



Arab American University of Palestine
Faculty of Graduate Studies
Contemporary Public Relations Program

**MEDIA RELATIONS AS A STRATEGIC TOOL TO
MANAGE AND CONFRONT EXTERNAL RUMORS IN
THE PALESTINIAN JUSTICE SECTOR**

by

Suhair A. H. Abu Awad

Supervisor

Dr. Elias Kukali

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requirements for the Master's degree in Contemporary Public
Relations

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Media relations as a strategic tool to manage and confront external rumors in the Palestinian Justice Sector

By

Suhair A. H. Abu Awad

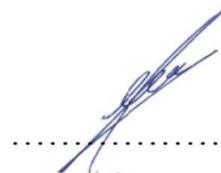
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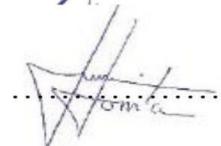
1. Supervisor:

Dr. Elias Kukali



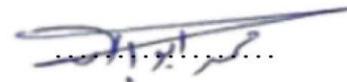
2. Internal Examiner:

Dr. Hussein Alahmad



3. External Examiner:

Dr. Mohammad Abu Alrob

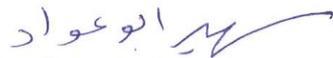


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Student's name:

Suhair A. H. Abu Awad

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Acknowledgment

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَاللَّهُ أَخْرَجَكُمْ مِنْ بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ ۗ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

It is He who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when ye knew nothing; and He gave you hearing and sight and intelligence and affection: that ye may give thanks

I acknowledge the contributions of several quarters acting in the domain of media and public relations, and I greatly appreciate the opportunity given by the Palestinian Justice Sector intuitions to interview the practitioners of media relations and public relations.

This work is the fruit of countless hours of work, perseverance, and commitment. It is proudly dedicated to my family and to the Faculty of Contemporary Public Relations and the academic staff of Arab American University in Ramallah.

One person has to be thanked with higher intelligibility; this study would not be complete without the help, availability, and support of Dr. Elias Kukali. I am very grateful to him for his contribution to this work.

Last but not least, very special thanks to my sweetheart, my daughter Zeina, for being there for me and for keep telling me that I am her role model. Thank you for the strength and motivation you have given me to keep striving.

Abstract

This qualitative study investigated media relations as a strategic tool to manage and confront external rumors in the Palestinian Justice Sector institutions and how media and public relations practitioners employ them. Therefore, this study aimed to understand the reality of media relations in the justice sector, highlight its significance as a strategic tool, and, most importantly, how to employ media relations strategies sufficiently and effectively.

The researcher achieved the aim of this study by building the interview questions on (a) the assumptions of inoculation theory as a defensive plan to manage external rumors, (b) the multiple levels of the Mediating Model to focus on the relationship with journalists and their media firms, (c) the assumptions of image restoration theory as an attack plan to confront external rumors. Furthermore, this study conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews and chose purposive sampling to interview experienced media relations and public relations practitioners serving at the Palestinian Justice Sector. The constant comparative method was used for interview analysis, in which the collected data were categorized in accordance to the assumptions of each theory, then the categories were interpreted into themes.

The main finding of this study revealed that the majority of the institutions of the Palestinian Justice Sector lacks a clarity in media relations strategies regarding managing and confronting external rumors. In addition, most of the interviewees agreed that media and public relations in official Palestinian institutions are weak, absent, and marginalized and that the practitioners lack powers and free space.

Furthermore, the findings uncovered many external constraints and obstacles that hinder the flow of work in legal institutions and they are beyond the control of the practitioners

in Justice Sector institutions, most significant examples are bureaucracy, legal limitations of publishing, the absence of Legislative Council and last but not least, the Israeli Occupation.

Keywords

Media relations, Justice Sector, External Rumors, Palestinian institutions, Journalists, Inoculation, The Mediation the Media Model, Image Restoration.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

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Opening Section

Due to the rise of new technologies and social media, which caused dramatic changes in many fields of work, most institutions and organizations have tried to employ best practices in the media and public relations field to manage and confront crises, external rumors in particular. As a result, within the past ten years, “*media relations*” managed to impose a new perspective on the practitioner-journalist relationship; and be a strategic tool for public relations practitioners in formal and informal institutions worldwide.

However, the transition of media relations in the Palestinian context from being considered one of the public relations’ activities toward professionalism is relatively slow. It refers to the lack of clarity in media relations strategies in the region and the few studies and references in regard.

Accordingly, this study investigates media relations in Palestinian Justice Sector institutions and how media relations and public relations practitioners utilize it. By the end of this study, the researcher aims primarily (a) to understand the reality of media relations in the justice sector and (b) to highlight its significance as a strategic tool. Moreover, (c) to emphasize the importance of employing inoculation and image restoration strategies sufficiently and effectively. Finally, (d) to shed light on the mediating model as the backbone to reduce the damage resulting from external rumors and help manage and confront them strategically.

This chapter starts with the background for the topic. Afterward, the study presents the theoretical background for helping formulate study and instrument questions. Then, it continues with the problem the researcher is trying to solve through her study. The study's objectives and questions follow the researcher's intentions regarding the solution to the

problem at hand. Furthermore, the sections above drive the conceptual framework, which pictures the researcher's intended contributions to advancing knowledge. Finally, it shed light on the assumptions taken for granted by the researcher, the limitation and delimitations of the study, and chapters' organization.

Study Background

Why is it essential to tackle the field of media relations in Palestinian Justice Sector institutions? Are the practitioners working in this field embracing scientific models of media relations?

Media relation is considered a fundamental function for public relations practitioners, and it covers all types of actions, including maintaining and updating media contacts, disseminating news releases, organizing press conferences, offering content, and responding to media queries. However, most studies focus on tactics rather than strategies and are primarily based on practitioners' experiences (Pang *et al.*, 2014). Today, organizations explore new practices beyond traditional media relations; they also produce newsworthy content to promote their brand or image by implementing journalists' skills, which removes boundaries between journalism, public relations, and advertising (Zerfass *et al.*, 2016). However, informal media relations institutions have been mandated to ministers and their departments (Marland, 2017). This mandate creates obstacles in processing research, mainly when scholars and academics depend on government communications data and news stories subjected to rumors.

The term “rumor” has been defined in many ways. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defined rumor as "talk or opinion widely disseminated with no discernible source" (Dictionary,

M.W., 2002). Other definitions perceive rumors as “stories whose truthfulness is ambiguous or never confirmed. This kind of false information is widely propagated on Online Social Networks” (Zannettou *et al.*, 2019). Recent studies have found that rumors during reconstruction and layoffs had harmful effects and the need for rumors’ control during change was essential (DiFonzo *et al.*, 2000).

“External rumors” have arisen from external public opinion. These are all information news that is inaccurate and anonymous. These are transmitted by individuals and significantly impact public facilities' performance. These are usually artificial and spread by chance or thoughtful and purposeful (Hindawy, 2021, p. 5).

The most dangerous rumors result from organized, planned, and deliberate campaigns. Put into action by bodies or organizations that have the information that achieves their goals by publishing artificial and anonymous information and news, they may contain a small portion of truth distort or influence public opinion (Hindawy, 2021). Therefore, unsubstantiated or not, rumors can create unprecedented vulnerability for the organization (Vafeiadis *et al.*, 2019).

Palestinian Justice Sector is a ‘fertile land’ for spreading rumors due to the sensitivity and confidentiality for most of its work and procedures, not to mention the lack of public awareness in regulations and laws that regulate the work of these institutions. Hence, this study addresses the topics of media relations as a strategic tool in general and media relations in formal institutions in the Palestinian Justice Sector in specific; false information and fake news in general and external rumors in specific. The researcher uses a methodology employed in several previous kinds of research on media relations and

public relations and is based on persuasive and crisis management theories in addition to a media model inspired by the theory of influence.

Theoretical Background

The current study started with a general research question embedded within a general statement at the beginning of this study and followed by selecting the relevant site(s) and subject (i.e., Justice Sector Institutions). A third step included collecting data from in-depth interviews with Public Relations practitioners in Justice Institutions. In this step, the researcher included detailed notes or transcripts of interviews. The fourth step included the interpretation of data. The fifth one was about the conceptual and theoretical work, where certain concepts and hypotheses emerged. Finally, the researcher ended up writing the findings and conclusions to illustrate the credibility and significance of the interpretations offered by the researcher.

The study used the following theories and models to better understand and analyze the phenomena under study, frame the study methodology, and build and construct its' study and interview questions.

Inoculation Theory

Research has established the inoculation theory as one of the most recognizable theories in persuasion and resistance research. It is a strategic application in several applied contexts, including public relations. The success of inoculation depends on two key elements, threat, and counterargument (Ivanov *et al.*, 2020).

Threat

McGuire (1964) suggested, Threat is the motivating force that initiates the inoculation-based process of resistance by delivering a “shock value” to the inoculation recipient, which McGuire defined as the person's realization of attitudinal vulnerability. In other words, the threat presented is intended to inspire the individual to take action in attitudinal defense-building to preserve his or her attitudinal position when rendered to counter attitudinal persuasive attempts.

Counterargument

According to McGuire, the individual would proceed to build and accumulate counterarguments to the forthcoming challenges, thus preparing the inoculated individual to better protect the attitude (Belief, intent, opinion, behavior, and more; henceforth referred only as attitude to avoid repetitiveness) in place (Ivanov, Parker, & Dillingham, 2020, p. 14).

The inoculation message is designed to evoke a threat that acts as a motivational aspect that inspires the individual to enhance his or her defenses in preparation for future attitudinal challenges. It also supplies the individual with motivation and counterarguing practice, contributing to attitudinal resistance (Ivanov *et al.*, 2020).

In line with the study's significance, inoculation can be applied as a strategic tool in any context, including the justice sector, which provides the need to protect, form, and defend individuals' attitudes. Great attention must be given to the ability of inoculation messages that protect individuals against media misinformation and external rumors as well. The assumptions of the Inoculation Theory:

- 1) How do Justice Sector institutions use the “threat on value” strategy to persuade the media not to be persuaded by the external rumors?
- 2) How do Justice Sector institutions provide media with a counterargument for external rumors in its messages?
- 3) How often does an institution match the counterargument in its messages with the actual external rumors that will arise?
- 4) How do the media cooperate with the institution?

The ‘Mediating the Media’ Model

According to Pang *et al.* (2014), The Mediating the Media Model, inspired by the theory of influence, has three assumptions: media relations practitioners must recognize the need to engage in proactive media relations, consider the cultivating of good media relations is their responsibility, understand how journalists work, and they operate their work environment. The model identified two influences: *first*, the internal influences include journalist mindset, journalist routine, and newsroom routine; *second*, the external influences include extra-media forces and media ideology.

Internal Influences

The journalist mindset comprises journalists’ background and characteristics that influence what they perceive as news and what kind of content is relevant to their audience, determining how they select news. Therefore, practitioners need to understand how journalists write and make news and provide exclusive stories, timely and well-written information, and easy accessibility. These will inevitably deflect on interpersonal relationships and professional work ethics.

Journalist routine refers to deadlines, publishing balanced stories and impartial stories. Hence, practitioners need to provide journalists with immediate information, footage, story ideas and meet their deadlines. Otherwise, practitioners will lose the opportunity for media coverage for their organization and lose journalists' trust.

The newsroom routine is based on the idea that each newsroom has different workers such as editors, copywriters, and sub-editors who work on each story. Practitioners may directly influence editorial decisions and contact editors by understanding where the power that decides news output lies. Moreover, they should build relations with administrators, camera crew, and photographers to ensure maximum coverage.

External Influences

Extra-media forces include the relationship between organizations and media foundations, market forces, government restrictions and regulations, the size of the media industry, and competition. Legal constraints restrict what journalists could use as information in their stories and reports. Practitioners need to understand the legal frameworks, so they know the limits of their organizations to be positioned on media and use credible sources that work well for journalists to have a better chance of coverage.

Media ideology refers to the role of media organizations in society and their reason for existence. It affects the relationship between organizations and media and how news gets distributed. Practitioners need to understand the role played by each media in society to decide how to structure their organizations' messages.

The Hierarchy Flow of Influences

The Mediating, the Media Model, comprises five concentric circles. At the heart of these circles is the journalist mindset and at the final and widest circle is the media ideology. It is better to understand that any single perspective does not present the whole picture; instead, combining multiple levels of analysis enables practitioners of media relations to draw connections among the five levels.

In line with that, the arguments of the Mediating the Media Model seek to examine:

- 5) How does the understanding of internal influences help build effective media relations?
- 6) How does the understanding of external influences help build effective media relations?
- 7) What other factors influence and affect building effective media relations?

Image Restoration Theory

Image Restoration Theory was introduced by William Benoit. The discourse of restoration theory concentrates on message options rather than describing types of crises. Researchers suggested a typology of five main communication strategies that can respond to potentially damaging information to restore one's image (Dardis & Haigh, 2009).

The theory posits two assumptions of image restoration:

- Communication is goal-directed activity.
- Maintaining a positive image or reputation is a goal of communication (Dardis & Haigh, 2009, p. 103).

In addition, the theory holds that: perceptions are more important than reality, and organizations must determine which audience must receive the messages.

The five main communication strategies are:

Denial strategy has two variants: first is refuting the offensive act; second is shifting the blame to another entity.

Evasion of responsibility strategy has four moods: provocation, lacking information, claiming that the incident occurred by accident, and claiming that the offensive act was performed by good intention.

Reducing the offensiveness of the event strategy has six variants: bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking accuser, and compensation.

Corrective action strategy has two forms: returning the situation to the state that existed before the offensive actor promising to stop the offensive act from happening again, but without admitting guilt.

Mortification strategy is represented in admitting responsibility for the unlawful act and requesting forgiveness, leading to filing lawsuits (Dardis & Haigh, 2009).

Embedding Image Restoration Theory within the communications activities can considerably impact the public's perception of institutions or organizations during crises and provide clear strategies for media and public relations practitioners who respond with a specific or coherent message type. In addition, communication messages often contain more than one image restoration strategy at a time.

The strategies of Image Restoration Theory seek to examine:

- 8) How does the *denial strategy* affect the public's attitude toward the institution, reputation, credibility, and position?
- 9) How does the *evasion of responsibility strategy* affect the public's attitude toward the institution, reputation, credibility, and position?
- 10) How does *reducing the event strategy's offensiveness* affect the public's attitude toward the institution, reputation, credibility, and position?
- 11) How does *corrective action strategy* affect the public's attitude toward the institution, reputation, credibility, and position?
- 12) How does the *mortification strategy* affect the public's attitude toward the institution, reputation, credibility, and position?

Statement of the Problem

Consequent to the dramatic changes in the media field mentioned above in the opening section, this study seeks to investigate the current situation for media relations regarding managing and confronting external rumors in Palestinian Justice Sector institutions. According to Waters *et al.* (2010), the changing media environment and the rising of online media caused a shift for traditional media relations strategies, which became more relevant to the social media environment. Marland (2017) mentioned that little data are known about mechanisms of daily work in institutions regarding the release of information by the personnel of government media relations. Meanwhile, Pang *et al.* (2014) suggest that media relations practitioners understand each media's role in society. In recent years, media relations have focused on interactions between public relations practitioners and media to inform the public about organizations (Waters *et al.* 2020).

