from PR professionals was often the type that journalists wanted, and that (4) online press conferences brought PR professionals and journalists somewhat closer to each other. Findings for sub-question 3 also showed that the role of online press conferences in supporting the relations between PR professionals and journalists was perceived to lie in (1) bringing PR professionals and journalists closer to each other, (2) making the cooperation between these two parties easier, and (3) trying and fulfilling the needs of both parties. According to the interviewees and the survey respondents, online services themselves did not, however, bring PR professionals closer to journalists as the personal contacts were, indeed, created and the social work done elsewhere. They could, however, provide journalists and PR professionals with a new medium for collaboration.

With regard to the main research question of the present study, i.e. *“What is the role of online press conferences in creating media coverage and supporting the relationship between PR professionals and journalists?”*, the interviewees and the survey respondents raised four factors as affecting the success of online press conferences the most. First, the key findings of the present study indicated that, similar to traditional press conferences, journalists perceived that the topics of online press conferences had to be relevant and useful to journalists in order to have them participate in these events. Second, journalists considered that, by using online press conferences instead of traditional events, PR professionals were offered a chance to differentiate among their competitors and profile themselves as forerunners of applying new media in public relations. Third, the interviewees and the survey respondents argued that, in order to increase the number of written stories and created media coverage of an online press conference, there had to be a diplomatic balance in the source-reporter relationship between promoting an organization’s interests and not trying affecting journalists

directly. Finally, as one interviewee noted, the essence of the informational content in traditional and online press conferences was, indeed, very often the same. Thereby, through online press conferences the possibility to save time and participate in a press conference regardless of the physical location often became the decisive factor in building media coverage.

6.3. Practical implications

This section presents practical recommendations for the main findings of the present study. Based on the study, there seems to be a common understanding of the fact that the infrastructure for synchronous online media is expensive to set up and maintain. The coordination of communication in online media, such as the Online Press Conference (OPC), may be problematic as well. However, based on the findings of the present study, the online communication medium of the OPC was considered appealing and potentially easy for journalists to use, and thereby, likely to attract press in a wider extent than with traditional press conferences. According to these considerations and the presented findings of the study, it can be established that the study has practical implications with respect to the online-mediated environment to support the relations between PR professionals and journalists and to create media coverage.

The findings of the study also indicated that there was still a lot of work to do to make the case service seem more interactive and social for its users. With regard to the social elements of the OPC, the interviewees and the survey respondents perceived the case service as fulfilling the most important characteristics of social media, i.e. real time, interactivity and collectivity, to some extent. Even though the service took place in real time, the current technology and structure were considered to leave room for improvement in, for instance, interactivity and collectivity of the service. According to the interviewees and the survey respondents, the service could, however, be fairly easily developed further to meet the requirements of social media. This could be done, for

instance, by creating linkages to other web sites, leaving material on the web site and, hence, making it available for everyone. As Interviewee (1) described,

“The OPC could offer good material for social media if the information and material received from there could be linked further to be commented in for instance Twitter, YouTube, Facebook or Flickr.” (I1)

With regard to the process and content of the OPC, there appeared to be a common interest among the interviewees in having the press material available online for checking facts for some time after the online event. Ideally, the specialists could also be contacted for a short time after the OPC, if necessary. According to the interviewees, this would improve the possibility for checking facts and decrease the possibility for informational errors related to the content of online press conferences.

Well functioning and trustworthy technology turned out to be one of the most important aspects of online press conferences to affect the experiences of their users. The findings of the study indicated that, even though some users were pleased with the functionality, others might have also had some technical challenges with the service. While one respondent of the online survey argued that there was a lot to improve with the interactivity of the case service, another considered it a fresh and promising possibility for the interaction between PR professionals and journalists. A common view among the survey respondents was, however, that, as in all press conferences, interaction was also necessary in online events to support the relations between PR professionals and journalists. The interviewees' perceptions of the technical functionality of the OPC supported these results. The findings indicated that the requirements for the technology and functionality of the online service require closer consideration. Several respondents also mentioned a two-way video connection to be a major improvement for the OPC in the future.

Even though both the survey respondents and the interviewees evaluated the process and content of the OPC as somewhat good, the findings of the study indicated that there

were still aspects to improve with the service. The findings showed that, even though most users were pleased with the overall content of the OPC, others might have also experienced the content as lacking, for instance, topicality, personal relevance or supplementary material. Therefore, the various aspects of the content of the case service have to be taken into closer inspection. As none of the aspects regarding the process and content of the OPC received an average score of good or very good, the topics, material posted on the online site and the specialists' presence at the online events require closer consideration.

