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Public relations as the new lobbyist rolodex

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Abstract

Despite its long history and key role in the development of public policy, serving the needs of virtually every sector of society, lobbying is an underdeveloped area of academic research. This study aims to establish an understanding of lobbying at the federal level in Canada and its synergies with communications and public relations. Through a review of existing scholarly research, as well as in-depth interviews with 15 federally registered lobbyists, five senior communications executives, and a survey of GR practitioners, this paper reveals that lobbying is very much aligned with public relations, especially as the online and social media landscapes continue to grow and evolve. It concludes that integration between the two fields is necessary, if not inevitable, and that greater public relations, marketing, and social media expertise should be leveraged to position the government relations practice for a future that embraces the new digital rules of engagement.

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Lobbying is the means by which corporations, trade unions, associations, and interest groups influence political decisions and policies. It is a staple of the democratic process and provides an essential communications channel between organizations and one of their key stakeholder groups: the government. The industry has suffered the stigmas of influence-peddling, bribery, and corruption allegations. However, regulations across several countries and jurisdictions have started to bring accountability and transparency to the practice. Today, it is a multi-billion dollar industry that drives policy changes, affects decision-making, and serves the needs of virtually every industry and sector of society.

In a 2012 *Hill Times* article profiling the top 100 lobbyists in Canada, the essence of the profession was characterized by one insider as "managing stake-

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holders" (Vongdouangchanh, p. 52). Commonly cited attributes of those in the practice included a strong understanding of government and its processes, strategic and tactical mindsets, and excellent interpersonal and communication skills (Vongdouangchanh, 2012a). These qualities mirror those of public relations practitioners in many ways (Flynn et al., 2014). In fact, the parallels between lobbying and public relations are abundant: both sides need to grasp their environments, create understanding between their organization and its stakeholders, build relationships, and bolster reputation. For these reasons, lobbying, government relations, and public affairs are often housed under the public relations umbrella. As Verčič and Verčič (2012) explain, "public relations has valuable insights into understanding and managing lobbying processes" (p. 20). Despite the prevalence of lobbying in the public relations profession, literature about the practice in public relations theory is underdeveloped. As Newsom, Turk, and Kruckberg (2010) explain, "Some people resist considering lobbying a part of public relations, but it is" (p. 11).

Like public relations, today's lobbying industry is facing a transformed communications landscape, where online communities, digital media, and social media are presenting both practices with a whole new set of engaged stakeholders that are powerful in numbers and effective at spreading their message. Politicians, the decision-makers lobbyists work to influence, are attuned to the space and often swayed by online mobilization campaigns (Smillie, 2015). An abundance of examples, including Keystone XL, Idle No More, and the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA), to name a few, illustrate how online communities have become effective in creating opposition to policy issues and influencing government decision-making. Ironically, despite the power of the new social media and online channels available to them, "professional lobbying firms… have largely opted out" (Levinthal, 2011, para. 3). With such big changes in how the world of today communicates, the lobbying industry is at a crossroads.

Research problem and questions

This study explores how communications theory and best practices can be applied to the specific role of lobbying and government relations. First, an analysis of where public affairs and lobbying fits into the existing public relations literature is offered, as well as an examination of how those working in the practice understand their role vis-à-vis the communications practice at large. Second, a review of communications and advocacy theories, including models of best practices and integration, was undertaken to assess parallels with the lobbying world. Finally, the study discusses how social media is being used in lobbying activities at the federal level in Canada, what challenges and opportunities it presents to those in the practice, and how it can be effectively employed and integrated into lobbying.

RQ1: Where does lobbying fit within public relations theory and practice?

This question establishes the position of lobbying and public affairs in existing scholarly literature and research as it pertains to public relations. This question also assesses the parallels and distinctions between the public relations and public affairs' practice, how the two roles complement and challenge the other, and how each fit into the corporate structure. A third component to this question gauges the perspective from federally registered lobbyists, all from the perspective of the organizational management of those companies or organizations with active lobbying activities.

RQ2: What communications models can lend guidance to government relations activities to position it for stronger engagement with its audiences?

Since scholarly literature about lobbying is in its infancy, this question reviews which existing communications models and theories can be borrowed from public relations research to establish a scholarly structure around the public affairs practice.

RQ3: How will emerging communications techniques such as social media be effectively employed in the world of lobbying to effect policy change?

This question examines whether social media is perceived to have a positive or negative impact on government relations processes, what risks it presents, and how it can be used to enhance the goal of effecting policy changes. Furthermore, the study looks at what level of social media experience federally registered lobbyists hold and whether this translates into their line of work.

Literature review

Lester W. Milbrath (1960), commonly referred to as the "father of lobbying research," was the first to look at lobbying as a communications process

(Koeppl, 2001, p. 70). Following the logic that lobbyists, in seeking to influence decision-makers, are concerned with providing information and presenting it in a receptive manner, he contended, "The lobbying process, then, is essentially a communication process, and the task of the lobbyist is to figure out how he can handle communications most effectively in order to get through to decision makers" (1960, p. 35). Generally speaking, Milbrath found that face-to-face communication was the most favorable method of lobbyists for communicating facts and providing supporting arguments to legislators. Other means were also increasingly being used, such as access to decision-makers through intermediaries, particularly constituents of elected officials who had power relationships with those officials (Milbrath, 1960). One of the communication types through intermediaries Milbrath measured was public relations campaigns. "Communications through intermediaries are, like the personal presentations of the lobbyist, also designed to communicate facts, arguments, and power. They are especially instrumental in communicating power" (Milbranth, 1960, p. 42). He found that with a mean of 5.5 on a 10-point scale, public relations campaigns ranked the second most common type of communication by intermediary, preceded only by contact by constituents, which had a mean of 5.9. Milbrath writes:

> A very expensive and indirect method of communication is the public relations campaign. The supposition is that if enough people favor the viewpoint of the organization sponsoring the campaign, this viewpoint and the power behind it will be communicated in various ways to Congress and the Administration. It is also hoped that the campaign will have long-range effects on the voting behavior of the public and thus find policy expression through the selection of government decision makers. (1960, p. 45)

This study, more than half a decade old, would draw the first connection between lobbying and public relations, but it would be a long time before more studies took up a similar cause.

While lobbying can be traced through decades of studies, its inclusion with public relations is in its infancy. In his work on pressure groups in U.S. government, Congressman Emanuel Celler (1958) defined lobbying as "the sum of all communicated influences – both direct and indirect – on legislators concerning legislation" (p. 1). However, there is debate on how to define the activity as it is now. In the political world, Nownes (2006) explained lobbying as "an effort designed to affect what government does" (p. 5). Baumgartner and Leech (1998) believed that a universal definition is elusive; the term is "seldom… used the same way twice by those studying the subject" (p. 23).

A review of the definition in public relations work yields the same result, although there is greater interchangeability between the terms "public affairs" and "government relations" (Verčič & Verčič, 2012). Apart from the definitional challenge, there appears to be confusion over how lobbying relates to public relations and how it differs from other specializations. To clarify this confusion and create a meaningful path forward, Verčič and Verčič (2012) contend that the definition of lobbying "needs to contain all the variabilities of communication management" and offer the following description: "Lobbying is a process that is composed of a number of techniques (as listed by Nownes, 2006), which leads us to an equation among government relations, public affairs and lobbying" (p. 17). Consider that the top lobbying firms in Washington, D.C., Brussels, and London are "actually owned by transnational communication conglomerates, including most of the globe's advertising, marketing and PR firms as part of their corporate structure" (Miller & Mooney, 2010, p. 466). While lobbying searches for a home in the scholarly literature, it may look to the realities of its practice for guidance.

