

Networks within the Competitive Media Environment

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Abstract

The goal of the current study is to understand the relationships between media practitioners, especially those in the integrated process of creating, disseminating and receiving visual and written content artefacts. There is a pervasive public notion that media professionals are at constant odds. Yet this simply is not the case, media professionals, such as public relations practitioners, journalists and television producers, have a complex, interdependent relationship that is both cooperative and competitive. To investigate how the cooperative-competitive environment play-outs over time, a mixed method of experiential learning and Social Network Analysis was employed. The experiential learning took the form of a simulation called “The Trifecta”, where teams of undergraduate students in the disciplines of journalism, public relations and television video production worked together to represent functioning media organizations over an eight-week period. After each week of the simulation, data was gathered on the quality and nature of the links that emerged between the practitioners. Results show that a dense emergent network evolved throughout the simulation with three noteworthy implications: cooperation is based on context; cooperation fluctuates among individuals; cooperation occurs through myriad technologies.

Keywords: cooperation, competition, journalism, public relations, television production

1. Introduction

Conventional thought is that media industry professionals, especially those in the creative industries, are at constant odds. Indeed, countless movies portray the relationship between areas such as journalism, public relations and television production as contentious. A great example can be seen in Kevin Smith’s 2004 film *Jersey Girl*, which follows the downfall of Ollie Trinke, a Manhattan publicist that loses everything when his wife dies during childbirth. At a press event to introduce the Fresh Prince Will Smith, Ollie, played by Ben Affleck, is struggling at the podium to maintain his composure while his newborn daughter is crying backstage. The crowd of journalists quickly gets frustrated with Ollie and starts to chant “Fresh Prince. Bring out the Fresh Prince”. After a minute of thinking what to do, a flustered Ollie takes his daughter in his arms and says, “will you people just shut the hell up with the Fresh Prince already. He is a 2-bit TV actor. He won’t be around any longer than it takes for the ink to dry on the pages of the worthless rags you write for”. The scene sums up the preconceived notion that media professionals have a confrontational and combative relationship. Yet this simply is not the case – media professionals in the creative industries have a complex, interdependent relationship that is both cooperative and competitive. The goal of the current study is to explore the circumstances that drive these delicate relationships.

The study combines the literatures of media ecology and inter-organizational communication to advance the concept of the media production loop, which is a vertically integrated process where media practitioners create and disseminate content. To gather data on the relationships within the media production loop, a mixed-method of experiential learning and Social Network Analysis (SNA) is employed. Experiential learning takes the form of a simulation called “The Trifecta”, where teams of undergraduate students in the disciplines of journalism, public relations and television video production worked together to represent functioning media organizations over an eight-week period.

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SNA is used to measure the relationship between the disciplines at various points in the simulation. From a conceptual standpoint, the benefit of the study is that it further defines the media production loop and the way in which the practitioners cooperate while still looking to control assets. In addition, the study provides a practical understanding of the particulars behind the way creative industries work together to create content.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Media Making and the Media Production Loop

Today, the fields of communication involved in the creative industries encompass a colorful and diverse set of practices such as journalism, publishing, public relations, advertising, performing arts, sound and video production (Caves, 2000). What these areas have in common is that they are involved in creation – they are all disciplines that focus on media making. There are many ways to look at media making but the strategy here is to start with the philosophies of Media Ecology. Media Ecology is the study of media as environments and emerged from McLUHAN's (1964) belief that theorists and researchers need to pay attention to the medium and not just the symbols and technology. According to Scolari (2012), Media Ecology has great usefulness for understanding contemporary media systems because the root metaphor looks at media as if they were species in an ecosystem. In other words, media are “the ultimate in open-systems” (Ong, 1977, p. 324) in that they are not self-contained, self-sufficient technologies but complex structures that intermingle with multiple actors to survive (Strate, 2008). Following this logic, media making is not a standalone activity because media are not isolated bureaucracies. To better describe the interconnected and interdependent nature of media making, the current study will advance the concept of the media production loop. The media production loop is the multi-layered, vertically integrated institutionalized process of practice of creating, disseminating and receiving visual and written artefacts; it is the web of relationships that provides access to thought, democratic process and access to meaningful information (i.e., Postman, 1970; 2000).

