Annotated Bibliography of Recent and Significant Sociological Research of Import to Public Relations Practitioners

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Annotated Bibliography of Recent and Significant Psychological Research of Import to Public Relations Practitioners

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Editor’s Note: The following bibliography consists of recent sociological research, reviews, and theoretical works that bear upon the work of the public relations practitioner. Most items in this list have been published within the last ten years and have been culled from scholarly journals in sociology or are public relations articles that draw heavily upon sociological research (no claim to representativeness, however, is made). It is hoped that this list will promote integrated research between sociologists and public relations practitioners.

Keywords are listed in bold.

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COMMUNITY RELATIONS

These articles focus on public relations as a function of community relations.

Ciliberti, A. (1997). Changes in Discursive Practices in Italian Public Administration. *Journal of Pragmatics, 27*(2), 127-144. This study examined the Italian telephone corporation, TELECOM Italia’s communication that portrays the company as an agent intending to establish relationships with the public. It contends that the recent focus on improving communication activities has made the messages of Italian public administration more comprehensible to the general public. Additionally, the study indicates elements typically found in advertising and political discourse (e.g., self-promotion and synthetic personalization) have been absorbed into public administration communication and concludes that these innovations manipulate social relationships to foster an illusion of friendliness and personal empathy and create a largely unnoticed cultural hegemony.

Community Relations, Governmental Public Relations, International Public Relations, Public Affairs

Crandon, G. L. (1995). Public Information Management—A Comparative Analysis of Three Law Agencies in the State of Texas, USA. *Policing and Society, 5*(3), 233-247. This study examined the importance of the public information office as a conduit for information release. The PIO is of use to law enforcement for information management and to journalists who benefit through the flow of material that forms the basis of their media messages. The study suggests that the style and policy of information release of each law enforcement agency will depend on certain factors and influences. Includes case studies of three law enforcement agencies in TX.

Community Relations, Governmental Public Relations, Media Relations, Public Affairs

Lasley, J. R. (1994). Ethnicity, Gender, and Police-Community Attitudes. *Social Science Quarterly, 75*(1), 85-97. Data obtained during a 1992 survey of 2,800 police patrol officers in Los Angeles, California, explore the relationship of officer ethnicity/gender and attitudes toward police-public relations. The study suggests that neither ethnicity nor gender are significant predictors of officers' attitudes toward their occupational role with community members.

Community Relations, Minority Relations, Public Affairs

Lewis, George H (1997). Celebrating Asparagus: Community and the Rationally Constructed Food Festival. *Journal of American Culture, 20*(4), 73-78. This study investigated the cultural meaning of the Stockton (California) Asparagus Festival. It suggests that, while this annual festival was rationally constructed to generate business and public relations for the area, over time it has come to be accepted as authentic by outsiders. In this sense, it has served as an important vehicle for the production of real tradition. The study concludes the Stockton festival has not only created economic rewards, but it has also been instrumental in creating a sense of community in a city that historically has had little sense of its identity.

Community Relations, Public Affairs
Rossman, E. J. (1992). The Use of Semistructured Interviews in Developing Superfund Community Relations Plans. *Sociological Practice Review, 3*(2), 102-108. This article examined the use of semistructured interviews for systematic data collection on environmental restoration as mandated by the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) of 1980. Through CERCLA has required that community relations plans be developed to ensure public involvement in clean-up actions, no methodology for data collection had been developed. The article argues that semistructured interviews can serve that purpose and should contain items on how affected parties perceive the environmental problem, how they can express views on the clean-up, and how to keep individuals informed. Sample interview items for use in collecting such information are presented.

**Community Relations, Research**

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**CORPORATE PUBLIC RELATIONS**

These articles explore how corporate public relations affects and is affected by a number of areas, to include ethics, the environment, and social responsibility.

Berman, E., West, J., & Cava, A. (1994). Ethics Management in Municipal Governments and Large Firms: Exploring Similarities and Differences. *Administration and Society, 26*, 185-203. This study surveyed 636 human resources directors to compare the ethics management strategies of large cities and firms to examine whether public-private sector differences were reflected in ethics management practices. The findings suggest that differences are minimal; however, they suggest cities use more regulatory-based strategies, while large firms use code-based strategies. Moral leadership by senior managers was found to be the most important strategy for improving ethics in both sectors. In both cities and firms, concerns about litigation, public complaints, and promoting good public relations drive concern over ethics.

