2008

Factors influencing the perceived credibility of public relations message sources

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Factors Influencing the Perceived Credibility of Public Relations Message Sources

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
School of Mass Communications
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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Date of Approval:
April 3, 2008

Keywords: source credibility, message strength, source affiliation, gender, sex roles

DEDICATION

To my parents Dr.& Mrs. Afolabi Adeyemi Epega, who instilled in me the spirit of hard work and dedication.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are several people I must thank for their help and support while completing this manuscript.

To my thesis chair, Dr Liu, thank you for being so patient with me from the formation of my first ideas, to the final execution of my thesis. Your honest and candid opinions and constant support through many frustrations made it possible for me to complete my thesis.

To my thesis committee members, Dr.Werder and Dr. Killebrew thank you for all the private meeting and class time spent on working on the details of my research. I appreciate the time you took out of your schedules to help me develop the details of my academic work.

To my graduate school advisor, Dr. Derina Holtzhausen your guidance, especially at the beginning of my graduate education made it possible for me not only to complete my thesis, but also to find the fortitude it took to make it through the entire program.

To Daniel and Kelly Epega, thank you for all everything. Your generosity and constant encouragement made it possible for me to finish my graduate program and thesis.

To John and Adeola Epega, thank you for the constant support and belief in me, I am grateful for all your supportive words and deeds.

To Caroline Simon, Tweba Sargeant, and Yeatie Morgan, thank you for putting your own work aside to encourage me daily. I also appreciate all the time you spent

proofreading draft after draft of my thesis. I am grateful for all the personal time you gave me to year.

To my cohort, colleagues, and friends working with all of you over the past two years has enlightened me academically, personally and professionally, thank you.

Finally, to my twin nephews, David and Daniel Epega, you two bring joy to my life.

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ABSTRACT

This study establishes a link between research done in the field of public relations on source credibility, communicator gender, message strength, and source affiliation. Research has established that source credibility is one of the most important factors influencing the acceptance of a message. For this study, source credibility was measured using three main dimensions: expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness. Similar to many studies focusing on source credibility, this study focuses on the various attributes of the communicator or message source. This study uses an experimental procedure to investigate the relationships between source credibility, message strength, source affiliation, and communicator gender. Based on previous findings, this study hypothesized that higher message strength will be perceived as more credible than lower message strength, sources labeled 'public relations practitioner' will be perceived as less credible than sources that are not, and male communicators will be seen as more credible than females. Findings indicate, however, that message strength has no significant influence on source credibility. Nor does it significantly influence the opinions of the participants on the communicator's gender and their affiliation with the term public relations practitioner, except in the case of their levels of expertise. The results however did indicate that there are statistically significant interactions between the trustworthiness

and attractiveness of the source and the attitudes of the participants toward the public relations message, the corporation and their subsequent behavioral intentions.

Chapter One

Introduction

Problems with Public Relation Sources

A growing body of literature suggests that public relations sources are not considered the most credible sources of information. Many individuals see public relations practitioners who create, design, and develop messages, as their company's designated public representatives (Callison, 2004). Public relations practitioners who are paid to represent their respective corporations are not typically seen as embodiments of truth and honesty. Some believe these organizational spokespeople are willing to say anything to build, rebuild, and maintain their corporation's image and integrity. This leads to their respective publics questioning the corporation's true communications intentions.

Publics of an organization and practitioners themselves understand that an organizational spokesperson is a paid supporter of his/her company and must maintain a certain amount of reporting bias. Callison (2001) suggested that the public's negative perception of practitioners is rooted in this perceived reporting bias. Reporting bias is the advocacy public relations practitioners' show towards their organizations when covering their causes (Murphy, 2001). It might be argued that practitioners who handle company communications must posses a certain amount of reporting bias in order to do their jobs effectively. Nonetheless, this reporting bias is the root cause of the public's distrust for the industry and its practitioners.

Eagly, Wood, and Chaiken (1978) carried out the first research suggesting, "bias attributed to information sources influence the way the source and his or her information are judged" (p. 428). The researchers suggest that the source of the information is a crucial factor in the way the information is accepted and assimilated by an individual or a specific public. It was concluded that when receivers of a communication believe that situational or occupational pressures are being applied to the communicator, it could cause the source to withhold some vital facts. These occupational pressures subsequently cause a reporting bias and compromise the willingness of the communicator to be honest. The implications of the Eagly et al. research are very pertinent to the public relations practitioners and the growth of the profession and this study.

Generally, members of the public do not believe that they are receiving the complete truth from practitioners (Callison, 2002). Practitioners are not always seen in the most positive light by the publics their organizations are affiliated with. This has caused a major credibility problem within the public relations industry.

The main purpose of this study is to explore the credibility of public relations messages sources. An experiment was conducted to examine the effect that message strength, communicator gender, and source affiliation have on source credibility. The information gathered in this study contributes to research development in the field on public relations.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

Source Credibility

Importance of Source Credibility

For many years now, the term credibility, or source credibility, has been an important area of research in persuasion theory. The source credibility theory states that people are more likely to be persuaded when the source presents itself as credible (Hovland, & Janis, Kelley, 1953). Credibility is considered to be "the judgments made by a message recipient concerning the believability of a communicator" (Callison, 2001, p. 220).

The source of a message is of vital importance when determining the credibility of the message. "An individual's acceptance of information and ideas is based in part on 'who said it.' This variable, the source's role in communication effectiveness, has been given many names: ethos, prestige, charisma, image, or, most frequently source credibility" (Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1969, p. 563). Credibility is one of the most fundamental source factors that has produced scholarly research.

Anderson (1971) described source credibility as a weight that can enhance the value of information in a message. Similarly, Tormala and Petty (2004), defined source credibility as a message source's perceived ability or motivation to provide accurate and truthful information.

Numerous factors affect the credibility of a public relations message. Research suggests a message's source, specifically communicator gender, may have a strong effect on message credibility (White & Andsager, 1991, Burkhart, 1989). Many studies show that message strength is a critical factor in determining the credibility of a message. Other literature suggests that the communicator's title (e.g. public relations practitioner) greatly affects message credibility (Callison, 2001).

Source Characteristics

Holvland and Weiss (1951) conducted the initial studies of source credibility as a theoretical construct. The researchers proposed that information sources are evaluated on two main dimensions of credibility; trustworthiness and expertise. Since the seminal study, many other researchers have studied source credibility and have added various other dimensions.

The initial studies on source credibility found expertise and trustworthiness were the two major factors of credibility (Holvland & Weiss, 1951; Hovland et al., 1953; Kelman & Hovland, 1953). Scholars since have argued that source credibility is composed of three individual and separate dimensions: (i) expertise, (ii) trustworthiness, and (iii) attractiveness (McCroskey, 1999; Perloff, 2003).

Expertise

Expertise refers to the extent to which a speaker is perceived to be capable of making correct assertions (Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953). The communicator's level of expertise deals with the level to which the receptors of the message believe that he/she is a knowledgeable and experienced source on a specific topic. Expertise also deals with

other attributes such as intelligence, qualification, authoritativeness, and competence. (McCrosky, 1999).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the degree to which an audience perceives the assertions made by a communicator to be valid (Holvland, Janis & Kelley, 1953).Trustworthiness deals with attributes such as the communicator's perceived honesty, sincerity, and objectivity (McCraken, 1989). It is important that the public perceive the source of a message as trustworthy in order for the messages designed to have the desired effect on the targeted audiences.

Attractiveness

Attractiveness refers to the physical appearance of the communicator, and the various ways that may positively or negatively effect his/her credibility with an audience. Communicators who are considered attractive to their audiences have a better chance of holding their audience's attention and persuading them to his/her point of view. A vast body of advertising and communication literature contends that attractiveness is a vital part of one individual's initial judgments of a communicator (Baker & Churchill 1977; Chaiken, 1979; Joseph, 1982; Kahle & Homer, 1985; Mills & Aronson, 1965; Widgery & Ruch, 1981).

Scholars throughout history have studied several other dimensions of source credibility. For example, Berlo, Lemert, and Mertz (1969) recognized competence, trustworthiness qualifications, safety, and dynamism as additional dimensions that could be attributed to a source. Whitehead (1968) also identified two dimensions of source

credibility research: competence and objectivity. McCrosky (1966) noted two additional factors in source credibility research: authoritativeness and character.

Determinates of Source Credibility

The following attributes, for the purposes of this study, are the main determinants of the perceived credibility of public relations messages sources: message strength, source affiliation, and communicator gender.

Message Strength

The majority of studies using the variable of message strength, or argument quality, have followed the Elaboration Likelihood Model conceptualized by Petty and Cacioppo (1981).

Elaboration Likelihood Model

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) states that an individual will receive a message, examine it, and form an opinion. Other times, they may listen to the message, do not actively process it, but allow an external factor to persuade them. According to the ELM, there are two basic routes to persuasion; the *central route* is the route taken by individuals who receive the message, diligently and actively process the information, and are subsequently persuaded by the rationality of the argument or the message. The *peripheral route* of persuasion occurs when a receiver of the message does not take the time to evaluate the argument or process the information. These individuals allow nonessential cues to guide their decisions.

The ELM claims that the process of attitude change will vary based on the degree of elaboration. When an argument takes the central route, it is generally because it has

been buttressed with strong arguments and has significance to the receiver. When an argument takes the peripheral route, there are different factors to be considered. In this case, the receiver is relying on simple decision-making criteria
(i.e. attractiveness, gender).