Taking a relational approach to media making is nothing new especially given the rise in convergence (i.e., Negroponte, 1995) and transmedia (i.e., Jenkins, 2010). Although it may fall under different terminology, the idea is that organizations involved in media creation engage in the development of long-term relationships. For example, Taylor and Botan (2004; 2006) use the term “cocreational” as a way to explain the process of negotiating changes in the interactions between public relations practitioners and groups and organizations. And, Ledingham, Bruning, Ki and Kim (2000) describe the emergence of “relationship management” as a paradigm for understanding cross-disciplinary dealings between public relations and those in other media-related industries. The upshot is that there is an understanding that interaction plays just as large of a role in media making as does design, writing, graphics, editing, and publication (Ziakas & Costa, 2010). Even though research has investigated the role of various players in media making, there is still more to be done (Lendingham, 2009) especially when advancing the concept that these relationships exist within a larger umbrella such as the media production loop. To do this requires shifting focus to theories that shed light on the nodal aspects of inter-organizational relationships.

2.2 Inter-organizational Relationships in the Media Production Loop

The specific nature of how mediated environments are formed and shaped falls directly in line with the way that an individual, or small groups of individuals, speaks for a collection of others. A newspaper reporter represents the medium they write for, a public relations practitioner speaks on behalf of a client and a producer is the voice of a production company. These individuals are frontline employees that negotiate the content, messages and symbols of the media they produce (Cali, 2012). In many ways, the disciplines involved in the media production loop are as much about building successful inter-organizational relationships as they are about writing articles, press releases, podcasts, or PSAs. Indeed, there is a symbiotic relationship within the media production loop: journalists, public relations practitioners and video production professionals for instance work together to share contested resources. In one instance, they are collaborating – sharing resources to produce content - while at the same time fighting for things like story dominance, pricing structures, proper representation, etc.

Since the media production loop is nothing more than an institutional field context, an appropriate level of analysis is inter-organizational (Leblebici, Salancik, Copay & King, 1991). As Doerfel (1999) explains, research on inter-organizational relationships falls within two broad categories. Category one focuses on the micro-level processes such as the interplay between organizational representative actions and the second looks at the macro-level structures involved in the overall system of relationships. Within these categories falls a variety of approaches to understanding the robust nature of inter-organizational relationships.

A large subset of this research focuses on the areas of cooperation within competitive environments (Karayanni, 2015), which can help with further examination of how media such as newspapers, PSAs, press releases, news programs, etc. are nothing more than artefacts created through the interfaces that occur between individuals.

Inter-organizational cooperation is the idea that interdependencies exist between organizations, and the stakeholders representing organizations, as opposed to the actions of any single organization, or representative (Gray, 1985). The cooperative link can exist on a multitude of levels from formal to informal. Organizations can enter into a codified partnership or alliance as well as participate in loose joint activities that bring multiple actors together. In the end though, inter-organizational cooperation involves some sort of layered interaction where organizations build common ground so that they can share resources, facilitate knowledge transfer and produce synergistic solutions (Hardy, Phillips & Lawrence 2003). Inter-organizational cooperation then is a strategic behavior where participating organizations attempt to accomplish some sort of predefined set of goals and objectives. However, when natural competitors come together, such as the case with media organizations in the media production loop, the cooperation takes on a different perspective. Media making, as it exists in the creative industries, is an economic activity that generates artefacts meant to exploit information. The underlying economic activity of media means that organizations are constantly fighting to position themselves appropriately. The relationships built between representatives, and by extension organizations, is not a simply joint activity of interaction because they include a high degree of maneuvering. There is a delicate balance within the media production loop that organizations must strike; collaborating to make media while upholding the individual mission and values of each organization.

Research to this point has not delved into the cooperative-competitive relationships within the media production loop. In fact, pervasive among academics is the notion that the creative industries are at constant odds and the best route is to keep practitioners separate. At the same time though, there is a sense among practitioners that relationships are at the core of the media production loop. Indeed, since media representatives understand the basics of this framework, it is no longer appropriate to define the relationships within the media production loop as simply hostile and antagonistic (Carlson, 2009). In practice, a beat reporter from the *New York Times*, or a member of the media relations team for Senator Cory Booker, can anecdotally explain the cooperative-competitive, but research has yet to explain these relationships in any way, shape or form. Therefore, given that newspapers, PSAs, press releases, performing arts, news programming, etc. are nothing more than artefacts created through the interfaces that occur within the media production loop, the current study asks the following RQ:

RQ: How are the cooperative-competitive inter-organizational relationships in the media production loop developed and maintained?