In line with this, the Palestinian Justice Sector lacks clarity in media relations strategies regarding managing and confronting external rumors. Unfortunately, the few studies and references specifically in the context of the Palestinian justice sector -to the best of researcher knowledge- not to mention the complicated political status, made it challenging to classify media or track media relations strategies in Palestine precisely.

Therefore, this study seeks to highlight the necessity of not considering inoculation strategies as a defensive plan, image restoration as an attack plan, and the mediating model that could reduce the damage resulting from external rumors and help in managing and confronting them strategically. Also, the researcher seeks to benefit from the data collected from the ten in-depth interviews through recommendations that could serve as insights for justice sector institutions.

Purpose of the Study

This study attempts to bridge the gap in literature dealing with rumors in the Palestinian Justice Sector -to the best of researcher knowledge- either because of the culture of secrecy and control access to information or the difficulty facing scholars and academics seeking to collect internal information about formal information and governmental institutions. Guided by methods and models applied in the existing media and public relations literature, the researcher aims to uncover patterns and themes that require careful judgments about what is important and meaningful in the collected data. All this is to guide media and public relations practitioners in reconsidering or re-evaluating their strategies to manage and confront rumors effectively.

Therefore, the more significant objective of this study is to know how Palestinian Justice Sector institutions employ media relations as a strategic tool to manage and confront

external rumors. In other words, how Palestinian Justice Sector institutions employ inoculation strategies in their messages to media to manage rumors, and how Palestinian Justice Sector institutions employ image restoration strategies in their messages to media to confront rumors.

Questions of the Study

The main question for this study is “**how do Palestinian Justice Sector institutions employ media relations as a strategic tool to manage and confront external rumors?**”

After discussing the literature and their view of its implications for her work, the researcher suggests the following sub-questions:

- 1) How do Palestinian Justice Sector institutions employ inoculation strategies in their messages to media to manage rumors?
- 2) How do media and public relations practitioners employ their understanding of internal and external influences of their relationship with media?
- 3) How do Palestinian Justice Sector institutions employ image restoration strategies in their messages to media to confront rumors?

Conceptual Framework

Based on the study’s theoretical framework, problem, objectives, and questions, the researcher developed the study model below to picture the research approach and ease the understanding of connections investigated in the current study, as shown in the study’s conceptual model hereunder.

As shown in the model hereunder, the “thick” black arrow stands for the “quality” of Media relations, which in turn, strategically reflects on the efficiency of image restoration and inoculation strategies supposedly employed by Justices Institutions. (Deflection)

The Green arrows stand for the “return” on investing in such strategies, which help protect the Justice Sector image from external rumors. (Output)

Finally, the black arrows represent the implementation of inoculation and image restoration strategies. (Inputs by Justice Sector)

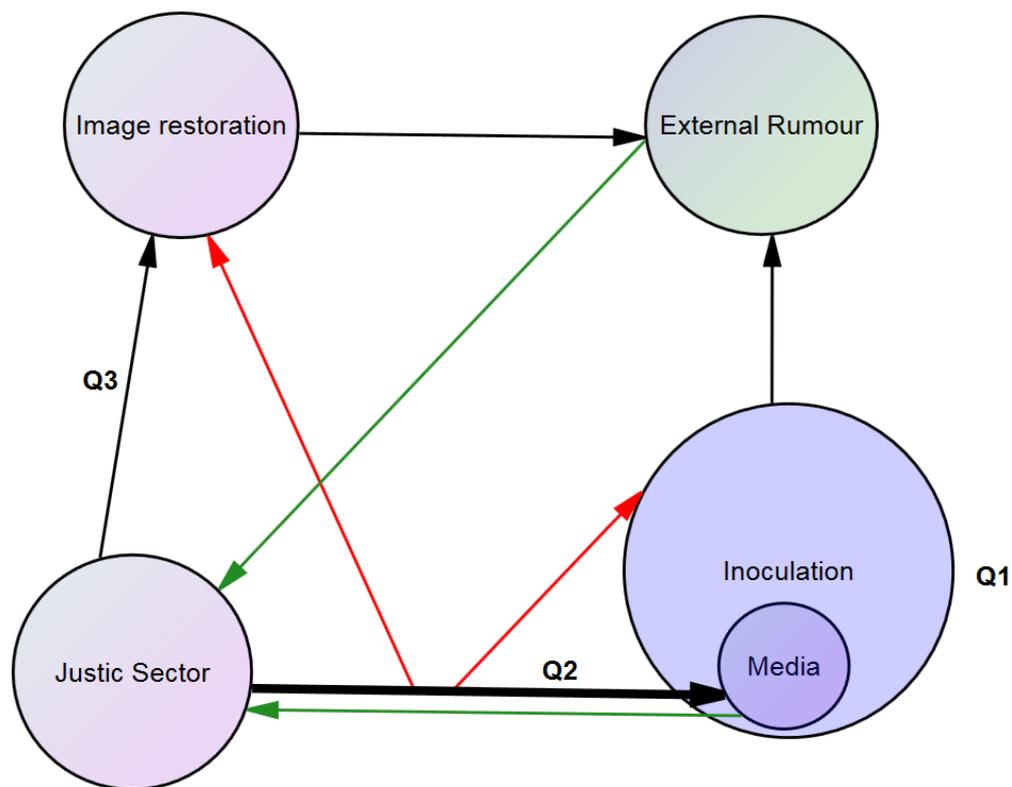


Figure 1 Study’s Conceptual Model

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is represented on potentially providing beneficial insights for media relations and public relations practitioners working in Palestinian Justice Sector institutions strategically and appropriately. In addition to guiding media relations and public relations practitioners in reconsidering and re-evaluating their media relations strategies to manage and confront rumors effectively. The valuable data obtained from this study could provide a more in-depth understanding of the importance of building a relationship of mutual benefit with media in general and journalists in specific.

The beneficiaries of this study are the Palestinian Justice Sector institutions that are established pursuant to laws, regulations, and decisions in force in Palestine. Friedrich *et al.* (2008) “and shall remain in force to the extent that they do not contradict the provisions of Basic Law until they are amended or replaced pursuant to the law.”

This study targets media relations and public relations practitioners to guide them in reconsidering and re-evaluating their media relations strategies to manage and confront rumors effectively. Furthermore, to enhance the best practices of the practitioners mentioned above, this study concentrates on the following interrelated steps:

1. Regarding *managing* rumors, inoculation can be applied as a strategic tool to manage rumors in any context, including the justice sector, which provides the need to send messages that protect, form, and defend individuals' attitudes. Therefore, great attention must be given to inoculation messages to media that protect individuals against media misinformation and external rumors;

2. As for *confronting* rumors, the leading five communication strategies of image restoration concentrate on messages. Embedding these strategies within the communication activities of Palestinian Justice Sector institutions can have a considerable impact on the public's perception of institutions during a crisis and provide clear strategies for media relations and public relations practitioners who will respond with a specific or coherent message type;
3. Most importantly, in most cases, Palestinian Justice Sector institutions deal with the public through their messages to the media. Therefore, Mediating the Media Model is based on three assumptions: media relations practitioners must recognize the need to engage in proactive media relations, consider cultivating good media relations as their responsibility, understand how journalists work and operate their work environment.

This study could perform as a critical element for practitioners to establish media relations and enhance effective strategies, to appreciate the different media environments, media orientation, and most importantly, journalists' "understanding".

Assumptions

The researcher, in this study, took for granted the following:

- The researcher assumed that interviewees acted as subtle realists constructing and representing reality accurately. For example, public relations practitioners in the Justice Sector have provided "true claims" about reality. In other words, we can never be sure about the truth of any account.
- Another assumption is what Hammersley referred to as "relevance." This means that media relations and public relations practitioners were willing to contribute

to the study at hand and showed interest due to its implications to their work or field of study. This adds to the claimed quality of their answers and representation of reality mentioned above.

- The culture of secrecy and control access to formal information institutions, where some practitioners of media relations and public relations departments in Justice Sector institutions may not reveal information explicitly due to limited power.

Limitations of the Study

- Findings are based solely on in-depth interviews, and some claims cannot be corroborated.
- As this is a qualitative study situated in one sector of a specific country, the justice sector in Palestine, it is also not generalizable to other sectors.
- Refusal of two Justice Sector institutions the request of formal correspondence to conduct the formal interviews with practitioners of media relations and public relations departments.

Delimitations of the Study

The self-imposed limitation by the researcher were as follows:

- *Study scope*: the interviews were conducted with practitioners of media relations and public relations working in eight Palestinian Justice Sector institutions, excluding the point of view of journalists and media firms in view of the bifurcation that the researcher may end up with.
- A thick description was not written because it is not an ethnographic observation of life in the Justice Sector Institutions.

- The researcher was interested in what interviewees said and not how they said it.
- *Spatial limitations*: The study was limited to the Palestinian Justice Sector institutions in the West Bank, excluding Gaza Strip, due to lack of accessibility.

Chapters Organization

The structure of this study consists of the Introduction Chapter above, followed by *Chapter Two*, which starts with related literature and concepts, then lists previous studies within four prongs, each followed by remarks from the researcher. *Chapter Three* includes methods and procedures to clarify research philosophy, approach, instrumentation, and more. *Chapter Four* includes the results of the analysis of the in-depth interviews. Finally, the study ends with *Chapter Five*, closing with results, recommendations, and conclusions.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

- Introduction
- Media relations
- Media relations as a strategic tool
- False information and fake news
- The legal background of Palestinian Justice Sector Institutions
- Media relations in formal institutions
- External rumors in Palestinian Justice Sector Institutions
- Previous studies
- Summary of Literature Reviewed and Rationale for the Study

Introduction

As mentioned in study significance, the study potentially provides beneficial insights for media relations and public relations practitioners working in Palestinian Justice Sector institutions strategically and appropriately. The study could guide them in reconsidering and re-evaluating their media relations strategies to manage and confront rumors effectively. Accordingly, the researcher hopes that the insights obtained from this study could provide a more in-depth understanding of how to employ media relations as a strategic tool to manage and confront external rumors.

Therefore, based on what was previously presented, the researcher explores the concepts of media relations in Palestine and media relations as a strategic tool. In addition to the concepts of fake information and news, and external and internal rumors, legal background of Palestinian Justice Sector institutions, and media relations in the formal institution, including external rumors in Palestinian Justice Sector Institutions.

Media Relations

The early history of media relations could be considered a period of “growing pains” for practitioners who had difficulty defining their occupation. In the years following World War II, the term “public relations (and later, media relations) was embraced by most of the practitioners in this field (Supa, 2014). Media relations remain an essential part of any public relations activity; its primary goal is to create a “systematic, planned, purposeful and mutually beneficial relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners. For Supa (2014), journalists tend to keep in touch with public relations practitioners they worked with regularly compared to those they did not know. In order to manage effective relationships, practitioners must constantly maintain communication,

establish credibility, and provide journalists with information that is closely connected to their organization.

According to Waters *et al.* (2010), several studies have shown a clear connection between public relations material and media coverage for this material and beneficial outcome for the source, which creates a discipline moving toward relationship management. However, there is increasing evidence that rules of relationship management are built on how both parties communicate with each other and how they perceive one another.

Media Relations in Palestine

It is vital for any practitioner in public relations and media relations to understand media classifications in Palestine. Unfortunately, the few studies and references in regard, not to mention the complicated political status, made it difficult to precisely classify media in Palestine or even know how media relations operate. According to some national websites, media in Palestine are classified into government-owned media, privately-owned media, factions' media, and community-based media; they argue that media relations are usually embedded within the tasks of public relations departments because it is not mature enough to be employed within the strategies of formal institutions in Palestine.

Media Relations as a Strategic Tool

It has become crystal clear that tactics and strategies of practitioners in the field of media relations have upgraded to new levels. According to Waters *et al.* (2010), the changing media environment and the growth of online media resulted in shifting traditional media relations strategies in the form of more relevant practices to the social media environment.

In the time of DiFonzo *et al.* (2000) study, strategies that bound uncertainty during organizational change could aid in reducing questions and doubts about what the current events mean and predict for the future. In general, the use of any strategy is related to its effectiveness. Among the strategies that were calcified as moderately effective and less popular: establish a rumor hotline, deny rumor by trusted outside source, and confirm the rumor (DiFonzo *et al.*, 2000).

In recent years, media relations have focused on interactions between public relations practitioners and different media types to inform the public about the organizational campaign. The key strategies that echoed best practices and efforts include crafting a message strategy designed to position the organization appropriately, targeting the audience that supports the organization's mission and goals, using consistent messages and organizational spokespersons, and following up on media inquiries on time (Waters *et al.* 2020).

Waters *et al.* (2010) stated that open two-way communication between journalists and practitioners of media relations must be present to create effective relationships. Pang *et al.* (2014) took media relations to a higher level; their study tested the viability of the Mediating the Media Model by examining how an understanding of internal and external influences helps practitioners to cultivate effective media relations.

From another point of view regarding the concept of “understanding” in media relations and public relations in the Middle East, Dhanesh *et al.* (2019) presented a framework consisting of three aspects of media related to understanding its effects on shaping public relations practices. First, *media control* is relevant to media ownership and has implications for editorial freedom. Second, *media diffusion* could be hindered by several

factors such as illiteracy and poverty. Third, *media access* is related to the extent of the publics' access to spread their message.

A key element for practitioners to establish media relations and enhance effective strategies is to appreciate the different media environments, media orientations, and, most importantly, journalists' "understanding."

False Information and Fake News

Various types of false information can be found and classified in previous studies and research. Moreover, various types of actors take part in the distributions of false information and their motives. Zannettou *et al.* (2019) provided a typology for the types of false information, actors, and their motives, covering many aspects of false information. The study categorized false information into eight types: fabricated, propaganda, conspiracy theories, hoaxes, biased or one-sided, rumors, and clickbait and satire news. Zannettou *et al.* (2019) argued that the current stage of the current automated solutions that do not use humane input could not mitigate the problem of false information on the Web effectively. Alternatively, put extra effort into raising awareness that can help regular users of social networks to distinguish false information and potentially understand if a post is made from a legitimate source. Very close to Zannettou *et al.*'s (2019) classification, Gue (2020) explained that fake news had been used to refer to news satire, news parody, fabrications, manipulations, propaganda, and advertising. However, according to Gue (2020), some scholars followed more inclusive approaches by classifying fake news based on author intention and facticity – to what extent the news intends to a deductive audience and to what degree the news reflects the truth, respectively.

External and Internal Rumors

The discussion of fake news or the increasing problem of false information, primarily involving rumors, becomes a growing concern for organizations and institutions worldwide. DiFonzo *et al.* (2000) stated that rumors appeared to be an ongoing concern for most professionals. Moreover, public relations professionals can expect to encounter harmful rumors frequently, be alert to the possible adverse effects of rumors, and create a plan to prevent and manage rumors. Most importantly, they can prevent rumors and their effects by reducing or setting limits on uncertainty through effective formal communications.

The dynamics of rumors have been subjected to research and studies over many years. Kimmel *et al.* (2021) stated that it is generally understood that there is no one simple explanation as to why rumors emerge and circulate or even why they disappear. Scholars in the past and more recently suggested the involvement of collective and group needs, personal motives, and situational forces. Guo (2010) stated that despite the Chinese government's strict regulations that launched several anti-rumor campaigns, rumors continue to penetrate China's internet. When traditional sources of information are controlled and lose their credibility, rumors are most widespread. Even more, in a closed information society, rumors may be perceived as a better path toward truth than government-controlled media.