A 2009 study surveying lobbyists at the state level in Oregon uncovered strong parallels between lobbying, public relations, and advocacy (Berg, 2009). When presented with Edgett's (2002) definition of advocacy as "the act of publicly representing an individual, organization, or idea with the object of persuading targeted audiences to look favorably on – or accept the point of view of – the individual, the organization, or the idea," more than 85 percent of respondents agreed that the statement described their work (Berg, 2009, p. 9). The results also showed that lobbyists perceived themselves as performing all four public relations roles – communications manager, senior advisor, media relations, and communication technician – as measured through the 16-item scale developed and used in the Excellence Study (1995) by D. Dozier, L. A. Grunig, and J. E. Grunig (Berg, 2009). While all four roles were discussed in the study findings, communications manager activities were more frequently performed than the traditional communication technician tasks (Berg, 2009).

Challenges in defining the field

Calling for greater depth in public affairs research, Toth (1986) underscored how difficult it is to conceptualize the field. Noting the challenge of having competing definitions, she draws summary characteristics which recur amongst the existing public affairs definitions. These characteristics are as follows:

- public affairs concerns political and social issues;
- its effectiveness is interdependent on consensus by many groups external to the organization; and
- it crosses organizational boundaries (Toth, 1986).

The author suggests Grunig's situational theory and his conceptualization of the political/regulatory vs. the product environment as ways to advance the study of public affairs (Toth, 1986).

Communications expertise can offer a great deal of practical and theoretical support to the lobbying industry. Crozier (2007) explores a fundamental shift in western democracies, termed "recursive governance," that is correlated to changing information patterns. The use of increased communications counsel is part of this trend. He argues that "effective participation in the political game requires professional communication and advocacy management" (Crozier, 2007, p. 2). In a 1997 study of lobbying practices in Norway, Haug and Koppang found that company CEOs were the primary influencers for their firms, with "the PR manager playing a crucial role" (p. 233). Public relations performed the daily lobbying efforts and were present at meetings with officials, with top management coming in for key discussions with decision-makers. It is important to underscore the cultural significance of this study. In Europe, lobbying consistently ranks as one of the top public relations functions, whereas in the U.S., it is among the least cited (Verčič & Verčič, 2012, p. 16).

In the past several decades, governments have moved to place firm laws around the lobbying practice. These new regulations have made government relations more transparent, more accountable, and reduced "loopholes in the system, which would otherwise allow for corrupt behaviour" (Chari, Murphy, & Hogan, 2007, p. 422).

A brief history of lobbying and regulation in Canada and the United States

In Canada, the Lobbying Act (2008) regulates the industry and is overseen by the Commissioner of Lobbying, an independent Agent of Parliament who holds a seven-year term following appointment by both the House of Commons and the Senate (Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada, 2012a). The Commissioner's mandate is to maintain a registry of lobbyists, educate the public about its guiding legislation and ensure compliance with the Lobbying Act (2008) and the Lobbyists' Code of Conduct (1997) through reviews and investigations. There are three categories of lobbyists that must register under federal jurisdiction in Canada: consultant lobbyists, who are hired by firms to communicate on their behalf; in-house corporate lobbyists, who are employed by for-profit companies; and in-house organization lobbyists, who work for non-profit organizations (Office of the Commission of Lobbying of Canada, 2012c). As of 2008, former designated public office holders and members of the Prime Minister's transition team are prohibited from lobbying until a five-year post-employment period has passed.

Legislation regarding the practice of lobbying in Canada was first introduced in 1989 under the Lobbyist Registration Act, which required paid lobbyists to disclose information about themselves and their lobbying subjects (Officer of the Commission of Lobbying of Canada, 2012d). In 2012, Parliament began its five-year statutory review of the Lobbying Act (2008) to address some of the concerns and unintended consequences of the rules. In appearances before the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, a number of witnesses expressed frustration with some of the Act's parameters and with the undefined nature of many lobbying activities. For example, former Member of Parliament Joe Jordan appeared before the committee in January 2012 and requested that "a definition of lobbying" be put into the legislation, explaining that "a clear and concise definition of the activity that is being regulated provides a stronger foundation to then define the related activities" (as cited in Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, 2012, p. 1). At present, the legislation, like scholarly research, loosely defines what it means to lobby. Even Conservative Member of Parliament Deal Del Mastro, a member of the committee studying the matter, explained that his perception is that "advocacy, lobbying, [and] government relations are all the same" (as cited in Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, 2012, p. 5).

The U.S. was the first country to legislate lobbying activities and did so in 1946 with the Lobbying Act following a series of scandals involving lobbying and public utility companies (Chari et al., 2007). Despite being considered inadequate and ripe with loopholes, the government did not revise the rules until 1995 with the Lobbying Disclosure Act, which demanded greater reporting and disclosure by those in the practice. Under this Act, a lobbyist was defined as "any individual who is employed or retained by a client for financial or other compensation for services that include more than one lobbying contact, other than an individual whose lobbying activities constitute less than 20 percent of the time engaged in the services provided by such individual to that client over a 3-month period" (Lobbying Disclosure Act, 1995). Significant amendments were made in 2007 with the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act, which legally increased the amount of lobbyist disclosure and extended periods of lobbying prohibition for former office holders among other changes (Honest Leadership and Open Government Act, 2007). Although government relations legislation has improved in an effort to bring about greater transparency and accountability, in recent years there has been yet another push to revise the latest U.S. lobbying laws at the state level. Massachusetts House Representative Tackey Chan sponsored Bill H 4012 in 2012 aimed at expanding the definition of lobbyists to include "communications and public relations specialists and chief executives of any company who routinely lobby lawmakers in an effort to identify people who act as lobbyists, but do not hold the title" (Quinn, 2012, para. 2). The distinction between public relations and lobbying is blurry not only in theory but also in practice.

Social media and online communications are also impacting the lobbying practice. Dubbed "social lobbying," the newest influence type is making waves and growing, "but instead of corporate checks or individuals' donations, the currency has shifted from cash to social connections, where financial power will be trumped by network power" (Shah, 2012, para. 2). These movements, "organized and recruited through the social graph of connections" (Shah, 2012, para. 6), are having a profound influence on government decision-making. There is a small but growing body of literature on the role social media plays in advocacy, which is summarized by Chalmers and Shotton (2015).

Methodology

A mixed methods approach was taken in this study. The first undertaking was an online survey aimed at federally registered lobbyists in Canada. A snowball sample beginning on November 27, 2012 collected 35 completed surveys by January 8, 2013. Respondents answered 19 questions designed to gauge the lobbyists' perceptions of synergies with public relations, what skill sets lobbyists felt were necessary for their role, their view of what role they play in the corporate structure relative to communications and in general, and how they view and use social media, both personally and in their lobbying work.

In-depth interviews were also undertaken with two different groups over the period of November 20, 2012 to January 25, 2013. The first group consisted of five senior-level communications executives to gauge best practices, models, or frameworks employed; how social media has been integrated into the workflow; and any synergies or cross-work with government relations or public affairs. The purpose of speaking with communications executives for this study was to examine government relations through the lens of a broader communications group. The second group of interviewees included 15 lobbyists registered at the federal level in Canada. These lobbyists equally represented all three designation types (five consultant, five in-house organization, and five in-house corporate) and also offered a broad range of disciplines, from finance and technology to energy and beyond.