**Corporate Public Relations, Ethics, Governmental Public Relations**

Granzin, K. L., & Olsen, J. E. (1995). Support for Buy American Campaigns: An Empirical Investigation Based on a Prosocial Framework. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing, 8*(1), 43-69. This study examined the prosocial determinants of support for "Buy American" textile campaigns. A survey of 243 adults from a large southern metropolitan area concludes that willingness to "Buy American" was associated with consumer's perceived salience of the problem, social concern, perceived deservingness of the workers, ethnonational tendencies, perceived inequity of the situation, sense of similarity with the workers, felt empathy with the workers, and the project benefits of helping workers. The article discusses three patterns of “Buy American” behavior — (1) general predisposition to help in a variety of ways, (2) personal willingness to sort through consumer products and not buy imports, and (3) reliance on government quotas or retailers to filter out imports.

**Corporate Public Relations, Public Affairs, Social Responsibility**
Grunig, J. (1993). Image and Substance: From Symbolic to Behavioral Relationships. *Public Relations Review, 19*(2), 121-139. This article explored the nature of symbolic and behavioral relationships in public relations and deconstructs the meaning of image as it is used in several fields. The article contends that many practitioners’ preoccupation with image indicates that PR is concerned only with symbols — with how the organization describes itself. It asserts that a struggle is taking place between practitioners who use superficial symbols and positive images, and those who seek to establish substantive relationships between organizations and publics based on behavior. The study concludes that communication (a symbolic relationship) can improve a behavioral relationship, but a poor behavioral relationship can weaken attempts to communicate a symbolic positive relationship.

**Corporate Public Relations**

Ibarra, H. (1992). Homophily and Differential Returns: Sex Differences in Network Structure and Access in an Advertising Firm. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 37*(3), 422-447. This study looked at two network mechanisms that create and reinforce gender inequalities in an organization’s distribution of power: sex differences in homophily (the tendency to form same-sex network relationships) and in the ability to convert individual attributes and positional resources into network advantages. The study conducted a network analysis of male and female interaction patterns in New England advertising and public relations firms. The study suggested that males are more likely to form more and stronger homophilous ties across multiple networks, while females evidence a differentiated network pattern in which they obtained social support and friendship from other females and instrumental access through network ties to males. The study concluded that males appear to reap greater network returns relative to females from similar individual and positional resources, as well as from homophilous relationships.

**Corporate Public Relations, Employee Relations, Minority Relations**

Northrup, H. R. (1996). Corporate Campaigns: The Perversion of the Regulatory Process. *Journal of Labor Research, 17*(3), 344-358. This article discussed the nature, benefits, and problems of cooperation between labor unions and government regulatory agencies. It argues that the union-developed strategy of corporate campaigns seeks to maximize bargaining strength by inflicting high public relations and financial costs on a target company or industry. Drawing on specific examples of cooperation between unions and major government regulatory agencies, the article argued that the common goals of unions and government agencies can lead to biased investigations of corporate wrong-doing.

**Corporate Public Relations, Governmental Public Relations, Public Affairs**

Pratt, C. B. (1994). Applying Classical Ethical Theories to Ethical Decision Making in Public Relations: Perrier's Product Recall. *Management Communication Quarterly, 8*(1), 70-94. This article discussed ethical theories in relation to the management of the 1990 product recall by the Perrier Group of America. To enable public relations practitioners, as strategic communication managers, to respond effectively to potentially unethical organizational action, the article proposes a nonsituational theory-based approach to ethics in public relations. It endorses an eclectic approach to problem solving because no single theory in itself is sufficient to guide the complex decision-making process that precedes the public conduct of the strategic
Crisis/Risk Communication

The following articles examine crisis and risk communication in general and within specific risk areas.