3. Method

Considering that the goal of the study is to see how relationships unfold over time, the data must encapsulate a trajectory of inter-disciplinary relationships. But seeing as how relationship building is tenuous, surveying practitioners would not yield a data set that fully describes how they negotiate the cooperative-competitive media production loop. Indeed, there are nuances to inter-organizational relationships that could take decades to play-out. This limitation means that the data has to be based on a context where the relationships could be observed from nascent stages up until they become more mature, fully functioning. For that reason, the current study utilizes a mixed-method approach where student-engaged experiential learning is analyzed using Social Network Analysis (SNA).

3.1 Experiential Learning

A commonality among the disciplines related to the media production loop is that they hinge on the practice of communication, which, as Craig (2006) explains, is a coherent set of activities that are commonly employed by people of a certain culture. Craig further explains that practice involves participating in, thinking and talking about the activities of communication. One of the more widely used ways to get students, particularly upper-level undergraduates, involved in learning about the practice of communication is through experiential learning. Experiential learning in this context enables educators to transform the theory-practice relationship (e.g., Craig, 2006) by providing an opportunity for students to perform, evaluate and reflect on communication. Most experiential learning though occurs through internships, case studies and service-learning and presents limited opportunity for external relationship building (Ziek & Fink, 2017).

Students within the creative industries are not given an opportunity to work on creating and sustaining partnerships and relationships outside of their discipline (Hynie, Jensen, Johnny, Wedlock, & Phipps, 2011) and thus they provide a clean slate from which to study. Therefore, a simulation was developed that enabled students from a public relations, journalism and television production course to perform the specific activities related to their field as well as work toward building inter-disciplinary and inter-organizational relationships.

The simulation, dubbed “The Trifecta”, was based around people and events in the fictional municipality of Pacechester, New York. Students in the public relations courses were organized into five groups: Chamber of Commerce, and Pizzetta, Mayor’s Office, Committee on Pacechester Liberty and the Pacechester Coalition. The journalism course included four rival media organizations, each consisting of four students. Finally, students in the television production course were divided into three teams, each composed of four students. Video production students provided support to students in the other two courses as they worked on their required video assignments each week, including public service announcements, press conferences, interviews, and news reports. The simulation took place over eight weeks in the middle of the semester. During each week of the simulation, instructors disclosed a new chapter in the Pacechester story. In Week 1 of the simulation, instructors provided groups with an inciting incident, which was video from a traffic accident involving an employee from the Mayor’s Office. From there the story was built-out week-by-week including the issue of an arrest report, a referendum on the abolition of alcohol and the release of a report detailing the impact of the ban on small business in Pacechester.

To drive group interaction, each course had a series of requirements that forced students to work together across disciplines. In the public relations course, each group was charged with developing and implementing an integrated communication plan that had to involve, in some way, video and news content. Each media organization was required to create and maintain accounts on the social media sites YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Soundcloud to report the statements and actions of the public relations groups. Finally, the video production groups were charged with producing content for both the journalism and public relations groups. It is important to note that the groups were not permanently matched up. Instead, each week, they all had to recruit each other for their given projects. This means grades, which were related to the quality of a project, were in part contingent on how well a group could develop beneficial relationships as well as deliver clear and concise information.

3.2 Social Network Analysis

Inter-organizational relationships are external organizational communicative linkages that involve information exchange (Monge & Eisenberg, 1987). Relationships within the media production loop are created and maintained within very dynamic social structures that are often described as “emergent networks”. Unlike formal network structures, such as those found in alliances, hierarchical organizations or coalitions, emergent networks have no prior structural components. Instead, organizations “are continually in the process of forging, maintaining, and terminating their various communication linkages” (Monge & Eisenberg, 1987, p. 334).