It was found that a communicator who uses arguments that contain strong claims that are relevant, objective, and verifiable will generally be more persuasive and foster more positive thoughts than weak arguments (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Petty and Cacioppo defined a strong message as one that, "when subjects are instructed to think about the message, the thoughts that they generate are predominantly favorable"(p.147), a weak message however will have statements that, when subjects are prompted to think about them "the thoughts that they generate will be predominantly unfavorable"(p.147). The authors claimed that the information contained in the stronger argument will be more influential in the overall influence on an individuals attitude and belief towards on organization or brand. Recently, ELM scholars, in response to criticisms have shifted the word choice to "stronger" and "weaker" messages to account for all message categories. (Areni & Lutz, 1988; Boller, Swasy, & Munch, 1993)

The ELM is the theoretical foundation chosen to examine more clearly the effect that message strength has on the credibility and the believability of the source of a public relations message. For the purposes of the study, the stronger message will contain relevant, objective, and verifiable information supported by numerous arguments. The weaker message will contain comparatively less relevance, objectivity, and verifiability supported with fewer arguments.

Source Affiliation

In order to determine the ability of a practitioner to serve as reliable spokespersons, individuals must first understand the public's perception of practitioners (Callison, 2002 p.220). Research has found that the impressions of public relations and its practitioners are negative. "Scholars have established credibility and its counterpart, trustworthiness, as the key source and message attributes necessary in communicating persuasive messages" (Callison, 2004, p.372). Individuals do not view public relations practitioners as credible and trustworthy sources, and this has contributed to the erosion of the practitioner's credibility as viable sources.

In recent times, one of the most exposing studies displaying the lack of credibility in the public relations industry was done by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). In September 1998, with funding from the Rockfeller Foundation, a telephone survey was conducted in which 1,000 respondents were asked to rate the credibility of sources of information on a 4-point scale, from 1 being (*very credible*) to 4 (*not at all credible*.) There were 44 information source providers rated by each respondent. Public relations practitioners finished third from last, a little behind professional athletes and student activists (Callison, 2004). Publics find it difficult to view public relations messages produced by practitioners as credible information.

Callison wrote:

> Scholars have isolated four key factors that play a role in determining the ability of public relations professionals to serve as quality sources. First, receivers note

> credibility in messengers to determine the believability and accuracy of communications. Second, an audience relies on judgments concerning a source's trustworthiness and competence in evaluating credibility. Third, public relations practitioners, students, and the general public doubt the trustworthiness of public relations professionals. Finally, this image can be attributed in part to public relations practitioners who often try to appease receivers and to the tendency to believe that sources who speak to an audience's expectations in persuasive situations are not honest (2001, p. 222).

In order to overcome the unfavorable perceptions that accompany the title public relations, corporations should associate themselves with credible and reputable spokespersons for their internal and external communications. Public relations practitioners must associate with trustworthy and believable sources (e.g. specialist, renewed scholars) in order to bolster the credibility of the field.

Public Relations Practitioners as Reliable Sources

> "Public relations-based messages are persuasive at heart. Whereas in most cases not overtly attempting to modify an audience's attitude in an extreme way, public relations messages are written with the goals of the organization in mind, and with an intention of improving or maintaining favorable impressions or beliefs about the organization" (Callison & Zillmann, 2002, p. 86).

Public relations messages are in principal meant to inform and persuade. Due to the persuasive nature of the messages, receivers tend to have their defenses up while viewing the message. Schramm (1971) stated that there are no contracts involved between the communicator and the receiver of a message in a persuasive situation. The

receivers of the communications are usually very skeptical when they know a piece of information is attributed to a less than trustworthy source. The combination of this "guard up" mentality from the receivers and public relations low credibility score have caused the current negative views facing the profession.

A study by Saunders (1993) determined that the general public was not alone in its poor perceptions of public relations practitioners. Public relations students did not have much more confidence than the public in their chosen profession. Researchers using first year public relations students as respondents found that "half of first time public relations students agreed that honesty is a relative term" (p. 8). Rebuilding the credibility of public relations practitioners should be of paramount importance to every scholar and practitioner. Modern public relations personnel work in arduous conditions. Public's lack of an overall sense of confidence in the organizations that practitioners represent, this coupled with their low credibility scores, have been crippling to the credibility of public relations as a profession (Judd, 1989).

In light of these discoveries, Callison (2001), through experimental research, demonstrated the public's negative perception of public relations. The participants were presented with sets of messages attributed to two different sources. In one set, the information was attributed to a public relations specialist; in the other, it was simply labeled company spokesperson. More than 98% of the text was held constant in both message sets. However, the participants were much more critical of the public relations source and its affiliated company than they were of the spokesperson source and its affiliated company. Communications sources not labeled as public relations were overall viewed as more believable and credible (Callison, 2002). The study concluded that

participants thought public relations sources were less likely to tell the truth, more dishonest, and less trustworthy.

Sallot (2002) used a mixed participant's pool of college students and mall shoppers. The researcher determined that perceived motives driving the public relations campaign, communication styles, and professionalism were the key indicator of how people evaluate public relations and its practitioner. Audiences view public relations messages as biased pieces of communication, slanted to portray the organization in the best light possible. Public relations messages are not seen as credible sources because the publics of organizations believe that messages are designed for the protection of the company and not for the betterment of the public. The publics of organizations have developed a certain distrust for public relations practitioners and their employers when they believe that the company's benefit or gain seems to be the apparent result from their communications (Durham 1997; Sallot, 2002).

Gender

Gender is "one of the earliest, and continues to be one of the most basic, components of self-identity" (Spence, 1984, p.81). The gender of the communicator is also a key factor when discussing source credibility of a public relations message. Gender, according to Alvesson and Billing (1997), is the social and cultural meanings associated with being male or female that are imposed and expected by society. Bem (1993) claimed that the term gender was constructed by the "historically-constructed cultural lens embedded in the social institutions and cultural discourses of society which… leads us to become unwitting collaborators in the social reproduction of the existing power structure" (p.46). Howard and Hollander (1997) defined gender as the

"culturally determined behaviors and personality characteristics that are associated with, but not determined by, biological sex (p. 11). Sex, the biological identification of being male and female, is also strongly associated with gender in public relations.

The gender of the communicator could have a significant influence on the recipients of the message and, subsequently, the credibility of the message. Researchers have cited traits such as rationality, activeness, dominance, competitiveness, self-confidence, aggressiveness, independence, boastfulness, and hostility as characteristics defining men; characteristics such as empathy, dependence, passivity, sympathy, sensitivity, nurturance, and shyness describe women. (Berryman-Fink, 1985; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). These characteristics can affect the ways in which messages are delivered by communicators and the ensuing credibility of the message being conveyed.

A clear understanding of the gender variable could be a critical factor when developing public relations messages specifically targeted towards an audience. This study also investigates the influence of the gender of the communicator on the credibility and subsequent believability of the message.

Gender and Public Relations

Historically, there have been very few studies showing the effects of the gender of the communicator as a variable in determining the credibility of a message. In one of the most important studies conducted using the gender variable to date, Freiden (1984) found no significant interaction between endorser type and gender of communicator. However, there have been other studies that have theorized "gender, or sex, of the influence source may be a significant factor in determining source credibility, and , if so, would then be a

significant factor in determining the success of the influence attempt" (Summers, Montano, Kasprzyk, & Wagner, 1980 p. 312).

The majority of gender studies in public relations have focused on salary and the role of the practitioner. Practitioner roles serve as a significant indicator of the income differences between male and female practitioners. (Broom, 1982; Broom & Dozier, 1986; Dozier, 1988; Dozier & Broom, 1995; Dozier, Grunig & Grunig 1995). The results of these studies showed that woman generally earn less money then men because women tend to stay in technical roles and rarely achieve the ranks of managerial or communicator roles. Research conducted on salary by PRWEEK in 2001 reported that men, on average, earn 38% more than woman annually.

Public relations is a significantly female dominated profession. According to the U.S. Census Beureau (2000) woman accounted for 50.1% of the public relations workforce in 1983 and 66.3% in 1998. However, research indicates that woman who achieve managerial status in their organizations do not have same benefits as their male counterparts. (L.A. Gruing, Toth & Hon, 2001; Toth & Hon 2001; Serini, Wright, Emig, 1998). Giving consideration to the female saturation in the field of public relations and the persistence of the glass ceiling, researchers claim that gender research is not only important to the development and advancement of the field but should continue to influence research (Choi & Hon 2002).

Ridgeway (1998) argued that the differences between men and woman are rooted in social expectations imposed by society. The researcher stated that men are more likely to achieve upper level managerial positions, not because of the difference in gender but because men are more likely to partake in active tasks, such as decision-making and

leadership activities than woman are. Ridgeway states that gender is constructed socially and institutionally. People are raised to believe that men and woman are supposed to behave differently and show different abilities, ranging from dealings with family to workplace activities, even with no concrete biological explanations to support these claims.

Researchers have stipulated that woman are generally perceived as inappropriate for managerial and communications roles. The managerial roles are constructed to fit within the constraints of the male descriptive characteristics such as dominance and self-confidence. Female traits such as dependence and passivity are seen as negative and not suitable for communicator and managerial roles (Choi & Hon, 2002). Powell and Butterfield (1978) conducted a study to determine the difference between perceptions of managerial and communications roles of men and women. The resercher determined that a good manager was traditionally defined in masculine terms.

Brenner and Greenhaus (1979) also documented that both male and female managers believed that male characteristics were more likely to be associated with good communications. Those traits that will be associated with a good manager and the most appropriate to manage large organizations. A study conducted ten years later by Brenner, Tomkiewicz, and Schein (1989) showed that male mangers had not changed their attitudes about the traits required for success. They did, however, discover that female managers believed that successful managers should posses traits attributed to both male and female communications managers. The specific problems female practitioners face are detailed in the glass ceiling and velvet ghetto studies.

The glass ceiling is the invisible barrier faced by middle management females

who desire to reach top-level positions. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2001 women comprise 41.4% of the workforce in the United States, but few women have attained top managerial and pay positions. Currently, woman comprise 10% of senior management positions in Fortune 500 companies; less than 4% are CEO, presidents, and executive vice presidents and comprise less than 3% of top corporate earners (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). This cuts across all professions, including public relations.

