

# Optimising publicity: towards a theoretical model

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Generating a continuous presence in the media and targeting mass audiences with predetermined marketing communication messages in the process does not have to be synonymous with large budget allocations and the advertising dimension of integrated marketing communication (IMC) only. Publicity can establish such a media presence with mass audiences without any cost to the organisation. However, this technique of IMC is often neglected and underutilised. A literature review as a non-empirical and qualitative research design was undertaken to develop a theoretical model that can assist marketing communication practitioners in optimising the use of publicity in the marketing communication mix.

## Die optimale benutting van publisiteit: aanloop tot 'n teoretiese model

Die ontwikkeling van 'n deurlopende mediateenwoordigheid en die tekening van messagehore in die proses met voorafbepaalde bemarkingskommunikasieboodskappe hoef nie noodwendig sinoniem te wees met ruim begrotingstoekennings en die uitsluitlike gebruik van reklame as geïntegreerde bemarkingskommunikasietegniek nie. Publisiteit kan so 'n mediateenwoordigheid by messagehore skep sonder dat dit die organisasie 'n sent uit die sak hoef te jaag. Desnieteenstaande word hierdie geïntegreerde bemarkingskommunikasietegniek dikwels verwaarloos en onderbenut. 'n Literatuurstudie as nie-empiriese en kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp word onderneem om 'n teoretiese model te ontwikkel wat bemarkingskommunikasiepraktisyns van hulp kan wees om die gebruik van publisiteit binne die bemarkingskommunikasiemengsel te optimaliseer.

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Publicity can be described as a continuous process whereby a skilled communication practitioner uses planned messages to generate a positive, predetermined corporate image of an organisation and/or a positive reputation of its products and services. This is done by communicating information on certain happenings, incidents and events in such a way that it is regarded as “newsworthy” by the mass media. Skinner *et al* (2001: 130) refer to this process as “creating” or “generating news about your company”.

This process is based on a sound understanding of factors such as news values, the nature of news, reporting trends, timing, and the needs of the news media. If such factors are not taken into consideration, attempts to generate publicity (even from potentially newsworthy incidents) will be futile and dismissed as “advertising puffery” by the news media (Nel 2000: 111) or advertising in disguise. On the other hand, generating publicity can be a powerful integrated marketing communication (IMC) technique in the hands of a creative and experienced communication practitioner. This assumption is validated by some experts who describe publicity as “often more credible than advertising” and that it “can deliver impact that no advertising budget can accomplish” (Burnett & Moriarty 1998: 365).

Against this background, and given the marketing communication budget constraints often experienced by many organisations, it is surprising that IMC practitioners do not explore publicity as an IMC technique more deliberately and optimally. This article aims to address this shortcoming and highlight the potential of publicity as a unique, effective and sustainable IMC tool.

## 1. Focus of the study

The study attempts to find a solution to a practical problem relating to the neglect and underutilisation of publicity as an IMC tool. The following research problem is identified: Apparently there is no model for optimising publicity within an integrated marketing communication context.

This article's main focus is to explore and describe how publicity can be optimised as a useful IMC tool (Babbie 1994: 90-2). Four research questions relevant to the study were formulated:

- What is the nature of integrated marketing communication as the broader context in which publicity should be generated? (Meta-analytical research question)
- What is meant by the term publicity as an IMC technique? (Conceptual research question)
- What knowledge of the news media environment is required for generating publicity? (Descriptive research question)
- What is the most plausible theoretical model for optimising publicity as an IMC technique? (Theoretical research question)

As far as the more specific objectives of this study are concerned, a distinction is made between secondary and primary objectives. These objectives constitute an attempt to answer the four research problems stated.

### 1.1 Secondary objectives

- To describe IMC as the broader context for generating publicity (aimed at answering the identified meta-analytical research question).
- To explore what is meant by the term publicity as an IMC technique (aimed at answering the identified conceptual research question).
- To describe what knowledge of the news media environment is required for generating publicity (aimed at answering the normative research question).

### 1.2 Primary objective

- To develop a theoretical model for optimising publicity as an IMC technique (aimed at answering the theoretical research question).

### 1.3 Defining key terms

The following definitions of key terms are relevant within the context of this study:

- Optimise: to use something to its full potential.
- Publicity: a public relations process aimed at generating positive media coverage for an organisation and its products/services.
- Model: a graphic illustration aimed at understanding and simplifying the dynamics of a complex and multidimensional process.
- Theoretical model: a model that has not been empirically tested.
- Integrated marketing communication: this study subscribes to the following definition of IMC:

IMC is a dynamic, holistic approach, integrated into all strategic levels of an organisation. It attempts to manage and fuse every point of contact between the organisation and its stakeholders. Through this coordinated effort, it supports a targeted, integrated and consistent brand communication strategy for the purpose of building positive lifelong relationships through data-driven techniques, by customer-conscious employees to ultimately give an organisation a competitive advantage and brand equity (Mulder 2007: 21).