According to the interviewees, online press conferences would at their best be technically easy to use, possibly even without having to register for the service. To meet the demand for saving of time, the informational content of online press conferences should also be fairly compact keeping the running time of the event within a reasonable frame. Based on the interviewee perceptions, the ideal length for an online press conference, however, differed from merely 15 minutes to approximately an hour.

With regard to the question and answer session of online press conferences, a few journalists considered it challenging or even inconvenient to have to ask questions in front of other journalists. While some journalists were pleased to be able to benefit from the questions and answers of other journalists, others were worried about the potentially increasing competition among journalists. Therefore, the findings indicated that online press conferences might also require a cultural change and a fresh perspective from journalist towards online events with open platforms for communication.

The novelty and unique nature of the OPC might have also been considered as minor challenges of the service in the market. However, a whole new solution for organizing – and attending – press conferences was likely to meet resistance, as well. Indeed, it might well have been the case that, to date of the study, only the trendsetters in their field had found the OPC and taken it as their own, so to speak. In order for the wider public to get used to the new way of attending press conferences might take a longer time. Therefore,

marketing the OPC especially to these people was considered essential by the interviewees.

To conclude, the following four practical implications for using online media in source-reporter can be generated from the study. In order to support the relations between PR professionals and journalists, online press conferences should include (1) relevant and compact topics to save time and to attract journalists, (2) a diplomatic balance between promoting an organization's interests and not trying to affect journalists directly, (3) functional technology to ensure the fluent progress of events, and (4) clear and informative material available to journalists before and after the online events.

To evaluate the implications of this study for the field of international business communication is a challenging task since the interviewees and the survey respondents consisted of only Finnish journalists. The value of online media in international business communication is, however, evident as they enable rapid communication throughout the globe regardless of the location of either the sender or the receiver of a message. Thereby, as the public relations industry has become increasingly global during the recent years, the role of online press conferences in the relations between international PR professionals and journalists as part of the corporate communication function is essential. Online press conferences bring international PR professionals and journalists closer to each other.

6.4. Limitations of the study

This section outlines the main limitations of the present study in terms of generalizability and reliability of the findings. The present study was likely to be challenged by several attributes that should be acknowledged and addressed especially with regard to the empirical study.

The first challenge of this research related to its nature of a commissioned case study. This means that the study was likely to be challenged by somewhat conflicting interests between the researcher and the company offering the case service. These challenges were expected to appear mostly related to the empirical part of the study, for instance phrasing the questions. The researcher was, however, given a fairly free hand to implement the study within the jointly agreed framework. Furthermore, the researcher had fairly little journalistic background, which was likely to have an effect on the basic assumptions of the study. However, through the cooperation with Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy, the researcher was offered a lot of external expertise and was able to take advantage of the company's experience in working with the media.

The topic of the present thesis was also challenging because of the lack of research in the field of online media in source-reporter relations between PR professionals and journalists. The aspect of the role of online media, especially online press conferences, in creating media coverage and supporting the relations between PR professionals and journalists had not been thoroughly studied yet. To date of the present study there seemed to be, however, quite a lot of research on public relations (PR), online media and the relations between public relations professionals and journalists, also referred to as source-reporter relations in this study. Based on these studies, the researcher was able to create a theoretical framework for the study.

In addition, the study was planned to be conducted by using both quantitative and qualitative research methods, which was likely to result in a challenging amount of data to be analyzed in a fairly short time. Since the collected data for the study was relatively large, including both qualitative and quantitative data, the analysis of the data was likely to reveal challenges. Even though the quantitative and qualitative data were carefully analyzed separately and compared to each other, the implications made of the findings should be considered only as suggestive.

Another challenge related to the empirical research was likely to arise related to international journalists. One of the key ideas of the case service was that, depending on

the topic of the Online Press Conference (OPC), journalists representing international media could be invited to participate in these events, as well. To date of the study, however, only a few international journalists had used the case service. Since none of these journalists were able to participate in the present study, the conclusions of the study had to be made based on the experiences and expectations of only Finnish journalists.