To capture the emergence and continuance of inter-organizational linkages, the current study uses Social Network Analysis (SNA). SNA is an analytic tool that maps networks of relationships as well as the means of interaction that occur within the networks (Scott, 2000). The use of SNA can provide unique insights into the evolution of inter-organizational relationships especially those focused on cooperation within a competitive environment (Ziek, 2013). Due to its ability to detail multiple levels and dimensions, SNA has been used numerous times to measure competitive-cooperative inter-organizational relationships (Doerfel, 1999; Keyton, Ford & Smith, 2008). More to the point of the current study, SNA had also been used in more specific contexts relative to the media production loop such as when Taylor and Doerfel (2005) used it to develop an inter-organizational public relations model for civil society.

To capture networking data, each group completed a weekly spreadsheet that detailed their interactions (Table 1). However, given the integrated nature of the media production loop, it was extremely important to measure more than just the nodes and links. Indeed, one of the major limitations of SNA is that it often misses the quality and nature of the links (i.e., Doerfel, Lai, Kolling, Keeler & Barbu, 2008). Thus, groups were asked to describe several aspects of the interaction including the instruments used to connect organizations and the outcome of the interaction. The data for each week was entered into UCINET so that the evolving nature of the relationships and network could be observed and illustrated.

Table 1

Networking Survey				
Organization:				
Date				
Your Name	Person Contacted	Method of Contact	Outcome of Contact	Notes

4. Results

Among the measurements used to determine network position, are those of density (Kilduff& Tsai, 2003) and centrality (Doerfel & Barnett, 2003). Density measures the level of linkages among points in a network (Scott, 2000) or “the ratio of actual to potential contacts in a network” (Monge & Esienberg, 1987, p. 317). Similarly, centrality refers to the extent to which organizations are linked to one another (Doerfel& Barnett, 2003) and includes 3 metrics: degree, betweenness and closeness. Degree centrality is defined as the direct connection between organizations (Monge & Eisenberg, 1987) and betweenness is when an organization “falls between” others (Doerfel& Barnett, 2003). As a trajectory study, the specific SNA measurements are reported here are done so at three intervals within the simulation.

4.1 Time 1: Week 1

For Week 1, the density of the network of individual actors that represented organizations was 68. This density indicates a moderate amount of network connectivity and describes a network that is still evolving (i.e., Taylor & Doerfel, 2003). Visualization 1 is a picture of the network at this first interval. As can be seen with the visualization, there are several organizational representatives, and consequently organizations, that play a large role in the network at Time 1. Following the visualization, the current study will focus on these individuals using the centrality measurements of degree and betweenness.