## 2. Research design and methodology

Wimmer & Dominick (1997) and Creswell (1994) indicate that the purpose of qualitative research often is to formulate new hypotheses and theories; develop new and refining existing models; increase the depth of understanding of a phenomenon, and pursue new areas of interest. Since the primary objective of this study is to develop a new model for optimising publicity as an IMC technique, and while the secondary objectives focus on a better understanding of publicity as a phenomenon within an IMC context, it is argued that qualitative research is the most desirable approach to be followed – the reason being that the objectives of this study link directly with the general purpose of qualitative research.

A literature review as a non-empirical and qualitative research design was used to address the research questions and develop a theoretical, empirically untested model for general scrutiny (Mouton

2001, Babbie & Mouton 2001). Existing literature on publicity within a public relations and IMC context was investigated. These sources (secondary data) constituted the unit of analysis.

### 3. Theoretical perspective

Focusing on the identification of variables that influence the optimising of publicity and the depicting of the interdependent relationship between these variables in a theoretical model, this study aligns itself with aspects of the pragmatic perspective on human communication, with its emphasis on relevant principles of the systems theory. Three main characteristics of this perspective are relevant in this instance, namely: communication activities can be regarded as a whole that functions as a whole by virtue of the interdependence of its parts; in a system the structural relationship between parts or components reveals both order and predictability, and communication mostly takes place within an interactive and open supra or social systems context.

### 4. IMC as the broader context for generating publicity

Koekemoer (2004) states that in the past various elements of the marketing communication mix were regarded as separate functions and were handled by experts in the relevant areas. This situation led to “overall marketing communication efforts that were uncoordinated and frequently inconsistent. The results achieved were, therefore, less than optimum” (Gonring 2000, Koekemoer 2004: 2).

Koekemoer (2004: 2-3) also identifies three factors that contributed to a new climate in the marketing environment in which such an uncoordinated and inconsistent approach could no longer be accepted. These factors are political and social changes, rapid technological development, and the empowerment of consumers. This has led to significant changes in the way marketers promote their product and service offerings to consumers.

To deal effectively with the changing marketing landscape, marketers had to make a paradigm shift in their approach to marketing communication. Schultz (1998: xiii-xv) describes the essence of this

paradigm shift as the realisation that “the key to successful product promotion is through integrated marketing communications”. Advertising, public relations, sales promotion, direct marketing and personal selling (as elements of a single communications system) must deliver a unified, clear, concise and easily understandable message to consumers. Mulder (2004) subscribes to the same idea, stating that all marketing messages must be coordinated to create a unified image for the organisation and its products. This coordination ensures consistency so that stakeholders are not confused by conflicting messages.

Gonring (1994: 1-2) emphasises that this integration should not only take place at a communication execution level:

The restructuring and re-engineering taking place in organisations is evolutionary processes requiring managers to continually realign priorities and resources with organisational goals. To achieve this, the communications functions should be integrated into a single planning system.

In other words, the entire marketing communication process, not only the execution phase but also the initial planning phase, must be integrated. Gonring and Duncan & Moriarty (1997) argue that the need for integration is further necessitated by the failure of traditional mass communications to reach highly fragmented and disenfranchised audiences. Integrated marketing communication addresses this situation by attempting to influence the attitudes, perceptions and behaviour of stakeholder groups over time. This process starts with the customer and then works back to determine the forms and methods whereby persuasive communication programmes should be developed.

Smith & Taylor (2002), O’Guinn *et al* (2003) and Shimp (2007) argue that inherent to this evolution of the IMC concept was a re-evaluation of and new perspective on the customer. They suggest that this re-evaluation and new perspective include a shift from transactions to a relationship focus and a new emphasis on customers becoming partners. In addition, they also emphasise the importance of a more personalised form of marketing communication since impersonal mass communications, especially media advertising, are becoming less effective. Belch & Belch (2004) indicate a tendency

to shift marketing budgets from media advertising to other forms of marketing communication. From a South African perspective it must be noted that a similar tendency is increasingly visible as local companies are shifting their pre-occupied focus from advertising in the mass media to incorporate other marketing activities, such as public relations, sales promotions, direct marketing and sponsorship (Smith & Taylor 2002). In other words, it appears that the concept of an integrated approach to marketing communication is winning ground locally.