In the online survey a few mistakes were made related to the forming of questions and response options. For instance, in the question regarding the use of social media in journalistic work, respondents were asked to select three options for what purposes they used social media in their work. The response options did not, however, include an option of not using social media at all, which is likely to have an effect on the results. However, the role of this particular question was to offer additional information and collect ideas for practical implications only, which is why it is not likely to have an essential role for the overall results of the study. Furthermore, the online survey respondents were not asked about their positions in their represented organizations like the interviewees, which creates minor limitations for the comparison of backgrounds of the journalists participating in the study.

One weakness of this study arises from the fact that the interviewees and survey respondents were contacted by email, which is why the ones most interested in the topic of the study were likely to reply to arrange an interview or respond to the online survey. This was also likely to have an effect on the findings of the study. Invitations were, however, sent to a large group of journalists, which is why the researcher resulted in a fairly good amount of data to be analyzed.

With regard to qualitative researching, it is also important to take into account that words and actions do not always match. Especially related to the conflicting interests of PR professionals and journalists this aspect is relevant for this study. This means that, even though journalists may have, for instance, replied that they would never take advantage of the ready-made materials provided by a PR agency, this may not

necessarily be the case in practice. On the contrary, they may, for instance, be willing to use materials in another format, such as videos provided by the PR agency, or take advantage of only parts of the text. Therefore, the results of the study may be biased to some extent, which causes minor limitations for the study, as well. However, this is always the case in qualitative research that focuses on perceptions. In other words, the findings of qualitative research always reflect on a people's personal views and values, and have to be analyzed as their perceptions of things.

Besides having used the OPC as an external journalist, one of the interviewees had also been working for the communication agency offering the service before and looked at the service from inside out, as well. This was of course likely to have an effect on the particular interviewee's perceptions and expectations as a journalist. Therefore, the answers of especially this interviewee have been interpreted with high sensitivity.

One of the most obvious ways of testing the reliability of a measure is without a doubt the test-retest method. However, in the present study including interviews and an online survey, replicating the study, or even parts of the study, was hardly possible. Therefore, reliability of the study was ensured by creating the possibility to replicate the data collection and analysis procedures. Because of the qualitative nature of the study, care should also be taken in generalizing the findings of the study. The study was, however, conducted as a case study of one specific service, which appeared somewhat unique in the market and may thus create minor limitations for the generalizability of the results. According to Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 288), external validity of qualitative research refers to the degree to which the findings of the study can be generalized or transferred to wider contexts. Especially in a single case study like the present this places an imminent challenge for the trustworthiness of the study. Because of the somewhat unique nature of the OPC, the researcher was not able to make generalizations of the findings with exactly the similar type of services. The OPC has, however, been discussed among other online media offering press briefings or conferences to ensure the external validity as a required level of generalizability to a wider context.

6.5. Suggestions for future research

This section introduces suggestions for future research based on the conducted study on the role of online press conferences in creating media coverage and supporting the relations between PR professionals and journalists.

As Theaker (2008, p. 377) points out, the development of the public relations industry cannot be discussed separately from the development of the media and globalization. In addition, the development of new technologies plays an essential role in today's public relations industry. As Theaker (2008, p.383) highlights, the opportunities offered by these developments should be seized and made use of, both in the tactical and strategic areas of public relations. Thereby, probably one of the most interesting aspects of the future of PR is how the use of new technology could improve the effectiveness and credibility of public relations. This present study has started this work by studying the use of online press conferences in public relations.

This present study focused on online media in the communication between PR professionals and journalists, and touched on the topic of social media only briefly. The current study thus paves the way for further research into the role of social media in the relations between PR professionals and journalists. Future research could also move further from online press conferences to study other forms of new media in the relations between PR professionals and journalists. Findings of the present study indicated that journalists valued the save of time and easily accessible information of online press conferences for not having to leave one's office to be able to attend a press conference. Thereby, future research could also examine the possibilities for mobile applications of online press conferences to provide journalists with the possibility to attend a press conference while on the move.

This study examined the role of online press conferences in the relations between PR professionals and journalists. The findings of the present study indicated that online press conferences were considered useful in source-reporter relations but that the

concept of these services could be further developed to be more interactive, social and technically functioning to meet the journalists' needs even better. Future research could, however, concentrate on measuring the efficiency of online press conferences, e.g. the amount and specific types of news stories and media coverage created through these services. In other words, future research could examine how many and what types of news stories are written about online press conferences, and whether stories are written more about certain types of subjects. In reality this may, however, be a somewhat challenging topic for a study as news stories may not always be written right after a press conference and may be based on more than one source of information. Thereby, a certain time frame for media monitoring should be set beforehand to base the findings on.

