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*“Roles and Scopes of Public Relations”*

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## **The Role of Messaging In IMC Campaigns to Market High-End Real Estate**

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In a newly-aggressive effort to grow their markets, real estate developers have redefined their integrated marketing communications strategies. The growth in competitiveness among real estate developers, coupled with a general flattening of sales in recent years, has stimulated new approaches for “getting the message out.”

The communications budgets of real estate developers have, in the past, typically funded narrowly-targeted communications, including sales-oriented print collateral, narrowly-targeted advertising and direct mail to targeted audiences. But today, some real estate developers are using their marketing dollars not just to sell product, but also to build brand. Placement of advertising in daily newspapers, which reaches a wider audience, helps to accomplish that task.

Brand-building has also become a major responsibility of public relations practitioners working in the multi-billion dollar real estate development industry. Public relations professionals employed by major developers are being challenged to collaborate with their advertising colleagues to integrate messages across all communications programs aimed at building brand and selling product. Therefore, it is useful for public relations practitioners to understand current trends and practices in real estate advertising in order to recommend message strategies that serve the integrated brand-building agenda of their companies.

This current study examines the nature of luxury real estate advertising through a content analysis of real estate ads in both *Miami Herald* and the *Sun-Sentinel*, Fort Lauderdale’s daily newspaper. The current study provides insight into the nature of luxury real estate advertising messages and suggests an agenda for public relations professionals participating in integrated marketing communications programs within real estate development companies.

### REVIEW OF EARLIER STUDY

This study part of a larger study of the evolving marketing practices for high-end real estate. It builds upon insights gained studying promotion of luxury developments in the mountainous area of western North Carolina. There, a number of developments are vigorously competing for a share of the growing market of aging baby-boomers investing in property with an eye toward current use, potential retirement and investment value. That phase of the study revealed the advent of “mega collateral,” \$100 + per piece brochures that appeal to the senses and are intended to appeal to the potential buyer’s ego and “win the battle of the coffee table.”

Much has been written about the real estate sales in the U.S., especially luxury, mountain and waterfront property. The maturing of the baby boom generation has fueled the interest of wealthy individuals in purchasing primary or secondary homes, condominiums or timeshares in locations that provide significant lifestyle amenities.

Upscale real estate developments include exclusive high-rise residences and gated communities replete with such amenities as concierge service, gracious clubhouses, fine dining, well-equipped health clubs, pro-quality golf courses, beautiful swimming and tennis facilities, spas, and an active social calendar.

The growing interest in high-end mountain property has fueled increasing expenditures on extremely sophisticated print collateral. An informal “industry standard” of high quality is apparent when reviewing the print collateral used for marketing luxury real estate. Real estate developers are producing high-quality – and expensive – print collateral to use in the process of establishing awareness, building brand, shaping image and, ultimately, generating inquiries. It’s necessary, developers reason, to remain competitive. However, some developers are *significantly* exceeding the industry standard, producing brochures of such expense that it raises the question of return on investment.

Reasoning that affluent consumers will respond favorably to extremely sophisticated brochures, some developers are expending previously unheard-of budgets on their print collateral, producing “showcase brochures”. Hard-bound, linen or leather covered brochures containing breathtaking panoramic and/or aerial photography, embossing, die-cuts, specialty papers and CDs depicting the property and surroundings are a few examples of the new gold standard for positioning and promoting high-end mountain real estate.

Although much has been written about the demographic and economic factors fueling sales of this type of property, very little has been written about the impact of public relations or advertising messaging as part of an overall integrated marketing communications program.

#### METHODOLOGY

This study is a content analysis of messaging used by real estate developers in 111 advertisements that appeared in the *Miami Herald* and *Sun-Sentinel* newspapers between December, 2006 and March, 2007.

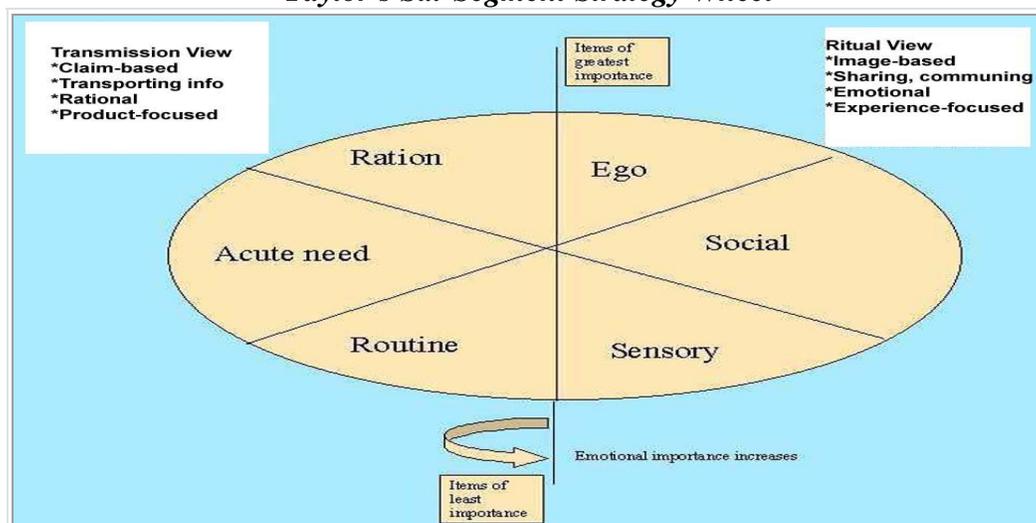
First, advertisements were analyzed to identify their function: to establish the brand, to provide information, or to call potential buyers to action.

The advertisements were then analyzed to identify their sales promotion approach, focusing on pricing, financing, closing costs, etc.

They were also analyzed to identify visual messages used, such as people, buildings, maps, etc.

Finally, the advertisements were analyzed using Taylor’s Six-Segment Strategy Wheel – a widely-accepted model for messaging in advertising – to identify messages according to their “transmission view” or their “ritual view.” Simply stated, transmission view refers to informationally-based messages, while ritual view refers to emotionally-based messages.

### Taylor's Six-Segment Strategy Wheel



Source: Ronald E. Taylor

Using the wheel, real estate messages embedded in the advertisements were identified as belonging to one of six different segments in Taylor's wheel: ego, social or sensory (all ritual view) or ration, acute need or routine (all transmission view). A brief description of each follows.

**Ego:** this refers to appeals to consumers who buy products to declare "This is who I am." The typical messages appeal to the private, fantasy worlds of consumers, and are image-based.

**Social:** There are three sub-segments to social messaging: romantic, family and others. Consumers buy these products to win the attention, approval, admiration, love, and respect of others or to "pretend" they are members of certain social groups.

**Sensory:** The sensory segments includes appeals to some or all of the five senses. It includes products that are purchased as "life's little treats" as well as ones that give "moments of pleasure."

**Routine:** because these messages represent appeals for purchases we tend to buy habitually, these messages depend on hyperbole and are pre-emptive in nature.

**Acute Need:** The need to make a purchase decision arises abruptly. This need could be real (your house burns down; you need to find another residence) or perceived (a realtor calls with special pricing on a property you want; the pricing expires at the end of the month).

**Ration:** This is the traditional hierarchy of effects model where consumers desire lots of information about product features, services, warranties, and price. Much time is spent gathering information about and comparing alternatives. (Taylor, 1999).

## FINDINGS

### Ad Function

Analysis of the advertisements showed that the main function of real estate ads studied is to provide information. Some 98% of ads provided specific factual information about the property. Additionally, 70% of the ads carried significant branding-oriented messages, establishing the credibility of not just the property but also of the development company. This was especially prevalent in advertisements for condominiums.

This analysis also contained a surprise: Interestingly, less than 40% of the ads contained a call to action, like “give us a call” or “visit us” or “send an e-mail for additional information.” This is in direct conflict with the basic public relations principal of two-way symmetrical communication.

**Table 1: Ad Function (Dichotomous)**

Product	Branding	Call for Action	Provide Info
Condo/Hotel	46	23	59
Townhome	5	3	9
Single Family	11	9	20
Combination	12	6	15
Other	4	3	6
Total	78	44	109

### Sales Promotion

The analysis of sales promotion messages in ads showed that the focus of financial messaging was major cost items -- closing costs, price off (discount) information and money down information. This analysis reinforces table 1, demonstrating the major role informational messaging plays in the real estate advertising studied.

**Table 2: Sales Promotion (Dichotomous)**

Product	Price Off	Discounted Interest rate	Closing Costs	HOA fees	Money Down
Condo/Hotel	5	5	6	3	6
Townhome	2	1	1	1	2
Single Family	5	2	6	1	2
Combination	2	0	3	2	1
Other	0	0	1	0	1
Total	14	8	17	7	12

### Ad visuals

An analysis of advertising visual messages shows that the depiction of buildings and people are by far the two most frequently used images. Images of buildings were used in 53% of advertisements, while depictions of people were used in 43% of advertisements. Depictions of other saleable attributes, like attractions, were infrequently used.

An interesting note is that depictions of floor plans were used in just 3% of the ads studied.

**Table 3: Ad Visuals**

Product	Floor plans	People	Buildings	Inside Home	Common Areas	Maps	Attractions
Condo/Hotel	0	26	35	4	6	4	12
Townhome	2	3	7	3	1	3	0
Single Family	1	5	10	5	4	6	4
Combination	1	12	3	1	2	2	1
Other	0	2	4	1	0	1	2
Total	4	48	59	14	13	16	19

### Six Segment Analysis

Analysis of the advertisements for consistency with Taylor's Six Segment Strategy Wheel yields a clear picture of message strategy used by the developers. That strategy gravitates heavily toward the use of rational appeals, but incorporates appeals to the ego needs of the customer.

In total, some 79% of ads contained rational (i.e. fact-based) information. This was especially true of messages about condominiums. This finding was expected, as real estate investments are often the single largest purchase an individual makes, and is done so with careful thought.

At the same time, 30% of the messages included ego-based appeals. In these ads, developers appealed to consumers who buy products to declare "This is who I am." These messages image-based. Of lesser importance but worth noting is that 22% of ads carried acute-need (i.e. "the time is now") appeals.

**Table 4: Taylor's Six Segment Strategy Wheel**

Product	Ration	Acute need	Routine	Ego	Social	Sensory
Condo/Hotel	44	15	6	22	5	5
Townhome	8	2	0	1	1	1
Single Family	18	5	2	4	3	0
Combination	12	2	3	7	3	1
Other	6	1	1	0	1	0
Total	88	25	12	34	13	7

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS

What does this mean for public relations practitioners working in a real estate environment? There are several implications worth noting.

First, it is critically important for public relations professionals to work in tandem with advertising/marketing professionals to develop an integrated communications program to brand their development company. As noted in the findings above, significant advertising space – and a correspondingly significant percent of advertising budget – is currently invested in building the developer's brand.

Second, public relations practitioners should dialogue with advertising/marketing professionals to interject calls to action as a means of facilitating a "conversation" with potential customers. Encouraging the use of a call to action, such as "visit us," "call us" or "e-mail us" will begin the customer relationship-building process so critical to successful public relations and marketing.

Third, public relations practitioners may want to explore the use of social and sensory messaging – currently relatively untapped message segments – in the overall integrated marketing communications programs. Social messaging introduces the "softer" messages that appeal to consumers looking for an emotional pay-off for their purchases, and sensory messaging allows customers a concrete experience with the product.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

With these two phases of the study complete, it is clear that the need exists to construct an integrated marketing communication model for high-end real estate developers that allows public relations and advertising professionals to develop consistent messages across the many and varied communication tools used by both.

With very little existing literature on the topic, it is increasingly clear that this study is breaking new ground. Experimental research testing effectiveness in messaging (extending this study) and message delivery vehicles (extending the previous study) will help shape theory that can be applied with confidence to communications campaigns in the future.

#### REFERENCES

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**In Search of the Lost Agendas:  
To Evaluate the Organizational Communication in the Socialization of the  
Subjects from Public and Private Organization**

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Globalization allows an easy access to the information and to the technological advances that contribute in the formation of a social group of citizens who will be able to consolidate society collectively. These new citizens wish to be contributors of the construction of the public spaces in society.

And that is exactly the focus of this intervention. Modern organizations, either public or private, must make social their actions: in order to make them public. Like social organisms they should assume their role in order to bring about social responsibility.

To begin debating on the subject, it is important to think about the importance of communication as the process through which we are able to communicate the actions that occur in the interior of an administration of the State, or of private organisms whose objective is to benefit a group of people. It is what we call the socialization of the actions. To explain the importance of this process, we will use two experiences as case studies.

Project UNI BARRANQUILLA began to work in 1994 with the management of a private organization, the *Universidad del Norte* and supported by the foundation W. K. Kellogg in Latin America. The objective was to contribute to the improvement of the conditions of health of the communities of fifteen marginalized neighborhoods of Barranquilla. This project's goal was to fortify the local capacity of management and also gain the ability to offer answers to the necessities of local health issues. Such issues are local planning, the development of information systems, the alternatives to guarantee the integral attention and the active participation of the communities.

Another objective was to reinforce the involvement of communitarian organizations in the defense of health and the quality of life; also to extend the participation of the inhabitants of the neighborhoods in the definition of public health policies and the autonomy of the populations.

The Common Agenda by Barranquilla (Colombia) is a document with a twenty-year prospect that has the reflection of diverse social leaders on the areas that would have to be developed for the construction of a city with regional and national importance. This project aims to make citizens consider public space as communal property and that transparency and confidence are present in the political and administrative system of the city. The project was led by City Hall.

The objectives of each case study are to contribute to the construction of a Barranquilla with a better future, one from the prospective planning of the city and led by a public organization and the other from the improvement of the conditions of health of a sector of the city, led by a private organization. But in addition to these coincidences in the objectives of the cases, there is another that motivates this study: the failures in the process of communication, especially in their socialization.

Both projects had to use communication to benefit a collection of people: what is known as the socialization of the actions.

But, were these objectives obtained? Was one of the profits of the intentions of the projects the communication? Would a visible strategy of communication have improved those results?

### **Approach to the concept of public**

The traditional concepts of public that arise in opposition to the private sphere have been marked by the social changes and the redefinition of the political activity.

Some of the distinctions that usually arise send the public sector to discussions on common subjects and private matters to the domestic sector (Garay, 2000). Also, it is usually spoken of the public like the visible thing, the accessible thing to all, of common, collective interest (Rabotnikof, 1997). In these theoretical contexts, private matters have been related to the individual interest, things that are reserved, hidden or of private property.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, social aspects that had been reserved for small social groups began to be considered like subjects of public interest and therefore the responsibilities of the State were extended towards topics such as health and education. The policies would now be oriented to facilitate the access of citizens to better conditions of life.

Theoreticians show how the instruments of the mercantile organizations became necessary to administer the mercantile sector, resulting in the growth of the bureaucratic state, under rational principles and the direction of public employees (Parsons, 1995). The conventional concept has entered in crisis because the public and private sector have penetrated one to the other and with the sprouting of new social actors, have considered subjects that had been relegated to the private sector.

The function of the communicative practice becomes fundamental because this interaction allows the individual to practice his/her citizenship and be recognized as a political actor (Benedicto, 2002).

As Antanas Mockus says, (2002:11) “construct what’s public it is to include by ways of communication, it’s to allow the ears, the voices and the perceptions of different people to enter; it is to look for transparency, it’s to publish. To construct what’s public is to include by means of words, by means of language”. This construction depends, then, of the form in which we communicate and of the form in which we put in common the consensus and inclusively what’s not a part of the general consensus. The function of communication is to retake the idea that what was public was common and accessible to all and also a space in which there were open and visible discussions between free citizens.

One definition of public space states that it should focus in the way that culture influences in political processes and the possibilities of expression and performance that have different social actors to decide on the factors that affect their everyday situation. From cultural elements, individuals construct their political universes and collective identities, simultaneously that draw up borders for their actions (Benedicto mentioning to Ceïfa, 2002). The effectiveness of the participation in the public space is therefore in the communication forms in which they arrange the different actors to be able to articulate these speeches constructed from their cultural contexts.

### **Stakeholders in the public sector**

Due to the diversification of the public sector and the extension of this concept, it was necessary to classify these social actors and establish their forms of participation in the public. In Literature concerning organizational communication, an instrumental concept appeared: the

stakeholders (actors who affect or are affected by the activities of an organization). The model of the Information System of the Public Sector (Zipa Correia: 2005), presented four types of stakeholders, distinguished as follows: the citizenship, the businesses, the politicians and the public administrations.

The four stakeholders have diverse interests and participate in the public sector with the principle of cooperation (Zipa Correia: 2005). This system implies that the responsibility and the control of public information do not reside simply in some offices of the public administrations. The citizens, companies or businesses, the politicians generate and need to accede to certain types of information that circulates in the public sector

The interaction between these stakeholders is not limited to just the access and generation of information. The interaction also implies processes of communication. Men and women give form to the human interaction and they help reduce uncertainty because they provide a structure to the daily life of a citizen (Costa mentioning to North, 2001). As an institution, foundation, industry, commercial organization, company of services, public administration or government, the organizations interact with their environment with projects and actions of social, material, cultural or economic characteristics (Coast, 2001). These factors establish the vision of the organization as an open system that interacts constantly with the environment or live organisms, and is able to be related and conformed by complex systems, with specific and interrelated functions (Urrutia, 2002).

In Colombia, the public sector bases its organization around the idea of communal property, different from the private sector that only persecutes particular benefits, and it is organized as united, it is centralized politically and decentralized administratively. “The central State reserves the execution of the constitutional, legislative and judicial functions, whereas the administrative function is shared with sections or provinces” (Rodriguez, 1999).

According to the Information system of the Public Sector, the private sector is reserved for the citizenship and companies or businesses (Correia, 1.998), because private companies are defined as units of basic production that contract manual labor and buy “other factors with the purpose of making and selling products and services” (Mochón, 1992). These characteristics and functions are articulated with the capitalist production system, that “is characterized by the existence of private property in systems of production, the division of work, the production of merchandise and the accumulation of profits” (Ramirez, 2002).

While some pursue social profits, others are motivated by economic gain. In order to make it work, they both require communication processes.

### **Specificity of the communication in the public**

When we communicate, what we do as Jesus Martin-Barber says (2000) is “to put in common”, not “have an agreement” or discuss and arrive at a consensus, “making common is what we have in common”. Organizational Communication looks for mechanisms to put in common and make it possible to communicate and interact in the organizations. As a complex process, it is not only limited to emit and to receive information. Through communication, senses are constructed due to the use of language, and with this a professional communicator can construct the strategies to interpret ‘multiple languages’ of the organization and the configuration of new agreed senses with the objectives of the organization (Urrutia, 2002).

For Joan Costa (2002) this is an activity harder than actions because what the organizations decide and plan acquires sense, meaning and values when they communicate them. The communication extends the action and it propagates it from one emitting point to many

destinies depending on the organization's interests. It is fundamental because the decisions, plans, projects, and the missions of an organization will never become facts, if they are not communicated. And if there are no facts, the public will not be able to be constructed.

Communication facilitates the exchange of ideas, opinions, experiences, attitudes and feelings (Alcázar, 2004). This construction of senses is elaborated necessarily in a collective way between the members of an organization, because "...everyone has a perspective, a way of viewing reality. Each person constitutes a unique perspective of a broader reality. If I can see through your perspective and you of mine, we will see something that otherwise we wouldn't have seen alone" (Senge mentioned by Alcázar, 2004).

The communication in the organizations, in general, pursues different aims depending on its nature. Ideologically communication in what's public begins with the recognition of the citizen as a social actor who is in charge of the construction of the concept and that in that process he needs organizations and institutions that help unify a social unit (Toro, 2001).

In fact, the governors understand that the participation of the civil society in the public management allows legitimize its actions, what is known as *accountability* defined as the obligation to give accounts of public acts and to assume responsibility with the citizens (Caballero, Moreno, 2004).

It is conceiving communication beyond its diffusing function and the traditional mediums, extending the instrumental and technocratic logic and allowing local development.

Although the companies of the state have heterogeneous publics and necessities of social character for developing programs of social, political or economic nature, the science of communication is the most effective tool so that individuals adapt to the organization and help integrate themselves in their surroundings within the global society.

As private companies did during the 1950s, public organizations must make their efforts and use marketing as a tool to identify their publics and their public's necessities, in agreement with heterodox markets and a more demanding consumer. In this new language concepts such as public relations, image and corporative identity, publicity, promotion, and marketing must be present. These concepts have defined the practice of communication in organizations in a commercial and competitive market.

The difference between a public organization and private one is the altruistic sense of the communication (Alcázar, 2004). For the public sector, the client of a private company is a citizen or "a social category that implies rights and obligations related to the administration and the government" (Mozzicafredo, AÑO??). Some organizations are moved by the importance of recognition and positioning of its image, the survival of the organization, the cooperation and alliance with other similar instances, the Investigation of markets, the knowledge of the client, and the determination of strategies in times of a crisis.

The socialization of public topics is accomplished by the ways and practices of the communication that each organization adopts to be related to her immediate or distant public. This communication causes the dialogue between the different actors that are in the public sector. The reasons for why this occurs in Latin American societies, amongst them the Colombian one, includes a democratization process which they have initiated from the implantation of political constitutions that foment the participation of its citizen. For that reason, the decisions made about public subjects must consult the perceptions of the different actors.

***Methodological design:***

The investigation is considered *descriptive-explanatory*. The first case searches to characterize the form and the ways in which the processes of socialization of the subjects were done by the public institutions (Common Agenda by Barranquilla) and private organizations that have functions in the public sector (Universidad del Norte with project UNI.)

The second case it is descriptive, because the study establishes the successes and errors accomplished during the study; the success of the process of socialization especially making it public within the community.

The design of the investigation is approached as a study of cases, where the subject studies constitute two organizations: the District City Hall of Barranquilla and the Universidad del Norte.

Something very important is that this study has an approach of *total investigation*; it conceives the research process in an integral way. The present study uses quantitative and qualitative techniques of investigation.

Two techniques of quantitative data collection were applied: the opinion and the survey. We made two design samples with different characteristics.

We used two sources of information: *secondary with the documentary technique*.

The documents considered were documentary sources within the framework of project UNI-COMMON AGENDA, the official notices of press and publications in the press.

The process of selection was defined by a design sample of an intentional kind for each case (the survey, interviews) due to the fact that it basically tried to investigate the degree of information and opinion on COMMON projects UNI-AGENDA.

For the case of the Common Agenda by Barranquilla, interviews were applied to the managers of the project, to the journalists, the members of the sector government, manager of the communications in the two projects and actors of the community.

In this investigation, it was important to analyze the way in which the local press (El Heraldo y La Libertad) registered the information given by the District City Hall during the process of formulation of the thematic axes.

In the case of the agenda in common, we reviewed the mass medium that emitted it, the location in the newspaper, the holders and the space destined by the press.

Each press dedicated an equal percentage of pages to all the referring actions of the Common Agenda, and these news coverages, were concentrated in statements that made reference to the activities coordinated by the District City Hall, as promoter of the initiative. The Universidad del Norte was support in the construction of the strategic axes. Of the 37 analyzed news, 25 show a journalistic registry focused more on an agenda of activities than the own characteristics of the project.

In addition, it was possible to analyze that the greater percentage of the news was located in the local pages and only 4 editorials in the three months of publication were dedicated. Considering the importance that this project had for the city, they did not stimulate the journalists to develop the subject in other journalistic forms.

We identified categories of analysis like: participation and leadership. From the leadership area we included subcategories like: Motivation, disposition and interest.

## Project UNI

### The Participation

Participation is understood from communication as the process from which it tries to construct equitable relations to guarantee the coherence of the expositions.

In project UNI, this variable is noticed through the different actors. The Principal knows the advances and the profits of this project. Maintaining him informed gives him knowledge of the state of the project. **His participation is centered in the informative level.**

In the case of the coordinator of communications, its process of participation was total. It initiates with **an organizational diagnosis, in which this leader becomes involved since the beginning of the project.**

It initiates with knowing the real necessities of the population directly affected or involved, it is to say of the objective public. It follows a phase in which after knowing these necessities they are convinced in participating in the project, **this phase of mutual agreement** is in the category of participation.

After this there is a **work in network**, recognized by the director of the project, in which the community recognizes the situation and is committed with the solutions.

In this axis, **the instruments of communication are present**, such as the bulletins and the face-to-face communication. They are of great importance at the time of speaking of participation, because they become an allied tool.

For the director of the project, the participation subject meant to generate authentic spaces in which the community felt comfortable.

From project UNI, the participation is noticed when individual spaces are generated for each stakeholder. If the spaces of the communications are more authentic each public takes control of it with force.

### The Interest

The interests are the objectives that each of the social actors who are defending a sector or union represent.

In UNI, the interest is the same will of the directors to stay informed of the advances and to totally support the execution of the project. In all project of communication and even more of this high social impact, **the commitment of the heads of the organization is fundamental.**

This interest has allowed the communication efforts to be effective. UNI speaks of participation efforts in which the academy, the communication and the society are united to project the UNI objectives. To reach and mainly **to maintain the interest of the social actors throughout the project, is very necessary for its success.**

UNI obtained this massive participation, due to the high diffusion that they had from the beginning. **The diffusion is the socialization spaces of the advances of the project** and it included different materials from promotion like the logo of the transportation (the truck of the project), the events and the announcements in the districts. There was also a permanent auto evaluation process that allowed all of the stakeholders to be informed and interested.

The interest is transformed in an affirmation of the coordinator of the project that says: "the project was accompanied of several dimensions: partnership, the alliances, the communication, the work in network and the permanent evaluation".

Again the work in network is in this second variable. This network structure allows the participation and maintains the interest. **The communication helps in that the attention does not decrease and the permanent evaluation of the processes becomes important.**

### The Disposition

It is the favorable attitude of the actors to obtain good participation.

In UNI **the changes of attitude of the actors are associated to the changes of spaces and mediums used in the work.** A clear example is when it is decided to remove the project from the settings of the University, as a meeting space, and to arrive to the same place in which the actors are located. Their own and natural space.

**This space gives new ways of communication.** The testimonies of the actors happened outside of the university. The dynamics of creation and recreation of mediums switched from an instrumental phase to a more human one.

From UNI, this variable shows us that **the disposition of the leaders toward the processes of the project is not sufficient.** We spoke, then, of a disposition of other factors to obtain that good atmosphere. We are speaking of the socialization spaces. As well, these **spaces give the communication tools.**

### The Motivation

It represents the degree of interest and diligence that the social actors show to construct the proposal. Motivation depends on the spirit to execute the project successfully.

In UNI, communication was the element used to obtain motivation. With the **communication strategies awoke the interest, the participation, and the proactive attitude of the actors.**

With the strategies, the information was told in order to communicate the concrete solutions that existed for the problems. It was to identify and be involved with the problem; to understand it, to assume it. That feeling of “your problem is also mine” had to be transmitted by the project and UNI considers that it obtained it.

Once the problem has been identified, the solutions had to be informed, to state them and explain that these solutions were practical. **New solutions were proposed to old problems. The newness was also in the way in which the form was presented or displayed and the communication helped with this very much.**

## Common agenda by Barranquilla

### The Participation

Participation is understood from communication as the process from which it tries to construct equitable relations to guarantee the coherence of the expositions.

This relation and equitable participation in the common agenda did not occur completely. The actors who participated were surprised of the small presence of the common and current citizen that is the main social actor of this project and also the poor presence of the leaders of the government.

There is a **total deficiency of planning of the project by its organizational leader, in this case City Hall. The Universidad del Norte, (its ally) did not** have to construct its plan of work solitarily.

The leader had to draw up the action plan. The Universidad del Norte as an ally, was in the agenda of the work and only did this.

**A work plan that included objectives, schedules and communication strategies had improved the participation in the common agenda.**

The participation had to include the mass media. **The mass media communication must be the first allies in this type of projects and would have had a fundamental role.** Mass media communication was present at the end of this project.

Not only did skepticism exist then, but also a tower of Babel between the involved that considered qualifying a different one from each concept. Here **communication also aided in making a balanced language, to put in common.**

The participation of the leader of the organization, **the Mayor, was not permanently visible. In order to obtain the impact it had to be more remarkable** or have strategic appearances. That absence would make one ask, who had the control?

In the socialization strategies, that were few, there wasn't a clear objective and still more there was no qualification. The clearest example is when some of the social actors fill out a format, without any instruction in how or for what purpose they were to do it. **The communication also could help in the qualification process.**

### **The Interest**

The interests are the objectives that each of the social actors who are defending a sector or union represent. An aspect to maintain the interest was the presence of an academic organization like the Universidad del Norte, the fact that the work had been assumed without economic repayment allowed an objective participation in the process.

In a governmental organism, what's economic has importance. And particularly from this variable the first questions is: how much is being paying?

This main interest moved to background the subject of the socialization of the information. As they recognize it, there was no massive communication. It was interesting to tell the journalists what was being done, but without obeying a creative strategy of communication.

### **The Motivation**

It represents the degree of interest and diligence that the social actors show to construct the proposal. Motivation depends on the spirit to execute the project successfully.

And this result invites us to reflect on the necessity that has the citizenship has to receive information. Under that premise, generally, many of the directors or leaders of the departments of communication of the public administrations base the emissions of information or news.

Unlike the basic concept of information, which can be identified with the simple data transmission, in the communication concept it is of vital importance to include the conception of a process that implies the "roundtrip of informative content that produces changes" (Lucas and Garcia, 2002: 374).

In this process and, following the origin of the term, communication allows "to put in common", not as much "to reach an agreement" or to discuss and to arrive at a consensus, like "making common" what "we have in common", even when being the discord (Jesus Martin-Barber, 2000).

### **The Findings and Conclusions**

- The project had experts in several disciplines, but none with formation in communication for the socialization of the project.
- The project did not make a communications plan from the beginning. The activities that needed to be communicated were made as the facts appeared.
- The call of the leaders was made without criteria of selection.

- The project did not use mass media communications that allowed the presentation of the project and its contribution to the development in some sectors of the city.
- Today the formation in communication must be prepared by professionals of the characteristics of the public sector, the interrelation between civil society and the organizations and the communicational tools necessary to contribute to develop deliberation spaces that allow the promotion of an active citizenship.
- The professionals in the organizational communication of the public sectors cannot continue supporting their mechanisms of communication through only what is mediatic.
- Organizational communication is a science that contributes in socialization of the subjects of governmental function. It does not make sense that one organization, private or public designs a social or political kind of speech, if this one does not obtain a legitimacy and approval by the actors.
- For the Common Agenda by Barranquilla and the project UNI, the results demonstrate the absent of planning in the design of communication strategies that allowed the community to know in more concrete way, the qualities and benefits of the project, and thus, to be able to participate in the construction of social capitals.
- The organizations interested in advancing projects of governmental function require professionals that know the social and political realities of their cities or communities.
- Although the projects are made by private institutions they have a social responsibility that needs to be taken care of. The political vision of the relations of the organizations with its surroundings entails them into thinking from the dialogue, the agreements and the discords.
- The necessity of a political vision is greater in the case of the public organizations that administer and produce goods of the citizenship. This political relation has been demanded even by the same society.
- In a democratic regime, the communicative processes allow the individuals to exert their citizenship into being recognized like political actors (Benedicto, 2002).
- The construction of the public depends on the form in which we communicate, even of the way in which we make in the consensuses and what is not the consensus in common.
- Communication promotes the participation within the public space, and manages to foment “the pact between actors who defend different interests and the collective construction of knowledge, the planning and the execution of what’s decided.
- Communication defines another form of citizenship, a deliberative public space of the necessities and priorities of the citizens” (Sierra y Moreno, 2004).

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## **Cashing In Goodwill Capital in Times of Crisis: Does Public Awareness of Organizational Charitable Contributions Lead to Leniency When Problems Arise?**

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How organizational perceptions differed depending on the organization's communication of charity involvement was examined experimentally (N=131). Results suggest that charity statements presented on an organization's homepage lead to more positive evaluations of organizational credibility and higher intentions to purchase organizational goods, regardless of the nature of other organizational news presented.

Creating and maintaining favorable relations with customers has long been a critical issue with corporations. One means of maintaining positive relations is to provide benefits beyond salable goods and services to consumers in the form of charitable giving. However, the effect of charitable involvement on credibility perception of organizations and various types of news messages delivered through online communication channels such as the internet has not been fully evaluated. This study aims to evaluate how informing constituents of corporate giving influences perceptions of the corporations themselves, their communications and their products, goods and services.

### Literature Review

An investigation of how communication of corporate involvement in charities influences public perception must begin with a review of how corporate communications is viewed. In situations where one entity attempts to persuade another, "the receiver enters with his guard up" (Schramm & Roberts, 1971, p. 35). As such, the persuader faces a handicap that must be overcome for meaningful communication to take place. In corporate communications, the corporation is often charged with disseminating information to its publics through a variety of channels. Many of these mass mediated channels allow for feedback but are more unidirectional with information flowing more readily from the corporation than back to it. Ultimately, research has suggested that the persuasive intent of this communication environment coupled with credibility problems that plague corporate communications results in organizational public relations efforts achieving little in the way of influence (Callison, 2001; Callison & Zillmann, 2002; Wilcox & Cameron, 2006).

Outside of the communication hurdles resulting from lack of trust in corporate information sources and the persuasive nature of corporate communication in general, recent survey research suggests that corporations face public scrutiny independent of communication concerns. A Roper survey found that fewer than 3 out of 10 Americans trust big corporations. A Gallop poll also found that business leaders have joined stockbrokers and used car dealers in the category of least trusted information sources in American society (Wilcox & Cameron, 2006). These findings clearly indicate corporations have are at a disadvantage at best in their communications with various publics.

### *Credibility and Corporations*

Source credibility and trustworthiness have become the most commonly studied topics in communicator credibility research (O'Keefe, 1990). Credibility and trustworthiness are a

function of three prime components; competence, expertise, and the audience's belief in the integrity of the source (Durham, 1997). Some research has found that many times, trustworthiness drives credibility (Sereno & Hawkins, 1967; Tuppen, 1974).

Four basic elements determine the quality of a public relations' source; first is the perceived credibility of the source. Second, the audience's judgment about the source's trustworthiness and competence influence the assessment of credibility. Third is the doubt that the public has concerning public large corporations and the spokespersons who work on their behalf. Finally, organizations and their spokespersons are often perceived as motivated to tell the public what it may seem the public wants to hear rather than what may actually be perceived as the truth (Callison, 2001; Eagly, Wood, and Chaiken, 1978). A fifth factor influencing source credibility is the perception of profit motives of the source (Moore, Mowen, & Reardon, 1994; Sparkman, 1982).

A study conducted by Eagly, Wood, and Chaiken (1978) found that biases attributed to information sources affect the way receivers judge sources and the information they present. According to the researchers, receivers make assessments regarding sources' reasons and motivation for taking a particular position on an issue. This explanation for the communicator's behavior greatly influences the amount of credibility attached to him or her in the minds of the receivers. In case of corporations, the receivers may perceive that spokespersons face some form of pressure to present biased information, resulting in audiences doubting the honesty of sources of corporate information.

Most source-credibility studies in corporate communications are implemented using a crisis news situation backdrop (Bovet & Moore, 1994; Harris, 1993; Saunders, 1993; Callison, 2001; Callison & Zillmann, 2002). Message type influences credibility in that seriousness of the message dictates audience attention. Some researchers argue that an audiences' perception of bias in organizational communications could negatively affect organizations' perceived credibility and integrity (Cornelius, 2004). Large corporations are often accused of withholding negative facts, stacking the cards, dissembling, and "perpetuating negative public and media staffers' perceptions of the integrity of their communications" (Cornelius, 2004, p. 15).

#### *Cause-related Marketing*

The primary force behind general business strategy is to meet the needs and expectations of customers and stakeholders (Crosby & Johnson, 2006). By doing so, businesses position themselves to maximize profits. Satisfying needs and expectations becomes increasing difficult, however, because sophisticated consumers review not only company products but also other indirect aspects of the company (Athiyaman, 2002). In making their purchase decisions, consumers often turn their focus on corporate reputation, entrepreneurship practices, and social contribution. As such, companies are under increasing pressure to take responsibility for their bottom lines and products as well as their environmental and societal impacts (Macleod, 2001).

Under such scrutiny, corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs have gained popularity (Maignan & Ralston, 2002). As a type of CSR, cause-related marketing (CRM) has received particular corporate interest (Brink, Odekerken-schroder, & Pauwels, 2006). CRM is a company's long-term commitment to society, and often results in sustainable competitive advantage. These long-term strategies aim to build favorable public relations with existing and prospective consumers and other publics. Endacott (2004) defined CRM as "a marketing strategy adopted by businesses to link their name, brand, or service with a particular good cause, service, and/or charitable organization" (p. 183). The benefits received by businesses, the causes, and the customers involved with CRM have been enormous, and the resulting outcomes have been

defined as “win, win” (Adkins, 2005). Providing customers and other stakeholders the opportunity to participate in an organization’s efforts through revenue-providing exchanges have proven particularly successful in that publics develop strong bonds and loyalties with their corporate partners (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988).

Since the late 1980s, CRM has progressed from a strategy aimed at simply increasing sales to one that is aimed more at building a strong corporate reputation (Cone & Roper, 1994; Ellen, Mohr, & Webb, 2000; Kotler, Armstrong, Brown, Adam & Chandler, 1998). Despite the new focus on how CRM and charitable giving that often accompanies or is part of the CRM program influences corporate image, researchers continue to focus on how CRM leads to sales. In fact, studies have shown specifically that CRM as a sales tool is almost 20 percent more effective than discounting prices or increasing promotional spending (Mason, 2002). Perhaps driven by its impact on profits, U.S. companies have increased their spending on CRM efforts by over 500 percent since 1990, and total spending was valued at \$630 million in 1999 (Network, 1999).

Researchers, however, are just beginning to investigate how CRM and charitable giving may ward off public wrath in times of crisis. When a company has earned a bad reputation prior to engaging in charitable activity, consumer perception does immediately skew positive as soon as awareness develops of corporate charitable activity. Bea and Cameron (2006) conducted an experiment to evaluate the effects of prior corporate reputation on perceptions towards corporate charity messages and the attitude of the public towards the company. The authors found that the reputation of a company significantly influenced how the public perceived the reasons for that company’s giving. Participants had positive perceptions about a company’s reasons for indulging in charity when the company had a good reputation. Also, participants showed positive attitudes towards companies that had a good reputation and were involved in charities. The researchers reported the exact opposite findings for companies that had a bad reputation at the outset and were involved in charitable giving as participants were suspect of the intentions of charitable activities.

In summary, corporate public relations and general communications research suggests that organizations face a difficult task in communicating with constituent audiences. Findings have been consistent in showing that the public questions the motives behind corporate communication efforts and public relations endeavors. As cause-related marketing and the charitable involvement that often accompanies it becomes more prevalent, the logical next step in terms of research seemingly would be to tie together the past research in corporate public relations to corporate communication of charitable involvement. The goal of the present study is to determine how corporations can leverage their involvement with charities and how that involvement influences perception of corporations and their communicative efforts as well as their products.

#### Hypotheses

Bea and Cameron (2006) were primarily interested in how prior reputation influenced perceptions of current charitable giving. By investigating how current positive corporate efforts influence perceptions in light of past negative behaviors, the researchers laid the groundwork for the investigation of how perceptions of organizations in times of crisis are altered when key publics are reminded of organizational good deeds. Taking into account the biases perceived in corporate actions and the credibility issues facing corporate communicators, it seems plausible that organizations under fire who remind their audiences of their social responsibility programs may face a particularly powerful backlash. When facing crisis situations, organizations that are

perceived as flaunting their positive societal contributions may be seen as having done the good deeds only as means of ensuring that negative attitudes do not fully develop. On the other hand, it may be possible that an organization that lacks a prior reputation may benefit in times of crisis by nudging audiences to be aware of its contributions to society. Likewise, there is little doubt that corporations take into account the potential benefits stockpiling good will may have in times of crisis when considering involvement in social programs (L'Etang, 1994). The current study attempts to determine if audiences do in fact give organizations leeway in times of crisis, as well as times of no crisis, when these audiences are reminded of an organization's charitable efforts. The following hypotheses guided the research:

H1: Audiences made aware of an organization's charity involvement will rate that organization more positively than will audiences not aware of an organization's charity involvement regardless of organizational crisis scenario.

H2: Audiences made aware of an organization's charity involvement will rate organizational information more positively than will audiences not aware of an organization's charity involvement regardless of organizational crisis scenario.

H3: Audiences made aware of an organization's charity involvement will have stronger purchase intentions of organization goods than will audiences not aware of an organization's charity involvement regardless of organizational crisis scenario.

## Method

### *Overview*

The hypotheses were tested via an experiment based on a 2 x 2 fully crossed design. The experimental manipulations involved two levels of indication of corporate charitable involvement (involvement v. no involvement) and two corporate news scenarios (benign news v. crisis news). Dependent variables in the study were organization and message credibility as well as purchase intention. A total of 131 participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions yielding a power of more than .80. The four conditions centered on the following communications settings: a.) an organizational statement in reaction to a crisis situation appearing on a webpage accompanied by a statement indicating organizational charitable giving; b.) an organizational statement in reaction to a crisis situation appearing on a webpage without accompaniment of a statement indicating organizational charitable giving; c.) an organizational statement in reaction to a benign situation appearing on a webpage accompanied by a statement indicating organizational charitable giving; d.) an organizational statement in reaction to a benign situation appearing on a webpage without accompaniment of a statement indicating organizational charitable giving. All participants were randomly distributed one of four coded stimulus booklets, each of which contained printouts of four corporate websites (two dummy and two experimental). After completing a set of dummy measures following exposure to each website, participants completed the key measures as well as measures aimed at gathering demographic data.

### *Population and Research Participants*

Research participants were recruited from various colleges at a large Southwestern university. Of these participants, 66 were female and 65 were male. The average age of the participants was 21 years, ranging from 18 to 49. Ethnic composition was also reasonably balanced. Participants received class credit for participation in the study.

### *Stimulus materials and measure*

Two fictitious websites (one for a restaurant and one for a hotel) were specially created for this study. A restaurant, *Easy Burger* (fast food restaurant), and a hotel, *Jacob Hotels* (middle-level hotel), were selected specifically because of their appeal to the demographics of participant pool. Website layout and look did not vary within the industries. The only manipulations were what news was presented on the websites (reaction to a crisis or benign news) and whether any indication of charitable involvement was included. All other aspects of the sites were held constant. In the crisis news conditions, similar crisis news items appeared on the homepages of both companies. The *Easy Burger* website presented news of people being hospitalized after consuming E-coli infected food at one of the restaurant locations, and the *Jacob Hotel* website listed news of people being injured in a fire at one of the hotel locations. In both cases, the corporation relayed the news and responded to it. Both companies made claims that they regretted the accidents and were planning corrections to ensure the future safety of patrons.

The benign news statements were manipulated by having similar announcements on the homepages of both company websites. *Easy Burger* announced the opening of a new restaurant, and *Jacob Hotel* announced installing better mattresses in its rooms. Charity statements were also similar for both companies as both companies announced high dollar donations to two different, but equally popular charities. *Jacob Hotel* detailed a \$2.3 million contribution to Habitat for Humanity; *Easy Burger* detailed giving \$3 million to the AIDS Foundation. The companies' homepages were created by using Adobe Photoshop, and black and white printouts of all stimulus materials were included in the coded stimulus booklets. To ensure no bias resulting from order of appearance of the treatments, the presentation of each of the treatment condition websites was rotated. The dummy webpages were held constant in position 1 (Allstate Insurance) and position 3 (The Body Shop).

All measures to investigate credibility perceptions of the organization and message were created using 11-point semantic differential scale based on previous research (Callison, 2001; Gibson & Zillmann, 1994; McCroskey & Young, 1981). Measures for intention to purchase were also measured on a similar 11-point semantic differential scale. For a manipulation check, a final set of questions asked participants to indicate if they had viewed the charity manipulations or not. Those who answered they did not but who were in the charity conditions were excluded from analysis; those who indicated they had seen charity statements but who were in the non-charity conditions were also excluded. This action ensured a direct link between results and awareness of manipulations based on hypotheses.

#### *Experimental procedure*

To avoid any biases caused by location, all experiments were conducted in a lab which could accommodate fifteen people at a time. When participants arrived at the lab, they were each randomly assigned one of four coded packets. A brief instruction for participation was given, but no detail information regarding the study was provided. Each coded packet contained two dummy websites and two manipulated websites. The order of the dummy websites were always the same and only the experimental websites (and the various combination of messages therein) were rotated. Dummy websites were not rotated and were placed in position one and three. The manipulated websites appeared in positions two and four. After each website were a set of dummy questionnaires included to disguise the true purpose of the study. Once the dummy questions were answered, participants completed four additional pages of measures aimed at gathering perceptions of the organization, organizational news, purchase intention, and demographics.

## Results

### *Data reduction*

All the scale items were initially submitted to factor analysis. To measure perception of the organization, 15 individual items were used in each experimental condition. Items included in the scale asked participants whether they thought that the organizations were; *just, honest, trustworthy, concerns about community, accurate in disclosures, involved with social causes, cares about people, only interested in profits, good, pleasant, credible, selfish, virtuous, responsible, and caring*. The items were subjected to principal component factor analysis with orthogonal rotation components. Two factors emerged, accounting for 66% of the variance (55.4% and 10.6 respectively).

The first factor showed high loadings on *is just* (.80), *is honest* (.73), *is trustworthy* (.82), *concerns about community* (.73), *is accurate in disclosures* (.76), *is involved with social causes* (.63), *cares about people* (.76), *is good* (.87), *is pleasant* (.84), *is credible* (.81), *is virtuous* (.74), *is responsible* (.84), and *is caring* (.85). The ratings showed a high degree of inter-item consistency ( $\alpha = .95$ ), which warranted the construction of a composite measure, labeled *Organization Credibility*. The second factor also showed high loadings on *is only interested in profits* (-.838) and *is selfish* (-.756). The rating showed an acceptable degree of inter-item consistency ( $\alpha = .62$ ), labeled *Organization Altruism*.