This tendency to place less emphasis on traditional mass communication techniques in marketing is also linked to a greater emphasis on stakeholder group segmentation. Mulder (2004: 227) describes a stakeholder group as “the group of people your marketing message is intended to reach” and that such a group has a direct impact on the existence of the business. Mulder also indicates that in the past marketers often used standardised, one-way mass communication messages to reach what was regarded as a homogeneous market and audience. However, this approach is no longer productive. “Marketing has moved from targeting a mass market to targeting specific segments” (Mulder 2004: 9) with the focus on “individual needs and purchasing behaviours” (Mulder 2004: 12). In addition, Mulder (2004) argues that IMC should be a two-way communication process aimed at maintaining dialogue with stakeholders to enable the marketer to respond quickly to customers’ changing needs and wants.

## 5. Publicity as an IMC technique

### 5.1 The nature of publicity

A conceptual problem in the use of the term “publicity” has been identified. According to Skinner *et al* (2001: 5), “publicity results from information being made known and it may be good or bad for the subject concerned.” It appears that Skinner *et al* regard the terms “publicity” and “media coverage” as synonyms. In other words, the term “publicity” is used to refer to an outcome of either negative or positive media coverage or reporting on an individual or organisation

and its products/services. However, they (Skinner *et al* 2001: 246-7) later use the same term (“publicity”) to specifically refer to a public relations process to generate positive media coverage. A similar conceptual problem was identified in Pickton and Broderick (2001) who use the term publicity to refer to media coverage in general (either good or bad), and then use it to indicate “disseminating positive information about the organisation and its products and services to achieve editorial coverage” (Pickton & Broderick 2001: 493).

These two examples are indicative of a lack of conceptual clarity that was found throughout literature on publicity. Within the context of this study it was decided that the term publicity would not be used to refer in general to an outcome in the sense of good or bad media coverage, but rather to indicate a process of generating positive media coverage for an organisation and its products/services.

## 5.2 The relationship between publicity, media relations and public relations

Some individuals use the term publicity as a synonym for public relations. However, the terms are not interchangeable. Public relations includes much more than publicity (Newsom *et al* 2004, Rensburg & Cant 2003, Lubbe & Puth 1994). But where exactly does publicity fit into the broader public relations domain? Skinner *et al* (2001: 9) identify various techniques of public relations, such as exhibitions, community involvement programmes, special events, sponsorships, media relations, and so on. They place publicity in a media relations context. Burnett & Moriarty (1998: 351) support this notion:

The public relations function that is primarily responsible for publicity is media relations. Media relations specialists develop personal relationships with the media covering their industry or company. They provide information in the form of story ideas, press releases and other publicity material.

This approach where publicity forms an integral part of media relations, in particular, is not necessarily shared by all in the IMC environment.

Pickton & Broderick (2001) separate publicity from media relations and treat them as two different entities or activities. However,



in their own discussion of these two entities or activities, it is difficult to identify any observable differences between media relations and publicity, thus rendering their conceptual separation of the two problematic. Other IMC authors such as Belch & Belch (2004) link publicity directly to public relations, but do not mention the media relations dimension in which publicity is generated. A potential problem with such an approach is that it does not sufficiently emphasise the reality that any effort at generating publicity can only be effective if it takes into consideration the dynamics and principles of effective media relations.

In concluding this discussion on the relationship between publicity, media relations and public relations, it is also important to take note of the allegation by Van Deventer (1996) that the emphasis in media relations is frequently on re-actively dealing with negative media coverage, while a pro-active approach to generating positive media coverage (publicity) is neglected:

Too many media relations practitioners are ignorant about the nature, sophisticated techniques and role of publicity as a communication generating function in media relations and public relations – a reality that leads directly to the under-utilisation of this potentially powerful communication and public relations tool (Van Deventer 1996: 10).

### 5.3 Media relations and public relations: the operational framework for generating publicity

Several authors<sup>1</sup> have ventured definitions of publicity, but Van Deventer (2003: 3) provides the most comprehensive definition of publicity as a media relations/public relations technique:

Generating publicity is a deliberate, pro-active, planned and sustained effort to identify information about an institution and/or its products/services and to present such information in a newsworthy manner to the mass media in an attempt to create credible, free and positive media coverage.

1 Cf Burnett & Moriarty 1998, Skinner *et al* 2001, Belch & Belch 2004, Newsom *et al* 2004.

Skinner *et al* (2001) and Van Deventer (1996: 3) suggest that the following activities could be included in the process of creating news or generating publicity in a media relations and public relations context:

- tie in with news events of the day and issue a media release to make a contribution to a public debate in the media on a relevant issue;
- take part in a controversy;
- arrange a trip, contest, special event, speech, inspection of a project, election, anniversary, or a celebrity to visit the company;
- issue a report, resolution, results of a poll or survey, prediction, praise, or protest;
- form a committee, appear before public bodies, or adapt national reports or surveys for local use;
- write a letter on a topic relevant to readers for publication in the letter column of the local newspaper or release a letter that you have received;
- involve the organisation in national days and community events;
- announce new appointments, competitions, award winners, an open day, and so on;
- partner with a newspaper or other mass media in launching a mutual project;
- capitalise on reporting trends in the media, for example: if a newspaper runs a series of feature articles on the experiences and problems of people with disabilities, approach them to also do a story on a colleague, who despite some form of disability, still makes a productive contribution, and so on;
- organise a media tour of a new facility, and
- get involved in event sponsorships.