The Velvet Ghetto study was sponsored by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC). Public relations was referred to as the velvet ghetto because "companies load their public relations departments with woman to compensate for their scarcity in other professional or managerial capacities that usually lead more directly to top management" (PR: "The Velvet Ghetto" 1978, p.122). The results of this study showed that women are not perceived to be as emotionally tough and are subsequently relegated to the technical roles.

These factors knowingly or unknowingly affect the perception of the perceived credibility of the message. Women, due to their gender are seen as less effective communicators and managers. Due to this perceived lack of 'toughness' women for the most part are fixed in technical roles. This may consequently affect their communication effectiveness.

In 1989, Ragins and Sundstrom analyzed gender differences in public relations in terms of accessibility to the resources of power. The researchers argued that power has a greater influence on the evaluation of managerial and communication effectiveness than gender does. The Ragins et al. study found that men can obtain and exercise power easier

than women, because men have access to power resources and maintain these positions due to a supportive male network and male intensive male populated dominant coalition.

The importance of communication competence is also of budding concern among communications scholars, in regards to source credibility (Allen & Brown, 1978; Bostrom, 1984; Larson, Backlund,& Wiemann,1977; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Wiemann, 1977).The precise nature of competent communication is not currently well known, but there is a consensus that competence incorporates two fundamental properties – appropriateness and effectiveness. Canary and Spitzberg (1987) stated "effective communication accomplishes the goals, objectives, or intended functions of the interact, whereas appropriate communication avoids the violation of the situational and relational rules governing the communicative context." (p. 94).

Canary and Spitzberg proposed a fundamental question in their 1987 study on communication appropriateness and effectiveness: "Does the gender of the communicator affect perceptions of message appropriateness and/or effectiveness?" (p. 94). This study plans to build on this 1987 study by exploring how, if in any way, the gender of the communicator influences the perceptions of public relations messages and its subsequent effectiveness on the targeted publics.

The researchers adapted a quasi-experimental design in order to operationalize the variables in the study. It was determined that gender had no significant effects on the competence of the communicator. Furthermore, the gender of the communicator did not affect the assessment of whether or not the communicator obtained his or her goal. These specific results however call into question existing research claiming that gender is an important factor in the evaluation of competence (Johnson, 1976).

Gender Schema Theory

The basic distinction between male and female serves as an organizing principle for every culture and society. The gender schema theory proposes that "the phenomenon of sex typing derives, in part, from gender-based schematic processing, from a generalized readiness to process information on the basis of sex-linked associations that constitute the gender schema" (Bem, 1981, p. 354).

The schema theory is further explained to be an understanding of reality depending on constructive processes in which what is perceived is a product of the various interactions between the information being received and the perceiver's preexisting attitudes and beliefs (Bem, 1981).

Understanding the gender schema theory could be significant to the advancement of public relations as a field. The socialization of a male or female child begins from birth and its effects last throughout an individual's lifetime. The practitioner who has a clear perception of the importance's the impact of either being socialized as a male or female can have on an individual, can become an effective communicator who knows how to address his/her specific publics on a interpersonal level.

Interactions Among Independent Variables

There have been numerous studies linking the main independent variables in this study. Moore et al. discovered a significant interaction between source credibility and argument strength (1986). He discovered that when arguments are strong, the highly credible source brought about a more favorable attitude towards the brand than did the low-credibility one. The same study showed no apparent effects of source credibility when the arguments were weak.

Stoltenberg and Davis (1988) conducted a study using argument strength, source credibility and issues involvement as variables in the design. They discovered that argument strength had a greater impact on attitudes and behaviors when the participants were dealing with a highly credible source, compared to a lower one. The study also discovered that participants were more likely to act on a certain recommendations when stronger arguments were put forth by highly credible source and were least likely to act when weak arguments were presented by a highly credible source. Argument quality affected persuasion only when the source was of high expertise, when the source was low, the different argument strengths did not significantly affect persuasion (Herron, 1997).

Slater and Rouner (1996) hypothesized that the strength of the message will have a direct effect and mediate the effects of the initial credibility assessments. In addition, the researchers claimed that message strength would affect subsequent source credibility assessments and belief change. Their results supported that a higher strength message will have a direct effect on initial credibility assessments.

Priester and Petty claimed that people who exert low cognitions were less likely to think about what a clearly honest source said in comparison to what a potentially dishonest source said. A source considered to be honest can generally be trusted, thus little scrutiny of their motives are needed. However, for an untrustworthy source, even those low in cognition needed to exert extra efforts to ensure they were not being deceived (Petty, Haugtvedt, & Smith, 1995).

These interactions of the independent variables and the literature reviewed are the foundations on which the hypothesis for this study was formulated. The main purpose of

this study is to explore the credibility of public relations messages sources. An experiment was conducted to examine the effect that message strength, communicator gender, and source affiliation have on source credibility. The next chapter outlines the main hypothesis and used to test the main variables chosen for this study.

Chapter Three

Research Hypothesis

The main purpose of this study is to explore the credibility of public relations messages. A 2X2X2 experiment was conducted to examine the effect that the independent variables of communicator gender, message strength, and source affiliation have on the dependent variable, the credibility of the public relations message source, which was analyzed using the dimensions of expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness.

The research gathered intends to further the public relations field by determining the most suitable ways to frame a public relations message in order for it to have credibility with the publics in its environment. Thus, the following hypothesis were tested:

H1: Public relations messages with higher message strength will be perceived as more credible than messages with lower message strength.

H2: Public relations message sources not labeled *public relations practitioner* will be perceived as more credible than those sources that are affiliated with the labeled *public relations practitioner*.

H3: Communicator gender influences source credibility.

Past research has shown an interaction effect between message strength and communicator gender. According to the research done by Kempf and Palan (2006) the most positive attitudes towards a brand or an organization were derived when the

communicator was male and the argument strength was strong. The least positive consumer attitudes were derived when the communicator was male and the argument strength was weak. Female communicators fell in the middle of the range with stronger arguments rendering more positive attitudes than weaker ones (Kempf & Palan, 2006, p.10). Based on these findings the following hypotheses were tested by the researcher:

H4: Men will be considered more credible than women as a message source when message strength is high but less credible than women when message strength is low.

H5: The communicator gender will have a more prominent effect on public relations practitioners; however, among non public relations practitioner sources the gender effect will be neutralized.

H6: A strong message will be enhanced by an official source but will lose its effect when presented by a non-official source.

Source credibility, as the literature suggests, is an important factor for the effective persuasion of an individual.

"Public relations-based messages are persuasive at heart. Whereas, in most cases, not overtly attempting to modify an audience's attitude in an extreme way, public relations messages are written with the goal of the organization in mind and with an intention of improving or maintaining favorable impressions or beliefs about the organization" (Callison & Zillmann, 2002, p. 86).

Hence, the credibility of the source can influence the subsequent attitudes and behaviors of the individuals exposed to the messages. Based on this the following hypotheses were tested:

H7: Source credibility will influence on the individual's attitudes towards the public relations message.

H8: Source credibility will influence the individual's attitudes towards a Corporation.

H9: Source credibility will influence the behavioral intentions of the participants towards alternative energy products.

Chapter Four

Methodology

Research Design

The experimental method refers to the process in which data is collected where certain constraints are exercised over one or more factors to determine their influence on the variables of interest. This method was chosen in order to determine the causal relationships and interactions between the independent variables and their consequent effects on the credibility of public relations messages. A controlled experiment was conducted in this study to test the nine hypotheses posed.

This study seeks to build and extend upon the Calliosn (2001) experiment on the importance of source credibility in public relations. However, in this study there is a distinct difference from the Callison experiments. This study takes a different approach by exploring the credibility of public relations messages by examining the message strength, communicator gender, and affiliation with the title public relations practitioner as independent variables and source credibility as a dependent variable.

The organization used in this study is the Alternative Energy Corporation. This fictional organization modeled after an actual organization, the Alternative Energy Sources Inc. The main issues addressed are the importance of alternative energy, microhydro electricity in particular, and the development of an energy plant in Fort Myers, Florida. This was chosen because of the geographic significance to the research

participants and because of the current trends leaning towards developing alternative energy.

Research participants

Research participants were recruited from a population of undergraduate students enrolled in a general education course at a large southeastern university. The total sample included 250 participants.

Procedures

The experiment was conducted during the second session of the class' weekly meeting. The primary researcher explained the purpose of the exercise and the survey process to the students. The participants were told that this was a master's thesis study seeking to gauge college students' attitudes towards alternative energy. Students were randomly assigned to specific treatment groups. Each participant received a packet containing one version of the editorial piece and a questionnaire booklet. Both the editorial piece and the questionnaire included an identifying number that corresponded with one another. Students were told that the survey packets they received were different from most of their fellow classmates. Directions for completing the process appeared on the outside of the stimulus packets (see Appendix A.1). The directions listed the step-by-step procedure to completing the reading the editorial piece and subsequently completing the questionnaire. The participants were instructed to wait until the entire class received their individual packets before beginning. Next, the directions instructed them to open the cover sheet of the packet and read the editorial piece. They were informed that they could spend as long as they deemed fit to read and fully understand the editorial piece. The

participants were told to flip to the questionnaire and answer the questions to the best of their ability. The researcher informed the participants to read the instructions to each section carefully and answer all the questions.

In each of the eight treatment groups, the participants were be exposed to eight distinctly different messages from the Alternative Energy Campaign. Each of these messages were different variations of the three independent variables mentioned in the literature review. The editorial piece created is a typical example, of an editorial piece placed in a quarterly report of an Energy or Natural Conservancy Magazine. The packets were collected when all the participants were done.