As for the items used to measure perception of the message, nine items asked respondents to rate the various combination of message on the homepages of *Easy Burger* or *Jacob Hotel*. The items were; *is true, tells whole story, is accurate, can be trusted, is factual, is credible, is of significance to me, is important to me, and is urgent*. Two factors emerged, accounting for 78.19% of the variance (54.33% and 23.86% respectively).

The first factor showed high loadings on *is true* (.85), *tells whole story* (.80), *is accurate* (.92), *can be trusted* (.90), *is factual* (.92), *is credible* (.87). The ratings also showed a high degree of inter-item consistency ( $\alpha = .94$ ), which warranted the construction of a composite measure, labeled *Message Credibility*. The second factor showed high loadings on *is of significance to me* (.90), *is important to me* (.95), and *is urgent* (.76). Because there is no expectation that message importance in itself would vary due to its accompaniment by indications of organizational charitable activities, the second factor was not included in analyses.

Items employed to measure intention to purchase intention were, *my attitude about this restaurant (hotel) is, impression of the food (rooms) at this restaurant (hotel) is, how likely would you be to go to (stay at) this restaurant (hotel), how likely would you be to regularly eat (stay) at this restaurant (hotel), what do you think is going to happen to the stock-price of this organization in short-term, what do you think is going to happen to the stock-price of this organization in the long-term, and how likely would you be to buy the stock of this organization*. Ratings on seven items were subjected to principal component factor analysis. One factor with an Eigen-value of more than 1 emerged accounting for 69.19% of variance. The factor showed high loadings on *overall attitude about this restaurant (hotel) is* (.86), *impression of the food (rooms) at this restaurant(hotel) is* (.86), *how likely would you be to go to (stay at) this restaurant* (.88), *how likely would you be to regularly eat (stay) at this restaurant* (.86), *what do you think is going to happen to the stock-price of this organization in short-term* (.79), *what do you think is going to happen to the stock-price of this organization in the long-term* (.80), and *how likely would you be to buy the stock of this organization* (.74). A high level of inter-item consistency ( $\alpha = .92$ ) also warranted the construction of a composite measure, labeled *Intention to Purchase*.

### *Preliminary Analysis*

The composite measures of organization credibility, organization altruism, message credibility, and intention to purchase of Easy Burger and Jacob Hotel were subjected to within subject multivariate analysis of variance with charity statements (charity message and non charity message) and news statements (benign news and crisis news) as independent-measure factors. Because effects were consistent across both industries, the company's were not investigated independently, and measures were collapsed across the companies to increase generalizability.

### *Key Analyses*

H1 predicted that adding a charity statement to an organization's homepage would lead to a more positive perception of the organization regardless of type of company news included on the homepage. H1 was partially supported. Analyses revealed a significant main effect involving existence of a charity message on organizational credibility ( $F(1, 127) = 13.53, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.097$ ). Associated means suggest organizations are rated more positively in terms of credibility when charitable activity is detailed on the homepage ( $M = 6.71, SD = 1.51$ ) as opposed to when charitable activities are omitted ( $M = 5.67, SD = 1.54$ ).

Breaking the findings out by message types, the positive influence of charitable contributions appears in both benign news and crisis news scenarios. In each situation, the presence of information on charitable activities increased organizational credibility perception scores, but only in the benign news scenario was the difference significant ( $t(66) = 4.14, p < .001$ ); (with charitable information  $M = 6.99, SD = 1.37$ ; without charitable information  $M = 5.68, SD = 1.23$ ). In the crisis news scenario, sites with no charity had scores ( $M = 5.69, SD = 1.81$ ) similar to the benign news category, but the organizations did not gain as much in the crisis scenario ( $M = 6.36, SD = 1.64$ ) as did their counterparts in the benign scenario ( $t(60) = 1.50, p = .14$ ).

Additionally, no significant main effect of charity statement presence on perception of organizational altruism emerged ( $F(1, 127) = .38, p = .54$ ). In fact, organizations detailing their charitable activities received a near identical rating ( $M = 4.79, SD = 2.18$ ) to organizations that omitted such information ( $M = 4.94, SD = 2.10$ ).

H2 predicted that adding a charity statement to an organization's homepage would lead to a more positive perception of organization news messages regardless of type of company news included on the homepage. H2 was not supported. Analyses revealed no significant main effect involving existence of a charity message on credibility rating of news message ( $F(1, 127) = .44, p = .51$ ). Respondents rated news statements with a charity statement ( $M = 6.58, SD = 1.72$ ) and news statements without a charity statement ( $M = 6.34, SD = 1.99$ ) equally in terms of credibility.

H3 predicted that adding a charity statement to a news statement on an organization's homepage would lead to a stronger intention to purchase organization goods or services. H3 was supported. Univariate analysis of existence of a charity statement on a homepage resulted in a significant main effect ( $F = 9.462, p < 0.01, \eta^2 = .070$ ). News statements without any information regarding an organization's charitable activities induced weaker intention to purchase ( $M = 3.85, SD = 1.68$ ) than did news messages accompanied by charity information ( $M = 4.74, SD = 1.77$ ).

Further investigations of how information pertaining to charitable activities influence purchase decisions separately in news scenarios showed that purchase intention is affected most strongly by charity involvement in times of organizational crisis. In fact, when accompanying

benign news, charitable information increased purchase intent ( $M = 5.47$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ) more so than did its exclusion ( $M = 4.92$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ), but the means failed to differentiate themselves significantly ( $t(67) = 1.99$ ,  $p = .05$ ). In the crisis scenario, however, organizations not indicating their charitable involvement garnered significantly less purchase intent ( $M = 2.80$ ;  $SD = 1.52$ ) than did organizations who speak of their involvement ( $M = 3.80$ ;  $SD = 1.91$ ),  $t(59) = 2.29$ ,  $p < .05$ .

### Discussion

The goal of the current study was to determine how an organization's charity involvement influences perceptions of that organization, its communications and its products/services. The research was most keenly focused on how organizations could leverage charitable involvement in times of crisis. No implication is made here that organizations participate in social programs only as a means of building capital to be accessed in bad times. The study was driven, however, by a desire to establish how organizational involvement in social good through charitable work does influence the manner in which consumers view that organization, and if in crisis scenarios, organizations can expect some leniency from a public aware of its social activities.

Findings suggest that organizations do in fact benefit from audience awareness of organizational charitable contributions. Companies seen as aiding in social causes garnered higher credibility scores overall. The effect was consistent across both a benign company news scenario and a crisis scenario, although the differences in the crisis situation failed to meet statistical levels of significance. Nonetheless credibility, a key attribute in successfully communicating with constituents, was enhanced through charitable giving. The fact that ratings of altruism did not differ depending on involvement with charities is somewhat puzzling but may speak well of organizations not being seen as manipulative by espousing their contributions. Research has suggested that the public often questions the reasons behind corporate participation in social programs (see Bae & Cameron, 2006). The present study uncovered no data that would imply corporations with no prior reputation are seen as manipulative or as having ulterior motives when they participate in charities.

While perceptions of the organization itself benefited from charitable contributions, the news messages the organization produced in response to a crisis (or benign news for that matter) were not viewed more favorably when audiences were made aware of an organization's involvement with charities. The finding that organizational credibility and message credibility do not correlate in certain communication scenarios is not a new one (Callison, 2001; Callison & Zillmann, 2002). In the case of corporate public relations, it seems that the divergent opinions on message and source are not significant as long as the organization maintains the positive position in the relationship between the two. After all, it is likely that most if not all practitioners would rather experience favorable opinions toward their employer regardless of feelings toward communications, themselves aimed at recovering positive favor in times of crisis.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, the present research suggests that organizational charitable involvement provided the most benefit when it comes to purchase intention. No doubt organizations must turn a profit and maintain sales to stay in existence. How consumers react with their pocketbooks to crisis situation facing an organization may be the most important form of public feedback. Data gathered in this study suggests that corporate charitable involvement increases purchase intent overall. More importantly, the data show relative positive purchase intention is strongest in reaction to charitable news in times of organizational crisis. This finding

alone seems to substantiate the need for organizations to communicate their good deeds to the public.

#### Limitations

As with the majority of controlled social scientific investigation employing experimental design, this study is not without its limitations. Two chief among others will be detailed here. One limitation of the study was that all the stimulus materials used in the study were printed in a black and white format and were in paper form. This could have had an impact on the study manipulation and the study could have yielded different results if the websites were presented in an electronic form, in color, and on a computer screen. However, this limitation was controlled for to a certain extent as all the participants were exposed to the exact same type of manipulation.

Another limitation of this study is that the organizations chosen were primarily from the hospitality industry. Because people may feel more personally invested in places where they eat and sleep, the results could have been a result of consumers' bias towards the hospitality industry. This study could have also been carried out using more than two stimulus company websites in each condition, thereby adding to the external validity of the results.

#### Conclusion

Corporations have long been involved in contributing to social causes. The benefits of corporate charitable involvement are many including making available to charities resources in the form of monetary donations, volunteers, media exposure and even legitimacy. Organizations receive the benefit of conducting business in a better social environment they help to create; but organizations also may receive a more positive public opinion. The present study suggests that involvement in charities results in greater organizational credibility and increased intention to purchase organizations' goods, services and stock. As stated earlier, no implication is made here that corporate charity work is prompted by a desire to stockpile good will in case of crisis. The fact remains, however, that the goodwill that may accompany charitable giving does in fact benefit corporations generally and maybe most importantly in times of crisis.

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## **Ethnic Differences in Participative Public Relations for Community Planning**

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Traditional democratic theory assumes that the public interest will be addressed through citizen participation in government decision making regarding local and regional plans and policies (Godschalk, Brody & Burby, 2003). Yet, cities and metropolitan regions around the world are challenged by a growing ethnic diversity, and a “new world order of ethnicity” in the United States has significant implications for public participation and participative public relations in community planning. By 2050, the Asian American population is expected to be almost equivalent to the African American population in size. In fact, by 2060, census data projections indicate that due to the rapid growth of racial minority groups, especially Hispanic and Asian Americans, there will no longer be a racial majority group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). As these changes are reflected in the composition of America’s neighborhoods, multi-ethnic communication in public meetings becomes increasingly important.

Recent scholars have eschewed the melting pot or blending metaphor for cultural diversity and have embraced the metaphor of a mosaic of different cultures (Qadeer, 1997; Sandercock, 1998; 2003). While Sager (1994) encourages an integrative approach to cultural sensitivity, others encourage planners and public engagement practitioners<sup>1</sup> to embrace the diversity of the community, or multiculturalism and to resist the repression of ethnic differences in public discourse (Motion, 2005). Challenges abound in planning for culturally diverse communities, but because of current immigration patterns and globalization, scholars argue that the need for sensitive treatment of these differences and needs have never been more urgent (Pestieau & Wallace, 2003). Burayidi (2000) contends that sensitivity regarding multiculturalism is critical for a number of reasons. First, since different groups want and often expect to be treated in culturally sensitive ways, it is both a practical necessity and a moral obligation for planners to accommodate these groups (Burayidi, 2003). He points out that planners have to be aware of the myriad ways that cultural differences can be manifested in public participation. Burayidi (2000) argues that community planning must be a deliberative, democratic process through which communities are able to address their needs, resulting in a plurality of plans that suit diverse needs. Marginalized discourses need to be included in public meetings, thereby providing opportunities for alternative views on public issues (Motion, 2005). In order to achieve minority group representation in community planning meetings, it is important for public engagement practitioners to have information about stakeholder motivation to attend such meetings, including how cultural differences can interplay with communication styles. This study focuses on determinants of public meeting attendance, particularly as they relate to two minority groups—African Americans and Korean Americans.

Public meetings are forms of public participation for discussion of both proposed development projects (McComas, 2001; Vantanen & Marttunen, 2005) and comprehensive planning (Abram & Cowell, 2004; Godschalk, Brody, & Burby, 2003; McComas, 2001). They can be defined as “nonrestricted gatherings of three or more people for purposes that include providing information, discussing issues, obtaining information, reviewing projects, evaluating options, developing recommendations, and making decisions” (McComas, 2001, 36-37). The

current study uses the term “public meeting” to represent a setting for various forms of public participation in community matters.

Public meetings come in many forms ranging from formal to informal. They are organized for many reasons, such as to share and gather information, to plan events, to organize and develop programs, and to debate controversial topics and proposals. Research that examines public meetings is as diverse as public meetings are. For example, previous studies have examined levels of participation (Laurian, 2004), communication satisfaction (McComas, 2003), procedural fairness (Webler, 1995), the role of public meetings in community development (Davis and Whittington, 1998), and conducting successful public meetings (Cogan, 1992).

Frequently in a climate of ethnic diversity, public engagement practitioners must contend with value conflicts in meetings that result in divergence on specific planning issues and communication style differences among different ethnic groups that can impede conflict resolution (Bollens, 2002; Burayidi, 2003). The conflictual aspects of politics are often emphasized in the media, which tends to discourage individuals who are averse to conflict from participating in political affairs (Ulbig & Funk, 1999). Prior research has indicated that propensities regarding conflict can influence the likelihood of participation in political activities, such as political discussion, and that conflict avoidance is inversely related to participation in these kinds of activities (Ulbig & Funk, 1999).

To legitimate planning processes in the eyes of diverse groups, planners must apply cultural sensitivity regarding community development. For example, they need to be conscious of ethnic differences in values and perceptions about the physical environment and the role of nature in quality of life concerns (Johnson, Bowker & Cordell, 2004) and how these differences can lead to conflicts in public meetings and other venues for political discussion (Burayidi, 2000). Although conflict may be most pronounced in legislatively required public hearings, conflict among stakeholders can occur in any form of public meeting (Llewellyn, 2005; McComas, 2003) or public expression of beliefs or viewpoints (Ulbig & Funk, 1999).

This study explores not only ethnic differences in willingness to attend community meetings on public issues, but also differences in conflict communication style and sense of community as predictive factors for willingness to attend community meetings on planning issues. This is important because public meetings are one of the most traditional methods of public participation in the United States; they are “firmly rooted in democratic tradition” (McComas, 2003) and enable stakeholders to have input in political decision-making (Llewellyn, 2005). Unfortunately, public engagement practitioners’ efforts to facilitate civic engagement in public meetings have often fallen short of multicultural sensitivity (Bollens, 2002; Burayidi, 2003), and research in multicultural planning needs to be revisited as ethnic diversity in our society increases.

Public participation is an interdisciplinary field of research, and scholars from various disciplines have conducted studies that contribute to planners’ knowledge in this area. These studies in public participation often include activities such as attending and participating in public meetings (Lien, 1994; Marschall, 2001), with the recognition that public attendance at planning meetings illustrates a high level of stakeholder motivation to participate in the decision-making process (Burroughs, 1999). Therefore, it is important to examine how conflict communication style and sense of community relate to public meeting attendance and whether these factors differ among ethnic groups.

### **Conflict Communication Style**

Communication processes and outcomes, including those related to conflict communication, have been heralded as significant areas of research that relate to public participation theory and practice (Barge, 2001b; Llewellyn, 2006; McComas, 2001; 2003), and previous studies of public meetings integrate research from a variety of communication specializations, including group communication, organizational communication, public relations, and risk communication (McComas, 2003). Furthermore, research from a variety of disciplines suggests that cultures differ in their ways of handling conflict (Cai & Fink 2002), and the intersection between cross-cultural communication and conflict styles has been an area receiving considerable attention from a number of disciplinary perspectives (Hocker-Frost and Wilmot, 1995; Bush & Folger, 2005; Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2005). Conflicts occur in a multitude of settings, including the workplace, schools, churches, civic organizations, and community (planning) meetings. The current study draws on an approach to public involvement in community planning that acknowledges that conflict or disputes among stakeholders is a common occurrence in matters involving public communication and decision-making (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2001; Spano, 2000). The public realm of planning is where the various interests in a community collide and conflict, and ethnic groups differ in their communication styles and in how they respond to conflict (Burayidi, 2000).

American society is generally considered to be an individualistic society, while Korea (Miyahara, et al 1998) and other Asian countries are generally considered among those that are collectivist societies (Chua & Gudykunst 1987). Similarly, conflict communication style is a cultural dimension and it includes multiple factors, including assertiveness, accommodation, conflict avoidance, compromising, and problem solving (De Dreau, Evers, Beersma, Kluwer & Nauta, 2001; Goldstein, 1999; Hartwick & Barki, 1999). For example, assertiveness is a person's ability to state opinions with conviction and defend one's opinions when others disagree (Park & Kim, 1992), and to express his/her rights without denying the rights of others (Singhal & Nagao, 1993). Burayidi (2000) and Brew & Cairns, (2004) cite the contrast between Western and Eastern cultures as an example of the differences in cultural norms regarding assertive communication. In Western cultures, assertiveness is associated with confidence and passion for an issue, while in Eastern cultures, assertiveness in communication is often considered to be rude behavior. Several studies have indicated that Americans tend to be more assertive in communication than are Asians or Asian Americans (Fukuyama & Greenfield 1983; Huang, et al., 2004; Singhal & Nagao, 1993), especially in public settings where non-Asian Americans are present (Huang, et al., 2004), and particularly relevant to the current study, Americans tend to be more assertive than Koreans (Park & Kim, 1992) or the Chinese (Brew & Cairns, 2004).

Chua and Gudykunst (1987) and Brew & Cairns (2004) examine the contrast between high-context cultures (such as Chinese) and low-context cultures (such as Americans) as an explanatory factor for differences in conflict resolution styles between the two types of societies. They explain that in low-context cultures, individuals consider it efficient to separate the conflict issue from the person involved in a conflict, while "in high-context cultures, the instrumental issue is intertwined with the person who originated that issue. To openly disagree with someone in public is to cause a 'loss of face,' which is an extreme insult" (Chua & Gudykunst 1987, 32).

Past research has demonstrated individual differences in willingness to express dissenting opinions (Ulbig & Funk, 1999), as well as, cultural differences in attitudes toward conflict, with Western cultures believing that confrontational dialogue is necessary for resolving disputes and Eastern cultures believing confrontational dialogue is demeaning and embarrassing and that

disputes need to be worked out quietly. Where these communication gaps exist, participation in planning declines and conflict resolution suffers (Burayidi, 2000). For ethnic groups wanting to avoid conflict, attendance at public meetings regarding policy conflicts can be undesirable or daunting. Therefore, it is reasonable to ask: *Do ethnic differences in conflict communication styles relate to willingness to attend public meetings regarding community issues?*

### **Sense of Neighborhood as Sense of Community**

While conflict communication style is integral to public meeting processes, individuals and groups hold beliefs that connect communication processes to community-related perceptions and values. A psychological sense of community is an important factor in determining involvement in community activities, such as attending meetings and signing petitions (Bachrach & Zautra, 1985). The current study focuses on sense of community as a cultural value, and a sense of community (including relationships within neighborhoods) could be viewed as a cultural dimension that is, in part, reflective of the dichotomy between collectivism and individualism in various cultures (Cai & Fink 2002).

A sense of community can refer to sense of belonging to a community of place (Chaskin, 1994; Nasar & Julian, 1995), a community of interest (Nasar & Julian, 1995), or a community of collective efficacy (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Ohmer & Beck, 2006). A neighborhood, in fact, can be a place for collectivist culture (Cai & Fink 2002). The current study conceptualizes community as neighborhood--a place of residence, (Bachrach & Zautra, 1985), a community of interest, and a community of collective efficacy that has significant implications for the association between ethnicity and public participation, and community as collective efficacy and power that can be a catalyst for public participation (Bachrach & Zautra, 1985; Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Ellison & London, 1992; Ohmer & Beck, 2006; Stoll, 2001). The concept of sense of community is defined for the current study as a sense of neighborhood, based on the notion that "residents experience a sense of community of place at the smaller scale of the neighborhood," which provides a location for social interaction (Nasar & Julian, 1995, p.2) and collective or group activism (Martin, 2003; Ohmer & Beck, 2006). Therefore, it is reasonable to ask: *Do ethnic differences in sense of neighborhood relate to willingness to attend public meetings regarding community issues?*

### **Research Questions**

Due to previous findings regarding ethnic variation in conflict communication style and sense of community, the following research questions are proposed:

- RQ1. Do ethnic groups differ in conflict communication styles and how does this difference relate to community meeting attendance?
- RQ2. Do ethnic groups differ in sense of community and how does this difference relate to community meeting attendance?

## **Method**

### **Sample**

Upon approval of data collection procedures by the appropriate institutional review board, the sample for the survey was drawn from the African American and Korean American populations in the metro Atlanta region of the state of Georgia. According to the 2000 census, African Americans were the largest minority group in the metro Atlanta region (at approximately one million) (ARC, 2005), and Korean Americans were one of the fastest growing minorities in the metro Atlanta region (Lewis Mumford Center, 2005). While the authors of the current study recognize that church congregants are not totally representative of the general population, due to

the need to access separate but sizeable aggregates of the two groups, survey participants were recruited from a large African American church (approximately 2000 adult members) in Atlanta, Georgia and a large Korean American church (approximately 700 adult members) in Duluth (a suburb of Atlanta).

According to church officials, both churches draw members from wide geographic areas and have diverse memberships within their respective ethnic groups in terms of urban and suburban dwellers; therefore, it was expected that each ethnic group would encompass both urban and suburban views and concerns. There is evidence that African American churches located in central city areas attract a large number of attendees from suburban areas (Wilson, 1987). Although many middle and upper middle class African Americans have left inner city areas for better housing opportunities in the suburbs, many return to their old communities to attend church. African Americans who stay connected to their old communities through institutions such as the church will probably have a more complex perspective of what constitutes their neighborhood or community.

For each of the two ethnic groups, church members were asked to volunteer as survey participants before or after church service. Two graduate research assistants—one African American and one Korean, bilingual international student administered the surveys, by means of printed, self-report questionnaires, to all adult congregants who were willing to participate. For the Korean American survey, the questionnaire was printed in both English and Korean, because some church members were not bilingual and spoke only Korean fluently. In each case, a student of the same ethnicity as the respondents from the church handed out and collected the questionnaire so as to control for confounding surveyor effects that can occur when the surveyor has a different ethnicity than the surveyed group (Davis & Silver, 2003).

### **Measures**

Several indices, based on previous studies, were used to measure the independent variables--conflict communication style and sense of community. Indicators were drawn from previously used composite measures and tested in the current study for reliability and validity. Although some of the survey questions related to conflict communication style were taken from research that focused on the workplace, broad themes are addressed by the questions. The workplace is only one type of public setting where meetings take place. The current research pertains to how individuals conduct themselves in public settings such as community meetings. However, the type of public setting the respondent has in mind when answering the conflict communication questions can not be known. The results must be interpreted with this limitation in mind.

Conflict communication style was measured as five indices of accommodating, compromising, asserting, problem solving, and avoiding (items listed in the Appendix). The accommodating index, which contained three items that were drawn from a previous study conducted by DeDreu, et al. (2001), had a Chronbach's alpha of .72 and loaded as one factor with factor loadings of .83, .79, and .78 respectively. The compromising index contained four items that were also drawn from the DeDreu, et al. study (2001) and in the current study had a Chronbach's alpha of .73 and loaded as one factor with factor loadings of .59, .78, .81, and .79, respectively.

The asserting index contained two items drawn from Goldstein (1999) and one item drawn from Hartwick & Barki (1999) and in the current study had a Chronbach's alpha of .67, loading as one factor with factor loadings of .74, .78, and .81, respectively. The problem solving index contained four items drawn from the DeDreu, et al. study (2001) and in the current study

had a Chronbach's alpha of .60 and loaded as one factor with factor loadings of .68, .71, .75, and .57, respectively. The avoiding index in the current study contained one item from DeDreu, et al. study (2001) and three items from Goldstein (1999); the index had a Chronbach's alpha of .79 and loaded as one factor with factor loadings of .69, .86, .77, and .86, respectively.

The sense of neighborhood index was measured as a composite of seven items drawn from both a previous study related to psychological sense of community in the neighborhood (Nasar & Julian, 1995) and a previous study related to neighborhood collective efficacy (Duncan, et al., 2003). The sense of neighborhood index had a Chronbach's alpha of .84 and loaded as one factor with factor loadings of .81, .79, .75, .74, .66, .61, and .60, respectively. The composite score represented an average of scores for the seven items.

The dependent variable--intent to attend a meeting on community issues is a construct that focuses on a specific aspect of public participation—meeting attendance—and is measured in a straightforward manner with a question as to what degree a person agrees or disagrees with the statement “I would attend a meeting on community issues that interest me.”

## Results

### Descriptive Analysis

Of the 185 respondents, there were 101 African Americans and 84 Korean Americans. The African American sample consisted of 55 males and 46 females, while the Korean American sample consisted of 40 males and 44 females. Chi-square analyses indicated there was no significant difference between the two samples in sex distribution ( $\chi^2 = 1.80, p = .41$ ) or residential environment as urban or non-urban ( $\chi^2 = 2.87, p = .09$ ). An analysis of variance indicated no significant difference in age between the two samples ( $F(1, 179) = .36, p = .55$ ). There was, however, a significant difference between the two ethnic groups for the key dependent variable, intent to attend a meeting ( $F(1, 171) = 25.35, p = .00$ ). Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for the key variables in the study, indicating that the mean for intent to attend a meeting was 3.1 for African Americans and 2.5 for Korean Americans (on a scale of 1 to 4). This demonstrates that African Americans were more likely than Korean Americans to attend a meeting on community issues, while Korean Americans were more neutral in their intent to attend a meeting. For behavioral intent to attend a meeting on community issues, there was no significant difference ( $F(1, 172) = 1.25, p = .27$ ) between females ( $M = 2.8, SD = .88$ ) and males ( $M = 2.9, p = .74$ ).

### Findings for Research Questions

RQ1. First, do ethnic groups differ in conflict communication styles? An analysis of variance comparing African Americans and Korean Americans yielded the following findings: ethnic differences were found for accommodating ( $F(1, 143) = 11.0, p = .001$ ) and compromising ( $F(1, 143) = 6.8, p = .01$ ) with Korean Americans higher than African Americans, and for asserting ( $F(1, 143) = 18.8, p = .00$ ) with African Americans higher than Korean Americans. Ethnic differences were not found for problem solving ( $F(1, 143) = .004, p = .95$ ) or for avoiding conflict ( $F(1, 143) = .05, p = .83$ ), and the group means in Table 1 indicate that both groups have moderate tendencies toward problem-solving and avoiding conflict. This is significant because it reflects inter-group similarities that can facilitate public meeting processes.

Second, for each ethnic group, is there a correlation between conflict communication style and behavioral intention regarding community meeting attendance? For African Americans, there is a positive correlation between assertive communication and intent to attend a community meeting ( $r = .28, p = .01$ ). However, there are no significant correlations between

intent to attend a community meeting and avoiding conflict/accommodation/compromising/problem-solving. For Korean Americans, a positive correlation was found between problem-solving communication and intent to attend a community meeting ( $r = .27, p = .02$ ) and between avoiding conflict and intent to attend a community meeting ( $r = .38, p = .00$ ). No significant correlations were found between intent to attend a community meeting and any of the following: asserting, accommodating, or compromising.

RQ2. First, do ethnic groups differ in sense of community (neighborhood)? Table 1 indicates that the means for both ethnic groups were between the “disagree” and “agree” values; therefore, neither group showed a particularly strong sense of neighborhood. An analysis of variance comparing African Americans and Korean Americans indicated no statistically significant difference between the two groups ( $F(1,167) = 3.3, p = .07$ ) for sense of neighborhood. Second, for each ethnic group, is there a correlation between sense of community and behavioral intention regarding community meeting attendance? For African Americans, there was no significant correlation ( $r = .08, p = .43$ ), while for Korean Americans, there was a significant positive correlation ( $r = .36, p = .00$ ) between sense of neighborhood and intention to attend a community meeting.

### **Multivariate Analysis**

A multivariate regression model was used to test the relative value of the independent variables as predictors of intent to attend a community meeting for African Americans and Korean Americans. Separate regression analyses were conducted for each ethnic group in order to provide group-specific information about the hypothesized relationships. The use of separate regression analyses for each group allowed for the search for sources of ethnic differences in the dependent variable—intent to attend a meeting on community issues.

Results for the multivariate regression analyses are indicated in Table 2. Age, conflict communication indices, and the sense of neighborhood index were entered into the multiple hierarchical regression model as predictor variables for the dependent variable. Due to a problem of multi-collinearity, the conflict handling variable of compromising was excluded from the model. Table 2 indicates that the conflict handling variables of accommodation and assertiveness are important predictors of African American’s intent to attend a community meeting, whereas avoiding conflict and sense of neighborhood are important predictors for Korean American’s intent to attend a community meeting. For African Americans, accommodation had an inverse relationship with intent to attend a public meeting, and for Korean Americans, avoiding conflict had an inverse relationship with intent to attend a public meeting. The OLS multiple regression model for the outcome variable “intent to attend a public meeting” accounted for a statistically significant 21 percent of the variance for African Americans and statistically significant 27 percent of the variance for Korean Americans.

### **Discussion**

Overall, this study supports the theory that ethnic differences in conflict communication and sense of neighborhood relate to individuals’ intent to attend a community meeting. Previous studies theorize that conflict communication style (Burayidi, 2000; 2003) and sense of community (Ellison & London, 1992; Stoll, 2001) each contribute to ethnic differences in public participation. The purpose of this paper is to address these components in a unified study that addresses these factors as predictors of individuals’ intention to attend community meetings. Differences in these factors were found between African Americans and Korean Americans.

As indicated in Table 1, African Americans in metro Atlanta were more likely than Korean Americans to attend a meeting on community issues. Given that African Americans tend to be more assertive than Asian Americans, it is not surprising that they would be more willing to attend a public meeting on community issues. Given this difference in conflict communication style, it seems fair to say that public engagement practitioners have a significant challenge in designing and conducting public meetings that are sensitive to cultural diversity; however, respecting and accommodating ethnic differences in conflict communication style should go a long way to enhancing the participation of culturally diverse groups.

### **Conflict Communication Style and Community Meeting Attendance**

The current metro Atlanta study supports previous work on the intersection of culture and conflict style (Burayidi, 2000; 2003; Cai & Fink, 2002) in that Korean Americans and African Americans differ in conflict communication style with regard to assertiveness, accommodation, and compromise. They also differ in the relationship between conflict communication style and behavioral intention for community meeting attendance. Given previous research (Brew & Cairns, 2004; Lineberger & Calhoun, 1983), it is not surprising that Korean Americans tend to be less assertive than African Americans and that Korean Americans tend to be more accommodating and compromising. It follows then that African Americans' assertive communication would be connected to their intention for community meeting attendance.

Regarding Korean Americans' problem-solving orientation towards meeting attendance, they apparently link accommodation and compromise with problem-solving in meetings. The one relationship found that was unexpected is the positive relationship between Korean Americans' conflict avoidance and their intention to attend a community meeting. This suggests that this group perceives community meetings as a means to avoid conflict through the processes of accommodation and compromise. Further research is needed to test and gain understanding of this finding.

### **Sense of Neighborhood and Community Meeting Attendance**

Previous research has indicated a connection between sense of neighborhood and political participation (Bachrach & Zautra, 1985; Ellison & London, 1992; Stoll, 2001), including neighborhood activism (Martin, 2003; Nasar & Julian, 1995). Although the two ethnic groups were similar in their levels of a sense of neighborhood, they differed significantly in how a sense of neighborhood relates to intention for community meeting attendance. This suggests that the idea of neighborhood as "community" is more important as a motivator of meeting attendance for Korean Americans because they are more likely to be first or second generation Americans (that is, immigrants or first-generation descents of immigrants) from a collectivist culture than are African Americans in the United States, and, therefore, have a stronger need to affiliate with a sense of neighborhood (and its concomitant relationships). Indeed, immigration literature suggests that recent immigrants rely heavily on social networks that are in place prior to their arrival in a new "world" (Portes, 1995). By following an established trajectory over time a community based on national origin ties becomes rooted in specific geographic spaces. In some instances, an ethnic enclave community may even develop. Enclave communities provide immigrants access to a spatial concentration of people of similar origin, thus facilitating the development of social networks that help immigrants settle into a new community (Garcia, 2005). These enclaves provide opportunities for public expression of opinions on community issues (Bachrach & Zautria, 1985).

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although this study depicted statistically significant differences in factors related to public participation in metro Atlanta, there are limitations in terms of generalizability to other metropolitan areas. African Americans represent approximately 29 percent of the population in the metro Atlanta region, while Korean Americans represent less than one percent of the same area (ARC, 2005). Other metropolitan regions have a different ratio of the two groups, which might be associated with different levels of participation or activism. Also, there may be some self-select bias in terms of the participants who were willing to participate in the survey. Despite these limitations, this study points to some important ethnic differences related to public participation in community planning.

### **Implications for Research**

Future research should examine qualitative distinctions in the way each ethnic group thinks and feels about public participation in the community planning process, particularly as it relates to meetings on community issues and how each group perceives the role of public meetings in resolving planning disputes. Future research should also recruit participants who are “unchurched” as well as individuals who are from a broader diversity of ethnic groups, including Hispanics/Latinos, Native Americans, and other Asian Americans.

### **Practical Applications**

This study focuses on the important and under-researched area of multiethnic communication in public meetings; as such, it has implications for “practical theory” (Barge, 2001b) pertaining to participative public relations in community planning. The findings offer useful insights for meeting planners and facilitators. As research depicts both cultural similarities and differences relevant to public participation processes, it is important for planners to keep an eye on practical applications of this knowledge.

Given the importance of a sense of neighborhood for Korean Americans, it would be helpful to reach out to neighborhood groups in soliciting meeting attendance. Informal neighborhood gatherings can provide planners an opportunity to build relationships with ethnic minority groups, which, in turn, can increase their comfort in attending public meetings (Colson & Ellis, 2006). For encouraging attendance at public meetings by both Korean Americans and African Americans, would-be participants need to expect that participation in such meetings will entail satisfying communication processes (McComas, 2003b). For example, the finding that African Americans are more assertive than Korean Americans in conflict communication points to a need for meeting facilitators to ensure communication processes and procedures that will ensure fair representation by participants from all groups attending a public meeting. “Planners need to find more communicative, less adversarial ways of resolving these conflicts, through participatory mechanisms which give a voice to all those with a stake in the outcome” (Sandercock, 2003, 322).

In order for collaborative problem-solving to occur, all parties must have an opportunity to express their interests and values. Rather than only opening up a meeting to public comment in a general way, facilitators need to reach out proactively to less assertive groups in a manner that helps them to feel less intimidated by the public meeting process. This may require such techniques as small break-out group discussions, seeking out individuals who have a leadership role within the less assertive, less outspoken groups; and encouraging inter-group communication and understanding through respectful and appreciative listening techniques (Barge, 2001a; Colson & Ellis, 2006). From an ethical standpoint, public agencies need to plan for and provide translators for immigrants who are not fluent in English so that bridges can be built for bilingual or multilingual dialogue (Renn, et al., 1995). Finally, meeting facilitators need

to reduce conflict apprehension by providing participation processes that emphasize collaboration through framing issues as they relate to shared values and interests (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2001) among different ethnic groups.

Host societies for ethnic minority groups need to be open to “new notions of a common identity emerging through an always contested notion of the common good and shared destiny of all residents” (Sandercock, 2003, 322). The mosaic of different cultures at public meetings provides an opportunity for community stakeholders to embrace a diversity of communication styles and sense of community associated with multiculturalism. The role of public relations practitioners in facilitating ethical public dialogue calls for a multiple stakeholder model in which to create a sense of community (Heath, 2000). As community stakeholders communicate their way through both common and divergent values and interests, public engagement practitioners need to facilitate public meeting processes that promote civil and respectful opportunities to disagree reasonably (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2001), find common ground, and achieve “moral compromise” (Motion, 2005, 508).

### Endnote

1. Given that the term “public engagement practitioners” encompasses some community planners and some public relations practitioners, the term “public engagement practitioners” will be used in the remainder of the paper to include relevant parties in both groups.

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## Appendix

### Conflict Communication Indices:

- (a) Accommodating (all items from DeDreu et al, 2001):  
 I give in to the wishes of the other party.  
 I concur with the other party.  
 I adapt to the other party's goals and interests.
- (b) Compromising (all items from DeDreu et al, 2001):  
 I try to realize a middle-of-the-road solution.  
 I emphasize that we have to find a compromise solution.  
 I insist we both give in a little.  
 I strive whenever possible towards a fifty-fifty compromise.
- (c) Asserting:  
 I stand firm in expressing my viewpoint. (Hartwick & Barki, 1999)  
 I prefer to solve disputes through face-to-face discussion. (Goldstein, 1999)  
 I feel comfortable expressing my thoughts, no matter who the others involved are. (Goldstein, 1999)
- (d) Problem solving (all items from DeDreu et al, 2001):  
 I examine issues until I find a solution that really satisfies me and the other party.  
 I stand for my own and other's goals and interests.  
 I examine ideas from both sides to find a mutually optimal solution.  
 I work out a solution that serves my own as well as other's interests much as possible.
- (e) Avoiding:  
 I avoid confrontation about differences of opinion (DeDreu, et al., 2001).  
 I avoid arguing in public. (Goldstein, 1999)  
 I would feel uncomfortable arguing with one neighbor in the presence of other neighbors. (Goldstein, 1999)  
 I try to avoid being involved in an argument in a public place. (Goldstein, 1999)

### Sense of Neighborhood Index:

1. If I feel like talking, I can generally find someone in this neighborhood to talk to right away. (Nasar & Julian, 1995)
1. People here know they can get help from others in the neighborhood if they are in trouble. (Nasar & Julian, 1995)
2. If there were a serious problem in this neighborhood, the people here could get together and solve it. (Nasar & Julian, 1995)
3. Being a member of this neighborhood is like being a member of a group of friends. (Nasar & Julian, 1995)
4. We have neighborhood leaders here than you can trust. (Nasar & Julian, 1995)
5. There are people in this neighborhood other than my family who really care about me. (Nasar & Julian, 1995)
6. I live in a close-knit neighborhood. (Duncan, et al., 2003)

**Table 1** Means and Standard Deviations for Conflict Communication Styles, Sense of Neighborhood, and Intent to Attend a Community Meeting

	African American (n = 101)		Korean American (n = 84)	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Conflict Communication Indices:				
Accommodating index *	2.3	.59	2.6	.48
Compromising index *	3.0	.44	3.2	.40
Asserting index *	2.9	.69	2.5	.50
Problem solving index	3.0	.34	3.0	.32
Avoiding index	3.0	.54	3.0	.48
Sense of Neighborhood Index	2.6	.61	2.8	.34
Intent to Attend a Meeting on Community Issues*	3.1	.80	2.5	.70

For all variables listed: 1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree

\* $p \leq .01$  for ethnic difference

**Table 2** Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Intent to Attend a Community Meeting

Independent variables	Model a (African Am n =73) $\beta$ (Beta)	Model b (Korean Am n =65) $\beta$ (Beta)
Age	.01 (.20)	.01 (.10)
Conflict Communication:		
avoid conflict	.18 (.12)	.47 (.34)*
accommodation	-.44 (-.30)*	-.13 (-.09)
assertive	.32 (.26)*	.13 (.09)
problem-solving	.12 (.05)	.31 (.13)
Sense of Neighborhood:	.01 (.18)	.50 (.25)*
<i>R</i> -square	.21	.27
Adjusted <i>R</i> -Square	.13	.20
Constant	1.7	-1.4

Note.  $\beta$ s are unstandardized; Betas are standardized.

\* $p \leq .05$

**Assessing the Ethical Motivations of Public Relations Practitioners:  
Adding the Ethic of Care**

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The evolving landscape of the public relations profession – predominantly female and advancing globally – calls for retooling how we talk about ethical foundations of moral development, and ethical intent and motivation. When moral development is discussed, many mass communication researchers and textbook authors (e.g., Day, 2003; Lieber, 2003) have relied on the ethic of justice, which focuses on objectivity and independence to ascertain the moral intention of practitioners. Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) determined that individuals should remain autonomous and distant when resolving ethical problems. Such an approach does not, however, reflect the foundations of public relations, namely the profession's focus on advocacy and mutual understanding. One of Kohlberg's protégés, Carol Gilligan (1993), found that an additional means of moral development exists and defined an ethic of care that incorporates mutuality and interdependence.

The public relations focus on advocacy and mutual understanding best reflects principles of Gilligan's (1993) ethic of care. Key components of public relations are relationships, cooperation, interdependence, and social bonds, according to Ledingham and Bruning's (2000) study of relationship management. Further, the ethic of justice is evident in the rights and responsibilities foci of the Public Relations Society of America's Code of Ethics (2000). Such a dichotomy supports Gilligan's contention that both means of moral development are legitimate.

Hence, this paper examines whether the ethic of care is as viable as the ethic of justice to ascertain the ethical motivation among public relations practitioners. Such a finding would reflect that both approaches should be researched and taught in the profession.

### **Literature Review**

Perhaps one of the most-discussed factors influencing an individual's ethical decision-making abilities is the individual's level of moral development. Researchers Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) and Carol Gilligan (1993) identified stages that reflect individuals' abilities to assess ethical situations (See Table 1).

Motivations to act ethically often have been charted using Kohlberg's (1981) six stages of moral reasoning, which depict humans' ethical growth from the most egocentric to the most universally responsible. All people proceed through the stages of moral development sequentially, Kohlberg argued, although many people stall at different stages and most do not reach the moral maturity of the sixth stage. An individual can visualize one stage beyond his or her current status, which provides the impetus for moral advancement (Rest, 1979). Regression also occurs; in times of crisis, an individual may revert to an earlier stage. For example, a practitioner may believe that a peer is being treated unfairly by management but does not vocalize objections in order to protect his own job. This example also supports arguments that an intention to act ethically does not ensure a person will ultimately behave in the most ethical way (Ford & Richardson, 1994; Jones, 1991; Rest, 1979; Schminke & Ambrose, 1997).

Although Kohlberg (1981) studied the moral development of males, he asserted that his findings applied regardless of gender. Researcher Carol Gilligan, one of Kohlberg's students,

challenged this contention. Her empirical research showed that another ethic – an ethic of care – also exists (Gilligan, 1993; Gilligan & Wiggins, 1988). Gilligan did not contest the presence of Kohlberg’s ethic of justice but indicated that moral development may occur differently among some people. Whereas men focus on fairness, justice, duty, and obligations to maintain moral principles, women tend to stress assistance, care, sympathy, consequences to others, and interpersonal relationships, she said.

**Table 1: Stages of Moral Development Identified by Kohlberg (1981) and Gilligan (1993)**

<b>Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development: An Ethic of Justice</b>	<b>Gilligan’s Stages of Moral Development: An Ethic of Care</b>
1. Pre-conventional (self-interests) * Punishment and obedience * Individualism and reciprocity 2. Conventional (interpersonal relationships) * interpersonal conformity * law and order 3. Post-conventional (societal good) * social contract * universal ethical principles	1. The individual concentrates on self to avoid personal harm 2. Responsibility and social participation, which may result in “choosing a victim” (p. 80) 3. Interdependence of self and others is accepted

Lyons (1988) also found that both men and women practice the ethic of care and ethic of justice. In general, females are more likely to employ an ethic of care, and males usually employ an ethic of justice. She discovered that individuals may apply one or both concepts to resolve real-world dilemmas, depending on the situation. That is, some situations involve care and interpersonal relationships, and others focus on obligations toward justice and fairness. Business ethics researcher Sheldene Simola (2003) applied the ethic of care and the ethic of justice to crisis management and also determined that both modes are valid.

Business researchers used Gilligan’s moral development foundation to determine differences between the ethical framework of males and females, and some findings supported these distinctions. Generally, women selected more ethical actions than their male counterparts, but gender differences dissipated with increased work experience (Betz, O’Connell, & Shepard, 1989; Franke, Crown, & Spake, 1997; Glover, Bumpas, Logan, & Ciesla, 1997; Harris & Sutton, 1995; Schminke & Ambrose, 1997). Other researchers indicated that differences might stem from factors other than gender, such as personal values, job tenure, work environment, and circumstance (Powell, 1990; Pratt, Golding, Hunter, & Sampson, 1988).

Mass communication ethics textbooks give relatively perfunctory attention to the role of ethical motivation and moral development in ethical decision making (e.g., Bivins, 2004; Christians, Rotzoll, Fackler, McKee, & Woods, 2005; Patterson & Wilkins, 2005), and some public relations texts do not broach moral development in their discussions of ethical public relations practices (e.g., Fitzpatrick & Bronstein, 2006). An exception is Patricia Parsons (2004), who points out implications of gender differences and lends credence to both approaches, although she gives more attention to Kohlberg’s (1981) model than Gilligan’s (1993). Similarly, communication studies authors Neher and Sandin (2007) point out the gender differences inherent in ethical decision making approaches when discussing the ethics of care and justice.

Recently, however, the ethic of care has received renewed interest among mass communication scholars. In a special issue of *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, scholars argue that an ethic of care may be useful as a means for journalists to minimize harm (Craig & Ferre’,

2006), effectively cover injustices (Green, Mann, & Story, 2006; Steiner & Okrusch, 2006), and aid in community building (Pech & Leibel, 2006; Vanacker & Breslin, 2006).

One reason for the dearth of research on the ethic of care in mass communication may be perceived methodological limitations. Rest's (1979, 1986) Defining Issues Test (DIT) helps quantify an individual's stage of moral development according to Kohlberg's categories. Public relations researcher Paul Lieber (2003) developed a modified DIT that employed public relations case studies to assess professionals' moral intentions. Since Gilligan's (1993) research, more structured – albeit still qualitative – approaches have been developed to ascertain moral development among professionals. For example psychology scholar Eva Skoe's Ethic of Care Interview Guide (Skoe & von der Lippe, 2002; Skoe, Pratt, Matthews, & Curror, 1996) may provide guidance for public relations scholars pursuing research in this area.