Results and analysis

The results from the qualitative interviews with both groups – federally registered lobbyists and senior-level communications executives – and survey findings have been organized into headings based on which research question they answer:

RQ1: *Where does lobbying fit within public relations theory and practice?*

With so many terms used to describe lobbying – and Canada's Lobbying Act (2008) not providing a clear definition of the term – survey respondents were asked to what extent they agreed that the following terms describe their role as a lobbyist. Results are presented by cumulative response, regardless of lobbyist designation type:

Table 1: Extent to which terms describe role as lobbyist (N = 35)

Terms:	1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither disagree nor agree	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
Advocacy	1	0	0	7	27
Communications	1	0	1	11	22

Terms:	1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither disagree nor agree	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
Education	1	0	4	15	15
Engagement	1	0	3	17	14
Government relations	1	0	0	10	24
Influence	3	0	8	11	13
Issues management	1	1	0	17	16
Public affairs	1	1	3	19	11
Public opinion	0	3	10	16	6
Public policy	1	0	1	16	17
Public relations	1	2	8	16	8
Relationship building	1	0	1	6	27
Stakeholder relations	1	1	1	6	26
Strategic communications	1	0	1	12	21

As Table 1 shows, there are many facets of communications areas that resonate with lobbyists in terms of describing their work, with advocacy and relationship building scoring the highest levels of strong agreement (77%).

The federally registered lobbyists who were interviewed for this study used a variety of terms to explain what they do: "reporter… you're monitoring and reporting on what's happening politically on the policy front or politically that may or may not affect an industry" (consultant lobbyist 2, personal communication, November 21, 2012); "a lawyer… part of what a lobbyist does is very similar. When a company brushes up against legislation or brushes up against government legislation that is detrimental to their well-being… they will seek out someone that can try to help them mitigate that" (consultant lobbyist 1, personal communication, November 22, 2012); "advocate… on policy positions" (in-house corporate lobbyist 2, personal communication, November 23, 2012); "(an) intermediary between the federal government and [my organization]" (in-house corporate lobbyist 1, personal communication, November 30, 2012); "a translator explaining a business or an issue to government" (in-house organization lobbyist 5, personal communication, December 5, 2012); and "facilitator… (of) the discussion between the people who make policy and the people who are affected by… those policy positions" (in-house organization lobbyist 1, phone communication, December 6, 2012). Other common aspects of the practice include tracking legislation, issues management, relationship building with key government departments and officials, ongoing communication with government to establish awareness of an organization or client along with their issues, and meeting with officials to provide them with information related to policy and legislation.

Survey respondents were asked to what extent they agreed lobbying and public relations should be grouped together. Only six respondents (17%) agreed that the definition of lobbying should include PR, with the highest support coming from consultant lobbyists:

Table 2: Extent to which lobbyists agree PR should be included under the definition of lobbying

	1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither disagree nor agree	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
Total respondents (N = 35)	5	11	13	6	0
Consultant (n = 14)	3	5	1	5	0
In-House Corporate (n = 7)	0	1	6	0	0
In-House Organization (n = 12)	2	4	5	1	0

Ironically, when the question was reversed, lobbyists felt more strongly that their profession should fall under the definition of public relations, with 12 respondents (34%) agreeing and 6 respondents (17%) expressing strong agreement:

Table 3: Extent to which lobbyists agree lobbying should be included under the definition of PR

	1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither disagree nor agree	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
Total respondents (N = 35)	5	4	8	12	6
Consultant (n = 14)	4	3	0	7	0

	1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither disagree nor agree	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
In-House Corporate (n = 7)	0	0	1	1	5
In-House Organization (n = 12)	1	1	5	4	1

PR and GR integration

Within the practice of lobbying itself, there appears to be a shifting structure that is seeing greater alignment between public relations and government relations. Of the three lobbyist designations interviewed for this study, consultant firms by and large see the greatest integration between lobbying and public relations, with one consultant lobbyist saying, "They're complementary to say the very least… We've always had the view that they go hand-in-hand" (consultant lobbyist 2, personal communication, November 21, 2012). Another consultant lobbyist said his company began as a strategic communications firm that did not offer GR, but "over time we've taken all the things we know about communications and applied them to our GR practice. So we view GR and [registered] activities within GR as one of the tools in our toolbox, but we use communications strategy, communications tools for everything we do, including our GR" (consultant lobbyist 4, personal communication, November 29, 2012).

In-house lobbyists also see a large degree of integration between public relations and government relations. Two of the five in-house organization lobbyists and one of the five in-house corporate lobbyists have both functions organizationally structured together, while the other interviewees work closely, often daily, with their communications counterparts. The need for this close working relationship ensures that "we're consistent in what we're saying to all of our audiences. Some of it obviously is tailored for different audiences, but… we work hand in glove" (in-house corporate lobbyist 1, personal communication, November 30, 2012). Another in-house corporate lobbyist explained that a lot of what transpires politically is driven by what is seen in the media, and while Canadians are consuming more non-traditional media, the consumption of print media by elites is still relatively high, so that medium matters to Canadian lobbyists: "how you're perceived in the newspaper matters in the echo chamber of Ottawa, so it's really, really important… to push (your message) through the media… quickly, because… that definitely drives how effective you are politically, so we are always working with our colleagues in PR" (in-house corporate lobbyist 2, personal communication, November 23, 2012). Alignment of messaging was underscored as one of the key reasons both functions need to collaborate. One in-house organization lobbyist explained that "Our message that we provide when we meet with government officials is in line with our communications objectives as an association, so we have public relations and we have communications and we have GR. While they're not identical, they have to work together… to help us meet our objectives and the mission that we set for ourselves" (in-house organization lobbyist 2, personal communication, November 27, 2012).

Survey results strongly supported lobbyist interview findings. When respondents were asked to what extent they collaborate with communications or public relations professionals on their lobbying activities, an overwhelming majority (85%) suggested collaboration, as seen in table 4:

Table 4: Extent to which lobbyists collaborate with PR on GR efforts

	1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither disagree nor agree	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
Total respondents (N = 35)	1	1	3	19	11
Consultant (n = 14)	1	1	2	8	2
In-House Corporate (n = 7)	0	0	0	3	4
In-House Organization (n = 12)	0	0	0	7	5

Similar to the above findings, the communications executives interviewed for this study also see a large degree of integration between their roles and that of government relations. Two of the interviewees' organizations have had recent restructuring so that both functions now reside together. One said their public relations and government relations functions are now "completely integrated… Most of us have the appreciation and understanding that communications and public affairs are not mutually exclusive" (communications executive 1, phone communication, November 26, 2012). Another communications executive interviewed who is now in a similar organizational structure said that previously the groups were "all over the map… Essentially what we did was brought that all under the one umbrella, which really speaks to the relationship management and the communications function" of both public relations and government relations (communications executive 4, phone communication, December 17, 2012).

Parallels and differences

Public relations and government relations are viewed as being similar in terms of their communications functions: "the common denominator is good, strong communications" (consultant lobbyist 5, phone communication, December 13, 2012). This view was echoed by several others. Put another way, "any good public speaker will say know how to read your audience; it's the same type of thing" (consultant lobbyist 4, personal communication, November 29, 2012). Other similarities included the representation of clients who have something they want to achieve and positioning ideas in an effort to get people to change their attitudes or behaviours.

Other signs that the two functions have a lot in common is the recognition by two interview participants that "the same person can do both" (in-house organization lobbyist 2, personal communication, November 27, 2012), with another consultant lobbyist observing "good PR people drift into the lobby world and good lobbyists certainly drift into the PR world" (consultant lobbyist, personal communication, November 22, 2012).

The key differentiator between public relations and lobbying, as identified by interview participants, was the end audience. It was generally felt by the interviewees that public relations professionals were more adept at dealing with the broader public and through the conduit of media, whereas lobbyists have the political knowledge and understanding of government and its processes. Another factor that was viewed as unique to the lobbying practice was background experience, with lobbyists tending to come more from political environments, including experience as political staffers or office holders. An in-house organization lobbyist noted that lobbyists had to operate within a stricter set of rules than public relations because of the Lobbying Act (2008); in a public relations role, "you're not necessarily restricted by those same parameters " (in-house organization lobbyist 3, phone communication, December 10, 2012). Timing was also viewed as a differentiating factor, with a consultant lobbyist explaining that public relations fights in the court of public opinion while also acting as the "icing on the cake… You're playing the hand you're dealt," as opposed to lobbyists who intervene at the proper points to get something structurally changed (consultant lobbyist 1, personal communication, November 22, 2012).