Instrumentation

To operationalize the independent variables communicator gender, source affiliation and message strength, eight instruments were created that contained all three of the variables. Each piece contained a picture of a man or a woman with their title, phone number and email address directly underneath their photograph. The strong/weak message will run through out the piece surrounding the pictures. After a thorough review of the instrument, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire containing items that measure each receiver variables.

Stimulus Material

To achieve a 2X2X2 factorial design between subject, eight treatment conditions were created. Participants in each of the eight cells were exposed to stimulus material featuring an editorial piece from the Alternative Energy Corporation. All eight editorial pieces had identical font and layout. The eight messages created were as follows:

- Strong message, male communicator, with a public relations specialist title
- Strong message, female communicator, and a public relations specialist title
- Strong message, male communicator, with a vice president of energy distribution title
- Strong message, female communicator, with a vice president of energy distribution title
- Weak message, male communicator, with a public relations specialist title
- Weak message, female communicator, with a public relations specialist title
- Weak message, male communicator and with a vice president of energy distribution title
- Weak message, female communicator, with the title vice president of energy distribution title

Measurement Apparatus

After viewing the editorial piece from the Alternative Energy Corporation participants were asked to complete a 38-item questionnaire that included the participants' perception of the communicator's credibility, message strength, attitude towards the editorial piece, attitudes towards the Alternative Energy Corporation, attitudes toward a new plant opening in Fort Myers, behavioral intent towards alternative energy. The questionnaire solicited demographic information as well (see Appendix).

Specifically, scales were created to measure the following variables: 1) source credibility was measured using Ohanian's (1990) scale of source credibility, source credibility was divided into three distinct sections, namely expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness ; 2) gender of the communicator was measured by using a subset of

Hafner's (1984) semantic differential of sex roles 3) source affiliation 4) Wittler & DiMeo (1991) argument strength scale was used as the manipulation check for message strength; 5) attitude toward the editorial piece; 6) attitudes towards Alternative Energy Corporation; 7) attitudes towards the new plant opening in Fort Myers; 8) behavioral intentions related toward alternative energy; and 9) demographic variables (including gender, academic rank, and specific college).

Expertise. Expertise was measured with a five item, seven-interval scale with anchors labeled expert-non expert, inexperienced –experienced, knowledgeable-unknowledgeable, unqualified- qualified, skilled-unskilled. The Cronbach's Alpha for expertise is .861

Table 1: Reliability Statistics for Expertise

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.859	.861	5

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Expertise	4.46000	1.356377	250
Experience	4.88800	1.249681	250
Knowledge	5.11600	1.310501	250
Qualified	5.00400	1.200729	250
Skill	4.71600	1.315395	250

Trustworthiness. Trustworthiness was measured with a six item, seven-interval scale with anchors labeled undependable-dependable, honest-dishonest, unreliable-

reliable, sincere-insincere, untrustworthy- trustworthy, and sincere-insincere. The Cronbach's Alpha for Trustworthiness is .872.

Table 2: Reliability Statistics for Trustworthiness

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.871	.872	6

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Dependable	4.7880	1.18519	250
Honesty	4.7800	1.21388	250
Reliability	4.8240	1.11264	250
Sincerity	4.8400	1.32871	250
Trustworthiness	4.7040	1.15138	250
Responsibility	4.8400	1.15748	250

Attractiveness. Attractiveness was measured with a two-item seven-interval scale with anchors labeled beautiful-ugly, and attractive-unattractive. The Cronbach's Alpha for Attractiveness is .618

Table 3: Reliability Statistics for Attractiveness

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.615	.618	2

Beauty	4.0040	1.14476	249
Attractiveness	3.7510	1.28666	249

Gender. A subset of Hafner's (1984) semantic differential of sex roles was used to measure the gender variable. Gender was measured with a five item seven interval scale with anchors labeled assertive-not assertive, sympathetic-non-sympathetic, aggressive-passive, non dominant-dominant; and compassion-not compassionate.

Source Affiliation. Source affiliation was measured with a single item seven interval scale with anchors labeled specialist – non specialist.

Message Strength. By using Whittler and DiMeo (1991) scale of argument strength four separate items were created. Each of the following items were measured on a 5-point Likert type scale by strongly agree/strongly disagree: "The editorial piece was convincing"; "The editorial piece was informative"; "The editorial piece send a strong message"; and "The editorial piece was believable".

Attitudes towards the Editorial Piece. To measure the attitudes toward the editorial piece, the following Likert type scale items, each anchored by strongly agree/strongly disagree, were created: "I like the editorial piece presented by the

Alternative Energy Corporation"; "I have a favorable attitude towards alternative energy".

Attitudes towards the Alternative Energy Corporation. To measure the attitudes toward the Alternative Energy Corporation piece, the following Likert type scale items, each anchored by strongly agree/strongly disagree, were created : " My attitude toward the Alternative Energy Corporation is favorable" ; "My attitude towards the Alternative Energy Corporation is positive"; My attitude towards the Alternative Energy Corporation is generally good" .

Attitudes towards the Plant Opening. Attitudes towards the new plant opening in Fort Myers were measured using the following Likert type scale items, each anchored by strongly agree/strongly disagree: "My attitude towards the Microhydro Plant opening in Fort Myers is favorable"; "My attitude towards the Microhydro Power Plant opening in Fort Myers is negative"; "I like the idea of opening the Microhydro Power Plant in Fort Myers"

Behavioral Intentions. Behavioral intentions were measured with the following Likert type scale items, each anchored by strongly agree/strongly disagree: "I would switch to an alternative source of energy if an electricity plant opened in my community"; "I would forward emails about the importance of alternative energy to my family/friends"; and "I would be actively involved in protecting the environments natural resources".

Demographic Information. In addition to the variables outlined above, participants were asked to provide demographic information, including their gender, academic rank, specific college, and age.

Chapter Five

Results

Data Analysis

Data analyses for this study were performed using SPSS 16.0 for Windows. $p < .05$ significance was used as the basis for rejecting the null hypothesis for all tests performed. Three one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) tests were used to identify the differences between groups for each of the first six hypothesis. Multiple regressions were used to analyze the relationship between source credibility, attitudes towards the editorial piece, attitudes towards the Alternative Energy Corporation, and behavioral related intentions towards alternative energy sources.

The final sample yielded 179 female respondents and 71 male respondents. The total number of respondents was ($n = 250$). The majority of respondents ($n = 137$) were in their first year of college. The mean age was 19. Table 4 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 4.
Categorical Demographics

	n	%
Academic Rank		
Freshman	137	54.2
Sophomore	58	22.9
Junior	44	17.4
Senior	9	3.6
Other	2	0.8
College		
Arts & Sciences	178	70.4
Business	41	16.2
Education	4	1.6
Engineering	5	2.0
Honors College	1	0.4
Medicine/Nursing	3	1.2
Visual Performing Arts	2	0.8
Arts	2	0.8
Public Health	3	1.2
Other	10	4.0
Age		
17	1	0.4
18	81	32.4
19	88	34.8
20	31	12.3
21	17	6.7
22	8	3.2
23	10	4.0
24	1	0.4
25	3	1.2
26	1	0.6
27	3	1.2
30	1	0.4
34	1	0.4
43	1	0.4

Table 5. Distribution of Participants to Treatments

	N	%
Public Relations title/ Strong Message	35	14.0
Male/ Public Relations title / Weak Message	35	14.0
Male/ Non Public Relations title/ Weak Message	29	11.6
Male/ Non Public Relations title / Strong Message	32	12.8
Female/ Public Relations title/ Strong Message	30	12.0
Female/ Public Relations title/ Weak Message	30	12.0
Female/ Non Public Relations title / Strong Message	32	12.8
Female/ Non Public Relations title/ Weak Message	27	10.8

Hypothesis Testing

In this study, the perceived credibility of public relations message sources were measured on the three dimensions of source credibility discussed in the literature. The nine main hypotheses tested the credibility of public relations message sources based on their degrees of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness.

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis stated that the participants of the survey would perceive a public relations message with higher message strength to be more credible than messages with lower message strength.

Three one-way ANOVA were used to test this hypothesis. The results showed that message strength had no significant effect on perceived expertise of the source F *(1,242)=.641;* p=.434 (see table 24). There was no significant difference in terms of expertise of the source when the message strength was strong (*M=4.88, S.D. =0.91*) and when the message was weak (*M=4.78, S.D.=0.03*).

Table 6: Dependent Variable:
Expertise

Message	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
strong message	4.8969	1.05740	128
weak message	4.7738	1.00048	122
Total	4.8368	1.02980	250

The results also indicated that message strength had no significant effect on the perceived trustworthiness of the source F*(1,242) =1.07;* p=.302)(see table 25). There was no significant difference in terms of trustworthiness of the source when the message strength was strong (*M*=4.86, *S.D.* =.944) and when message strength is weak (*M* = 4.72, *S.D*. =.913).

Table 7: Dependent Variable:
Trustworthiness

Message	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
strong message	4.8622	.94423	127
weak message	4.7276	.91393	123
Total	4.7960	.93003	250

In addition to these the results, the ANOVA showed that message strength had no significant effect on the perceived attractiveness of the source F *(1,241) = .309*; p=.579 (see table 26). The results determined that there was no statistical significance in terms of the attractiveness of the source when the message strength was strong (*M=3.84, S.D. =.941*) and when the message strength is weak (*M=3.91, S.D.=1.13*).

Table 8: Dependent Variable:
Attractiveness

Message	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
strong message	3.8465	.94178	127
weak message	3.9098	1.12635	122
Total	3.8775	1.03471	249

The message strength has no significance in terms of this study on the credibility of the source as measured by expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness.

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis sought to determine if public relations messages not labeled with the term public relations would be perceived as more credible than those who are affiliated with the term public relations practitioner.

Three one-way ANOVAs were used to test this hypothesis. The results showed that source affiliation had a significant effect on the perceived expertise of the source F*(1,242) =4.34;* p=.038)(see table 24). There was a statistically significant difference in terms of expertise between the messages labeled public relations (*M=4.70, S.D.=1.09*) and those not labeled public relations practitioner (*M=4.98, S.D.= .938*).