The Legal Background of Palestinian Justice Sector Institutions

All Palestinian Justice Sector institutions are established pursuant to laws, regulations, and decisions in force in Palestine. Friedrich *et al.* (2008) "and shall remain in force to the

extent that they do not contradict the provisions of Basic Law until they are amended or replaced pursuant to the law." The Palestinian Justice System includes:

The high Judicial Council was established according to Judicial Authority Law No. 1 of 2002 and represented the Palestinian Judicial Authority; it has a mission to enhance the independence of the judiciary, ensure the dignity and transparency, and efficiency of judges, improve courts' performance and institutionalize council's departments.

The provisions of Article (37) of Judicial Authority Law No. 1 of 2002 stipulates that:

"Pursuant to the provisions of this law, a judicial council shall be established which shall be called 'High Judicial Council.' It shall be exercise its jurisdiction pursuant to the law" (Friedrich *et al.*, 2008, p. 333).

Public Prosecution is one of the Judicial Authority components, and it represents and aims to protect its security and safety, fighting and investigating crime, persecuting and referring perpetrators to courts.

The provisions of Article (1) of Law of Penal Procedure No. 3 of 2001 stipulates that:

"The right to file and conduct a criminal action shall be vested exclusively with the Public Prosecution. A criminal action may not be filed by others, except in cases where the law determines otherwise"(Friedrich *et al.*, 2008, p.424).

The high Constitutional Court was created according to a presidential decree issued in April 2016. It is worth noting that the High Court temporarily assumed all duties assigned to Administrative Courts and the High Constitutional Court.

The provisions of Article (1/1) of Law of the High Constitutional Court No. 3 of 2006 stipulates that:

"Pursuant to the provisions of this law, a 'High Constitutional Court,' which shall be an independent, self-existent juridical entity, shall be established in Palestine and shall be referred to hereinafter as 'the court'" (Friedrich *et al.*, 2008, p. 360).

The provisions of Article (103) of The Amended Basic Law of 2003 stipulates that:

"1. A high Constitutional Court shall be established by the law consider:

- (a) The constitutionality of laws, bylaws, and other enacted rules.
- (b) The interpretation of the Basic law and legislation.
- (c) Resolution of jurisdictional disputes which might arise between judicial entities and administrative entities having judicial jurisdiction"(Friedrich *et al.*, 2008, p.50).

The Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) was established by a presidential decree issued in 1993; its duties and responsibilities represented following up and ensuring that the Palestinian different laws, by-laws and regulations, and the work of different departments, agencies, and institutions of State of Palestine and Palestinian Liberation Organization are implementing and safeguarding human rights.

The provisions of Article (31) of The Amended Basic Law of 2003 stipulates that:

"An independence commission for human rights shall be established pursuant to a law that shall determine its formation, duties and jurisdiction"(Friedrich *et al.*, 2008, p. 35).

Judicial Police is considered one of the most important pillars to which Palestinian law has been assigned to implement justice with judicial Authority and execute all issued by Regular courts, Sharia Courts, and Public prosecution.

In addition to the capacity of the police force as an administrative control authority, some of them also enjoy the capacity of judicial police, which specializes in detecting and prosecuting criminals, and assisting the Public Prosecution in some crime investigation authorities, either in their original capacity or as delegated by it to carry out some investigation work (D'eis, 2004).

The provisions of Article (6) of The Decree-Law No. 23 of 2017 on the Police stipulates that:

“Officers and non-commissioned police officers enjoy the capacity of a judicial officer during the performance of their duties, each within the limits of his jurisdiction, in accordance with the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedures in force. They carry out their duties as a judicial officer under the supervision of the Public Prosecutor in his capacity as the head of the judicial police”.

Advisory and Legislation Bureau is an independent legal institution within the institutions of the justice sector, and it is affiliated with the Council of Ministers. It was established and regulated in 1994 by Law No. (4) of 1995 regarding preparing legislation. The bureau started providing legal services as a specialized institution that works on developing and unifying the legislative system in Palestine and strengthening the legal culture in the Palestinian society.

"One of bureau's functions is to prepare a formal draft of proposed and draft legislation referred to it from the ministries, without altering legislative substance or purpose. In its drafting, the bureau considers the compliance of the proposed legislation with the Basic Law and its consistency with existing legislation" (Regulatory Consultation in the Palestinian Authority, 2011, p. 17).

The Ministry of Justice is one of the Palestinian ministries of the Executive Authority; the ministry seeks to support building a society based on justice and equality and protecting rights and freedoms by strengthening the rule of law. It contributes to the formulation and preparation of legislation that respects human rights, the separation of powers, and the independence of the judiciary, and it provides judicial and legal services and raises legal awareness to achieve effective justice.

Palestinian Anti-Corruption Commission is working to unify national efforts to fight corruption and eliminate its features in Palestinian society by implementing policies that serve as the backbone in deducting the source of corruption, addressing its causes, and limiting its occurrence.

The provisions of Article (3) of Law No. 1. of 2005 Concerning Illegal Gains stipulates that:

"Pursuant to the provision of this law, a commission called the 'Commission for the Elimination of Illegal Gains' shall be established. The commission shall enjoy juridical personality and administrative and financial independence." (Friedrich *et al.*, 2008, p. 92).

It is worth noting that in the amendment of the law as mentioned earlier, the provision of Article (1) of Law by Decree No.7 of 2010 stipulates that: "The term "law of Illegal Gain"

No. (1) 2005 shall be substituted with the term "Anti-Corruption Law" No. (1) 2005"

Supreme Judge Department/ Shari'a Judiciary constitutes an essential part of the Palestinian legal system. The department was created as a governmental institution linked directly to the President according to Law No. 1 of 1994.

The provisions of Article (101) of The Amended Basic Law of 2003 mentions the Religious and Military Courts and stipulates that:

"1. Matters governed by Shari'a law and matters of personal status shall come under the jurisdiction of Shari'a and Religious Courts, pursuant to the law.

2. Military Courts shall be established by special; laws. Such courts shall not have any jurisdiction beyond military affairs." (Friedrich *et al.*, 2008, p. 50).

Palestinian Bar Association was established in 1997 and worked as a framework that brings together and represents Palestinian lawyers in Palestinian Territories. In addition, the Bar Association works to take care of and defend lawyers' social and professional affairs through the programs and training that are addressed to them.

The provisions of Article (11) of Law N. 3 of 1999 Concerning the Regulation of the Practice of the Legal Profession, stipulates that:

"The Bar shall enjoy juridical personality and financial independence, and the board elected by the general panel shall assume its functions pursuant to the provisions of this law."

Media Relations in Formal Institutions

Before addressing media relations in Palestinian Justice Sector institutions, this study explores some examples of media relations practices from western and non-western democracies to create a “road map” for standard practices in media relations in governmental and formal institutions.

Following the strategies mentioned above by Waters *et al.* (2020), organizations and institutions are likely to notice increased media coverage. For example, scholars found

that the interpersonal relationships between South Korean journalists and public relations practitioners considerably influenced the outcome of the organization's media relations. The networking created from interpersonal relationships was pivotal in defining media relations' success. Meanwhile and according to Marland (2017), in Canada, standard practices of media relations include using a strategic choice of words, emphasizing specific points of view, leaking selected information, speaking off the record, timing announcements either to maximize or to minimize attention, circulating talking points and repeating key messages. However, little data are known about mechanisms of daily work in institutions that form the release of information by government media relations personnel. When these common tools are used, workflow in public administrations is more efficient and less exposed to mistakes.

Pang *et al.* (2014) suggest that media relations practitioners understand each media's role in society. For example, there are national newspapers in the UK; each plays a specific role in society. Knowing where each media fits into societal structure would assist practitioners in deciding how to tailor messages of an institution to costume their public. In non-western democracies like China, Guo (2010) classified China's journalism using two models: part journalism and western-style journalism.

In the Middle East, Dhanesh *et al.* (2019) stated that traditionally, public relations has been a governmental tool to advertise their affairs and has been strongly linked to areas of publicity and government matters. The close relationship between media and public relations, often used as media relations, assured the importance of building and maintaining relationships between both parties to provide information and assistance for the media. Zayani (2008) analyzed public relations practices at Al Jazeera, an Arab media

organization, and found that some of the practices in the field of public relations include employing an effective spokesperson and focusing on media relations.

External Rumors in Palestinian Justice Sector Institutions

Palestinian Justice Sector is a ‘fertile land’ for spreading rumors due to the sensitivity and confidentiality for most of its work and procedures, not to mention the lack of public awareness in regulations and laws that regulate the work of these institutions. In addition, several cases in this sector went viral. They became public opinion cases related to courts sessions at the High Judicial Council or procedures at Public Prosecution, complaints of corruption submitted to the Palestinian Anti-Corruption Commission, or allegations on Constitutional Court.

Following are examples of rumors that emerged in three Palestinian Justice Sector institutions:

High Judicial Council

Rumors: “Palestinian judiciary released the defendants in case of Israa Charib before the end of their trial.”

Public Prosecution

Rumors: “Lack of transparency and integrity in the selection process for the new prosecutors, in which some of them are relatives of officials.”

Constitutional Court

*Rumors: “Dismissal of two employees at Constitutional Court who submitted allegations of suspicion of corruption against their court to *Palestinian Anti-Corruption Commission.*”*

Accordingly, the researcher of this study will investigate how media relations and strategic tools have been utilized to manage and confront external rumors by collecting data from practitioners working in Palestinian Justice Sector institutions. During the interview, the researcher will inquire about practices and strategies used before and after the emergence of external rumors.

Previous Studies

In an attempt to highlight the necessity of considering inoculation and image restoration strategies, and the mediating model in managing and confronting external rumors strategically, this study performs as a critical element for practitioners to establish media relations strategies and enhance their effectiveness. Nevertheless, overall, a review of the literature has found that the majority of both English and Arabic studies were mainly interested in strategies and techniques to confront rumors and false news and identify their source and rumor-mongers *after* their prevalence.

Most media relation strategies dealt with prompting and advertising the image of institutions, organizations, corporations, and even political movements. Therefore, the significance of this study is in providing insights for media relations practitioners practically and reconsidering their media relations strategies.

Most studies and researches are thoroughly investigating the sources of external rumors and the reasons for their prevalence; others addressed the strategies and tools to confront

false news and rumors, few tackled the strategies of media relations in formal institutions related to external rumors, and rare studies touched on the topics mentioned above in Justice Sector.

Accordingly, this study followed a four-pronged literature review method in listing journal articles, papers, reports, books, and conference proceedings in the narrow topic in hand. The researcher has categorized these studies as the following: the first prong is the strategic tools to manage and confront external rumors; the second is the role of media relations in confronting external rumors; the third is media relations management in formal and governmental institutions; the fourth is crisis management of rumors. Below are the studies the researcher read and summarized; for further elaboration, each prong will be followed by remarks from the researcher.

Studies About Strategic Tools to Manage and Confront External Rumors

A study conducted by Abdel Rahim (2017) titled "*Fighting Rumors and Preventing its Dangerous in the GCC States*" showed that rumor is one of the most dangerous means aimed at destroying societies, and the research concluded that the danger of rumors lies in the speed of their circulation and prevalence over public opinion. The study focused on analyzing the ability of current methods to confront and deal with rumors in the light of technological development and changes. The study recommended a strategic vision that includes ways to deal with rumors and reduce the danger of their spread by raising awareness and education. Moreover, by establishing a media observatory to monitor and follow up rumors; conducting media campaigns for students; the existence of deterrent regulations to deal with rumors source and their promoters; raising the efficiency of officials in monitoring and following up rumors.

Al-Bakour's (2001) paper titled "Modern Methods Psychological and Social Inoculation against Rumors" identified inoculation strategies. For example, informing the public with truth about what happened in due course, legal and logical aspects based on the state's plans and procedures followed sources and objectives of the rumors. Furthermore, presenting the target audience positively as sane and patriotic; providing live examples of rumor-mongers who cannot be trusted; stating the facts related to them and the opinion of specialists; presenting facts in a way that is acceptable to the public without exaggeration or promises that cannot be achieved; introducing the dangers that may afflict rumor-mongers. The paper offers three methods: firstly, the direct method, including attacking the rumors directly, executing them, and stating their invalidity; secondly, the indirect method, which raises the level of public awareness of the state and its institutions; and thirdly, the neutral method which carries out the counter-campaign that use media, such as foreign or international institutions, or neutral experts.

The study of Suntwal *et al.* (2020) titled "*How Does Information Spread? A study of true and Fake News*" argued that the information adopted by individuals or created by news outlets with great credibility will be more believable. Also, individuals will find information less believable if they do not find credibility in the sources. When information is shared, individuals look for two sources: the person or organization sharing the information and the entity hosting the information. The study developed a measurement scale and a survey to collect data and test hypotheses. They found that several factors such as source, endorser credibility, and argument quality crucially affect belief.

The research article of Basol *et al.* (2020) titled "*Good News about Bad News: Gamified Inoculation Boosts Confidence and Cognitive Immunity against Fake News*" indicated that recent research has examined the possibility of building resistance against online misinformation through psychological inoculation by proactively exposing people to weakened doses of misinformation that can confer cognitive immunity. The study provided further evidence on the effectiveness of inoculation against specific instances of fake news and strategies used in its production. Second, it demonstrated the efficiency of "broad-spectrum" inoculation against misinformation in the form of an online fake news game. Third, it found clear evidence that was described as moderate to significant and scientifically meaningful, supporting the effect of proactive cognitive interventions on warning people of behavioral challenges. Finally, the study recommended that it is essential for future research to assess the susceptibility of active inoculation to passive approaches, including traditional fact-checking and other critical-thinking interventions.

The Article of Walters (2018) titled "*How to Tell a fake: Fighting fake Against Fake News on the Front Lines of Social Media*" indicated that fake news has leaked from the web to become one of the greatest threats to the civil political discourse, which limits the viability of most potential legal and regulatory solutions. The Article proposed an objective standard to identify fake news, which offers a flexible tool that scholars and courts can apply in a wide variety of contexts. For example, strengthening the Communication Decency Act to slow down the flow of misinformation on the front lines of the internet; combating false content; confronting new threats; thinking ahead about preventive measures that can help mitigate the attack; creating a creative space for innovators to develop technological countermeasures to combat fake news. The experts

find fake news problematic because it interferes with the democratic process by providing baseless information that may negatively affect their decision-making.

“Several major technology companies have derived clever means to target fake news, many of which they have fully implemented. For instance, Facebook and Google have partnered with fact-checking companies to examine problematic content to determine whether it is fake news they can remove or flag for users” (Walters, 2018, p.167).

The study of Zhang (2012) titled "*A Relational Perspective on Media Relations Strategies: the Chinese Government's News Conference from 2001 to 2009*" used the conceptual framework of organizational-public relations strategies to evaluate the relationship of the Chinese government with international media. Its methodology used content analysis of the transcripts of news conferences hosted by the State Council of China; it found that their international media relations efforts have enhanced, but there is room for further improvement.