Building on Simola's (2003) findings for the use of the ethics of justice and care in business crisis situations, and the growing emphasis in public relations research on feminist values (Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2000) and relationship management (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000), this research explores ethical foundations employed by public relations practitioners, to determine the applicability of the ethic of care and ethic of justice to the profession.

Because qualitative research was used to explore ethical characteristics and behaviors of public relations practitioners, the following research question was posited: What characteristics do public relations practitioners exhibit that reflect an ethic of justice and/or an ethic of care?

## **Method**

Data were collected using in-depth interviews of public relations practitioners who were at various points in their diverse careers. The purposeful sample of practitioners represented various job levels, varying experience and training, and different industries and businesses. The least-experienced and youngest participant had been on the job three months when the interviews took place. The most experienced and oldest public relations practitioner had worked in the profession for more than twenty years. Participants worked in the agency environment, for-profit businesses, nonprofit organizations or universities, and were self-employed public relations consultants. The majority had worked in more than one of these areas. These participants represented an array of disciplines: agribusiness, biotechnology, communications, education, environment, high technology, media, pharmaceutical, sports, and tobacco. Two-thirds of respondents have manager or director titles or are executives; one-third are in non-managerial or assistant/junior-staff levels.

A series of open-ended, non-directive questions permitted respondents to discuss their ethical decision-making experiences. The semi-structured interviews, which lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to 2 hours each, were recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

The analytic induction design of qualitative analysis was used to analyze the data. Coding procedures defined Strauss and Corbin (1998) were employed. The three-step coding process includes open coding to identify contexts and concepts; axial coding, to reassemble the fractured data into mutually exclusive coding frames; and selective coding, which integrates categories into a logical, central concept.

## **Results**

In the course of open coding, data revealed that participants assume different approaches to ethical decision-making based on what they define as their "personality" or "identity." Four categories of decision makers emerged: absolutist, debater, loyalist, and avoider.

*Absolutist:* The absolutists are definitive about what is “right” and what is “wrong,” often taking a judgmental stance against those who might disagree with their assessments. In addition, these participants often rationalize or justify their behavior based on personal principles. Evidence suggests that this approach is based on the participant’s own set of standards, and they rarely feel compelled to weigh outside views. As an owner of a small agency said, “As long as I think I’m right, I don’t care what they [other people] think, to a fault.” A relationship development vice president also said that he does not need assistance in determining what is ethical. “There’s a way . . . to do it right and do it wrong,” he said.

Further evidence reveals that these decision-makers act quickly because the “right” action is clear to them. They believe if something is “broken,” it should be repaired without delay; inaction would only serve to perpetuate the problem. As a result, absolutists contend those who act unethically—whether a client or a peer—should be informed of the need to take corrective action. Absolutists may not always take the most diplomatic route, these practitioners confessed. For example, an agency managing director stated:

I think there are a lot of people who . . . may be a little more tactful about it than I would be, but I think I’m a little more definitive in terms of, ‘OK, that’s a really bad thing.’ I think you need to tell people that. You need to be that frank with people . . . and I think a lot of people resent it. People don’t want to be told that they’re wrong, that their idea sucks.

Absolutists believe that clients are not the only ones who should be informed of inappropriate actions. One participant, a vice president, believes that association members who violate the Public Relations Society of America’s ethics code should be reported and reprimanded. Blatant violations of ethical principles “ma[k]e a mockery out of what public relations really is or should be,” he said.

Had a ‘legitimate’ PR person been involved with that, I probably would have spoken up and said, . . . ‘How do you have any conscience at all in doing this work that you’re doing?’ I wouldn’t call it PR and I sure wouldn’t call it anything legitimate.

Not all absolutists feel confrontation is necessary, however. One agency executive indicated he would not pursue clients who “didn’t care how the job got done, just as long as it got done.”

*Debater:* The second category of decision maker emerging from the interviews is the debater, one who assesses all sides of an issue equally and incorporates counter-arguments in the assessments. In the course of discussing how she works through ethical problems, a corporate communications manager shared that she was a member of her college debate team. “I was a debater, can’t you tell? I can argue both sides of an issue.” The three participants categorized as debaters said they consider the effects of their actions on various constituents. Unlike the absolutists who are emotionally attached to their views, the debaters consider an issue from an objective or practical perspective and avoid personal involvement. “There are very few things . . . that are so personal that I can take a hard-and-fast stand on,” a manager said. Debaters believe decision making requires balance and weighing of multiple factors, discounting the completely rules-based approach of the absolutist. There are “gray areas” that defy clear-cut answers that resulted in right-versus-right dilemmas among participants. A development director for a university explains: “It’s not that one value is detrimental to society and the other isn’t. Both people have a legitimate, reasonable ethical stand but just don’t agree . . . I’m trying to see it from their point of view . . . I admire their convictions. I’m not sure I agree with all of them but

I admire them.” The data reveal that debaters seek compromise and try to accommodate other viewpoints. “We can each move a step in this direction and come close enough to call it even,” the director added.

Debaters believe their decision-making process never ends. Since “reality constantly shifts,” as a corporate communications manager explained, a decision made today may need to be revisited tomorrow. These debaters do not consider this shifting pattern a deterrent to making adequate decisions, however, but an aspect of what they considered to be active decision making. As a corporate communications director for a biotechnology company explained, “If you have a tough ethical situation, you’ve weighed all the evidence, you’ve done all the background you need to do to feel good about the decision you make. Now, it doesn’t mean that later on you may find out that you made the wrong decision . . . . That happens all the time.” The three study participants who assume the debater approach each have more than 10 years of professional experience and are decision-makers within their organizations.

*Loyalist:* The third decision-maker category to emerge from this study is the loyalist, who is ruled more by the heart than the head. The participants who fall in this category have a strong concern for the feelings and views of others. “I think about how the issue affects people,” explained a public relations/communications manager for a nonprofit organization. “You know, how it would affect those people in immediate circles, how it would affect beyond that.” These participants said they often struggle to determine which loyalty should take precedence. In fact, their breadth of loyalties emerged as quite extensive, as one public relations director’s list reveals. “I felt a loyalty to her [an employee], I felt a loyalty to my boss, to her boss. I felt a loyalty to the company and possibly also to the employees.” Loyalists consider relationships to be crucial but feel personal responsibility for the success or failure of those relationships. The difficulty, the director finds, is that a public relations practitioner’s duty to the company can interfere with relationships with individuals inside or outside the corporate structure.

It’s important to me that I have a relationship with the people who I do business with, which is not good, you know? For me the ethical conflicts would arise because of . . . my loyalty to the people who I knew and respected versus what was the interest of the company. And sometimes what that meant is that I didn’t always have the personal relationship anymore . . . . It caused me a lot of personal angst.

This anxiety is present during and following the loyalists’ decision-making process. They believe decisions often are difficult to make and, as a result, they make an intensified effort to take care of others. For example, a public relations manager said that media relations and client relations goals often clash. In one instance, a client of the nonprofit organization where she works agreed to media coverage but didn’t like the end result. “I felt sorta bad for her,” the manager said about the client. “For me it meant that I had to do extra work in terms of making sure that they knew what they were possibly risking by talking [to the media].” Likewise, a public relations director acknowledged this shortcoming and described the personal struggle necessary to distance herself from the deliberation.

You gotta take yourself out, because if you get too emotionally involved in the situation, sometimes you can’t respond effectively. I responded effectively but . . . I’d go home and be so drained. . . . I wasn’t dealing with life or death situations but it was enough to, you know, rattle my nerves.

*Avoider:* The final category of decision making to emerge is the avoider. Reasons they gave for avoidance range from fear of disapproval to lack of job responsibility for making ethical decisions. Evidence emerged, however, that their indecision reflects a lack of experience in public relations and/or ethical decision making but not a lack of moral conviction. In fact, these avoiders believe they have strong intentions to act ethically but perceive the process or circumstances to be overwhelming or beyond their jurisdiction. They believe it is important to maintain their ethical reputations, and the reaction of others is paramount. A special events coordinator explained her panic when her former supervisor asked her to work the bar at an organization event. “My thought was, ‘I can’t do that!’ And you know, this is my job. I can’t tell them ‘no.’ This is my boss . . . . How do I tell her I’m not gonna do what she says for me to do?” She ultimately declined the assignment but said she would have served the alcohol – violating her personal values – to avoid causing a scene at the event and then later would have discussed her position with the supervisor in private. In another instance, a public relations assistant explains that she rejected a job offer “in this wimpy, underhanded way” to avoid appearing ungrateful to a mentor who recommended her. Both were women who work in subordinate roles and had less than five years of professional experience.

Some avoiders said they have strayed from personal beliefs and have acted in ways they perceived as uncharacteristically unethical, often in an effort to feel accepted by peers or managers. “I think when you’re a young PR professional, you’ll do just about anything,” said a senior account executive for a mid-sized agency. “I shouldn’t say that as a catch-all but . . . I’ve worked with people who’ll do just about anything to get their client placed somewhere.” Their decisions fluctuate based on the input they receive from others. For example, a junior account executive explains that any reaction to her views might affect what she does:

I guess if I get immediate reassurance from a couple different people, I feel pretty good about it. If I get a little bit of opposition, but it’s just blatantly because they’re just not thinking about it the way I want them to think about it, then I usually go with my gut feeling. And if there’s just opposition on the decision just due to my not knowing what to do, then I go with them.

The data suggest the right action is not always clear to the avoiders in this study. For a corporate communications manager, this lack of clarity occurred when she shifted from journalism to public relations three years ago. The once-clear line delineating right from wrong was muddled by differences in the value systems she saw between journalism and public relations. “I still struggle with . . . the whole question of how rosy a picture to paint,” she said. “It makes me feel like I’m taking baby steps, just getting started here.” A senior account executive also said he is unsure of where the “line” between ethical and unethical action lay. “I think it’s a matter of, you get that feeling. You don’t like it . . . . I’m not sure where that line is. It’s different for each person.”

Evidence also suggests that lack of experience – many respondents in this category have five or fewer years of public relations experience – and a dearth of decision-making responsibility contribute to avoidance among these participants. Younger avoiders believe that their behind-the-scenes role removes the decision-making action from their hands. For example, a junior account executive explained, “I don’t feel like I deal with it as much because I don’t see them face to face.” A special event coordinator’s comments concur:

I’m kind of at the bottom of the list. The ethical dilemmas are there for me, too, but I’m not responsible for them. You know, the upper-level

people are responsible for them. But they're there in my work, but I generally have to pass them along to people . . . . That's left to somebody up above me.

Two participants believe they do not deal with ethical issues because they consider themselves advisers or facilitators and not decision makers. A publications/promotions director for a nonprofit organization regards herself as a "communication facilitator" who reports ethical roadblocks, recommends optional solutions, and brings interested or conflicted parties together to resolve their problems. "All I could do, I think, was express why I was concerned about it and why I didn't think it was up front," she explained. A senior account executive also says he passively advises his clients. He explains, "I play a facilitator role. It's my job to . . . help out, but it's not my job to make [the] decision."

One participant uses avoidance to rationalize inaction. This media relations consultant believes avoidance helps her justify her involvement in an account that conflicts with her beliefs. A tobacco company sponsors the sport she promotes, and although an adamant nonsmoker, she has not become anxious about violating personal standards. "I kinda had a set response, which was that I'm not promoting that product. I can tell you about [the sport] but I really don't know anything about tobacco. But here's someone who can answer those questions. So it was basically to not deal with the issue at all."

*Role of gender:* The gender of these interviewees also provides insight into decision-maker action. All of this study's absolutists are male, and none of the women reflect the characteristics of an absolutist. It remains unclear whether this finding is a gender issue or whether other factors, such as experience, position in the company, or public relations area play a role. That is, the men work at high levels in agencies. On the other end of the spectrum, the loyalists are all women. The mix of gender emerged in the debater and avoider categories.

In summary, the evidence reveals that decision-making roles help determine how participants assess ethical dilemmas and make decisions. The three absolutists have definitive ideas about what constitutes right and wrong actions and judge their clients and peers based on personal standards. The three participants categorized as debaters consider it imperative that they assess multiple views before resolving a problem. The two participants in the loyalist category also assess multiple views, but struggle to determine which loyalties should take precedence. Finally, members of the largest group – avoiders – remain indecisive because of concern about disapproval or for lack of decision-making responsibility.

## **Discussion**

In terms of the research question – What characteristics do the public relations practitioners exhibit that reflect an ethic of justice and/or an ethic of care – it was determined that the decision-making roles do have an impact on the ethical foundation employed. Further, the roles point to the legitimacy of the ethic of justice and ethic of care as foundations for public relations ethics. The following section explores the use of each ethic by the different groups of participants.

First, the absolutists approach ethical decision making from a deontological or rules-based perspective, evident by their clear notions of right and wrong. Their sense of right and wrong centers on obligations, justifications, and whether moral principles are maintained or restored, which also supports characteristics of Kohlberg's (1981) ethic of justice. Specifically, evidence points to the fourth level, the rules-based law and order stage, which focuses on obeying the law to maintain social order.

It also is important to consider the gender of the absolutists, an individual factor that may affect ethical decision making (Betz, O'Connell, & Shepard, 1989; Franke, Crown, & Spake, 1997; Glover, Bumpas, Logan, & Ciesla, 1997; Harris & Sutton, 1995; Schminke & Ambrose, 1997). All three absolutists are male. This detail may support why absolutists' beliefs support the ethic of justice, considered predominantly a male approach to moral development, rather than the ethic of care (Gilligan, 1993; Lyons, 1988). Because no female participants emerged as absolutists, further research may determine whether a relationship exists between gender and the type of ethic applied by public relations practitioners.

Contrary to the absolutists, the debaters practice teleological approaches to ethical decision making. They recognize that moral viewpoints may conflict, and weigh pros and cons of potential solutions to determine the fairest resolution to ethical issues. Debaters exhibit characteristics that support Kohlberg's (1981) social contract stage, in which individuals believe in the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Gilligan's (1993) third stage of moral development, in which individuals reconcile self-worth in balance with concern for others, addresses similar utilitarian issues. Debaters use objective, detached approaches distinctive of the ethic of justice rather than a context of interpersonal relationships reflective of the ethic of care. This distinction is interesting because debaters in this study are both men and women, which supports Gilligan's (1993) and Lyons' (1988) beliefs that more than one ethic exists. Debaters have twelve or more years of public relations experience, have supervisory or managerial responsibilities, and range in age from mid-thirties to mid-forties. The relative age and experience of the debaters supports Kohlberg's (1981; Rest, 1979, 1986) argument that ethical decision making can become more sophisticated with maturity.

Third, the affinity toward relationships by loyalists supports the feminist perspective's ethic of care as defined by Gilligan (1993). Like debaters, the loyalists approach ethics teleologically and believe that the most ethically sound action shows concern for others. Their difficulty balancing personal and societal concerns, however, reflects what Gilligan referred to as "choosing the victim" (p. 80). That is, the individual cannot reconcile conflicts between self-interest and concern for others and becomes distressed that someone might be dissatisfied with the decision. The irreconcilable differences produce discomfort for the loyalists, who said that ethical decision making creates personal anxiety. The loyalists in this study are women, which supports Gilligan's contention that women might experience moral development differently from men.

Fourth, the participants categorized as avoiders also espouse strong ethical convictions – that is, the intention to act ethically – but the move from intent to action often is impaired or evaded. Reasons given for avoidance ranged from fear of disapproval to lack of job responsibility. The differences among avoiders suggest that more than one ethic exists (Gilligan, 1993; Lyons, 1988). First, many of the avoiders are driven by a desire to maintain interpersonal relationships. Younger respondents exhibit characteristics of Gilligan's first stage of moral reasoning, in which the individual focuses on the self to avoid suffering. Participants believe that external hurdles such as low organizational status threaten their ability to act ethically. This self-protection approach equates with Gilligan's notion that feelings of powerlessness lead individuals to personal isolation as a defense mechanism. The second group of avoiders struggle to maintain firmly rooted values when their personal standards meet challenges. They are concerned whether they make decisions that cause others to think they lack ethical fortitude. This finding supports an intermediary category of individuals moving from Gilligan's stage one to stage two, because of their tendency to lean toward satisfying self-interests.

The third group of avoiders, who have more work experience, believe that rules and loyalties both deserve their attention. This finding supports Kohlberg's (1981) interpersonal conformity stage, in which individuals perceive right to involve concern for others, maintaining loyalties, and following rules. The avoiders in Kohlberg's interpersonal conformity stage comprise two women and the one man. The avoiders in Gilligan's first two stages of moral reasoning are women, which further supports Gilligan's (1993; Gilligan & Wiggins, 1988) contention that both the ethic of care and ethic of justice exist, and moral development may vary by gender.

In general, evidence supports the existence of both Kohlberg's (1981) and Gilligan's (1993) models of moral development. Loyalists' beliefs mirror Gilligan's care ethic, which distinguishes them from debaters. Although both the loyalists and the debaters approach ethics teleologically, the debaters focus on fair and just results while loyalists value the welfare of others. Absolutists' objective obligations to moral standards support Kohlberg's justice ethic. As noted previously, some avoiders have adopted an ethic of care and others approach ethics from a justice purview.

Despite evidence supporting both Kohlberg's (1981) and Gilligan's (1993) models, these results cannot be used to explain the practitioners' ethical behavior. As critic James Rest (1979; 1986) noted, moral development theories describe the *intent* to act ethically but cannot determine how that intent will be employed. Although evidence suggests that participants have strong values and ethical foundations, many actions they described contradict their beliefs. That is, their intentions can be compromised when other factors – specifically, unfulfilled needs such as job security and approval – intervene. The moral development categories provide convenient upper-level boundaries of ethical standards; however, the participants generally act in ways below that level.

As with any study, this project had its limitations. Only fifteen practitioners were interviewed, which prevents generalization. However, since characteristics of decision-making roles have been identified qualitatively, they may be tested empirically through survey research of a larger sample. Additionally, the individuals interviewed did not adequately represent the race and ethnic make-up of the public relations profession, so it is unclear whether those characteristics also might relate to the ethic employed. Hence, further research should delve into ethical foundations of minority practitioners.

## **Conclusion**

The discovery of four decision-making roles among public relations practitioners – the absolutist, debater, loyalist, and avoider – may be a significant contribution to better understand how these professionals explore and determine their actions regarding ethical issues. The results show that the decision-making role may help determine the ethical foundation employed, whether an ethic of justice or an ethic of care. These participants exhibited characteristics of moral development discovered by both Kohlberg (1981) and Gilligan (1993). Hence, both approaches should be considered foundations for the study and instruction in ethical decision making by public relations professionals.

This study's findings point to several needs in the study of ethical decision-making in public relations. First, the ethic of care would serve as a valuable concept to inform relationship management theory (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000), based on the emphasis on relationships, interdependence, and social bonds. Specifically, future studies may examine how the ethic of care informs the five dimensions of relationship management theory – trust, openness,

involvement, investment, and commitment. Second, research by Simola (2003) and Skoe and her colleagues (Skoe & von der Lippe, 2002; Skoe, Pratt, Matthews, & Curror, 1996) may provide methodological foundations to pursue research that examines practitioner employment of the ethic of care. These studies would augment those that utilize the justice-based Defining Issues Test (e.g., Lieber, 2003) to ascertain levels of moral maturity.

Although the results of this qualitative study cannot be applied across the public relations profession, the findings do contribute toward a greater understanding of practitioners' decision-making processes, specifically regarding their roles, ethical foundations, and intent to behave ethically. Perhaps, too, the study's findings may provide public relations instructors with insight into teaching ethical decision making techniques that incorporate both Kohlberg's (1981) ethic of justice and Gilligan's (1993) ethic of care to the next generation of public relations practitioners.

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**Further Explorations of Post-Crisis Communication and Stakeholder Anger:  
The Negative Communication Dynamic Model**

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Little research exists to explain the effects of post-crisis communication on stakeholder affect or the importance of stakeholder affect for crisis communication. This study seeks to examine (1) the impact of accommodative post-crisis response strategies on stakeholder anger and (2) explore the negative communication dynamic (relationship between anger after a crisis and word-of-mouth). While the model developed for the negative communication dynamic was not supported, the implications for post-crisis communication and future research into this understudied but valuable topic are discussed.

The area of crisis communication is a rapidly expanding body of literature. The focus is on post-crisis communication. Post-crisis communication examines what organizations say and do after a crisis occurs. The majority of this research is oriented towards the impact of post-crisis communication on the organization's reputation (e.g., Bradford & Garrett, 1995; Benoit, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2004). Little research exists that examines the effect of post-crisis communication on the affect stakeholders experience from a crisis (e.g., Härtel, McColl-Kennedy, & McDonald, 1998; McDonald & Härtel, 2000; Jorgensen, 1996).

It is unfortunate that so little research is conducted on stakeholder affect after a crisis. Affect can be a powerful motivator for stakeholders. Crises can produce a variety of emotions including sympathy, schadenfreude, and anger (Coombs & Holladay, 2005). The most common emotion seems to be anger. Crises are a form of inappropriate behavior and that can lead to anger. Jorgensen's research (1996) shows a link between anger and purchase intention. The anger generated by a crisis can be every bit as important as the impact a crisis has on reputation. Stakeholder affect after a crisis can have important ramifications for crisis communication. This study seeks to take an additional step in understanding the relationship between post-crisis communication and anger. More specifically, the study attempts to unpack the influence of various post-crisis response strategies on anger and the connection between anger and word-of-mouth, what we term the negative communication dynamic.

#### POST-CRISIS COMMUNICATION AND STAKEHOLDER REACTIONS

Crisis communication is a vital part of research in crisis management. A primary focus of crisis communication scholarship is the effect of post-crisis communication (words and actions) on stakeholders. Comparatively, a great deal is known about the effect of post-crisis communication on the organization's reputation (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2004; Dean, 2004).

Crises are clearly events that can threaten a reputation. A reputation is valuable to the organization so it is natural to focus on ways to protect it during a crisis (Barton, 2001). Less is known about the affect generated by a crisis.

#### Overview of Post-Crisis Communication

Post-crisis communication is divided into three categories: instructing information, adjusting information, and reputation building (Sturges, 1994). Instructing information involves explaining what happened in the crisis and telling stakeholders what, if anything, they must do to protect themselves from the crisis. Examples include descriptions of events and warnings to shelter-in-place or to evacuate an area. Adjusting information involves attempts to help victims cope psychologically with a crisis. Examples include taking actions to prevent a recurrence of the crisis and expressing sympathy for victims (Sellnow, Ulmer, & Snyder, 1998).

Reputation building tries to protect and/or repair the threat of/damage from a crisis. Reputation building strategies range in their amount of accommodation, how much emphasis is placed on the victim (Coombs, 1999; Marcus & Goodman, 1991). Low accommodation strategies include denial (claim not responsibility for the crisis) and scapegoat (blame someone else for the crisis). Moderate accommodative strategies include excuse (could not control the events leading to the crisis) and justification (minimize damage from the crisis). High accommodative strategies include compensation (provide money, gifts, or services to victims) and apology (publicly accept responsibility and ask for forgiveness) (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 1999). As strategies become more accommodative, they become more expensive financially for the organization (Patel & Reinsch, 2003; Stockmyer, 1996).

#### Applications of Post-Crisis Communication

Weiner's (1986) Attribution Theory has been used to understand the reputational threat and affect generated by a crisis. One example of its application to reputation is Situational Crisis Communication Theory or SCCT (Coombs, 2004; Coombs & Holladay, 2005). SCCT uses Attribution Theory to develop a system for evaluating the reputational threat posed by a crisis. Various situational factors, such as crisis type and history of past crises, are used to estimate the threat posed by the current crisis. The crisis manager then matches the post-crisis response to the reputational threat. The greater the reputational threat, the more accommodative the post-crisis response (Coombs, 2004; Coombs & Holladay, 2004)

The affect most commonly associated with a crisis is anger (McDonald & Härtel, 2000). People get angry when an organization has an unexpected and negative event. A crisis is unexpected and negative event. (Organizations should anticipate a crisis but they cannot predict when one will occur, hence, a crisis is unexpected). Anger has been shown to translate into purchase intention. Research finds that increases in anger result in decreases to purchase intention (Folkes, Koletsky & Graham, 1987; Jorgensen, 1996). Thus, anger also has important ramifications for an organization in crisis.

Anger from a crisis is partly a function of the crisis responsibility, how much stakeholders believe the organization is responsible for the crisis event. Research documents that as perceptions of crisis responsibility intensify, reports of felt anger also increase (Coombs & Holladay, 2005; Jorgensen, 1996). Responsibility should be an important factor in the prediction of anger.

McDonald and Härtel (2000) use Affective Events Theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) to further our understanding of anger a crisis. AET helps to illuminate how events trigger emotions and influence our behaviors. Of note is how personal relevance will increase the affect

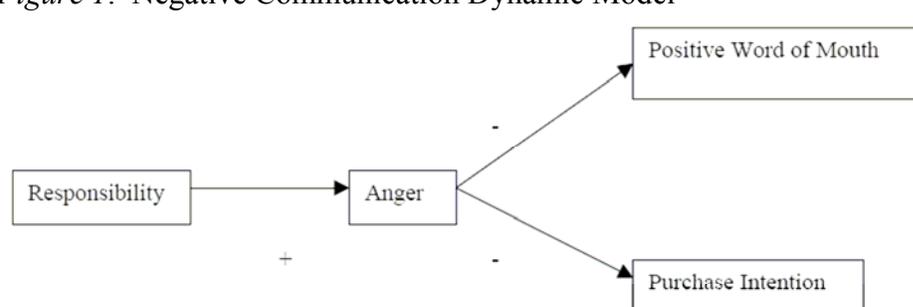
generated by a crisis. Personal relevance can be conceptualized as felt involvement. Does the stakeholder perceive or feel the personal relevance of an event? The higher the felt involvement, the more attention the stakeholder will give to the crisis and the post-crisis communication. The conclusion is that the greater the felt involvement, the stronger the impact of the crisis on anger and purchase intention (Härtel, McColl-Kennedy, & McDonald, 1998; McDonald & Härtel, 2000).

As McDonald and Härtel note (2000), the felt involvement is transitory because the crisis variables are dynamic and changeable. This is true for anger as well. In most crises, the anger will dissipate as stakeholders forget about the crisis. The old adage “time heals all wounds” applies here. The exception would be high impact crises that generate extremely high levels of anger. Such watershed crises are burned into the collective conscious of society and the memory of most stakeholders. Fishman (1999) refers to crisis that are likely to linger in the collective memory as focusing events. Luckily for management, most crises fall into the forgettable category. It would follow that as anger subsides, purchase intention would return to its pre-crisis level. If anger subsides before a purchase is made, the crisis conceivably could have little to no impact on purchasing.

#### The Negative Communication Dynamic

We speculate that there is an addition problem arising from anger that we term the negative communication dynamic. We know that unhappy customers are much more likely to tell friends and family about a product or service than happy customers. Stakeholders angered by a crisis should be less prone to engage in positive word of mouth and more likely to engage in negative word-of-mouth, “interpersonal communication among consumers concerning a marketing organization or product which denigrates the object of the communication” (Richins, 1984, p. 697). With the increased use of the Internet, negative word-of-mouth is easier to create and to disseminate (Schlosser, 2005). The negative communication dynamic posits that anger leads to an decreased proclivity towards positive word-of-mouth as well as reduced purchase intention. Figure 1 outlines the variables and relationships relevant to the negative communication dynamic.

Figure 1. Negative Communication Dynamic Model



RQ1: Does the data support the relationships in the negative communication dynamic model?

Word-of-mouth has long been recognized as a powerful force in shaping the attitudes of consumers (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991). Moreover, negative word-of-mouth demonstrates a stronger effect on customer evaluations than positive word-of-mouth (Laczniak, DeCarlo, & Ramaswami, 2001; Mizerski, 1982). Of course a number of source (e.g.,

credibility) and message factors (strong and compelling verses ambiguous) along with prior brand evaluations can influence the effects of negative word-of-mouth (Herr et al., 1991; Laczniak et al., 2001). Still, negative word-of-mouth exists as a threat to an organization and positive word-of-mouth as a benefit. Crisis responsibility and anger should be predictors of positive word-of-mouth because the two variables have been shown to be predictors of purchase intention (Jorgensen, 1996). Like purchase intention, positive word-of-mouth reflects feelings toward the organization.

H1: Responsibility and anger will be negatively related to positive word-of-mouth.

Corporate executives are increasingly aware of and concerned with comments stakeholders make on the Internet through web pages, weblogs (blogs), and discussion boards. Collectively this information posted to the Internet is known as consumer generated media (Black & Nazzaro, 2004). It is basically an electronic form of word-of-mouth Consulting groups are selling packages for tracking, analyzing and monitoring consumer generated media and corporations are buying those products. Corporations worry that negative word-of-mouth online will hurt their reputations and their bottom lines and seek to cultivate positive word-of-mouth (Boyd, 2000; Measuring, 2005; Tucker & Melewar, 2005). Hence, it would be valuable to understand how post-crisis communication could be used to address the formation of the negative communication dynamic.

As with protecting the reputation, post-crisis communication can be used to reduce anger and to blunt or to reduce the consequences of the negative communication dynamic. If a stakeholder experiences less anger, she or he is more likely to engage in positive word-of-mouth and less prone to engage in negative word-of-mouth and experience less of a decline in purchase intention. More accommodative strategies should be the most effective post-crisis response for reducing anger. Accommodative strategies focus on the crisis victims and accept some degree of responsibility for the crisis (Jorgensen, 1996). The organization takes positive actions to counter-balance the negatives of the crisis. Anger could be reduced as stakeholders see the organization is accepting its responsibilities and helping victims in some way. Compensation and apology are the strongest forms of accommodative strategies discussed in the literature (Benoit, 1995; Bradford & Garrett, 1995; Coombs, 1999; Marcus & Goodman, 1991; Siomkos & Shrivastava, 1993). The crisis literature also recommends expressing sympathy for victims. Expressions of sympathy would seem to be related to accommodative strategies as both share a focus on concern for the victim. Research indicates compensation, apology, and sympathy are viewed similarly in terms of accepting responsibility and showing concern for victims (Coombs, 2006).

Jorgensen's (1996) early work in post-crisis communication compares a denial response (accept no responsibility) to a confession and apology response (accept responsibility). His results report a connection between response and anger, stakeholder reported higher levels of anger in the denial condition. Comparing denial to apology is loading the results in favor of apology. A denial response is viewed harshly by stakeholders when they think a crisis has occurred (Coombs, 2006). Organizations have a range of options, not just denial or apology. One option is just to report the instructing information about a crisis (explain what happened) and not add any additional post-crisis responses (Coombs, 1999). Research needs to compare accommodative strategies to other, more positive strategies.

H2: Respondents in the accommodative post-crisis response condition will be more inclined toward positive word-of-mouth than respondents in the information only condition.

H3: Respondents in the accommodative post-crisis response condition will report less anger than respondents in the information only condition.

## METHODS

### *Participants*

Participants in the study were 167 undergraduate students from a Midwestern university. The ages ranged from 18 to 56 ( $M = 20$ ,  $SD = 3.24$ ). The participants were 55% female ( $n = 92$ ) and 45% male ( $n = 45$ ).

### *Design and Procedure*

Participants read a series of three printed news stories and completed the research instrument. The three stories were a report of disease in deer, an explosion at a wax factory, and report on wacky warning labels on products. Only one news story, the report of a chemical explosion, was of interest to this investigation and contained the manipulation of crisis response. The other two stories were presented before and after the explosion story and served as distractors. The crisis was an actual chemical explosion at Marcus Oil. Marcus Oil was selected because respondents were very unlikely to be familiar with this company or to have any strong feelings about this obscure wax manufacturer. We wanted to control for the effect strong prior reputation has on reactions to a crisis. The three news stories were reported as coming from the Reuters News Service. The crisis response was manipulated by including a quote from a company spokesperson that was either information only, expression of sympathy, compensation, or apology (accepting full responsibility).

The research was conducted in a classroom setting. Participants received a packet containing a consent form, cover page with directions, prior crisis reputation items, a set of three news stories including the stimulus crisis story, and a three-page questionnaire. They also were verbally instructed to carefully read the news stories and then respond to the questions that followed. The entire process, including explanation of the informed consent, reading or viewing the news reports, completing the survey, and de-briefing required about 20-25 minutes.

### *Instrumentation*

*Perceptions of Responsibility.* Perceptions of organization responsibility assessed the degree that subjects held the organization responsible for the crisis. Participants indicated their level of agreement on a seven point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Example items include “The blame for the incident lies with the organization” and “The cause of the crisis was something the organization could have controlled.” The reliability of the five item scale resulted in a Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .78$  ( $M = 4.04$ ,  $SD = .99$ ).

*Anger.* Perceptions of subjects’ anger toward the organization over the crisis incident was measured using a three item scale. Participants indicated their level of agreement on a seven point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The higher the score, the more anger was reported by the subjects toward the organization. Example items include “I feel annoyed toward the organization for what happened” and “I do NOT feel angry toward the organization (Reverse coded).” The reliability of the three item scale resulted in a Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .86$  ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ).

*Positive Word of Mouth.* Positive word of mouth assessed the degree that subjects reported the likelihood that they would speak favorably about the organization. Participants indicated their level of agreement on a seven point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The higher the score, the more subjects reported being likely to recommend the purchase of a product from the organization. Example items include “I would encourage friends or relatives NOT to buy products from the organization (Reverse Coded)” and “I would

recommend the organization's products to someone who asked my advice" The reliability of the three item scale resulted in a Cronbach's  $\alpha = .75$  ( $M = 4.68$ ,  $SD = .99$ ).

*Purchase Intentions.* Purchase intentions assessed whether subjects would purchase products produced by the organization. Participants indicated their level of agreement on a seven point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The higher the score, the more likely subjects would purchase products made by the company. Example items include "The likelihood of my buying products made by the organization is quite high" and "I would continue to buy products made by the organization in the future." The reliability of the five item scale resulted in a Cronbach's  $\alpha = .80$  ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ).

#### Manipulation Checks

Manipulation checks were created for the three accommodative strategies. The manipulation for the apology CCS was assessed using a single item question. Apologies, by definition, accept responsibility for the incident in question. The question asked whether "The organization accepted responsibility for the incident." Subjects who read the apology condition perceived that the organization took greater responsibility for the incident ( $M = 5.70$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) than those who did not read the apology statement ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ),  $t(162) = 4.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .33$ .

The manipulation for the compensation CCS was assessed using a single item question. The question asked whether "The organization gave money to and provided housing for those affected by the incident." Subjects who read the compensation condition perceived that the organization compensated victims for the incident ( $M = 6.10$ ,  $SD = .88$ ) more so than those who did not read the compensation statement ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ),  $t(162) = 11.56$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .67$ .

The manipulation for the sympathy CCS was assessed using a single item question. The question asked whether "The organization expressed concern for those affected by the incident." Subjects who read the sympathy condition perceived that the organization was more concerned for the victims ( $M = 5.30$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ) than those who did not read the sympathy statement ( $M = 4.53$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ),  $t(162) = 2.78$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $r = .21$ .

## RESULTS

### *Evaluation of Proposed Model*

The current paper proposes a model where perceptions of responsibility lead to greater amounts of anger, which in turn reduce positive word of mouth or purchase intentions. The model was tested by comparing the estimated parameter sizes to the obtained correlations using Ordinary Least Squares (Hunter & Gerbing, 1982). Path estimates were corrected for attenuation to account for measurement error. Descriptive statistics and zero order correlations of all variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics and Zero Order Correlations*

		Mean	SD	N	1	2	3	4
1.	Responsibility	4.04	.99	167	(.76)	.55	-.59	-.52
2.	Anger	3.30	1.25	167	.45	(.88)	-.77	-.68
3.	Word of Mouth	4.68	.99	167	-.45	-.63	(.76)	.95
4.	Purchase Intentions	4.44	1.13	167	-.40	-.56	.73	(.77)

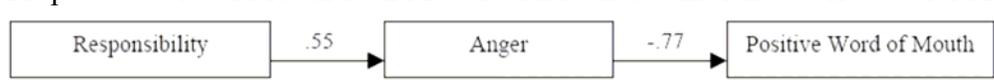
Note: \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

Correlations above the diagonal are corrected for attenuation.

Alpha coefficients are presented in the diagonal.

The first model tested the responsibility, anger, and word of mouth model. The predicted correlation between responsibility and word of mouth is  $r = -.42$ . The obtained correlation is  $r = -.59$ . The resulting error is .17. The obtained correlation falls outside of the 95% confidence interval,  $P(-.55 < p < -.29) = .95$ . The error is higher than would be expected due to sampling error. The model was also tested using a chi-square global test of goodness of fit,  $\chi^2(1) = 9.30, p < .01$ . The significant result leads to the rejection of the model. A final test was conducted using the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation test (RMSEA). Any RMSEA score over .10 leads to the rejection of the model. The obtained RMSEA = .24. All of the tests suggest the rejection of the model.

Figure 2. Proposed Word of Mouth Path Model with Path Coefficients Corrected for Attenuation



The second model tested is the responsibility, anger, and purchase intentions model. The predicted correlation between responsibility and purchase intentions is  $r = -.37$ . The obtained correlation is  $r = -.52$ . The resulting error is .15. The obtained correlation falls outside the 95% confidence interval,  $P(-.50 < p < -.24) = .95$ . The error is higher than would be expected due to sampling error. The model was also tested using a chi-square global test of goodness of fit,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.13, p < .01$ . The significant result leads to the rejection of the model. A final test was conducted using the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation test (RMSEA). Any RMSEA score over .10 leads to the rejection of the model. The obtained RMSEA = .18. All of the tests suggest the rejection of the model.

Figure 3. Proposed Purchase Intentions Path Model with Path Coefficients Corrected for Attenuation



The proposed path models were not supported by the data. Further tests were conducted using the test variables. A regression was conducted to test the impact of both responsibility and anger on word of mouth. Results of this analysis indicates a significant effect for responsibility and anger on word of mouth,  $F(2,163) = 62.13, p < .001, R = .66$ . Responsibility ( $\beta = -.20, t(1,163) = -3.07, p = .01$ ) and anger ( $\beta = -.54, t(1,163) = -8.15, p < .001$ ) were negatively related to positive word of mouth. A regression was conducted to test the impact of both responsibility and anger on purchase intentions. Results of this analysis indicates a significant effect for responsibility and anger on word of mouth,  $F(2,163) = 40.53, p < .001, R = .58$ . Hypothesis 1 was supported. Responsibility ( $\beta = -.18, t(1,163) = -2.48, p = .02$ ) and anger ( $\beta = -.48, t(1,163) = -6.58, p < .001$ ) were negatively related to purchase intentions

### Effects of Crisis Communication Strategies (CCS)

It was predicted that the use of accommodative strategies would result in higher positive word-of-mouth among subjects than a strategy that is not accommodative (an information only condition). This prediction was tested using an independent samples t-test. Results indicate no significant difference between the use of an accommodative strategy ( $M = 3.45, SD = 1.01$ )

versus an information only strategy ( $M = 3.28$ ,  $SD = .98$ ),  $t(162) = -.98$ ,  $p = .35$ . However, an observation of the means indicate a trend in the predicted direction. Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

It was predicted that the use of accommodative strategies would result in lower anger among subjects than a strategy that is not accommodative (an information only condition). This prediction was tested using an independent samples t-test. Results indicate no significant difference between the use of an accommodative strategy ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ) versus an information only strategy ( $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ),  $t(162) = 1.83$ ,  $p > .05$ . However, an observation of the means indicate a trend in the predicted direction. Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Further tests were conducted examining whether anger is impacted using the different accommodative strategies. A multiple regression was conducted using the independent variables of apology, compensation, and sympathy. These variables were dummy coded, where a 1 indicated the presence of the strategy, and a 0 indicates no presence of the strategy. Results of this analysis indicates no significant effect on anger,  $F(3,163) = 1.12$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $R = .14$ .

## DISCUSSION

Overall, the results found little support for the negative communication dynamic model. Crisis responsibility and anger were both found to be related to positive word-of-mouth and purchase intention. However, the test of the overall model failed. Unlike Jorgensen's (1996) study, we did not find a model linking anger to purchase intention. Jorgensen used two different crisis situations, one that produce high levels of anger and one that would produce low levels of anger. We chose a crisis situation that would produce moderate levels of anger (Coombs and Holladay, 2005). Our study had an anger mean of 3.30 ( $SD = 1.25$ ). It could be that high levels of anger are necessary for the model to emerge. Still, anger and crisis responsibility were shown to have an impact of positive word-of-mouth and purchase intention. Anger had the stronger impact of the two variables. Hence, it is still important to consider the anger created by a crisis and to explore ways to reduce that anger.

The use of accommodative strategies had a more positive effect on anger than information only but the difference was not significant. The use of accommodative post-crisis response strategies was of limited value in reducing anger. Jorgensen (1996) found a much greater effect for accommodative strategies when compared to denial. However, that finding could be result of the negative feelings generated by denial rather than the positive impact of accommodative strategies.

### *Future directions*

Crisis managers should be concerned about the anger generated by a crisis. Anger can lead to less positive word-of-mouth and by implication, potentially more negative word-of-mouth and reduced purchase intention. We did not find support of the negative communication dynamic model in this study. Future research should examine the model using crisis scenarios that generate higher levels of anger. Using a crisis situation that has very high levels of anger such as those with high attributions of crisis responsibility and strong levels of felt involvement for participants should be used. For instance, a crisis where personal student data were exposed by a human error in the university computer center should engender strong anger.

We also did not find much support for accommodative strategies being able to reduce anger. Again, it might be the level of anger that matters. Accommodative strategies might be more effective than information only when the anger is higher. However, there is some good

news for crisis managers. It would seem that when levels of anger are low (moderate levels of crisis responsibility), instructing information and/or expressions of sympathy is enough to pacify non-victims of the crisis. (Respondents in this study were not victims of the crisis). Instructing information and expressions of sympathy result in less financial expenditures for the organization than either compensation or apology. Of course the respondents were non-victims meaning they have less of a connection to the crisis. Most stakeholders are non-victims. As a result, most post-crisis communication is directed toward non-victims so this is important information to know (Coombs, 2004). Moreover, the results should hold even for victims in crises that produce very low attributions of anger. Any post-crisis response that does not deny or scapegoat should work equally well in addressing anger. Further research is needed to compare response strategies and to determine the negative effects of denial strategies on anger.

Even though most of the hypotheses were not supported, this research adds to our understanding of crises and stakeholder affect. The anger generated by the crisis was moderate to low at 3.30 on a seven-point scale. At such low levels anger still correlates with positive word-of-mouth and purchase intention but the model for the relationship between the variables did not hold. Given Jorgensen's (1996) findings that model anger with purchase intention, it is possible a high level of anger is needed to trigger the negative communication dynamic. Again, this is good news for crisis managers. Crises that produce low to moderate levels of anger are unlikely to have much effect on purchase intention or work-of-mouth. Crisis managers have a number of reliable cues for estimating the level anger associated with a crisis and understanding how that anger might impact the organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2005; McDonald & Härtel, 2000).

The most disappoint result was the failure of accommodate strategies to have a greater effect on anger and positive word-of-mouth than information only. Taken with Jorgensen's results, it seems any positive response—not using a form of denial—is beneficial to an organization. Again the level of anger may be a factor. We may see a separation between information only and highly accommodative strategies with higher levels of anger. More research is needed to more fully understand the ability of accommodative strategies to reduce anger and to shape word-of-mouth. This study is an additional small step toward understanding the connection post-crisis communication and stakeholder anger. Unfortunately or fortunately, the study raises more questions than it answers. Anger and post-crisis communication is an area worthy of further pursuit and ripe with unanswered questions.

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## Top Communicators from Global Pharma Firms Talk About Transforming Times

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Through in-depth interviews, expert communicators inside the pharmaceutical industry discuss the issues facing the industry, how these issues have and have not changed over time, and how they are responding to the continuing environment of grinding and intense public criticism. Several important insights emerged including: the persistence of many issues over a decade or longer, the increased complexity of the political and social environment, the increased intensity of public and media attention, and the turning point precipitated by online community building. The long road to rebuilding trust in the pharmaceutical industry was also a prominent theme. This study is underpinned by contemporary issues management theories and research.

### Introduction

#### *Paragons of Virtue to Pariahs of Public Opinion*

Once widely regarded as a group of virtuous organizations forging new frontiers with important research and life-saving products, the pharmaceutical industry is now reviled by many. Activist organizations, foreign governments, health care industry pundits, politicians, and individuals alike accuse the industry of price-gouging, of withholding vital drugs to protect patents, of deceptive marketing, of cynical and sloppy research agendas, plus a host of other misdeeds. In this paper, we discuss the preliminary findings of research involving some of the pharmaceutical industry's most senior communication industry insiders. The purpose of this ongoing research is two-fold: to better understand insiders' perceptions of the nature and extent of change since the 1990s in the issues that compel the attention of the global pharmaceutical industry, and to explore the strategic rationale for the responses made by individual organizations and the wider industry.

This research is grounded in the strategic issues management literature emerging largely from scholars of business and society, and to a lesser extent, public relations. Two fundamental concepts—publics and the contested issues around which they organize—are of particular interest. We will explore how the industry views the role of the mass media, specifically the news media, in reflecting and influencing public opinion. Note that we discuss the issues compelling the pharmaceutical industry and do not limit our discussion to that of individual organizations. This approach is, we believe, an important way to understand the public opinion environment, defined here as the set of issues that concern a group of similar organizations, the publics with which those organizations must engage, influencers (such as the media), and others with a stake in the issues.

Organizational theory posits that as the environment changes, so do the activities and structures of boundary spanning units (Miles, 1980); issues management demands boundary spanning activities. Boundary spanning activities undertaken in the pursuit of issues management goals include buffering and bridging strategies (Miles, 1987; Meznar & Nigh 1995; Johnson Jr. & Meznar, 2005). Buffering strategies are intended to establish or modify the terms of the social contract between business and society and bridging activities are intended to bring

the firm into compliance with the changing expectations of social and political stakeholders. In the boundary spanning roles occupied by corporate communications professionals, it is logical to contend that pharmaceutical companies have responded to the issues by applying buffering and/or bridging strategies as the complexity and turbulence of their environment has increased.