Table 9: Dependent Variable:
Expertise

Affiliation	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Non Pr	4.9754	.93758	122
Pr	4.7047	1.09802	128
Total	4.8368	1.02980	250

The ANOVA also uncovered that there was no statistical significance on the perceived trustworthiness of the source between sources labeled public relations practitioner and those not labeled public relations practitioner *F(1,242) =1.03;* p=.310 (see table 25). The results determined that there no statistical significance in terms of the trustworthiness of the source when an item is labeled public relations practitioner (*M=4.73, S.D.=.923*) and those not labeled public relations practitioner (*M=4.86, S.D.=.936*).

Table 10 Dependent Variable:
Trustworthiness

Affiliation	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Non PR	4.8620	.92305	122
PR	4.7331	.93590	128
Total	4.7960	.93003	250

The results also indicated that there was no significant results in terms of attractiveness of the source between items labeled public relations practitioner and those that are not labeled public relations practitioner F *(1,241,)=.949*; p.=.331)(see table 26). There was no statistical significance between those public relations messages not labeled as public relations (*M=4.00, S.D.=.889*) and those that were (*M=3.81, S.D.=1.16*).

Table 11 Dependent Variable
Attractiveness

Affiliation	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Non PR	3.9426	.88886	122
PR	3.8150	1.15779	127
Total	3.8775	1.03471	249

There is a significant effect in terms of expertise between messages labeled public relations and those messages not labeled public relations practitioners. Non-labeled public relations practitioners are perceived as having greater expertise than their counterparts with a public relations label. However, there was no significant effect in terms of their trustworthiness and attractiveness.

Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis was posed to discover whether the communicators' gender would affect source credibility.

Three one- way ANOVAs were run to test this hypothesis. The results determined that in terms of expertise there was no significant difference between the two genders F *(1,242) =2.39;* p=.123) (see table 24). The results showed that expertise has no significant effect between males (M=4.92, S.D. =.939) and females (*M=4.74, S.D.=1.12*).

Table 12 Dependent Variable:
Expertise

Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	4.9282	.93909	131
Female	4.7356	1.12132	118
Total	4.8369	1.03187	249

The same ANOVA proved that there was no significant effect between the two genders when taking the trustworthiness of the source into account F*(1,242) =.450*; p=.503)(see table 25). The results determined that the trustworthiness of the source has no statistical significance between males (*M=4.83, S.D. =.873*) and females (*M=4.76, S.D. =.992).*

Table 13 Dependent Variable:
Trustworthiness

S Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	4.8333	.87284	130
Female	4.7619	.99210	119
Total	4.7992	.93053	249

Additional analysis revealed that there was no statistical significance in terms of attractiveness between the two genders F *(1,241) = .215;* p =.643 (see table 26). It was discovered that there was no statistical significant results between males (*M=3.90, S.D.=1.07*) and females (*M=3.84, S.D.=.993*).

Table 14 Dependent Variable:
Attractiveness

Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	3.9031	1.07906	129
Female	3.8487	.99267	119
Total	3.8770	1.03677	248

Hypothesis 4

The fourth hypothesis set out to determine the potential relationship and interaction effects between message strength and gender.

Three one-way ANOVAs were used to test this hypothesis. It was determined that there was no significant effect between the interaction of message strength and gender in terms of the expertise of the source F *(1,242) =.901*; p=.334(see table 24). These results showed that there was no statistical significance in terms of expertise between males

distributing a strong and weak message respectively (*M=5.05, S.D.=.891 M=4.82, S.D.=.975)* and females distributing a strong and weak message respectively(*M=4.73, S.D.=1.20, M=4.74, S.D.=1.04)*.

Table 15 Dependent Variable:
Expertise

Gender	Message	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
male	strong message	5.0523	.89112	65
	weak message	4.8061	.97537	66
	Total	4.9282	.93909	131
female	strong message	4.7355	1.20097	62
	weak message	4.7357	1.03685	56
	Total	4.7356	1.12132	118
Total	strong message	4.8976	1.06156	127
	weak message	4.7738	1.00048	122
	Total	4.8369	1.03187	249

A one way ANOVA was used to test this hypothesis. It was determined that there was no significant effect between the interaction of message strength and gender in terms of the trustworthiness of the source F *(1,242)=.663;* p=.416 (see table 25). There results showed that there was no statistical significance in terms of trustworthiness between males distributing a strong and weak message respectively (*M=5.00, S.D.= .801 M=4.71, S.D.=.927)* and females distributing a strong and weak message respectively *(M=4.77, S.D.=1.07, M=4.74, S.D.=.906).*

Table 16 Dependent Variable: Trustworthiness

Gender	Message	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	strong message	4.9557	.80192	64
	weak message	4.7146	.92716	66
	Total	4.8333	.87284	130
Female	strong message	4.7796	1.07199	62
	weak message	4.7427	.90637	57
	Total	4.7619	.99210	119
Total	strong message	4.8690	.94484	126
	weak message	4.7276	.91393	123
	Total	4.7992	.93053	249

The same set of one way ANOVAs were used to further test this hypothesis. It was determine that there was no significant effect between the interaction of message strength and gender in terms of the attractiveness of the source F *(1,241)=.631 ;* p=.428)(see table 26). These results showed that there was no statistical significance in terms of attractiveness between males distributing a strong and weak message respectively (*M=5.00, S.D.=.801 M=4.71, S.D.=.927*) and females distributing a strong and weak message respectively*(M=4.77, S.D.=1.07, M=4.74, S.D.=.906*).

Table 17 Dependent Variable:
Attractiveness

S Gender	Message	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	strong message	3.9219	.96040	64
	weak message	3.8846	1.19167	65
	Total	3.9031	1.07906	129
female	strong message	3.7661	.93088	62
	weak message	3.9386	1.05674	57
	Total	3.8487	.99267	119
Total	strong message	3.8452	.94544	126
	weak message	3.9098	1.12635	122
	Total	3.8770	1.03677	248

Hypothesis 5

The fifth hypothesis was posed to determine the possible interaction effects between the communicators gender and source affiliation.

Three one-way ANOVA was used to test this hypothesis. It was determined that there was no significant effect between the interaction between the communicator's gender and the affiliation with the term public relations with regard to the expertise of the source F*(1,242)=.120;* p=.729)(see table 24). The results showed that there was no statistical significance in terms of expertise between male public relations practitioners and non public relations practitioners respectively *(M=4.81, S.D.=.971, M=5.05*, *S.D.=.892*) and female public relations practitioners and non public relations respectively practitioners respectively*(M=4.58, S.D.=1.22, M=4.89, S.D.=.991*).

Table 18 Dependent Variable:
Expertise

SGender	Affiliation	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
male	nonpr	5.0548	.89235	62
	pr	4.8145	.97155	69
	Total	4.9282	.93909	131
female	nonpr	4.8949	.99124	59
	pr	4.5763	1.22564	59
	Total	4.7356	1.12132	118
Total	nonpr	4.9769	.94134	121
	pr	4.7047	1.09802	128
	Total	4.8369	1.03187	249

The ANOVA was used to further analyze this hypothesis. It was determine that there was no significant effect between the interaction between the communicator's gender and the affiliation with the term public relations with regard to the trustworthiness of the source *F(1,242)=.250;* p=.617)(see table 25). The results showed that there was no statistical significance in terms of trustworthiness between male public relations practitioners and non public relations practitioners respectively *(M=4.79, S.D.=.865, M=4.88, S.D.=.885)* and female public relations practitioners and non public relations practitioners respectively *(M=4.67, S.D.=1.01, M=4.85, S.D. =.969*).

Table 19 Dependent Variable: Trustworthiness

SGender	Affiliation	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
male	Nonpr	4.8790	.88561	62
	Pr	4.7917	.86549	68
	Total	4.8333	.87284	130
female	Nonpr	4.8588	.96927	59
	Pr	4.6667	1.01310	60
	Total	4.7619	.99210	119
Total	Nonpr	4.8691	.92351	121
	Pr	4.7331	.93590	128
	Total	4.7992	.93053	249

The ANOVA shed further light on the hypothesis by revealing that there was no significant interactions between the communicator's gender and the affiliation in terms of attractiveness of the source F*(1,241)=.005;* p=.941(see table 26). The results showed that there was no statistical significance in terms of attractiveness between male public relations practitioners and non public relations practitioners respectively (*M=3.84, S.D.=1.18, M=3.98, S.D.=.956)* and female public relations practitioners and non public relations respectively practitioners respectively*(M=3.79, S.D.=1.13, M=3.91, S.D.=.827).*

Table 20 Dependent Variable
Attractiveness

Gender	Affiliation	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	Non PR	3.9758	.95569	62
	PR	3.8358	1.18510	67
	Total	3.9031	1.07906	129
Female	Non PR	3.9068	.82772	59
	PR	3.7917	1.13605	60
	Total	3.8487	.99267	119
Total	Non PR	3.9421	.89254	121
	PR	3.8150	1.15779	127
	Total	3.8770	1.03677	248

Hypothesis 6

The sixth hypothesis was set to determine the possible interactions between message strength and source affiliation.