Another insight into how public relations and lobbying compare was related to the development of the lobbying practice. An in-house corporate lobbyist explained:

> I think the roles are now evolving. Traditionally a PR professional would have looked at… their primary stakeholder as being…the media proper. I'm not sure that that's necessarily the case anymore in the sort of the digital era or in terms of grassroots communications. Whereas I could say that the politicians and the decision-makers are my primary constituency that I care about, but actually right now, lobbying has evolved into more and more grassroots activities or social media activities to influence those decision makers, so I think the two really kind of mesh now. I think the roles of both have changed greatly over the last decade, but I do think they sort of intersect more now than they ever did… they're definitely not mutually-exclusive of one another. (in-house corporate lobbyist 1, personal communication, November 30, 2012)

In a similar vein, one consultant lobbyist viewed the government relations practice as changing if not growing obsolete. In speaking about the parallels between PR and GR, he said:

> I think the two, over time they've become linked. We actually started [our organization] years ago on the belief that old school GR was dead or dying and I think that over the last 10, 14 years that [our organization's] been in existence, I think that that's actually proven to be true. It's still not dead but I think it's on life support. I don't think you can exist by holding meetings with politicians in backrooms of steakhouses anymore. I think you actually have to engage the public to get them to do something in order to demonstrate to the politicians that the voters want it; so that they will be more susceptible to our messages. So it's more advocacy than it is GR now. (consultant lobbyist 4, personal communication, November 29, 2012)

The communications executives provided similar responses to those offered above in terms of how PR and GR are similar to and different from one another. One communications interviewee suggested that "we're all working off the same songbook" in terms of corporate goals (communications executive 4, phone communication, December 17, 2012). Another stressed "the need to be on message " as a similarity, with "both [supporting] each other in preparing briefing notes and implementing GR/PR strategies to support issues management" (communications executive 2, written communication, November 30, 2012). This view was shared by a communications executive who explained that both were taken "more holistically around reputation management… The government stakeholder obviously is a big part of our reputation and success " (communications executive, phone communication, January 25, 2013), There is often "a lot of overlap" (consultant lobbyist 1, personal communication, November 22, 2012) because both PR and GR are dealing with external audiences; there is a need for consistent messaging, but it is the focus of the relationships that differs given the end audiences. Survey findings revealed the extent to which a number of communications areas contributed to the effectiveness of lobbying activities, vis-à-vis those in GR:

Table 5: Extent to which activities performed by client/employer influence lobbying effectiveness (N = 35)

Activities:	**1. Strongly disagree**	**2. Disagree**	**3. Neither disagree / agree**	**4. Agree**	**5. Strongly agree**	**6. N/A**
Communications strategy	1	0	3	11	20	0
Employee relations	0	4	17	11	1	2
Issues management	1	0	2	13	19	0
Marketing	0	4	8	16	4	3
Media relations	0	1	5	17	12	0
Public relations	1	0	7	15	12	0
Reputation management	1	0	2	11	20	1
Social media	0	7	9	15	2	2
Social responsibility	1	1	11	16	5	1

Issues management is seen as influencing or contributing the most to lobbying effectiveness at 91% (n = 32), followed closely by communications strategy and reputation management, both at 88% (n = 31). Media relations and public relations were also cited highly as functions that contribute to or influence the success of GR efforts, at 83% (n = 29) and 77% (n = 27) respectively.

The lobbyist skillset

What skills make for an effective lobbyist? Survey respondents were asked to list the top three proficiencies needed in today's GR world. According to a majority of participants, they are 1) communications, 2) knowledge of government and its processes, and 3) strategic thinking. Communications was by far the most cited top skill, noted by 19 respondents (54%), followed by knowledge of government and its processes (7 respondents or 20%) and strategic thinking (5 respondents or 14%). Scoring the highest on the second most-needed quality was knowledge of government and its processes (10 respondents or 29%), followed closely by communications (8 respondents or 23%) and strategy (6 respondents or 17%). Communications and government knowledge were the two most-cited skills as a third requirement for effective lobbying, followed by strategy. Other skills that were noted but not in high enough quantity to make them hard and fast rules were networking ability, research, critical analysis, honesty, non-partisanship, and diplomacy.

Interview participants were asked to thoroughly explain the key skills that are needed to perform their role. As was the case in the GR survey, a majority of participants (11 out of 15) highlighted communications, or the need to be a good communicator, as paramount. Lobbyists need to be able to think on their feet and deliver a clear and sound case to their government audiences. A second element of communications, beyond the general skill of being able to present and convey ideas, was also identified by three participants. It was having the right communications collateral or materials and using them to explain issues, positions, or data. As one consultant lobbyist explained, "I've seen people try to bring a 45-page text for a 30-minute meeting," which was not feasible given the timeframe (consultant lobbyist 5, phone communication, December 13, 2012). One in-house organization lobbyist believed that lobbyists need to develop "visual messaging skills… to convey data in a visual form that is easy to understand and pops off the page… and to be able to do it quickly" (in-house organization lobbyist 1, phone communication, December 6, 2012).

Followed closely on the heels of communications was the need to have a strong government and policy knowledge, a skill cited by 10 interview participants. This finding mirrors the GR survey results. Because the government is so complex, many interviewees believe lobbyists need to have a fundamental understanding of the inner workings of government and how legislation is processed. One consultant lobbyist explained it thusly:

> You need to know how government decisions are made. You need to know the Cabinet process from a Memorandum to Cabinet; you need to know how decisions work their way through Treasury Board, through Finance, get approved at Cabinet, go to Justice, how legislation is drafted, how regulation and legislation is balanced and then how it goes into the House [of Commons] and the committee process, and the same in the Senate. You've got to know that, because it's important [that] if you're trying to change what government's planning, that you don't waste your resources trying to intervene at the wrong times. So that's a basic. And that's why when you look at this industry, a prominent number of [lobbyists] are, surprisingly enough, not elected MPs; they're staffers, the people that actually did the work. (consultant lobbyist 1, personal communication, November 22, 2012)

Other skills that were frequently offered included strong strategic capacity, listening skills, trustworthiness, persuasiveness, being non-partisan, advocacy skills, networking, negotiation skills – including being able to deliver a win to government while advancing your own agenda – gracility, and stability.

Several interviewees commented on how legislation around the lobbying practice has forced lobbyists to adopt a new set of skills that make up for the inability to gain access through money. With the introduction of the Lobbying Act (2008), restrictions were placed on individual political contributions so that no more than $1,100 per individual per year can be donated, and corporations are no longer allowed to contribute anything. This has changed the dynamic of lobbying. One in-house corporate lobbyist observed:

> It used to be that money mattered a lot in politics, and money still does matter, but because individuals can only give X amount and corporations can't give at all, it matters a lot less. And it used to be that corporations and individuals would write big fat cheques and that's how they became influential… It's a lot different now… People who expect influence based on merely their or their company's ability to write cheques are misapprehending the diffuse nature of power in the world of small political donations. (in-house corporate lobbyist 2, personal communication, November 23, 2012)

This point was similarly raised by a number of other interviewees who noted that lobbyists have had to step up their game, or, as one consultant lobbyist put it, “I think the communications professional is the new lobbyist, not the guy who happens to have a big rolodex” (consultant lobbyist 4, personal communication, November 29, 2012).