The process of generating publicity does not take place in a vacuum – it takes place within a media relations and public relations context. Therefore, a sound understanding of the principles and dynamics of both media relations and public relations as the operational framework in which it takes place, is crucial for generating effective publicity.

#### 5.4 Publicity in an IMC environment

From an operational point of view publicity is directly linked with media relations that forms an integral part of public relations which, in turn, is regarded an element in the IMC mix – the other elements being advertising, sales promotions, direct marketing and sponsorship.

As indicated earlier, the potential marketing role of publicity in a single IMC planning system is often not explored by IMC practitioners. Van Deventer (2003: 10) is of the opinion that two factors contribute to this state of affairs.

First, media relations and public relations practitioners often reveal a lack of understanding and appreciation for the value-adding role of publicity. The emphasis is too often on reactive damage control and viewing the media as a threat, while the pro-active use of the media and potentially newsworthy opportunities are not explored in day-to-day media relations activities and longer term strategies. Subsequently, when the public relations element is integrated into the IMC mix, this deficiency is transferred into the IMC process.

Secondly, Van Deventer (2003: 10) argues that IMC literature is predominantly written by marketing specialists who do not always have an in-depth understanding of the media relations/public relations context and its processes and dynamics. This can undermine the real value that publicity can add to IMC. For publicity to be effective, both the media relations/public relations function must take up its rightful place in the IMC environment.

This article argues that the functions and objectives of publicity as part of the IMC mix can, according to Pickton & Broderick (2001: 492), be linked to a large extent with the functions and objectives of public relations in IMC in general, namely to promote a consistent corporate image; build relationships; raise awareness; share information; provide education; create interest; cause excitement; address concerns; generate understanding; build trust, encourage loyalty; change attitudes; win goodwill; reinforce other marketing messages, and generate sales.

Belch & Belch (2004: 598) list the following advantages of publicity over other forms of marketing communication: publicity is regarded as highly credible and unbiased; apparent news value ensures a wider stakeholder group; significant word-of-mouth communications are stimulated, and the perception is created of being endorsed by the media. However, Belch & Belch (2004: 598) also identify the following problems related to the pursuing of publicity:

## Theys *et al*/Optimising publicity: towards a theoretical model

- Unless information supplied has very high news value, there is no control over whether efforts at generating publicity will lead to media coverage or not.
- In a media relations environment where timing is often crucial, when the coverage will take place is entirely in the hands of the news media.
- Journalists will not always report on an issue in the way the media relations/public relations practitioner intended it to be.
- Important information may be reported inaccurately, omissions can be made or a certain aspect may be reported out of context or highlighted.

The above problems are similar to those experienced by media relations practitioners in general. An expert and skilled media relations practitioner with a thorough understanding of the media environment and how the news media operate will have the framework of reference and contacts in the media industry to at least address some of these disadvantages effectively.

## 6. Knowledge of the news media environment as a prerequisite for effective publicity

To enhance the success of generating publicity, it is imperative to thoroughly understand the news media environment and its dynamics (Lubbe & Puth 1994). Sound knowledge in this regard will not only empower marketing communication practitioners to generate publicity, but also prevent valuable time and energy being wasted on ill-devised attempts in this regard.

### 6.1 Potential influence of the media

The influence of the mass media has been the topic of much research over the past decades. Van Deventer (2003:16) remarks in this respect:

While many academics still debate the issue, a vast number of communication practitioners involved in some or other way with media liaison experience the power of the media on a day-to-day basis when it comes to the immense impact that positive or negative news coverage can have on the corporate image and public perceptions of an institution. The management of sound media relations and the generating of publicity to make a positive impact on mass media audiences is therefore of crucial importance.

Van Deventer (2003: 18) also states that the management of media relations resulting in positive news coverage can:

- enhance the corporate image and public perceptions of an institution;
- enhance the reputation of a company or institution's products or services;
- ensure the co-operation and constructive involvement of the public and other important external role-players;
- effect the manner in which the public view, feel and behave towards representatives of an institution and products/services at grassroots level;
- create awareness of and understanding for the problems experienced by an institution;
- foster a willingness to support an institution despite shortcomings and mistakes made, and
- contribute in the short- and longer term towards the success and effectiveness of an institution.

The influence of negative news coverage is often the opposite of the above. Since media coverage can make or break an institution, the importance of generating publicity cannot be overemphasised. It forms a critical part of the spectrum of activities performed by corporate and marketing communication practitioners.