An important proposition underpinning predictions of issue emergence and change is that issues are overlapping, persistent, and compel the attention of similar organizations (Dougall, 2005a). For example, issues that emerge for one pharmaceutical company almost always concern them all in some way. Building on the contention that the changing set of issues concerning an industry can be tracked over time, we designed an interview schedule organized around the buffering/bridging concepts, together with four dimensions developed to characterize and specify change in the sets of issues that concern organizations and their publics. These dimensions are stability (turnover of issues), complexity (the number of issues), intensity (volume of media coverage), and direction (favorability of media coverage). We asked senior executives to respond to questions about their perceptions of the issues affecting their companies, and the extent to which concerns about these issues are shared across the industry. Therefore, the research questions organizing this study are:

(1) To what extent and in what ways has the composition of the public opinion environment of the pharmaceutical industry (issues, stakeholders, influencers) changed in the last decade?

(2) What strategic adaptations have been made by the pharmaceutical industry in response to the issues with which it must publicly contend? That is, to what extent and in what ways does the pharmaceutical industry apply buffering and/or bridging strategies to manage responses to the compelling issues of the decade?

## The Literature

### *Issues and Public Opinion*

Public opinion is driven by issues, but issues are not neatly bounded entities significant only to one organization and one public at any point in time (Dougall 2005a, 2005b). Much more often, issues demand the attention of many organizations and a multitude of publics, frequently extending to organizational groupings by industry or some other classification (Heath, 1997; Smith, 1996; Smith & Ferguson, 2001). These issues have collective significance and are contested by organizations individually and, more importantly for this discussion, collectively (Heath, 1997).

The public opinion environment is the aggregation or set of issues that concern organizations and their publics (Dougall, 2005a). These issues are shared by organizations that occupy similar niches and are similarly constrained by a common environmental setting. Issues are “given meaning through the process of drawing inferences and hypotheses about the sources, causes, and solutions for an issue, and the likely evolution of that issue and potential implications for the focal organization, its friends and allies, and its adversaries and enemies” (Mahon & Waddock, 1992, p. 20). Important in the interpretation of issues are individuals, organizations, associations, governments, governmental agencies, and issue networks (Hecl, 1978). An issue network consists of individuals and groups with shared knowledge about some aspect of public policy (Hecl, 1978, p. 103). In other words, issue networks comprise individuals, groups, and organizations with knowledge of an issue and so membership in any given issue network “cuts across traditional organizational boundaries of business, government, and society” (Mahon & Waddock, 1992, p. 20).

Industries and the organizations comprising them need to apply social and political strategies to deal with issues because “external stakeholders, such as activists, regulators, the media, or other pressure groups and institutions, have learned how to exert influences that necessitate responses” (Mahon & Waddock, 1992, p. 21). Activists present social problems by creating symbols within and around them (Mahon & Waddock, 1992) and articulating them in a way that demands responses (Straughan 2005a, 2005b, 2006).

#### *Issue Pacesetters*

Also important to this discussion of the issues comprising the public opinion environment at this, the macro, industry-level of analysis, rather than the micro, organization-level, is the concept of issue pacesetters. Dawkins (2005) uses institutional and resource dependency theories as the conceptual framework for an issue pacesetter model of corporate issues management. According to Dawkins (2005), some organizations do not wait for firms in the industry to collectively respond to issues, but rather move deliberately or intuitively to take the industry lead. He argues that when an industry is confronted with an issue pacesetter that uniquely redresses an issue, the dynamic of issue management is quite different than when industry members act in concert to implement change, such as the self-imposed content ratings issue in the music industry, or when an issue affects a single company (Dawkins, 2005, p. 245). The issue pacesetter model is characterized by the following steps: (a) changed stakeholder expectations, (b) issue pacesetter emergence, (c) heightened attention and pressure, (d) decision making under pressure, and (e) industry implementation and compliance (Dawkins, 2005, p. 247).

#### *Buffering and Bridging*

Buffering activities establish or modify the terms of the social contract between business and society, bridging activities are intended to bring the firm into compliance with the changing expectations of social and political stakeholders (Meznar & Nigh, 1995). The two strategies are, however, not mutually exclusive and many firms pursue a combination of buffering and bridging in carrying out public affairs activities (Meznar & Nigh, 1995). On some issues particular firms “may find the option of doing nothing...quite viable. In instances where the issue affects a large group of firms (firms in an entire industry, for example) the task of resolving the issue may be taken up by a smaller group of firms, allowing other firms to be free-riders” (Meznar, Johnson Jr., & Mizzi, 2006, p. 59). Free-riders can benefit from the resolution of issues without bearing the costs of actively pursuing the resolution. However, when the issues are firm-specific, the option of free-riding is less feasible “and firms must often make a choice on whether to buffer or bridge to resolve the issue” (p. 60).

Increased media coverage is expected to be more indicative of negative than positive expectational gaps (Gans, 1979) because there is little pressure on the firm or on society to close positive expectational gaps (Meznar, Johnson Jr., & Mizzi, 2006, p. 60). Meznar and Nigh (1995) found that “the complexity and turbulence in a firm’s environments—as well as a variety of organizational characteristics (such as size/power, diversification, and top management values) —helped to explain whether a firm would engage in buffering and/or bridging activities” (p. 56).

Public affairs managers with “less experience or shorter tenure may perceive their regulatory environment as highly (and increasingly) complex” (Johnson, Jr. & Meznar, 2005, p.57). This is consistent with Dougall’s contention that studying industries over time reveals issue inertia (2005a), that is, the public opinion environment can be very slow to shift and will

typically settle around some dominant issues of concern. This inertia is only visible when a longitudinal lens is applied and would be largely invisible to individual managers who are immersed in the day-to-day responsibilities of their job.

Meznar, Johnson Jr., and Mizzi (2006) also used the buffering/bridging lens to examine whether increased press coverage promotes corporate bridging and/or buffering behavior and whether the level of press coverage a firm receives affects the perceived performance of its public affairs function. They found that “press coverage is not associated with greater corporate efforts to comply with societal expectation” (2006, p. 58). In other words, increased media attention was not found to be tied to a firm’s efforts to bring it into compliance with the changing expectations of social and political stakeholders (bridging). This may be explained in part by studies of conflict, which show that contending parties in conflict situations take tougher, more extreme positions in the presence of audiences than they do under conditions of privacy (Levinger & Rubin, 1994).

The involvement of the media in the issues of contention between organizations and their publics is certain to intensify the situation (Heath, 1997; Huang, 1997). Greening and Gray (1994) found a positive association between firm-specific media attention and corporate resource commitments to public affairs management. “The corporate response may be to try buffering (altering external expectations or standards) or bridging (altering internal practices of standards) but as press coverage increases most firms come under pressure to do something” (Meznar, Johnson Jr., & Mizzi, 2006, p.59). The news media are likely to cover such interactions when the degree of conflict expressed is high because of the importance of conflict driving the selection and publication of news (Karlberg, 1996). Activists obtain credibility, resources, and exposure for their positions by attracting media coverage, and therefore media coverage is critical to their mobilization and effectiveness (Heath, 1997, Olien, Tichenor, & Donahue et al., 1989). Regardless of whether media attention is sought out by organizations or activists in an attempt to better serve their interests in the prevailing public opinion environment or whether media attention is an unwelcome but unavoidable side-effect of the conflict, the higher the degree of evident conflict in organization-activist relationships, the more likely that media attention and coverage will result (L.A. Grunig, 1992; Heath, 1997; Olien et al., 1989).

### Method

During February 2006 and March 2008 we interviewed 9 executives, all employed in senior communications positions with leading global pharmaceutical companies. The participants were recruited purposively based on the size and global reach of the firms. We believe this sample of industry experts is sufficient to obtain rich, relevant data; however, this is a preliminary report and we will continue to recruit participants from the focal population until data saturation is achieved. All of the interviewees had at least five years experience in the pharmaceutical industry. Most had more than 10 years and one had been in the business for 37 years. All were members of senior management and were, as such, informed of and influential in the firm’s strategic decision-making. The interviews, which ranged from 35-70 minutes, were conducted and recorded according to the guidelines provided by McCracken (1988). The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the analytic procedures outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994) and their three streams of concurrent data analysis: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. To preserve confidentiality, no names or company identifiers are provided and pseudonyms are used to protect the identities of all participants.

The preliminary findings of this study are organized around the following themes—the persistence of fundamental issues, the increased intensity of public and media attention, the increased complexity of the political and social environment, the turning point precipitated by online community building, and the long road to rebuilding trust.

### Findings

#### *The Persistence of Fundamental Issues (The More Things Change....)*

“It’s a crazy time. And if you just joined the industry you’re going to think it’s never been like this before. I can tell you it’s been like this before, but for different reasons.”(Darlene, Director Corporate Communications)

When asked to consider whether the fundamental issues that concern their organization had changed over the last decade or so, all but one respondent (who had worked in the industry less than five years) responded that there were no completely new issues, that the “...fundamental issues are the same”... but they attract more attention than they used to (Britt, VP Corporate Communications). For example, discussions about the need for social equity in relation to medical treatment are the stage on which the more specific discussion about access to drugs is now playing out. Although Britt described access to drugs as a “relatively new” issue, one of the industry veterans, Darlene (Director, Corporate Communications), pointed out that issues are “pretty much the same, but public perception is different. People didn’t used to associate certain drugs with a company... (but) folks started thinking about their medications and how much they were costing and suddenly the industry became the villain.”

Other interviewees had similar responses. According to Graeme (VP Corporate Affairs), issues “don’t really change a lot, but the intensity of any given issue in the portfolio of issues moves up and down a bit.” Charles (Senior VP, Global Communications) offered a similar perspective saying, “the topics we worry about, the topics we discuss haven’t changed, but the intensity of the discussion has become much more severe and harsh.” Using the search for cancer treatments and cures as an example of how issues stay the same, he went on to say that: “Death rates for cancer have not really changed in the last 20 years, but the whole intensity, the debates have become much more mean-spirited at times.”

One of the challenges his company and others in the industry have failed to address, according to Aaron (Director, Corporate Communications), is to better explain the risks and benefits of drugs; this failure, he says, has contributed to the heightened attention paid to drug safety. While drug safety has always been a concern, the companies failed to say enough to consumers, to the medical community, to government about the risks as well as the benefits of drugs. Adverse events such as the Vioxx recall have attracted an enormous amount of attention, the consequences of which have been felt by the whole industry. He explained that the situations like the Vioxx recall have happened before but were “not nearly as visible 10 years ago...today it is one of the two or three most significant issues that we struggle with as an industry.”

The first and only person to say that the industry was dealing with a great deal of change in the fundamental issues also had the shortest tenure in the industry. This individual discussed fact that pharmaceutical companies make products that are lifesaving, but have reputations that “may be lower than that of insurance salesmen...it’s an amazing shift of perception by people and a lot of it has come down to one simple word: price” (Frank, Executive Director, Media Relations).

On the question of change in issues comprising the public opinion environment of the global pharmaceutical industry, the consensus is clearly that many fundamental issues have remained static for more than a decade while the intensity of public attention focusing on these corporations has increased.

*Intensity of Public and Media Attention*

While core issues such as drug pricing, access to drugs and drug safety have been on the radar for more than a decade, the intensity of media attention, the complexity of these issues, and the number of issues to which the companies are responding at any point in time have increased dramatically. “We refer to the last couple of years as the perfect storm...we are hit with rising drug costs, dramatically increasing litigation on many fronts, 24-hour news coverage, which makes our job tougher from a public relations and also from a corporate standpoint...” (Frank).

The changing and intensively competitive media environment has had some interesting consequences, according to Aaron. The competition between media outlets is now so intense; the news media no longer need a good story to print in their newspapers tomorrow, they need stories for their Web sites today and its “...right now, in the next 50 minutes. And because the capacity of news delivery is almost limitless... (the media have) got to have something to fill it up... the scrutiny that certain events ... get today is greater than it was before simply because what it takes to be categorized as news today seems to be a pretty low bar.”

Perceptions of the industry as a convenient political football were shared by all interviewees. “It’s become fashionable or acceptable to use healthcare costs and specifically prescription drug costs as a political message” (Darlene). This sentiment was echoed by Helen (VP, Media Relations) who contended that while some issues, such as drug safety, have existed for years, “the intensity is increasing. (The) difference now is that public awareness of the issue has increased, and public scrutiny has increased as well.” As for new issues, she named the Internet purchase of drugs and the importation of drugs from Canada (Helen).

Ernest (Director, Corporate Media Relations) argued that while the issues themselves have not changed much in the last decade, the intensity of public and media attention that an issue attracts has moved exponentially. He gave the example of drug pricing, saying that while the issue has been around since the 1970s, it is “driving a lot of the negative publicity now, it’s driving a lot of the political attacks, it’s driving a lot of litigation.”

One respondent (Charles) said that he likes to take Western journalists to the developing world and to “confront them with the realities...so they got a very up close and personal view of what it’s like to deliver health care in Africa—what are the challenges and what are we doing to address some of those challenges. So they got a chance to knock down some of the stereotypes and perspectives that people have about what it’s like to deliver health care.”

Media coverage of the industry has grown extensively, said industry veteran, Darlene. While pharmaceutical industry stories were once lumped in with medical or science articles “...now there are actual staff reporters, broadcast as well as print, that are assigned specifically to the pharmaceutical industry.” She says the two reasons for that are the industry has become highly visible from a business perspective, which has also made it a popular political target. There are now “...a proliferation of reporters in Washington bureaus who cover the FDA, pharma industry, and biotech industry” (Darlene). While there was once only a handful of reporters who understood the industry, “...now I couldn’t even count them because you’ve got the world news, the national news, the regional news.” And while some are very fair and

knowledgeable, she says, “I find too many of them are too quick to jump on the industry as the bad guy and that’s unfortunate.”

### *Complexity of the Political and Social Environment*

All agreed the environment was more complex. The industry is more complex “because there is no compartmentalization of issues to national boundaries” (Britt), a sentiment shared by all respondents. “Because of globalization there is more attention paid to what we are doing in other parts of the world and this affects us here in the US” (Britt).

In describing the environment as much more complex, Charles again used the example of the drug pricing issue, saying that “20 years ago people did not have access to a lot of the drugs they have now to keep them alive, or that keep them out of the hospital, or that keep them at work, or allow them to maintain the lifestyle that they want. But they’re not willing to pay for it...(making) it a much more complex environment to get across the message of the value of medicines.”

Graeme (VP Corporate Affairs) observed that science was itself becoming far more complex and this has important industry-wide implications. Helen also elaborated on the point about science and research, saying that the discussion of drug trial results and drug studies was once reported only in medical journals. “What we’ve done today is to reduce those to simplified numbers and bumper sticker bytes of commentary, that completely takes it out of the realm of the scientific and into the realm of water cooler discussion...I think that is a dangerous place to leave medical judgment.” The discussion of medical research “has moved away from the medical place where it belonged and has gone into sort of a public marketplace” (Helen).

Frank discussed the shift in public perceptions of and respect for the pharmaceutical industry saying that the catalysts for this shift have been direct-to-consumer advertising, increasing drug prices, and the advent of lifestyle drugs, like Viagra. He said that whereas firms were once in the business of providing drugs to people with cancer, AIDS and diabetes, things have changed and consumers have “...started to become more, ‘well I need to take a drug because I’m not feeling like myself today, so therefore I have to go get medicated.’” While doctors were once the only people making diagnoses and suggesting and prescribing medicines, “...when people started getting a little more involved into the actual medicines they were taking, when DTC advertisers started taking over the airwaves, I think you saw a paradigm shift...”

Graeme pointed out that “...the one weakness this industry’s had... (is that it) was very attuned to the marketplace, but it was not very attuned to society developments—attitudes, needs, and opinions. Now, we’re re-engaging with society.”

### *The Internet and the End of Local Issues*

There are no local issues for a global pharmaceutical corporation today, a result of new technology, primarily the Internet. The critical role of the Internet was a central and mostly positive theme. One executive explained, “...there is no compartmentalization of issues to national boundaries.” Another described the place of the Internet in connecting people and creating communities:

The old model was that [of] the playing field. And there was a government and regulators and companies. And everybody was in the stands watching the game go on. And now, because of the Internet, everyone who was in the stands is now in the playing field. That’s why it’s exceedingly more complex. But it’s also provided some huge opportunities now to engage people to be a part of the conversation and get them

involved...It will lead to better informed patients and better patient outcomes, and [a] better functioning health care system. But like any time when one paradigm is dissolving and another one is taking shape, it looks pretty rough when you're in the middle of it.

A common sentiment was that advocacy groups took a giant leap forward in prominence and effectiveness because of the online community-building facilitated by the advent of the Internet. These groups "...are now smarter, they're more powerful, they're more organized, they've got ways of dealing with their constituents that we never had to deal with before. The Internet and a few other little things have made us all that much more attuned" (Frank). "I'd say that because of the Internet and the connectedness of people, the social environment that we operate in has become much more of a community."

Aaron (Director, Corporate Communications) also drew an explicit connection between advocacy groups and the formation of communities online. "The kind of thirst or appetite for information and the level of activity and the sophistication of the individual patient is much higher...patients can find and coalesce with others who are going through the same thing...they're more readily hooked up because of technology." Overall, the interviewees were positive about the influence of new media and online communities. "It will lead to better informed patients and better patient outcomes...and better functioning health care system" (Ira, Group VP Global Communications).

Direct-to-consumer advertising was discussed by most respondents, and the general consensus was best expressed by Ira (Group VP, Global Communications): "DTC has been responsible for the fact that we now have much more knowledgeable, empowered consumers. We have people that are asking the right kinds of questions because they now realize that they have options and they're not just going to accept a doctor's recommendation for a particular drug..."

The increased sophistication among patients was, according to Aaron, a consequence primarily of people using the Internet "to either get more informed or to be more vocal... making the customers a lot more involved in the business." As a result, discussions about the industry are debated publicly, rather than by the affected companies and regulators, as might have happened in the past.

### *The Long Road to Rebuilding Trust*

Finally, rebuilding trust in the industry was, without exception, identified as the biggest challenge. As one executive said, "...nobody has much faith in the FDA anymore and they certainly don't have any faith in the pharmaceutical industry. That's resulted in a lack of trust top to bottom..." Some argued that the industry has been its own worst enemy. "Rather than trying to present a unified front about the good we're doing in helping people to live longer and healthier lives and even saving lives...we're too quick to start pointing fingers at each other and shooting holes in each other's products and their data." Each executive emphasized the many resources their companies invest in developing relationships with many stakeholder groups. "I think the move industry-wide has gone from avoidance to engagement," was one comment. Another elaborated on his firm's approach to working with advocacy groups, "if you have a friendship, you don't say to somebody I'll call you when I need you...when you're a company, sometimes you should help these groups accomplish their objectives."

## Discussion

### *Strategic Responses - To Buffer or To Bridge?*

The demands and expectations placed on pharmaceutical companies in relation to redressing the issues, those gaps in expectations between the industry's performance and the expectations of many of its stakeholders ensured that the executives interviewed in this study talked extensively about bridging strategies. Aaron (Director, Corporate Communications) said: "We spend a lot of time developing those relationships. We've got what we call the advocacy organization whose job is just to develop and maintain these relationships." Patient advocacy groups were most frequently cited as critical publics for the pharmaceutical giants: "...as much as we like to think that we understand the needs of all the patients that use our drugs we should be so naïve or arrogant. We should recognize that these patient advocacy groups know better really than anybody what the day-to-day needs are of certain types of patients" (Aaron).

According to the one executive who had spent most of her career in the industry, it was during the 1970s and 1980s that perceptions of the pharmaceutical industry started to change and "...the industry realized we hadn't built the kinds of bridges that perhaps other kinds of industries already had done" (Darlene). "Suddenly in the late eighties and nineties, companies said we need to forge relationships with those entities that are not the professional groups. They're the patient groups. They're individual activist groups." The biggest awakening came in the mid 1980s when HIV came on the scene and "...there was a whole generation of people that suddenly had something to say about your drugs, everything from the price of your drugs to access to your drugs to new drugs. That really shook the industry up."

Another respondent remarked on the impact of AIDS and its role as a catalyst for bridging strategies "The company actually began to understand, to talk with people. And we needed to get people to understand our perspective, and we needed to understand their perspective—and over the years we developed, if not a cooperative attitude, at least a non-adversarial one. ... We've found that by opening the lines of communication backwards and forwards with people in the community, we can find places where there is common ground" (Helen). These sentiments were echoed repeatedly: "I think the move (industry-wide) has gone from avoidance to engagement. There are certain groups that you just don't even bother trying to engage...but there are other groups, even animal welfare groups, where they're invited to come in" (Charles). Building relationships with advocacy groups is much different than it was years ago:

"The old model of ally development was transactional; say we have a common issue, let's work together on it. But then once that common issue is handled, thanks a lot and we'll see you. Now I think the company's focus is on the strategic relationship. First we will agree to disagree and that's okay. So it doesn't have to be purely one-sided. Second, I think it is long term. We shouldn't get together unless we're committed to each other. ... We're getting to understand things a lot better and develop a more trusting relationship. (Graeme)

### *Insiders' Perceptions of Change*

While drug safety has always been a concern, the companies failed to say enough to consumers, to the medical community, to government about the risks as well as the benefits of drugs. Once again, the advent of direct-to-consumer prescription drug advertising in 1997, which signaled an easing of regulations by the FDA, appears to have been an important turning point, as was the advent of the Internet and, going back further, the emergence of AIDS in the

1980s. The lightning rod issues for public debate named by each interviewee were specified as drug pricing in general, perceptions of drug safety, and access to drugs. The first and third issues are both central to global debates on affordable medical treatment as a basic human right or a privilege and the wider discussion of social responsibility and social equity. Discussions about the need for social equity in relation to medical treatment provide the general context for more specific discussions about access to drugs.

Most of the issues that concern the biggest players in the pharmaceutical industry, even those that are precipitated by the actions of just one, affect every firm in the industry. In the words of one executive, “the portfolio of issues moves up and down...but the topics we worry about, the topics we discuss, have not changed.”

### Conclusion

The issues comprising the public opinion environment - stability, intensity, complexity, and direction - have been applied to measure change in the issues comprising organizational environment by analyzing media coverage of issues (Dougall 2005a, 2005b). This study demonstrates that these dimensions of issue environment change reflect and organize the ways senior practitioners perceive their environments. That is, when scanning and interpreting the issues of concern to their organizations and industries, senior practitioners can and do, for example, distinguish between volume of media coverage (intensity), and number of issues (complexity); or between the turnover of issues (stability), and number of issues (complexity).

Evidence from this study also supports contentions that the sets of issues comprising the public opinion environments of organizations are more often characterized by inertia than volatility. What can shift over time, as new events and topics emerge, are the intensity and favorability of public attention. The number of issues that can emerge to galvanize media and public attention at any one time can, and does, reach a point of saturation. We envisage that this study of the public opinion environment of an important global industry will provide further guidance for communications professionals whose issues management responsibilities extend to building and rebuilding new and effective forms of cooperative relationships with their publics.

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## **Public Relations as Storytelling: Challenging Normative Theory**

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This paper challenges normative models of the public relations role by re-framing the occupation as a storytelling practice. The model is a theoretical development that draws on the role of narrative in organisational life, and argues for a relational articulation of the role from within practitioner communities and their clients.

Historically, the main focus of theorists who examine public relations has been to propose normative models, either based on a functionalist view of occupational groups or, conversely, on power-based models developed from Weberian notions of conflict and bureaucratisation. Neither of these models can adequately account for the expectations that practitioners face from their clients and from their peers. There is a schism between the normative models proposed by theory and in formal professional contexts (such as vocational schemes of study) and the socially-framed demands of practice. This paper argues that too little attention has been given both to the social construction of the role within the labour market, and to the dialogically produced expectation that practice will comprise a purposive and profitable act, one in which success involves a complex notion of narrative competence; storytelling.

The paper locates public relations within established work on purposive storytelling and narrative in organisations, and within wider debates on sense making processes.

It offers a critical reading of public relations in the light of Habermasian notions of the public sphere and of strategic action and extends the critique to dominant modes of public relations teaching in post-industrial capitalism, where a neo-liberal commodification of institutions and individuals is in tension with established notions of democratic citizenship. The paper is significant not just because it challenges existing theory but because it offers a re-examination of the experience of practice.

By treating public relations as storytelling, the paper opens up debate on the dialectic and dialogic relationships of practice, of socially-created expectations of practice, and of expectations concerning education, professional development, and development of the body of knowledge. Public relations practice is framed within a control narrative (the story of what public relations is) yet is experienced in a relational way, co-created as the result of social interactions. These social interactions draw on deeply embedded notions of how communicative acts make sense, and this paper re-problematizes the public relations role in the light of narrative theory and storytelling in a bid to create more adequate models of the role, its co-creation, and its effect on both democratic processes and consumer behaviours.

### Defining the problem

The central problem is that theory and formal educational settings develop one story about what public relations is and what it does, while social and commercial practice develops and supports a different story altogether. This suggests a number of difficulties. For theorists, it suggests that normative positions have developed that are far beyond empirical evidence for the role. For practitioners, it suggests a schism between their experienced world and the development of knowledge, so that practice is restricted in its ability to use, conceptualise and adopt newly created and formally-constituted types of knowledge such as theory and research.

For those people who are formally educated in the field it suggests that the transition to and from the field of practice will be difficult, that claims to expertise based on a practice-based story of the field will be regarded as invalid when viewed through the lens of its 'educated' alternative, and vice versa. For society, in the broadest sense, it suggests an ambiguous view of practice and raises persistent questions about its influence on people both as consumers and, more crucially, as citizens. For all these groups and interests, the story of public relations needs re-telling in a way that makes more sense. The significance of undertaking the task is that it paves the way for a new understanding of the relationship between educational policy, theory, and practice, and perhaps to begin to develop an understanding of public relations that is appropriate to the challenges of contemporary society, and which remain sensitive to issues of power and control through communications practice in a democratic setting.

### History and development

The academic blueprint for the discipline was proposed by International Public Relations Association (IPRA) Gold Paper No 4 (1982), which stated that public relations should be taught at postgraduate level to mature people, and that it should encompass both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary elements of study.<sup>1</sup> Public relations has developed both relatively quickly and relatively recently as an academic discipline in the UK and US, although not always in the ways prescribed by IPRA. Throughout the development and growth of undergraduate programmes, (something that the original Gold Paper neither envisaged nor encouraged) tension between academia and practice has been a more or less constant factor, usually focussed not so much on the curriculum itself, but on the graduates it creates. The UK public relations curriculum, broadly, is developed on a theoretical model developed in the US, where public relations education boomed in the immediate post-war period. By the time the UK introduced public relations as a subject the curriculum had settled into an academic position that was heavily influenced by American functionalism. There was also a strong reliance on students obtaining a certain skill set, including the ability to carry out social science research, ethical awareness, an ability to analyse and make strategic decisions, a commitment to research and continual renewing of knowledge, an emphasis on public service and social responsibility over private interests. Much of this can be traced back to sociological work on defining the characteristics of the professions, notably by Talcott Parsons (1939) whose interest was in describing a set of defining characteristics found in occupations which were to be regarded as professional. Although his findings related to the most established and most closed professional groups in law and medicine, the characteristics Parsons defined included formal socialisation processes, formal qualifications and self-regulated occupational closure, have subsequently served as a blueprint for formal processes of professionalisation in the US and the UK.

This interest in establishing normative criteria which would serve to define the occupational field led to the development of a variety of theoretical models for public relations practice; for the purposes of this introduction they are treated very briefly and chronologically: Broom and Smith (1979) introduced the concept of four dominant roles; expert prescriber, communications facilitator, problem-solving process facilitator, and communication technician. Broom is regarded as the father of the debate as it relates to public relations; his typology that splits practitioners into 'managers' and 'technicians' has been elaborated by some studies, contradicted by others, but is broadly supported by Grunig and Hunt (1984). It is Broom's typology, and the seam of public relations knowledge, which stems from it, which is at question; the storytelling role remains under explored. A re-evaluation of the importance of the storytelling

role has the potential to disrupt the manager/technician split that has dominated the debate for almost 30 years.

Dozier's (1984) subsequent investigation developed this model and concluded that there were two major roles, manager and technician, and two minor ones, media relations and communications liaison. Dozier's manager vs technician model has been tested numerous times in various countries (L Grunig et al 2001, Toth et al 1989, and van Ruler 2000) and achieved a position of dominance in discussions of normative role development. Cutlip's further elaboration of the normative roles and the relative intellectual and practical skills implicit in this 'technician – manager' split (Cutlip, 2000, 44) has been influential and curriculum development has, not surprisingly, tended to develop in ways that would place its graduates on the managerial side of the divide. It is no coincidence that academic credibility for the emerging subject took this direction; the neo-liberal political turn spawned educational policy that emphasised vocational subjects, their utility to capital and the economy, and strategic management emerged as a dominant paradigm within business schools. Higher education institutions in both the UK and US developed the public relations curriculum along rather unadventurous lines, drawing what was (and to some extent remains) a rather thin field of research and a rather narrow range of academic enquiry. Reviewing the development of a public relations curriculum in the UK, L'Etang notes: 'It seems that the university sector itself needed to legitimise the subject of public relations as a field of vocational study. To do this is had to take an explicitly functional rather than critical view of the topic.' (2004, 217) As a result, the public relations curriculum has developed in ways that have encouraged the recognition and reinforcement of canonical works, drawn mainly from a relatively restricted intellectual perspective – a broadly functionalist approach aimed at creating practitioners with a particular outlook, and a defined set of skills and values.

Practitioners, meanwhile, maintain an approach to education that is far more instrumental, and as a result the market for public relations graduates is influenced by the practitioner demand that the graduates can carry out technical skills to an acceptable level of competence. Practitioner interest has focussed on skills, training, performance at a technical level, and the growth of public relations as an academic discipline was accompanied by complaints from practitioners that graduates did not meet the needs of the industry. Many practitioners, L'Etang suggests, continue to value graduates of the 'university of life' (L'Etang 2004, 217) and to choose employees on the basis of 'calibre', of possessing the 'right stuff' or, even more simply, of 'common sense'. (L'Etang 2004, 73-75). Others have identified that buyers select and employ public relations practitioners on the basis of factors such as personal judgements of personality and credibility (Keany, 1996; Elmer, 2000).

Thus a picture emerges of an academic discipline that has developed to endow its graduates with a particular knowledge and expectations of their intended role that is informed by theory and by research, supported by the professionalizing ambitions of professional bodies who were keen to establish occupational closure and achieve effective control of the occupation. Yet the curriculum exists in tension with the practitioners and employers who define the market for graduates, and who neither recognise nor value many of the functionally-defined characteristics that the curriculum sets out to establish. One market view of this situation may well conclude that the current state of public relations education is to equip graduates with knowledge for which the market shows little specific demand. The topic is commonly revisited by research, which repeatedly suggests that the functional definition of 'professional' public relations hardly exists except as an influence on the curriculum (Kinnick and Cameron, 1994; Elmer, 2000;

Keany 1993; Heath 1991) and practice exists along entirely different lines, much closer to Cutlip's (2000) definition of the technician role. These studies also exposed differences between buyers and providers, who tend to disagree about the importance and desirability of a variety of functionally defined role characteristics of the public relations role. Recent studies confirm that the public relations curriculum is widely regarded by employers as failing to meet their needs. Such empirical studies suggest that people buying public relations skills do not share the same view of the field as those who practice it, and, by extension, the academics who influence both its theoretical base and educational outcomes.

However, there is a gap in the studies at precisely this point. Once theorists have identified the technician/manager split, defined it more closely and set out to find evidence of it, there is little subtlety in their treatment of the detail of these roles. It is as if interest in the technical aspects of the role was negligible, since the professionalisation project had identified that role as lower status technical or 'non-professional' labour. This state affairs continued until quite recently; Lauzen's (1992) study of practitioners in management roles drew attention to the fact that organisation power remained contested, even when the normative criteria for 'professionalism' were fulfilled. When subsequently, studies of practitioners in the early part of this century (Grunig and Toth, 2001; van Ruler, 2005) drew attention to a growing awareness that the manager role was inadequate as a model to explain the habits of practice, attention was focussed back onto the neglected technician role, about which little had been heard since Dozier's 1984 study. Throughout the same period, research interest began to develop into narrative approaches to practice, although this was not a single coherent strand of interest. Vasquez (1994) tapped the growing interest in narrative as a performative aspect of the human role and sparked interest in the concept of *homo narrans* in relation to this specific occupation, Mickey (2002) achieved an almost literary deconstruction of the narratives of practice (examining the cultural products, communications campaigns, news releases and publicity materials rather than the role) and more recently, Pieczka (2007) has taken forward a narrative approach to case study analysis. Regarding the role itself, Netherlands study (DeLange and Linders, 2003) suggested that narrative sense making is a complex role formulation that forms part of a labour market for public relations practitioners.

### Re-framing public relations

This paper argues for a re-examination of the public relations role, framed within the context of a tradition of interpretive sociology, and more especially one, which concerns itself with the construction of meaning in a particular occupational context. It is only in the past 20 years or so that academics in this subject area have seriously questioned the dominance of the functional approach and have drawn on, for example, Max Weber's (1947) studies of power and the formation of power elites in organisations in order to suggest that it is power, rather than the functional skill-set per se, that is a pre-requisite for exerting influence over public relations activities such as communication management, relationship management and the creation of intangible assets in organisations. (Kinnick and Cameron 1994; Elmer, 2000). One important aspect of this approach is control over the field of activity, and an exploration of the licensing process makes it clear that issues of power and recognition have to be addressed if it is to be successful. Thus the issue of licensing is directly linked to the claims that the buyer will accept about the product or service; in the case of public relations, there is growing evidence that buyers reject many of the claims made by credentialed practitioners, educationalists, and the professionalisation project.

The study of occupational roles as social phenomena takes into account power and influence at both a structural and interpersonal level, in which Weber's work is seminal in the exploration of power among occupational groups. Within public relations the landmark in this tradition is Bernays' (1953, 1980), developed by Wylie (1994) who contributed an understanding of a control-based approach that re-visits the question of licensing. Power in organisational settings is also explored in relation to the power to recognise and reward the occupational role (Kinnick and Cameron, 1994; Heath, 1991; L'Etang, 2003; Keany, 1993) but power-based analysis has proved as partial in its explanatory scope as claims based solely on typology. Encroachment by other occupational groups emerges in a small but important strand of public relations research, but linked to power structures rather than normative roles. The common theme is that as public relations is perceived to gain organisational power, expertise in that subject is claimed by other occupational groups as diverse as advertising, sales, finance, accounting, human resources, law, fundraising, economics and engineering, by managers with more organisational power than the public relations practitioners, (Dozier and Broom, 1995), more experience than them (Johnson and Acharya, 1982) or by men in favour of women (Lauzen, 1992).

But while power is an important aspect of occupational life, few would argue that it accounts entirely for the complexity of the way that our social lives are conducted. Unless we adopt the position of radicalised structuralism we need some way of understanding and analysing individual and group agency, no matter how imperfect its articulation may be in practice. Power-based analyses fail to tell us anything about the appeal of the product to the buyer, what it is that they believe public relations activity actually is, and how the construction of the public relations practitioner is achieved. This cannot solely be a matter of organisational power; while faith in normative criteria seems naïve, a cynical reliance on power alone is equally inadequate (Brante, 1988). A more sophisticated model is needed, one which accounts for complex social construction of the role and the expectations surrounding its performance.

Bourdieu's (1992) concept of the way that a field of study is constructed offers one fundamental cornerstone, and Goffman's (1974) contribution of a frame analysis approach is similarly influential in informing the epistemological conviction that the social world is one that is open to interpretation, and that the attempt to make sense of our social behaviours can inform us more deeply about the nature of our human activity, our human relationships, and the ideas that shape our experience. Further influences at the philosophical level are offered by both Lyotard (1979) and Latour (1993) who call into question the validity of constructing a linear, historical, time-based narrative of experience and open the possibility of a constructed social experience that is formed by a multiplicity of competing narratives. This notion of reality being 'constructed from stories', which may not actually form a coherent grand narrative, is one that underpins the study, and which is used in a communications practice context.

This is also important both culturally and politically, for the cultural intermediary role identified by Bourdieu is one that does not just mediate our life experience as consumers, but as citizens. The author's current research explores subjective cultural resources in an attempt to redress that omission, but recognises that cultural accounts alone are not sufficient, since the role is co-created in a market between buyers and sellers as part of a wider cultural economy. It is to the political and social conditions of that cultural economy, and the position of public relations within it, that this paper now turns, firstly to review historical and contemporary changes in notions of the public and the public sphere, which offer a range of assumptions about the public relations role in both a democratic and social context and, finally, frame notions of narrative,

story and storytelling as social functions that occur in a public space, a space between the individual and the state

The concept of narrative enquiry into social conditions is not new, and has been applied to subjects as diverse as family relationships and medicine. The concept that narrative practice forms a part of the socially formed expectations of occupational performance (that is, what it means to perform a role) is also not new. But to apply the study to public relations is new, and to do so brings with it a particular set of problems that concern the contradictions of a propagandist and partial occupation in late capitalist democracy. It is this public sphere role that provides a context for study – the concentration here is on storytelling as an activity that aims to make sense of the organisation or the individual to others in a public realm, not merely in the public sector or in a democratic context. Nevertheless, the picture is confusing precisely because public relations also holds a place within the architecture of professionalized politics, a contradiction that has been subjected to extensive critique by Habermas (1987, 1988, 1991, 2006) for whom the public relations role remains inimical to the exercise of democratic freedom. However, his later work confirms no easy solution to the problem, and only draws attention to the division between normative and empirical models of public communication, within which the practices of public relations, (no less than journalism and professionalized politics) are intimately entangled as the providers of ‘distorted communication’. This final aspect is explored within the context of the public sphere, where public relations activity is widely construed as corrosive to the democratic project, at both a theoretical level and at the level of popular understanding. The suggestion here is that critical theory, and not just a more detailed understanding of role, may well be elaborated by a narrative methodology that seeks to capture and even celebrate the strategic, creative and instrumental aspects of public relations practice.

#### Story and narrative in context

The storytelling role offers one possible route to that new understanding, firstly in relation to its philosophical and anthropological antecedents and secondly to argue that the things storytellers do when acting in role can be regarded as a performative and interpretive act of sense making. The storytelling role has particular anthropological and political antecedents. It can be regarded as an ancient technique in which the storyteller refreshes and reinforces notions of a distinctive culture - the tribe, the village, the organisation (Levi-Strauss 1995). Storytelling has also been used to reinforce the distinction between self and other (as in many psychoanalytic readings) and as a key element in managing the boundary between the private and public spheres in activities such as journalism. Within the literature of occupational behaviour, focus falls upon storytelling both as a research methodology (Boyce, 1996; Gabriel, 2004a, 2004b) and as an instrumental aspect of occupational skill in settings that range from medicine to management (Denning, 2001).

The related, but not identical, concept of narrative has been used both as a mode of analysis (Czarniawska, 1998) as well as an act that is charged with political meaning, (Jameson, 2002). Furthermore, the stories that result, if treated solely as an information object, may carry meaning and be subject to interpretation in the same way as other acts of cultural productions, linguistically, symbolically, and with reference to the rich resonance of personal and social psychology (Jung, 1968).

A focus on the technic and the praxis of storytelling has its origin in Greek philosophy. Plato’s famous attack of rhetoric (Plato, *Gorgias*, 465), positioned rhetoricians, poets and storytellers as enemies of democracy, free and rational debate between equals, and remains a

foundation stone of anti-persuasive debate. Aristotle's defence of rhetoric claimed that poetry and story could in fact be more truthful than history or factual narratives, because they gave a fuller account of events, emotions and motivations. Aristotle's also offers an influential tripartite division of the elements of persuasion, either through the character of the speaker, the emotional state of the listener, or the argument (*logos*) itself (Aristotle, *Ars Rhetorica*). Through this we gain the commonly held view that in order to persuade, a rhetorician needs to have access to the endoxa, or shared understandings, of the audience, and to be trusted by them, elements that reappear in Gabriel's account of storytelling (Gabriel, 2004), This same reliance of access to, and creation of, shared understandings is explored by Jung, at a psychoanalytic level, and Campbell at a psychological level; in each case they draw attention to shared meta-narratives which underpin the creation of archetype and myth, in the creation of meaning.

At a technical level, storytelling constructs events in a narrative way, by using structural features such as human reactions, first person accounts, and the attribution of emotional qualities. It is also widely regarded as a reciprocal act, even if the communicative act is one-way, since 'texts make sense of the intentions of authors and the creativity of readers' (Brown 2003, 45). Telling a story acts as a sense making tool that is variously described as forming a bridge between the individual and the group (Dervin et al, 2003, 238), forming a reciprocal link between the individual and the social (Weick, 2001, 5) or creating a link between culture and cognition (Czarniawska-Jorges, 1992, 32).

The reflexive nature of sense making appears as a central theme, and contains echoes of Giddens's structuration model; 'People make sense of things by seeing a world on which they already imposed what they believe' (Weick, 1995, 15). This suggests that successful, or perhaps more successful, influence over sense making will require a type of knowledge of the group that is as complete as possible. This paper argues that, while all knowledge can only ever be partial, a positivist, functionally-inspired knowledge can only ever be both partial and selective, focussed on particular attitudes or opinions, while the reflexive nature of storytelling hints at a more comprehensive, but still necessarily incomplete, type of knowledge, closer to that intended in an ethnomethodological approach. Both Dervin and Weick rely on an ethnographic knowledge-base in order to analyse how sense making takes place and, although Dervin's methodology is developed to include a specific linguistic base which emphasises 'verbizing' or making facts, both draw heavily on shared creation of meaning, and in Dervin's case explicitly linked to a meta-theory that is drawn on verbs and activities, rather than nouns and things (Dervin, 2004).

Sense making also links to storytelling by taking 'a relative approach to truth, predicting that people will believe what can account for sensory experience but what is also interesting, attractive, emotionally appealing, and goal relevant' (Fiske, 1992, 879). This suggests that the search for a 'good story', or even for a credible fiction, deserves a position in the study of public relations that it has thus far been denied. Dervin seems to be pointing to the end of 'authoritative' journalism or 'communication as truth', and instead returning to an older model of communication – the folktale model where the best story was the story that fitted the occasion and was the most sufficient for the case rather than the most true. In fact, such stories were not necessarily to be regarded as absolute truth in the factual sense, but as a kind of truth, as a narrative that 'rings true'. This raises the intriguing possibility that the debate concerning 'spin' or the assumption of untruthfulness, may not be as central to public relations as has sometimes been suggested.

Following the pioneering work of Weick (1979, 1995, 2001) Czarniawska and Boje (1994, 1995, 2001) it is possible to understand that 'narrative and organizing activities,

consumption and storytelling, production and poetic activities do not belong to different spheres of human experience. The quest for meaning characterises organising, consuming and producing as well as purely narrative acts. The void of meaning threatens them all.’ (Gabriel, 2004a, ix-xii). Academic interest in storytelling has awakened interest in folklore and mythology, as well as philology, linguistics, semiotics, and the study of plots, characters, symbolism and other narrative phenomena. Interpretation of these frequently draws on psychoanalysis to explore the emotional life of organisations. The premise is that individuals bring behave inside organisations in much the same way as they do outside them, that organisations carry the emotional weight of individual fears and expectations, and that there is an interface between the public world of the organisational and the private world of dreams and the unconscious. The value of the unconscious, regardless of which methodology is preferred, is that it makes visible phenomena that are otherwise opaque, as distorted expressions of hidden desires. ‘The Marxist concept of ideology and the sociological concept of norm would lose their bearings without the implicit or explicit assumption that there is an unconscious in which they become internalised.’ (Gabriel, 1999, 54-56). Like the study of linguistic development, in the way that we can learn a language without knowing grammar in a conscious way, or the study of mythology, folklore fairy tales, symbolism and magic, is dependent on the unconscious for a decoding of the meaning. This is merely one possible mode of analysis in pursuit of explanations that are sufficiently sensitive to account for social phenomena that are nebulous, but no less real.

Foucault (1971) suggests that the possibility of the unconscious is ‘not simply a problem within the human sciences which they can be thought of as encountering by chance in their steps; it is a problem that is ultimately coextensive with their very existence... a unveiling on the non-conscious is constitutive in all of the sciences of man.’ (Foucault, 1971, 364). However, it does not follow that a psychoanalytic approach is the best choice for interpreting story, nor that storytellers require a rigorous understanding of psychoanalytic theory. Fineman (1996) is a social constructionist who is a critic of psychodynamic approaches on two levels. Firstly, that psychodynamic writers tend to ignore emotions that derive from the logic of a situation (ie, mourning at funerals, anxiety at job appraisals etc). Also, individuals might experience emotions due to cultural factors (ie, their culture gives them the language to describe and differentiate them (ie, in some languages jealousy and envy are the same, in some languages there are no words to describe embarrassment or stress (Gabriel 1999, 229-9).

Fineman’s second criticism is that psychodynamic writers work within the assumption that there is an ideal of the task-orientated organisation, and so negative emotion is regarded as pathological or as evidence of neurosis. To this we might add that psychodynamic theory is anti-political, locating the root cause of ills within the individual, rather within society. If I am angry, it might not be evidence of inner conflict or a deeply buried unconscious emotion. I might actually be overworked and underpaid; I may well be bullied at work, frustrated by a poor transport system, annoyed by a failing health service or angry at the high cost of electricity in my flat. By relocating those factors as an inner conflict, we do the analysis and a political disservice (Jameson, 2002).