Visualization 1

Time 1: Week 1

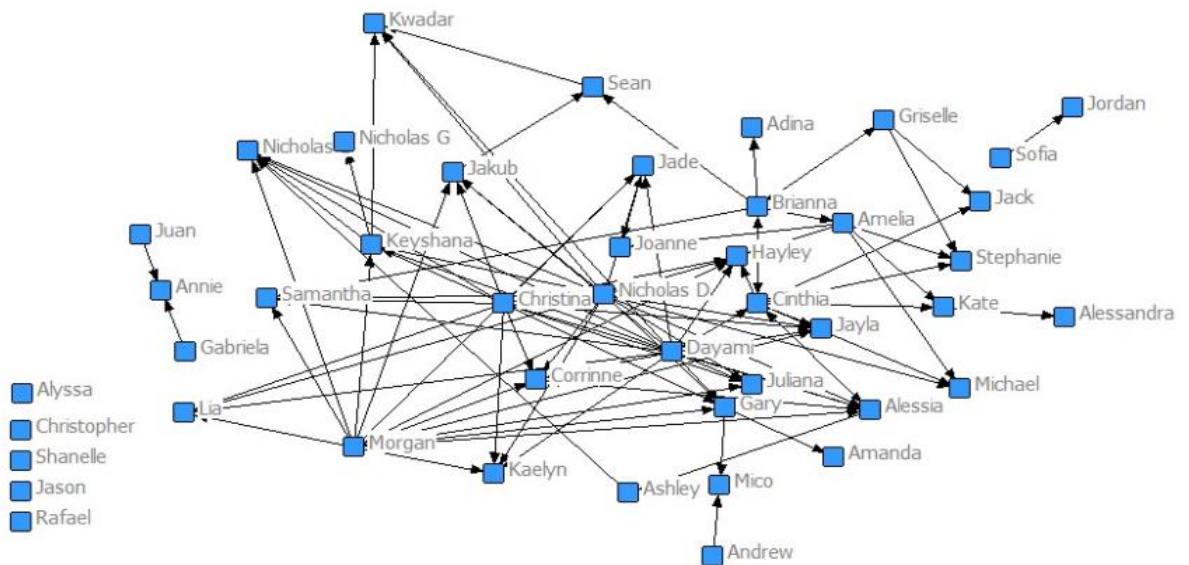


Table 2 illustrates the 8-organizational representative with the top degree and betweenness measurements. Time 1 measurements show that andPizzetta (the sole corporate entity in the simulation) and the Mayor’s Office were the most active at making connections (outdegree) and the media organizations, or journalists, were the recipients of this activity (indegree). The betweenness measurements, on the other hand, were a bit more random in that there were a host of different organizations that fell between other organizations. Notice here that the production organizations, those that hailed from the Advanced Television and Online Media course, did not score high on any centrality measurements. As far as the instruments used within the network are concerned, 72% of the interactions were completed through text messaging, 11% were face-to-face, 7% were direct messaging through Twitter, 7% were direct messaging through Instagram, 2% occurred with a phone call and 2% were through email.

Table 2

Time 3: Week 1: Centrality Measurements

Degree			Betweenness	
Representative	Outdegree	Indegree	Representative	Betweenness
Nicholas D (&Pizzetta)	15	0	Cinthia (Mayor)	100
Dayami (&Pizzetta)	15	0	Brianna (PaceFeed)	49
Christina (&Pizzetta)	13	0	Dayami (andPizzetta)	48
Morgan (&Pizzetta)	13	0	Alessia (TCPL)	40
Cinthia (Mayor)	9	3	Gary (Chamber)	16
Haley (PNN)	0	6	Keyshana (TCPL)	10
Nicholas L (PNN)	0	6	Kate (Setters News)	9
Jayla (PaceFeed)	0	5	Amelia (Mayor)	7

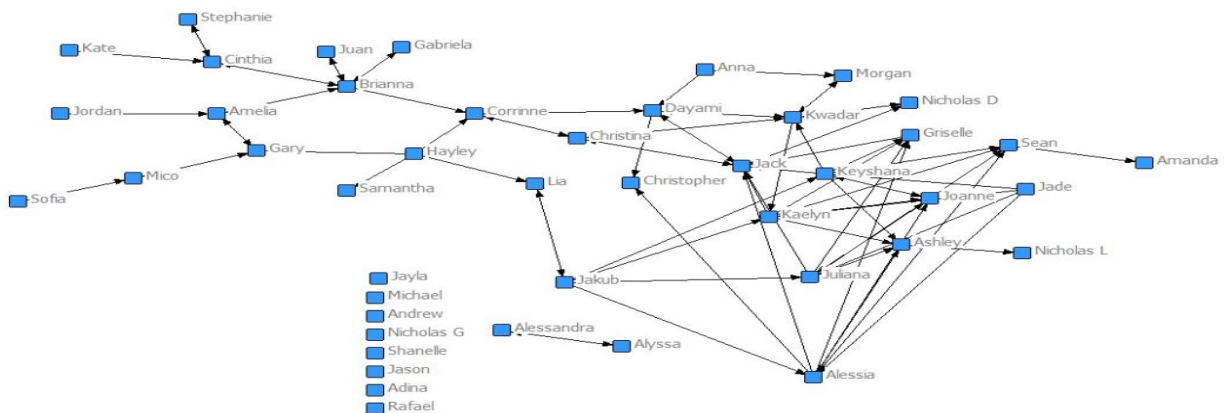
The data from Week 1 illustrates that cooperation is in part based on the context an organization finds itself in. The Mayor’s Office was at the center of the story line during Time 1 and thus worked to building relationships within the network. Given their tenuous position in the simulation, and consequently their need to control the story, the organization needed to make connections with both journalists and other actors involved in the media production loop. The low degree and betweenness measurements of the other organizations, except and Pizzetta, affirm that in the eyes of many of the actors, cooperation with other organizations was not imperative. What is curious about Week 1 is the high degree scores of and Pizzetta’s representatives. Although they were only indirectly involved with the storyline (the police report stated that the individual from the Mayor’s Office was eating and drinking at the restaurant), the and Pizzetta representatives were aggressive in building external relationships.