The research paper of Vafeiadis *et al.* (2019) titled "*Refuting Fake News on Social Media: Non-profits, Crisis Response Strategies, and Issue Involvement*" sheds light on the strategies of denial and attack in dealing with rumors and their effectiveness. The methodology tested the hypothesis of response type: denial vs. attack and privacy concern: low vs. high. The findings showed that attacking the source of fake news reduces the message's credibility more than denying fake news.

In the studies mentioned above, rumors, misinformation, and fake news constitute vital component elements consistent with this study. Abdel Rahim (2017) showed the importance of utilizing strategic tools to reduce the prevalence of rumors through establishing media observatories and raising officials' abilities to deal with rumors. These

tools can be included in Palestine's national strategy of the justice sector and the rule of law. Inoculation strategy informs, without exaggerating, the public about the rumor, its source, and goals even before its spread—the three methods to confront rumors: direct, indirect, and neutral (Al-Bakour, 2001).

All these methods will enrich the current study, specifically when preparing the questions of in-depth interviews. Moreover, Basol *et al.* (2020) first studied the possibility of building resistance for individuals then provided, by evidence, the effectiveness of inoculation against rumors and misinformation. The core attention of this study is to examine how media relations in formal Palestinian institutions in the field of justice utilize media campaigns and other preventive tools to confront rumors. The Article of Walters (2018) is consistent with this study due to the importance of adopting legislation regulating the accelerated flow of misinformation on the internet and media. The research paper of Vafeiadis *et al.* (2019) offers this study practical insights that may develop response strategies in formal justice institutions, considering the degree to which the public is involved before deciding the type of response. Also, Suntwal *et al.* (2020) discussed that understanding the mechanism of the spread of information is crucial for any media and public relations practitioners and considering the different factors that affect fake news, including rumors.

Studies About the Role of Media Relations in Confronting External Rumors

Al-Badayna's (2001) paper titled "The Use of Modern Technologies in Rumors" presented the most critical solutions to confront rumors through social inoculation and raise public awareness on the nature of rumors and the danger of their prevalence. The

paper focused on the role of media in revealing the content of rumors because it depends on ambiguity in its composition. The paper found that when the rumor stated not true and its sender stated malicious or aims to offend, this contributes to stop the rumors.

The study of Micó *et al.* (2014) titled "*Political activism online: organization and media relations in the case of 15M in Spain*" is based on the case study of the 15-M movement and analyzed the relationships established between journalists and conventional media. It implemented the qualitative approach to explain transformations that affect the media system. The methodology combined two techniques, conducting 15 in-depth interviews and analyzing reports, working papers, and file data. The study found that the internet has created a new communication and media scene in which the boundaries between old and new media are dissolving through digital gathering and managed to establish power relationships in both media and political scenes. Hence, activists independently produced and distributed information about their cause, influencing the traditional media, who are obliged to include the activists' demands in their agenda. The study concluded that the use of digital tools helped the 15-M in disseminating their information and in optimizing their organization and: "the classic formulas of news coverage are no longer of use in this context; journalists must find new ways to obtain information, among which the internet has a key role" (Micó *et al.*, 2014).

The study of DiFonzo *et al.* (2000) titled "*How Top PR Professionals Handle Hearsay: Corporate Rumors, Their Effects, and Strategies to Manage Them*" surveyed seventy-four experienced public relations professionals, and the results showed that harmful results are usual, especially during organizational change. Most of the rumors were internal, and the external ones were likely to consist of hearsay of concern to the general

public, such as rumors affecting the organization's reputation, products, and service quality. Two main approaches effectively prevented rumors: strategies that structured uncertainty and enhanced the efficacy of official comments and communication. The findings offer four implications for rumor prevention and management action plans in which the PR professionals can: expect to encounter harmful rumors frequently, be alert to possible adverse effects of rumors, formulate a proactive plan to prevent and manage rumors, reduce or place bounds on uncertainty and belief in the rumor by effective formal communication.

The study of Chen *et al.* (2015) titled "*Crisis Information Generation and Spread: Examining the Influence of Traditional and Social Media in Crisis Response through the Lens of Media Professionals*" conducted in-depth interviews with experienced media professionals covering organizational crises natural and man-made disasters. Some interview participants expressed that many social media unfiltered raw material, leaving much room for rumors and harmful misinformation if published to the public. The study provided implications for crisis managers by establishing crisis information credibility, using social media to facilitate deep and authentic storytelling, engaging actively in crisis information generating and spread, combating rumors and inaccurate information in cooperation with media professionals, and performing as reliable information sources. The findings presented best practices during crises for effective communication with stakeholders and the public who need rapid and accurate information.

The study of Zheltukhina *et al.* (2016) titled "*Role of Media Rumors in the Modern Society*" applied several methods, among them are inductive, descriptive, and comparative, to identify the role of media rumors. It aimed to identify the role of media

rumors in modern society and examined the use of media rumors as a pragmatic influence mechanism in modern communication. The study concluded that it is possible to distinguish two main functions of rumors in printed mass media: informational and affecting the recipient through the announcement of certain information which realized in: filling of informational gaps, adding the image of the event, forming identity, increasing homogeneity of opinions, control over conflicts, harm the reputation of an opponent, provoking recipient to act. The study results say that official mass media does not explain to stop the tension of physical activity. As a result, people try to explain the situation themselves and do it using usual notions; the absence or lack of information in mass media encourages the appearance and spread of rumors on the topic. Mass media has a decisive step to fade the rumor by presenting clear information. On the other hand, the media is trying to realize critics who create and spread rumors themselves and use false arguments and lie instead of revealing various rumors, false arguments, and lies.

The paper of Khodarahmi (2009) titled "*Media Relations*" aimed to identify important aspects of media relations researched by others. The methodology was conducted by reading the literature review and explaining terms using suitable examples. The findings showed that many organizations do not plan for their media relations and have limited information about managing them. Therefore, the paper concluded that organizations are required to reconsider their relationships with media regularly.

In the prong mentioned above, Al-Badayna (2001) presented solutions in the media field mainly to reveal the content of rumors. Given that the paper was conducted in 2001, substantial technological advancements have occurred in media relations. This study may include some of these solutions within the questions of in-depth interviews for Palestinian

justice institutions. The study of Mico *et al.* (2013) is consistent with this study as it implemented in-depth interviews with media officials and reveals the role of media relations. However, the case study of Mico *et al.* (2014) does not apply to this study because it is about a newly emerged political movement, at the time of conducting the study, does not resemble the formal justice institutions, which are established in accordance to law and errors in media relations are a huge responsibility, and there is no room for mistakes. Both studies, DiFonzo *et al.* (2000) and Chen *et al.* (2015), differ from Mico *et al.* (2013) in which they followed the in-depth interviews to extract data about rumors during an organizational change from public relations professionals and about external rumors during the crisis from media relations professionals. This applies to this study since it targets formal institutions. Meanwhile, Zheltukhina *et al.* (2016) applied several methods to examine media rumors and critics who spread them and concluded that the official media does not provide the public with explanations to stop those rumors.

Studies About Media Relations Management in Formal and Governmental Institutions

The research of Hindawy (2021) titled "*Modern Administrative Methods to Combat Electronic Rumors*" studied the impact of electronic rumors on public facilities in the information of proliferation era in terms of media, security, and crime with a purpose to confront and prevent electronic rumors via administrative agencies' role. The state's administrative system is not immune to the adverse effects of rumors, whether they spread from inside or outside facilities, and are raised by public opinion. Due to the tremendous progress of communication, the process of collecting, monitoring, and denying rumors is no longer sufficient. The study addressed the elements and motives of raising electronic

rumors; it explained rumors' types and their effects related to public facilities and administrative mechanisms to combat electronic rumors. The study recommended setting strategies and proactive plans in all administrative authorities to prevent rumors and promptly confronting them via their official websites and digital accounts; and proposed to determine a trustworthy media source in each administrative authority to uncover all information related to rumors and to enhance cooperation between all these authorities to combat rumors.

The study of Al-Daaja (2009) titled "*The Role of Civil Society Institutions in Security Awareness*" stressed the importance of extrapolating the complementary relations between the institutions of society and their role in creating an integrated security system. This would protect society from the danger of rumor, given that the social interaction between these institutions and security services represents an integration that achieves security and stability. The study presented a set of steps to confront rumors and to stop them from spreading, including analyzing news and studying it objectively, fortifying public opinion through scientific methods, and preparing awareness messages as a preventive measure; raising legal awareness by declaring and announcing penalties to constitute a deterrent means to prevent the circulation of rumors.

The Article of Marland (2017) titled "*Strategic Management of Media Relations: Communications Centralization and Spin in the Government of Canada*" reveals the strategic planning used by government staff when they engage in media management and spin. The research used two data sources to present the findings; the first is in-depth interviews, and the second is the internal instrument used in the federal government. The interviews provided important context given that the processes in government are always

in growth, and the obtained communication templates described by a manual review to identify baseline evidence of those instruments. It concluded that media relations templates differ between institutions and some of them are no longer official policy instruments of the government; in addition, social media strategies are getting popular.

Pang's (2010) paper titled "Mediating the Media: a journalist-centric Media Relations Model" presented two diametric models in current media relations. The first model examines media relations from how practitioners can impact the news; the second model examines how practitioners impact journalists. Then, the paper proposed a new framework The Mediating the Media Model, in which the practitioners focus on learning how the media and journalists work. Finally, the paper suggested journalism training using a communication curriculum to understand media relations and journalism culture better and establish a relationship between practitioners and journalists.

The paper of Pang *et al.* (2014) titled "*Media Relations in an Evolving Media Landscape*" adapted to conduct in-depth interviews with media relations practitioners to collect data. The paper introduced the model of influences, internal and external, in Mediating the Media Model that comprises five layers of concentric circles. Findings showed that internal influences have a more significant role than external ones, and the journalist's mindset, which is part of the internal influences, was the most dominant factor that impacted media relations. The study concluded that traditional media in Singapore is still dominant against the growth of social media.

The paper of Kirat (2007) titled "*Promoting Online Media Relations: Public Relations Departments' Use of Internet in the UAE*" examined the patterns of internet usage of 24 private and public organizations to promote their relations with news media and other

purposes. Its methodology developed a Website Analysis Sheet and used a questionnaire to assess the organizations' online and internet publications patterns. Among the findings, at the time of conducting the study, all examined organizations have a homepage, but only three have online newsrooms, and those organizations still need to take advantage of what interactive communication is offering.

The study of Carlson *et al.* (2018) titled "*Rumors and Refugees: How Government-created Information vacuums undermine Effective Crisis Management*" argued that governments and other types of institutions can weaken their policies by mishandling the flow of information. Moreover, some standard tools of crisis management have an adverse effect, such as information dissemination limits and frequency policy change. The study used interviews with government officials and aid workers as a tool to collect data, then concluded that governments must give priority to effective communication and transparency during a crisis.

The study of Edes (2000) titled "*The Role of Government Information Officers*" considered the 'government information officers' as crucial figures in providing public information at the government level and how they contribute to the public understanding of government and raise awareness. It mentioned the responsibilities of government information officers, complaints from journalists - old but still new, and problems and challenges faced by government officers working in the media relations field.

Hindawy's (2021) method is consistent with this study since it dealt with public facilities and states administrations to combat rumors; this will be reasonable to make projections in the case of Palestinian Justice Institutions in some aspects. Al-Daaja (2009) highlighted the role of civil society organizations; this is very similar to the role of one of the

Palestinian Justice Sector Institutions, the Independence commission for Human Rights. The method of Marland (2017) and Pang *et al.* (2014) are appropriate in the context of this study, in which they both utilized in-depth interviews to collect data from media relations practitioners. Besides, Marland (2017) examined the internal instruments of media relations used by staff working in governmental intuitions. Both Pang (2010) and Pang *et al.* (2014) dealt with Mediating the Media Model; the findings and methods are helpful to form the basis for establishing a practitioner-journalist relationship that may take media relations in the Palestinian justice sector to the next level. The paper of Kirat (2007) and Zhang (2012) presented the usage of the internet in promoting online media relations in UAE; its findings are somehow common in the Arab environment.

Moreover, Kirat (2007) and Zhang (2012) concluded that media relations in public and governmental organizations in UAE and China, respectively, need more enhancement. Likewise, the study of Carlson *et al.* (2018) argues that when institutions mismanage their information, people can develop deep distrust and create a space for rumors, especially during a crisis. Even in developed countries, inconsistent formal messaging has harmful effects which need to be addressed carefully by formal institutions. Although the study of Edes (2000) was conducted in 2000, it tackled crucial elements in media relations that can be reformulated as recommendations.

Studies About Crisis Management of Rumors

The paper of Roux-Dufort (1993) titled “*Rumors and Crisis: A Case Study in the Banking Industry*” investigated the increased effects of rumors and their accelerating processes during a crisis by analyzing how rumors emerge. The paper identified a systematic crisis

management strategy based on five related interventions, which improve managers' understanding of rumors and their ability to deal with them.

The study of Zeng *et al.* (2016) titled "*Rumors at the Speed of Light? Modeling the Rate of Rumors Transmission during Crisis*" contrasted the messages of rumor-affirming and rumor-correcting on tweeter during a crisis to uncover the differences in transmission speed. The study concluded that public and government officials tasked with crisis management can use social media to publish information related to their organizations' events.

The article of Garcia (2017) titled "*Responding to Doping Rumors and accusations in Sports Communication: Rafael Nadal's Use of image Repair Strategies*" described the approaches of both image restoration theory and crisis management, following the impact of rumors on reputation. He then analyzed the quality of responses in the case study using the framework of image restoration theory. The study concluded that utmost concern must be given to transparency to maintain a strong reputation and legitimacy, especially in work environments that are highly sensitive to rumors.

Old and recent studies such as the paper of Roux-Dufort (1993) and the study of Zeng *et al.* (2016), and the article of Garcia (2017), noted that the role of crisis management during the spread of rumors must be given a great concern by public and government officials, it is vital to understand the process of rumor spreading and speed of transmission during a crisis.

The study of Aertsen & Gelders (2011) titled "*Differences Between the public and Private Communication of Rumors. A Pilot Survey in Belgium*" offers data by concentrating on the increasing importance of corporate communication about rumors in the public

relations field. The study found that external rumors were often about organizational reputation; however, public sector communicators appeared to be confronted with rumors more often than their colleagues in the private sector. The complex environment makes it challenging to combat rumors, which possibly explains why surveyed government communicators were less convinced by the effectiveness of the proposed strategies and less care about the external effects of organizational rumors. They even do not try to combat rumors because they know it will be harder to deal with them and have less time to focus on other tasks in their job.

The study of Edwards (2011) titled “*Defining the ‘object’ of Public Relations Research: A New Starting Point*” considered the assumptions of approaches related to public relations. Among these study assumptions, well-managed communication is a request for effective public relations, a strategic practice rather than a tactic. This will give power and influence to practitioners within their organizations to achieve organizational goals through their contacts with senior management. Furthermore, to ensure that administrative messages will be shown in suitable locations, crisis management and media relations are considered strategic approaches in this area.