RQ2: *What communications models can lend guidance to government relations activities to position it for stronger engagement with its audiences?*

There are a number of communications tools that lobbyists employ when performing their GR activities. Survey respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of both well-known and emerging means of outreach in their dealings with political decision-makers. The findings are as follows:

Table 6: Extent to which methods of communications are effective in dealings with decision-makers (N = 35)

Activities:	1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither disagree / agree	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree	6. N/A
Emails	0	2	4	21	8	0
Personal meetings	1	0	1	6	27	0
Phone calls	1	0	2	15	17	0
PR campaigns	1	1	11	20	2	0
Social media	1	8	14	7	3	2
Testimony at hearings	0	1	5	23	6	0
Written communication	0	1	0	20	14	0

The results suggest that personal meetings are viewed as the most effective method of communications in dealing with political decision-makers; 77% of respondents strongly agree with this. However, weighting answers that combine both agree and strongly agree responses, written communication is seen as the most effective, with 97% support. Phone calls are also effective (92%), as are email and testimony at hearings, which both received 83%

support between those who agreed and strongly agreed. Social media is the least effective form of communications in dealing with political decision makers at 29%, followed by public relations campaigns at 63%.

The communications executives' take

Senior communications executives were asked to share their views on how their practice could enhance the effectiveness of government relations and lobbying. Not surprisingly, they saw value in reinforcing the public's awareness of their organization and its issues so that public opinion would support the work of their GR counterparts. One interviewee stated that "politicians obviously want to be introducing policies that have majority support… If elected officials… do not see a significant amount of general public support… their will to move forward with policy decreases, so our job is to ensure that our GR folks [are supported]" (communications executive 1, phone communication, November 26, 2012).

Alignment in messaging and strategy can also reinforce government relations activities. With government and communications often working hand in hand, a communications executive stressed the importance of having "positions on certain issues or policies… very clear, publicly and… in our meetings with government, and that there's a lot of consistency there " (communications executive 3, phone communication, December 18, 2012). The two mutually enhance the other so that when the company is in discussions with government, "they're already aware of what our positions are on certain issues, because we've been very clear on them in a variety of channels" (communications executive 3, phone communication, December 18, 2012). Another communications executive noted the importance of having those working in public relations be aware of their strategies' political implications and what impact they may have on the organization.

Cutting through the noise

Lobbyists were also asked how communications could better be leveraged from their vantage point. Responses varied.

Because political decision-makers are often inundated by files and requests, one consultant lobbyist noted that professionals have to be creative to get attention: "sending somebody a two-page paper, you might as well save the cost of the stamp. You're not going to get through to them that way, so… communications offers tremendous potential" for ingenuity (consultant lobbyist 1, personal communication, November 22, 2012).

Marketing

Two interview participants believed that lobbying could learn a lot from marketing. An in-house corporate lobbyist said that in other countries where their company operates, they have tapped into their marketing teams to assist them in selling an idea or a position, and he hopes that his Canadian operation will soon do the same. He criticized some of the events he sees in Ottawa that try to pass as PR putting its stamp on GR, saying:

> It is often really, really ham-fisted… Somebody sets up an open tab… and puts up a banner… it's just so un-compelling, so uncreative… I don't know a single politician who leaves one of those things more convinced about the rightness of your position than they were when they came. Maybe they have a vaguely positive view of you because you bought them a beer, but realistically how many hearts and minds are you convincing?… It's just lazy. And so that's where marketing assistance in addition to PR I think can be effective in public policy. (in-house corporate lobbyist 2, personal communiation, November 23, 2012)

An in-house organization lobbyist also believed that marketing principles can offer tremendous guidance to government relations: "having a bit of that marketing savvy and knowing which messages are going to resonate with that audience and knowing what collaterals to use" (in-house organization lobbyist 3, phone communication, December 10, 2012).

Public opinion

Winning over the hearts and minds of the general public is something else communications can share with government relations. One in-house organization lobbyist explained that it is important to demonstrate that a position is not only in the government's interest but also in the public interest:

> Elected officials can be swayed with reason, with logic, good arguments, but they can also be swayed by public opinion, so having PR efforts and communication efforts that are designed in targeting the public at large

> rather than elected officials can have an impact on how elected officials see a certain issue. So if it's possible, it's important to have a comprehensive approach to dealing with an issue. Not only dealing with the policy component and elected officials and non-elected government officials but as well a component of public relations and communications with the public at large and other stakeholders as well. (in-house organization lobbyist, personal communication, November 27, 2012)

Leveraging other channels of support through industry associations was highlighted by two in-house corporate lobbyists. Both acknowledged in separate interviews that while communications can be used to give awareness to an issue or public policy campaign, there can sometimes be a risk to investor confidence in a publicly-traded company. As one corporate lobbyist put it, you may be critical of a piece of legislation the government is proposing, but while "that's a public policy objective we support corporately, we don't want to convey to our investors that there's some problem… You don't want to come across as being too alarmist " which is what may happen if they gave more awareness to such issues (in-house corporate lobbyist 5, phone communication, December 18, 2012). In this sense, an industry association is a better avenue for advancing an issue of concern without posing direct risk to the company's stock price.

Social media was one area of communications that two lobbyists felt could strongly improve government relations. Mentioning a few campaigns that employed social media in effecting policy change, a consultant lobbyist said there have been both constructive and some less constructive campaigns to date around select public policy issues, but that in the future, "the use of social media to really effect change" will take hold to an even wider extent. A few interviewees noted that some policy issues are better dealt with more discreetly (consultant lobbyist 3, personal communication, November 20, 2012). An in-house organization lobbyist said, "It depends on the issue… I think you have to be targeted and selected when you engage public relations in support of GR and vice versa. I don't think every GR campaign needs a Facebook page or needs a hash tag… Others, it makes sense " (in-house organization lobbyist 5, personal communication, December 5, 2012). There is also the fear of losing control. One consultant lobbyist identified a common fear among many organizations and lobbyists that they face when weighing the extent to which they employ additional communications channels in their policy efforts:

> I've wanted to use more… communications tools, but you worry about losing control of the message somewhere in the stream, whether it's me-

> dia interpretation of the message…and the story's not exactly what you had hoped… message control is probably one of the challenges when you get outside of the pure GR dialogue with legislators or bureaucrats and into a more marketing or communications side. (consultant lobbyist 3, personal communication, November 21, 2012)

Another fear is that with communications around GR being "a very specific brand," it requires certain sensitivities. Employing generic public relations without that GR understanding is a risk: "You need someone who understands that distinction, and I think that there's probably a small number of people who get that" (in-house organization lobbyist 1, phone communication, December 6, 2012).

Advice to GR

Communications executives were asked what guidance they felt communications could offer to government relations in terms of integrating social media into its workflow. Given that PR is at the forefront in this arena, with several years' experience under its belt in maneuvering through social media, there were several PR-sourced opportunities highlighted for government relations.

Many felt that communications and public relations could play an advisory role, having been there and done that. Certain areas, such as developing social media policies, understanding social media principles, the need for authenticity, the value of monitoring platforms, and embracing the two-way dialogue were some things that one communications executive believed PR could share. Highlighting recent experience through which monitoring both government and public audiences provided insight, she said "both are monitoring different stakeholder groups and provide me with a broader understanding of what is happening in social media and the opportunity to brief up when an issue starts to break" (communications executive, written communication, November 30, 2012).

Another interviewee saw a key opportunity for government relations to connect with political decision-makers in social media, especially as more politicians build their own social media presence. Another piece of advice communications can share is related to the transparency social media brings. One communications executive explained: "[GR in years past was] less used to transparency. People in media relations have had that experience always…

That very public view… is something that we're very used to doing, and I think that can provide counsel to some of the other areas… because we've always had to be this open book… and now that's required across all functions in a company" (communications executive 3, phone communication, December 18, 2012).