However, ‘everything that is meaningful is also emotionally charged’ (Gabriel 1999, 230) and Gabriel calls for an effective combination of psychodynamic and social constructionist approaches, while acknowledging the difficulties that this poses at a theoretical level: ie, should emotions be interpreted, analysed or described? Should they be seen as outcomes, signs or causes? Should they be approached systematically, phenomenologically or causally? (ibid p230). This remains an unresolved tension, especially in any approach that explores storytelling and

narrative sense making through the methodology of narrative analysis, and it remains a difficulty that the author's current research cannot solve except through critical reflection on the process and proceeding with a certain amount of scholarly care.

Furthermore, if story formats are linked to fundamental human needs - as both Campbell and Jung suggest - then it is perfectly possible to suggest that 'successful' stories will be those that lock into the basic 'folklore' building blocks of storytelling. To the extent that public relations is concerned with storytelling (which is unexplored) it is also possible that the socialisation of a 'successful' public relations practitioner in the field would be supported by study of mythology, literary theory, and psychoanalysis in preparation for their role. This is a tantalising aspect that cannot be explored fully here since it rests on a premise that has not yet been investigated, and at this stage simply indicates the educational possibilities for the re-colonisation of purposive story within a cultural framework, rather than solely within a vocational one.

When we turn to examine vocational communications, storytelling as a component of activity has emerged as a role in several key studies. Weaver (2004) draws attention to it as a journalistic function - he concludes that it frames what journalists think they are doing and what readers believe about what journalism. Storytelling also appears as a key aspect of agenda-setting in journalism, in political life, and when information is communicated from private space to the public sphere (Deuze 2005, Dervin 2003, McNair, 1995, 1996), and it is this transition from private to public that will be a particular point of interest. This emphasis on information that transcends boundaries is less influenced by a systems approach (where similar concepts are explored), and more by a narrative one; it builds on the work of Levi-Strauss (1995), and Goffman (1981). For these social theorists, boundaries, and particularly boundaries between private and public realms, are marked by activities that include storytelling and performances that convey a particular meaning.

So, in exploring the public relations role we should include an exploration of storytelling as one possible aspect of the activities attributed to that role. The main focus must be to elaborate the construction of the role in an economic and cultural market and in this the author has opted to use a narrative technique, and analyse work in a qualitative tradition that generates narrative explanations and traces the influence of shared meanings in the construction of social behaviours and expectations. Fieldwork that explores actors' use of storytelling as a concept, and their perceptions of the public sphere as a space that demands a particular combination of attributes that may include strategic storytelling, or the ability to make 'profitable sense', are areas that remain tantalising but untouched.

Making sense of what can be termed organisational life through non-positivist or metaphorical means has its own strand of theoretical development, with both Kuhn (1962) and Morgan (1986) offering seminal works in the field. This has led to some theorists claiming that narrative is the main mode for humans to convey knowledge (Bruner, 1990) or to communicate (Fisher 1987). Storytelling as an activity is less well explored although the importance of organisational narratives has been explored by Sims, Gabriel and Fineman (2005) who draw attention to the never-ending search for meaning in organisations. Gabriel (1999) develops this further, although his focus remains on interpretation of stories and the storytelling impulse, while the role of 'corporate storyteller' remains explored to a far lesser degree.

The development of sense-making as a particular area of study, and story-telling as an aspect of it in turn, owes much to Weick's (1995) development of a methodological framework in sense-making, and to Dervin (2003) who has explored sense-making in relation to

communications practice. Weick provides the clear link between sense-making and story telling, purpose and form, when he writes that sense-making requires a mode of communication that ‘can be constructed retrospectively, but used prospectively, something that emphasises both feeling and thought...in short, what is necessary in sense making is a good story’ (Weick, 1995, 60-61).

The rationale for concentrating on the construction of public relations roles is that it is a unique departure in this area of study; the functionalist argument tends to support a notion of public relations as a management science in the positivist mould, with its emphasis on formal and objective measurement, outputs and planning. Sociologists of the workplace have emphasized the basis of occupational power, but have largely ignored the characteristics of the function and its claims. By contrast, management theorists working in a more constructivist tradition such as Gabriel (1999, 2000), and those exploring public relations roles such as De Lange and Linders (2003) and Ruler (2004) have drawn attention to the influence of sense-making and storytelling in constructing the lived experience of organizations. This raises the possibility that our understanding of the roles available to public relations practitioners may be broadened, or indeed challenged, by an analysis that explores the part that sense-making plays in proscribing the social reality of practice and the claims to power that the provider of services exerts over the buyer of them. The result will be a deep understanding of the public relations role and the factors influencing a market or relational model of consultancy practice. This is unique, both more sophisticated and more complete than models or studies currently developed, and highly applicable both to public relations practice and a basis for understanding the consultancy role in social and organisational settings. In this field, Czarniawska’s (1997) work on narrative approaches to organisations illustrates how the idea of creating purposive narrative is multi-layered and offers a bridge between the theory of shared understandings and the distinctive public relations role.

Czarniawska synthesises three approaches; anthropological, literary, and the institutional school within sociology. Her methodology is broadly constructivist, and contributes the notion that for human action to be intelligible, it has to be situated in a narrative, an approach that draws on Berger and Luckman (1966). Her research focus is informed on the one hand by the literary approaches of MacIntyre, Fisher and Polkinghorne, and on the other by the new institutionalism of DiMaggio, Meyer and Powell. This combination refers back to the Chicago School for its foundations, using narrative as the model of the way in which knowledge is created, and institutionalism to account for the collective nature of social life. Her work also provides a valuable route to distinguishing narrative as an approach, and storytelling as an activity.

However, it is not true that we can ‘tell stories as we please, and in doing shape our lives as we see fit’ (Czarniawska, 1997, 14), which is a standard criticism of constructivism. We are ‘never sole authors of our own narratives’ (ibid) and in each conversation a positioning takes place (Davis and Harre, 1991) in which the position is accepted, challenged or negotiated by participants in the conversation. The positioning is a continuous process, subject to revision. In addition, and in relation our subsequent discussion of roles, other people or institutions sometimes make narratives for us without our inclusion. Although we co-author our own story it is not always a conversation between equals. This brings us back to the structure and agency debate, where Czarniawska, like DiMaggio and Powell, avoids polarised positions at either end of the spectrum. Like Giddens’ later work, (1984), this draws on a facilitative concept of power, similar to Foucault’s non-zero-sum, in which power is described as a useful thing, and our investigations focus not on good or bad, but on powerful and less powerful practices (Foucault,

1977). This is especially apposite in the investigation of public relations, rhetoric and persuasion, where arguments about power can become diverted into discussion of ethics, and assumptions about their effect can easily be overplayed by confusing a moral argument with the experienced conditions in society. Like Lockwood (1964), who argues that power is not always so easily deployed as dominant ideology or hegemonic positions would suggest, and Clegg (1989), who claims that power should be viewed in the 'real world' context of more or less organised agents engaged in more or less organised games, the concentration shifts away from absolute arguments and towards an examination of circuits of power, away from the broad sweep of deontological ethics, and towards an examination of influence and knowledge.

Czarniawska draws attention to three types of narrative knowledge in organisations. Firstly, there is the narrative interpretation of organisational accounts (ie, treating organisational events as stories, for example in case study treatments or in order to bring insights from narrative fiction to organisational analysis), extending shared meanings by making a connection between the narrative and the logo-scientific method of knowing). This is a type of narrative knowledge that has been widely acknowledged as useful, for example in communicating change within organisation, or in generating changed behaviours (Denning, 2001).

There is also the collection of narratives from within organisations. Sims, Gabriel and Fineman (1993, 2005) typify this approach, and its development into both a typology of stories and a definition of storytelling is explored below. However, while the trend in the 1980s was for to treat stories as artefacts waiting to be collected by researchers, the trend has broadened to include view of storytelling as 'the never-ending construction of meaning in organisations' (Czarniawska 1997, 28). In this context, Czarniawska points to Boje, 1991, Boland (1989, 1994) and Gabriel (1995). However, Gabriel has occasionally taken a more strict definition of storytelling as an activity based on the oral tradition, an activity that arises spontaneously and to which public relations activity is inimical (Gabriel, 2004, 2-14), while for Boje (1991) and Czarniawska (1997) storytelling is a descriptor that can be attached, either a posteriori, simultaneously or a priori, to an action that requires accounting for, and may be purposive in nature. This distinction is an important one in the field and, while it is not the case, for example, that Gabriel dismisses stories that are told for a purpose, it is the case that there is a certain amount of suspicion surrounding stories that are 'particularly dangerous devices in the hands of image-makers, hoaxers, spin-doctors and fantasists' (Gabriel, 2004, 19).

A third stand of Czarniawska's narrative knowledge has more direct application to methodology; 'organising as narration', by which she means that the narrative form is the 'natural' ie unreflective, coming easily to mind form that is most likely to be gathered in interviews. This tradition of organisation studies (mentioned by Burrell and Morgan, 1989) is interpretive and generates alternative or competing stories from the field in order to develop a dialogue with practice, or to generate a dialogue between theory and practice.

This New-Institutional paradigm, coupled to an ethnomethodological approach, contrasts with the functionalist and more particularly the systems-based paradigm that has been more or less dominant in public relations since the mid-1980s. Grunig and Hunt's seminal text *Managing Public Relations* works entirely within a dominant understanding of both organisational and communicative realms as systematic, with a public relations role that occupies a boundary position and has a regulatory influence (Grunig and Hunt, 1984, 8-15). Czarniawska's rejection of the open systems approach to organisations is based on three main criticisms. Firstly, that the categorisations it relies upon are increasingly false because organisations and their environments

are not easily distinguishable. Second, that the notion of adaptation to that environment is misleading; instead she adopts a more constructionist model (Lewontin, 1995) or an enacted model (Weick, 1979). Third, that mergers, acquisitions, the privatisation of public bodies, the translation of citizens into consumers, and lack of boundaries between economy, politics, society and identity (cf Deuze, 2005; Simmons, 2002; Smart, 2003, Sennett 2000) mean that many of the categorisations on which systems theory (and therefore much established public relations theory with it) no longer hold.

So, recent research into roles has confirmed sense-making and story telling as additional roles available to the practitioner (De Lange and Linders, 2003; Ruler, 2004) while others have pointed to narrative constructs as ways to order the experience of being in an organisation (Gabriel, 1999; Czarniawska, 1997) and as ways of controlling organisational outcomes (Simmons, 2002; Hannabuss, 2000). This paper suggests that these cornerstones of knowledge can inform emerging research into public relations, and indeed other cultural intermediary roles that operate simultaneously within cultural and economic frames. The aim to reach a more adequate understanding of the nature of public relations as it is experienced within a social and political context and which does not respect the assumed boundaries between strands of enquiry that take as their focus either the creation of roles, or of power or of meaning. The author's initial work will not attempt to offer a psychoanalytical reading of the stories that organisations use, nor to deconstruct their narratives, as Mickey (2002) does, nor to offer models of 'effective' storytelling, nor to categorise and deconstruct stories according to myth, to archetype or to meta-fiction. However, this approach remains open to the possibility that Jungian concepts of archetypes and common story forms could well underpin a study that attempted to analyse public relations activity in precisely those terms. This seems a logical extension of this work, and could build up on the findings of this study to create an expanded view of storytelling practices in contemporary organisational life, and to re-colonise aspects of the public relations role, such as intuition, sensing, and creativity, which may have been relegated to the status of crass performative technique. However, to propose that at this stage is to put the cart well and truly before the horse; the task in hand is to research public relations in ways that allows its story to be told in a new way.

Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Although this approach has been elaborated (in Gold Papers no 7 of 1992, no 12 of 1997) its fundamentals remain unchallenged.

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## When PR Worlds Collide: A Chinese Case Study

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### Foreword: Paul Elmer

When I first saw Lili's case study, I was saddened but not in the least surprised, and resolved to bring it to a wider audience as part of my own work. As a researcher who takes an interest in personal narratives of public relations work, as well as an educator who has supported many mature public relations practitioners, the themes are depressingly familiar. Like Lili, I do not believe that they are uniquely the result of Chinese business culture, nor the result of cultural differences, but rather that they are a product of the gap between various understandings of the public relations role and of strategy enactment in organisational life. Some years ago I suffered my own 'Lili' experience at the hands of an organisation, and I have listened to many similar accounts. My suspicion that there is a very real schism between the dominant narratives of public relations (and with it, strategic management), and the experienced reality of jobs in the labour market, is not based on personal experience alone, but on the growing evidence that such roles are negotiated in a social, economic and political context that is too seldom considered. We need to engage this more fully, partly as academics interested in explaining the world we inhabit, but also as educators. I have often joked with colleagues that it is our role to educate students so that they become disgruntled public relations practitioners, since the contented ones have no motivation to change things. That much is simple critical acuity. However, evidence from cases such as this feeds my suspicion that current pedagogical practice, using narrow, unsustainable and less than critical models, does not even meet the narrow and debased needs of contemporary capitalism.

### Introduction

When a Public Relations director, schooled in the language and practice of western public relations and business strategy, joins a Chinese company in business transition, what barriers stand in her way?

Rather than the direct conflicts we may expect between specific Chinese business culture and western public relations ideology, with surprise this case study finds the conflicts facing the PR director are between two western-orientated views of PR that exist simultaneously during the firm's business transition. The traditional view that the employing organisation adopts is in conflict with the more recent relationship management view emerging in the West and practiced by the PR director.

This is a rare account drawn from the perspective of a female Chinese practitioner whose formal public relations knowledge draws on a combination of western PR models and traditional Chinese business philosophy. Can the firm, with a PR department setup by the former PR manager, maintain two contrasting views of PR throughout its business transition? And how does the new PR director, who confronts the apparent differences from her first day in the job, negotiate her own position?

This study examines the people, process, events and experiences during the change management period of the PR director's involvement, and discusses the managerial implications of importing western models of public relations in the Chinese business context. The original case study is summarised here, and compared with research into western cases where formal knowledge about public relations comes into conflict with practice. This offers additional contextual analysis, and poses questions concerning the conflict between dominant forms of theoretical knowledge and dominant forms of cultural expectation, as they affect and create the public relations role. The resulting analysis offers insights into the tensions between internationalized business processes, models, theories and an accepted body of knowledge, and their cross-cultural articulation in public relations practice.

### **The Chinese context**

This case concerns a private company in a Chinese environment that is vibrant, yet unfamiliar and perhaps perplexing to western public relations scholars or practitioners. Current knowledge of western public relations in China is limited, and is sometimes presumed to be in transition, away from traditional cultural practices associated with business networking, and towards westernised models. This is as a result of increased globalisation and cultural interchange coupled with growing numbers of Chinese graduates who gain a westernised business education.

Business public relations activities are traditionally conceived in a Chinese context as either publicity and promotion planning activities (when 'public relations' is pronounced in its official translation - 'Gonggong Guanxi'), or "walking the backdoor" (when the translation is abbreviated as 'Gong Guan', which has the same pronunciation with the Chinese idiom 'Attack/Strike a Pass'). This suggests that in Chinese language the use of 'guanxi' has disparate meanings depending on the contexts: it means relationships in conceptual discussions of public relations and other professional subjects, and may mean personal favours and connections in social discussions. In both contexts the 'guanxi' represents a pervasive concept in Chinese business environment - the strategic use of interpersonal relationships. Confucian Chinese business wisdom places paramount value on the management of harmonious interpersonal relationships in all connected groups, as can be reflected by such elementary terms in Chinese language as 'Guanxi' (interpersonal relationships), 'Zuzhi guanxi' (organisational relationships), 'Guanxiwang' (relationship network), 'Guangxihu' (party with most favoured relationship), and 'He-Neng-Sheng-Cai' (harmony [in relationships] creates profits), etc (Parnell, 2005; Paull, 2004; Vanhonacker, 2004). The established view appears rather coherent with the strategic relationship management view of public relations in the west (Ledingham and Bruning (2000).

### **Background**

The public relations professional is a Chinese female, hereafter abbreviated as LC. She was brought up in a Chinese school teachers' family rich with Chinese literature and cultural traditions, has more than 5 years of public relations and service marketing experience, has worked in management positions in more than three firms, and has a postgraduate degree in strategic communication from a British university business school. The perspective she has gained from this experience leads her to believe that strategic stakeholder relationship management offers a contemporary strategic role for public relations practice.

The firm is an overseas Chinese family firm, (abbreviated as TS), a privately owned commercial property development and management company located in Guangzhou, capital city

of China's most developed province neighbouring Hong Kong and Macau. Its CEO is of Hong Kong origin and has worked in mainland China for the previous 10 years. The company is trying to adapt to wider changes in its business environment by shifting its business from landlord of high-value office property, to property speculator in a specialised shopping centre. It has all the physical resources including financial resources to support such transition. However, its previous attempts resulted in failure. Neither LC nor the CEO was in any doubt about the company's position, with a property that is underperforming and dissatisfied clients. There is even rumour saying that the property is a 'dead corner' according to *Feng Shui* (an ancient Chinese geomantic system that foretells the prosperity of a place). Many current leasers were hostile to the former PR director.

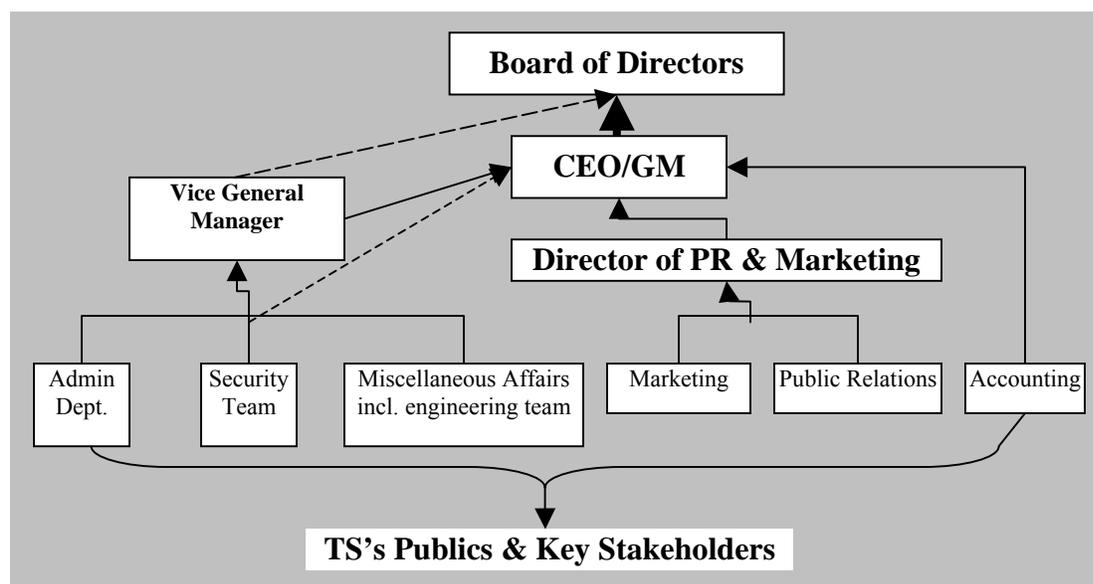


Figure 1. Organisational Chart of TS

## Methodology

This case study, in its original format, adopts an analytical framework that uses three functional characteristics (communicative function, business aims, beneficiaries) drawn from Lauzen's (1992) approach to the supervisor-practitioner relationship in public relations. However, the primary methodological strand is ethnographic. This was a choice made in order to focus on the complexity of the relationships between the dyadic parties' expectations to produce rich, first-hand, and relevant information of the people, the business environment, the people's interpersonal interactions through various activities, and ultimately, their expectations of each other and their perceptions of these activities (as data regarding how people make sense of what happens) for the intended analysis. Sources of data in this study include:

- Direct, first-hand observation of daily behaviours, including mostly participant observation;
- Conversation with different levels of formality. This involves small talk, MSN (web-based) chats to face-to-face interviews with internal staffs and external partners;
- Personal work log, diaries, and other written communication records;
- Longitudinal research via phone conversations;

- Operational documents and work produced.

A study of this type necessarily produces long data, and rich data, a vast volume of material that requires coding and analysis, and which cannot be produced in detail here. Instead this paper has rewritten the findings, summarised in a narrative to give an overview of events, partial and brief as it is. The original format, which coded and reported the many items in terms of three major (functionally-derived) themes, persists in the discussion below, although this, too, has been rendered in a more discursive form, and from the point of view of LC, rather than the original which is more polyvocal. This is a matter of presentational style, since the aim here is not to repeat the case study entirely. As seasoned readers of such studies might expect, much of the evidence chronicles a gap between the CEO's view of public relations and the public relations professional's view. Equally disturbing, but perhaps more universal in some respects, is the evidence of a distressing, even abusive, power relationship between a CEO and a key member of staff, an experience that may be familiar to those who have experienced high office.

**LC's story:**

LC first met her future employer through a mutual acquaintance, who had clearly told him about her previous marketing and public relations management experience. She subsequently left Asia to study in the UK, but agreed to meet the CEO on her return. She learned that the CEO had been enquiring indirectly into her past professional experiences, and they subsequently met. He tentatively asked her view of TS's business and public relations problems in private meetings, before inviting her to accept a job as PR director.

LC divides her account of the employment into two parts, the first is distinguished from the second part due to significant change in the job expectations she held, a sort of coming to realisation about the role and the expectations of the CEO. To a very great extent the diary notes and personal communications suggest that the second period of the job is one where she was simply going through the motions, competing tactical tasks as best she could and, at the same time, looking for an honourable escape route.

The early part of LC's employment reveals activities that many will find a familiar part of the new job routine; there are meetings with function heads, initial analysis, the first operational changes, and so on. There are also continuing negotiations over the job description, and it is very early in the story that the CEO directs LC to, effectively, forget the strategy and butter up a potential leaseholder. LC, meanwhile, continued making public relations proposals based on her understanding of the business scenario and her analysis of the situation, but faced set backs. The CEO neither welcomed nor wanted her advice, gave negative feedback and LC's proposals were met with blank refusals, with no explanation. The CEO simply crossed out budget lines with a decisive stroke of his pen. Things had not started well.

LC responded by adjusting tactical types of public relations, putting more effort into what was possible, and using her tactical skills to build social capital for the firm. This gained short-term public relations successes that TS had never had before. But, in the course of this, LC encountered conflict from other departments and staff that seemed to willingly contribute to the problems the firm was having, setting unrealistic rents or failing to maintain the property in good order. While the CEO had acknowledged these problems initially, he seemed unwilling to actually do anything to influence them. LC also met with resistance when she asked the CEO

about the longer-term direction of the project, and this lack of information lack made LC very concerned for her job role in longer term.

There were several problems for LC. She discovered that she had no operating budget, and no way of discovering the direction the business was heading. In fact, spending requests in LC's several proposals in the early stage of the job are simply crossed out by the CEO without further explanation. This budgeting characteristic becomes a serious constraint to the public relations department's ability to produce even basic communication materials to attract public visitors for the existing leasers' shops in later stages. The CEO was not persuadable in this regard. Second, poor service quality was backed by the organisational culture, which seemed, if anything, to be designed to lose clients rather than retain them. After receiving continuous complaints from her subordinates and current leasers, LC approached the other department's staffs and found that there was no culture of customer service. She also, surprisingly, discovered from the HR director that TS staff were traditionally very well paid, never had any in-job training, yet most worked in TS for over 10 years without changing jobs. It was a well-repeated story within the organisation that the CEO refused to fire anybody at his reign due to poor performance. It was suspected that someone else was in charge of such issues but the CEO was not willing to explain this. Third, and most simply, the rents for shops were set too high for TS' transitional period, and in relation to the local market for office and shop space and, on this point, too, the CEO was not open to persuasion.

In the face of this, LC continued to work and achieved some immediate gains, in the hope of securing both wider change and more influence. At the time, LC records that the lack of critical information became a major, if not the biggest, barrier to the enactment of her aspired public relations role as the strategic relationship manager of the firm. As a result, in the process of important negotiations LC was not able to judge whether her plans of PR activities would affect collaborative relationships with potential partners. As the director of PR and marketing communication, LC saw it as very dangerous to make promises without knowing the level of resources that the CEO would back. She asked marketing and promotional staff, but they had even less of a clue than she did about the future business direction or marketing objectives. This point marks the end of what has subsequently been termed the first part of LC's employment. At this point in the evidence her diaries and personal communications reveal that she effectively 'gives up' on the idea of enacting any longer-term strategic direction for the organisation, and concentrates instead on what we could call a survival and exit plan.

As LC became pessimistic about her longer-term job role, she had to adjust her expectations about gaining the CEO's support and changed her job strategy to a more passive functional manager's role. Interestingly the CEO was not a bit less pleased with her job performance in the second-half than the first-half, and was ultimately very disappointed when LC decided to leave the job. The written evidence shows that several things happened concurrently here; LC narrowed the scope of the central objectives in her work plan, continued the successful tactical PR practice by communicating short-term alignments with potential leasers, and avoided any long-term collaborations. This significantly reduced the number of negotiations with potential stakeholders, effectively limiting the growth of the business and confining the

public relations role to a sort of customer relationship office, but the CEO supported the decision, and even lavished praise on her at this time.

### **Role-relationship data**

The original study adopted Lauzen's (1992) framework as a coding schema, which was helpful to some extent; it provided three main categories for coding action between a practitioner and their supervisor over time (stakeholder relationships, specific PR activities and strategic business aim), but these were, in the end, positivistic categories imposed on cultural material.

In the pre-employment stage, LC was able to form a comparatively privileged understanding of TS' business aim and difficulties, but gained nothing about the expectations for the role of public relations, or on the specific expectations of stakeholders of the business. Subsequently, during the job, role enactment interactions between the practitioner and supervisor show that business aim issues faded out from interactions during the first-half of the period of employment. However, when the two parties did interact about the business aim at the end of the first-half of the period, the results were decisive; the practitioner reduced their relationship management role.

### **Constructing the role 1: the pre-job stage**

Before taking the job, LC had talked with her circle of business associates and friends, and gained a basic but consistent perspective of the firm's overall business context and immediate business problems. This knowledge formed the basis for evaluating the CEO's job proposal.

Expectations of the public relations role at TS hinged mainly on a single meeting between LC and the CEO, during which both parties agreed over the general business objectives, and over the link between the PR director's job objectives and stakeholder relationships management needs in PR activities. Consequently the CEO changed LC's job title as she requested and LC agreed to join the firm immediately without further negotiation over job conditions. That is, very positive enactment had been achieved by both parties through communicating on the role's contribution to business aims, and agreement was reached easily. The written evidence from the period shows that LC's agreements at the time include several of the formally-defined characteristics that are often taken as indications of the type of role; there is a direct reporting line from the CEO; LC will take charge of the PR department and focus on public relations activities that support business growth; and LC will help the marketing department with its marketing communications targeted towards with current and potential leasers.

LC and the CEO agreed; the PR department's activities should be based on stakeholder relationships management objectives. However, when things were put down in writing, the conflict is easy to trace. The CEO's job description is resolutely tactical, and includes the core activities LC would carry out. LC's version (drafted during the pre-employment stage) focussed on overall job objectives and responsibilities in that document according to her understanding of 'job description' in western HRM vocabularies. The CEO signalled special attention on the specific activities, while the practitioner was not intending to make premature decisions on tactics. LC put this down to a lack of awareness of public relations – she had, after all, just graduated from a western business school, so she could hardly expect to meet an employer that shared her privileged or educated view of the role. During the pre-job stage, LC understood little about the relationships that she hoped she would manage, except that leaseholders were unhappy, negative about their relationship with TS, and harboured unrealistically high expectations of visitor volume.

To sum up, through face-to-face meetings in pre-job phase and open discussions on the role's contribution to the business aim, the CEO satisfied the practitioner's optimistic view of realising her desired role as relationship manager for the firm. So much so that the sarcastic complaints of the predecessor only confirmed her view of the firm's strategic relationship management needs.

### **Constructing the role 2: at work**

During her initial days at work LC was surprised by the persistent difficulties in budget allocation and obtaining information of strategic business direction, which hindered the effective direction of public relations as well as marketing communication. These difficulties in implementing her specific public relations activities prompted her to ask more information of the business aim from the CEO, as she could not obtain it from the marketing department or other functional heads in the firm. However, their discussions on the business aim were contradictory to the CEO's words before LC joined the firms. LC was disappointed, felt let down and resigned herself to coping with the reality of the job. Subsequent enactment of her roles focused on changing and implementing specific public relations activities under unclear business strategy, while the CEO continued to avoid discussing it.

Once the job was underway, LC understood that leaseholders were unhappy and harboured unrealistically high expectations of visitor volume, chiefly on the basis of over-optimistic promises by the CEO and the former PR director.

LC starts by first meeting the PR department's staff, learning about them, seeking out training or coaching needs and so on, very much a 'by the book' western approach, if you like. LC also guided the staff to establish an accounts system for tracing and recording current and potential leasers' expectations, which become one of the core activities of the PR department. This means that public relations practitioner's role enactment through her understanding stakeholder expectations directly influenced the type of core activities of the public relations department.

Similar influences marked most of the subsequent changes that LC made, as she brought in the techniques and processes that contemporary functionalist modes of strategic management suggest. She sought better understanding of stakeholder expectations, established relationship-oriented communications with the stakeholders, and apparently created a valuable network of information exchange on their mutual expectations that would enable practitioner to make right decisions over the types of PR activities. Initially, things even went quite well, with new potential clients being identified through a more systematic approach. Shortly, however, such communication improvements helped LC to get a fuller picture of the real causes of the firm's internal management problems. For example, existing leasers' complaints exposed the high rents and poor service that were all too easy to confirm.

### **Constructing the role 3: after the watershed**

Since the CEO gradually made it clear that he did not expect LC to engage in or even just to know about the development of the strategic business direction, LC knew she would not be able to achieve her original job expectation, or to contribute to the strategic development of the firm through running public relations activities oriented by strategically positioned stakeholder relationships. She gave up in that regard and simply tried to satisfy the CEO's expectations by implementing existing PR activities without making obvious errors. For most her time in the post, LC found herself doing tasks that she had not expected, activities designed and adapted both to the firm's internal conditions. In short, she did what she could with what she had. This

appeared to meet the CEO's needs and expectations perfectly well, and the bulk of data that would indicate this stem from this period.

### **Analysis and commentary**

The study concludes that the relationship management view is highly applicable for Chinese public relations practice and does offer a comfortable fit with elements of traditional culture as it affects business and personal networks. But the paper suggests that the relationship management view, like the manager-technician views of public relations roles, is subject to the dominant coalition of the organisation and to the other cultural expectations that surround the practitioner role. These remain to be explored in greater depth. Commentators on the Chinese business environment have suggested that tactical public relations practitioners of modest competence have many employment options in China's growing metropolitan and business elite (Wu, 2004), which indicates that conditions may favour practitioners who work to a role that is socially enacted, rather than formally-defined.

Lauzen's argument that many practitioners enact strategic level roles despite their supervisors' tactical level expectations is certainly not reflected in this single, and perhaps untypical, case (Lauzen, 1992; 92). It is possible that Chinese practitioners are perhaps less likely to 'push for change' by any available means, when the traditional cultural values of the 'guanxi' network does not draw firm divisions between business and personal relationships. Case study material drew attention to LC's difficult decision to resign and leave, but this may not be a uniquely Chinese phenomena. It may simply be that the effects of social elites are acknowledged here, rather than masked beneath capitalist labour market narratives of opportunity, the level playing field and free and open competition (Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Scott, 1997).

When LC's original study adopted Lauzen's (1992) framework as a coding mechanism, it was partly a matter of organisational convenience, and the study acknowledged that using such a framework would bring its own problems. The data reflects that, with its emphasis on stakeholder relationships, specific PR activities and strategic business aim, and as a result emphasis falls on an approach that is less critical, more rooted within the dominant paradigm of positivistic research into role behaviours. Using this approach the study concluded that the practitioner was forced to carry out activities in respect of the two of Lauzen's categories (stakeholder relationships, specific PR activities), while important information was withheld regarding business aims, the third category, and the data analysis clearly showed that information about that third strand was lacking. This offers a view of the technical public relations role that is consistent with previous studies (vanRuler 2004; 2005; Elmer, 2000), but the study also concluded that a more sophisticated view of the social construction of the role would be valuable, something that the functionally-determined coding structure could not fully accommodate. This paper suggests that a more narrative approach could offer useful ways to explore this further (cf Pieczka, 2007; Elmer, 2007).

The case also adopts, without serious question, the assumed hierarchy of strategy and tactics. That such a hierarchy exists in the established literature of the field is not in doubt, and its influence on the development of public relations curricula in the developed west can be clearly seen, but the question of whether it is an accurate representation of the social reality of the role is a very different question altogether. Several studies confirm that tactical activities rather than strategic or managerial ones dominate client understanding of the role (Keany, 1993; Elmer, 2000; van Ruler, 2005), yet tactical behaviour has yet to be reclaimed as valuable, creative and worthwhile by the literature surrounding the credentialed occupation, and the social construction of the role using cultural, political and economic culture(s) has not been sustained, either. Nor

has there been a consistent research focus on the experiences of graduates who occupy transitional positions, migrating between the public relations of the seminar room or library and the public relations of the marketplace, although where research exists, it is sometimes surprising. One group of students, facing their first period of live practice, found it so alien that they re-conceived of it as a 'put up job', a sort of experiment that their lecturers had arranged for them. Clients were re-conceived as actors, playing a role and being deliberately challenging, awkward or obtuse, and for a while one group refused to even acknowledge it as 'real life' at all (Elmer, 2005). How we wish it were true. While such conditions persist, the possibility exists that conceiving of public relations as a subject of vocational study is mistaken, for its true success may yet be in educating people out of a role, rather than into one.

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## **Perceived Social Distance in American and Russian Public Relations Students' Evaluations of Ethicality of Self and Others**

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Perceived social distance on ethical issues in public relations was tested with a survey of 204 American and 206 Russian PR students. Both American and Russian respondents saw themselves as more ethical than both PR students from the other country as well as PR students in their own country.

In recent years, public relations scholars, educators, and practitioners have paid increasing attention to ethical frameworks in decision making and to codifying ethics in practice. However, few studies have examined perceptions of ethics on the part of public relations students. This comparative study explores this important topic through the perceptions of Russian and American public relations students and within the theoretical perspective of social distance (Perloff, 1993).

Findings from the survey (n=410) suggest that both Russian and American public relations students acknowledge the importance of ethics in their school curricula, which supports the idea that studying ethics in college may lead to better ethics in professional practice (Gale & Bunton, 2005). In addition, students from both countries saw themselves as more ethical than PR students from the other country, a demonstration of the third-person effect (Davison, 1983). Compared to American respondents' attitudes toward other American PR students, Russian participants demonstrated a greater gap between themselves and other Russians, supposedly revealing their desire to distance themselves from unethical practices, or so-called "black" PR, which is often employed in Russian public relations practice.

Responses from female students in both countries revealed a somewhat more favorable attitude toward "other" students than did male participants. The study highlights the need for research that is focused on ethics instruction and education.

### *Public Relations, Ethics, and Education*

Public relations scholars have proposed a variety of ethical frameworks and models to bring ethical criteria to strategic decision-making processes in organizations. Edgett (2002) suggested 10 criteria for ethical advocacy, while David (2004) outlined a comprehensive framework by which to evaluate professional values in public relations. Bowen suggested models for ethical issues management (2004) and for ethical decision-making (2005a). These and other theorists (e.g., Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002) contend that ethical practices help organizations do the right things in society, build trust with stakeholders, and strengthen the profession.

Nevertheless, public relations practitioners do not always play important roles in ethical decision making. Fitzpatrick (1996) found that "public relations remains a relatively untapped resource in ethics programs" (p. 249). The highest percentage of ethics officers in U.S. companies she surveyed cited law as their primary field of responsibility (27.9% of respondents), and only 6.7% cited public relations as their primary field. Of those companies that had established ethics committees, only 11.5% of those committees included public relations representatives. In addition, public relations counsel was cited as least important when ethics

officers were asked to “rate the importance of various sources in helping them reach ethical decisions” (p. 253).

### **Professional Associations**

Professional public relations associations also have long emphasized the need for ethical practice through codes, accreditation measures, training programs and other means. The most recent PRSA Code of Ethics, for example, is introduced with this statement: “Ethical practice is the most important obligation of a PRSA member” (PRSA Member Code of Ethics, p. 5). The PRSA code is founded on professional values of advocacy, honesty, expertise, independence, loyalty and fairness, and the document concludes by asking professionals to “work constantly to strengthen the public’s trust in the profession” (p. 13).

Many researchers and practitioners have pointed to well-known shortcomings of existing codes of ethics, including the general nature of their provisions, lack of enforcement measures and cultural differences. Nevertheless, at least one recent development suggests such codes are expanding globally. The Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, founded in 2000, consists of more than 60 member organizations that represent more than 150,000 practitioners internationally (Molleda, 2004). One of the alliance’s first initiatives was development of a protocol to standardize the various codes of ethics in the profession (“Worldwide standard,” 2003).

Another issue is differences among practitioners regarding professional ethics. In a study funded by IABC, Bowen (2005b) found significant differences between men and women regarding ethics training, ethical issues and preferred styles of moral discussion. Kim and Choi (2003) concluded from their survey of practitioners that ethical standards appeared to change with age and ideology. Wright (1985) found that the level of ethical standards increased with age among PR practitioners and business professionals.

Individual professionals also may see themselves as more ethical than other PR practitioners—a type of third-person effect. Sallot, Cameron, and Lariscy (1998) found that practitioners hold their peers in comparatively low esteem, seeing them as unprofessional and unenlightened compared to the way they view themselves. “Practitioners see themselves individually as having higher status, being more accountable, and having more professional skills in strategic planning and research than their peers” (p. 14). Berger and Reber (2006) found that 15 of 65 practitioners they interviewed admitted to having leaked information to external publics, planted rumors in the grapevine, or used similar tactics that may blur ethical boundaries. However, nearly twice as many (29) of those interviewed said they thought other practitioners used such techniques.

### *Education*

Increasing attention has been devoted to the importance of teaching professional ethics in education, and to what ought to be taught (Gale & Bunton, 2005). Harrison (1990) surveyed public relations and advertising professors and found nearly all of the educators believed that studying ethics was important for their students. The report of the 1999 Commission on Public Relations Education outlined areas of knowledge that graduates of PR programs should understand, and ethical issues was one of them (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1999).

VanSlyke Turk (1989) surveyed practitioners regarding public relations curricula and found that they believed the top five skills for success as a manager in public relations were planning and organizing, problem solving and decision making, goal setting and prioritizing, time management, and ethical and legal issues. Toth (1999) reported that educators and

practitioners agreed that ethics and codes of practice were one of a number of important areas of study in public relations.

One recent study examined the impact of ethics instruction (Gale & Bunton, 2005). The researchers surveyed 242 alumni with majors in public relations or advertising and found that graduates who had completed a media ethics course were more likely than those who had not to value ethics more highly, better identify ethical issues, and deem ethical issues to be important in their professional work.

Despite increasing research into ethics in public relations, we still know relatively little about ethics pedagogies or practices in the classroom in the U.S. or any country. We know even less about students' knowledge or perceptions of professional ethics. This study contributes to the literature by exploring perceptions of Russian and American public relations students regarding their own ethicality and understanding of ethics versus those of other Russian and American students. The project investigates such perceptions through the perspective of social distance and third-person effect (Davison, 1983).

### **Third-Person Effect and Social Distance**

The perceptual phenomenon known as the third-person effect (TPE) was first articulated by Davison (1983), and since then it has been a "curiously robust phenomenon" (Paek, Pan, Sun, Abisaid, & Houden, 2005) for dozens of social scientists. TPE postulates that people tend to perceive others as being more influenced than themselves by media content. The third-person effect phenomenon consists of two components: perceptual and behavioral. This study examines the first component, concerning American and Russian PR students' perception of various aspects of ethics courses in school curricula and following ethical codes in the PR profession. In the context of this study, TPE is defined as surveyed public relations students' beliefs that they possess higher degrees of ethicality than other students from their native country and students from a foreign country.

One of the aspects of TPE is social distance (Bogardus, 1925), which is taken as "the degrees and grades of understanding and feeling that persons experience regarding each other" (p. 299). Perloff (2002) noted that "self-other disparities grow in magnitude with increases in perceived distance between self and comparison others" (p. 497). After several studies, the notion of social distance was enshrined as the "social distance corollary" (Meirick, 2005). According to Perloff's (1999) review, of the 11 studies that have tested the social-distance notion, nine confirmed it, articulating this phenomenon as "another factor on which the strength of the third-person effect hinges" (p. 364).

In the past 20 years, research on the third-person effect has been done in various dimensions of human activities. With respect to political identification, for example, Duck, Hogg, & Terry (1995) found that "perception of self-other differences in media vulnerability are influenced by the subjectively salient social relationship between self and other, and are governed by motivational needs, such as self-esteem, social-identity, and differentiation from others" (p.195). Thus, consistent with the need for ego-enhancement (Gunther & Mundy, 1993), the following hypothesis was developed:

H1: Survey respondents will perceive themselves as more ethical than other PR students in their native country.

The social distance phenomenon was supported in a study of Stanford students who perceived media effects to be less on themselves than on other Stanford students; also, other Californians were considered to be more susceptible to media impact than other Stanford students (Cohen, Mutz, Price, and Gunther, 1988). A similar study (Gunther, 1991) was done at

the University of Minnesota, and the same phenomenon was observed: As groups became more broadly defined (other University of Minnesota students, other Minnesota residents), participants' perception of media effects on the groups increased. Other studies yielded similar findings (e.g., Duck et al., 1995; Gibbon & Durkin, 1995; White, 1997). Therefore, consistent with the observation that a perceptual gap is widening when the other is the most distant from the self, the following is hypothesized:

H2: Survey respondents will perceive themselves as more ethical than PR students from a foreign country.

Some TPE researchers (e.g., Burger, 1981; Schlenker & Miller, 1977) have suggested that because of self-serving biases, a person considers close friends and relatives an extension of self, whereas such a vague category as "other" might evoke stereotypes in the mind (Perloff & Fetzer, 1986). Thus, consistent with the statement that perceptual gaps depend on the degree of similarity, the following hypothesis was generated:

H3: Survey respondents will perceive generalized other PR students from their native country as more ethical than PR students from a foreign country.

In sum, in this study, two targets—other PR students from a native country (the second person, close distance) and generalized PR students from a foreign country (the third person, remote distance)—are used to vary psychological distance to determine the third-person effect.

#### *Method*

##### **Participants**

Identical questionnaires were administered to convenience samples of 410 public relations students in Russia ( $n=206$ ) and the United States ( $n=204$ ). The total sample included 81 males and 329 females. The average age of the students was 19.8 ( $SD=1.7$ ). The majority of the participants (233/410) were sophomores and seniors. Detailed analyses of the Russian and American samples are provided in the Study I and the Study II sections, accordingly.

##### **Measurement**

Most questions in the survey were adapted from the questionnaire developed by Gale and Bunton (2005) for their study of advertising and public relations graduates in the United States. The researchers found that graduates who had completed a course in ethics were more likely to value ethics highly and to discuss ethical issues with colleagues than those who had not have such a course in their college years.

The questionnaire of the present study consisted of two parts—quantitative and qualitative. The structure of the first part was similar to the questionnaire that is usually employed to investigate the third-person effect (Youn, Faber, & Shah, 2000). In 10 sets of questions (three questions in each), the wording was identical except for the first-person (self), second-person ("other American PR students"—for American participants and "other Russian PR students"—for Russians), or third-person ("Russian PR students"—for Americans and "American PR students"—for Russians) connotation.

For example, in the first set, the question about "self" was phrased, "To me, ethics is a very important topic for discussion in public relations courses." The "second person" question stated, "To other American (or Russian) PR students, ethics is a very important topic for discussion in public relations courses. The "third person" question in the set was phrased, "To Russian (or American) PR students, ethics is a very important topic for discussion in public relations courses." Respondents answered the questions using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Age, gender, level of education and completion of a course in ethics were the independent variables in this study. Completion times varied from 15 to 30 minutes.

The second part of the questionnaire was developed to assess participants' perception of relationships between ethics and public relations leadership and consisted of three open-ended questions. Qualitative evaluation of students' short essays will be presented in a separate study.

#### **Study I—Russian Students**

Data for the Study I was gathered in two Russian universities, with 480 and 250 public relations majors respectively, in May-June, 2006. In the first university, located in a city with 500,000 population, 125 students (19 males and 106 females) were surveyed. Eighty-one students (14 males and 67 females) participated in the same survey in the second university, which is located in a city with one million residents. Practical reasons made the researchers choose the two universities. In the first university one of the researchers taught a course at the PR department a few years ago, which facilitated access to students, while the second university was selected because the head of the PR program there had participated in a previous research project (Erzikova & Berger, 2005) and agreed to undertake another initiative.

Overall, 206 Russian public relations students participated in this study. Ages ranged from 17 to 26, with a mean of 19 years old ( $SD=1.53$ ). The majority of participants (117/206) were 18 and 19 years old. The sample consisted of 55 freshmen, 63 sophomores, 40 juniors, 35 seniors, and 13 fifth year students (higher education in the Russian Federation requires completion of five years). The fact that only 16 percent of the overall participants in two studies were males reflects the general situation in the public relations field in Russia, where the majority of practitioners are women (Tssetura, 2005). In addition, statistical data from the universities in which the surveys took place indicate that 21 percent of all students in the first university were male, and 15 percent of all students in the second university were male.

The questionnaire was translated into Russian by one of the researchers. Two Russian professional journalists then examined the text independently and offered several suggestions for improvements, which were incorporated into the final survey instrument.

#### **Results**

The results of one-way ANOVA tests with self, other Russian PR students, and American PR students as three levels of the independent variable, which was used to determine the significance of the effects between comparison groups, are presented in Table 1. The significance level established for all tests was .05.

Hypothesis 1 stated that survey respondents would perceive themselves as more ethical than other Russian PR students. This hypothesis was strongly supported. The means in Table 1 present a clear pattern in the perception of "self" as more ethical than generalized Russian counterparts. There were statistically significant differences in each test with self versus other Russian PR students.