The study of Laudy (2017) titled “*Rumors Detection on Social Media during Crisis Management*” proposed an approach to detect rumors and conflicting information to support officers of public safety organizations in monitoring the information spread on social media. The overall rumor detection process was described in four steps. The first step, *Event Report Typing*, in which each short message is received and transformed into a standardized typed event report. The second step is *Event Report Fusion*, in which all standardized typed event reports are merged into one comprehensive report through

measures that find similarities and harmonization between them called “strategies.” The third step, *Conflict Detection*, triggers an alert that a contradiction between reports has been discovered; this new event may be a rumor or an actual event. Fourth step, *Information Evaluation*, in which the detected new event is evaluated to identify its credibility to support officers of public safety organizations to detect the potential rumors then manage these rumors per crisis development.

The studies mentioned above emphasized the importance of well-managed communication, crisis management, and media relations strategies and the approaches utilized to detect rumors and conflicting information. Therefore, these studies are crucial for media and public relations practitioners to learn lessons and then adapt within their strategies and work mechanisms.

Summary of Literature Reviewed and Rationale for the Study

The previous literature focused on the following aspects:

- It is essential to utilize strategic tools to reduce the prevalence of rumors by establishing media observatories and raising officials' abilities to deal with rumors.
- Inoculation strategy informs, without exaggerating, the public about the rumor, its source, and goals even before its spread.
- Building resistance for individuals and providing them, by evidence, with practical inoculation strategies against rumors and misinformation.
- Adopting legislation regulating the accelerated flow of misinformation on the internet and media is essential.

- The importance of developing response strategies in formal justice institutions is to consider the degree to which the public is involved before deciding the type of response.
- Understanding the mechanism of the spread of information is crucial for any media and public relations practitioner.
- The methods of examining external rumors during the organizational exchange or the spreading of critics and media rumors.
- The methods of utilizing the in-depth interviews to collect data from media relations practitioners in the context of formal institutions.
- The methods of establishing media relations practitioner- journalist relationship.
- The role of crisis management during the spread of rumors and the approaches utilized to detect external rumors in public and governmental institutions.

The key driver for the methodology of this study is the philosophy of interpretivism, which is mainly concerned with gaining a deeper understanding of the complexity of a phenomenon. The researcher conducted the literature review to be familiarized with existing studies and benefit from their results and recommendations so far.

- Abdel Rahim (2017) showed the importance of utilizing strategic tools to reduce the prevalence of rumors through establishing media observatories and raising officials' abilities to deal with rumors; this resembles *Tahaqaq-Kashif*, an independent Palestinian platform that aims to combat misinformation in Palestinian media. These tools can be included in Palestine's national strategy of the justice sector and the rule of law. Inoculation strategy informs the public about the rumor, its source, and goals even before its spread.

- Al-Bakour (2001) presented the three methods to confront rumors; these methods will enrich this study specifically when preparing the questions of in-depth interviews. Moreover, Basol *et al.* (2020) studied the possibility of building resistance for individuals then provided the effectiveness of inoculation against rumors and misinformation, which meets the core attention of this study is examining how media relations in formal Palestinian institutions in the justice sector utilize media campaigns and other preventive tools to confront rumors.
- Walters's (2018) article is consistent with this study due to the importance of legislation regulating the prevalence of misinformation on the internet and media. The research paper of Vafeiadis *et al.* (2019) offers this study practical insights that may develop response strategies in formal justice institutions, considering the degree to which the public is involved before deciding the type of response.
- Suntwal *et al.* (2020) discussed that understanding the mechanism of the spread of information is crucial for any media and public relations practitioners, taking into consideration the different factors that affect fake news, including rumors.
- Al-Badayna (2001) presented solutions in media mainly represented in revealing the content of rumors. However, given that the paper was conducted in 2001, substantial technological advancements have taken place in the media relations field, it may include some of these solutions within the questions of in-depth interviews for Palestinian justice institutions.
- The study of Mico *et al.* (2013) is consistent with this study as it implemented in-depth interviews with media officials and reveals the role of media relations. However, the case study of Mico *et al.* (2014) does not apply to this study because it is about a newly emerged political movement, at the time of conducting the study,

does not resemble the formal justice institutions, which are established in accordance to law and errors in media relations are a huge responsibility, and there is no room for mistakes.

- As this study targets formal institutions, DiFonzo et al. (2000) and Chen et al. (2015) are beneficial because they followed in-depth interviews to extract data about rumors during an organizational change from the public about external rumors during the crisis from media relations professionals. Meanwhile, Zheltukhina *et al.* (2016) found that official media does not provide the public with explanations to confront rumors; this resembles the reality of media relations in formal Palestinian institutions. They do not provide the media or the public with any interpretations during the spread of the rumors.
- Hindawy's (2021) method is consistent with this study since it dealt with public facilities and states administrations to combat rumors; this will be reasonable to make projections in the case of Palestinian Justice Institutions in some aspects.
- Al-Daaja (2009) highlighted the role of civil society organizations in confronting rumors in societies; The Independent Commission for Human Rights has a similar role as it is one of the Palestinian Justice Sector institutions.
- The methods of Marland (2017) and Pang *et al.* (2014) are crucial to understanding by the researcher as they are appropriate in the context of this study, in which they both utilized in-depth interviews to collect data from media relations practitioners. Besides, Marland (2017) examined the internal instruments of media relations in governmental intuitions.
- Pang (2010) and Pang et al. (2014) dealt with Mediating the Media Model; the findings and methods are helpful to this study to form the basis of establishing a

practitioner-journalist relationship that may take media relations in the Palestinian justice sector to the next level.

- The paper of Kirat (2007) and Zhang (2012) presented the usage of the internet in promoting online media relations in UAE; its findings are somehow common in the Arab environment. Moreover, both concluded that media relations in public and governmental organizations still need more enhancement. Likewise, the study of Carlson *et al.* (2018) argues that when institutions mismanage their information, people can develop deep distrust and create a space for rumors, especially during a crisis. Therefore, the delay in providing media with explanations about rumors from the side of formal Palestinian institutions or inconsistent formal messaging, even in developed countries, has harmful effects that need to be carefully addressed by formal institutions.
- Although Edes's (2000) study was conducted in 2000, it tackled “new old” elements in media relation, which can be reformulated as recommendations in this study within the Palestinian context.
- Old and recent studies such as Roux-Dufort (1993), Zeng *et al.* (2016), and Garcia (2017) indicated that the role of crisis management during the spread of rumors must be given great concern by public and government officials; emphasizing the importance of understanding the process of rumor spreading and speed of its prevalence during a crisis.
- The studies of Aertsen & Gelders (2011), Edwards (2011), and Laudy (2017) emphasized the importance of well-managed communication and utilizing media relations strategies during a crisis to detect rumors and conflicting information. These

studies can be lessons for media and public relations practitioners and adapted within the Palestinian context.

Accordingly, and due to the rare studies that addressed the reality of media relations in the Palestinian Justice Sector, this study attempts to provide insights and in-depth understanding on how to employ media relations as a strategic tool to manage and confront external rumors in the Palestinian context. Furthermore, to be later as an introductory to other researchers from Palestine or the region in the future.

Chapter III

Research Design and Methodology

- Research Design
- Population of the study [Toc97502050](#)
- Sources of Data
- Instrumentation
- Interview Analysis
- Validity and Reliability

Research Design

Qualitative research is often associated with interpretivism (Goldkuhl, 2012). Interpretivism is based on the idea that the method used to understand knowledge related to human and social sciences cannot be used in physical sciences because humans act based on their interpretations of their world. Within the perspective of interpretivism, researchers are likely to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of a phenomenon in its unique context rather than trying to generalize the results to other people and other contexts. Among its advantages, interpretivism is a crucial method of the interactive interview in which the researcher investigates and prompts things that we cannot observe; researchers can examine the interviewees' thoughts, values, biases, perceptions, feelings, and perspectives (Pham, 2018).

This study seeks to investigate using the inoculation messages sent by justice institutions when dealing with media to *manage* external rumors as part of the inoculation strategy, given that media might be a source for spreading external rumors. Consequently, protecting the public from possible exposure to external rumors. In addition, this study investigates the employment mechanism for image restoration strategies with media considering them the medium of justice sector institutions to reach the public as a strategy to *confront* external rumors. Moreover, most important, examining the understanding of practitioners of media relations and public relations to media through The Mediating the Media Model.

Accordingly, the current study is based on a qualitative approach. Generally, the qualitative approach has an advantage in “the understanding” since it is recommended with other evaluative functions such as process analysis, staff employment, interpretation,

and understanding of experience (Mohr, 1999). In addition, professional and trained researchers who aimed to understand individuals' experiences and organizational dynamics influenced their commitment to qualitative methodologies (Brown, 2010).

Although the connection between theory and research is somewhat ambiguous or unclear; where many qualitative researchers stress the importance of unearthing theoretical ideas from research data. In his article, Silverman (1993) wrote that qualitative research should play a vital role in testing theories, and it is not limited to quantitative research. In his view, this does not undermine qualitative research, but on the opposite, reflects a higher level of strategy maturity. Adding to that, specifying in advance a theory and testing its plausibility (as in this study) does not deviate from the very nature of qualitative research that tests theories during the research process (i.e., theoretical sampling – in the grounded theory approach), where theoretical positions emerge and spur the collection of more data to test the “upgraded,” and proposed position.

Population of the Study

The population of this study was primarily the officials at Public Relations Departments in their institutions and they were chosen under the criteria of years of experience and profession. The interviewees had on average 10 -15 years of experience or more in media relations and public relations. In addition, the study addressed practitioners with more than 20 years of experience as “*senior practitioners.*” Access to them was achieved through formal correspondences addressed to the head of each institution. This what the researcher referred to below as *priori purposive sampling*.

Sample

The officials at Public Relations Departments (*participants*) were interviewed in the eight Justice Sector Institutions (*context*) in the West Bank (a "supra" *context*), intermingling three layers of observations. The first is the West Bank, due to the lack of accessibility referred to before in the study's limitations. Then, followed by Institutions of Justice Sector, where the phenomena under investigation reside, and finally, a representative of the public relations department in each institution was chosen based on the pre-assumed high level of engagement within the institute.

The sample was chosen purposively (referred to as *purposive sampling*) to be relevant to posed research questions and with research goals in her mind.

Furthermore, and in order to contextualize the sample. The researcher used *a non-sequential approach, a fixed sampling strategy* that the sample was chosen ahead in the research with no additions to the sample as the research proceeds. Additionally, the sampling approach was a priori purposive sampling, meaning the criteria for selecting participants was established at the outset of the research.

With direct reference to research questions, the researcher interviewed a representative from each department of media relations and public relations in the ten institutions of the Justice Sector, so their perspectives, experiences, and activities are under the lens of investigation.

Sources of Data

The number of in-depth interviews *originally* coupled with the number of media relations and public relations practitioners (n. =10) who work in the ten Palestinian Justice Sector institutions, established pursuant to laws, regulations, and decisions in force in Palestine.

The source of data for this study was a total of *eight* in-depth interviews with experienced media relations and public relations practitioners working in Palestinian Justice Sector institutions in the West Bank, who were a key information source for media relations and implemented strategies that manage and confront rumors in their formal institutions. Two of the ten institutions refused to participate in the interview, as mentioned earlier in this study.

For confidentiality reasons, interviewees were identified numerically (e.g., P1, P2, P3) and matched with their *Generic Position Titles (Appendix 5)*. Interviews were conducted using a designed guide to aid the data collection process and help the researcher focus on the intended questions, and maintain consistency across interviews.

Instrumentation

Face-to-face interaction (in the form of in-depth interview) was used because it implies the “fullest” level of participation in the minds of another person, and it helped the researcher “stand in others’ shoes,” for a better understanding of how they see the social world, and how they attribute meaning to things. The researcher reported through the in-

depth interview what participants have said in their own words and captured their frames of reference.

The researcher initially asked interviewees general questions, then tried to prop on some more particular aspects when the interviewee deviated from the general idea under investigation. Alternatively, she avoided delimiting inquiry areas, and instead, she started with general rather specific interview questions. Again, the goal is not to “contaminate” the social reality for the participant with pre-specified venues of discussion.

Method of Interview

The researcher used semi-structured, in-depth interviews to tackle the topic at hand. Generally speaking, the qualitative interview approach aims to investigate interviewee’s point of view rather than the researcher’s concern. Although rambling in qualitative interviews is often encouraged, semi-structured, in-depth interviews direct the talk on pre-determined subjects or topics to be covered. The goal is to get as many details as possible but, at the same time, focus on a particular angle of discussion. In other words, this kind of interview helped the researcher connect themes and topics easily without pigeon-holing conclusions from the interviewees’ responses.

Interview Guide

The interviews were conducted following to in-depth interview guide of open-ended questions exploring the study questions listed in the introduction. The study followed the three essential parts of the *Interview Guide and Notes* (Appendix 3) of Boyce & Neali (2006): *The Factsheet*, used to record time, date and place of interview, other notes that may affect the interview. *The Interview questions* were placed on the left side of the page

and blank space on the right side of the page for written observations and answers. Knowing that the interviews and questions will be delivered in Arabic. *The Post-interview comment sheet*, a place to write notes after the interview, usually includes feelings, interpretations, and other notes that may arise during the interview.

An interview guide was developed discussing three main aspects highlighted in Chapter one: the employment of inoculation and image restoration strategies by media relations and public relations practitioners in Justice Sector Institutions and their understanding of external and internal influences on the relationship with the media.

The exact wording and questions were asked from interviewee to interviewee, as outlined in the guide. The researcher ensured that the structure was consistent across institutions (i.e., cross-case comparability).

The questions in the guide were not very specific, so other avenues of discussion were not suppressed or closed off, and they were formulated to answer each research question the researcher is interested in, but at the same time, covered the areas of investigation from the perspective of the interviewees.

The flow of questions was reasonable and coherent with the study's conceptual framework. The interview started with initial open-ended questions about the media mediation model, followed by intermediate questions about the employment of inoculation strategies against external rumors in light of the media mediation model. Finally, the researcher ended with questions about image restoration strategies to confront these external rumors, encapsulated within media relations as a strategic partner.

The researcher took some field notes and the recording of the interview on a recorder. Some of the notes included emerging ideas. Others include some general demographics of interviewees and contextualizing their answers.

Interviews' time was on average around an hour, or less, depending on interviewees' responses and cooperation. The interviews were recorded after taking permission from the interviewees. Then the recodes were transcribed into a written form, *Interview Transcript (Appendix 4)*, to be analyzed based on the following section.

Interview Analysis

This study investigates media relations in ten Palestinian Justice Sector institutions. The researcher attempted to group answers into categories, analyzed the different perspectives of ten interviewees, and then presented the findings as “an integrated whole.” Therefore, the interview analysis was conducted according to Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method for inductive data analysis of data collected from interviews with media and public relations practitioners in Palestinian Justice Sector Institutions. Based on Dye *et al.* (2000), this method follows four distinct stages:

1. Comparing incidents in each category;
2. Integrating the categories;
3. Delimiting the theory; and
4. Writing the theory.

Categorizing enables the researcher to reduce the complexity of data and ordain and relate themes together. According to Patton (1990), content analysis of interviews and observations identifies, codes, and categorizes the primary patterns in the data. Also, the

qualitative analysis aims to uncover patterns, themes, and categories, which requires carefully judging what is important and meaningful in the collected data. As for the inductive analysis, the categories emerged out of collected data rather than imposed before the data collection process. To compare categories, the researcher looks for similarities and differences in each category, considering that things are not simply alike or related; they are somewhat alike or related in some respect or another. During the comparison process, the categories evolve and develop, more and more decisions are made as part of the continuous refinement. During analysis, the including and excluding data and observations become more precise and defined. By following the method mentioned above, the researcher will produce meaningful interpretations of the findings.