The traditional means of garnering public support for a public policy campaign is shifting: "Politicians want to see broad public support, and one of the ways you can show that is by showing up at your constituency office. Another way is through the media or through letters to the editor, but the way that it is employed most often today, because it's quick and people can do it from home or on the bus sitting on their iPhone, is through social media" (communications executive 1, phone communication, November 26, 2012).

Despite all these opportunities, one interviewee noted that there may be some challenges in giving guidance to GR, because lobbying is "a conservative function by nature " (communications executive 5, phone communication, January 25, 2013). His company has struck a good chord with balancing the conservative needs of GR with the openness of PR, but there still exists "the tension of 'you don't understand this and you can get burned' versus 'this is a principle of good communication, having transparency, having discussion' and so forth " (communications executive 5, phone communication, January 25, 2013).

RQ3: *How will emerging communications techniques such as social media be effectively employed in the world of lobbying to effect policy change?*

There was a divide among the lobbyists interviewed for this study in terms of those who are enacting social media in their work and those who are not. Even among those who are using social media in GR efforts, some are doing much more than others. When asked to detail the extent to which lobbyists are currently leveraging online communities or social media in their work, answers ranged from "we don't," "not at all," and "not enough" to "a bit," "indirectly," "extensively," and "significantly".

The survey findings reflect this varied uptake of social media as a tool for GR activities. When asked to indicate which social media tools lobbyists used professionally in their role, responses were fewer (N = 29) than when asked to indicate which social media tools they used personally (N = 35):

Table 7: Social media tools used by lobbyists personally and professionally

Tools:	Personal use (N = 35)	Professional use (N = 29)
Blog	6	7
Digg	1	0
Facebook	26	5
Flickr	2	0
Google+	8	1
LinkedIn	30	15
Pinterest	4	1
Reddit	2	0
Tumblr	2	0
Twitter	25	17
YouTube	19	10
Other	2	0

Blogs were the only social media platform that scored higher on professional use than personal use, and only by one respondent. Twitter was by far the most common social media platform for lobbying, followed by LinkedIn and then YouTube. This brief snapshot shows that lobbyists are active in the social media space, but social media is more heavily utilized in their personal lives than professionally in GR.

The most cited use of social media for GR efforts was monitoring feedback. Interviewees mentioned blogs they consulted daily, Twitter feeds they watched, and platforms like Facebook that they checked as a way to stay on top of developments: "You do try to keep abreast, because that whole environment is faster… they're free of some of the confines of traditional media, and speed is everything" (consultant lobbyist 1, personal communication, November 22, 2012). Another consultant lobbyist who also uses social media as an issues management tool noted that it offers a way to see how the media is responding to an issue or policy announcement, which gives him "the ability to get information very early to a client" (consultant lobbyist 5, phone communication, December 13, 2012).

Another example of how lobbyists are using social media to enhance their efforts is creating forums for discussion. One in-house organization lobbyist was piloting a LinkedIn group around a specific area of policy to keep experts, government, and others informed of the organization's efforts to improve and enhance services related to healthcare. The goal of the forum was to serve "as a neutral resource where governments can… keep abreast of developments " while also positioning the company as an "authority in this space [that is] credible [and] neutral " (in-house organization lobbyist 3, phone communication, December 10, 2012). Another in-house corporate lobbyist created a similar space online around public policy as it relates to their organization and its industry. There, they invite politicians and other decision-makers to take part in discussions on certain issues.

There were a few examples of campaigns run by multiple organizations to effect policy change. In one example, a number of companies came together to oppose a proposed regulatory policy. The campaign rolled out across traditional and non-traditional media platforms, including print, radio, television, and online: "We had an online site; we encouraged grassroots participation through… sharing… links to that site… signing of an online petition… so that helped build our case to say the public is on our side " (in-house corporate lobbyist 1, personal communication, November 30, 2012). Another consultant lobbyist who was also involved in this campaign noted its success:

> In the span of four weeks, we had 62,000 people take action through our website, whether that's send a tweet, whether that's post something to Facebook, whether that's send a letter to the [government]. And could we have gotten 62,000 people in Ottawa, Toronto, whatever? No, but spread out across the country, it sounds like a lot of people. 60,000 letters on this to the [government]? That's pretty good. (consultant lobbyist 4, personal communication, November 29, 2012)

Criticisms

In several interviews, social media's uncontrolled nature was concerning for some, while others questioned its place in the GR world. One in-house corporate lobbyist said, "I see no value in trying to generate grassroots opinions or lobbying from that level in terms of our activities. Most of our… issues are dealt with in direct communication with the key political and bureaucratic leaders… I can't think of many examples where I would be open to even entertain the idea " (in-house corporate lobbyist 5, phone communication, December 18, 2012). He explained his position, saying "we… want to protect confidential, respected relations with key officials in government and don't really want to be seen to be agitating… through social media to get their attention " (in-house corporate lobbyist 5, phone communication, December 18, 2012). This feeling was echoed by others as well; was viewed as more of an advantage to grassroots or non-profit movements, where members or citizens really count.

Other interviewees believed social media was being leveraged by lobbyists, but not to its full potential: "You have to have the ability to… respond to it and value that two-way communications through social media " (in-house organization lobbyist 4, personal communication, November 29, 2012). A separate interviewee, who is thoroughly immersed in social media as part of his in-house corporate lobbyist responsibilities, observed:

> I think most people suck at it… because 1) they don't understand that primarily they are in a conversation with a navel-gazing echo chamber, and they also don't understand how to use analytics in this context, and 2) they don't understand fundamentally… how to move an audience from merely being the passive recipients to a message to acting on that message… It's not just enough to have… a bunch of Ottawa insiders talking about an issue, but you have to really get people exercised about it and talking about it online and engaging with politicians. (in-house corporate lobbyist 2, personal communication, November 23, 2012)

Opportunities

While critique of social media in lobbying exists, on the opposite side are opportunities to use social media for lobbying that those in the practice do acknowledge. One in-house corporate lobbyist who is a strong opponent to social media's place in GR does recognize the value it delivers under the purview of communications, public relations, or marketing by enhancing branding efforts and building customer loyalty. Other opportunities which extend to lobbying include creating awareness of an issue or an organization: it is "a conduit to get people to your message" (in-house organization lobbyist 1, phone communication, December 6, 2012).

Social media engagement was also highlighted as a major benefit to GR. Referencing his own personal experience in using social media to advance his organization's policy agenda, an in-house corporate lobbyist shared that social media allows those in public affairs to "engage in a public conversation with influencers… If you are good at it, you can help be a more effective advocate… You can reach them with the amplification of people who agree with you " (in-house corporate lobbyist 2, personal communication, November 23, 2012). Another explained that social media provides an opportunity to counter myths that may be circulating and also to reach beyond main stakeholder groups: "It just adds value considerably because it's unfiltered, it is so responsive, and you can truly measure impact " (consultant lobbyist 3, personal communication, November 23, 2012). Social media also allows messages to stay on the agenda on an ongoing basis that extends well after meetings.

Survey results showed that 56% of respondents (n = 19) either agreed or strongly agreed that social media has the potential to help lobbyists effect policy change, which indicates a level of support for the interview evidence detailed above. This reinforces the belief that social media can be useful in government strategy.