The second hypothesis predicted that respondents would perceive themselves as more ethical than American PR students. The means on Table 1 indicate a pattern that generally supports hypothesis 2: Nine of ten tests were statistically significant. The test that did not yield a statistically significant difference concerned perceptions of personal and professional ethics as an indistinguishable phenomenon (set of questions #6),  $F(2,62)=78.68$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Hypothesis 3 predicted that respondents would perceive other Russian PR students as more ethical than American PR students. Although one of 10 tests was statistically significant, and, as indicated by Table 1, six of the nine non significant tests were in the predicted direction, these results do not support the hypothesis.

T-tests did not indicate significant differences based on respondent demographics such as age, level of education and completion of a course in ethics. However, several significant differences were found by gender. For example, female participants more strongly than male

participants disagreed that ethics were cut and dried when participants evaluated other Russian PR students' perceptions of this issue,  $t=2.10$ ,  $df=204$ ,  $p<.001$ . The same favorable attitude was observed in females' assessment of whether Russian PR students in general think that business ethics and personal ethics are two different things,  $t=2.03$ ,  $df=204$ ,  $p<.001$ . In the last set of questions, evaluating "self" and "other Russians" questions, female participants more strongly than male participants supported the assumption that a PR leader who obeys ethical rules will have greater professional success,  $t=-2.24$ ,  $df=204$ ,  $p<.001$  and  $t=-2.13$ ,  $df=204$ ,  $p<.001$  accordingly.

In addition,  $t$ -tests did not reveal significant differences between students of the two Russian universities, allowing the combination of these populations into one sample to compare it with the American sample.

### Study II—American Students

In October 2006, 204 American public relations majors (48 males and 156 females) participated in the same study. American students were recruited from an introductory PR course, an introductory communication course, and three upper-level PR courses at a large southeastern university with more than 500 PR majors. The majority of students completed the survey outside of class time and received credit for their participation. Similar to the Russian sample, the American pool was a convenience sample with a predominance of females (76%). According to statistical data, about 75% of all PR students in this university were females. This number is consistent with the overall figure of females (70%) in the public relations field in the United States (Aldoory & Toth, 2002).

Participant ages ranged from 18 to 33, with a mean of 20 years old ( $SD=1.72$ ). The majority of participants (113/204) were 19 and 21 years old. The sample consisted of 23 freshmen, 60 sophomores, 44 juniors, 75 seniors, and 2 graduate students. American respondents ( $M=20$ ) were slightly older than Russian participants ( $M=19$ ).

### Results

The results of one-way ANOVA tests with self, other American PR students, and Russian PR students as three levels of the independent variable, which was used to determine the significance of the effects between comparison groups, are presented in Table 2. The significance level established for all 10 tests was .05.

Hypothesis 1 was generally supported. The results showed statistically significant differences in 8 out of 10 tests with self versus other American PR students. The tests that did not yield significant differences addressed the issues of discussion of unethical practices with others (the set of questions # 3),  $F(2,61) = 20.02$ ,  $p < .05$  and ethics as a helpful tool for reasoning through ethical dilemmas (the set of questions # 4),  $F(2,61) = 28.10$ ,  $p < .05$ .

The second hypothesis stated that respondents would perceive themselves as more ethical than generalized Russian PR students. This hypothesis was strongly supported. All 10 tests yielded statistically significant results.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that respondents would perceive other American PR students as more ethical than Russian PR students. This statement was generally supported. The questions # 8 and # 9 did not yield significant differences, which means that surveyed students did not think that other American PR students differ from Russian PR students in perceptions of whether legality in business equals ethicality,  $F(2,61) = 11.86$ ,  $p < .05$ , and whether a PR-leader needs to be ethical in his or her professional relations,  $F(2,61) = 11.86$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Similarly to the Russian study,  $t$ -tests did not indicate significant differences based on respondent demographics such as age, level of education and completion of a course in ethics. However, several significant differences were found by gender. For example, while evaluating other American PR

students' perceptions, more males than females agreed with the statement, "Drawing on ideas learned in ethics classes makes it easier to talk about unethical practices with others,"  $t=2.04$ ,  $df=202$ ,  $p<.001$ . However, females demonstrated more favorable attitude toward Russian PR students when assessing whether Russian PR students think that business ethics and personal ethics are two different things,  $t=2.06$ ,  $df=202$ ,  $p<.001$ . While evaluating themselves, female participants more strongly than male participants supported the assumption that a PR-leader needs to be ethical in all relations with personnel and clients,  $t=-3.48$ ,  $df=202$ ,  $p<.001$ . In the last set of questions, females differed from males in the perception of "self" and "Russians," more strongly supporting the idea that a PR leader who obeys ethical rules will have greater professional success,  $t=-3.51$ ,  $df=202$ ,  $p<.001$  and  $t=-2.07$ ,  $df=202$ ,  $p<.001$  accordingly.

#### *Russian and American Samples Compared*

Differences between Russian and American students' perceptions of ethical issues were tested by an independent-samples  $t$ -test. Table 3 indicates some significant differences in the magnitudes of the first-, second-, and the third-person effects demonstrated by the participants.

#### **The first-person effect**

Russian participants scored higher than American students on the "self" question in the set # 3, more strongly supporting the statement that ideas learned in ethics courses help talk about unethical practices,  $MD=.39$ ,  $p<.000$ . Also, Russian respondents more than their foreign counterparts agreed that the management of a company should be socially responsible for its actions,  $MD=.15$ ,  $p<.033$  (the set # 7). As for a negatively phrased question (the set # 5), Russian participants expressed a greater disapproval of the assumption that ethics is cut and dry,  $MD=-.25$ ,  $p<.005$ .

American respondents showed a higher score on "self" question concerning whether studying ethics is helpful in developing tools for reasoning through ethical dilemmas (the set # 4),  $MD=-.36$ ,  $p<.000$ . Also, they had a stronger belief in a positive correlation between an ethical code and leadership (the set # 10),  $MD=.02$ ,  $p<.035/.034$ .

Overall, 5 out of 10 "self" questions revealed significant differences in the magnitude of the first-person effect.

#### **The second-person effect**

American participants perceived other American PR students more positively than Russian respondents perceived other Russian PR students regarding: 1) whether ethics is an important topic for discussion in PR courses,  $MD=-.45$ ,  $p<.000$ ; 2) studying ethics in college leads to better ethics in PR,  $MD=-.26$ ,  $p<.000$ ; 3) ideas learned in ethics classes help students discuss unethical practices,  $MD=-.15$ ,  $p<.038$ ; 4) ethics courses help in developing tools for finding right answers in ethical dilemmas,  $MD=-.66$ ,  $p<.000$ ; 5) a PR-leader's relations with personnel and clients need to be ethical,  $MD=-.17$ ,  $p<.028$ ; and 6) a PR-leader who follows ethical rules is more successful in the PR profession,  $MD=-.26$ ,  $p<.015$ . American participants were less negative than Russian respondents in the evaluation of whether "the second person" perceives ethics as cut and dry,  $MD=.24$ ,  $p<.002$ .

Overall, American participants scored higher on 5 positively formulated questions, and they scored lower on a negatively formulated question. Thus, in general, they revealed a more favorable attitude toward "the second person" than Russian respondents did.

#### **The third-person effect**

Russian respondents demonstrated a higher score on a question of whether American PR students think that the management of a company should be aware of the social impact of its actions,  $MD=.26$ ,  $p<.001$ . They also perceived American peers more positively while assessing their attitudes toward the statement, "In business if it is legal, it's OK",  $MD=.34$ ,  $p<.000$ .

American participants scored higher when estimating Russian PR students' outlooks whether ethics courses help in developing tools that are necessary in going through ethical complexities,  $MD = -.41, p < .000$ .

Overall, 3 out of 10 "third-person" questions revealed the discrepancy in perceptions of American and Russian students.

### **Discussion**

The third-person effect has been described as a "systematic perceptual bias or judgmental contrast arising from a combination of motivational and cognitive factors at the individual level" (Terry, Hogg, & Duck, 1999; p. 299). The findings of this study revealed that perceptual differences do exist in the minds of Russian and American public relations students. However, American participants demonstrated results that are closer to a "traditional" pattern of the social-distance effect than Russian respondents did.

Russian participants strongly distanced themselves from other Russian PR students, but American respondents were not so psychologically remote from their American peers. For example, American participants felt that both they and other American PR students benefited from studying ethics in college. In general, however, American and Russian participants manifested what is known as "false distinctiveness" (Valins & Nisbett, 1972) and "the uniqueness bias" (Goethals, Messick, & Allison, 1991). According to Goethals et al. (1991), uniqueness bias is "the tendency for people to underestimate the proportion of people who can or will perform desirable actions" (p. 149). As a consequence, people in general perceive their own behaviors as either uniquely or uncommonly good.

In their study of high school students, Goethals et al. (1991) found that uniqueness bias was greater for advanced placement students than for students in regular classes. Since the public relations occupation is a prestigious one in the United States and Russia, it seems likely that participants in the present study would experience the same feeling of pride and uniqueness as the advanced placement students in the aforementioned study did. Brosius and Engel (1996) proposed to consider the false uniqueness effect as a component of the third-person phenomenon.

In the pair, "self versus foreign PR students," American participants perceived Russian PR students as absolutely distant, whereas Russian respondents left room for a shared attitude. Particularly, Russian students did not think that they differ from American students in the view of personal and professional ethics as an indistinguishable phenomenon (the set # 6). The third pair, "PR students from a native country versus PR students from a foreign country," brought the most striking result in regard to Russian participants. While American respondents manifested a general support of the assumption that the magnitude of the third-person effect is greater when the comparison group is more distant (David, Morrison, Johnson, & Ross, 2002), Russian participants perceived only a slight difference between the two groups—other Russian PR students and American PR students. Considering the two aspects—a well-pronounced social distance between self and other Russian PR students and a minor distance between generalized Russian PR students and their American counterparts—it might be hypothesized that national identity as a social-distance attribute was challenged in the Russian sample.

According to Brosius and Engel (1996), perception of similarity between oneself and a friend as an in-group member positively influences estimation of media effects. Thus, there was an assumption that Russian participants would distinguish "other Russians" more clearly from such psychologically distant others as American PR students. Besides being citizens of the same country, Russian participants read professional magazines about students' lives within the country and communicate with "other Russians" while attending national public relations conferences and seminars and participating in

student competitions. Thus, they have an opportunity to know Russian counterparts better and, presumably, develop the feeling of “belonginess” to one group of professionals.

One possible explanation why Russian respondents did not support the notion of in-group bias stems from the negative perception of public relations in Russian society. In Russia, public relations is a twofold phenomenon: it is highly desirable in spite of its questionable credibility. Public professionals still practice three types of PR: “black,” “grey,” and “white.” “Black” practice refers to unethical technologies, or as Bobrov (2005) put it, to manipulative forms of communication that presume goals of agitation, whereas “grey” PR follows the rule, “If it is not prohibited by the law, it is permitted.” Professionals, who practice “white” PR, are dedicated to professional norms that are based on ethics. It might be presumed that distinguishing themselves so obviously from generalized Russian PR students, the participants of the study distanced themselves from those who practice “black” and “grey” PR.

Compared to a cross-cultural investigation of the third person effect in South Korea and the United States (Cho & Han, 2004), the present study did not support the assumption that the magnitude of the third person effect is less manifested in collectivistic cultures, to which Russian culture belongs. Future research is needed to investigate whether there are other possible explanations (besides a desire to distance themselves from “black” PR) for why Russian participants showed that “I” is more important than “we.” In other words, the question is why Russian respondents demonstrated an obvious sign of an individualistic culture and why they associated themselves more strongly with the outgroup than with the ingroup (Stephan & Stephan, 1996). One possible explanation stems from Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) speculation that even if a culture is distinguished as collectivistic, there still is room for varying degrees of individualism in self-perceptions. In the case under consideration, individualistic traits seem to be challenging such a fundamental dimension of the Russian collectivist cultures as connectedness (Solovyov, 2003).

In regard to foreign PR students, perceived psychological distance might be explained by physical distance between the participants and the outsiders. It might be presumed that Russian participants perceived less detachment between themselves and Americans because they are familiar with the public relations practice in the United States because of the prevalence of American textbooks in school curricula, whereas American students do not know much about the Russian PR field.

It is possible that culture, educational traditions, and overall development of the PR field are the main contributors to the differences that exist in teaching public relations courses in Russia and the United States. However, some disparities are observed within the countries also. For example, some PR instructors in Russia as well as in the United States focus on theoretical aspects of ethics, believing that public relations professionals should develop philosophical understanding of ethics through studying works of Socrates, Epicure, Kant, and other great thinkers. Other instructors focus on applied ethics, or how ethics are incorporated in the everyday activities of professionals. Research showed (Harrison, 1990; Bivins, 1989) that textbooks used in ethics courses varied considerably, ranging from predominantly philosophical to mainly anecdotal. In addition to course content differences, teachers also use a variety of pedagogies, which may affect student perceptions, attitudes, and understanding of ethics.

Consistent with previous research (Bowen, 2005b), this study found differences in the perceptions of ethics on the basis of gender. With one exception in the American sample, in which male participants supported the assumption, “Drawing on ideas learned in ethics classes makes it easier to talk about unethical practices with others” more strongly than female

participants, females in both groups—American and Russian—revealed more favorable attitudes toward selves and others in 8 tests. The question # 10 brought an identical result in regard to “self” question: Both American and Russian female respondents scored higher while evaluating their perceptions whether the ethicality in the PR leadership leads to the greater professional success. In the question # 6, American and Russian female participants assessed more favorably generalized Russian PR students’ attitudes toward business ethics and personal ethics as an indistinguishable phenomenon.

It is well-known that when people consider media content positive, they perceive the effects as being greater on themselves than on others (Gunther & Thorson, 1992). Accordingly, for this study, a growing concern about unethical public relations practice of some firms and individuals could prevent respondents from acknowledging their true degree of ethical awareness.

### Conclusion

This study showed that when projecting to others, both Russian and American participants perceived social distance between themselves and comparison groups. Thus, the same citizenship and (or) belongingness to the same profession did not prevent the respondents from critical evaluation of hypothetical others. It might be assumed that both American and Russian surveyed students saw themselves as more ethical than PR students from their native country and a foreign country because of respondents’ desires to preserve a positive self.

The results of this study suggest that in the case of Russian participants, the social-distance effect was confounded by the current situation within the PR profession, which made the respondents distance themselves from their peers who might have been perceived as possible carriers of unethical practices. Importantly, surveyed students in both countries valued ethics courses in their school curricula and perceived ethics as a key issue in successful public relations leadership.

The findings of this study cannot be generalized to the rest of the population because of the convenience samples. Nevertheless, it is useful to know how public relations students in Russia and the United States perceive themselves in regard to ethicality today, when concern about the lack of ethical behavior among many public relations practitioners in both countries is a highly controversial issue. In addition, the study underscores the need for more research focused on ethics instruction—course content, effective pedagogies and outcomes—in public relations educational programs if such programs do, in fact, favorably influence professional ethics.

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Table 1  
Mean Ratings of Perceived Ethicality of Russian and American participants

Questions	Russian participants (n=206)						American participants (n=204)							
	Self		Other		Americans Russians		Self		Other		Americans Russians		F (2.61)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
1. Ethics is a very important topic for discussion in PR courses.	4.4	0.7	3.6	0.8	3.6	0.9	80.12	4.5	0.6	4.1	0.7	3.6	0.7	101.63
2. Studying ethics in college leads to better ethics in PR.	4.3	0.7	3.7	0.7	3.6	0.8	62.66	4.4	0.7	4.0	0.7	3.5	0.7	71.97
3. Drawing on ideas learned in ethics classes makes it easier to talk about unethical practices with others.	4.1	0.9	3.6	0.8	3.4	0.8	33.93	3.7	0.8	3.7	0.6	3.3	0.6	20.02
4. Studying ethics helps develop tools for reasoning through ethical dilemmas.	3.9	0.9	3.4	0.7	3.4	0.8	29.38	4.3	0.7	4.1	0.6	3.8	0.7	28.10
5. Ethics is cut and dry, not situation specific.	2.0	0.7	2.7	0.8	2.9	0.7	78.68	2.2	1.0	2.5	0.8	2.7	0.6	19.75
6. Business ethics and personal ethics are two different things.	3.5	1.1	3.2	0.7	3.3	0.7	4.11	3.3	1.1	2.7	0.8	3.1	0.7	19.11
7. The management of a company should be concerned with the social impact of its actions.	4.5	0.6	4.1	0.7	3.9	0.8	39.54	4.4	0.8	4.0	0.7	3.7	0.7	49.2
8. In business if it is legal, it's OK (ethical).	2.4	1.1	2.8	0.8	3.2	0.8	35.26	2.4	1.0	2.8	0.8	2.8	0.8	11.86
9. A PR-leader needs to be ethical in all relations with personnel and clients.	4.4	0.8	3.8	0.9	3.7	0.8	41.82	4.4	0.8	4.0	0.7	3.8	2.5	8.48
10. A PR-leader who obeys ethical rules will have greater professional success.	4.0	1.0	3.6	0.8	3.5	0.8	18.88	4.1	0.8	3.8	0.8	3.6	0.8	28.65

Note. Responses were measured on a 5-point scale. Higher score means higher degree of ethicality.

Table 2: Results of Independent-samples T-test between Russian sample (n=206) and American sample (n=204).

	t value		p value	Mean difference
	Russians	Americans		
1. Ethics is a very important topic for discussion in PR courses:				
-first person	-1.41	-1.41	.160	-.09
-second person	-6.38	-6.39	.000	-.45
-third person	-.26	-.26	.795	-.02
2. Studying ethics in college leads to better ethics in PR:				
-first person	.22	.22	.828	.02
-second person	-3.64	-3.65	.000	-.26
-third person	.71	.71	.481	.05
3. Drawing on ideas learned in ethics classes makes it easier to talk about unethical practices with others:				
-first person	4.65	4.66	.000	.39
-second person	-2.08	-2.08	.038	-.15
-third person	1.66	1.66	.098	.11
4. Studying ethics helps develop tools for reasoning through ethical dilemmas:				
-first person	-4.64	-4.65	.000	-.36
-second person	-9.91	-9.92	.000	-.66
-third person	-5.77	-5.77	.000	-.41
5. Ethics is cut and dry, not situation specific:				
-first person	-2.84	-2.83	.005	-.25
-second person	3.18	3.18	.002	.24
-third person	1.82	1.82	.069	.12
6. Business ethics and personal ethics are two different things:				
-first person	1.05	1.05	.296	.12
-second person	-1.03	-1.03	.304	-.08
-third person	1.48	1.48	.481	.05
7. The management of a company should be concerned with the social impact of its actions:				
-first person	2.13	2.13	.033	.15
-second person	1.53	1.53	.126	.11
-third person	3.27	3.27	.001	.26
8. In business if it is legal, it's OK (ethical):				
-first person	.01	.01	.993	.001
-second person	.73	.73	.465	.06
-third person	4.44	4.44	.000	.34
9. A PR-leader needs to be ethical in all relations with personnel and clients:				
-first person	.02	.02	.988	.001
-second person	-2.21	-2.21	.028	-.17
-third person	-.80	-.79	.428	-.13
10. A PR-leader who obeys ethical rules will have greater professional success:				
-first person	-2.12	-2.12	.035/.034*	.02
-second person	-2.45	-2.46	.015	-.26
-third person	-1.28	-1.28	.200	.05

Note.  $df=408$ .

\*.035—for the Russian sample; .034—for the American sample.

**Social Responsibility in 100 Global Corporations:  
Public Relations and Regional Influence**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this project was to identify 100 U.S. and international corporations ranked by various organizations as best corporate citizens in terms of their social responsibility programs and initiatives and further to describe the breadth and depth of those programs. The researchers explored the associations between the number and rank of communication professionals working in those corporations, plus the types of departments in which the communication professionals were housed, with the types of social programming the company fostered.

The study employed content analysis to survey the websites of 100 global organizations considered to be “best corporate citizens” drawn from five different ranking systems: Dow Jones Sustainability World Index, FTSE4Good Global, Global 100 Most Sustainable Corporations in the World, Ethibel Sustainability Index, and the Business Ethics 100 Best Corporate Citizens list.

Researchers found that these companies practiced more than 100 different types of corporate social responsibility and sustainability programming representing three broad categories: (a) economic, (b) environmental, and (c) social initiatives.

In addition, the authors examined the prominence of communication functions within organizations by identifying the numbers of executive officers, directors, and managers operating in departments such as corporate communications / communications, investor relations / financial communications / analyst relations, corporate affairs, government relations / affairs, community affairs / relations, human resources / human relations / personnel / internal communications, public relations / affairs, media relations, marketing communications / brand communications / advertising, international relations / international communications, corporate social responsibility / social responsibility and environmental / sustainability. The study also found significant associations for the number of communications professionals in several corporate departments with specific types of social responsibility programming.

Finally, the researchers observed differences in the amount and type of social programming by the region of corporate headquarters, with U.S. and Japanese companies showing the greatest diversity and companies headquartered in Northern Europe showing the least.

While monetary donations to social programs, disaster relief programs, energy conservation programs, and employee volunteer programs were common to companies across all the regions, Western European-headquartered companies also favored air pollution, environmental management, arts, and buildings and equipment for education. Northern European companies favored hazardous waste reduction/prevention, water pollution reduction, recycling, water conservation, product recycling, and in-kind contributions. Japanese companies favored product recycling, environmental education, and forest restoration. Companies in the UK/Canada/Australia group favored other educational programs, recycling, environmental management, in-kind contributions, science education, community economic development, and arts programs. U.S.-headquartered companies favored in-kind product contributions, air pollution reduction, hazardous waste prevention, scholarships, other educational programs, building homes for the poor, and giving support to volunteer community organizations.

### *INTRODUCTION*

Corporate social responsibility and good citizenship are not only desired traits in today's competitive environment, but, many argue, are required for global businesses to survive and thrive. According to Michael Deaver, Vice Chairman of Edelman, the world's largest independent public relations agency, organizational success depends on public trust. "Trust is the key objective for global companies today because it underpins corporate reputation and gives them the license to operate. To build trust, companies need to localize communications, be transparent and engage multiple stakeholders continuously as advocates across a broad array of communications channels" (Edelman, 2006, online). Trust leads to better corporate citizenship, which leads to an improvement of a company's bottom line. Research has shown a direct and strong relationship between corporate citizenship, corporate public image, corporate reputation, and corporate financial strength. For example, according to the 2005 Edelman Trust Barometer<sup>1</sup>, "Trust has important bottom-line consequences. In most markets, more than 80 percent say they would refuse to buy goods or services from a company they do not trust, and more than 70 percent will 'criticize them to people they know,' with one-third sharing their opinions and experiences of a distrusted company on the Web" (Edelman, 2006, online).

Corporations that today operate on a global level, rather than only in their country or region of origin, are increasingly expected to align themselves to changing global standards of citizenship, as well as to contribute to the well-being and betterment of the cultures in which they do business. For example, a US corporation with operations in developing countries may be expected to aid in eradicating poverty, improving children's education, contributing to healthcare programs for the needy, or helping to save the environment in countries of operation. "Globalization has made corporate global responsibility an imperative and business practice will need to be transformed accordingly" (Ethical Corporation, 2006, online). This requires involving stakeholders, as well as "a scanning of the environment to detect emerging social, cultural, technological and political trends and demands" (Ethical Corporation, 2006, online).

### *BACKGROUND*

Scholars such as Skinner, Mersham, & Valin (2003) and Fitzpatrick (1996) argue that public relations practitioners should ultimately act as the corporation's "social conscience"

because they are uniquely trained in social responsibility and ethics and in how to understand and communicate interdependencies between an organization and its publics. As professional communicators, they are the logical and essential link to establish and maintain an open dialogue with stakeholders for transparent socially responsible and ethical business practices. Thus, from this perspective, corporate public relations practitioners are best suited to incorporate social views with corporate views and to advise top management on the most ethical, socially responsible courses of action for a variety of important issues. In spite of these assertions, there is little evidence to suggest that public relations practitioners are assuming these roles in global corporations.

#### *ETHICS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY*

The conceptual differences and similarities between ethics and social responsibility are approached in a variety of ways by academic scholars (Boatright, 2000; Davidson & Griffin, 2000; Fisher, 2004; Garriga and Mele, 2004; Robin and Reidenbach, 1987; Schwartz, 2002; Vitell, Paolillo, & Thomas, 2003), with some making clear distinctions between the functions of the two in corporate culture, and others intertwining the two terms. The majority of literature suggests that regardless of whether the two terms required different definitions, the concepts are inextricably linked in the corporate environment.

One way to understand the concepts is to look at them from an historical perspective. Some 30 years ago, Hay and Gray (1974) argued that people have always held some concept of the responsibility owed by business management to society, and that this type of responsibility has gone through three phases throughout the years. The first phase was the *profit maximizer phase*, where corporations needed to only worry about maximizing profits and the only existing constraints were legal. This philosophy was founded on the belief that a corporation that created the greatest amount of wealth was doing the greatest amount of good for the public. This view was accepted throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is sometimes associated today with Milton Friedman.

*Trusteeship*, the second phase that began during the 1920s and 1930s, resulted from structural changes both in corporations and society, including the depression. In this phase, managers and corporations were not only responsible for maximizing profit, but for keeping abreast of competitors and the needs of customers, employees, and other stakeholders (Hay & Gray, 1974).

Finally, the third phase Hay and Gray (1974) called *quality of life management*. Previous to this phase, American society had focused primarily on a business' ability to produce goods and services which raised the standard of living. According to Hay and Gray (1974), the third phase emerged out of economic success and out of social problems that required more effort and resources than were available from government. This phase was based on the notion of a more "balanced" society where businesses are expected to give back and to help even out economic and social disparities. In this phase, society began to demand that corporations extend their activities to solve major societal problems.

#### *STAKEHOLDERS DEMAND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY*

Bernardi and LaCross (2005) believe that scandals, such as those involving Enron and WorldCom, have resulted in stakeholder demands for corporate transparency because the publics' perception of ethics changes dramatically when poor ethical decision-making appears. The authors argue that publics now require more transparent financial reporting and evidence of better ethical conduct. Part of restoring stakeholders' faith includes corporate social responsibility using best practices, more transparency and communicating effectively about those

practices. Kruckeberg (2000) is one among many scholars who argue that public relations is a discipline uniquely suited to undertake development roles of best practices in ethical leadership and remains an untapped resource that should be called upon to advance the institutionalization of ethics as companies continue to prioritize corporate social responsibility in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Not only do stakeholders want their corporations to act ethically, research shows that stakeholders will withhold their business from a company if that company is not socially responsible, all other factors being equal (Gildea, 1994). “A nationwide survey, conducted over a six-month period in 1994, confirms that a company's social performance significantly influences prospective customers, employees and investors in basic decisions about the firm” (Gildea, 2004, p. 20).

Gildea (1994) points out that stakeholders seem determined to actually punish those corporations that are not socially responsible. According to the CEO of Walker Research, the corporation that provided Gildea's data, consumers are still concerned about price, quality, and service, but also base buying decisions on a company's best practices. From a list of 74 suggested attributes, respondents checked the 20 most often viewed as indicators of a company's social conscience. These include: “makes products that are safe,” “does not pollute air or water,” “obeys the law in all aspects of business,” “promotes honest/ethical employee behavior” and “commits to safe workplace” (Gildea, 1994, p. 20).

#### **Public Relations Left Out**

As views of the role of the corporation in social life have changed, so has the role of the public relations practitioner in communicating about those changes, but not necessarily in the level of involvement in decision making with regard to the changes themselves.

Academic literature is fairly consistent in its findings that public relations practitioners often are left out of ethical decision making and codes of ethics enforcement. Studies conducted by Heath and Ryan (1989), The Center for Business Ethics (1992), and Fitzpatrick (1996) indicated that while ethics officer positions are growing in number, public relations practitioners are overlooked as candidates for these positions; these positions are more commonly filled by lawyers and human resources employees.

Heath and Ryan (1989) conducted a survey of 300 corporate public affairs officers and found that only about half of the respondents had even moderate involvement in ethical decision making, while a significant minority of respondents had no input in ethical decision making. In addition, they found that corporate codes of ethics are traditionally initiated and developed by corporate officials rather than public affairs executives, emphasizing, they say, the exclusion of public relations practitioners from ethical leadership as well as from the dominant coalition in corporate management.

Fitzpatrick's (1996) study expanded on Heath and Ryan's findings in her survey of 349 members and affiliates of the Ethics Officer Association. Only half of the respondents had any involvement in the development and/or enforcement of corporate codes of ethics, and only 39% of officers received any prior ethics training. A majority (58%) of respondents assumed the roles of ethics officers, in addition to other responsibilities, and reported devoting 21 to 40% of their time to related duties (Fitzpatrick, 1996). More important, the survey found that most ethics officers came from legal (27.9%), human resources (25%), and financial (11.5%), rather than public relations departments, which accounted for only 6.7% of ethics officers or related positions. Fitzpatrick also found that public relations is represented on only 11.7% of institutional ethics committees, a clear indication that public relations professionals were not an integral part of corporate ethics initiatives.

### **Evaluating Socially Responsible Best Practices**

Today there are literally dozens of organizations and scholars evaluating or rating corporations based on their ethical and social responsibility programs. For example, Schnebel and Bienert (2004) focused on companies that infuse traditional values into an internal ethical climate with employees, while Snider, Hill and Martin (2003) conducted an analysis of websites of Forbes top 50 U.S. and top 50 global companies and studied everything from corporate value statements to the breadth and depth of CSR and sustainability programs. Snider, Hill, and Martin (2003) named companies that are socially responsible in a variety of different ways, based on a thorough analysis of their websites. For example, they report that JP Morgan Chase, ABN-AMRO Holding, and Coca-Cola demonstrate commitment to corporate social responsibility through descriptions of corporate values and statements intended to guide relationships with stakeholders, adherence to ethical standards, and going above and beyond financial obligations to address social needs (Snider, Hill, and Martin, 2003). In terms of specific philanthropic activities, Nissan and Bristol-Myers Squibb have shown dedication to many national and international causes; BASF, BP Amoco, and LM Ericsson have innovative projects focused on human rights; Volvo, Shell, and Nike have made significant labor improvements; and Unilever and DuPont are heavily focused on environmental issues.

#### *STANDARD MEASURES OF CSR*

The 2005 Business Ethics Awards praises companies that have transformed their practices to meet increasing concerns over social responsibility, as well as companies that have incorporated social responsibility into innovative economic structures. Its honorees include Gap, Inc., which published a path-breaking report on factory conditions worldwide—taking the risk to expose where its own vendors fell short of meeting the company code of conduct; Dell, which has recently led its peers in instituting computer-takeback programs to keep toxic materials out of waste streams; Chroma Technology Corp., a global high-tech manufacturer of optical filters where the highest salary was \$75,000 and the lowest was \$37,500, there were no designated managers, and all seats on the board of directors were held by employees; Clif Bar Inc., which is powered 100 percent by renewable energy; and King Arthur Flour, which became 100 percent employee-owned that year.

The Dow Jones Sustainability World Index includes the leading 250 companies in terms of sustainability of the largest 2,500 companies in the Dow Jones Global Index. The companies are selected according to a systematic corporate sustainability assessment from each industry group. The index is reviewed quarterly and annually to ensure that its composition accurately represents the leading sustainable corporations in each industry group ([www.sustainability-indexes.com](http://www.sustainability-indexes.com)).

The FTSE4Good Index Series (provided by FTSE, an independent company owned by The Financial Times and the London Stock Exchange) measures “the performance of companies that meet globally-recognized corporate responsibility standards.” The index is created by analyzing corporate annual reports, corporate websites, written questionnaires and liaison with companies when appropriate, and other publicly-available material. FTSE4Good Index is revised twice a year by the FTSE4Good Policy Committee ([www.ftse.com](http://www.ftse.com)).

The Global 100 Most Sustainable Corporations in the World is a project of Corporate Knights Inc., using data provided by Innovest Strategic Value Advisors Inc. The 100 companies are selected each year from a pool of 2,000 of the world’s largest corporations based on their sustainability performance, i.e., “demonstrated performance and strategic ability to manage the triple bottom line—society, environment, and economy” ([www.global100.org](http://www.global100.org)).

The Ethibel Sustainability Index, calculated by Standard & Poor's, "provides a comprehensive perspective on the financial performance of the world's leading companies in terms of sustainability." The index "applies the same criteria and gives equal weights to company scores on social, environmental and economic criteria, regardless of the type of company or the sector." The index contained 289 companies as of June 2005 ([www.ethibel.org](http://www.ethibel.org)).

The Business Ethics 100 Best Corporate Citizens index is selected annually from a pool of about 1,100 companies in the Standard & Poor's 500, Russell 1000, and the Domini 400 Social Index lists. "Companies receive ratings in 8 different stakeholder-service categories: total return to stockholders, community, governance, diversity, employees, environment, human rights, and products." The overall score is an average of the scores from each of the eight areas ([www.business-ethics.com](http://www.business-ethics.com)).

### *RESEARCH QUESTIONS*

This study identified 100 U.S. and international corporations ranked by Dow Jones, FTSE, Corporate Knights, Standard & Poor, and Business Ethics as best corporate citizens in terms of their social responsibility programs and initiatives and further described the breadth and depth of those programs. Researchers were primarily interested in analyzing similarities and differences among companies by geographic region of the corporate headquarters, in terms of inclusion on various ranking lists, number of communications managers employed by corporations, and types of social responsibility programs practiced. The following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: What is the association between companies from different geographic regions and their listing on various social responsibility and sustainability indices?

RQ2: What is the association between companies from different geographic regions and the number of upper-level communications and public relations employees in these corporations?

RQ3: What is the association between companies from different geographic regions and the number and type of social responsibility programs practiced by the companies?

Secondarily, the researchers explored the associations between the number and rank of communication professionals working in those corporations, plus the types of departments in which the communication professionals were housed, with the types of social programming the company fostered. Specifically, the research questions were:

RQ4: What is the association between the number of communication staff in one particular department and the number in other departments in these companies?

RQ5: What is the association among the number of communication staff at different ranks in the organizations?

RQ6: What is the association among the number of communication staff at different ranks in the company with the number of communication staff in different units of the organization?

RQ7: What is the relationship among the number of communications professionals at different ranks in the organization and the number of professionals in different departments or units of the organization to different social responsibility activities reported on the organization's website?

The next section describes the research methodology and sample selection procedure.

### **Methodology**

#### *DEVELOPING THE SAMPLE OF SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE GLOBAL COMPANIES*

The goal of this research was to study companies with best practices in social responsibility and who communicate their best practices publicly, thus the method was designed to select for study companies that provided a good deal of information about their social responsibility activities and sustainability activities on their headquarters' website.

The researchers used widely-recognized lists that ranked or rated global corporations on ethics and social responsibility and selected the following lists for their inclusiveness and wide acceptance as sustainability and social responsibility indicators:

- a) the Dow Jones Sustainability World Index,
- b) the FTSE4Good Index,
- c) the Global 100 Most Sustainable Corporations in the World,
- d) the Ethibel Sustainability Index, and
- f) the Business Ethics 100 Best Corporate Citizens.

Using the most recent lists available in Fall 2005, a composite of all companies on any one of the five lists was prepared, which resulted in 601 unique global companies on one or more of these lists.

Next, the researchers selected the 76 companies that appeared on three or more of the lists as exemplary companies. The remaining companies were sorted by country of headquarters and industry of activity, then quota sampling was used to select 52 companies to have representation across the globe and diverse industries and product sectors. The research team then identified the headquarters website address of the 128 corporations and checked the corporations' websites for a sustainability report, a social responsibility report, and an annual report. (As a reliability check, every website was reviewed separately by two researchers and if there were inconsistencies in their reports, the project managers visited the websites to resolve the inconsistencies.) Companies that did not have an English language version of the website were eliminated, as were those with websites that showed no evidence of a social responsibility report, an annual report, a sustainability report or other evidence of the organization's social responsibility activities.

After reviewing the results of these websites searches, the final sample was reduced to the 100 organizations that provided the most information about their social responsibility and sustainability activities on their corporate websites and provided representation across the globe and the different sectors (Table No. 1).

### **Content Analysis of the Websites of 100 Socially Responsible Companies**

#### *RESEARCH TEAM*

Working on this study were three graduate students and two groups of public relations undergraduate students enrolled in a research methods course, supervised by the first author and the course's instructor. All students had had prior experience with content analysis research or were being trained at the same time. Conformity with the research method and quality of data collected was monitored by student supervisors throughout the study.

#### **Stage one—Open-ended coding**

First researchers were instructed how to analyze each corporate headquarters websites using an open-ended pretest form. This form allowed the researchers to indicate the information they had found on sustainability and social responsibility reports, the company's definition of social responsibility and sustainability (if it published such), any global social responsibility or sustainability indices mentioned on the website, as well as a description of external stakeholder social involvement/performance/sustainability programs mentioned on the company websites. Subsequently the content analysts were assigned three companies from the list of 100. This process was set up so that each company website had two researchers randomly assigned to it, and worked separately and without knowledge of one another.

After the coders had submitted coding of their own forms, they received the coding forms produced by the other (anonymous) coder who had been assigned to the same companies. They

were then asked to compare their own coding forms with their coding “partner’s” forms and to reconcile any differences by returning to the company website. If they disagreed with the other coder’s judgment, they were invited to handwrite comments on the other coder’s form to indicate why they disagreed with their “partner” coder and to justify their own decisions.

After this step, if two coders still had disagreement about what they had found on the websites, the coders received a copy of the form where the “partner” had made handwritten comments. Coders were again asked to revisit the company websites to resolve any remaining inconsistencies between their own form and partner’s hand-written comment on their earlier coding form. In the few cases where the disagreements were not resolved, the project managers visited the company website to better understand why the coders did not agree on what was on the site.

### **Stage two—Closed-ended content analysis**

Using the open-ended coding forms, the principal investigator and the project managers developed a coding scheme to cover all the categories of data that were observed on the open-ended forms. Category development went through several stages. The first stage included a literature review to determine the type of programs the various ratings systems included in their evaluations. These became a working list. The second stage was a review of earlier research by the principal investigator that generated categories from content analysis of other websites (Ferguson, Popescu, & Collins, 2006). Stage three included a review of the pretest code sheets generated by content analysts and the categories resulting from that process.

Next, the principal investigator and the project managers each developed their own separate set of categories using the above information. The first set of program listings included the following groupings: (1) environmental programs, (2) social programs, (3) community programs and (4) governance programs. It became apparent as the researchers went through this process that the stakeholder who was the target of the program needed to be identified separately from the programs themselves, so the sub-categories were modified to remove reference to stakeholders and separate listings were made of stakeholders. The final category system grouped the activities under three groupings: (1) economic programs, (2) environmental programs, and (3) social programs. A complete list of the major categories and subcategories are presented in Table No. 2.

These categories resulted in a coding form that the coders used to hand-code their three companies and later to enter these data in an online electronic version of the form. (Again, each company website was coded twice—by coders blind to one another--to check for coder consistency.)

In the final step, teams of two or three members were randomly assigned three or four companies and instructed as to how to compare the codings that had been entered by hand on the final coding form with those entered electronically for any other inconsistencies. If there was an inconsistency between the coding form and the electronic version, the coding teams highlighted the inconsistency on the coding form and then resolved the inconsistencies by revisiting the website and arriving at a team consensus for the website. They then corrected the data in the electronic data base so that it represented the team’s consensus for each company. In the rare instances where the teams were not able to reach consensus on the codings, the project managers revisited the websites and resolved the inconsistencies.

### *RESULTS*

The next section of the report describes the variables in the study.

## *DESCRIPTIVES*

### **Region of Headquarters**

Of the 100 corporations in the study, 27% had their corporate headquarters in the US, 17% in the UK and Australia, 8% in France, 8% in Japan, 7% in Denmark-Finland-Norway, 6% in Canada, 6% in Germany, 5% in Switzerland, 4% each in Italy, Netherlands and Sweden, and 4% in Belgium-Spain.

### **Product and Service Sector**

About 15% of the companies are in the personal and household goods/food/beverage/retail sector, 14% in telecommunications/utilities, 12% banks, 10% each in industrial goods and services, 10% in technology, 9% in health care/pharmaceuticals, 9% in financial services/insurance, 8% in basic resources/construction, 4% oil and gas/chemicals, and 9% other.

### **Financials**

The financial data (2004) for these companies were obtained from the Fortune 500, the Fortune Global 500, and the Forbes 2000 listings. In the few instances where the financial numbers were not available in these three lists, the company's annual report was reviewed to obtain the numbers. If the numbers were not reported in U.S. dollars, a currency converter was used to make the translation.

The assets of these corporations ranged from \$536.1 mil. to \$1,525,551.6 mil., with a median of \$25,938 mil. and a mean of \$154,099 mil. Revenues ranged from \$413 mil. to \$285,059 mil., with a median of \$18,907 mil. and a mean of \$31,711 mil. Profits ranged from \$-4,490 mil. to \$27,810 mil. with a median of \$1,726 mil. and a mean of \$2,853 mil.

### **Good Citizenship Ranking Lists**

By design, companies in this study were listed in one or more indices representing corporate social responsibility worldwide. Fifty-seven percent of the companies were listed on three or more indices, 39% were on two indices, and 4% on one. Eighty-two percent of the companies were listed on the Ethibel Index, 82% on the Dow Jones Sustainability Index, 51% on the Global 100 index, 37% on the FTSE4Good index, and 14% on the Business Ethics 100 Best Corporate Citizens ranking.

### **Public Relations Staffing and Structures**

The content analysts recorded the number of communications employees along with their titles and their home departments as indicated on the websites. Coders were instructed to adopt a broad view of what might be considered a communications position and to write down both the titles of the employees and the units in which they were housed, if indicated. The resulting list of titles included assistant or associate managers and directors, managers, directors, vice presidents, and other executive titles.

Overall, there were between 1 and 35 communication employees holding one or more of these titles (median = 2.5, mean = 3.9) in each company. Specifically, these companies had a range of 0 to 14 communication employees with the titles of senior vice president, vice president, associate vice president, executive vice president, or assistant to the vice president (median = 1, mean = 1.5); 0 to 23 communications employees with titles such as senior manager, manager, head, or group director (median = 0, mean = 1.2); 0 to 8 with titles of director or executive director (median = 0, mean = 0.7); 0 to 3 employees with titles of CEO, officer, president or chairman (median = 0, mean = 0.3); 0 to 4 with titles of associate manager, assistant director, associate director, junior manager, or assistant manager (median = 0, mean = 0.1); and 0 to 2 with other titles (median = 0, mean = 0.1).

In addition, the analysts recorded the name of the department or unit the website indicated for these employees. Again, the coders were instructed to take a broad view of communication and list all the units that appeared to have as their primary focus communications, public relations, media relations, investor or financial relations, community relations, corporate relations, public affairs, government relations, employee relations, and external affairs. (These groupings were later collapsed into the categories mentioned below.)

With regard to the title of the departments or functions, 55% of the companies had a human resources/personnel/internal communications department with a range of from 1 to 7 employees listed on the website, 33% listed a unit called corporate communications with a range of from 1 to 8 employees, 32% had an investor relations/finance department with a range of from 1 to 9 communication employees, 25% had a marketing/marketing communications/brand advertising unit with a range from 1 to 6 employees, 23% had an external affairs/corporate affairs unit with a range of 1 to 6 employees, 16% had a media relations unit with a range from 1 to 10 communication employees, 9% had an environmental relations/sustainability unit with a range from 1 to 4 employees, 8% of the companies had a unit called public relations with a range from 1 to 4 employees, 6% had a corporate social responsibility unit with the number of employees ranging from 1 to 4, 6% had an international communication unit with the number of employees ranging from 1 to 4, 6% had a government relations/affairs unit with a range of from 0 to 2 employees, and 6% had other communication functions with the number of employees ranging from 0 to 2 communications employees listed on the website.

The next section looks at the association of the numbers of public relations/communication officers listed on the website with the number of employees in different types of communication units.

Organizations with officers holding the titles of Chief Executive/Officer/President or Chairman are most likely to have those officers located in corporate affairs, marketing, corporate communication or international relations departments. Those organizations whose communication officers hold the titles of Vice President, or Senior/Associate/Executive VP are most likely to have those officers in human resources, personnel or internal communications, corporate communications, or government relations/affairs. Organizations with the titles of Director or Executive Director are most likely to have those employees in units of corporate communications, marketing, or corporate social responsibility. The organizations with communication officers with the titles Manager/Senior Manager, Head, or Group Director are most likely to have those employees in functions titled media relations, corporate social responsibility, corporate communications, and corporate affairs.

In general, corporate communications departments are most likely to be headed by officers with the title of director, manager or vice president. Investor relations departments are most likely to be headed by associate managers, corporate affairs by managers, human resource units by vice presidents, marketing departments by directors, media relations departments by managers, government relations departments by vice presidents, and corporate social responsibility departments by managers or directors.

### **Comparison of Companies Across Geographic Regions**

For the purpose of making comparisons among companies across geographic regions, the researchers needed to find a means of grouping together countries with geographic or social similarities in order to have large enough categories for statistical comparisons. The groupings selected are as follows: United States (n = 27); France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, and Spain (hereafter called Western Europe) (n = 27), Canada, UK, and Australia (n = 23),

Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Norway (hereafter called Northern Europe) (n = 15), and Japan (n = 8).<sup>2</sup>

Prior to observing whether there were differences for these grouping on social responsibility activities, it was important to be assured that the companies in these groupings were not significantly different on variables such as profits, revenues and assets for the five geographic regions, to rule out that financial variables might be correlated with region and thus regional difference could also be explained by financial aspects of the companies. An ANOVA for each of these three dependent financial variables revealed no significant differences for region on any of these variables.

While 52% (n=14) of the U.S.-based companies were listed on the Business Ethics 100 Best index, there were no other companies from outside the US on this list as it only ranks U.S.-based companies.