Furthermore, as this study focused on journalists' perceptions towards online press conferences, more research attention should also be given to the perspective of PR professionals in the future.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. Interview invitation in Finnish

Hei,

Olen kansainvälisen yritysviestinnän maisteriopiskelija Aalto-yliopiston Kauppakorkeakoulusta ja teen pro gradu-tutkielmaani aiheenani sähköiset lehdistötilaisuudet yritysten ja toimittajien välisessä vuorovaikutuksessa. Tutkielmani on yhteistyöprojekti Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy:n kanssa ja liittyy yrityksen eLehdistötilaisuus-palveluun.

Mediasuhteiden merkitys nyky-yhteiskunnassa on yhä kasvava, mutta sosiaalisen median mahdollisuudet yritysten ja toimittajien välisessä vuorovaikutuksessa kaipaavat lisätutkimusta. Tutkimuksessani pyrin kartoittamaan sähköisiin lehdistötilaisuuksiin osallistuneiden toimittajien kokemuksia ja odotuksia eLehdistötilaisuuden kaltaisilta palveluilta. Haastattelutulosten pohjalta tulen lisäksi toteuttamaan loppuvuodesta 2011 kattavan kvantitatiivisen kyselytutkimuksen suomalaisten ja ulkomaisten toimittajien keskuudessa.

Haastattelisin mielelläni teitä, sillä uskon, että eLehdistötilaisuuteen tutustuneena toimittajana näkökulmanne ja kokemuksenne palvelusta tarjoaisivat arvokasta tietoa tutkielmaani.

Haastateltavien ja heidän edustamiensa organisaatioiden nimiä ei mainita lopullisessa tutkimuksessani ja kaikkia tietoja käsitellään anonymisti.

Löytyisikö teiltä vajaa tunti aikaa puhelinhaastattelulle?

Ystävällisin terveisin,

Eveliina Kujansuu

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APPENDIX 2.

Interview invitation in English

Hi,

I'm a Master's student at the Aalto University School of Economics studying at the International Business Communication Master's program. I'm currently working on my Master's thesis on the role of online press conferences in the communication between companies and journalists. The thesis is a joint project with the communication agency Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy and relates to their online press conference service called eLehdistötilaisuus.

The role of media relations in today's society is growing but the possibilities of using social media in the interaction between companies and journalists need further research. The aim of my study is to find out how the journalists who have used Deski's online press conference have experienced it and what kind of expectations they have towards similar services.

I'd be happy to interview you, as I believe your views and experiences from the service would offer valuable information for my study.

The names of the interviewees and the organizations they represent won't be mentioned in my final report and all information will be handled anonymously.

Would you be able to spare approximately half an hour for a telephone interview? Just let me know a suitable time and contact information how to reach you, and I'll get back to you.

Best regards,

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APPENDIX 3.

Interview framework in Finnish

1. Taustatiedot

1. Sukupuoli
2. Syntymävuosi
3. Koulutus
4. Organisaatio
5. Asema

2. Sosiaalinen media PR-ammattilaisten ja toimittajien välisessä vuorovaikutuksessa

1. Suhde sosiaalisen median palveluihin ja työkaluihin yleisesti (asenne, käyttö, yleisyys, tavat).
2. Sosiaalisen median käyttö työssä (palvelun/työkalun tyyppi, yleisyys, käyttötarkoitus, vaikutukset, kokemukset, toiveet).

3. eLehdistötilaisuus PR-ammattilaisten ja toimittajien välisessä vuorovaikutuksessa

1. Odotukset ja toiveet ennen osallistumista ensimmäiseen eLehdistötilaisuuteen.
2. Palvelun käyttökokemukset (osallistumiskerrat, tapahtumien luonne, kokemukset).
3. Palvelun vahvuudet ja heikkoudet.
4. eLehdistötilaisuus suhteessa sosiaalisen median palveluihin (edustavuus, kehitysmahdollisuudet).
5. eLehdistötilaisuus-palvelu ammatillisten tarpeiden tukena (toiveet, odotukset, kehitysehdotukset).

6. Kokemukset muista eLehdistötilaisuuteen verrattavista sähköisistä palveluista (luonne, erot, käyttökokemukset).
7. Tuotenäytteiden vaikeamman saatavuuden merkitys sähköisessä lehdistötilaisuudessa (näytteiden tärkeys, saatavuusrajoitteiden merkitys ja vaikutukset).