Table 8: Extent to which lobbyists agree social media offers potential in effecting policy change

	1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither disagree nor agree	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
Total respondents (N = 35)	1	7	7	14	5
Consultant (n = 14)	1	2	2	5	3
In-House Corporate (n = 7)	0	2	0	4	1
In-House Organization (n = 12)	0	2	4	5	1

Risks

While many touted the benefits and opportunities of leveraging social media for lobbying and government relations, there were just as many risks involved. One consultant lobbyist put it: "The irony is, the incredible potential is exactly what makes [clients] recoil, because it can be very strong, but that's out of their control. It's as simple as that " (consultant lobbyist 2, personal communication, November 21, 2012). Losing control of one's message was by far the greatest risk mentioned in using social media for lobbying efforts: "When you're lobbying… you want to keep your message tight, and you want to have control of that message at all times when you're dealing with the government… When you start a social media program… you're giving up the biggest control of your messaging" (in-house organization lobbyist 3, phone communication, December 10, 2012). The survey results also reflected the perception of the risk factor involved in using social media for GR:

Table 9: Extent to which lobbyists agree social media poses risk in effecting policy change

	1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither disagree nor agree	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree
Total respondents (N = 35)	1	4	12	11	7
Consultant (n = 14)	1	2	3	5	3
In-House Corporate (n = 7)	0	1	2	0	4
In-House Organization (n = 12)	0	1	5	6	0

At 51% (n = 18), more than half the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media poses a risk when used for lobbying. Lobbyists falling under the in-house corporate designation showed the strongest trepidation, with 57% of them strongly agreeing social media brings risk to the lobbying profession. As some of the interview details below will show from members of the in-house corporate lobbyist group, this perception could be related to concerns around investor confidence.

Other challenges cited by interviewees included the speed and immediacy social media both delivers and demands, which in turn has the potential to negatively impact the audience's perspective and sometimes informational accuracy. An in-house corporate lobbyist observed, "people want to respond instantaneously without the facts" (in-house corporate lobbyist 4, phone communication, December 18, 2012). Knowing when to engage and when to let things settle is a real challenge. Sometimes, a situation can be made worse by reacting to something that otherwise may have just quietly went away on its own. Being able to judge the sensitivities of a development in so publicly a place as social media requires thoughtful consideration.

While the upside to social media is its speed, one consultant lobbyist believed "the downside is accuracy. That's the tradeoff " (consultant lobbyist 1, personal communiation, November 22, 2012). This feeling was reiterated by another in-house organizational lobbyist, who said, "It poses the challenge that it's not always thorough; it can be superficial at times " (in-house organization lobbyist 2, personal communication, November 27, 2012). If something is trending on Twitter, it does not necessarily imply something is right, and in that respect it can be misinterpreted. For this reason, a consultant lobbyist felt that "you can't trust it as an accurate barometer of public opinion. You know, there's a saying: 'empty vessels make the most noise'" (consultant lobbyist 5, phone communication, December 13, 2012). This shows the need for not only judicious response, but level-headed response. One interviewee underscored that "the risk is saying something intemperate which people do a lot on these platforms, and it's hard to take something back once you've tweeted it" (in-house corporate lobbyist 2, personal communication, November 23, 2012). Put another way, "Social media is a no gravity zone; you can spin yourself completely out of control… There's no confines on that" (consultant lobbyist 1, personal communication, November 22, 2012), hence the need for thorough consideration of the implications of every action taken online, especially as it relates to social media. Another cautioned, "It's such a buzz word – social media – that a lot of people are jumping onto it without really looking at the implications" (in-house organization lobbyist 4, personal communication, November 29, 2012).

As much as social media can offer lobbyists effective means to build support, it also does the same for the competition. Several interviewees referenced the extreme power social media offers those in opposition to their cause. An in-house corporate lobbyist noted, "In the same way that we can effectively fan the flames of influence, so can others… Social media for anybody who's in sort of a consumer-based industry can be a double-edged sword, because you've given every individual a platform now from which to complain" (in-house corporate lobbyist 1, personal communication, November 30, 2012). The other challenge to those that have been effectively employing social media in their GR efforts is that soon others will catch on, and the results that were once considered monumental successes will lose their luster: "Pretty soon 60,000 letters through a website isn't going to have the impact that [it] used to have. So that's one of the drawbacks" (consultant lobbyist 4, personal communication, November 29, 2012).

According to a lobbyist for a publicly traded company,, "making public statements about work issues is a very complex thin g" (in-house corporate lobbyist 3, phone communication, December 13, 2012). Another explained that while "constantly wanting… to somewhat push the envelope on public advocacy… you're always very careful to protect… investor relations and consumer confidence in your product" (in-house corporate lobbyist 5, phone communication, December 18, 2012).

A final challenge, which has implications for the industry at large, is whether the rules around lobbying apply to social media activities and, if so, how. As the literature review demonstrated, there is a call on behalf of the industry to clarify some of the rules around lobbying and define what exactly constitutes lobbying in certain situations. What does this mean for social media? An in-house corporate lobbyist said, "We're in a place where government wants transparent lobbying. I don't know that it's effective to lobby out in social media. I don't know how you register it; I don't know how you manage it " (in-house corporate lobbyist 4, phone communication, December 18, 2012).

The future

All lobbyist interviewees were asked how they think social media will change the lobbying practice in the future. Answers ranged from "I'm not sure it will" (consultant lobbyist 5, phone communication, December 13, 2012) to "It's changing it now. It has changed it. It continues to change it " (consultant lobbyist 4, personal communication, November 29, 2012). Still, the majority of lobbyists made it clear that social media will impact government relations in a variety of ways, with some seeing a more profound effect than others.

One of the positive impacts many interviewees see social media having is heightened transparency, which almost all touted as a benefit, especially as it builds the profession's credibility. Only one interviewee flagged transparency as perhaps an equal challenge, in that all communication, regardless of whether it takes place behind closed doors or not, is subject to potential exposure: "It's a combination of changing legislation, the registration requirements, the monthly reporting obligation for communication, but in turn I think the… transparency that comes with… web-based tools and blogs… it's almost like you can't assume anything is secret" (in-house corporate lobbyist 5, phone communication, December 18, 2012). Others welcomed the change: "[Social media] will improve [lobbying]… because I think it will be able to bring more authentic interaction with constituents" (consultant lobbyist 3, personal communication, November 20, 2012). One in-house corporate lobbyist felt that there "definitely is a lot of potential" by bringing social media into the practice, likening it to "the modern version of the letter-writing campaign " (in-house corporate lobbyist 3, phone communication, December 13, 2012). Another former Hill staffer-turned-lobbyist explained, "When I worked on Parliament Hill, it was the model where one letter represented one hundred views. Now that equation has changed very much " (consultant lobbyist 3, personal communication, November 20, 2012).

Returning to the idea that politicians ultimately want to serve the best interests of their constituents, one consultant lobbyist said:

> Because it is an air war, and because politicians are heavily influenced in their decisions by what they perceive are the winners and losers algorithm, I think it will have increasing impact. You're already seeing it. You've already seen governments react directly to stuff that's going on in the social media sphere. They get very concerned if they think they're on the wrong side of something. If it's going to potentially cost them support, they'll move very quickly. I mean, people say government moves slow; well don't get in its way if it thinks you're standing between them and votes… I think you'll see that's on an exponential curve that is only going to increase. (consultant lobbyist 1, personal communication, November 22, 2012)

Still others view social media as an extension of the existing means of communications:

> I think it will complement [lobbying]. Like every other tool throughout the last hundred years, other communications tools, whether it's radio or TV, they've had an impact on lobbying, and we've seen examples where people launch radio campaigns or TV campaigns to help get public support for their issue, for their position to convince government officials to act a certain way… Social media's just another tool of organizing people and communicating with people your point of view, whether it's to convince the public to help you convince elected officials or simply to communicate directly with elected officials. (in-house organization lobbyist 2, personal communication, November 27, 2012)

Speculation on how the adaption to social media would unfold revealed varied responses. An in-house organization lobbyist expressed that "you'll be able to target through social media… but right now, it's too… broad, engaging everybody in something that people really don't care about " (in-house organization lobbyist 4, personal communication, November 29, 2012). Another consultant lobbyist said, "I suspect you'll see much more use going forward – you simply will have to – of social media and GR activities " (consultant lobbyist 2, personal communication, November 21, 2012).