Dowie, M. (1991). Saving Face: Could Public Relations Have Rescued Exxon's Image? *Propaganda Review, 8*(Fall), 26-28. This study argues that the recent development of crisis communications task forces within public relations firms is a response to large corporations' need for immediate damage assessment and control through manipulation of public image when corporate negligence or accident results in disaster. Analyzing the 1989 Alaskan Exxon Valdez oil spill, it suggests that crisis communicators have identified a number of public relations imperatives: make the chief executive officer first to survey the incident; do not abandon a middle-management official scapegoating attacks; limit media exposure of contacts between the corporation and the community affected; build an image of with the parties affected, including symbolic gestures concerned action, while minimizing the impact of negative outcomes; stress the company's victimization; and consult with an outside public relations expert in image cleanup.

Freudenburg, W. R., & Rursch, J. A. (1995). The Risks of "Putting the Numbers in Context": A Cautionary Tale. *Risk Analysis, 14*(6), 949-958. This article argued that, despite the warnings of risk communication specialists, the technical community often urges that technological risks should be put in context against risks that are more familiar. In this experiment people were exposed to two types of information about a hazardous waste incinerator — a simplified statistical summary and a comparison of incinerator risks against the risks of smoking. The statistical information led to a modest increase in the reported willingness to vote in favor of the incinerator in a community referendum, but the comparison against cigarettes led to a slight decrease in support. The study suggested that an implicit assumption of risk comparisons is in error: opposition to controversial technologies may have less to do with citizens' levels of information about technology than with their levels of trust in governmental and industrial actors.

Hobbs, J. D. (1995). Treachery by Any Other Name: A Case Study of the Toshiba Public Relations Crisis. *Management Communication Quarterly, 8*(3), 323-346. This article examined Toshiba's selling of advanced submarine propeller technology to the USSR. Using the concept of *apologia* provided insights into Toshiba's handling of the crisis. The article argued that public relations in an image crisis situation should be viewed primarily as a battle for re-identification with the public.
Crisis Management, Corporate Public Relations, Governmental Public Relations

Loury, G. C. (1994). Self-Censorship in Public Discourse: A Theory of "Political Correctness" and Related Phenomena. *Rationality and Society, 6*(4), 428-461. This study examined how this interactive process of inference and deceit affects the quality and extent of public deliberations on sensitive issues. The author argued that uncertainty about what motivates senders of public messages leads receivers to read between the lines to discern the sender's deepest commitments. Anticipating this, senders write between the lines, so that their expressions further their own ends. The study concluded that genuine moral discourse on difficult social issues can become impossible when the risks of upsetting some portion of one's audience are too great. Reliance on euphemism and platitude should be expected in this strategic climate.

**Risk Communication, Audience Analysis**

Marlin, R. (1993). Public Relations Ethics: Ivy Lee, Hill and Knowlton, and the Gulf War. *International Journal of Moral and Social Studies, 8*(3), 237-256. This article looked at why the public relations firm of Hill and Knowlton has been criticized for the methods it used in 1990 to persuade the U.S. Congress and the public to wage war on Iraq. It reviewed a widely circulated but later discredited story about Iraqis removing babies from incubators and leaving them to die on the floor that fueled anger against the Iraqis. The article determined that a major factor in public acceptance of the story was endorsement by Amnesty International and emotional testimony by a girl identified only as "Nayirah." The incident underscores the importance of the most central ethical concern expressed by Ivy Lee, namely, that the source of persuasive materials presented to the public should never be disguised. The factual record of the incubator story and Lee's ethical writings are both examined to explore the ethics of the case.

**Crisis Communication, Ethics, International Communication**

Miller, D. (1999). Risk, Science and Policy: Definitional Struggles, Information Management, the Media and BSE. *Social Science and Medicine, 49*(9), 1239-1255. This essay examined the role of public relations in definitional struggles in the science-policy interface using the example of mad cow disease in the United Kingdom. It contended that an explicit focus on definition illuminates the processes by which scientific judgments are made, promoted, communicated, assessed, and judged. The essay suggested that neglected areas — such as the role of secrecy, public relations, and the mass media in the science-policy interface — are brought into sharper focus as an intrinsic part of the wider definitional struggles.

