

Assessing Business/Media Attitudes:
Florida's Phosphate Industry and Florida Newspapers

by
Rosemary Holden

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Mass Communications in
the University of South Florida

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Major Professor: Dr. Emery L. Sasser

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An Abstract

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This study continued the search for those aspects of the business/media relationship that indicate an adversarial tone. It focused on one controversial business--Florida's phosphate industry--and its relationship with one form of mass communication--Florida newspapers that report on phosphate news. It compared the opinions of those directly involved in this relationship: phosphate spokespeople and newspaper journalists. Five aspects of the phosphate/newspaper relationship were investigated: (1) perceptions of newspaper coverage of Florida's phosphate industry, (2) professional ideals and the existence of dilemmas in regard to them, (3) beliefs about business in general, a free press in general, Florida's phosphate industry, and Florida newspapers in regard to the industry, (4) political philosophies, and (5) descriptions of the phosphate/newspaper relationship and beliefs about the effects of this relationship.

An adversarial tone between spokespeople and journalists was evidenced by support of six hypotheses predicting differences between the two groups in the following areas: perceptions of the newspaper role in newspaper coverage of Florida's phosphate industry; beliefs about a free press, Florida's phosphate industry, and Florida newspapers; political philosophies; and beliefs about the benefit or detriment of the phosphate/newspaper relationship to those involved.

Spokespeople had favorable perceptions of Florida's phosphate industry. They had unfavorable perceptions of the newspaper role in newspaper coverage of their industry and of Florida newspapers in regard to Florida's phosphate industry. Spokespeople felt the phosphate/

newspaper relationship is detrimental to all parties involved. Politically, they described themselves as conservative. Journalists had favorable perceptions of a free press and of their own role in newspaper coverage of Florida's phosphate industry. They had unfavorable perceptions of Florida's phosphate industry. Politically, journalists described themselves as middle-of-the-road.

Hypotheses were not supported in the following areas, but due to question wording or unacceptable scale reliabilities these areas cannot be eliminated as not indicating an adversarial tone: perceptions of the phosphate role in newspaper coverage of the phosphate industry, professional ideals and dilemmas, and beliefs about business in general.

Abstract approved:

Emery L. Sasser
Major professor: Dr. Emery L. Sasser

Chairman, Department
of Mass Communications

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