Predictions from two lobbyists who are already quite active in the social media space also varied. One was of the opinion that it would be "quite a while for the traditional players in communications to wake up to this " (in-house corporate lobbyist 2, personal communication, November 23, 2012), while the other saw it changing as soon as the politicians fully embrace the potential: "Once politicians realize this stuff ain't magic… it'll become more commonplace " (consultant lobbyist 4, personal communication, November 29, 2012).

What is apparent for those who have practiced lobbying over the years is the drastic change that has been felt even in recent years. Citing an example from 2011 in which a Conservative Cabinet Minister took to Twitter to announce the government's intentions to overturn a ruling by the CRTC, an in-house organization lobbyist explained that "reaction from government to things is much quicker, and as a lobbyist, you have to be much quicker in turn in order to respond " (in-house organization lobbyist 5, personal communication, December 5, 2012). One consultant lobbyist noted how his monitoring focus has changed: "Five years ago, when I first got into this business… I was monitoring mainstream media " (consultant lobbyist 1, personal communication, November 22, 2012). This is not to say that he now disregards traditional media, but he shared that his perusal of social media is now, at the very least, of equal value. Similarly, an in-house corporate lobbyist observed that "it is a whole different game, even in the eight years that I've been here " (in-house corporate lobbyist 1, personal communication, November 30, 2012). What previously was a meeting taken with public office holders, with no formal public record of it, is now found on the public registry. And what previously passed for one's pitch or presentation in the privacy of closed offices now "has to be able to stand up to be scrutinized to, frankly, a Google search" (in-house organization lobbyist 1, phone communication, December 6, 2012). The game has changed.

From a legal standpoint, there is concern over the extent to which the Lobbying Act (2008) covers these new media. Many expect that the legislation around lobbying will have to take the new digital landscape into account: "There'll be a push eventually for registering even social media interactions; I think it will bring a whole new level of professionalism and transparency" (in-house corporate lobbyist 4, phone communication, December 18, 2012). Another echoed this viewpoint, saying they "anticipate that there will maybe be a revisiting… of the lobby guidelines at some point to contemplate this new communications reality" (in-house organization lobbyist 3, phone communication, December 10, 2012).

A final thought about the future came from an in-house corporate lobbyist who believes lobbying will ultimately be strengthened by other areas of communications expertise:

> You're going to have to see people in GR and PR use many of the same marketing techniques that people in marketing use… you're much more effective not only when you're partnering with PR but when you're partnering with marketing, and I think marketing has a lot to teach these guys about how to reach consumers, because that's what you're going to have to do more and more of I think. In a world where consumers make their voices heard in the political process more easily, you will need consumers on your side, and so you'll need to find a way to reach them with a compelling message, and that's new for these guys, so they're going to have to figure out how to do that, and I don't think they have done that yet, and frankly the Canadian marketing industry in general is generally unsophisticated, so there's not all that many marketers who know how to use online marketing tools. But I think that the people who figure that out are going to do very well for themselves. (in-house corporate lobbyist 2, personal communication, November 23, 2012)

Limitations

While this study sought to take the pulse of lobbying at the federal level in Canada through the lens of those in the government relations and public relations practices, its small sample size of 20 in-depth interviews and 35 completed surveys cannot be generalized to the greater lobbying population in Canada or other jurisdictions. Also, given the scant amount of academic research around lobbying in a Canadian context, it is limiting to try to apply or compare the findings of this research to GR studies that are focused primarily on public affairs in the United States or Europe, as the current literature does.

Conclusion

Amidst a lack of research on government relations as a communications function, this study explored the role of lobbying in Canada at the federal level and its synergies with the public relations field. Through a survey of those practicing GR, 15 in-depth interviews with federally registered lobbyists spanning a wide spectrum of industries, and another 5 interviews with senior communications executives at organizations with active lobbying interests, this research has provided an understanding of the current lobbying practice in Canada at a time when the political and business landscapes are challenged by a new digital reality.

This study's findings suggest that government relations shares a common place with public relations in practice. While the overall academic corpus remains underdeveloped, especially as it pertains to Canada, this research reinforces the ownership of lobbying claimed by communications given the myriad similarities between lobbying and public relations (Verčič & Verčič, 2012). What Lester W. Milbrath (1960) first deemed a communications process more than six decades ago holds more truth today than ever before.

The confusion surrounding lobbying's definition continues, with even the guiding legislation of its practice in Canada – the Lobbying Act (2008) – unable to clearly state its meaning. But this study demonstrated that in Canada those who actively register as lobbyists associate themselves with established communications functions, including advocacy, relationship management, and stakeholder engagement. The strong affinity to advocacy supports the findings of Berg (2009), while the interchangeability between public affairs and GR gives weight to the evidence found by Baumgartner and Leech (1998). However, the lobbyists surveyed in this study overwhelmingly do not support the idea that PR should be reflected in the definition of lobbying, even though they believe lobbying should be included in the definition of PR. These findings reflect the turf war opinions showcased in the literature review between practitioners of both practices (Barnes, 2009; Is it public relations or lobbying?, 2012; Grieb, 2010).

Not only do lobbyists have strong collaboration with their PR peers, but many organizational structures are now moving in the direction of fully integrating the two under common directorship, a step in the direction advocated by Sheldrake (2011). Both government relations and public relations reinforce one another to achieve organizational objectives. They both require strong communications and strategic capacity, but they have different end audiences that require different types of expertise, with lobbyists needing much greater depth in their knowledge of government and its processes.

Interviews with senior communications executives revealed a number of ways in which public relations can strengthen GR efforts – views that mirror Crozier (2007) in the belief that professional communications management can improve lobbying. To the extent that they can lay the foundations for a positive stakeholder environment, communications can help build awareness, support, and message-development to fortify the work of their lobbyist peers. It is uncontroversial to suggest that political decision makers, who are elected to serve the public interest, are often swayed by public opinion. If communications and public relations can be used to develop favorable conditions before lobbyists meet with government, it follows that the case will be more sound and open to consideration if the citizenry is already onside.

At present, social media is underutilized in lobbying efforts in Canada, but it does exist among a select few who practice, challenging the findings of Levinthal (2011). There is growth in this area, but several factors, including loss of message control, risk to investor confidence, and the undefined terms of social media's use under the Lobbying Act (2008) have largely held it back. Lobbyists are active on social media platforms but engage with it more for personal use than in their professional lives. Many lobbyists acknowledge its great potential in mobilizing the masses, but few appear to actively use it in their government relations strategy. In short, the dawn of social lobbying as explained by Shah (2012) has not yet fully taken hold. This area demonstrates incredible opportunity for leveraging public relations support. Communications professionals have been at the forefront of this evolution and are perfectly positioned to play a role in guiding their GR counterparts along a similarly successful path.

As several of the interviewees suggested, the current landscape is completely different from what lobbyists knew even five years ago. Now is the time for lobbying and public relations to integrate, collaborate, and bolster each other to achieve effective communications with all stakeholders. Stakeholders, and especially government, can no longer exist in solo domains – they must all be viewed in tandem as social media continues to break down walls and change the traditional concept of currency to one of network power. Lobbying in the traditional way of the "old boys' club" is officially over. The new art of lobbying demands the experience and expertise of public relations and communications strategy.

As Toth (1986) suggested, much more research is needed in the area of public affairs, government relations, and lobbying. This study has been but a small step in that direction with a focus on the state of the practice at the federal level in Canada. A number of findings have been illuminating and offer potential for further research. Expanding these types of research questions to a larger sample size would offer greater validity to the findings.

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