## 6.2 Factors influencing news reporting

Mainly two factors influence the way in which the news media report on issues or whether they report on it at all. These are a particular news medium's editorial policy and traditional news values. Every news medium has a formal or informal editorial policy that influences the angle used in reporting on issues, the prominence given to issues and incidents, and even whether they report on an issue or not. According to De Beer (1977: 7), editorial policy signifies a particular news medium's unique approach to dealing with news as its basic product. This policy is influenced, *inter alia*, by socio-political orientation, financial aspects, receivers and their needs, geographical factors, and so on.

De Beer (1977: 4) states that the term news values refers to operational criteria used by journalists and newsroom staff to evaluate, select and prioritise potential news stories. When a news report meets one or more of these criteria, and it concurs with the news

medium's editorial policy, it is regarded as newsworthy and suitable for that particular medium's news agenda. These traditional news values are timeliness, public interest, proximity, magnitude/consequence/impact, prominence, emotional involvement, the unusual, human interest, and conflict.

The impact of the human factor in practising journalism must not be underestimated. It is therefore important to establish and maintain good personal relations with journalists. Van Deventer (2003: 12) remarks:

One of the simplest, but most effective ways to build constructive relationships with journalists is to assist them in meeting their deadlines. Therefore, if the information required will not be available in time, call the journalist and explain to him/her the problems you experience in obtaining the information so that he/she can take pro-active steps in addressing this lack of information in completing the report. If a big story is breaking, try to keep contact with a designated official who has first-hand information so that you can update journalists on progress being made or the latest developments. Ensure that the information that you supply to journalists is factually correct.

Marketing communication practitioners must also pro-actively identify specific journalists who might cover stories related to their company or institution. Deliberate attempts must then be made to build a positive interpersonal relationship with such journalists since experience has shown that it is easier to generate publicity if it takes place within the context of an existing positive relationship between a marketing communication practitioner and a specific journalist.

In addition, note must be taken of the distinction between hard news and soft news (Nel 2000: 59). Hard news is mainly time-sensitive and loses its impact if it is not presented immediately. Hard news is about the here and now; it focuses on actuality, current affairs or events of the day. On the contrary, soft news is not so time-sensitive. It is not important whether one reports on an issue today or next week. Attempts at generating publicity can focus on both hard and soft news.

### 6.3 Media communication mechanisms used in generating publicity

In attempting to generate publicity, marketing communication practitioners have to decide which media communication mechanisms (media release, media conference, radio interview, television interview, inviting journalists to cover a special event or combination of tools) is best suited for communication on an issue. Each of these mechanisms has its own unique characteristics and requirements.

## 7. A theoretical model for optimising publicity in an IMC context

The model for optimising publicity is aimed at simplifying a relatively complex process consisting of various variables, while simultaneously considering the dynamics of IMC, the news media environment and media relations/public relations as the context in which the generating of publicity takes place.

### 7.1 Discussion of the elements and dynamics of the model

The elements in the model are interrelated and its dynamics indicate the logical succession of elements as steps or phases in the process of generating publicity.

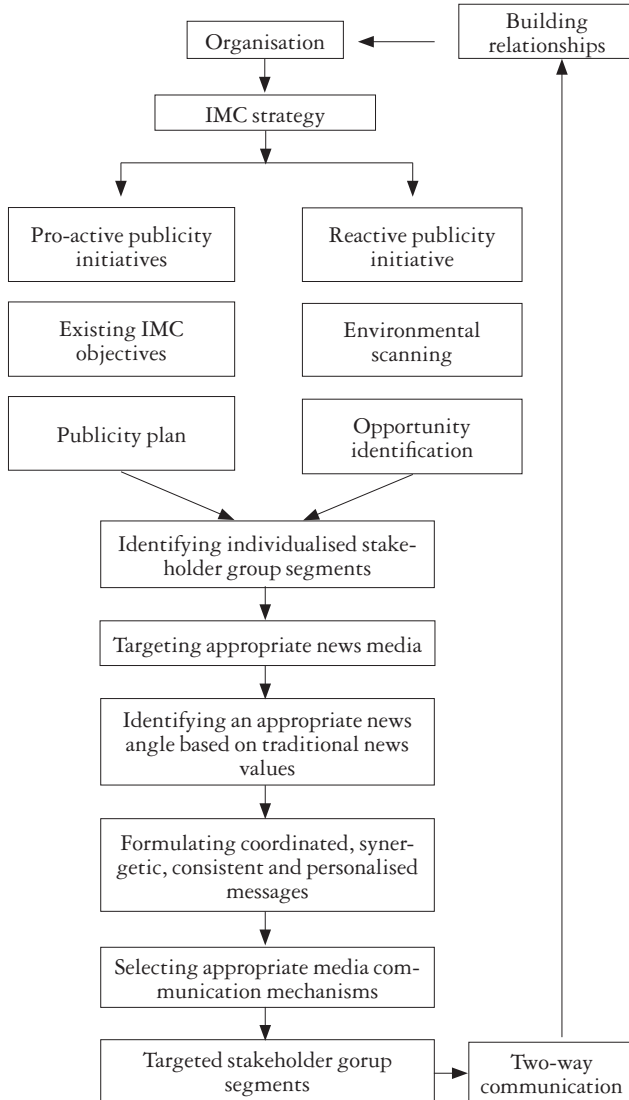
#### 7.1.1 Linking the process of generating publicity with the IMC strategy

