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## Attempt to Solving Situational Problem of Alumni Employability

Norliana Hashim<sup>a\*</sup>, Chang Peng Kee<sup>a</sup>, Mat Pauzi Abd Rahman<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, 43600 Bangi, Selangor Malaysia

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### Abstract

The situational theory of publics (STP), one of the most popular public relations theories, provides a mechanism for the identification of publics and their communication behaviors. The situational theory of problem solving (STOPS), an extension of the STP, is a more general theory of communication that looks at antecedents of individuals' communication and information behaviors in the process of problem solving. This conceptual paper reviews the application of STOPS to see the relevance of this theory in the context of organization (university) and publics (alumni) in solving the problem of employability. This study explores the essence and practice of public relations practitioners in The National University of Malaysia (UKM) in enhancing the reputation of the organization.

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*Keywords:* Information acquisition; selection & transmission; problem recognition; involvement recognition; constraint recognition

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### 1. Introduction

The success of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) demands high commitment from university (in this case, UKM) and the publics (one of the main publics is the alumni) to develop and achieve the organization's mission and objectives. Both the parties must cooperate especially in ensure the alumni employability in the market. In this aspect, UKM's main concern in terms of employability is to ensuring the quality of graduates that meet the demands of the job market. The alumni's main concern on the other hand is to secure a job that meets their own personal demand. The common problem between the university and alumni create a situation where problem solving is needed. This issue must be taken seriously to ensure the development of human capital and enhance the reputation

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +6014-2234506; Fax: +603-89213542.  
E-mail address: [yana830907@gmail.com](mailto:yana830907@gmail.com)

of the university.

The society we live in are interwoven with much communication between parties. The publics are groups or persons who communicate with an organization, both internally and externally (Jefkins, 1998). Publics have a stake in the organization as a customer and contribute to profit oriented organization, sometimes rather known as the stakeholders. Hence, to understand the public is an important issue. Organization-public network can be strengthened and enhanced with in depth knowledge of public perception on an issue or a problem. A thorough research must be done to gain this understanding as each person's perception might be different. For example, issue of employability will not concern graduates who have secured a job, but to those who are still unemployed, this issue is of utmost importance.

This future study will be conducted with the assumption that there must be public relations practices among various parties to establish a stable relationship between organization and publics. It aims to help organization identify stakeholders' perception of the organization's reputation. This study is hoped to aid in crisis communication management in organizations when they understand their public's perception better. This study addresses employability as the problem with the hope that it serves as a useful input to universities for better progress. Universities are now increasingly aware that communication with its publics and creativity are very important to ensure a mission is accomplished.

This study will adopt STOPS as the theoretical framework in solving problem of employability in university. Through STOPS, Kim and Grunig (2011) predict significant implications for the pattern of communication between different individuals in problem-solving situations (e.g., health, consumer problems, management and political science) as well as the individuals that make up the aggregate publics that is an object in information campaigns and communication programs. Public perception will be taken into account to find out their communication behaviors. For public conscious organization, the organization must plan something upon hearing and evaluating public perception. However, what the publics view as problem may not be viewed the same way by the organization. There must be a midpoint between the expectations of the organization and the expectation of publics. Therefore, the researcher hopes to use UKM as a case to understand the perception of university and alumni on employability issues and seek the solution as a benchmark for future researchers. The understanding of essence of successful product and service is important for management to guide them in the decision-making (Cooper & Kleinschmidt 1996).

## **2. Situational theory of problem solving**

The word problem refers to a condition, situation or experience that can affect an individual's balance in terms of emotions, thoughts, actions and sometimes physical (Compton, Gallaway & Cournoyer, 2005). Two well known theorists who introduced problem-solving approach were Dewey (1927) and Blumer (1966). According to Dewey and Bulmer, publics are critical component in the democratic process to recognize the problems that affect them, organize and act to resolve the problem. Problem solving process involves levels that are classified as entry level, intermediate level and termination level. However, each of these levels prioritizes certain elements to achieve effective problem-solving process. In this research, UKM success with proactive moves and focus on a clear mission and goals is the aim at the end of it.

James Grunig pioneered the Situational Theory of Publics (STP) in year 1966. This theory provides a method to categorize public response's to a problem, their sum and type of communicative behavior, the effect of communication to public's cognition, attitude and behavior, and the potential in committing to effort of problem solving. Grunig (1996, 1997) develops STP as a standalone communication behavior and decision-making theory. This theory was then extended to a more macro level to explain organization and public relationship. STP was then expanded to A Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS) by Kim (2006) which is more specific into communicative behavior in problem solving rather than general communication behavior. Kim and Grunig (2011) specifically explained why and how individuals communicate while experiencing problematic situations. They then define "problem" as perceptual discrepancies between expected conditions and experienced conditions in a situation that resulted in an uncomfortable situation. Therefore, "problem solving" is an attempt to close the said perceived discrepancies.

Kim (2006) develops STOPS as a general theory that can be applied across all fields. Firstly, STOPS begins with

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