It was determined that there was no significant effect between the interaction between affiliation with the term public relations and message strength in regards to the expertise of the source F *(1,242) =.081;* p=.777(see table 24). There results showed that there was no statistical significance in terms of expertise between public relations practitioners distributing a strong and weak message respectively *(M=4.78, S.D.=1.15 M=4.63, S.D.=1.05)* and non public relations practitioners distributing a strong and weak message respectively *(M=5.00, S.D.=.959, M=4.94, S.D.=.919).*

Table 21 Dependent Variable:
Expertise

Affiliation	Message	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Non PR	strong message	5.0030	.95916	66
	weak message	4.9429	.91906	56
	Total	4.9754	.93758	122
PR	strong message	4.7839	1.14994	62
	weak message	4.6303	1.05027	66
	Total	4.7047	1.09802	128
Total	strong message	4.8969	1.05740	128
	weak message	4.7738	1.00048	122
	Total	4.8368	1.02980	250

It was determine that there was no significant effect between the interaction between affiliation with the term public relations and message strength in regards to the trustworthiness of the source F*(1,242) =.315;* p=.575 (see table 25). The results showed that there was no statistical significance in terms of trustworthiness between public relations practitioners distributing a strong and weak message respectively *(M=4.77, S.D.=.951 M=4.69, S.D.=.928)* and non public relations practitioners distributing a strong and weak message respectively*(M=4.94, S.D.=.936, M=4.76, S.D.=.904*).

Table 22 Dependent Variable: Trustworthiness

Affiliation	Message	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Non Pr	strong message	4.9470	.93697	66
	weak message	4.7619	.90445	56
	Total	4.8620	.92305	122
Pr	strong message	4.7705	.95120	61
	weak message	4.6990	.92762	67
	Total	4.7331	.93590	128
Total	strong message	4.8622	.94423	127
	weak message	4.7276	.91393	123
	Total	4.7960	.93003	250

The ANOVA shed further light on the hypothesis by revealing that there was are no significant interactions between affiliation with the term public relations and message strength in regards to the attractiveness of the source F*(1,241)=.599;* p=.440 (see table 26). The results showed that there was no statistical significance in terms of attractiveness between public relations practitioners distributing a strong and weak message respectively (*M=3.73, S.D.=.883 M=3.89, S.D.=1.37*) and non public relations practitioners distributing a strong and weak message respectively(*M=3.95, S.D.=.987, M=3.92, S.D.=.765)*.

Table 23 Dependent Variable:
Attractiveness

Affiliation	Message	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Non PR	Strong message	3.9545	.98733	66
	Weak message	3.9286	.76532	56
	Total	3.9426	.88886	122
PR	Strong message	3.7295	.88305	61
	Weak message	3.8939	1.36583	66
	Total	3.8150	1.15779	127
Total	Strong message	3.8465	.94178	127
	Weak message	3.9098	1.12635	122
	Total	3.8775	1.03471	249

Table 24 Dependent Variable :
Expertise

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	9.703a	7	1.386	1.319	.242	.037
Intercept	5791.699	1	5791.699	5510.305	.000	.958
SGender	2.522	1	2.522	2.399	.123	.010
Message	.646	1	.646	.614	.434	.003
Affiliation	4.566	1	4.566	4.344	.038	.018
SGender * Message	.947	1	.947	.901	.344	.004
SGender * Affiliation	.126	1	.126	.120	.729	.000
Message * Affiliation	.085	1	.085	.081	.777	.000
SGender * Message * Affiliation	.676	1	.676	.643	.423	.003
Error	254.358	242	1.051			
Total	6112.720	250				
Corrected Total	264.061	249				

a. R Squared = .037 (Adjusted R Squared = .009)

Table 25 Dependent Variable : Trustworthiness

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	5.439a	7	.777	.896	.510	.025
Intercept	5693.495	1	5693.495	6563.109	.000	.964
SGender	.390	1	.390	.450	.503	.002
Message	.929	1	.929	1.071	.302	.004
Affiliation	.897	1	.897	1.034	.310	.004
SGender * Message	.575	1	.575	.663	.416	.003
SGender * Affiliation	.217	1	.217	.250	.617	.001
Message * Affiliation	.273	1	.273	.315	.575	.001
SGender * Message * Affiliation	2.056	1	2.056	2.370	.125	.010
Error	209.935	242	.867			
Total	5965.778	250				
Corrected Total	215.374	249				

a. R Squared = .025 (Adjusted R Squared = -.003)

Table 26 Dependent Variable :
Attractiveness

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	3.654a	7	.522	.480	.848	.014
Intercept	3711.937	1	3711.937	3416.240	.000	.934
SGender	.234	1	.234	.215	.643	.001
Message	.336	1	.336	.309	.579	.001
Affiliation	1.031	1	1.031	.949	.331	.004
SGender * Message	.685	1	.685	.631	.428	.003
SGender * Affiliation	.006	1	.006	.005	.941	.000
Message * Affiliation	.650	1	.650	.599	.440	.002
SGender * Message * Affiliation	.832	1	.832	.766	.382	.003
Error	261.860	241	1.087			
Total	4009.250	249				
Corrected Total	265.514	248				

a. R Squared = .014 (Adjusted R Squared = -.015)

Hypothesis 7

The seventh hypothesis stated that the credibility of the source will have an influence on the participants attitudes towards the public relations message.

A standard multiple regression analysis was performed between the dependent variable attitude towards the public relations message and the independent variable source credibility divided into three dimensions: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Regression analysis revealed that the model significantly predicted an individual's attitude toward the public relations message $F(3,243)=21.29, p<.001$. R^2 for the model was .208 and adjusted R^2 was .198. Table 27 displays the unstandardized regression coeffients (B), intercept, and standardized regression coefficients (β) for each variable.

Table 27

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.771	.253		7.007	.000
Expertise	.072	.059	.103	1.214	.226
Trustworthiness	.263	.066	.338	3.989	.000
Attractiveness	.085	.040	.124	2.140	.033

a. Dependent Variable: Attitude Towards the Editorial Piece

In terms of individual relationships between the independent variable and attitude towards the public relations message, expertise ($\beta = .103, p = .226$), trustworthiness ($\beta = .338, p < .001$), and attractiveness is ($\beta = .124, p = .003$). Trustworthiness and

attractiveness both significantly influence the individual's attitudes towards the public relations message.

Hypothesis 8

The eighth hypothesis stated that source credibility would influence the participants general attitude towards the Alternative Energy Corporation.

A standard multiple regression analysis was performed between the dependent variables attitude towards the Alternative Energy Corporation and the independent variable source credibility divided into three dimensions: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Regression analysis revealed that the model significantly predicted an individual's attitude towards the Alternative Energy Corporation $F(3,243)=23.04$,$p<.001$. R^2 for the model was .222 and adjusted R^2 was .212. Table 28 displays the unstandardized regression coeffients *(B),* intercept, and standardized regression coefficients *(β)* for each variable.

Table 28

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.115	.234		9.021	.000
Expertise	.019	.055	.029	.342	.732
Trustworthiness	.326	.061	.448	5.337	.000
Attractiveness	.005	.037	.007	.130	.897

a. Dependent Variable: Attitude Towards the Corporation

In terms of individual relationships between the independent variables and attitude towards the Alternative Energy Corporation, expertise *(β =.029, t=.342*),

trustworthiness (*β =.448,t=.5.33*), and attractiveness is *(β =.007, t=.130).* Trustworthiness showed a significant influence on the individual's attitudes towards the Corporation.

Hypothesis 9

The ninth hypothesis stated that source credibility will have an impact on the future behavioral intentions of the participants of the study.

A standard multiple regression analysis was performed between the dependent variable behavioral intentions towards alternative energy and the independent variable source credibility divided into three dimensions: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Regression analysis revealed that the model significantly predicted an individual's behavioral intentions, $F(3,236)=23.04$,$p<.001$. R^2 for the model was .103 and adjusted R^2 was .091. Table 29 displays the unstandardized regression coeffients *(B),* intercept, and standardized regression coefficients *(β)* for each variable.

Table 29

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.761	.324		5.432	.000
Expertise	.011	.075	.013	.143	.886
Trustworthiness	.217	.083	.236	2.615	.010
Attractiveness	.138	.051	.171	2.732	.007

Dependent Variable: Behavior

In terms of individual relationships between the independent variables behavioral intentions towards alternative energy, expertise *(β =.013, t=.143),* trustworthiness *(β =2.36,t=2.62)* and attractiveness is (*β =.171, t=2.73).* Both trustworthiness and attractiveness showed a significant influence on the individual's behavioral intentions towards alternative energy.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

Public relations messages have garnered a credibility problem over the years. Studies have shown that public relations practitioners and the messages they produce are seen in less favorable light than those not affiliated with the term public relations. Public relations messages sources are generally viewed by the public as a less truthful, believable and viable source of a message. (Saunders, 1993; Judd, 2004, Callison, 2002; Callison, 2004).

The main purpose of this study was to determine what effects, if any, communicator gender, message strength and affiliation with the term public relations has on the subsequent credibility on the source of the message.

Source Credibility, Message Strength, Source Affiliation and Communicator Gender

In terms of source credibility, the results of several studies have determined that messages with stronger message strength are perceived as having greater credibility with than messages with lower message strength. Researchers have verified that the communicator who uses arguments that contain strong claims that are relevant and readily and easily verifiable will foster more positive thoughts towards the brand, product and organization that weak arguments (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Contrary to these findings, the results of this study indicate no significant difference in the perceived

believability of strong and weak messages. Although the mean of the stronger message was higher than the weaker message, this rating did not reach statistical significance. This study measured each aspect of source credibility under the three dimensions discussed in the literature. Conversely, to findings in similar studies stated in the literature, this study showed no statistical significance between message strength and source credibility. The independent variable message strength was isolated to analyze the credibility of the source measure using expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness. There was no statistical credibility found in regards to message strength. There could be various why strong messages and weak messages had no statistical significance in this study. Perhaps the topic chosen in previous studies had a less positive polarizing effect on the audience and it was easier for the participants to draw distinctions between stronger and weaker messages.

The company used in this study was a fictitious company, the Alternative Energy Corporation, which is based on an actual company the Alternative Energy Sources Inc. Many individuals already believe that alternative sources of energy are a popular and cheap means of producing energy. This agreeability of the general usefulness and efficiency of alternative energy sources could potentially be the reason behind the lack of statistical significance between the strong and the weak messages. In addition the participants may have had prior knowledge about alternative energy sources and its uses. This may have skewed the participants view on the general message due to the prior favorable consensus on the topic of alternative energy. However, this study did not include any questions to test for prior knowledge.