Generating publicity cannot take place in isolation as it forms part of public relations – one of the elements of the IMC mix – and of the IMC process and its objectives. Promoting the corporate image of the organisation and the reputation of its products/services by means of continuous publicity should be included in the IMC strategy and, in particular, the implementation of public relations.

#### 7.1.2 Pro-active publicity initiatives

The first type of publicity initiatives can be labelled pro-active in the sense that they are initiated by marketing communication practitioners by using pre-identified IMC objectives as their starting-

A theoretical model for optimising publicity in an IMC context





point. The development of a publicity plan forms an integral part of the IMC strategic planning process and initiative is pro-actively taken to identify how, where and when happenings could be used to generate publicity in an attempt to assist in realising IMC objectives. Wherever possible, publicity must also be integrated with the activities of the other elements in the IMC mix.

### 7.1.3 Reactive publicity initiatives

The second type of publicity initiatives can be regarded as re-active because not all publicity generating endeavours can necessarily be planned in advance. Marketing communication practitioners can capitalise on unforeseen circumstances, incidents, events, trends, and so on in order to generate publicity as part of the IMC process. In this instance, constant environmental scanning is crucial. Environmental scanning can be described as a process in which the internal and external environment of an organisation is constantly scrutinised and under surveillance to identify important happenings relevant and related to the strategies of the organisation (Steyn & Puth 2000).

Within a publicity context this means to be constantly involved with opportunity identification in an attempt to recognise happenings in the organisational environment that could be used to generate publicity in aid of realising the organisation's IMC strategy. Successful opportunity identification regarding the internal environment depends on the IMC practitioner's knowledge of the organisation:

For a publicist to be able to translate the marketing objective of his or her company or client into news, he or she must have intimate knowledge of the company, the image it wants to convey and events taking place in the company (Nel 2000: 188).

Van Deventer (2003:11) elaborates:

Keep abreast with happenings, changes and developments inside the institution. You must know what decisions were made at managerial meetings; whether important internal investigations, new initiatives or research projects are being launched and when the outcomes will be available; when new policies and procedures will be implemented and what their effect will be, etc. In addition, informal interaction with employees of the institution can prove to be both a valuable form of internal environmental scanning and source of information. With regard to external environmental scan-

ning it is important to take note of happenings in the community, know what people are talking about and issue a media release to make a contribution to a public debate. External environmental scanning also includes analysing the media environment. Monitor the newspapers, as well as radio and television news bulletins on a daily basis and capitalise on reporting trends if they can be related to your organisation and its strategic objectives. Formal and informal contact with role-players and stakeholders outside the organisation can likewise be of value in identifying opportunities.

#### 7.1.4 Identifying individualised stakeholder group segments

As is the case with the IMC process in general, pro-active publicity initiatives based on a publicity plan must link the potential news item to individualised stakeholder group segments (Rensburg & Cant 2003). The same focus on targeting the right audience is crucial in the case of re-active publicity initiatives once an opportunity for publicity has been identified (Newsom *et al* 2004). This fact is also emphasised by Nel (2000:115):

Sending out 50 news releases may impress your boss or client, but you are likely to irritate the editors whose time you are wasting – and they are likely to pay scant attention when a release with your name on it crosses their desk again. The spray-and-pray approach – spraying out releases and praying that they will be used – yields poor results and wastes a lot of money and time.

In identifying individualised stakeholder group segments, Nel (2000:116) suggests that the following questions be raised. Are the clients male or female? How old are they? What are their levels of literacy and education? Where do they live? What do they think and believe? What interests them? Which publications do they read? To which radio stations do they listen? Which television stations do they watch?