4. PR-ammattilaisten ja toimittajien välinen lähde-raportoiija -suhde

1. Yleinen mielikuva ja omakohtaisia kokemuksia PR-ammattilaisten ja toimittajien välisestä suhteesta (luonne, ominaisuudet, toimivuus, tärkeys).
2. Mahdolliset ristiriidat PR-ammattilaisten ja toimittajien ammatillisissa intresseissä, arvoissa yms. (luonne, olennaisuus, vaikutukset, ilmenemistilanteet, omakohtaiset kokemukset).
3. Toimittajien ja PR-ammattilaisten etujen yhteneväisyys (tilanteet, omakohtaiset kokemukset).
4. PR-ammattilaisten ja toimittajien välisen suhteen mahdollinen muutos viime vuosina (luonne, olennaisuus, vaikutukset, syyt).
5. eLehdistötilaisuus PR-ammattilaisten ja toimittajien välisessä yhteistyössä (mahdollisuudet, vaikutukset, kokemukset).

APPENDIX 4.

Interview framework in English

1. Background information

1. Gender
2. Year of birth
3. Education
4. Organization
5. Position/ status

2. Social media in the interaction between PR professionals and journalists

1. Relations with social media services and tools in general (attitude, use, frequency, habits).
2. Use of social media for work (type of service/ tool, frequency, purpose, effects, experiences, hopes).

3. Online Press Conference (OPC) in the interaction between PR professionals and journalists

1. Hopes and expectations before attending the first Online Press Conference (OPC)
2. Experiences of the case service (participation times, nature of events, experiences).
3. Strengths and weaknesses of the service.
4. Online Press Conference (OPC) in relation to social media services (representation, developmental potential).
5. Support of the Online Press Conference (OPC) for professional needs (hopes, expectations, developmental propositions).

6. Experiences of other online services comparable with the Online Press Conference (OPC) (nature, differences, user experiences).
7. Relevance of the more difficult availability of product samples in online press conferences (importance of product samples, meaning and effects of availability limitations).

4. Source-reporter relations between PR professionals and journalists

1. General impression and personal experiences of the relations between PR professionals and journalists (nature, qualities, functionality, importance).
2. Potential contradictions between PR professionals' and journalists' interests, values etc. (nature, meaning, effects, situations of existence, personal experiences).
3. Consistency between journalists' and PR professionals' interests (situations, personal experiences).
4. Potential change in the relations between PR professionals and journalists over the recent years (nature, importance, effects, reasons).
5. Online Press Conference (OPC) in the collaboration between PR professionals and journalists (possibilities, effects, experiences).

APPENDIX 5.

Online survey invitation in Finnish

Hei,

Olen kansainvälisen yritysviestinnän maisteriopiskelija Aalto-yliopiston Kauppakorkeakoulusta ja teen pro gradu -tutkielmaani aiheenani sähköiset lehdistötilaisuudet PR-ammattilaisten ja toimittajien välisessä vuorovaikutuksessa. Tutkielmani on yhteistyöprojekti Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy:n kanssa.

Toivoisin muutamaa minuuttia ajastanne kyselyyni vastaamiseen. Uskon, että ammatilliset näkemyksenne ja kokemuksenne toimittajan työstä tarjoaisivat arvokasta tietoa tutkimukseeni.

Löytyisikö teiltä hetki aikaa kyselyyni vastaamiseen?

Linkki kyselylomakkeeseen:

<https://www.webropol.com/P.aspx?id=591249&cid=45165996>

Kiitokset ajastanne ja oikein mukavaa joulunodotusta!

Ystävällisin terveisin,

Eveliina Kujansuu

Aalto-yliopiston Kauppakorkeakoulu

International Business Communication -maisteriohjelma

@: eveliina.kujansuu@aalto.fi

<http://communication.aalto.fi/en/studies/mscprograms/ibcmaster/>

APPENDIX 6.

Online survey invitation in English

Hi,

I'm a student from Aalto University School of Economics studying in the International Business Communication Master's program. I'm working on my Master's Thesis on online press conferences in the interaction between PR professionals and journalists. The thesis is a joint project with the communication agency Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy.

I wish for a few minutes of your time to answer to my survey. I'm certain that your professional views and experience in journalism could provide the study with valuable information.