Based on earlier conclusions found in previous research claiming that messages distributed by public relations practitioners are perceived as less credible than messages distributed by non public relations practitioners (Callison, 2001), this study included affiliation with the term public relations as its second independent variable. The anticipated results for this study fell in line with the results of the Callison experiment. Subjects were expected to view the public relations practitioners as less credible and attribute similar judgments to the organizations they represent. The results however showed no statistical difference between public relations professionals and a source not affiliated with the term public relations. This did not support the findings in previous research done in this specific area. The study indicated that there is no statistical significance in terms of the difference between labeled public relations practitioners and non-labeled practitioners except in terms of their respective expertise. Public relations practitioners were seen statistically less credible than non-labeled public relations practitioners in terms of their expertise. In this study, the label assigned to the non public relations was Energy Distribution Specialist. The results in terms of expertise, however statistically significant they may be, might not carry the weight desired due to the label assigned to the non public relations practitioner. The participants were aware this source was an expert due to the label assigned to him/her. Public relations professionals were seen as the statistically the same a non-affiliated source distributing the same message.

In addition, to the findings that there were no statistically significant difference between in the credibility rating between labeled practitioners and non labeled practitioner in terms of their trustworthiness and attractiveness, the results showed the

means of the non labeled practitioners to be higher than the labeled practitioner across all dimensions of source credibility mentioned in the literature.

Based of previous research that showed the gender variable has no statistical significance on message credibility (Freiden, 1984; Spitzberg 1987), this study chooses to add the independent variable gender to further test this concept. The anticipated results of this study were that the participants would find male communicators more credible than female communicators when measured against the three dimensions of credibility analyzed in the literature. The gender schema theory proposes that "the phenomenon of sex typing and differentiation derives, in part, from gender-based schematic processing, from a generalized readiness to process information on the basis of sex-linked associations" (Bem, 1981, p. 354). The findings did not statistically support the posed hypothesis or theory. There were no statistical significant differences between the male and females in this study. However, the means in this study where slightly higher for males than they were for females in terms of their general credibility.

This study further examined the relationships between the gender of the communicator and message strength. The researcher anticipated a discovery that would coincide with the Kempf and Palan (2006) research. It was anticipated that male communicators will be perceived as more credible when message strength was high and least credible when message strength was low. However, the results of this survey did not support the posited hypothesis. There was no statistical significance found between message strength and gender in terms of expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness.

This study also sought to discover if there was an interaction effect between the communicator's gender and source affiliation. There was no statistical significant

difference between gender and source affiliation in regards to expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness of the source. Since the results of the study found no significant results between with gender and source affiliation respectively, the lack of statistical significance here was unsurprising.

A final interaction hypothesis was set to discover if there was any interaction effect between message strength and source affiliation. The study anticipated that a strong message would be enhanced by an expect source but will loose its effect when presented by a non-expert source. The results showed no statistical significance between source affiliation and message strength. The non public relations source for the purposes of this study was identified as an Energy Distribution Specialist. This title however ceased to produce a statistically significant result amongst the participants. Neither the public relations source nor the non-labeled public relations source reached statistical significance amongst the participants in the study and there was no statistical significance with its interaction with message strength.

Behavioral Intentions Attitudes towards the Message and Organization

In this study, three regression analyses were done to determine the correlations and possible interactions between source credibility as measured by the three dimensions of source credibility discussed in the literature review: expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness. One of the principle intentions behind having a credible source is the production of favorable intentions towards the organization, brand, or product. Hence, for this study it was important to analysis the correlations between the credibility of the source and the correlating attitudes and behavioral intentions of the participants.

This study stated the postulate of the Elaboration Likelihood Model that claims that an individual will receive a message, examine it, and form an opinion, while other times individuals will listen to the message, not actively process it, and simply allow external factors to persuade them. This study showed a significant result in terms of the participant's attitudes towards the public relations message and their opinions on the communicator's trustworthiness and attractiveness. The communicator's attractiveness had a significant impact on their message acceptability. This supports the peripheral route of the ELM that claims that an individual will receive the message, not actively process it, but alternately allow external factor such as the attractiveness of the communicator to sway their attitudes.

However, according to the results of the study, the participants did not appear to process the information centrally due to the fact that there was no significant difference between the strong message that contained facts and official sources and the weak message that did not contain facts and figures. The participants did not also appear to process the information peripherally, because there was no significant difference between the communicator's genders and their respective titles.

Nowadays, individuals are inundated with advertisements, pamphlets, public service announcements, and various sorts of persuasive information. The researcher proposes a "theoretical" route of the Elaboration Likelihood Model where the receiver of the message views the information and unconsciously chooses to disregards it totally. The individual chooses not to process the information at all due to the high volumes of cognitive energy needed to process the myriad of persuasive information on a daily bases. This would help clarify the lack of statistical significance in the results in this study.

A simple regression was conducted in the study to examine the relationship between source credibility and the participant's attitude towards the Corporation. In this case, trustworthiness was the only significant variable discovered in terms of the participant's attitude toward the message and their subsequent opinion of the Corporation. This is enlightening for the future in terms of general message design for public relations practitioners. Public relations practitioner should develop a certain amount of trustworthiness amongst their pertinent publics in order to be able to portray their organizations in the best light. The results of this study show that individuals should have a more favorable opinion of the corporation if the spokesperson appears to be trustworthy.

A final simple regression was done to determine the impact source credibility has on the behavioral intentions of the participants. Once again, trustworthiness and attractiveness were the only two significant variables. Trustworthiness is very important in garnering the support of a corporations publics and establishing credibility as a profession.

One possible explanation for the general lack of statistical significance in this study in may be the channel used to deliver the message in this study. An editorial piece format was used to convey the messages attributed to the Alternative Energy Corporation. Perhaps the participants of the study considered the editorial piece general information and by default factual. If a standard press release were use, the participants would have perhaps been more aware of the intentions of persuasion the piece was intending to convey. An editorial piece was utilized in order to incorporate the picture of

the author of the message more smoothly and further emphasis the importance of the independent variable of gender.

Chapter Seven

Discussions and Recommendations

This study sought to investigate the relationships between source credibility, source affiliation, gender, and message strength. It was asked if the independent variables have an influencing effect on the perceived credibility of public relations message sources. The findings indicate that message strength and gender have no influencing effect on the credibility of public relations message sources. Affiliation with the term public relations has a slight significance, only in terms of the expertise of the communicator. Additionally, audiences see trustworthiness and attractiveness as key factors influencing their subsequent attitudes and behaviors towards an organization.

These findings did not support previous findings that have attributed lower credibility scores to public relations practitioners. According to previous research public relations, practitioners are facing a credibility crisis. The results of this study failed to support that claim. This is good news for practitioners currently working in the industry and for those soon to join. If a practitioner can establish a sincere base of trust between themselves, the organizations they represent, and the publics associated with their company the public relations practitioner can turn the present credibility crisis into a credibility success.

Limitations of the Study

Although the study presented findings that highlighted the links between trustworthiness to positive attitudes about the message, corporation and subsequent behavioral intentions, it had several limitations which prevents the generalization of the findings.

Undergraduate students were used as the participants for this study. The use of undergraduate students in social science setting is a general limitation of many studies. Because these participants are not randomly selected, the results cannot be generalized to a larger audience.

Only one specific picture of the communicator from each gender was used. In further research, perhaps different pictures of varying attractiveness can be used to analyze the attractiveness dimension of source credibility more closely.

The study only used one mean to deliver the message, the editorial piece. Perhaps the participants would have had a greater understanding of the message and the interactions between the variables if a different means of message delivery such as a public service announcement was used.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study utilized experimental research in order to determine the influencing effects source credibility, messages strength and communicator gender has on source credibility. Additional steps should be taken to further understand the influences the independent variables have as singular entities on source credibility and their potential interaction effects with one another. The data collected in the study suggests many new directions for future research in the field. For example, the following studies are needed

in order to test the variables and their influences on source credibility more thoroughly and be able to apply it to real world situations

I. A replication of the current research. Further research should be conducted in order to determine the relationships amongst the independent variables. However, other participants should be used in future research. The samples should not consist of undergraduate students in a general education introductory class.
II. A replication of current research with a different means of delivering the message. This study used editorial pieces, future research should comprise of video Public Service Announcements (PSA),press releases or advertising copy.
III. A replication of the current research with a different main topic. This study used alternative energy as the subject of its message. Future research should use a less agreeable topic which could easily provide for stronger and weaker message points.

Guidance for Practitioners

Practitioners can use this research as a tool to explain to the organizations they represent the best possible ways to present themselves to receive adequate credibility and subsequent trustworthiness from their pertinent publics

Public relations practitioners must understand the lenses under which they are scrutinized. The public according to established literature does not consider public relations practitioner as credible sources of information. The research collected in this study and future experimental research should guide practitioners in the way of

developing an open honest and trusting relationship with their organization's internal and external publics in order to garner credibility as professionals and as an industry.

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Appendices

A.1: Survey

Instructions: This packet contains questions about your impression of the editorial piece you just read. Please answer as honestly as possible. Your responses will remain completely confidential. The fist set of questions have to do with the author of the editorial page you just read. Using the scales presented below, please describe your reactions to the author by putting a check mark he appropriate position on each scale.