**RQ1: What is the association between companies from different geographic regions and their listing on various social responsibility and sustainability indices?**

The number of companies from our study on the Dow Jones Sustainability World index varied significantly by region ( $\chi^2 = 13.62$ , d.f. = 4,  $p < .01$ ). The Dow Jones list included 95.7% (n = 22) of our companies from the UK/Australia/Canada group, 88.9% (n = 24) from the Western Europe grouping, 87.5% (n = 7) from Japan, and 86.7% (n = 13) from the Northern Europe grouping but only 59.3% (n = 16) of the U.S. companies in this study were present in this index.

There were also significant differences for the Global 100 index by region ( $\chi^2 = 11.42$ , d.f. = 4,  $p < .023$ ). The percent of companies from our study on this index are 80% (n = 12) of the Northern Europe grouping, 65.2% (n = 15) from the UK/Australia/Canada group, 50% (n = 4) from Japan, 40.7% (n = 11) from the Western Europe group, but only 33.3% (n = 9) of the U.S. companies.

No significant differences were found for the Ethibel or FTSE4Good indices; i.e., the geographic region of the corporate headquarters was not differently associated with appearing on either of these lists.

**RQ2: What is the association between companies from different geographic regions and the number of upper-level communications and public relations employees in these corporations?**

The region of the company headquarters was also associated with the total number of communication titles listed on the corporate websites ( $F(4, 95) = 3.97$ ,  $p < .005$ ). On the average, the UK/Australia/Canada companies had 6.6 communications titles, the Northern Europe group had 5.3, U.S. had 3.4, Western Europe countries had 2.4, and Japan 0.6. In other words, the UK/Australia/Canada companies had nearly twice as many communication employees listed on the corporate websites as did the U.S. headquartered companies and almost three times as many as did Western European-based companies.

---Figure 1 Here---

The next step in this research was to determine if there were statistically significant differences for the number of employees with different titles or ranks by regional location of the corporate headquarters.

There were no statistically significant differences for the average number of employees with the communication titles at the CEO/officers/presidents/chairs level or the associate/assistant managers rank by region. However, as Figure 2 shows, there are regional differences for the Vice president category ( $F(4, 95) = 3.68$ ,  $p < .009$ ) such that the regional grouping of Northern Europe had a mean of 2.6 vice presidents listed on the website and the U.S.

group had a mean of 2.2, compared to only 0.13 in the Japan group and 0.5 in the Western Europe group. The differences were also significant for the director category ( $F(4, 95) = 4.71$ ,  $p < .003$ ) and the manager/senior manager grouping ( $F(4, 95) = 3.16$ ,  $p < .018$ ). Companies in UK/Australia/Canada group had the most titles of manager/head (mean=2.9) and director (mean=1.7) while Japan and the U.S. groups had the fewest titles of manager, head or director.

---Figure 2 Here---

#### *REPORTS ON SUSTAINABILITY*

There are no significant differences for the likelihood of having a sustainability report by corporate financials or for the number of employees with a particular title. On the other hand, the 25 companies that did not have a sustainability report on the website had an average of 0.68 communication employees in a marketing/marketing communication department, compared to 0.28 employees for the 75 companies with a sustainability report ( $F(1, 98) = 3.94$ ,  $p < .05$ ), indicating a much stronger marketing focus for those companies.

#### *SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ACTIVITIES*

The next section of this report describes the types of social responsibility activities these 100 companies reported on their websites. Table 2 gives the breakdown of the number of different types of social responsibility activities in each category as observed on the company's website.

#### *COMPARISON OF CSR PROGRAMS BY GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS*

More than four-fifths of these companies engaged in philanthropy, environmental and education programs. Three-fourths engaged in community programs and made donations to social causes. Three-fifths were involved in conservation and more than half in disaster relief, anti-poverty, health programs, and educational infrastructure. About 45% were involved in energy conservation, economic social development, arts/music/sports/culture programs and encouraged employee volunteerism. More than one-third made in-kind contributions, had recycling initiatives, health programs, and hazardous waste programs and more than one-fourth provided financial advice to citizens, and had programs in air pollution prevention, natural resources water pollution, water conservation, environmental management, environmental education, and arts and visual arts programs.

#### **RQ3: What is the association between companies from different geographic regions and the number and type of social responsibility programs practiced by the companies?**

Chi-square and ANOVA tests indicated significant regional differences for a number of program categories.

Companies headquartered in different regions of the world were significantly different in the number of economic social programs ( $\chi^2 = 10.91$ ,  $d.f.=4$ ,  $p < .029$ ). Slightly more than 59% of U.S. companies and of Western European companies in the study had economic social responsibility programs. By contrast, only 40% of companies in Northern Europe, one in four (25%) of Japanese companies, and about one in five (21.7%) of companies located in United Kingdom/Australia/Canada were likely to have such programs (Figure 3).

---Figure 3 Here---

Regarding environmental protection, Western European companies were significantly more likely to have air pollution prevention and reduction programs than other regions of the world. Almost half of the corporations headquartered in Western Europe (48.1%) had programs in this area, while 44.4% of U.S. companies had at least one program each. About one in three Japanese companies (37.5%), one-fifth of companies from Northern Europe, and 13% of the companies located in United Kingdom/Australia/Canada had air pollution-related programs ( $\chi^2 = 17.43$ ,  $d.f.=8$ ,  $p < .027$ ) (Figure 4).

---Figure 4 Here---

Regional differences were also found in the likelihood of companies having natural resources programs ( $F(4, 95) = 3.6, p < .01$ ). Specifically, 62.5% of Japanese companies, 40.7% of American companies, 26.7% of the companies located in Northern Europe, 25.9% of the companies from Western Europe, and 13% of companies from United Kingdom/Australia/Canada had at least one program focused on natural resources (Figure 5).

---Figure 5 Here---

Companies also differed significantly by region with regard to their social programs, overall. All companies in all the regions analyzed had social programs, except for those located in Northern Europe where 87.7% had such programs ( $F(4, 95) = 69.05, p < .01$ ) (Figure 6).

---Figure 6 Here---

Japan proved to be the leader in corporate contributions to educational infrastructure, with more than 62% of Japanese companies contributing to education, followed closely by 60.9% of the companies located in UK/Australia/Canada and 59.3% of U.S. companies. Of the companies headquartered in Western Europe, slightly more than half (51.9%) contributed to educational infrastructure, while only 6.7% of companies from Northern Europe did so ( $\chi^2 = 29.41, d.f. = 16, p < .022$ ) (Figure 7).

---Figure 7 Here---

Regarding community programs, companies scored differently depending upon geography. Almost all (95.7%) companies located in UK/Australia/Canada were directly involved with their communities and so were 86.2% of the U.S. companies. Organizations from Western Europe were less likely to be so involved, with only 63% of companies sponsoring community programs and 53.3% of companies from Northern Europe having community programs. Fifty percent of the Japanese companies had such programs ( $F(4, 95) = 3.56, p < .01$ ) (Figure 8).

---Figure 8 Here---

Finally, while many of the companies studied here were involved in arts, sports, and music, there were notable differences, particularly for Japan where seventy-five percent of companies had programs in this category, compared to 55.6% from Western Europe, 47.8% from UK/Australia/Canada, 33.3% from the United States, and 26.7% from Northern Europe ( $F(4, 95) = 3.34, p < .02$ ) (Figure 9).

---Figure 9 Here---

#### *INFLUENCE OF COMMUNICATION FACTORS ON CSR PROGRAMMING*

In addition to providing a descriptive overview of social responsibility activities for which these sustainable corporations ranked highly, the authors of this study were also interested in understanding how various factors such as having more communication experts on staff or having different types of communications departments or units with different foci might influence corporate social performance and sustainable behavior. Each of those questions is detailed below with the approach used to address the question and the resulting analyses following.

#### **RQ4: What is the association between the number of communication staff in one particular department and the number in other departments in these companies?**

This question is first addressed by observing the correlations among the number of staff in different communication units. While there are small or moderately significant correlations for many of the numbers of communication staff in the different departments, the strongest associations are for the number of staff specializing in international communications with those

specializing in environmental sustainability ( $r = .75, p < .001$ ), the number of staff in media relations with the number in corporate communications ( $r = .60, p < .001$ ), number of staff in media relations with the number in corporate social responsibility ( $r = .58, p < .001$ ), and the number in government affairs with the number in human resources ( $r = .53, p < .001$ ).

To further explore these relationships,<sup>3</sup> a factor analysis (principal axis factoring, Varimax rotation) revealed a five-factor solution with the first factor representing the number of staff in units of corporate social responsibility, media relations, corporate communications, marketing, and corporate affairs; the second factor representing environmental sustainability and international communication; and the third factor representing human resources and government relations. (The item representing public relations was not correlated with any other factor.)

**RQ5: What is the association among the number of communication staff at different ranks?**

This question explores the degree of likelihood of a company having, for example, communication personnel at a vice president rank, if it already has other staff at the director or manager rank. A principal axis factor analysis (Varimax rotation) revealed a two-factor solution;<sup>4</sup> the items representing Managers, Directors and Assistant managers loaded on one factor while those representing different Vice Presidents (Executive, Associate, Assistant) and CEO/President/Chair loaded on a second factor. This suggests that the greater the number of employees at the manager rank, the greater the number at the director or assistant manager rank. Companies with employees listed on the website at the vice president rank were not likely to have other employees at the director or manager rank listed on the website.

**RQ6: What is the association among the number of communication staff at different ranks in the company with the number of communication staff in different units of the organization?**

This question explores the association between having communication employees at a particular rank with the likelihood that these employees would be in a particular department. The first step was to review the correlations of the total number of communication staff with the number in different departments. The more communication staff overall, the greater the number of staff in corporate communications ( $r = .74$ ), media relations ( $r = .71$ ), corporate affairs ( $r = .59$ ), and corporate social responsibility ( $r = .56$ ). This suggests that the largest units in these companies are likely to be corporate communications and media relations departments.

Next, the correlations were examined for each rank measured in this study with the number of staff in the departments noted on the company website. The number of staff with the title of Vice President/Senior VP/Associate VP/Executive VP is significantly correlated with the number of staff in human resources ( $r = .72$ ). The number of staff with the title Director was significantly correlated with the number of staff in corporate communications ( $r = .53$ ). The number of staff with the title Manager was significantly correlated with the number of staff in media relations ( $r = .84$ ), corporate social responsibility ( $r = .63$ ), and corporate communications ( $r = .56$ ).

These findings suggest that communication employees in human relations departments are likely to hold the title of vice president, those in media relations are called manager, as are those in corporate social responsibility departments, while those in corporate communications departments are likely to hold the rank of either director or manager.

**Predictors of Economic Social Responsibility Activities**

**RQ7: What is the relationship among the number of communications professionals at different ranks in the organization and the number of professionals in different**

### **departments or units of the organization to different social responsibility activities reported on the organization's website?**

This question gets at the “heart” of the purpose of this study: to learn what relationships, if any, there are among the types of communication departments and the number of communication employees at different rank levels to variation in types of social responsibility programs these companies endorse.

In a study of 100 U.S. companies on the *Business Ethics* magazine's 100 Best Corporate Citizens for 2004, Ferguson, Popescu and Collins (2006) found that “companies with more public relations practitioners and with variation in public relations functions have more social responsibility programs that focus on broad social programs beyond those for employees, investors, and consumers. This variation in public relations functions and public affairs structures influence and statistically predicted—beyond, and in interaction with, the CEO's and the company's values--the actual nature of a company's social responsibility practices. In addition, the number of public relations practitioners mentioned on organizational websites was a significant predictor in three of the four models for social programs that had a broader focus beyond that of production, product, and employees” (Ferguson, Popescu & Collins, 2006, p. 2).

To answer Research Question 7, a separate stepwise regression model was used to regress each of the social responsibility program categories on the number of professionals at different ranks and the number of professionals in different communication units.

The number of economic social responsibility activities reported on the company's website is a function of the number of communication employees listed in the investor relations unit (Beta = .27,  $t = 2.69$ ,  $p < .008$ ) and the number of communication employees with the title director (Beta = -.22,  $t = -2.52$ ,  $p < .028$ ), [ $F(2, 97) = 5.05$ ,  $p < .008$ ]. This is an interesting finding in that it suggests that investor relations departments with more employees and employees at the director level are associated with the organization focusing on economic and business education programs, certainly a logical outcome of having more communication professionals in investor relations.

#### *PREDICTORS OF ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ACTIVITIES*

The number of programs in the area of air, water and waste management when regressed on the employee level and the type of unit indicated a significant effect for the number of employees in a government relation/affairs unit (Beta = .27,  $t = 2.79$ ,  $p < .007$ ), [ $F(1, 99) = 7.76$ ,  $p < .006$ ].

Likewise, the number of air pollution programs was significantly correlated with the number of employees in the government relations department (Beta = .26,  $t = 2.72$ ,  $p < .008$ ), and the number of employees listed as director (Beta = -.20,  $t = -2.08$ ,  $p < .040$ , [ $F(2, 97) = 5.59$ ,  $p < .005$ ]. The more communication employees in the government relations department, the greater the likelihood that the company is involved in air pollution reduction programming.

There were no individual associations for water pollution programs, natural resource programs, or conservation programs with these variables.

The number of hazardous waste programs was positively associated with the number of communications employees at the level of vice president (Beta = .26,  $t = 2.71$ ,  $p < .008$ ), [ $F(1, 98) = 7.34$ ,  $p < .008$ ].

#### *PREDICTORS OF COMMUNITY PROGRAMS*

There was no association for the number of communications employees with the philanthropy programs; having many communication employees is not likely to lead to having a variety of philanthropic programs.

The number of educational infrastructure programs was associated with the number of employees in government relations and the number of crime prevention programs (Beta = .27,  $t = 2.81$ ,  $p < .006$ ,  $F(1, 98) = 7.89$ ,  $p < .007$  and Beta = .21,  $t = 2.10$ ,  $p < .039$ ,  $F(1, 98) = 4.43$ ,  $p < .04$ , respectively).

### **Predictors of Total Numbers of Social Responsibility Programs**

The total count of varieties of socially responsible programs was statistically significantly different by geographic regions ( $F(4, 95) = 3.10$ ,  $p < .02$ ). Companies with headquarters in the U.S. reported on their websites activities in 14.4 categories of programs on average, Japan averaged programs in 13.3 categories, companies in Western Europe had an average of 12.5 categories of programs, those in the UK/Australia/Canada had 10.7, and those in Northern Europe averaged 8.3 categories of programs.

There were no differences for the product sector of the company with the number of different social responsibility programs.

## *DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS*

### *SUMMARY OF FINDINGS*

This section focuses on what appear to be the most salient findings in this research.

The 100 exemplar socially responsible companies in this report have their corporate headquarters in the U.S., the United Kingdom/Australia, Western Europe, Northern Europe, and Japan and they represent companies with from about \$535 million to \$2,525,550 million in assets. These companies represent diverse product sectors including retail, technology, health care, finance and insurance, utilities, natural resources, and construction.

The number of communications or public relations professionals listed on corporate websites varied dramatically, ranging from 1 to 35 different individuals. The most common title was in the category of vice president (including senior vice president, vice president, associate vice president, executive vice president or assistant to the vice president), followed by listings in the manager category (including senior manager, manager, head, or group director). These communications professionals were most commonly found in a department with the title of human resources (including personnel or internal communications), followed by corporate communications (including communications), and investor relations (including finance). The second tier of occurrences included marketing (including marketing communications, or brand communications or advertising), corporate affairs (including external affairs, public affairs, community relations, or charity) and media relations. (The departmental titles of environmental relations/sustainability, public relations, corporate social responsibility/corporate responsibility, international communications/multicultural/foreign affairs, and government relations/affairs occurred much less often--in less than 10% of these companies--and tended to have only small numbers of employees listed as members of these units.) A human resources unit is the only title that was found, without exception, in every one of these companies.

The companies vary by the rankings of the individuals listed for the different departments: The highest ranking officers (with titles of chief executive, officer, president, or chairman) were most likely to be found in departments of corporate affairs or marketing. The second tier ranking of titles (vice presidents) were most likely to be in departments of human resources, corporate communications or government relations. The titles of manager were most likely to be found in departments of media relations, corporate social responsibility, corporate communications, or corporate affairs and directors were most likely to be in departments of corporate communications, marketing, or corporate social responsibility. Associate directors were most likely to be found in investor relations departments.

The region of the corporate headquarters had a significant association with the total number of communications professionals listed on the company's website, with companies in the UK/Australia/Canada group listing twice as many as the U.S. companies and three times as many as the Japanese companies. In addition, the rankings of the titles varied by region such that companies in Northern Europe and the U.S. were more likely to have communications professionals with the titles of vice president, while the UK/Australia/Canada companies were most likely to have manager and director titles and Japan and the U.S. least likely to have these titles.

### **Most Often Mentioned SR Activities**

The diversity of the social responsibility activities in which these organizations engage is truly remarkable. First of all, nearly half of these companies have social responsibility programs to develop business, more than four-fifths of these companies had environmental programs, and nearly 100% had social programs.

The most often-found business social responsibility programs were to provide mentoring/education/advice about business or economics.

The environmental programs were equally far ranging with the larger plurality of categories in the general conservation areas of energy, recycling and water conservation, followed by air pollution/prevention/reduction, water pollution/prevention/reduction, hazardous waste prevention/reduction, and environmental education.

The social programs were equally far reaching with philanthropy as donations of monetary contributions followed by in-kind contributions as the most common. Educational programs were nearly equally prominent with infrastructure as one of the most common followed by scholarship, literacy, and technology education.

Community programs also dominated much of the social responsibility activities of these companies, with community program sponsorship the most common, followed by anti-poverty programs, and employee volunteerism activities. Arts programs were also common and followed nearly as often by sports programs.

Programs to promote health and to prevent diseases were supported by many of these organizations, with programs to prevent diseases or illness most prominent, as well as many different forms of health education.

Finally, more than half of these companies participated in disaster relief programs.

Another important finding in this study is the variation in the types of social responsibility programs by the region of the globe for the corporate headquarters. Some of those findings that stand out are:

U.S. and Western European companies were more likely to have programs for economic or business education, and the UK/Australia/Canada the least likely.

Western European companies and U.S. companies were the most likely to have air pollution prevention and reduction programs and the UK/Australia/Canada companies the least likely.

Japanese and American companies were more likely to have natural resource programs than were UK/Australia/Canada companies.

Northern European companies were less likely to have social programs than the other regions.

For educational programs, Japan was the leader followed closely by UK/Australia/Canada companies, while almost none of the Northern European companies had programs in these categories.

Companies in the UK/Australia/Canada were the most likely to have community programs followed closely by U.S. companies, with Japan the least likely to have these programs.

Japan, on the other hand, tended to have programs in the arts/sports/music/culture categories, and the U.S. and Northern European companies were the least likely to have these programs.

### *CONCLUSIONS*

As with any research, there are limitations to the conclusions one can draw from the data. These data are from a content analysis of 100 corporate headquarters' websites. Some of these companies had different websites for the offices of the company that were located in another country. Because of duplication concerns, we elected to analyze the corporate headquarters' website, but these results might change if we were to look at websites developed specifically for other regions of the globe. This, in fact, would be an interesting research question for a future study—how do the social responsibility programs undertaken by global corporations vary by the location of the workplace?

Another limitation of this study results directly from the methodology; some companies are much more transparent in terms of the amount of information they publish on their websites than are others. It may well be that there are cultural/regional differences in this transparency. For example, in several instances it appeared that Japanese companies were less likely to make public their departmental information, by not publishing the names, ranks and departmental affiliations of their communications staff. If that is the case, then these data could well underrepresent the communication functions and numbers of employees for this particular geographic region and perhaps for others where it is not normative to publish the names and ranks of employees on company websites.

Another limitation of this study is that there are relatively small numbers of companies in some of the countries, thus we collapsed the data by regions, or historical traditions. While some might argue that the culture/values/norms of companies in Spain, for example, are not similar to those in other Western European countries, for the purposes of this work the researchers assumed that companies in Spain are more likely to be like companies in Western Europe than they are to be like companies in Northern Europe, the U.K., the U.S., or Japan. The fact that we have found differences by these regional groupings argues for the reasonableness of these subsets, but another classification scheme might yield different findings.

What might appear to some to be another limitation of this study, we will argue is more accurately viewed as a strength. We very purposively and carefully selected what we expected would be the best of the best companies in the world in terms of corporate social responsibility. Our analogy was to an athlete; if you observe the best athletes and compare them with one another on factors such as training or nutrition and you find differences for such variables, you can reasonably assume that in a more heterogeneous sample these differences would be magnified. This is our assumption too; we believe that if we had selected a random sample of companies across the globe, the associations we observed here would be much greater. Our intent was to give ourselves the most stringent test by selecting exemplars and observing whether communication departments, the number of employees in those departments and the ranks of those employees were associated with variations in social responsibility above and beyond what might be attributed to differences due to product sector, company size, and region of the globe. In several instances, we believe this is the case; having more communication employees, in more

diverse departments and with different ranks in the organization is associated with the depth and breadth of the social responsibility activities of these organizations.

We would be remiss if we did not comment on what was a concern to us as scholars of public relations: most of these companies do not use the title public relations either for their employees or their departments, in spite of the fact that many of their communication employees clearly performed public relations functions. In the few instances where we did find companies using that term in their departments or for their staff, we did not observe any differences for the types of social responsibility programs in which the company was engaged. In the next stage of this work, we hope to learn more directly from these practitioners about the role that public relations and the principles of good public relations such as those advocated by Arthur W. Page have played in the companies' choice of social programs and the development of their ethical philosophies.

It is the hope of those involved in this research that other scholars and practitioners of public relations will take on the challenge of understanding and documenting the role that such principles play in the ethical climate of the socially responsible organization. One such scholar, Leeper (1996), believes what could help public relations is a communitarian approach because it emphasizes community and responsibility as an ethical base for public relations, which in turn may enable organizations to respond appropriately in crisis situations. It will be important to learn whether the communication professionals in these exemplar organizations have adopted such an approach and how that affects the choice of social responsibility programs the organizations endorse.

As global corporations enter more and different cultures and environments, they will find that they are expected to perform many of the social functions that these exemplar companies are now performing. Those that elect not to do so may find themselves in violation of ethical standards and consequently their ability to do business in those countries severely diminished. How the professional and academic field of public relations responds to these challenges will no doubt affect the type of reformations now being called for in public relations, among many other fields. Some are arguing for a type of governing body similar to that of the accounting field, with similar repercussions for ethical violations. Fitzpatrick (2000) argues that enforcement is perhaps one of the biggest challenges in establishing an ethical corporate culture.

The findings reported in this research study will go a long way to help us understand the breadth and depth of social programs being carried out across the globe and the role that geographic region, financial stability of the company, and the type of communication professionals working in those companies play in their social performance. In the current stage of this program of research, made possible by support from the Arthur W. Page Center at Penn State, we are describing in detail the actual programs of these companies and are trying to learn more directly from communication professionals themselves about how and why these particular social programs were selected as corporate foci.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Edelman Trust Barometer, currently in its seventh edition, is an annual survey of approximately 2,000 opinion leaders from around the world regarding their trust in, and credibility of, institutions, companies, and sources of information. Opinion leaders are defined as individuals age 35 to 64, college graduates with a household income of more than \$75,000 and with a significant interest and engagement in the media, economy, and public affairs. The survey is sponsored by Edelman, the Chicago-based largest independent public relations agency in the world.

<sup>2</sup> The authors recognize that there are many fallacies associated with these groupings and that other authors might suggest other groupings, but these five categories appeared to us to be a reasonable way of grouping by region and culture.

<sup>3</sup> These results should be viewed with great caution because of the small number of companies. Thus, only the results of the first three factors are reported here.

<sup>4</sup> Again, the small size of this sample requires caution for the interpretation of these factors.

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Table No. 1. 100 companies chosen to represent socially responsible organizations, plus country of headquarters and product sector.

<b>Company</b>	<b>Country of Headquarters</b>	<b>Sector</b>
3M	US	Industrial Goods & Services
ABB Ltd.	Switzerland	Industrial Goods & Services
ABN AMRO Holdings	Netherlands	Banks

Table No. 1. 100 companies chosen to represent socially responsible organizations, plus country of headquarters and product sector.

Adidas Salomon AG	Germany	Retail
Advanced Micro Devices	US	Technology
Aetna	US	Health Care
Agilent Technologies	US	Industrial Goods & Services
Alcan	Canada	Basic Resources
Alcatel S.A.	France	Technology
Allianz AG Holding Company	Germany	Insurance
Applied Materials Inc	US	Technology
Arcelor	France	Basic Resources
Asahi Breweries	Japan	Food & Beverage
Astrazeneca	UK	Health Care
Avaya Inc.	US	Telecommunications
Aviva PLC	UK	Insurance
AWG PLC	UK	Utilities
BAA	UK	Industrial Goods & Services
Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena	Italy	Banks
Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentina	Spain	Banks
Bank of America	US	Banks
Baxter International	US	Health Care
BNP Paribas S.A.	France	Banks
BP PLC	UK	Oil & Gas
Bristol-Myers Squibb Co.	US	Pharmaceuticals
British Land PLC	UK	Financial Services
BT Group PLC	UK	Telecommunications
Canon Inc.	Japan	Technology
Centrica PLC	UK	Utilities
Cummins, Inc.	US	Industrial Goods & Services
Danisco A/S	Denmark	Food & Beverage
DENSO	Japan	Automobiles
Deutsche Telekom	Germany	Telecommunications
Dexia	Belgium	Banks
Dofasco	Canada	Basic Resources
Ecolab Inc.	US	Chemicals
Electrolux AB	Sweden	Personal & Household Goods
Enel S.p.A.	Italy	Utilities
Ford Motor Company	US	Automobiles
Fuji Electric holdings co	Japan	Industrial Goods & Services
Gas Natural	Spain	Utilities
Gillette Co	US	Personal & Household Goods
GlaxoSmithKline	UK	Pharmaceuticals
Hennes & Mauritz (H&M)	Sweden	Retail
Hewlett-Packard Co.	US	Technology
ING Group N.V	Netherlands	Insurance
Intel Corporation	US	Technology
Interface, Inc.	US	Construction
J Sainsbury PLC	UK	Retail
Johnson & Johnson	US	Health Care
Kimberly-Clark	US	Personal & Household Goods
Lafarge	France	Construction
Lloyds TSB Group PLC	UK	Banks

Table No. 1. 100 companies chosen to represent socially responsible organizations, plus country of headquarters and product sector.

LVMH	France	Retail
Manulife Financial Corporation	Canada	Insurance
Munich Re Group	Germany	Insurance
National Australia Bank Ltd	Australia	Banks
New York Times	US	Media
Nokia Corp	Finland	Technology
Novo Nordisk	Denmark	Pharmaceuticals
NTT Docomo Inc	Japan	Telecommunications
Pearson PLC	UK	Media
Proctor & Gamble Co.	US	Personal & Household Goods
Reed-Elsevier	Netherlands	Media
Reuters Group PLC	UK	Media
Ricoh Corp	Japan	Technology
Royal Bank of Canada	Canada	Banks
Royal Bank of Scotland	UK	Banks
Safeco	US	Insurance
Sanofi-Aventis	France	Pharmaceuticals
SAP AG	Germany	Technology
Schneider Electric S.A.	France	Industrial Goods & Services
Severn Trent PLC	UK	Utilities
Skanska	Sweden	Construction
Smith & Nephew PLC	UK	Health Care
Starbucks Corporation	US	Food & Beverage
Statoil ASA	Norway	Oil & Gas
STMicroelectronics	Switzerland	Technology
Stora Enso Oyj R	Finland	Basic Resources
Sumitomo Forestry	Japan	Personal & Household Goods
Swiss Reinsurance Co.	Switzerland	Insurance
Swisscom AG	Switzerland	Telecommunications
Telecom Italia	Italy	Telecommunications
Telefonica Group	Spain	Telecommunications
Telus Corp.	Canada	Telecommunications
Tomra	Norway	Industrial Goods & Services
Total SA	France	Oil & Gas
Toyota	Japan	Automobiles
TransAlta Corp.	Canada	Utilities
UBS AG Company	Switzerland	Banks
Uncredito Italiano S.p.A.	Italy	Banks
Unilever	Netherlands	Food & Beverage
United Parcel Services	US	Air Freight & Couriers
Vestas	Denmark	Industrial Goods & Services
Volkswagen	Germany	Automobiles
Volvo	Sweden	Industrial Goods & Services
Washington Mutual	US	Financial Services
Weyerhaeuser Co.	US	Basic Resources
Whirlpool Corp.	US	Personal & Household Goods
Whole Foods Market	US	Retail

<b>Table No. 2. Percent of companies mentioning these programs on their websites</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b><i>Programs to develop business/capitalism</i></b>	<b>45%</b>
<b>Education/advice/mentoring about business/economics</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Financial aid/loans for businesses/farms</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Programs prohibiting business in countries with human rights violations</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>1</b>
<b><i>Environmental Programs</i></b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Air/water/hazardous waste pollution programs</b>	<b>55</b>
Air pollution programs	34
Water pollution programs	28
Hazardous waste programs generally	35
<b>Natural resources programs</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Conservation, generally</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Contract only with environmentally sound vendors/contractors</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Environmental education</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Environmental management programs beyond compliance</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Environmental research generally</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>4</b>
<b><i>Social Programs</i></b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Philanthropy, \$ or in-kind contributions</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Education programs or infrastructure</b>	<b>82</b>
Educational Programs	74
Infrastructure	50
<b>Community program sponsorships/\$</b>	<b>74</b>
Crime/safety programs	17
Anti-poverty programs	53
Anti-racism/bigotry	5
Community cleanup	6
Employee volunteerism	44
Religious causes/programs support	6
United Way/volunteer organizations	16
Other	8
<b>Arts/music/culture/sports</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Health programs &amp; research</b>	<b>52</b>
Blood drive	8
Diseases/illnesses	33
Drug/alcohol/tobacco abuse	3
Exercise/healthy living	5
Genetics/testing	2
Health care	14
Other	11
<b>Political</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Disaster/Crisis/terrorism</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Technology for social benefits</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>6</b>

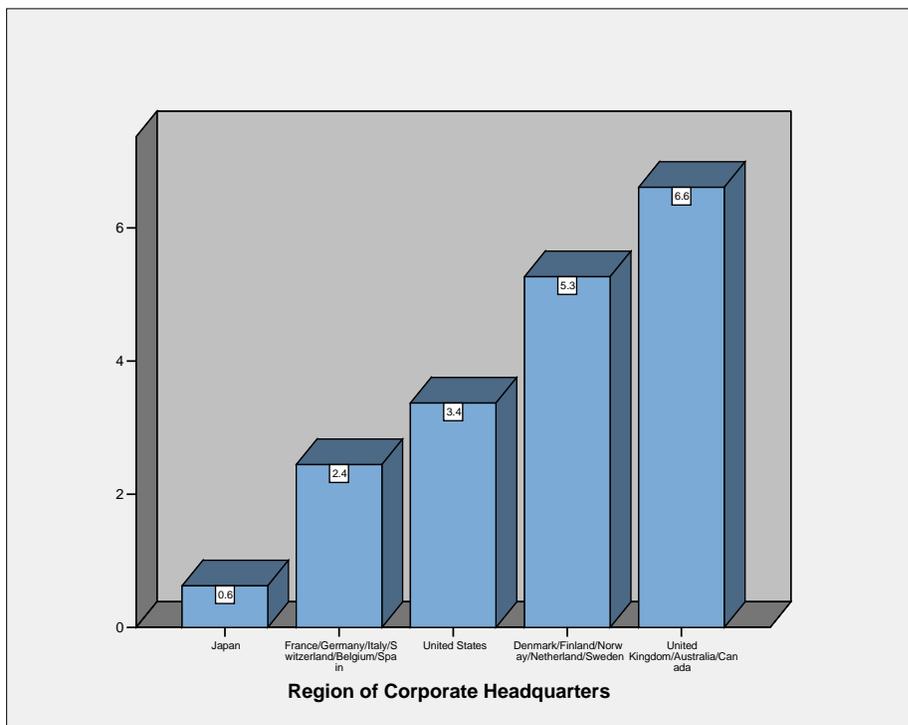


Figure 1. Average number of communication titles by region location of corporations

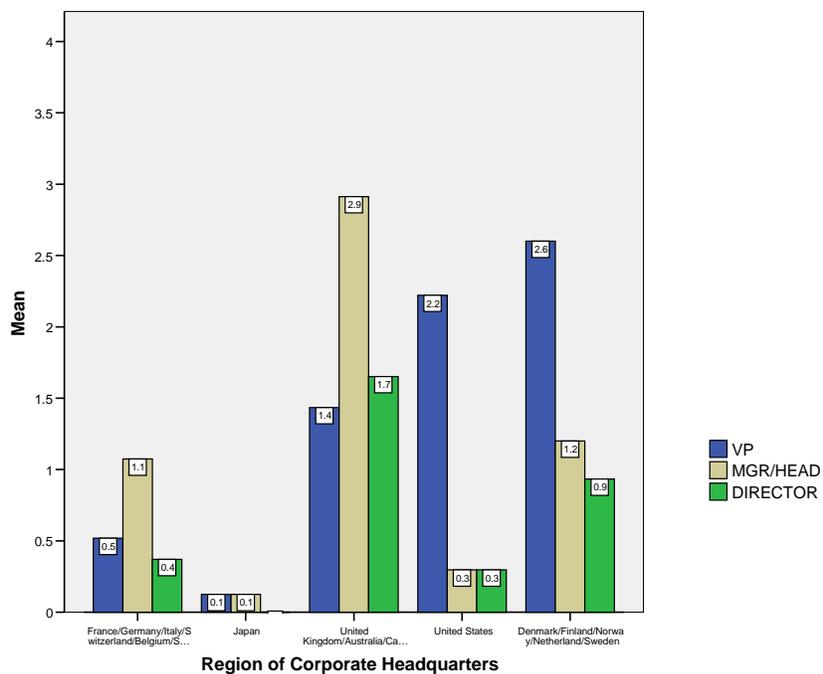


Figure 2. Difference by region for titles of corporate communications executives

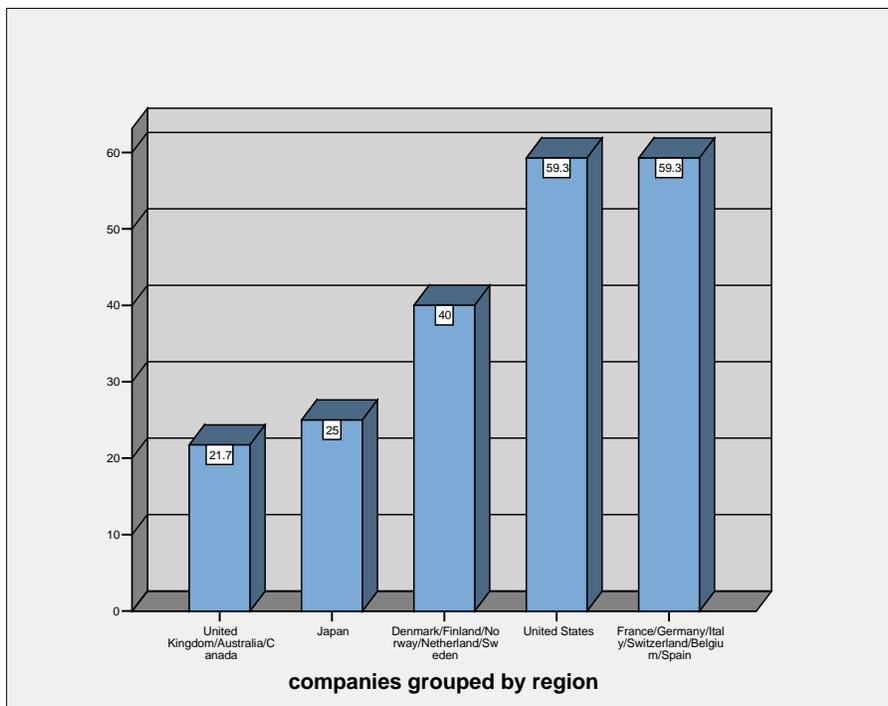


Figure 3. Companies with economic programs

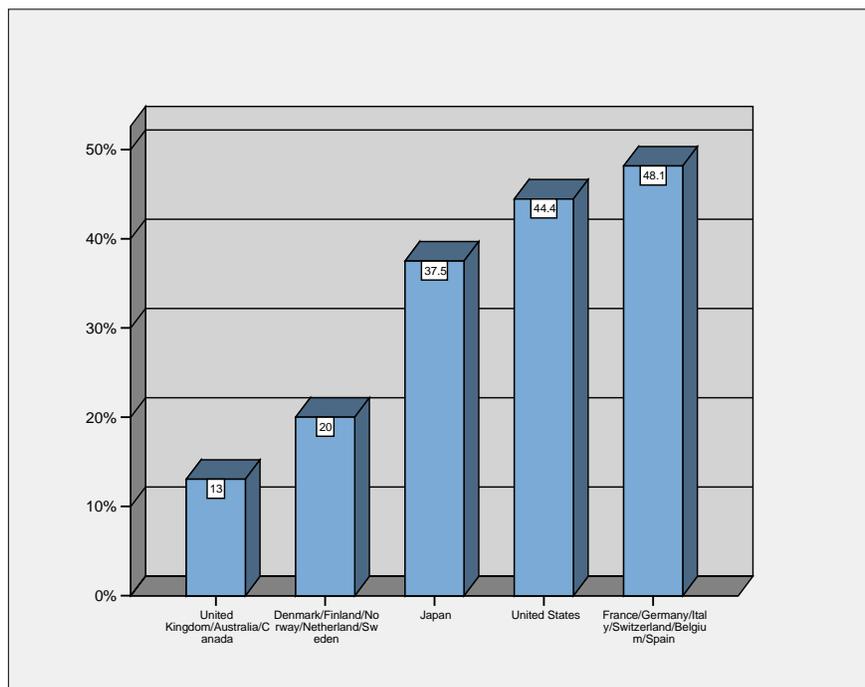


Figure 4. Companies with air pollution programs

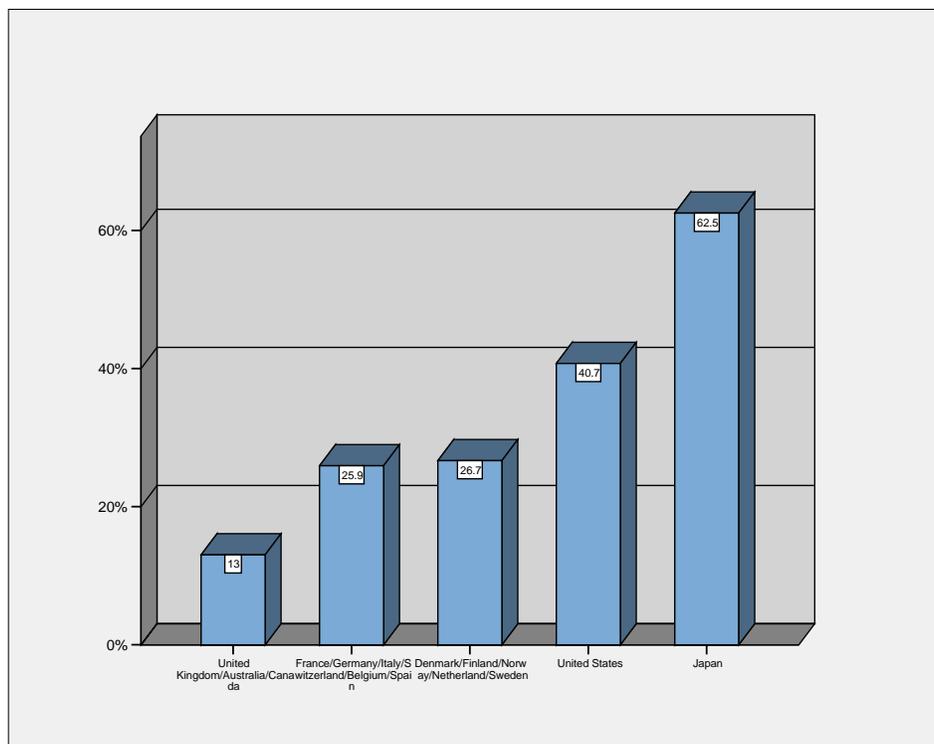


Figure 5. Companies with natural resource programs

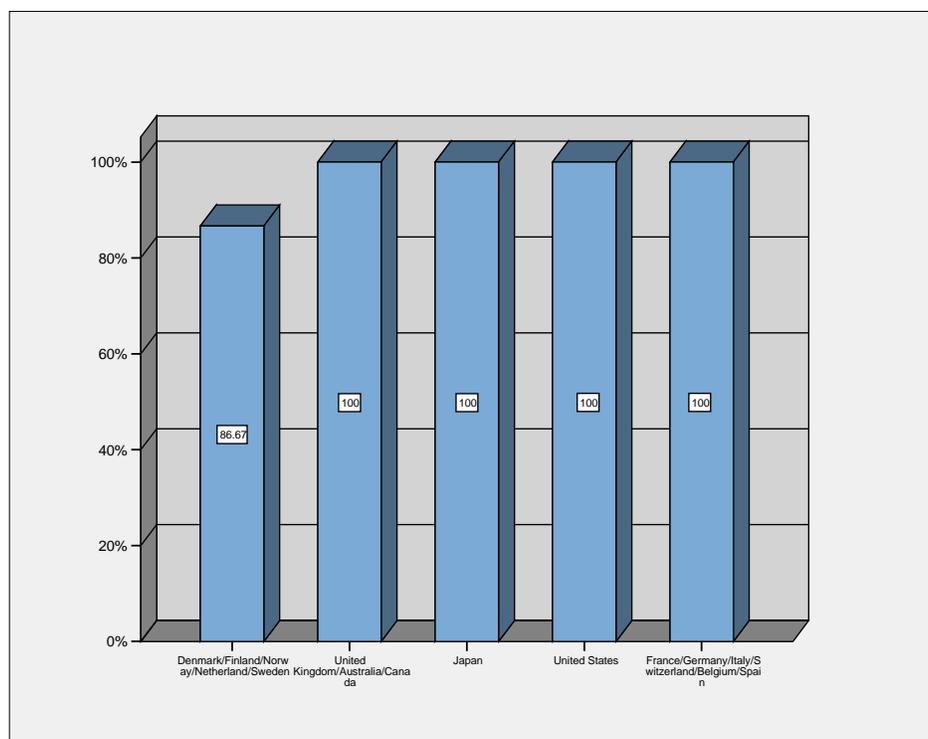


Figure 6. Companies with social programs

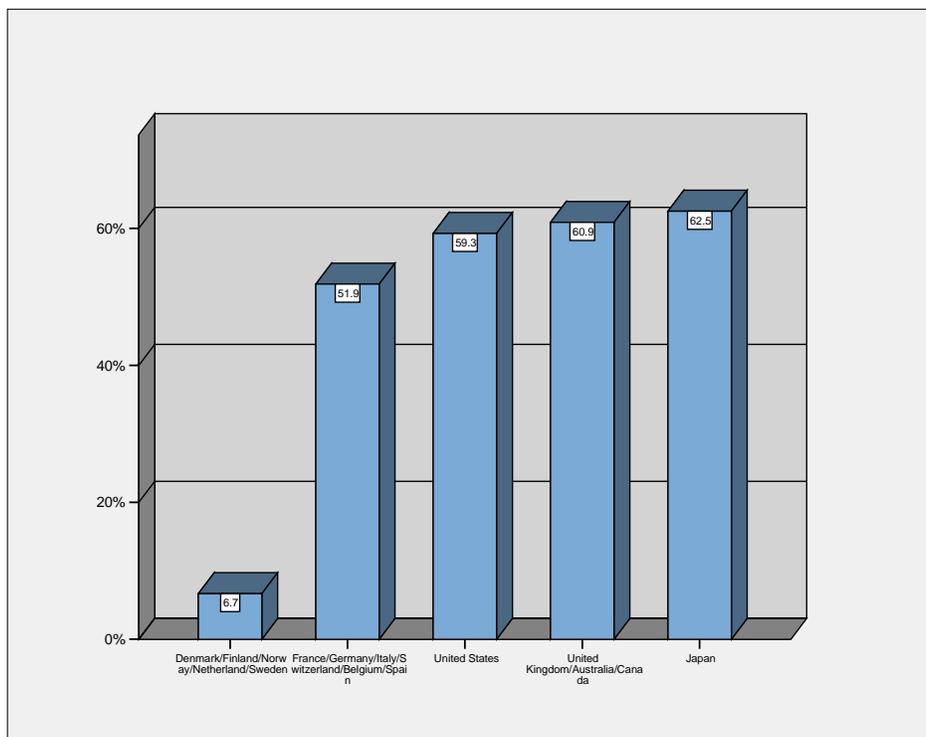


Figure 7. Companies with educational infrastructure programs

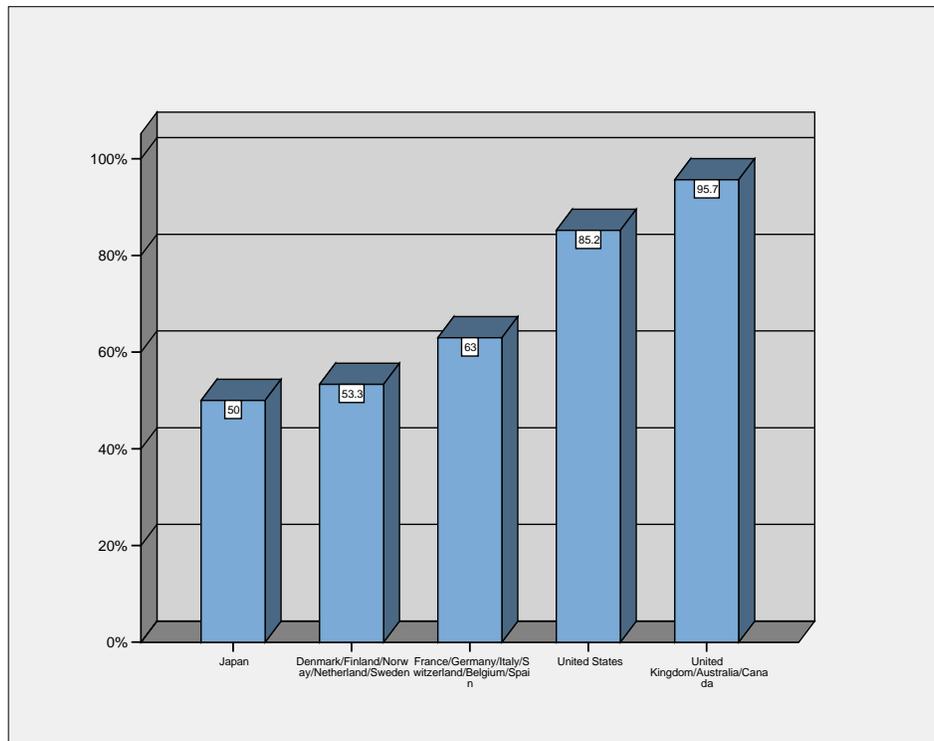
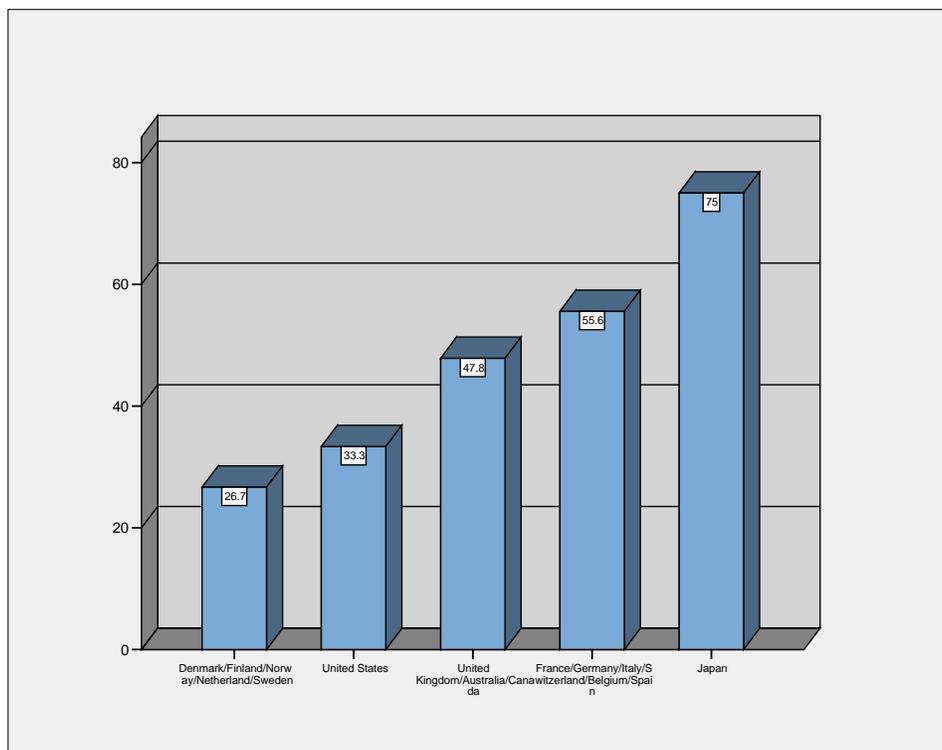


Figure 8. Companies with community programs



*Figure 9. Companies with arts/music/sports programs*

## **Expanding the PR Palette: Facilitation as a Means toward CSR Policy Development**

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As organizational leadership increasingly appreciates the benefits that accrue from Corporate Social Responsibility, the need arises for a systematic framework for crafting CSR policies. This paper proposes that public relations take the lead in that effort through several deliberate and integrated measures. First, scholars and practitioners should explore the CSR concept thoroughly and analytically, identifying points of tangency between CSR and current public relations practice as well as potential areas of additional intersection. Second, practitioners should acquire structured facilitation skills to guide panels of organizational managers, employees, and citizens in a purposeful exploration of policy possibilities in regard to CSR. Further, this paper suggests that facilitation skills may offer management-centered applications to public relations practice beyond CSR.