**Crisis/Risk Communication**

More, E. (1995). Crisis Management and Communication in Australian Organisations. *Australian Journal of Communication, 22*(1), 31-47. This article examined the communication component of crisis management preparedness in Australia. A survey of 101 MBA graduates with at least 5 years of work experience revealed that only one-third of their companies had an operational crisis management plan; that the companies were principally concerned with product
defects; and that only a minority of the companies recognized an increased vulnerability to crises. The article argues that a comprehensive communication plan is needed before, during, and after a crisis; that precrisis communication consists of adequate circulation of the crisis plan; that during the crisis, employee and media communication is critical; and that postcrisis communication should include counseling services and sustained media contact.

**Crisis/Risk Communication, Corporate Public Relations, International Public Relations**

**ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC RELATIONS**

These articles focus on environmental public relations and “green public relations.”

Athanasiou, T. (1996). The Age of Greenwashing. *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism, 7*(1), 1-36. This article discusses the nature and implications of the expanding political and public relations-oriented character of environmentalism practiced within corporations and political institutions. Suggests the modern media age has positioned PR, not physics or ecology, as the dominant scientific paradigm in corporate environmental positioning. The article suggests that corporate PR generally engages in "greenwashing," whereby environmental optimism is emphasized while structural change is avoided. It criticizes this approach for fostering minor changes, marginal concessions, gross ignorance, underestimation, and conscious avoidance of real environmental problems.

**Environmental Public Relations, Corporate Public Relations, Social Responsibility**

Burkhart, F. N. (1991). Journalists as Bureaucrats: Perceptions of "Social Responsibility" Media Roles in Local Emergency Planning. *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters, 9*(1), 75-87. This study examined the effect of a 1986 federal law requiring journalists be included on the country’s 3,000 local emergency planning committees (LEPCs) that develop contingency plans for chemical emergencies. A survey of LEPC members and journalists showed that members favored journalist participation while journalists' responses were mixed. Few journalists favored doing public relations or voting on policy, while most nonmedia members approved. In response to whether a journalist should report committee news while on the committee, responses varied by type of media. The study suggests that for chemical emergency planning, journalists may be more amenable to cooperation with LEPCs than expected, and partnership roles for the news media may include attending LEPC meetings, learning about hazards, and sharing professional needs in an emergency.

**Environmental Public Relations, Community Relations, Crisis/Risk Communication, Public Affairs**

Chess, C., Tamuz, M., Saville, A., & Greenberg, M. (1992). Uncertainty and Increasing Credibility: The Case of Sybron Chemicals Inc. *Industrial Crisis Quarterly, 6*(1), 55-70. This article examined the linkages between organizational factors and risk communications through a case study of Sybron Chemicals, Inc., following an industrial accident. Data drawn from questionnaires and in-depth interviews with 13 companies suggest that Sybron's willingness to reduce company buffering and openly communicate with the public revolved around the
perceptions about the vulnerability of its organizational core, the media, and the community. It suggests that vulnerable companies and those that perceive the community and media as threatening may seek to protect themselves by erecting barriers and initiating superficial public relations campaigns. Less vulnerable companies will be less buffered, and companies perceiving the media and community as detached or uninterested may feel no need to implement a communication program.

**Environmental Public Relations, Community Relations, Credibility, Crisis/Risk Communication,**

Gedicks, A. (1998). Update: The Exxon/Rio Algom Mine Controversy. *Sociological Imagination, 35*(1), 67-81. This article reviews an environmental public relations campaign which overcame grassroots environmental resistance to a proposed metallic sulfide mine in northern Wisconsin. Exxon and other multinational mining corporations developed an extensive public relations/lobbying campaign in the late 1990s designed to drive a wedge between workers and environmentalists. The effectiveness of this campaign was evaluated in light of the intense controversy over mining in Wisconsin.

**Environmental Public Relations, Corporate Public Relations**

Walker, B. (1994). Green Like Me. *Propaganda Review, 11*(Spring), 28-31. This article focused on corporate strategies and practices to appear environmentally correct. From a public relations perspective, the article asserted that the central question derived from the Exxon Valdez disaster is neither about pristine Alaskan shoreline being fouled, nor about the loss of wildlife. Instead, it is suggested the central issue is how a huge U.S. corporation spent $2 billion on the cleanup of the area, yet one year later was still struggling with one of the worst tarnishings of corporate image in U.S. history.