Validity and Reliability

Although, “measurement” in quantitative research is the first thing that comes to our mind when thinking of validity. Still, many researchers argued that bearing on validity in qualitative studies is inexcusable. Instead, they found that the assimilation of reliability and validity from a different “frame of understanding” will add a meaningful scientific benchmark of quality that can guide research furtherment and replication. Thus, validity refers to the degree to which the researcher is observing, measuring, or investigating what they are saying they are doing.

In line with the paragraph above, the meaning of the terms is different in qualitative research. The researcher followed the suggestions of LeCompte and Goetz regarding internal and external reliability and internal and external validity, as presented hereunder:

External Reliability

It refers to the extent to which the current study can be replicated. Particularly in qualitative research, where exact replication is not feasible due to the variability among contexts in which the original study was conducted and the context where the replication will occur. The researcher assumes that external reliability in the current study does not influence the integrity of results because the Justice Sector in the West Bank is not fluctuating, and the “system” remains stable according to government laws and regulations. In other words, although the social context cannot be “frozen,” still other researchers can replicate to a high degree the study by interviewing subjects in the same positions as in the current study and Palestine. The Palestinian context and government are “unique” and should be considered when conducting research in any field.

Internal Reliability

It is crucial when multiple observers or conductors are in the field, and inter-observer consistency becomes essential. There was only one observer (i.e., the researcher). Therefore, high internal reliability is to be assumed.

Internal Validity

It is a strong point in qualitative research, where a high internal validity refers to a high level of congruity between emerging theoretical concepts and themes developed by the researcher and their observations. Fortunately, the researcher is already familiar with the “social life” in the Justice Sector because she has been working there for many years. Therefore, her understanding of how things go, how people act and interact, and how they respond to actions, whether internally or externally, are reasons to assume with confidence a high internal validity between their observations and evolving theoretical categories and concepts.

External Validity

The degree to which conclusions of a study can be generalized to other contexts, is a challenging task for every qualitative researcher. Therefore, the researcher wrote a thorough review of the Justice Sector to help other researchers “understand” the context and compare accordingly. Nonetheless, the researcher took the Justice Sector as a case study, and the level of generalizability is not the goal of this study. This was evident earlier in this chapter, where the researcher pinpointed using a constructivist epistemological philosophy to arrive at knowledge about the phenomena at hand.

A thick description of the details of the social reality in which interviews took place can provide a good reason to “transfer” conclusions to another milieu. However, the researcher favored being pragmatic with a broad description rather than an accurate description of context because it is not an ethnographic observation after all.

Chapter IV

Findings

Introduction

This study investigates media relations in Palestinian Justice Sector institutions and how media relations and public relations practitioners utilize it. Palestinian Justice Sector suffers from a lack of clarity in media relations strategies regarding managing and confronting external rumors. Therefore, the researcher tries to highlight the necessity of not considering the strategies of inoculation, image restoration, and the mediating model. Also, the researcher seeks to benefit from the data collected from the eight in-depth interviews through recommendations that could serve as insights for justice sector institutions.

Owing to the close correlation between the central question of this study and the research philosophy of interpretivism as a critical method of the interactive interview, the researcher examined the interviewees' thoughts, values, biases, perceptions, feelings, and perspectives (Pham, 2018). Also, because the in-depth interviews provide the researcher with the opportunity to step into others' minds and to experience the world from their perspectives, the researcher followed the interview analysis of Pang *et al.* (2014) titled "*Media Relations in an Evolving Media Landscape*" to this study.

Therefore, the following section presents the data collected from eight interviewees and their comments in light of study questions. (1) *Comparing incidents in each category*: the researcher categorized the collected data according to the assumptions of each theory to reduce the complexity of data. (2) *Integrating the categories*: each category was interpreted into themes. (3) *Delimiting the theory*: the researcher looked for similarities and differences in each category, considering that things are not simply alike or related; they are somewhat alike or related in some respect or another. (4) *Writing the theory*: as

the categories evolve and themes develop, the decisions are made, and the researcher is to produce meaningful interpretations for the findings.

It is worth noting that the researcher did not manage to conduct interviews with two institutions out of ten. The first apologized for accepting the meeting request from the researcher, claiming that they do not have public relations department or media relations practitioner. The second did not reply to the meeting request, and they stopped answering phone calls and messages from the researcher.

Question 1: *How do Palestinian Justice Sector institutions employ inoculation strategies in their messages to media to manage rumors?*

Category 1 - Inoculation through warning messages to manage potential external rumors

Three themes were identified. The first theme covered the idea that there was no case in which warning messages were sent to the media before the prevalence of external rumors. From practitioners' point of view in six institutions, dealing with external rumors occurs after their spread, and no action is taken before that. In other words, these institutions wait for the rumor to happen and then deal with it according to its nature and subject. An interviewee (P1) shared:

“Sometimes sending a press release or news has no intention to consider it under the title of potential rumor. We expect some things to happen in the Judicial Council and justice sector. There is no such thing as a potential rumor in justice sector institutions. Before, it was a rumor; we did not deal with it and did not believe this concept existed.”

As for getting in contact with media and journalists regarding managing rumors, some practitioners see that scrutiny and checking the spreading rumors are the responsibility of the media themselves; they are the ones who should contact us. For example, a senior practitioner (P6) said:

“We try to build a long-term relationship with the media, not based on reactions. Therefore, we do not put proactive procedure to control the rumors because whoever does such a step has matters that he wants to hide... we do not use this approach.”

From another practitioner’s point of view who tried to strike the right balance through their institution’s strategic and operational plans, one senior practitioner (P8) explained:

“Sometimes, the official authorities do not issue clear, sufficient, and convincing information to convince the public that what is circulated is pure fantasy. In short, we do not look for rumors, and we cannot prevent people from sending them out... but if the case is related to legal and justice issue and there is much controversy over it, the Commission, through its methods and its mandate, reaches certain convictions which are released through an official position that clarifies the facts as they are. Nevertheless, of course, we always consider not to stir up public opinion.”

Meanwhile, the second theme focused on dealing with media before the prevalence of external rumors to manage them as an existed procedure supported by facts and authoritative information. From the practitioners’ point of view in the other two institutions, they consider the importance of media relations management. They have a

specialized department that regularly deals with journalists to inform them of the danger of spreading false news and contacting the police. One practitioner (P5) stated:

“We may expect potential rumor, and accordingly we send to some journalists that news may spread and it may be incorrect, and we want you not to deal with it. Our messages contain the penalty for spreading the rumor and related laws.”

Another practitioner (P7) mentioned that the procedure of managing rumors before their spread was taken several times in his institution, he said:

“We expected that a rumor would spread about a specific topic, so we immediately caught the matter in time and asked the chairman of Bar Association to issue a live press release before issuing any news about the topic. The press release was provided with facts and information supported by dates and evidence.”

The third theme is related to the latter two institutions, which send warning messages to the media. They indicated that warning messages helped them to put several rumors to rest. Practitioners have experienced the positive effect of such a procedure in which they receive warnings and information from journalists when they encounter rumors or false news.

Question 2: *How do media relations and public relations practitioners employ their understanding of internal and external influences of their relationship with media?*

Category 2 - Understanding the internal influences

Journalist Mindset

Five themes were identified in this category; the first focused on how interviewees got to know journalists who covered their institutions. Most depend on building a solid relationship with journalists who are mainly coworkers and have a personal and professional relationship with them. Some ask for updated lists of journalists, join journalists' WhatsApp groups, or pay regular visits to their media institutions. In addition, others follow up writings and publications of journalists on audio-visual and written media. A senior practitioner (P8) shared:

“Having worked as a journalist, I know journalists personally and professionally, as well as identifying them through their published writings and reports.”

The second theme focused on how interviewees approach journalists. Most of the interviewees maintain their contacts with those who have a constant interest in legal and justice matters and those who are the most professional, respected, and famous in the media field. Interviewees also mentioned that the nature of the activity and its magnitude are key elements for approaching journalists. For example, one practitioner (P5) said:

“What determines the journalist is the event in the first place, then the journalist who is interested in police news and the subject of the news.”

The third theme covered the tools used by interviewees to pitch their stories. The most commonly used method is making phone calls, especially with journalists who have close

relationships, pitching via WhatsApp, then sending emails and publishing stories on institutions' formal websites attached with links and any other needed documents and information.

The fourth theme focused on how interviewees understand what journalists would like to cover in their scoop. Here, some interviewees mentioned again that they understand the journalists through dealing with them and based on their interest and strive towards having a scoop or reaching information from institutions. Other interviewees mentioned that their long experience as journalists helped them build a mutual relationship and deep understanding of journalists' needs. A senior practitioner (P6):

“By virtue of our experience, we can know the motives of journalists and the way to deal with them; we try to involve them so that they become part of the thinking processes and pre-planning of the activities and events carried out by the institution.”

As for offering exclusive stories, in the fifth theme. When taking a thorough overview of the interviewees' answers, the researcher noticed variation in some of the interviewees' answers in which they did not want to be seen as playing favorites. Five institutions out of eight declared that they do not offer exclusive stories to any journalist or media firm, but at the same time, they give priority to journalists who get in touch first or to those who ask for an exclusive story. For example, one practitioner (P6):

“If a journalist requests an exclusive story, we provide it, but we stand in front of all journalists at the same distance and do not distinguish one journalist from another.”

Another practitioner (P1) justified:

“There is no such thing as exclusive, there are journalists who respond quickly and show interest, and this is what makes them the closest.”

Meanwhile, practitioners (P4) and (P5) indicated, respectively:

(P4): *“There is an influential press. Therefore, if the news or the statement reaches them first and we want to pass it on to them, we will have achieved the success that we initially sought, and the news will be more credible and widespread.”*

(P5): *“We can distinguish a journalist with exclusive news; he or she may be influential or have followers. However, we usually give the news equally to all journalists.”*

Journalist Routines

In this category, two themes were recognized. The first covered the accessibility for journalists to contact interviewees any time of the day. All interviewees assured that they are accessible to journalists 24 hours a day through mobiles and emails. A practitioner (P5) shared:

“The journalist can call me at any moment. I answer all calls and sometimes call them back if I am busy. My job as a spokesperson is to respond to journalists’ questions.”

The second theme revolved around the possibility of responding promptly to meet journalist deadlines. Again, all interviewees agreed that responding to media queries would not be immediate due to several legal and organizational constraints. Some

mentioned that caution in giving information gives journalists sufficient time to write a well-balanced story. The interviewees revealed the most known constraints were: institutional bureaucracy, prior approval of decision-makers in the institutions, recourse to legal procedures, secrecy, legal parameters of publication, prior coordination with specialized legal professionals in institutions, following work procedures and manuals, and internal protocols. For example, a practitioner (P2) said:

“We are governed by the law and the confidentiality of procedures in the issues under investigation. Our media discourse is determined based on legal constraints, and the journalist must understand that we do not withhold information from him, but there is a law that governs us.”

Newsroom Routines

One theme was identified, and it covered relationship improvement with the newsroom. Five out of eight interviewees confirmed the importance of building a solid relationship with the newsroom, editors-in-chief, and other staff in media firms. For example, a practitioner (P1) shared:

“The real and important relations for us are with the editorial room. What is between us and the media is an agreement on the editorial policy. In addition, we have established training for a group of journalists working in newsrooms on the mechanisms of covering news in court sessions.”

In contrast, one interviewee mentioned that they have limited communication with the newsroom, explaining that the institution's interests are different from those of editors-in-chief. Another mentioned that they contact the newsroom only in the event of an error or

mistake in a press release. Finally, a third interviewee revealed that there is a shortfall in the area of dealing with the newsroom and editors-in-chief.

Category 3 - Understanding the external influences

Extra-Media Forces

Two themes were identified; the first focused on how interviewees find out and reach the legal factors in their institutions' news or press release. All interviewees confirmed that they refer the legal text and terminologies to legal departments or legal advisors responsible for editing, reviewing, and adapting all these texts to be simplified for the public. A practitioner (P4) explained:

“Public Relations practitioner drafts the format of the news story, the title, and the arrangement of the content. If the news is likely to have legal material, we refer it to the competent authority in the ministry to inquire about the validity of the legal information and to provide the appropriate legal texts that support the subject of the news.”

The second theme addressed the risks resulting from not knowing legal factors in news materials. Again, the interviewees highlighted primarily the embarrassment that might be created and severely affect the image and credibility of the institutions as a whole—also creating a situation that weakens the role of the institutions, threatens civil peace, and compromises the trust in institutions.

Media Ideology

The researcher identified three themes; the first covered media classifications in Palestine and their effects on the effort of the interviewees' institutions. One interviewee indicated that media classifications could not be seen as negative or positive; instead, it is vital to understand the map for these classifications and comprehend the nature of the economic equation and the political reality in Palestine. A practitioner (P6) explained:

“The unorganized media environment poses a problem, as no clarity in the legislative environment regulates the work of the press in Palestine.”

From another point of view, a practitioner (P4) said:

“Formal media serves Ministry of Justice greatly; the ministry has kind of balance because it is part of Executive Authority and at the same time it is part of the justice sector.”

Meanwhile, another senior practitioner (P5) said:

“Media classifications had a positive and negative impact on our institution; nevertheless, problems arise at the level of non-official media, social media platforms, or unlicensed platforms and pages.”

The second focused on how interviewees shape their stories to cope with different media platforms. Two institutions mentioned that they follow one single format to all media platforms considering that their press release or news is supported with facts and a clear position. Another interviewee mentioned that they follow two formats, one legal issued by the General Assembly and another issued by public relations. However, other

interviewees clarified that their news format depends on professional media: traditional media, audio-visual, and digital media. A practitioner (P1) shared:

“Each media has its format, the material that we present on radio spot is different from what we present on TV. We have a pretty good understanding of protocols and algorithms of social media platforms like Facebook.”

Also, a senior practitioner (P8) said:

“The commission produces media productions that not only meet the needs of the press and media but also meet the needs of the public. We produce radio spots, films, short videos, and e-posts, taking into account the delivery of information with the least amount of writing and optimal use of the image.”

The third theme covered the shortage among the skills of media and public relations practitioners of justice institutions and the availability of sufficient training in managing and confronting external rumors. Although some interviewees mentioned that the skills of media and public relations practitioners could be gained by experience or on-the-job training, they avoid mentioning what kind of shortage they usually observe in their institutions. Others mentioned that media and public relations practitioners lack professionalism, power, and authority, freedom from their supervisors, specialized media staff, mastering the proper mechanism to deal with media, and producing media formats. For example, a practitioner (P1) shared:

“There is a lack of free space to work in. All institutions suffer the same problems, as there are no incentives for workers in the field of media and public relations.”

As for the availability of training, most assured that there is always a need for training and improving media staff skills. If there were any implemented training, their goals were

not oriented specifically on subjects related to manage and to confront external rumors; instead, such topics were within more broad concepts. One interviewee (P5) said:

“We conducted training, but we still need more. For example, there was a training on rumors, but the topic was part of an integrated training package.”

Except for one interviewee (P4) who said:

“Media team was trained within the strategy of fighting rumors and how to deal with them, and ways to communicate the media.”