#### 7.1.5 Targeting appropriate news media

Cohen (1987) emphasises that every communication practitioner dealing with the media should create a media list, for example a list of all the media contacts that are relevant to one's organisation. Such a media list can be in the form of an electronic database, wall chart or spreadsheet programme and should include important information such as the focus of the medium, the names of individual journalists, writing style in

the case of publications, deadlines and audiences. On the contrary, Nel (2001: 117) prefers the term “media profile” instead of media list:

A media profile is an essential tool in determining the media with which you need to establish good relations in order to target your message at the right audience through the right media. This is done in two steps: pinpoint the stakeholder groups your organisation needs in order to address and get to know why they are important to your company, and determine the media preferences of these groups. This will help you design your message to reach the audience directly, in a language they understand, through the media of their choice.

Van Deventer (2003: 16) opines that communication practitioners in their selection of appropriate media often neglect the entire spectrum of available news media:

One should not focus on the mainstream media only, but also incorporate more specialised media publications on your e-mail or fax lists when appropriate. For example, the successful bust of a syndicate dealing in endangered species is as (or even more) important to a magazine focusing on wildlife and environmental issues, while success in the fight against white-collar crime could be more of interest to an economics publication. Although the readership of more specialised media publications is less than that of the mainstream news media, such a readership often includes important opinion leaders – people who can be influential in changing public perceptions of your institution.

Once appropriate media linked to a specific stakeholder group segment have been identified, the IMC practitioner must use his/her knowledge of a particular news medium and its editorial policy to the advantage of the publicity-generating process.

#### 7.1.6 Identifying an appropriate news angle based on traditional news values

IMC practitioners must present a potential news item in such a way that it will enhance the possibility of publication or coverage. IMC practitioners' first priority should not merely be on providing the facts related to a particular happening. By using knowledge of traditional news values and a specific news medium's editorial policy, practitioners must attempt to devise a newsworthy angle in the presentation of facts. In addition, Van Deventer (2003: 12) proposes the following three guidelines:

## Theys *et al*/Optimising publicity: towards a theoretical model

- Never assume that the media will automatically take note of a positive story, package these stories to the best of your abilities to make them as attractive as possible to a journalist.
- Develop the ability to think like a journalist.
- Think of yourself as a salesperson who has to 'sell' these types of stories to the media by using your knowledge of news values and newsworthiness as the basis for your sales pitch."
- Formulation of coordinated, synergetic, consistent and personalised messages

In accordance with IMC principles, the messages formulated in the process of generating publicity must link directly with the coordinated, synergetic, consistent and personalised messages formulated as part of the overall IMC strategy. In other words, the messages communicated through publicity cannot differ from those communicated by other elements in the IMC mix. Therefore, all messages in the IMC process, including those used in generating publicity, must be coordinated to create a unified image for the organisation and its products/services. This coordination ensures consistency so that stakeholder groups are not confused by conflicting messages. The idea with IMC is to integrate all marketing communication messages in a mutually supportive and enhancing manner so that the resulting whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

However, the term "personalised" messages warrants some discussion. This term is closely related to stakeholder group segmentation (Newsom *et al* 2004). This article argues that, although messages must be coordinated, synergetic and consistent, this does not mean in practice that certain message elements cannot be adapted to better suit different stakeholder group segments who differ as far as needs, literacy, educational background, and so on are concerned. In essence, the overall message or central theme conveyed in a message must remain intact.

The term personalisation with regard to message content in generating publicity can also be used in a different context. Communication to the media is personalised when

... it is about specific people, but it demonstrates a common theme or basic trait. Include names and some basic details about the humans involved – it'll beat a dry recitation of statistics. For example:

While it is great to know that the Red Cross delivered one million gallons of water to people after a disaster, it's even better if you can give texture to that statistic by telling how three teenage volunteers had to canoe two miles to find the Anderson family who were living with their five kids in a still-dry attic and down to their last pot of clean water (Anonymous 2003).

When dealing with local media in an attempt to generate publicity, another factor also becomes relevant in message formulation, namely localisation. According to Nel (2000: 46-52), this entails giving a local angle to information furnished to the media. The following can serve as an example:

- Not localised for the Bloemfontein newspaper *Volksblad*:

Neville Johnson has been named a director of the photo lithography and printing company Graphco in Bloemfontein.

- Localised for the Bloemfontein newspaper *Volksblad*:

Neville Johnson, a graduate of the Free State University of Technology and son of Mr Jason Johnson, well-known city manager of the Mangaung Local Municipality in Bloemfontein, has been named a director of the photo lithography and printing company Graphco.

Localisation will definitely increase the success rate when attempting to generate publicity in local news media. In addition, Nel (2000: 111) maintains that "advertising puffery" should be avoided in message formulation. This refers to obvious attempts at marketing in which too many adjectives and inflated claims are used to blow the organisation's own trumpet. A more sober and modest approach is advised:

Avoid hackneyed words and phrases like spectacular, incredible, the only one of its kind, breakthrough, cutting-edge, unique and state-of-the-art since they may reveal blatant attempts at commercialism (Crowther 2005).