**Environmental Public Relations, Corporate Public Relations**

**HEALTH COMMUNICATION**

These articles focus on health communication topics.

Brunt, J. H., Chappell, N. L., Maclure, M. & Cassels, A. (1998). Assessing the Effectiveness of Government and Industry Media Campaigns on Seniors' Perceptions of Reference-Based Pricing Policy. *Journal of Applied Gerontology, 17*(3), 276-295. This study examined the intensive public relations campaigns and competing media messages used by the government, a pharmaceutical corporation, and the broader pharmaceutical industry in the implementation of health care funding policies that affect seniors. The study found that where British Columbia’s Pharmacare stressed the fiscal merits of reference based pricing, the pharmaceutical industry focused on the possible threat to public health and attempted to rally seniors and health care providers against it. It concludes that the pharmaceutical industry's campaign was unsuccessful because Pharmacare's messages resonated more effectively with seniors' views on public health policy.

**Health Communication, Corporate Public Relations, Governmental Public Relations**
Cameron, G. T; Yang, J. (1991). Effect of Support and Personal Distance on the Definition of Key Publics for the Issue of AIDS. *Journalism Quarterly, 68*(4), 620-629. This study used data from a telephone survey to suggest that a refined version of situational theory (situational theory predicts the most active information seekers are those evidencing high problem recognition, high involvement, and low constraint recognition) allows a rich understanding of certain key publics in public relations and communications campaigns about AIDS. The study suggests that personal and impersonal conditions can be used to distinguish active and passive publics.

**Health Communication, Crisis Communication, Risk Communication**

Powers, A. (1999). Newspaper Coverage of the Breast Implant Controversy. *Women and Health, 30*(2), 83-98. This study analyzed newspaper coverage of the silicone breast implant controversy between 1992 and 1996 to determine whether women in the US were provided a fair and balanced account. It also addressed how Dow Corning’s public relations campaign impacted newspaper coverage. The study suggests that reporting patterns were influenced by the public relations efforts of the implant manufacturer, raising questions concerning the coverage of health care controversies involving large corporations seeking refuge from litigation.

**Health Public Relations, Corporate Public Relations, Crisis/Risk Communication**


This study analyzed how newspapers framed the silicone breast implant controversy from 1992 through 1996 to determine if some of the most influential US newspapers provided women and the public with a fair and balanced account. It also addressed whether Dow Corning’s public relations campaign impacted newspaper coverage. Results indicated that early coverage of the controversy focused on the health risks of silicone breast implants, while later coverage focused on the financial situations of the implant manufacturers. The study concluded that reporting patterns were influenced by the public relations efforts of the implant manufacturer.

**Health Public Relations, Corporate Public Relations, Crisis/Risk Communication**

INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS

These articles focus on international public relations and the practice of public relations in various countries.

Davis, A. (2000). Public Relations, News Production and Changing Patterns of Source Access in the British National Media. *Media Culture and Society, 22*(1), 39-59. This study addressed the rising influence of professional public relations on the process of national news production in Great Britain and discusses how this influence is affecting existing media-source relations. The
article argues that a wide range of organizations have begun adopting public relations as a means of achieving particular goals through media coverage. At the same time, British media institutions, operating under tighter editorial budgets, have become more dependent on information supplied from external sources. The two trends have resulted in the sudden growth of the professional public relations sector and changes to existing patterns of source access. The article’s focus is on how such trends are affecting various sources in their attempts to gain and manage media access.

**International Public Relations, Corporate Public Relations, Media Relations**

Lee, P. S. N., & Chu, L. L. (1998). Inherent Dependence on Power: The Hong Kong Press in Political Transition. *Media Culture and Society, 20*(1), 59-77. This study looked at Chinese use of punishment, rewards, and public relations in changes in the press in Hong Kong during its political transition. It suggested that covert and overt self-censorship was increasing and predicted the press would take up a public relations role, serving mainly as a conveyor of positive messages for government.

**International Public Relations, Media Relations**

Signitzer, B. H., & Coombs, T. (1992). Public Relations and Public Diplomacy: Conceptual Covergences. *Public Relations Review, 18*(2), 137-147. This article explored the ways that public relations models can be conceptually related to notions derived from a branch of international relations known as public and cultural diplomacy. The underlying assumption of this is that, while public relations theory may be well-suited to explain and to predict the communication behavior of organizations in both the profit and nonprofit fields, public diplomacy theories are better suited to the understanding of the relationship between a nation-state and its foreign publics.