Question 3: *How do Palestinian Justice Sector institutions employ image restoration strategies in their messages to media to confront rumors?*

Category 4 - Communication with media after the prevalence of external rumors to confront them

The researcher identified four communications themes in this category; the first focused on *sustained* communication between the institution and media to confront the prevalence of external rumors. Two institutions out of eight employ communication with media as a goal-directed activity. For example, a practitioner said (P1):

“During years of work, relationships are built. Being part of the media sector expresses relations with various media and parties related to the field. Yes, whenever a rumor happens, communication happens.”

A senior practitioner (P8) commented on outreaching media directly after the spread of external rumors:

“Certainly, and this happened with one of the media in the Gaza Strip that wrote a piece of news and attributed it to one of our employees. We communicated directly with the journalist and contacted his manager and editor-in-chief and informed them that the news was completely false and we sent them our official position, and accordingly the false news was withdrawn.”

The second theme revolved around employing communication not only with media but also with the entity which published the external rumor to analyze its source and mechanism that deals with it, another senior practitioner (P6) shared:

“Very few professional media that spread rumors. We may communicate with the entity that published the news material, and we make inquiries to analyze the source of the rumors and the mechanism for dealing with them, but we try to push the media themselves to put in place the solution for dealing with the rumor and addressing it.”

In a similar situation, one of the institutions employs communication and coordination with other institutions in the justice sector due to the complementarity of legal work between them. Then practitioner of media relations gets in contact with the media to provide them with clarifications or statements in case media published misinformation; one practitioner (P2) explained:

“There are circumstances for each case. For example, a rumor spread about a case. We contacted the Judicial Council for clarification; the council stated that this is a judge's decision on which we do not want to comment. In other words, there is coordination with justice sector institutions to confront the rumors. We communicate media and explain to them that this statement has been used in a

wrong way, and we ask them to use the true statement issued by the Public Prosecution.”

However, the third theme was the opposite, in which institutions did not communicate with the media after the spread of external rumors. From practitioners' point of view, media are the ones that need information and clarifications in such situations. One practitioner (P4) said:

“We do not communicate directly with the media because the media is the one that needs information, but for my part, I am prepared and ready for the expected questions from the journalists. Accordingly, the information we want to disclose or issue must be one, comprehensive and useful for the credibility of my institution.”

Another practitioner (P7) assured:

“We do not communicate with media; whoever wants clarifications about any situation shall be the one who communicates.”

The interview with one of the media and public relations practitioners presented the fourth theme, in which communication happens depending on the nature of the situation. The practitioner (P3) said:

“We communicate with the media according to the nature of the event and the subject of the rumor.”

Category 5 - Communication strategies – nature of messages- to confront external rumors to restore institution's image

Here, the themes appeared in the form of image restoration strategies. The eight interviewees revealed several strategies used by their institutions. All eight institutions

agreed primarily on issuing press releases as a strategy for *correction*. However, the press release content varied from one intuition to another. For example, one practitioner revealed that they combine several strategies to be as one, considering that all elements in the press release are essential. Practitioner (1) explained:

“We point out the defect or erroneous information directly, and we point out the mistake made by the media in receiving or misusing information without a source, and we hold those who spread the wrong information responsibly, and we provide real and clear information in detail, and we send a message to ask media to investigate the accuracy and be careful when dealing with the news of Judicial Council and Judicial Authority.”

Others adopt the press release that uses one strategy in its content by providing specific facts to reduce public opinion confusion. Their standpoint is that their truth is sufficient to confront any external rumor. Both practitioners, (P2) and (P9) said, respectively:

(P2): *“The rumor that affects the justice sector and the public and families, here comes our role in preparing a full report and monitoring everything that is said in the country. We also monitor the extent to which people circulate and deal with rumors; we immediately provide the truth in presenting the accurate information and not as it was circulated.”*

(P9): *“In my estimation, whatever the rumor and whatever it is kind, whether intentional or unintentional, we refute it in one way. The way is the truth that we have before us, and we rely on accurate and transparent sources of information through field researchers.”*

One of the institutions sometimes *attacks* the source of the external rumor and reveals its name to the media, explaining that the sources' position is unsound and inaccurate. Their standpoint is that they exercise their rights to reply.

Also, all eight institutions agreed on *considering* or *mortification* for external rumor; when the rumor spread from an unknown source or non-prestigious personalities; when the prevalence of the rumor will increase if respond to it; when the institutions are not required to reply; when the value of rumor is low and with little impact or illogical.

One of the institutions did not respond to 99% of rumors or related incidents around them. Another institution leaves the external rumor circulating without *denial* or *confirmation* because they think it is for their benefit or their audience's benefit. Meanwhile, one institution designates an icon on their website to display the false information as rumors and warns the media and public from dealing or circulating them.

Category 6 - Positive perceptions reflected on reputation, credibility, and position of the institutions

Most interviewees agreed on the central theme; they confirmed that media response was improved due to mutual trust. Most of them revealed a long-term, excellent and professional relationship with journalists and media. Journalists and media took the initiative to contact institutions to inquire about rumors and make sure about any news before publishing it. Except for one practitioner who stated that media did not assist their institution.

The second theme covered several positive impacts and perceptions from journalists and media. Due to the importance of each element mentioned by the interviewees, the researcher summarized these impacts as follows:

(P1): *“By disseminating the professional legal methodology used in our work, we relieve all parties from confusion in exchanging information from the judiciary to the judiciary. There is an appreciation from media regarding the right to obtain information as long as it is consistent with the law and leads to the public interest, and according to the legal understanding of the public interest.”*

(P2): *“Communication helped create a bridge between professional journalists and us, as they are taking information from its source. Also, they have become for us as a reference for any rumor that spreads in the country, and they provide us with guidance and assistance regarding it.”*

(P4): *“The journalist has become a kind of support for our work, as he understands our specialization and alerts us to what the street says; the journalist started talking about us, and therefore I benefited from his presence and his media popularity; the journalist also stopped talking about the crisis that the ministry is going through and excludes it from his news bulletins.”*

(P5): *“The public has started to understand the mechanism of our work, which has led to a reduction in the number of complaints. In addition, the media has defended and supported us; we have personal relationships so that we consult with them about news, its formulation, and writing.”*

(P6): *“We consider the journalists' trust in us as the first line of defense in the sense that they are the ones who face any false news, and they practically become part of the defensive process to confront news and rumors. Through journalists' writing and press materials, they became the ones who defend us, and this is part of the mechanisms that we have seen its effects and results.”*

(P7): *“The relationship with media reflected positively on the Bar Association, in which it gave our association a presence among the people and in society, and it became almost one of the strongest associations in the country. The journalists helped us in preparing media drafting of the legal news, also in hosting our representatives on media, which had a positive role in conveying the size, image, and reputation of the Bar Association.”*

(P8): *“The best way a journalist can help is by conveying the true picture. There have been positions of support from some journalists or writers who write the official position of the commission, and sometimes they provide public with the link that we have listed in our press release.”*

Prop on Interventions That are Crucial to the Findings

Most of the interviewees mentioned above (P1-P8) have experience of more than fifteen years. Moreover, two of them are senior experts who have been working in media and public relations for more than 23 years. Following are some critical comments that emerged during the discussion in the interviews with practitioners of media and public relations in the eight institutions of the Justice Sector. These comments suggest some critical ideas related to the reality of media relations in Palestine.

The Current Reality of Media and Public Relations in Palestine

One interviewee elaborated: It is a turbulent and unhealthy reality concerning the legal issue. All this came from a group of elements and factors:

1. The first and the most important of which is the occupation and its execution for the political sovereignty, and it becomes difficult to convince the public and litigants of the rule of law when there is no political sovereignty.
2. Secondly, the absence of the Legislative Council for many years hits the basis of legal understanding and the basis of the legal process because people are the source of the powers that they exercise through Parliament. Although the judiciary has been responsible for interpreting the law sometimes and representing the law in society, the judiciary should not be the only one representing the legal institution. The legislative Authority is the basis, and its absence has left gaps.
3. Thirdly, the unhealthy reality of the judiciary and the legal reality in Palestine indicates the existence of grievances faced by citizens and litigants, for which the judiciary is not responsible—knowing that the judiciary bears the responsibility for some of these grievances. These grievances reflect negatively on public opinion and affect the various interests in Palestinian society. This shared understanding of reality may vary between the parties of the judiciary.

In the same topic, another interviewee added: the Palestinian reality of media and public relations in Palestine in official institutions is weak, absent, and marginalized, and it is operated in accordance to the decisions of officials in the institutions. What makes things worse is that the government's decision marginalizes the Palestinian Ministry of Information; it is like an orphan ministry with no one to represent it and no minister. When discussing the current media and public relations situation, it is considered a place for those who “do not have work.” In addition, we have weaknesses in training staff, and they do not have the required position at the level of organizational structures or any other career privileges. There must be an official decision from formal institutions to recognize

the role and responsibilities of public relations departments, allocate and monitor the budget for these departments, and provide training, developing, and qualifying the staff.

The third interviewee explained that *there is now a so-called reorganization of the media profession, the internal organization in the Palestinian reality. I am part of a fellowship project with some institutions in Sweden and Denmark on the self-regulation of the media profession. This has various relevant laws such as the Press and Publications Law, the Penal Code, the Ministry of Information, and other laws to be reviewed and updated. The Journalists Association has a role to play; the media colleges that graduate media professionals also have their role, this matter requires a collective effort from all. We need to reorganize the media sector in general or to improve and develop media itself continuously, considering the journalists as the critical elements in the developing process in which they must keep pace with events and developments, they need to have different sources of information and to maintain professionalism and ethics of the profession.*

The Delayed Response From Justice Sector institutions

An interviewee said that the delay of the institutions in responding to rumors harms the institution's reputation or the ministry. Sometimes a crisis or a rumor may occur, and we may wait a day or two or three, and this may create a kind of confirmation of the rumor for the public who is waiting for a legal response. Moreover, the researcher is referring to the justice sector in general, it is essential to link the pillars of the justice sector, even if the Ministry of Justice is part of the Executive Authority, but we have some supervisory tasks over some institutions of the justice sector. Therefore, from the researcher's point

of view, the delay in response sometimes negatively affects the course of the crisis and its management.

Chapter V

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

- Introduction
- Theoretical Conclusions
- Practical Conclusions
- Future Research
- Recommendations

Introduction

This study attempts to bridge the gap in literature dealing with the strategies of managing and confronting rumors employed by the institutions of the Palestinian Justice Sector. The results of this study serve as a reference for scholars and academics who seek to collect internal information about formal and governmental institutions. Moreover, the results show that media relations in the Palestinian context in general and in Justice Sector institutions in specific is still considered one of the public relations' activities, and the transition toward professionalism is relatively slow and weak.

The contribution of this study lies in enriching the theoretical and practical aspects of media and public relations studies. The conclusions below summarize the findings in Chapter V and list them as follows:

Theoretical Conclusions

This study fills a gap in the existing literature dealing with media relations strategies used to manage and confront rumors in the Palestinian Justice Sector. Therefore, this study argues media and public relations research by uncovering theoretical patterns and themes of best practices in Palestinian Justice Sector institutions. It also draws the attention of media relations and public relations practitioners to reconsider or re-evaluate their media relations strategies to manage and confront rumors effectively.

The findings of this study represent a call to recognize the strategies of inoculation theory as a defensive plan. Second, to assure the effectiveness of image restoration theory as an attack plan. Third, understanding the combination of multiple levels of the Mediating Model reduces the damage resulting from external rumors.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on media relations in the Palestinian Justice Sector, which faces a complicated political status, turbulent and unhealthy media reality, and journalists' different backgrounds and diverse affiliations.

Practical Conclusions

The findings of this study provide beneficial insights on developing effective strategies of media relations for Palestinian Justice Sector institutions and perform as a starting point for media relations and public relations practitioners to establish their media relations and highlight the value of different media environments and orientations; and most importantly, the emphasize the significance of journalists "understanding." In addition, this study offers a vivid example and overall view on the nature of legal procedures and their intersections with media and public relations in the Palestinian Justice Sector.

Future Research

This study reflects media relations as a strategic tool to confront and manage external rumors from the perspective of media relations and public relations practitioners working in eight Palestinian Justice Sector institutions; future research needs to include the point of view of journalists and media firms in Palestine, and integrate it within the framework of this study.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings of this study. It is assumed that adopting these recommendations will lead to employing best practices in the field of media relations in Justice Sector institutions.

1. Considering and employing inoculation strategies through warning messages to media to manage potential external rumors.

In general, Justice Sector institutions do not employ inoculation in their communication strategies with media; there is a need to emphasize the role of warning messages as proactive tools within strategic plans. However, out of eight that employed inoculation, the two institutions had experienced the positive effect of such a procedure in which they received warnings and information from journalists when they encountered rumors or false news; consequently, they helped them put several rumors to rest. Therefore, this study recommends including inoculation within the communications of Justice Sector institutions before the prevalence of external rumors. Furthermore, it is consistent with the article of Basol *et al.* (2020), which revealed that recent research had examined the possibility of building resistance against misinformation through inoculation by proactively exposing people to weakened doses of misinformation that can confer cognitive immunity.

2. Understanding the hierarchy flow of internal and external influences, as a whole, when building relationships with journalists and their media firms.

The findings of this study showed some understanding of the need for journalists and the importance of building a solid relationship with them, especially with those who have a constant interest in Justice Sector institutions. However, there is plenty of room for more improvement regarding promptly responding to media queries and expanding communication with the newsroom and editor-in-chief. Therefore, this study

recommends considering the five-level of the Mediating Model when approaching and building a relationship with journalists and their media firms. This is consistent with Pang *et al.* (2014), which indicated that media relations practitioners must recognize journalists' needs and understand how they work and operate their work environment.

3. Including communication with different media classifications in Palestine within media and public relations strategic plans.

Due to the weak, absent, and marginalized media and public relations situation in official Palestinian institutions, the act of direct communication with media varied among Justice Sector institutions. Therefore, this study recommends that Justice Sector institutions clarify their mechanisms of approaching journalists and media regardless of their classifications, backgrounds, and diverse affiliations to remove any ambiguity in building a relationship of mutual benefit with media in general and journalists in specific.

4. Reconsidering the position of spokesperson in each institution of the Justice Sector

The findings show that this position is not stable; it is instead adapted according to the nature of the event or type of the crisis, in which it is referred to a different person each time. This could confuse journalists or media and raise risks that may result from not knowing legal factors in the context of news and media interviews. According to Waters *et al.* (2010), one of the critical strategies that echoed best practices and efforts includes using consistent messages and organizational spokespersons who promptly follow up on media inquiries and deliver a unified speech. In order to guarantee a unified speech and well-structured legal messages issued by any institution in Justice Sector, this study recommends that the spokesperson position and his/ her tasks need to be reconsidered and identified by the departments of media and public relations.

5. Granting powers and free space to practitioners of media and public relations in Justice Sector institutions.

During the interviews, active discussions were achieved with the interviewees. As a result, some observations were revealed explicitly, and others were implicitly discussed regarding the curtailment of work and creativity for media and public relations practitioners in formal institutions. Therefore, this study recommends that the decision-makers and high-level officials in Justice Sector institutions take an official decision to recognize the role and responsibilities of public relations departments, support these departments with qualified and specialized staff, and allocate customized budgets for these departments.