Could you spare a moment for my study?

Link to the online questionnaire:

<https://www.webropol.com/P.aspx?id=591249&cid=45165996>

Thank you for your time and Merry Christmas!

Best regards,

Eveliina Kujansuu

Aalto University School of Economics

International Business Communication

@: eveliina.kujansuu@aalto.fi

<https://www.cms.tkk.fi/communication.aalto.fi/en/studies/mscprograms/ibcmaster/>

APPENDIX 7.

Online survey questions in Finnish

Sähköiset lehdistötilaisuudet PR-ammattilaisten ja toimittajien välisessä vuorovaikutuksessa

Taustatiedot:

1. Sukupuoli

- Nainen
- Mies

2. Syntymävuosi

3. Koulutus

4. Edustamasi mediatyyppi (voit valita useampia vaihtoehtoja)

- Aikakauslehti
- Erikois- ja ammattilehti
- Kaupunki- tai paikallislehti
- Radio
- Sanomalehti
- Televisio
- Verkkojulkaisu
- Freelancer
- Muu, mikä

5. Oletko käyttänyt Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy:n eLehdistötilaisuus-palvelua?

- Kyllä
- En

Kysymykset vain eLehdistötilaisuus-palvelua käyttäneille vastaajille (Vastaus kysymykseen 5 = Kyllä):

6. Kuvaile omin sanoin, mitkä ovat kokemuksesi mukaan sähköisen ja perinteisen lehdistötilaisuuden olennaisimmat erot toimittajalle.

7. Arvioi eLehdistötilaisuuden teknistä käyttökokemusta.

Asteikko:

5 = Erittäin hyvä

4 = Hyvä

3 = Ei hyvä eikä huono

2 = Huono

1 = Erittäin huono

- Rekisteröityminen ja oman profiilin luominen
- Sisään kirjautuminen palveluun
- Tiedote- ja oheismateriaalin saatavuus ja tekninen toimivuus
- Kysymysten esittäminen chat-toiminnon avulla
- Vastausten saaminen chat-toiminnon avulla
- Kysymysten ja vastausten koordinointi

8. Muita ajatuksia eLehdistötilaisuuden teknisestä käyttökokemuksesta

9. Arvioi eLehdistötilaisuuden sisällöllistä käyttökokemusta.

Asteikko:

5 = Erittäin hyvä

4 = Hyvä

3 = Ei hyvä eikä huono

2 = Huono

1 = Erittäin huono

- Lehdistötilaisuuden aiheen ajankohtaisuus
- Lehdistötilaisuuden aiheen laajuus
- Tilaisuuden asiantuntijat
- Saatavilla olevan tiedote- ja oheismateriaalin sisältö
- Mahdollisuus palata oheismateriaaliin sekä kysymys- ja vastausosion sisältöön tilaisuuden jälkeen
- Tilaisuuden ajallinen kesto

10. Muita ajatuksia palvelun sisällöllisestä käyttökokemuksesta

11. Arvioi, kuinka interaktiivinen palvelu eLehdistötilaisuus kokemuksesi mukaan on.

Asteikko:

5 = Erittäin interaktiivinen

4 = Melko interaktiivinen

3 = Kohtalaisen interaktiivinen

2 = Melko vähän interaktiivinen

1 = Erittäin vähän interaktiivinen

12. Ajatuksia eLehdistötilaisuuden interaktiivisuudesta

13. Arvioi, kuinka yhteisöllinen palvelu eLehdistötilaisuus kokemuksesi mukaan on.

Asteikko:

5 = Erittäin yhteisöllinen

- 4 = Melko yhteisöllinen
- 3 = Kohtalaisen yhteisöllinen
- 2 = Melko vähän yhteisöllinen
- 1 = Erittäin vähän yhteisöllinen

14. Ajatuksia eLehdistötilaisuuden yhteisöllisyydestä

15. Valitse kolme (3) tärkeintä asiaa, joita eLehdistötilaisuus tarjoaa sinulle ammatillisesti.

- Ajansäästö
- Helposti saavutettava informaatio
- Juttuideat
- Kiinnostavat asiantuntijakommentit ja –näkökulmat
- Mahdollisuus osallistua lehdistötilaisuuteen poistumatta omalta työpisteeltä
- Mahdollisuus palata palveluun ja tarkistaa tietoja jälkikäteen
- Valmiit tarinat
- Verkostoituminen toimittajien kanssa
- Verkostoituminen muiden ammattikuntien edustajien kanssa
- Muu, mikä