In my opinion, the author of the editorial piece is (an):

1. Expert ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____:____ Non Expert

2. Inexperienced: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____:____ Experienced

3. Knowledgeable ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____:____ Unknowledgeable

4. Unqualified: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____:____ Qualified

5. Skilled: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____:____ Unskilled

6. Undependable ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____:____ Dependable

7. Honest ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____:____ Dishonest

8. Unreliable ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____:____ Reliable

9. Sincere ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____:____ Insincere

10. Untrustworthy ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____:____ Trustworthy

11. Unattractive ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____:____ Attractive

12. Beautiful ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____:____ Ugly

13. Insincere ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____:____ Sincere

14. Non –Assertive ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____:____ Assertive

15. Sympathetic ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____:____ Non -Sympathetic

16. Aggressive ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____:____ Passive

17. Non Dominant ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____:____ Dominant

18. Compassion ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____:____ Not Compassionate

19. Specialist ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____:____ Non Specialist

The following questions ask your opinions on the message strength of the editorial piece you just read. Please use the following scales to indicate your opinions:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
20. The editorial piece was convincing	5	4	3	2	1
21. The editorial piece was informative	5	4	3	2	1
22. The editorial piece sends a strong message	5	4	3	2	1
23. The editorial piece was believable	5	4	3	2	1

The following questions ask your attitudes about the editorial piece you just read. Please use the following scales to indicate your opinions:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
24. The editorial piece from the Alternative Energy Corporation is informative	5	4	3	2	1
25. The editorial piece from the Alternative Energy Corporation is credible	5	4	3	2	1
26. The editorial piece from the Alternative Energy Corporation is trustworthy:	5	4	3	2	1

The following questions ask your attitudes towards the Alternative Energy Corporation. Please use the following scales to indicate your opinions:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
27. My attitude towards the Alternative Energy Corporation is favorable	5	4	3	2	1
28. My attitude towards the Alternative Energy Corporation is positive	5	4	3	2	1
29. My attitude towards the Alternative Energy Corporation is generally good	5	4	3	2	1

The following questions ask your attitudes about the new plant opening in Fort Myers. Please use the following scales to indicate your opinions:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
30. My attitude towards the Microhydro Power Plant opening in Fort Myers is favorable:	5	4	3	2	1
31. My attitude towards the Microhydro Power Plant opening in Fort Myers is negative:	5	4	3	2	1
32. I like the idea of opening the Microhydro Power Plant in Fort Myers:	5	4	3	2	1

The following questions ask your behaviors related to alternative energy sources. Please use the following scales to indicate your opinions:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
33. I would switch to an alternative source of energy if an electricity plant opened in my location	5	4	3	2	1
34. I would forward email about the importance of alternative energy to my family/friends	5	4	3	2	1
35. I would be actively involved in protecting the environments natural resources	5	4	3	2	1

The following questions will help us understand your answers. Please respond by marking the appropriate box:

36. What is your gender? Female □ Male □

37. Please indicate your academic rank:

Freshman □ Sophomore □ Junior □ Senior □ Other: _____

38. What college are you in?

Arts/Sciences □ Business □ Education □
Engineering □ Honors College □ Medicine Nursing □
Visual/Performing □ Arts □ Public Health □

Other: _____

B1: Male/Non PR title/Strong Message

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY PLANT OPENS IN FLORIDA

Microhyrdo Energy Plant Opens in Fort Myers

Microhydro energy is a form of renewable energy that uses water to generate power. Microhydro energy is a natural source of energy that only requires a small amount of water to produce a large amount of energy. This form of energy is generally used in water rich areas as a Remote Area Power Supply (RAPS). RAPS are systems that provide electricity to specific communities without requiring connection to a typical electricity distribution system.

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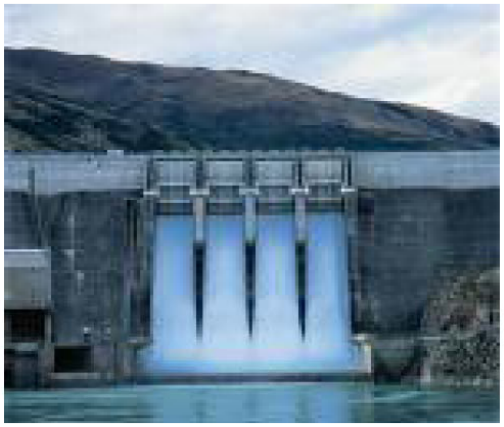
Microhydro energy is a cost efficient source of alternative energy. Utilizing this form of energy can drastically cut the electricity cost for the individuals living in the community. This is particularly important to the residents of the state of Florida because of the vast amounts of natural water that surround the state. According the Northeast Sustainable Energy Association (NSEA), building a small-scale hydropower system can cost from $1,000 - $20,000, depending on site electricity requirements and location. Microhydro power plants can provide an invaluable source of renewable natural energy that can power homes and businesses for decades to come.

Substitute forms of energy such as water, wind, and solar energy are derived from sources that do not deplete important natural resources and from their surroundings.



The city of Fort Myers is developing a new Microhydro energy plant to complement its local electricity provider. This will be one of the first American cities to develop an extensive Microhydro energy plant. The energy generated from this plant will come solely from the water surrounding the city. Current projections estimate this plant will create enough energy for 48 percent of the local residents. "This type of alternative energy makes it possible for Americans to rely less on foreign oil resources" said Michael Smith, director of the Alternative Energy Corporation in South Florida.

NSEA has affirmed that the electric industry is the largest source of pollution in America. Electric utilities generate **close** to 66 percent of the sulfur oxide pollutants in the atmosphere. Choosing a source of electricity for our homes and businesses that generates less pollution by using renewable energy sources is a great way to act locally to solve a global problem.

Hydro Energy

B2: Male/Non PR title/Weak Message

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY PLANT OPENS IN FLORIDA

Microhyrdo Energy Plant Opens in Fort Myers

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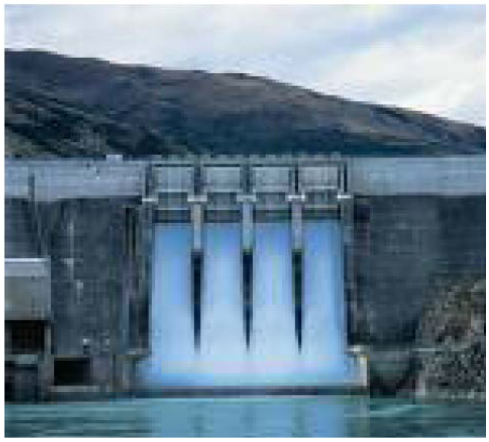
A poll of Fort Meyers residents found that many still believe a vast reservoir of water is required to power the microhydro energy plant. In addition the poll showed that residents



believe that building the plant will destroy acres of natural animal habitats. In actuality, most small-scale hydro systems require very little water to power its turbines and the land being used is relatively small in comparison to the large industries in the area. "We're really happy to have this opening here, it's going to be great" said Lucy Miller, president of a local housing association.

Alternative energy is an important consideration for every American. We are severely depleting our planet's mineral and oil resources, and will need to consider an alternative source of energy in the future. Choosing a source of electricity for our homes and businesses that generates less pollution by using renewable energy sources is a great way to act locally to solve a global problem.

Hydro Energy

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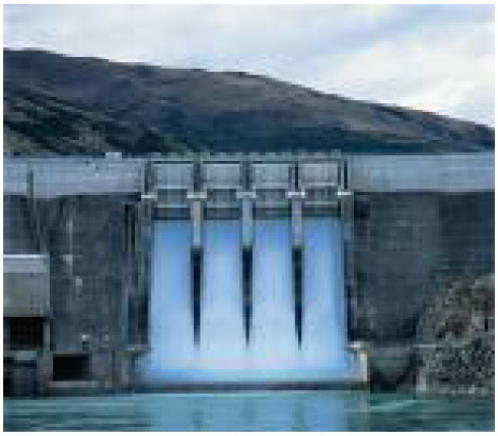

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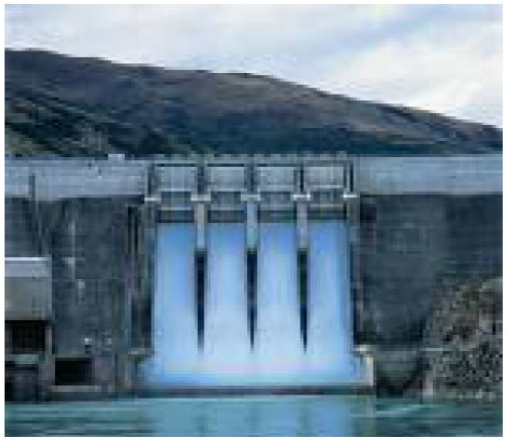

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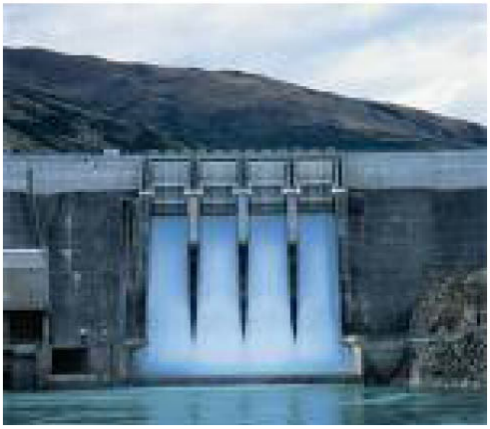

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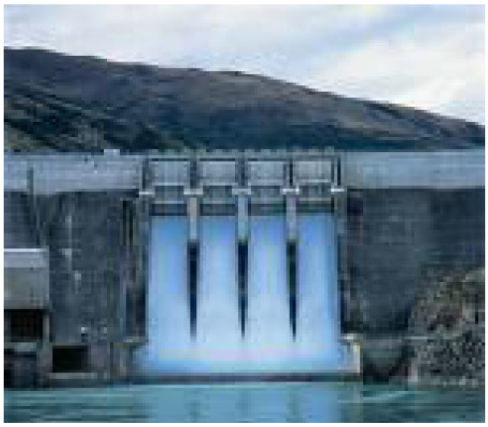

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