#### 7.1.7 Appropriate media communication mechanisms

As mentioned earlier, there are various media communication mechanisms such as media releases, interpersonal and telephonic interviews, radio interviews, television interviews, media conferences and inviting journalists to special events (Lubbe & Puth 1994; Newsom

*et al* 2004). In selecting an appropriate media communication mechanism, the IMC practitioner should take note of the unique characteristics and requirements of each mechanism.

### 7.1.8 Timing

Van Deventer (2003: 9) states that timing in the form of taking cognisance of what is going on in the media environment is imperative during the process of generating publicity – it can make the difference between failure and success. When a dramatic local or international news story breaks, it is often not a good time to release a significant success story:

Under usual circumstances, your story would have received prominent coverage, but in the event of such important breaking news, these stories often dominate news reporting in the sense that the first few pages of newspapers are dedicated to it. In such cases the same dominance is often also reflected in radio and television coverage. Your story that could have made the front page of the newspaper now ends up as a small news item on page 5 or is even not carried by the newspaper at all. Therefore, time your media release by taking note of what is going on in the media environment (Corwell 2006: 2).

Timing also refers to the cycles in which news reporting runs:

The easiest way to help assure coverage is to time your event so it happens at an 'easy' time. Weekends and holidays are usually slow because government offices and most businesses are closed. It's hard for reporters to get in touch with anyone, so they are often casting about desperately for something to cover (Orwell 2006: 9).

Van Deventer (2003: 9) also mentions that in the month of December and at the beginning of January journalists are often experiencing so-called "cucumber time" when there is a lack of news-worthy items to report on. This is, however, an excellent time for marketing communication practitioners to generate publicity by means of soft news stories.

An article on an interesting component in your organisation, that would not have generated much interest in the media during the other months of the year, can now (due to a lack of hard news items to report on) become manna from heaven to a journalist struggling to fill the pages of his/her newspaper. Furthermore, timing also refers

to avoiding attempts to present potential stories to journalists to close to deadlines. Their “crunch” periods are the time just before a deadline when calling them will really put you on their black list. Whether either side wants to admit it, public relations folks and the media have a symbiotic relationship – they need each other to do their jobs well (Van Deventer 2003: 11).

### 7.1.9 Targeted stakeholder segments, two-way communication and the building of relationships between the organisation and the stakeholder segment

In the past marketing was associated with a unidirectional or one-way communication process. However, in IMC a paradigm shift is made to emphasise a two-way flow of information between marketers and their targeted stakeholder group segments and the building of mutually beneficial relationships. Consequently, the process of generating publicity must, wherever possible, also be aimed at promoting interaction between the organisation and stakeholder groups. When appropriate, publicity activities must include invitations to stakeholder groups to contact the organisation and its representatives telephonically or by means of e-mails, faxes and letters or by attending activities such as open days, launches or special events presented by the organisation.

Apart from exchanging information and learning more about each other, opportunities for two-way communication can also be used by IMC practitioners to invite and monitor customer input in order to promote continuous dialogue and refine marketing communication accordingly. From the viewpoint of audience members this exchange of information could give them a better sense of what the organisation does, how it is differentiated and how its unique products/services can add value.

## 8. Revisiting the theoretical perspective of the study

As mentioned earlier, the process of developing a model to optimise publicity as an IMC technique will be aligned with the pragmatic perspective on human communication, with its emphasis on

relevant principles of the systems theory. The characteristics of both the proposed model and this perspective intertwine as follows.

First, the pragmatic perspective highlights the fact that communication activities can be regarded as a whole that functions as a whole by virtue of its interdependent parts. This characteristic is directly applicable to the development of the proposed model, since the publicity-generating process on which it is based can be regarded as a system consisting of various distinctive but interrelated and interdependent parts or activities that collectively constitute a whole in the form of a model. Secondly, this perspective underlines the assumption that in a system (like the process of generating publicity), the structural relationship between parts or components reveals both order and predictability. This study premises that the process of generating publicity follows a certain degree of logical order or a logical succession of steps or phases and that therefore this process is predictable to a certain extent. Lastly, the pragmatic perspective accentuates that communication mostly takes place within an interactive and open supra or social systems context. This is also relevant to generating publicity, because interaction between the organisation employing this process and the external social and media environment can be regarded as an integral dimension of the proposed model.

## 9. Conclusion

The proposed model could provide IMC practitioners with a potentially valuable theoretical approach to generating publicity. The step-by-step and analytical approach depicted in the model not only aspires to simplify the process of generating publicity, but might also enhance the success of publicity-generating activities in realising IMC objectives. It is hoped that this model will stimulate further scientific reflection and discussions among both academics and practitioners in order to facilitate the general recognition of publicity as an integral and distinctive part of media relations/public relations within IMC strategies.



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