**International Public Relations**

Stulik, D. (1998). The Role of Public Administration during Information Campaigns in Countries Applying for EU Membership. *Sisyphus, 12*, 83-96. This study assessed information campaigns in countries seeking European Union (EU) membership. It examined persuasive, communicative, interactive, and participatory campaigns. Through the use of the case studies of Austria, Finland, and Sweden it examined differences in preaccession position. Case studies of Poland and the Czech Republic were examined from the role of historical experience and geopolitical constraint.

**International Public Relations, Media Relations**
Zaharna, R. S. (1995). Understanding Cultural Preferences of Arab Communication Patterns. *Public Relations Review, 21*(3), 241-255. This study suggested how U.S public relations practitioners and scholars can incorporate the dynamics of intercultural communication into their work with Arab clients in the U.S. It focuses on the fact that the two cultures have distinct perspectives regarding the role of language, and different strategies for structuring persuasive messages and communicating effectively with their audiences. For the Arab culture, communication emphasis is on form over function, affect over accuracy, and image over meaning. An awareness of these cultural differences can help Americans deal more effectively with their Arab clients in developing written and oral communication, in public relations programming, and understanding professional ethics.

**International Public Relations**

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**MARKETING PUBLIC RELATIONS**

These articles focus on marketing and consumer communications.

Christensen, L. T. (1995). Buffering Organizational Identity in the Marketing Culture. *Organization Studies, 16*(4), 651-672. This article discusses the role played by marketing in attempts to manage organizational identity in a complex and turbulent environment. It suggests that, with its strong emphasis on the consumer and the changing needs of the market, marketing represents an attempt to impose and control a flexible identity, which enables organizations to establish and maintain flexible environmental buffers between. Within this buffer defined by marketing, organizations are able to display a high degree of adaptiveness while upholding and confirming themselves. Thus, in the marketing-managed organization, identity and flexibility are closely intertwined.

**Marketing Public Relations, Corporate Public Relations, Public Affairs**

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Fairchild, C. (1996). What You Want When You Want It: Altering Consumption and Consuming Alternatives. *Media Culture and Society, 18*(4), 659-668. This research project examined public relations’ use of market control to eliminate or appropriate competitors. It shows how the progressive or college music underground was channeled into the productive mainstream as alternative music, which is actually an inventory of production disguised as a musical genre. Because of the loose association in this genre between unpredictable agents (disk jockeys, audiences, obscure record stores), there is a conflict with the controlled-access media culture that is trying to operate under efficient marketing techniques. The study points out that marketers have used the technique of offering huge contracts to emerging artists or operating dummy independent labels, while forcing truly independent labels out.

**Marketing Public Relations, Entertainment Public Relations**
Maguire, M., Ball, T. J., & Macrae, S. (1999). Promotion, Persuasion and Class-Taste: Marketing (in) the UK Post-Compulsory Sector. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 20*(3), 291-308. Examines two major tactics in the promotion and marketing of educational brochures for promoting school choices in the United Kingdom. Includes issues such as access, targeting, response to "difference" in the client group/market segment, and professionalism of approach. Argues that market tactics do semiotic work as class-taste markers.

**Marketing Public Relations**

Pedelty, M. (1996). Coors' World Culture War: Multicultural Conservatism in Advertising. *Socialist Review, 26*(3-4), 71-110. The marketing strategies employed by the Coors Brewing Co. during the 1980s in response to a public boycott of its products by a broad coalition of labor unions, African American groups, Latino organizations, women's rights associations, and gay and lesbian rights forums was studied. The boycott was initiated in response to the corporate giving pattern of the Coors family, which has privileged very conservative groups. The boycott succeeded in tempering Coors' more explicit racist remarks and in securing more corporate money for minority business people. But, author suggests that, while the boycott won a few of the battles, Coors won this particular war, largely because of its extensive marketing campaign.

**Marketing Public Relations, Community Relations, Corporate Public Relations, Crisis Communication, Minority Relations**