Kysymykset vain vastaajille, joilla ei aiempaa kokemusta eLehdistötilaisuus-palvelusta (Vastaus kysymykseen 5 = En):

Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy:n eLehdistötilaisuus rakennetaan ennalta ilmoitettuna ajankohtana joko ainoastaan verkkoon tai vaihtoehtoisesti perinteinen lehdistötilaisuus voidaan laajentaa suorana verkkoon. Näin sähköinen lehdistötilaisuus tarjoaa toimittajille mahdollisuuden osallistua lehdistötilaisuuteen, vaikkeivät he pääsisi fyysisesti paikalle. Rekisteröidyttyään ja kirjaututtuaan sisään sähköiseen lehdistötilaisuuteen toimittajilla on mahdollisuus tutustua sivustolla tarjolla olevaan tiedote- ja oheismateriaaliin. Tämän jälkeen toimittajat voivat esittää kysymyksiä tilaisuudessa paikalla oleville asiantuntijoille. Kirjoitetut kysymykset ja vastaukset ovat palvelussa kaikkien nähtävillä ja tilaisuutta moderoi Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy:n konsultti. Tilaisuuden oheismateriaali sekä kirjoitetut viestit säilytetään sivustolla tavallisesti muutama päivä, jotta tietoja on mahdollista käydä tarkistamassa sieltä vielä tilaisuuden jälkeen.

16. Kuvaile omin sanoin, millainen olisi mielestäsi hyvä sähköinen lehdistötilaisuus.
17. Valitse kolme (3) tärkeintä asiaa, joita toivoisit sähköisen lehdistötilaisuuden tarjoavan sinulle ammatillisesti.
- Ajansäästö
 - Helposti saavutettava informaatio
 - Juttuideat
 - Kiinnostavat asiantuntijakommentit ja –näkökulmat
 - Mahdollisuus osallistua lehdistötilaisuuteen poistumatta työpisteeltä
 - Mahdollisuus palata palveluun ja tarkistaa tietoja jälkikäteen
 - Valmiit tarinat
 - Verkostoituminen toimittajien kanssa

- Verkostoituminen muiden ammattikuntien edustajien kanssa
- Muu, mikä

Kysymykset kaikille vastaajille:

18. Oletko kohdannut muita eLehdistötilaisuuden kaltaisia sähköisiä palveluita Suomessa tai ulkomailla?

- En.
- Kyllä.

Kuvaile omin sanoin, missä ja millaisia muita sähköisiä lehdistötilaisuuksia tarjoavia palveluita olet kohdannut.

19. Arvioi, kuinka hyvin seuraavat väittämät vastaavat omakohtaisia kokemuksiasi.

Asteikko:

5 = Erittäin hyvin

4 = Hyvin

3 = Ei hyvin eikä huonosti

2 = Huonosti

1 = Erittäin huonosti

- PR-ammattilaisten ja toimittajien väliset suhteet ovat lähentyneet viime vuosina.
- Saan toimittajana helposti tietoa PR-ammattilaisilta.
- Saan PR-ammattilaisilta haluamaani tietoa.
- PR-ammattilaisten tarjoama informaatio on hyvää palvelua toimittajille.
- Sähköinen lehdistötilaisuus helpottaa PR-ammattilaisten ja toimittajien välistä yhteistyötä.

- Sähköinen lehdistötilaisuus madaltaa näkemuseroja PR-ammattilaisten ja toimittajien välillä.

20. Valitse kolme (3) käyttötapaa, joihin käytät sosiaalista mediaa eniten työssäsi.

- Tiedonhaku
- Ideoiden etsintä
- Verkostoituminen
- Kirjoitetuista jutuista kertominen eteenpäin
- Kuva- ja videomateriaalin jakaminen
- Muu, mikä

21. Valitse mielestäsi kolme (3) tärkeintä sosiaalista mediaa kuvaavaa tekijää.

- Yhteisöllisyys
- Reaaliaikaisuus
- Interaktiivisuus
- Itsestään kertomisen mahdollisuus omassa profiilissa
- Yleisön rajattomuus
- Muu, mikä

APPENDIX 8. Online survey questions in English

Online press conferences in the interaction between PR professionals and journalists

Background information:

1. Gender

- Female
- Male

2. Year of birth

3. Education

4. Represented media type (you may select multiple alternatives)

- Magazine
- Trade magazine
- Local newspaper
- Radio
- Newspaper
- Television
- Online publication
- Freelancer
- Other, what

5. Have you used the Online Press Conference offered by Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy?

- Yes
- No

Questions only for the respondents who have used the Online Press Conference (OPC) (Answer to question 5 = Yes):

6. Describe in your own words what are, based on your personal experiences, the main differences between online press conferences for journalists.