4.2 Time 2: Week 4

The density of the network during Time 2 is 70, so there was moderate growth relative to the creation and maintenance of relationships compared to Time 1. Visualization 2 is a visualization of the network at this juncture in the simulation. The visualization shows that a slightly different network developed relative to the cooperation among representatives, and subsequently organizations. Table 3 illustrates the 8-organizational representative with the top degree and betweenness measurements.

Visualization 2

Time 2: Week 4



For Time 2, TCPL (an organization dedicated to preserving the liberty of Pacechester residents) was the most aggressive in terms of reaching out to other organizations. Another difference in Time 2 was the activity of the journalists as Kwadar (Post), Jakub (PNN) and Jack (PaceFeed) had high outdegree and indegree, meaning they were participants in a variety of interactions. Much like Time 1, the betweenness measurement shows a multitude of actors falling between others. The variation here demonstrates a shift in the influence of certain actors and a change in the spread of information throughout the network. Finally, it should be noted that again, the representatives from the Advanced Television and Online Media course did not play a significant role in the network. Finally, during Time 2, there was a significant shift in instrument usage: 33% of the interactions were completed through text messaging, 35% were face-to-face, 5% were direct messaging through Twitter, 5% were direct messaging through Instagram, 22% occurred on email and no phone calls were made.

Table 3

Time 2: Week 4: Centrality Measurements				
Degree			Betweenness	
Representative	Outdegree	Indegree	Representative	Betweenness
Alessia (TCPL)	6	3	Kwadar (Post)	238
Keyshana (TCPL)	6	3	Brianna (PaceFeed)	236
Kaelyn (TCPL)	5	4	Corrinne (Chamber)	195
Juliana (TCPL)	5	3	Kaelyn (TCPL)	190
Kwadar (Post)	5	5	Dayami (andPizzetta)	132
Jakub (PNN)	5	1	Amelia (Mayor)	121
Jack (PaceFeed)	3	8	Christina (andPizzetta)	102
Ashley (Coalition)	1	5	Joanne (Coalition)	74

The take-away from Time 2 is similar that that of Time 1: the context an organization finds itself dictates relationship building. From Time 1 to Time 2, the story of the simulation revolved around the sale of alcohol within Pacechester. The culmination of the story in and around Time 2 was the announcement, and eventually vote by Pacechester residents (students in class), on a referendum to prohibit the sale of alcohol in the township. Given that the situation had a great deal to do with individual rights, it makes sense that TCPL would be at the center of the network. In addition, because all of the PR groups were competing for media coverage, having 3 of the 4 news agencies receiving connections fills-in a great deal of information – they were fielding pitches and press releases and determining what stories to run. Another interesting aspect of the network was the shift in instrument usage. The network moved from text-based to one that encompassed a variety of instruments. This change in the way organizational representatives contacted one another is further evidence that the entire network itself was developing and constantly fluctuating.

4.3 Time 3: Week 8

The density of the network during Time 3 is 71, so there was no real growth relative to the overall connections compared to Time 2. Visualization 3 is a picture of the network at this juncture in the simulation. The visualization shows what seems to be a more spread network in terms of how the individuals are connected which means that even though the amount of connections remained the same, the type of connections changed.