6. Enhancing the skills of practitioners and staff of media relations and public relations

The finding showed, in general, that there is always a need for organized training and improving vocational skills. Therefore, this study recommends conducting continuous, systematic, and updated training and workshops on modern scientific methods of communication with media and producing professional and legal formats.

7. Institutionalizing the employment of image restoration strategies through periodic communication messages to media to confront external rumors.

Among the main findings of this study showed that the eight institutions that have been interviewed may use one strategy or more to confront external rumors; however, the purpose of each strategy to restore credibility and trust of the institution was not clear or systemized by the Justice Sector institutions, and it varied in accordance to the

orientations of the high-level administration. Moreover, in some cases, the delay of response may reflect negatively on the course of crises and their management in some Justice Sector institutions and create more confusion and inconsistency in their image restoration strategies. In Chen *et al.* (2015), the experienced media professionals covering organizational crises expressed that many social media unfiltered raw material can leave much room for rumors. They recommended that best practices during crises are effective communication with stakeholders and the public who need rapid and accurate information. This study recommends balancing the practical experience of image restoration theory and its theoretical framework; this guarantees the stability of strategies and the institutionalization of work regardless of the changes of administration or staff.

8. Greater focusing on media's positive impact and perceptions reflected on reputation, credibility, and position of Justice Sector intuitions.

Media relations is basically about building mutual interest of practitioner-journalist relationship, and the findings of this study revealed that the majority of Justice Sector institutions tackled the positive impact of building bridges and strong relationships with media. Carlson *et al.* (2018) argued that governments and other types of institutions could weaken their policies by mishandling the flow of information or limiting its dissemination in addition to the frequent policy change. This study recommends maximizing the principle of the right to obtain information from formal institutions and focusing on the proper understanding of professional journalists regarding the acquiring of such information from its legal and authorized sources. This could positively reflect Justice Sector institutions' credibility and reputation, which is the ultimate goal for any formal and non-formal institution.

9. Intensifying the cooperation between Justice Sector institutions to raise public awareness in laws that regulate the work of Justice Sector institutions.

The findings showed that only one of the eight institutions performs limited coordination attempts with other Justice Sector institutions in some public opinion cases. Therefore, this study recommends close coordination among Justice Sector institutions in procedural regulations and laws. This will gradually create public awareness on how such institutions proceed with legal work and deal with the secrecy of procedures for any public opinion cases. Also, in this regard, this study recommends the necessity of the engagement of journalists and media in the sensitization process.

10. Addressing the external challenges and organizational limitations

The findings of this study revealed many external constraints and obstacles that hinder the flow of work in legal institutions in which the practitioners of media relations and public relations are experiencing during their daily work. Bureaucracy, legal limitations of publishing, the absence of Legislative Council -which creates a frozen situation to laws and legislations and hinders any updates- and last but not least, the Israeli Occupation.

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Appendices

Appendix (1) - Abstract in Arabic

العلاقات الإعلامية كأداة استراتيجية لإدارة ومكافحة الشائعات الخارجية في قطاع العدالة الفلسطيني

بحثت هذه الدراسة النوعية في العلاقات الإعلامية كأداة استراتيجية لإدارة الشائعات الخارجية ومواجهتها في مؤسسات قطاع العدالة الفلسطيني، وكيفية توظيفها من قبل ممارسي العلاقات الإعلامية والعلاقات العامة. ومن هنا، هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى فهم واقع العلاقات الإعلامية في قطاع العدالة، وإبراز أهميتها كأداة استراتيجية، والأهم من ذلك، كيفية توظيف استراتيجيات العلاقات الإعلامية بشكل كافٍ وفعال.

حققت الباحثة هدف هذه الدراسة من خلال بناء أسئلة المقابلة بناءً على (أ) افتراضات نظرية التلقيح كخطة دفاعية للتحكم بالشائعات الخارجية، (ب) المستويات المتعددة لنموذج الوسيط الإعلامي للتركيز على العلاقة مع الصحفيين ومؤسساتهم الإعلامية، (ج) افتراضات نظرية ترميم الصورة كخطة هجوم لمواجهة الشائعات الخارجية. إضافة إلى ذلك، أجرت هذه الدراسة مقابلات معمقة شبه المنظمة وتم اختيار عينة هادفة لإجراء مقابلات مع ممارسي العلاقات الإعلامية والعلاقات العامة ذوي الخبرة العاملين في قطاع العدالة الفلسطيني. كما تم استخدام أسلوب المقارنة الثابتة لتحليل المقابلات، حيث تم عرض البيانات التي تم جمعها من المقابلات، ثم تصنيفها إلى فئات وفقاً لافتراضات كل نظرية، ثم تفسير الفئات إلى موضوعات.

وأظهرت النتائج الرئيسية لهذه الدراسة أن غالبية مؤسسات قطاع العدالة الفلسطيني تعاني من عدم وضوح في استراتيجيات العلاقات الإعلامية فيما يتعلق بإدارة الشائعات الخارجية ومواجهتها. كما واتفق معظم من تمت مقابلتهم على أن عمل الإعلام والعلاقات العامة في المؤسسات الفلسطينية الرسمية ضعيف، ومغيب ومهمش وأن ممارسي العلاقات الإعلامية والعلاقات العامة يفتقرون إلى الصلاحيات والمساحة الحرة.

وكشفت النتائج عن العديد من القيود والعقبات الخارجية التي تعيق تدفق العمل في المؤسسات القانونية وهي خارجة عن سيطرة العاملين في مؤسسات قطاع العدالة، ومن أبرز الأمثلة على هذه المعوقات: البيروقراطية، المحددات القانونية للنشر، غياب المجلس التشريعي وأخيراً وليس آخراً، الاحتلال الإسرائيلي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العلاقات الإعلامية، قطاع العدالة، الشائعات الخارجية، المؤسسات الفلسطينية، الصحفيون، التحصين، نموذج الوسيط الإعلامي، ترميم الصورة.

Appendix (2) - The form of formal correspondence

حضرة حفظه الله

تحية طيبة وبعد ،،

الموضوع: تسهيل مهمة لاستكمال متطلبات الحصول على درجة الماجستير

أهديكم أطيب التحيات، بالإشارة الى الموضوع أعلاه وسنداً للكتاب المرفق من الجامعة العربية الأمريكية، أرجو من حضرتكم تسهيل مهمتي لإجراء مقابلة رسمية مع السيد مسؤول في، وذلك لاستكمال متطلبات الحصول على درجة الماجستير.

مع الإحترام والتقدير،،

الباحثة سهير أحمد حسين أبو عواد

برنامج الماجستير في العلاقات العامة المعاصرة

الجامعة العربية الأمريكية

- كتاب الجامعة العربية الأمريكية

2021-12-1

الى من يهمه الامر

تسهيل مهمة بحثية

تحية طيبة وبعد،

تهديكم الجامعة العربية الأمريكية أطيب التحيات، وبالإشارة الى الموضوع أعلاه، تشهد كلية الدراسات العليا في الجامعة أن الطالبة سهير احمد حسين أبو عواد والتي تحمل الرقم الجامعي 201911319 هي طالبة ماجستير في الجامعة العربية الأمريكية تخصص علاقات عامة معاصرة، وتعمل على دراسة علمية حول: " العلاقات الإعلامية كاداة استراتيجية للتحكم بالثانعات الخارجية ومواجهتها في مؤسسات قطاع العدالة الفلسطيني) تحت اشراف الدكتور الياس كركالي، علماً ان المعلومات مستخدم لغاية البحث فقط وسيتم التعامل معها بغاية السرية، وقد أعطيت هذه الرسالة بناءً على طلبها.

وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام


عميد كلية الدراسات العليا

د. شاهيناز نجار



Page 1 of 1

Jenin Tel: +970-4-2418888 Ext.:1471,1472 Fax: +970-4-2510810 P.O. Box:240
Ramallah Tel: +970-2-2941999 Fax: +970-2-2941979 Abu Qash - Near Alrehan
E-mail: FGS@aaup.edu ; PGS@aaup.edu Website: www.aaup.edu

Study title: Media relations as a Strategic Tool to Manage and Confront External Rumors in Palestinian Justice Sector Institutions.	
Researcher name (Interviewer):	
Place and site:	
Date:	
Start time:	End time:
Interviewee (P1): Current position: Years in PR: Institution:	P= Practitioner of Media Relations and Public Relations
Questions	Answers
Question 1: Does your institution send warning messages to media about potential external rumors?	هل ترسل مؤسستكم رسائل تنبيهية إلى وسائل الإعلام بشأن الشائعات الخارجية المحتملة؟
Question 2: Does your institution use facts in its warning messages to dispel the potential external rumors?	هل تستخدم مؤسستكم الحقائق في رسائلها التنبيهية لدحض الشائعات الخارجية المحتملة؟
Question 3: Has your institution observed that your warning messages have affected and changed media response?	هل لاحظت مؤسستكم أن رسائل التنبيه الخاصة بكم قد أثرت وغيّرت استجابة وسائل الإعلام؟
Question 4: How do you get to know journalists who cover your institution?	كيف تتعرف على الصحفيين الذين يغطون أخبار مؤسستكم؟
Question 5: How do you estimate which journalist to approach when you need coverage?	كيف تحدد الصحفي الذي يجب عليك الاتصال به عندما تحتاج إلى تغطية؟
Question 6: How do you usually pitch stories to journalists (press release, email, phone calls, etc.)?	كيف تقوم عادة بعرض القصص على الصحفيين (بيان صحفي ، بريد إلكتروني ، مكالمات هاتفية ، إلخ)؟
Question 7:	

<p>How do you seek to understand what the journalists have to cover or would like to cover in their scoop?</p> <p>Question 8: Do you offer exclusive stories about your institution for journalists from different media?</p> <p>Question 9: Are journalists able to contact you anytime of the day? How quickly do you respond to their calls and queries?</p> <p>Question 10: Do you often try to meet their deadline? Why do you think it is important to respond promptly?</p> <p>Question 11: Do you try to improve further relations with other contacts in newsroom? (e.g., editorial manager, department assistants, photographers, etc.)</p> <p>Question 12: Do you have preferred journalist? What do you do you to get him/her be assigned to your story?</p> <p>Question 13: How do you find out about the legal factors in each of the contexts that you work in?</p>	<p>كيف تسعى لفهم ما يجب على الصحفيين تغطيته أو يودون تغطيته في السبق الصحفي؟</p> <p>هل تقدمون قصصًا حصرية حول مؤسستكم للصحفيين من مختلف وسائل الإعلام؟</p> <p>هل يستطيع الصحفيون الاتصال بك في أي وقت من اليوم؟ ما مدى سرعة الرد على مكالماتهم واستفساراتهم؟</p> <p>هل عادةً ما تحاول الالتزام بالموعد النهائي؟ لماذا تعتقد أنه من المهم الاستجابة بسرعة؟</p> <p>هل تحاول تحسين العلاقات مع جهات الاتصال الأخرى في غرفة التحرير؟ (على سبيل المثال ، مدير التحرير ، مساعدو القسم ، المصورون ، إلخ.)</p> <p>هل لديكم صحفي مفضل؟ ماذا تفعل لتخصيصه لقصتك؟</p> <p>كيف يمكنك التعرف على الأمور القانونية في كل من السياقات التي تعمل فيها؟</p>
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<p>Question 14: What are the risks in not knowing the legal factors?</p> <p>Question 15: How do media classifications in Palestine affect the efforts of your institution's publicity?</p> <p>Question 16: How do you shape your stories to cope with different media platforms?</p> <p>Question 17: In your opinion, what is lacking among media and public relations practitioners when trying to improve their media relationship (skills, experience, resources, etc.)? How can this be improved?</p> <p>Question 18: Has your institution trained media and public relations practitioners to deal with crisis during and after the spread of external rumors?</p> <p>Question 19: Has your institution outreached the media during the spread of external rumors? Occasionally or constantly?</p> <p>Question 20: What is the nature of your messages to media to confront</p>	<p>ما هي مخاطر عدم معرفة الأمور القانونية؟</p> <p>كيف تؤثر تصنيفات الإعلام في فلسطين على جهود الترويج لمؤسستك؟</p> <p>كيف تقوم بصياغة قصصك لتتوافق مع المنصات الإعلامية المختلفة؟</p> <p>برأيك ، ما الذي ينقص ممارسي العلاقات العامة والإعلام عند محاولتهم تحسين علاقتهم الإعلامية (مهارات ، خبرة ، موارد ، إلخ)؟ كيف يمكن تحسين هذا؟</p> <p>هل تقوم مؤسستكم بتدريب العاملين في مجال الإعلام والعلاقات العامة على التعامل مع الأزمات أثناء وبعد انتشار الشائعات الخارجية؟</p> <p>هل قامت مؤسستكم بالتواصل مع وسائل الإعلام أثناء انتشار الشائعات الخارجية؟ من حين لحين أو باستمرار؟</p> <p>ما هي طبيعة الرسائل التي ترسلونها لوسائل الإعلام لمواجهة الشائعات الخارجية بعد انتشارها؟ تذكر حسب احتياج الباحثة (على سبيل المثال ، الإنكار/النفي، التهرب من المسؤولية، التقليل من أهمية الشائعة، التصحيح، الإماتة)</p>
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<p>external rumors after their spread? Mentioned as needed by the researcher (denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing the offensive. Correction, mortification)</p> <p>Question 21: How does your relationship with media reflected on image restoration, credibility and position of your institution during the spread of external rumors?</p> <p>Question 22: How does your relationship with media assisted image restoration, credibility and position of your institution after the spread of external rumors?</p>	<p>كيف انعكست علاقتك بالإعلام على استعادة الصورة ومصداقية ومكانة مؤسساتكم أثناء انتشار الشائعات الخارجية؟</p> <p>كيف ساعدت علاقتك بالإعلام في استعادة الصورة والمصداقية ومكانة مؤسساتكم بعد انتشار الشائعات الخارجية؟</p>
Post-interview Comments	
<p>Interviewer comments:</p>	

Appendix (4) - Interview Transcript Form

Transcriber: the researcher
Answers of interviewees: (P1- P8)
<p>Question 1: All answers of interviewees (P1- P8) for Q1</p> <p>Question 2: All answers of interviewees (P1- P8) for Q2</p> <p>Question 3: All answers of interviewees (P1- P8) for Q3</p> <p>Question 4: All answers of interviewees (P1- P8) for Q4</p> <p>Question 22: All answers of interviewees (P1- P8) for Q22</p>

Appendix (5) - List of Participants

	Institution	Generic Position Titles	Years of Experience
P1	High Judicial Council	Manager of Media and Public Relations Unit	14 years
P2	Public Prosecution	Manager of Media	10 years
P3	Constitutional Court	Head of Public Relations and Media Division	10 years
P4	Ministry of Justice	Head of Public and International Relations Unit	12 years
P5	Judicial Police	Palestinian Police Spokesperson	15 years
P6	Palestinian Anti-Corruption Commission	Media Official	23 years
P7	Palestinian Bar Association	Bar Association Spokesperson	8 years
P8	The Independent Commission of Human Rights	Contact and Communication Official	25 years
P9	Advisory and Legislation Bureau	Apologized for interview request	-
P10	Supreme Judge Department/ Shari'a Judiciary	Did not respond to interview request	-