7. Evaluate the technical user experience of the Online Press Conference.

Scale:

5 = Very good

4 = Good

3 = Neither good nor bad

2 = Bad

1 = Very bad

- Registration and creating one's own profile
- Logging in to the service
- Availability and functionality of informational and supplementary material
- Asking questions through the chat function
- Receiving answers through the chat function
- Coordination of the questions and answers

8. Other thoughts on the technical functionality of the Online Press Conference

9. Evaluate the content of the Online Press Conference

Scale:

5 = Very good

4 = Good

3 = Neither good nor bad

2 = Bad

1 = Very bad

- Topicality of the subject of the press conference
- Scale of the topic of the press conference
- Specialists at the event
- Available informational and supplementary material
- Possibility to return to the supplementary material and the content of the question and answer section after the event
- Running time of the event

10. Other thoughts on the content of the service.

11. Evaluate based on your personal experiences how interactive the Online Press Conference is.

Scale:

5 = Very interactive

4 = Interactive

3 = Somewhat interactive

2 = Little interactive

1 = Very little interactive

12. Thoughts on the interactivity of the Online Press Conference.

13. Evaluate based on your personal experiences how collective the Online Press Conference is.

Scale:

5 = Very collective

4 = Collective

3 = Somewhat collective

2 = Little collective

1 = Very little collective

14. Thoughts on the collectivity of the Online Press Conference.

15. Select three (3) most important things the Online Press Conference offers you professionally.

- Saving of time
- Easily accessible information
- Story ideas
- Interesting specialist comments and perspectives
- Possibility to participate in a press conference without leaving one's own office
- Possibility to return to the service and check information afterwards
- Ready-made stories
- Networking with journalists
- Networking with other professionals
- Other, what

Questions only for the respondents with no previous experience of the Online Press Conference (OPC) (Answer to question 5 = No):

The Online Press Conference (OPC) offered by Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy is built at an agreed time either only online or alternatively a traditional press conference may be streamed online. This way the Online Press Conference offers journalists the possibility to participate in a press conference even if they wouldn't be able to make it at the physical location. After registering and logging in to the Online Press Conference journalists have the possibility to explore the informational and supplementary material at the online site. After this journalists can ask questions from the specialists present at the event. The written questions and answers can be seen by all the service users and the event will be moderated by a communication consultant from Viestintätoimisto Deski Oy. The supplementary material and the written messages stored at the site normally for a few days to provide journalists with the possibility to check information after the event.

16. Describe in your own words what would make a good online press conference.
17. Select three (3) most important things you would wish from an online press conference to offer you professionally.
 - Saving of time
 - Easily accessible information
 - Story ideas
 - Interesting specialist comments and perspectives
 - Possibility to participate in a press conference without leaving one's own office
 - Possibility to return to the service and check information afterwards
 - Ready-made stories

- Networking with journalists
- Networking with other professionals
- Other, what

Questions for all respondents:

18. Have you come across with other similar type of services as the Online Press Conference either in Finland or abroad?

- No.
- Yes.

Describe in your own words where and what kinds of services offering online press conferences have you come across with.

19. Evaluate how well the following assertions meet your personal experiences.

Scale:

5 = Very well

4 = Well

3 = Neither well nor poorly

2 = Poorly

1 = Very poorly

- The relations between PR professionals and journalists have become closer during the recent years.
- As a journalist I easily get information from PR professionals.
- The information I get from PR professionals is the type of information I want.

- The information offered by PR professionals is good service for journalists.
- Online press conferences make the collaboration between PR professionals and journalists easier.
- Online press conferences lower the differences in perceptions between PR professionals and journalists.

20. Select three (3) most important purposes for which you use social media in your work.

- Information retrieval
- Search of ideas
- Networking
- Telling about written stories
- Distributing photos and video material
- Other, what

21. Select three (3) most important elements that in your opinion describe social media.

- Sense of community
- Real time
- Interactivity
- Possibility to tell about oneself in one's own profile
- Unlimited audience
- Other, what