Visualization 3

Time 3: Week 8

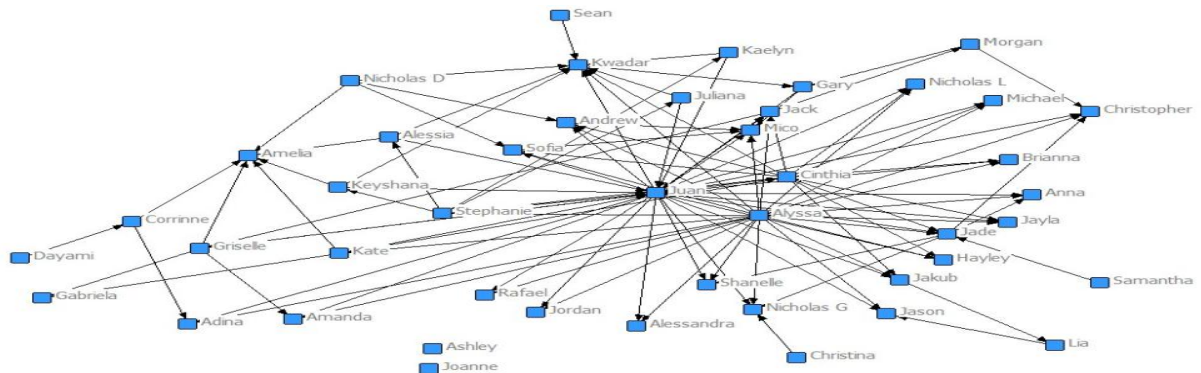


Table 4 illustrates the-8 organizational representative with the top degree and betweenness measurements. For Time 3, there was another significant shift in the organizations that were most active in the network. To begin, the two most active organizations for Time 1 and Time 2, and Pizzetta and TCPL, played an insignificant role as none of their representatives had high in-degree, out-degree or betweenness scores. Instead, the Mayor's Office was the most prominent among PR organizations with the Coalition for Pacechester (an external, civil society group formed by numerous organizations that work together to maintain the quality of life in Pacechester) and Chamber of Commerce (an organization representing businesses in the Pacechester area) right behind. Again, the journalists had high in-degree scores meaning they were still on the receiving end of network interactions. In addition, unlike Time 1 and Time 2, in Time 3 a representative from media production had a high in-degree measurement. Finally, the change in the network was mirrored by a transformation in instrumentation. By Time 3, there was a radical shift in how the entire network was communicating: 22% of the interactions were completed through text messaging, 72% were face-to-face, 6% were direct messaging through Twitter, 5% were direct messaging through Instagram and there was no use of phone or email.

Table 4

Time 3: Week 8: Centrality Measurements				
Degree			Betweenness	
Representative	Outdegree	Indegree	Representative	Betweenness
Juan (Mayor)	24	7	Juan (Mayor)	378
Alyssa (Mayor)	24	0	Gary (Chamber)	131
Cinthia (Mayor)	13	3	Kwadar (Post)	77
Griselle (Coalition)	5	1	Cinthia (Mayor)	62
Kwadar (Post)	1	9	Stephanie (SettersNews)	60
Amelia (Mayor)	0	6	Kate (SettersNews)	43
Mico (ADTV 2)	0	5	Griselle (Chamber)	31
Sofia (Post)	1	4	Jack (PaceFeed)	18

At Time 3, every PR group was involved in the simulation in that they found themselves involved in the story line. More specifically, the big event at Week 8 was the release of a report that detailed the damage prohibition had done to the local economy. The release of the report, which came from the overarching county (i.e., faculty overseeing the simulation), spurred discussions about repeal. What is also interesting at Time 3 is the complete reversal of networking instrumentation. From Time 1 to Time 3, the technologies used to connect the representatives completely changed. By Time 3, the vast majority of interactions were held face-to-face. The importance of this shift should not be lost since the simulation was played-out by millennials.

5. Discussion

The first implication of the current study is how organizations within the media production loop alternate positions over time. In other words, organizations might be a focal participant at one point in time and a bystander at another, i.e., organizations are adapting by forging new links and dropping dysfunctional ones (Contractor, Wasserman & Faust, 2006). The upshot is that cooperation among organizations within the media production loop seems to be based on the context, or state of activity, an organization finds themselves in. Cooperation, whether it occurs with shared mission or shared power (Heath & Sias, 1999), revolves around the attributes of the environment. For example, sometimes organizations are embroiled in a controversy, where communication is constitutive of the situation and not just a response (Ziek, 2015). Sometimes organizations are involved in crisis, which is an unexpected, non-routine event that creates high levels of uncertainty and threatens priority goals (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 1998). Sometimes organizations are in a state that is less dramatic such as when they are maintaining operational strategy or undergoing first-order change such as minor administrative, technology, product and human resource (Zorn, Page & Cheney, 1999). The result is that the state of activity gives rise to the strategic dimensions of cooperation.

The second implication of the study revolves around the changing nature of the spokesperson. The spokesperson, or the individual charged with networking, was not appointed prior to the simulation. The spokesperson was assigned internally by organizational members. Even then, the individual charged with external networking fluctuated week to week – no group had one designed spokesperson. This is a tricky aspect of the media production loop to analyze. While the spokesperson in the media-organization matrix is consistently recognized in media studies, discussions typically reside within the framework of media relations (Warburton & Troester, 1997).

This means, how journalists and television producers network among themselves, or with individuals in other creative industries, is not a main concern for researchers. There are indeed hints of the importance relationships play within the research on the advent of new forms of journalism, i.e., traditional vs public (Nip, 2006) but these are not fully developed or formalized views. However, as can be seen here, individuals act as proxies for all types of organizations in media production loop. More to this point, the role of the spokesperson, no matter what industry they hail from, fluctuates over time and relative to the content being created.

The final point of discussion relates to the technology that facilitated collaboration among the organizations. Aakhus and Ziek (2009) explain that as organizations engage in relations outside of normal states of activity, they build an infrastructure for communication. The infrastructure for communication is a repertoire of materials that act as a tacit framework for the preferred forms of communicative strategy and instrumentation among a community of organizations. One of the elements of the infrastructure for communication are the instruments, i.e., delivery systems (Hutchby, 1984), that enable organizations to interact. The current study shows that instrumentality shifts a great deal over time. Although the foundation of the media production loop was built on two technologies (text messaging and face-to-face), at one time or another, the dominance of these technologies flip-flopped. At first, the network relied heavily on text messaging and by the end of the simulation, the network was built on face-to-face interactions. It seems that as the interpersonal relationships among the spokespersons matured, so too did the choice in instruments. Text-based communication is an asynchronous one-way message delivery system with low social presence and thus low information richness. Face-to-face communication facilitates synchronous communication and high social presence. The cues gained from face-to-face communication are the foundation for a more robust interaction. It is out of the scope of the current paper to determine if the quality of the cooperation simultaneously increased with the quality in instruments. It is certainly interesting to note that the entire network shifted the way cooperation was enacted as time wore on especially considering that the simulation consisted of millennials.

Since the current study analyzed the trajectory of relationships, the idea was to speed-up the process. What might take years to develop had to happen within a finite amount of time. This is a major limitation of the current study. The limitation was mitigated by the fact that to investigate how relationships play-out over time takes creativity. In addition, compared to seasoned professionals, students have limited experience in how to build and maintain beneficial inter-organizational relationships. Most experiential learning in the creative industries focuses on producing and reproduction instruments and tactics and now how to gain access to, and negotiate, a network of professionals. This second limitation is balanced by the fact that to build any type of academic understanding starts with exploration first. The goal of the study was to do precisely that: to describe the process of inter-organizational relationship building relative to the media production loop.

6. Conclusion

The current study does well to describe the ebbs and flows of cooperative-competitive inter-organizational relationships within the media production loop. It does not tell us much about the impact relationships have on the quality of media that are produced within the loop. As Picard (2005) describes, a multitude of factors, such as cost economics, technological features, strategic approach and management quality have been associated to the ultimate excellence and success of a media property. This leads to a possible next step, which is to determine how inter-organizational relationships in the creative industries contribute to the quality of media making. Beyond value and worth, the current study also does not say much about best practices. According to Seeger (2006), best practices in the creative industries are generally practice-driven “but may also be grounded in systemic research and a grounded theoretical approach” (p. 233). This is yet another avenue to be taken as future studies can begin to identify standards of excellence relative to the relationships within the media production loop so that improvements can be made to reach those standards.

Although the scene from *Jersey Girl* is highly stylized for comedic effect, the underlying narrative rings true. There is a preconceived notion among many that individuals in the creative industries that they are at constant odds. However, given that media are open systems, relationships are just as crucial to their creation as anything else. Conversely, Ollie, the chanting journalists, and the transposed television actors, need each other to fill their own coffers. Simply accepting that inter-organizational relationships play an important role in the media production loop is not enough. There needs to be empirical evidence about how these relationships evolve and the impact they have on media making. The current study was a step in this direction but certainly more need to be taken.

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