Expanding the PR Palette:

### ***Facilitation as a Means toward CSR Policy Development***

For several decades, the public relations profession has defined itself as comprising a spectrum of skill sets ranging from the technical to the managerial. Technical skills include writing, editing, designing and producing public relations products such as news releases, PSAs, brochures, etc., as well as, in more recent years, Web sites and other new media products. Managerial skills have incorporated, in macro context, roles as expert prescriber, communication facilitator and problem-solving facilitator. In these managerial roles, the practitioner exercises authority in addressing communication problems, conducting research, mediating between an organization and its constituencies, and defining and dealing with issues (Broom & Smith, 1979; Broom, 1982). This approach has served the discipline well, elevating public relations from its roots in propaganda and publicity to recognition as a valued component of organizational management, increasingly part of, or at least on the periphery of the “dominant coalition.” Moreover, the discipline has made strides in recent years in the area of impact measurement such as reach; opinion, attitude and behavior change; and strength of relationships (see, e.g., Hon, 1998; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Lindenmann, 2006). These advances are meritorious, and practitioners who embrace these innovations can be grateful to the scholars and professional leaders who continue to move these components forward. This progress should continue, but this paper argues that these advances offer another opportunity – expanding the public relations practitioner's palette in directions that build upon its management role. Specifically, the case is made for a public relations role in major policy development through a purposeful, deliberative and dialogic process initially aimed at identifying and describing policy possibilities in a defined policy area. Bivens (1993), in fact, advocated such a role for public relations more than a decade ago, stating, “In its dual role as mediator and advocate, public relations has the opportunity both to engage in and to encourage public debate” (p.121).

The defined policy area selected as an exemplar to illustrate the efficacy of the policy possibility development process is the rapidly emerging field of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Consequently, the paper begins with a review of CSR: its origins; its definition, its value,

its future, and public relations' potential leadership role in its application and administration. Second, the paper outlines a carefully structured, collaborative process designed specifically for the development of policy possibilities across a broad spectrum of macro-level issues. The recommendation is then made and defended to adapt the process to the area of CSR, with public relations leaders initiating and guiding the process. Finally, suggestions are advanced for extending the process to other areas of policy development within the public relations milieu.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Kotler and Lee (2005) examine a number of definitions for CSR including one with references to sustainable economic development, working with employees and their families, and working with communities to improve quality of life. Another definition they cite refers to exceeding ethical and legal standards and public expectations in business operations. They settle, however, on the following definition:

*Corporate social responsibility is a commitment to improve community well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources* (p.3).

Critical to this definition is the term *discretionary*; CSR policy and activities are neither mandated by regulatory agencies nor are they compelled as part of normal business operations. The authors describe Corporate Social Initiatives as those activities an organization engages in to support social causes and meet obligations (self-imposed) to CSR. If these initiatives and activities are discretionary, what compels organizations to pursue them? Joseph (2001) says the reason often is to "avoid reputation backlashes instigated by active consumers or NGOs" (p.121), though other organizations may be seeking to reach the growing number of consumers and investors making purchasing or investing decisions based on the socially responsible reputation of a company or its products. These are unflattering motivations, and indeed, environmentalists sometimes sniff disparagingly at the concept of CSR, referring to it as "greenwashing," meaning businesses simply apply a patina of environmental responsibility in order to stave off criticism and capitalize on a popular notion (Berkhout, 2005). In fact, in a cynical treatise on the subject, Munshi and Kurian (2005) claim the emerging CSR movement is merely a continuation of a century-old trend of corporations endeavoring to make over their images to satisfy perceived changes in societal sensitivities, an effort they say "rests on a platform of insincerity" (p.514). And the late and highly regarded economist Milton Friedman likely contributed to that impression, stripping the concept of any pretense when he said, "There is one and only one social responsibility of business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game" (1962, p.133).

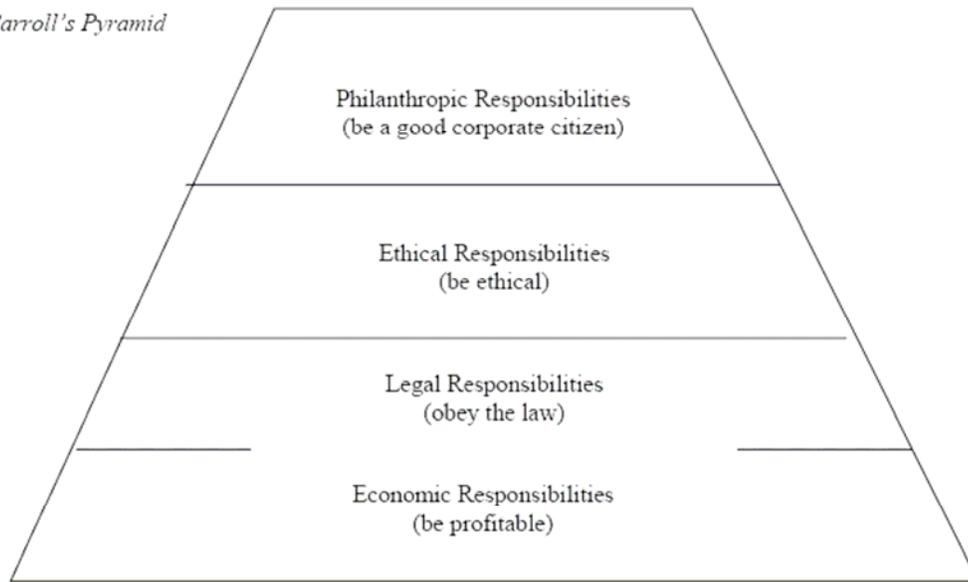
However, sensitivities have changed since Friedman's dismissive pronouncement, and public relations leaders are ideally poised to seize upon growing recognition of CSR's potential to create new organizational relationships, strengthen existing ones, improve the western business model, and in so doing, accomplish no less than improving the human condition. Smith (2003) admits that there are certainly profit motivations for engaging actively in CSR-driven activities, and these he calls the "business case," but he also stresses the growing desire on the part of business leaders to simply do good – what he calls the "normative case" (p.53). Smith acknowledges, therefore, that CSR is likely to result from a mixture of these two motivations, and that the challenge for any organization is to understand and proscribe the nature and scope of its CSR activities while balancing the business and normative cases. That challenge, as the reader will see, is the motivation for this proposal.

Interestingly, CSR seems to be acquiring adherents outside the United States more rapidly than within the world's leading economic power. As Smith (2003) notes, The World Economic Forum has made CSR a leading topic at its meetings, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (comprising 120 international companies) reports that CSR is "firmly on the global policy agenda," and calls for increased attention to CSR have come from organizations including the International Business Leaders Forum, Business for Social Responsibility, and Business in the Community. The United Kingdom has appointed a Minister for CSR. The European Community has adopted a formal strategy for CSR. Nevertheless, the combination of terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, and a cascade of corporate scandals in recent years may be conspiring to compel publics in the United States and elsewhere to expect, even demand greater responsibility from businesses in a democratic society considering that, as Arthur Page said, "All business in a democratic country begins with public permission and exists by public approval" (Griswold, 1967, p.13).

Perhaps the earliest academic foray into CSR was provided by Bowen (1953) when he asked whether the paths of business interests and society's interests might ever merge, and Windsor (2001) suggested those paths may occasionally merge, but might equally diverge. Windsor further suggests that CSR may be diminishing in prominence in favor of wealth generation, though he acknowledges that this may be a minority view. This view stems from the assumption that managers may view CSR as reducing maximum wealth, though Windsor agrees that some more altruistic managers may assess CSR activities to be a path to maximum profitability. The question of how those managerial decisions regarding CSR activities are made prompted Carroll (1991) to depict CSR as a pyramidal structure, with the pyramid's foundational base depicting economic responsibilities, the next layer legal responsibilities, followed by ethical responsibilities, topped at last by philanthropic responsibilities (see Figure 1). Carroll says the four components are in constant dynamic tension, with the greatest tension existing between economic responsibilities and the other three components. Different stakeholders would likely view different components as most important to their own interests. Investors, of course, would be concerned primarily with economic responsibility, while environmentalists or community activists would gauge legal, ethical and/or philanthropic responsibilities as salient. Of course, failure to meet economic responsibilities is foundational because failure in that regard would negate the possibility of any activity in the other sectors. The manager's challenge then becomes determining which stakeholders to accord consideration in any decision-making process.

Figure 1.

Carroll's Pyramid



Kotler and Lee (2005) offer a matrix of six options for CSR activities that fit primarily in the top tier of Carroll's pyramid, but which also extend into ethical and legal sectors, and conceivably underpin profitability in an increasingly sensitive and expectant environment:

1. Cause Promotions – funds or in-kind contributions in support of a social cause managed directly or in partnership by the organization.
2. Cause-related Marketing – Linking a product and committing a percentage of revenue to a social cause.
3. Corporate Social Marketing – Supporting and endorsing a behavior change aimed at improving public health, safety, the environment, etc.
4. Corporate Philanthropy – Direct cash or in-kind contributions to an established charity or cause.
5. Community Volunteering – Encouragement and support for employees and others directly associated with the organization to volunteer for a community charity, effort or cause.
6. Socially Responsible Business Practices – Adopting policies and procedures that reflect social concerns and sensitivities, such as environmentally responsible manufacturing (pp.23-24).

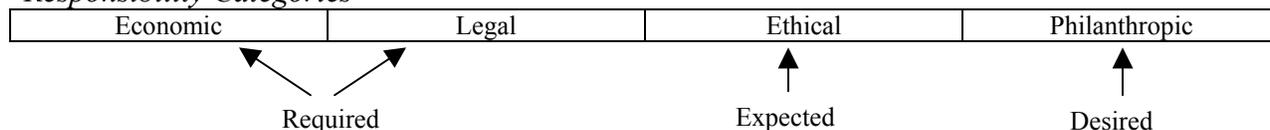
The authors offer principles to aid in identifying appropriate causes and charities to support, such as access to target markets, a link between the cause and the organization, availability of otherwise underutilized organizational assets, and so forth. However, they provide no systematic approach to making those and related determinations. Nevertheless, the list is a useful approach to more clearly identifying the nature of CSR; it also helps make the case for extensive involvement of public relations managers in the deliberative process. Public relations managers, presumably actively engaged in issue monitoring and management, attuned to community sensitivities and concerns, deeply involved in employee communication, and with access to media and interpersonal communication conduits, are ideally positioned to pursue carefully planned approaches to CSR activities in all six categories.

*A public relations role.*

CSR is increasingly correlated with organizational reputation, including at the global level, and reputation is clearly an area under public relations purview. Palacios (2004) notes that companies that have not conducted business responsibly have watched their brands deteriorate and their markets shrink. Public scrutiny of such activities, he says, is increasing. He concludes that CSR needs to exceed merely observing legal and ethical requirements and extend to social accountability with stakeholders including employees, communities and government entities. One might think of socially responsible behavior as describing a continuum from what is required to what is expected to what is desired, as depicted in Figure 2.

*Figure 2.*

*Responsibility Categories*



Reputation reflects an organization's performance along this entire spectrum, and those activities described as "expected" appear to be expanding beyond the ethical into the philanthropic, a situation that augurs well for increased public relations engagement in organizational policy development. Macleod (2001) calls CSR a "necessary strategy to safeguard corporate reputation" (p.8) and analyzes data from a comprehensive content analysis and series of in-depth interviews in six nations to identify factors impacting reputation. Those factors include, she says, consumerism, environmentalism, anti-capitalism and anti-globalization. She also cites increasingly business-savvy publics, growth of investors, skilled labor shortages (creating recruiting and retention challenges), and spread of media access, especially the Internet. These factors conspire to complicate strategic business planning for organizational leadership, focused as they have been on economic and legal responsibilities, because consumers are judging organizations on more than just the quality and value of their products and services.

Although growing interest in CSR would seem to be a positive trend, it presents an ethical dilemma for public relations managers and for the organizations for which they advocate. Fitzpatrick and Gauthier (2001) note that on one hand businesses intuitively benefit by doing good deeds and behaving ethically; therefore, it is permissible for public relations to conduct activities that represent the organization in a positive light based upon its responsible behavior. They say, though, that doing so makes them susceptible to criticism that the responsible behavior is driven by self-serving motives. If driven by altruistic motives, the critics might claim, the organization would engage in such activities quietly. Macleod (2001) echoes that concern. If organizations communicate about their CSR efforts, she says, they could appear boastful. On balance, though, she says her analysis of the research data indicate such communication is received well by most publics provided the public relations effort complies with established best practices. Although this concern revolves around public relations engagement in the CSR process after the fact, astute organizational leaders will recognize the argument it makes for engaging public relations management in the CSR policy development and planning stages; doing so ensures that a balanced strategic communication component is developed alongside CSR activities.

That link between public relations and CSR was explored fully and reported by Clark (2000). She traced the origins of both public relations and CSR, finding considerable parallel between the two, though she lamented the conspicuous absence of references to communication

in CSR literature. Clark suggests CSR and public relations began to establish linkages with the Texas Gulf Sulfur case of 1973 and those linkages were reinforced during that decade when public relations leaders such as Harold Burson began to argue that the discipline's role needed to expand its responsibilities into the area of qualitatively analyzing and evaluating social trends, then assisting organizations with developing appropriate responses. To reinforce that contention, Hopkinson (1971) cites national leaders including President John Kennedy's adviser, Ted Sorenson, Chase Manhattan Bank Chairman George Champion, and others as increasingly advocating business's responsibility to address social and economic issues. Clark (2000) then makes a forceful argument that the process for addressing CSR is remarkably parallel to the well-established 4-step public relations process. The message is that the public expects businesses to contribute to social wellbeing and that public relations leaders are uniquely qualified and positioned to guide that effort.

By the 1980s, most but not all public relations professionals were supportive of the CSR concept. Ryan's (1986) survey revealed that roughly three-fourths of responding practitioners by that time believed that pursuing social goals bolstered a corporation's potential for profitability in the long term, and an even larger percentage believed practitioners should play a principal role in identifying and developing social goals. By the late 1980s, Heath and Ryan (1989) observed that CSR was becoming increasingly entrenched in business culture and suggested that organizations had three options in approaching CSR: adopt an appearance of responsible behavior (donate money, encourage employees to participate in community clean-ups, etc.); establish a lofty code of ethics; or establish a culture of monitoring the environment, identifying community interests and needs, and responding ethically and responsibly. Not surprisingly, Heath and Ryan recommend the third option and argue that public relations practitioners are uniquely qualified to administer such a process, given practitioners' skill sets in environmental scanning, relationship maintenance and ethics monitoring.

Utting (2005) agrees that during the last 20 years, CSR has continued to become increasingly embedded in corporate culture, driven by expansion of NGOs, unethical practices of some transnational corporations (TNCs), perceptions of inequitable financial flow patterns that favored TNCs at the expense of labor and environmental conditions, and a series of disasters and perceived social injustices such as Bhopal, India; Exxon Valdez; Shell's Nigerian activities; and Nike's sweatshop issues. Utting argues that CSR can now address many of these manifestations of lapses in corporate social conscience (real or perceived), but CSR has not matured adequately to address underlying political and economic, systemic issues that lead to those manifestations. Utting suggests, though, that the way to achieving that next level of CSR is to develop concrete measures of accountability applied universally. Other research and thought concerning CSR suggests that public relations leaders ought to be at the vanguard of elevating CSR to an even higher plane than it now occupies.

*Seeking a structure for CSR policy.*

That CSR is increasingly accepted as an important component of business practice is evident, but what is not evident is how that should look in practice or how approaches to CSR should be developed. Eclectic approaches by a variety of companies and industries reflect the various interests of the business sectors, the communities and publics they serve, and the contemporary environments in which each operates. For example, Weldon (2003) describes the CSR efforts of British public transport company Go-Ahead. Those activities began with environment-related efforts involving reducing damaging emissions from its fleet of buses, but it extended to in-kind contributions related to public transport and even to employee training

programs. Still, the author lamented the lack of guiding policies or strategies. Eventually, Go-Ahead addressed that deficiency by establishing a “Stakeholder Board” that met quarterly and included structured CSR performance reporting in its meeting agendas. And British American Tobacco (Beadle & Ridderbeekx, 2001), acknowledging that its products carry with them a degree of risk, focuses on public health and safety issues in its CSR programs. Nevertheless, despite some organizations such as these evolving what appear to be coherent and purposeful approaches to CSR, it’s also possible that CSR-generated activities reflect nothing more than the personal interests of a CEO. Often, CSR activities make intuitive sense on the surface, but in most cases it would be difficult to identify connective tissue between and among an organization’s activities and to assemble a comprehensive organizing rubric that explains how each activity reinforces and extends the others in a unifying, purposeful way.

Gathering input from various internal and external constituencies might seem an appropriate approach. Thompson and Driver (2005), however, caution against simply assembling traditional stakeholder groups if that process is merely “cosmetic.” Often such exchanges are reduced to parochialism. To achieve a high level of purpose and effectiveness would require a procedural protocol to guide those exchanges and ensure that each CSR activity met a set of meaningful and logical standards. Those policies would necessarily be linked to the organization but would transcend reactive, disconnected activities, well-intentioned as they might be. Achieving policies sufficiently flexible to accommodate evolving operating environments and emerging stakeholder groups would require a deliberative process that thoroughly examines a range of possibilities, and that process would need to be conducted by a group that is both manageable and inclusive of potentially underrepresented voices. Leading such a process would require a peculiar set of skills as well as an understanding of the purpose of the exercise. The remainder of this paper outlines just such a deliberative process and advocates that skill in guiding the process be acquired by public relations leaders.

#### *The Role of Facilitation*

Researchers have addressed a public relations role in employing structured dialogue with relevant constituencies (Woodward, 2000), and in managing issue dynamics (Hallahan, 2001; Vasquez, 1996). McComas (2003) examined the value of public meetings as a public relations tactic, and a number of researchers have examined a public relations role in conflict resolution (Huang, 2001; Plowman, 1998). Importantly, Plowman (1998) makes the case that acquiring skills in conflict resolution can empower public relations managers and reinforce their right to participate in the dominant coalition’s decision-making processes. Nevertheless, what is advocated here is different from issues management, conflict resolution, and ongoing dialogic efforts with stakeholders. Rather, the proposal here is that public relations managers would benefit from the ability to guide small groups through a structured process leading to collaborative development of policy possibilities. For illustration, CSR is the demonstration platform, selected because it represents an emerging area of potential leadership responsibility for public relations practice.

A possible model of considerable promise comes from the Interactivity Foundation, a nonprofit organization whose mission is “to stimulate and enhance democratic discussion or deliberation” (Gunderson, 2005, p.3).<sup>1</sup> Selected members of the Foundation are titled “Fellows,” and they have designed, after several years’ work, a structured but flexible deliberative model designed to facilitate purposeful discussion by small groups. Gunderson says the purpose of the deliberative process is to pursue clearly delineated projects, detailing a number of policy possibilities for addressing the project issue and enumerating the potential consequences of each

policy possibility. This is accomplished, under Interactivity Foundation guidelines, by two separate small groups – one comprising issue experts and the other “ordinary” citizens. Initially, the groups work separately, but over time are brought together to “fuse” their respective work. Ideally, individual groups initially meet monthly for 18 months, then jointly for 4-6 months; the total deliberative process, therefore, takes two years. The resulting “Staff Work Report” contains crisply articulated, contrasting policy possibilities that have been thoroughly scrutinized and that represent the groups’ collective wisdom. The Foundation is quick to point out, though, that the Staff Work Reports reflect neither “group think” nor consensus; any member of the group who presents a logical, compelling case for a policy possibility may have that possibility included in the report. To date, Foundation Fellows have conducted deliberative processes on several broad social issues: human genetic technology; depression as a health policy issue; and privacy rights. Underway are projects addressing rewards for work, learning, and science. Certainly, public relations application of the IF process would be more tightly focused, which would have several implications. First, the deliberative process in a public relations context is unlikely to take two years. Second, the employment of two separate groups may not be necessary in most cases. Third, the impact of results would extend potentially to more narrowly defined publics. On the other hand, if the IF deliberative process were to be employed as a qualitative research method to explore broader public relations issues, application of the full model would be appropriate.

*The facilitation model.*

Before describing in some detail the IF deliberative model, it’s important to present key assumptions that underlie the process.

- ✓ The process is characterized as an unhurried, wide-ranging, conceptual approach to a policy issue.
- ✓ It transcends any single viewpoint or discipline purview and considers ethical, social and cultural dimensions of the issue.
- ✓ Typically, 6-8 panelists participate in each of two separate groups: one a panel of subject matter experts, the other a panel of lay citizens. All are selected for their willingness to engage actively within IF process guidelines.
- ✓ Panels are guided by a non-participating facilitator.
- ✓ Panel discussions are conducted under condition of what the Foundation calls “sanctuary,” meaning there is no attribution and deliberations are not to be discussed with those not on the panel.
- ✓ The focus is not on fixing problems but on crafting possible approaches along with potential consequences of each approach.

Figure 3 is a graphic illustration of the IF process designed to guide panels through a 2-year discussion process culminating in a Staff Work Report.

Figure 3.  
The Facilitation Process

<b>Stage 1 – Preparing for Sanctuary Discussions</b> <i>Planning and Assembling a Project</i>	
1	Identify an area of concern that appears appropriate for the IF Discussion Process
2	Select panels likely to be effective in the collegial and conceptual discussions of the policy area.
3	Develop a starting point to foster unfettered conceptual discussions as free as possible from bias.
<b>Stage 2 – Exploring and Developing the Area of Concern</b> <i>Generating the broad conceptual questions to which policy possibilities might respond</i>	
4	Describe (without defining) the various aspects of the area of concern from multiple perspectives
5	Develop initial general question to which public policy possibilities might respond
6	Expand the description of the area of concern by continued development of possible questions
<b>Stage 3 – Exploring and Developing contrasting Governance Possibilities</b> <i>Generating contrasting conceptual policy possibilities to address the above questions</i>	
7	Brainstorm conceptual policy possibilities for addressing the area of concern
8	Continue development of contrasting conceptual policy possibilities that represent distinct responses to the area of concern, with the goal of producing at least four
<b>Stage 4 – Exploring Potential Consequences, Review and Revision</b> <i>Imagining the practical implications of policy possibilities and making revisions</i>	
9	Explore the potential consequences and real-world implications of the policy possibilities from a variety of perspectives in a democratic society with a mixed market economy
10	Exclude or change policy possibilities that the panel finds deficient (e.g. conceptually incoherent, falling short of its own goals), while aiming at producing contrasting conceptual possibilities regardless of feasibility or personal preferences
11	Select policy possibilities that the panel would like to take forward into joint panel discussions and eventual public discussion; perhaps revising, consolidating, or generating new possibilities
<b>Stage 5 – Clarifying Policy Possibilities and Renewed Exploration of Consequences</b> <i>Capturing the gist of each policy possibility and illustrative consequences</i>	
12	Develop concise descriptions of at least four conceptual policy possibilities based on the above review activities, including the general exploration of consequences, and the goal of focusing attention on the basic ideas of each possibility
13	Renew exploration of potential consequences for the conceptually clarified policy possibilities
<b>Stage 6 – Joint Panel Discussions</b>	
14	Prepare and conduct several joint panel sessions for interactive development of at least four policy possibilities and their possible consequences for eventual public discussion
15	Develop the Staff Work Report that represents the thinking of the joint panel (both the citizen-generalist and expert-specialist panels) to stimulate further public discussion
16	Prepare recommendations, including panelists', for public discussions of the Staff Work Report
<b>Stage 7 – Moving from Sanctuary into Public Discussions</b>	
	<i>No predetermined activities, on-going development</i>

Obviously, the process is elaborate and somewhat complex and should not be employed by facilitators untrained in it. To this end, the Interactivity Foundation initiated in summer 2006 its first workshop aimed at equipping a small group of university instructors with the capability not only to design and facilitate IF panels, but also to train others in the process.<sup>2</sup> With additional workshops, and with those trained instructors teaching, in turn, others to apply the process, a body of facilitators will develop. Among those should be instructors in public relations, a discipline that will benefit from the introduction of this new and very practical tool. To illustrate its efficacy, let us examine its potential application to the challenge of developing possible approaches to an organization's social responsibility policies.

In Stage 1, the facilitator first crafts what Byrd calls a "charter statement" (2005), "a document that describes what the participants are being asked to accomplish" (p.26). Provided

to panel members at the first meeting, the document provides basic background of the issue, a description of the deliverable – the Staff Work Report, an introductory set of questions to guide initial discussion, a broad description of the project’s scope, and a projected timetable. In the CSR scenario, the charter statement might summarize the CSR concept, broadly outline the organization’s past and current approaches to CSR, and suggest relevant constituencies that affect and are affected by organizational CSR activities. Also in the first stage, the facilitator (the public relations manager, trained in the IF process, in this CSR demonstration scenario) identifies and recruits members of the panel. For this CSR scenario, a single panel rather than two panels is appropriate. The panel can be considered a hybrid of the advisory panel concept, a public relations strategy recommended by many public relations scholars and practitioners (see, e.g., Austin & Pinkleton, 2001, pp.94-95; Wilcox, Cameron, Ault & Agee, 2003, pp. 205-206). Often, public relations managers are puzzled as to how best to employ an advisory board; recruiting a board willing to engage in the deliberative process of policy exploration using the IF structure would assign purpose to the board at the same time the board’s activities would benefit the organization by helping to develop beneficial policies (governing CSR, for example). Selecting board members from employees, volunteers, community leaders, media and other constituencies would have the added benefit of building productive relationships and tangibly conveying the organization’s value of two-way communication.

Stage 2 sees the initial panel sessions during which the facilitator helps panelists explore in an unfettered manner the open-ended questions posed in the charter statement. Through this stage, panelists expand on initial discussions by identifying potential perspectives from which to view the issue. In all panel sessions, the facilitator’s initial role is to summarize previous discussion and to help panelists discern any emerging patterns that might eventually help form the basis of the Staff Work Report, though this aspect must not be hurried. The IF process calls for a designated note taker for each session, and the facilitator uses these notes along with his or her own to prepare succinct bulleted and narrative session summaries; these summaries are distributed to panelists in advance of subsequent meetings. Perspectives in a discussion concerning CSR policies might identify as potential perspectives those of shareholders, management, rank-and-file employees, community leaders, nonprofit organizations (related to health, the arts, education, the environment, etc.), government agencies, and so forth. It becomes increasingly evident in this stage – as discussion sessions progress -- that facilitators must be trained in the delicate art of encouraging participation while preventing individual dominance or advocacy. The IF process stresses the importance of panel members moving beyond simply representing their individual points of view, a quality of the process wholly compatible with the public relations discipline. The IF process also stresses that thoughts and ideas are developed without rivalry or dispute; in fact, a technique IF Fellows recommend is to have panel members restate other members’ ideas. The process also calls for ideas to unfold in a self-directed, non-linear manner, with anecdotal instances gradually giving way to general themes and concepts. Also during this stage, panelists seek (under facilitator guidance) to develop broad questions to which eventual policy possibilities might respond.

By stage three, the facilitator should begin helping panelists sketch embryonic policy possibilities and explore those possibilities in terms of their (the policies) core values and goals as well as the roles potentially played by various actors involved in each possible approach. This stage marks a transition from broad exploration of the issue to emerging alternative approaches to the issue. For CSR, panelists might, for example, consider one possible approach that maximizes shareholder return, another that responds to perceived community needs, a third that

addresses employee pride and morale, a fourth that builds organizational reputation, and a fifth that focuses only on community needs in the area of public education. Important to note, though, is that this stage's early sessions do not involve critical evaluation of each possibility, nor should the panel eliminate or even consolidate ideas. However, panelists may, during later sessions of this stage, begin to note potential connections and potential hybrid combinations among approaches. With facilitator guidance, the aim is to generate at least four, but probably not more than eight or nine distinct policy possibilities with the understanding that further revision is possible, even likely, in subsequent stages.

Stage four is marked by recursive review of the policy possibilities along with the exploration of potential consequences (positive and negative) for each. Panelists seek here to envision how each possibility would change the environment if implemented, but discussion purposefully avoids addressing how each would be implemented. The aim is for panelists to jointly clarify and expand group understanding to each policy. Consequences could include social, economic and cultural areas and would consider which groups are benefited or harmed by the policies. There is a risk, of course, for panelists to see only positive consequences of policies they support and negative consequences of those they oppose; the facilitator must skillfully prevent that from occurring. Stage four concludes with the panel eliminating policy approaches that fail, upon thorough examination, to meet criteria set in earlier stages, consolidating policy approaches where appropriate, and identifying the fundamental policy approaches the panel agrees should be moved forward to the final single-panel stage. The IF process includes a "negative veto" policy here – one panelist's vote is sufficient to retain a policy possibility to the next stage. For CSR, panelists might, by way of illustration, determine that a policy aimed solely at benefiting public education is not feasible and incorporate some elements of that policy into another policy that more broadly addresses community needs.

Stage five moves the process to the serious document drafting level, with primary writing responsibilities falling on the facilitator with active panel involvement. Here is where policy approaches are expressed in concise but conceptual terms. The document begins to clarify goals and purposes, underlying assumptions, responsible agents, specific actions and activities. For the CSR illustration, the panel, led by the public relations manager, would draft a document describing in some detail the policy possibilities the organization might adopt, the measures needed to implement each, responsibilities of each person or agency involved, benefits and costs for each participant, and other likely consequences. The writing process, though executed primarily by the facilitator, is a recursive exercise with the same rules of engagement that apply to discussions: sanctuary conditions; negative veto regarding inclusion of policy possibilities; deliberate and unhurried; avoiding consensus or compromise. It's important to emphasize that the ultimate product, the Staff Work Report, is, as Gunderson (2006) describes, "conceptual rather than technical or quantitative" (p.21). Therefore, the iterative drafting process that begins in Stage 5 requires that policy possibilities be described in general with details sufficient to convey a distinct vision of each. During this stage, too, each possibility is retested against conceptual questions established in the earliest stages of the discussion process. Participants seek to imagine and describe what the world would look like if each policy possibility were implemented.

Stage six calls for joint sessions combining the lay citizen and expert panels, though in a public relations setting, where advisory panels are charged with developing organizational policies related to communication issues, a single panel approach is appropriate and this stage is not envisioned. However, in some applications of the IF deliberative process the two-panel

structure may be employed. In the joint panel version, panelists would explore elements of divergence and convergence between the two panels' findings. That exercise may lead to fresh ideas as well as to merging of possibilities.

With the single-panel approach appropriate for most public relations issues, or with the two-panel approach, the process now moves to completing the final Staff Work Report. The panel now serves to guide the facilitator in this task, helping to ensure that the document is a straightforward summary of participants' collective efforts, with no recommendations or arguments for or against any of the possibilities. The Staff Work Report, representing the culmination of the discussion process, also represents the beginning of more public discussion of the issue, with the ultimate aim of establishing policy that has been logically developed, thoroughly examined, and carefully considered. Continuing the CSR example, the Staff Work Report might contain organizational policy possibilities from perspectives such as a pure business case, a pure normative case, a mixed motive case, a responsive case, a pre-game case, a corporate citizen case, a global case, etc. Policy makers would then be able to conduct a deliberative process based upon the exhaustive work of the panel.

### *Summary*

Public relations managers can continue to establish themselves as essential components of the dominant coalition by consistently demonstrating the important skills they bring to the decision-making process. Practitioners continue to apply increasingly well-developed skill in critical thinking, situation analysis, and creative problem solving. By acquiring the skills associated with facilitation, practitioners can expand their value into the area of policy development, and because those skills applied to the IF process do not require extensive knowledge of the policy area, the public relations manager so qualified could exercise those skills in areas beyond public relations and organizational communication policies. The public relations manager thus becomes indispensable in an organization's policy development activities. Even within the public relations arena, a skilled facilitator could direct the process of crafting policies in the area of employee communication, community relations and other areas important to organizational vitality and reputation. An ongoing facilitation process, such as might be incorporated into advisory group activities, could serve as a valuable research tool in aiding public relations managers as they engage in the important process of issue analysis and management.

Another aim of this paper has been to argue that public relations managers ought to claim the arena of corporate social responsibility. Researchers from other disciplines such as political science, business management, sociology and economics lament the lack of a structured approach or definitive framework for developing organizational policies addressing CSR (Smith, 2003). The IF deliberative process offers an important component of that framework, and public relations managers acting as skilled facilitators can guide it purposefully and productively. CSR has ebbed and flowed for more than a century as management struggled to balance responsibilities to shareholders with nobler, if normative, aims, but intensified scrutiny enabled by advances in communication and transportation make finding that balance increasingly imperative. Doing so will require informed and unemotional examination of carefully developed policy possibilities, followed by high-order public discourse. Public relations managers are uniquely positioned, experienced and qualified to guide that effort.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This and other Interactivity Foundation documents are available through the Foundation's Web site, [www.interactivityfoundation.org](http://www.interactivityfoundation.org).

<sup>2</sup> The author of this paper was privileged to have participated in this workshop. Subsequently, he is teaching a spring 2007 graduate course called "Facilitating Corporate Social Responsibility" in which the precepts of this paper are applied.

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## PR, Community Building and the Challenge of Climate Change

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How is public relations to fulfill the community-building role some claim for it when the community faces a major disruptive threat? This paper explores that question in the context of local impacts of global climate change. It proposes adopting a community development strategy to help build local capacity to handle major risks.

New Zealand's Prime Minister, Helen Clark, has identified "issues around sustainability and climate change" as "the compelling issues of our time, dominating international forums and agendas" (*Prime Minister's Statement*, 2007). In a speech to Parliament, Ms Clark went further, proposing that New Zealand seek to become "the first nation to become truly sustainable" in the way its economy, society, environment and nationhood are managed, suggesting that such a commitment would define the country in the way its notable nuclear-free stance has done for more than two decades.

A particularly savvy politician, Helen Clark was reflecting a shift in both political and popular discourse on sustainability and also, especially, on climate change. More than five years ago, Demeritt commented that, "In little more than a decade, global warming has been transformed from an obscure technical concern into a subject of widespread public concern and international regulatory interest" (2001, p. 307). Now, helped perhaps by public awareness spurred by media interest in former Vice President Al Gore's Oscar-winning documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, the situation appears to be even more acute. The issue of climate change and its impacts may now have reached one of Breakwell and Barnett's "critical points". Although they are talking about risk events, when particular occurrences make possible harm actual, their description seems apposite:

Specifically, critical points are phases of varying lengths of time when the orientation, tempo or strength of the social image of a hazard changes significantly. Self interest, moral outrage and the arousal of fear are identified as principles that are instrumental in leading to an event achieving critical point status (2001, p. 9).

Arguably climate change debates illustrate all of these principles. Countries as well as corporations express reservations about what a commitment to reducing their contribution to greenhouse gas emissions would mean to their economies. Australian Prime Minister John Howard has said that while there is undeniable evidence that the climate is changing, "...the answer is not knee-jerk responses that harm the national interest" (*PM says carbon trading*, 2007). Activists and affected citizens alike articulate outrage over perceived inaction, or inadequate action, of governments and corporations in relation to climate issues. Fear both for the future of the planetary physical environment and for wellbeing at a localised level is a feature of climate change discourse. In Australia, the world's driest inhabited continent, these strands come together as drought affected farmers and townspeople not only express grave fears for their

future livelihoods but also blame governments for not doing enough to “drought-proof” their district. It is not only farmers who suffer (the archetypal picture of climate change impact in Australia is parched pasture) but also those whose livelihoods depend in some way on the land. In one town in Victoria, Australia – Leongatha -- more than 400 jobs at a dairy factory were threatened when the local dam’s water supply dropped to 15 per cent of capacity, provoking anguished appraisals not only of how to handle the immediate crisis but also of how to ensure it was not repeated. A survey showed not only that access to water was the top issue for locals but also “a strong sense of frustration that the relevant authorities have failed to plan for Leongatha’s water needs” (*Water tops real need*, 2007).

This paper is an initial exploration of how public relations could choose to involve itself in the way such climate issues are handled at a local level. Phenomena such as drought are “glocal” (A Dictionary of Sociology, “glocalization”, 2005) questions negotiated at international and national as well as at regional levels; here the wider considerations are excluded for reasons of scope. A particular geographic community may not be able to influence policymaking in national or international for a – but it can seek to affect how risks seen as related to climate change are handled locally. In Australia, although some voices argue that the unprecedented drought affecting large parts of the country is at least partly due to a change in the natural cycle of wet and dry conditions, there seems to be discursive closure around the idea that much of the problem results from global climate change.

### **Framing risk**

We seek to connect public relations with this issue for several reasons. One is that whether public relations professionals are involved or not (and they are not, always) corporations, governments and lobby groups use public relations techniques such as media relations and government relations to frame debates including those centered on risk questions such as climate change. As climate change is now assuming a prominent position in public agendas, it is appropriate to note the role of public relations in this framing. One does not need to delve into allegations of corporate funding of climate change deniers (Monbiot, 2006) to do this: framing issues is business-as-usual both for PR practitioners and those who seek to draw from the public relations toolkit. For example, in Toowoomba, Australia’s second largest inland city, the council launched a “new Toowoomba Water Futures initiative” to include “construction of a best practice advanced water treatment plant to provide a reusable water source” (*Toowoomba Water Futures Project*, 2005). The council’s media release did not mention that the water to be treated would be sewage effluent. The public relations role may extend beyond persuasive communication to programmed stakeholder dialogue and engagement designed to blunt criticism of social and environmental actions (Burchell & Cook, 2006). Such a brief would be consistent with the positioning of public relations as a boundary-spanning function helping manage the interface between the organization and the community. This kind of interaction may be undertaken as a form of risk management aimed at diminishing the “social risk” of negative campaigns by stakeholders driven by environmental concerns (Joyce & Thomson, 2000). According to Burchell and Cook, “Arguably the reduction of risk is a major driving force behind companies seeking to engage more directly with stakeholders through processes of dialogue” (2006, p.224). However, attempts to draw the sting of citizen ire from contentious debates will fail if their “risk management” rationale is organization-centered and is not founded on an understanding of the dynamics of the community concerned.

Often it is the risk-generators – organizations seen as being “part of the problem” in terms of their perceived contribution to climate change – that deploy public relations to either protect existing industrial practices or mitigate constraints on them. For example, mining industries are active in implementing programs designed to establish and maintain their “social licence to operate” through building social acceptability for their operations. Australian Prime Minister Howard has promised to look after them: “We are not going to sell out the thousands of workers in the mining and power generation industries” (*PM says carbon trading*, 2007).

Given the claimed consequences to humankind of not moving urgently to moderate its contribution to climate change (Stern Review, 2006; IPCC, 2007) citizens may call into question the ethics of PR activity by any industry perceived to be delaying or deterring appropriate action -- and industries which may be moving to mitigate their environmental impact may also vigorously defend the progress they are making. Contestation over risk assessments, optimum management strategy and attributions of blame and responsibility are a common feature of risk debates, including those that are fought locally.

In Toowoomba, a referendum was called for on the question of whether to add treated effluent to the city’s drinking water. The council held more than 160 public forums, ran an advertising campaign and organised taste tests of water that had been through the treatment processes proposed. Its “yes” case was buttressed by sound science arguments, affirmed by Councillor Michelle Alroe, who stated on a city website that, “I have looked at the research and I thoroughly trust the science, which is the foundation of our Water Futures Toowoomba project” (*Why we’re voting YES*, 2006). On the same website, Councillor Michelle Schneider commented:

Opponent’s (sic) claims regarding the health implications of water recycling is (sic) just scaremongering. Wherever recycled water is used, strict Health Department guidelines for water quality and management must be met. It is highly treated recycled water that has been strongly endorsed as a safe source of water.

I am appalled by the conspiracy theories, the political agendas and the misinformation surrounding the issue. The issue is water, and our lack of it. Are the people who are against Water Futures able to give the community a viable option? (*Why we’re voting YES*, 2007).

The ‘no’ campaign was led by citizens who argued memorably that if the referendum resulted in endorsement of the council’s plans, the city would become known as “Poowoomba” ([www.poowoomba.com](http://www.poowoomba.com)). The face-off was summarised in a radio interview on the day of the poll with Malcolm Turnbull, then the Prime Minister’s Parliamentary Secretary for Water and since appointed federal Minister for the Environment and Water Resources:

LISA MILLAR: What have you thought about the quality of the debate going on in Toowoomba over the last few weeks?

MALCOLM TURNBULL: I think the no case has obviously been a scare campaign. It's been based more on emotion rather than science.

LISA MILLAR: And the people who say "Poowoomba" - they're drinking sewage - what do you say to them?

MALCOLM TURNBULL: Well nobody's drinking sewage. The water that will be produced from this process, as I said, will be purer than the water in Toowoomba's dams today. So drinking sewage is nonsense, that's ridiculous.

I mean, this Poowoomba thing is ludicrous, it's childish. And it's only being promoted by those people on the no side.

(*Poowoomba: Turnbull supports treated sewage water*, 2006).

There was an economic argument, too: former mayor Clive Berghofer claimed that, "The perception our water will be 25% recycled sewage is already doing harm. People won't want to come here, others will leave. Property values will drop and jobs will go."

(<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/btn/teachers/activitysheets/2006/ep20/0808recycwater.pdf>)

The referendum resulted in a resounding defeat for the "yes" camp, with nearly 62 per cent of voters giving the water recycling proposal the thumbs-down. The debate and its outcome illustrate the perils of constructing persuasive communication campaigns. In a confrontation between different groups each claiming a rational foundation for their case, laypeople may well call for a plague on both houses, as

when the issue is precisely the competing factual claims of differing experts, nonexperts can hardly be expected to judge the scientific facts for themselves. Instead, they base their judgments about environmental risks on both the perceived credibility of the scientists in question and wider criteria about the kind of social and political commitments those risks involve (Jasanoff and Wynne, 1998) (Demeritt, 2001, p. 329).

It is not a matter merely of objective analysis facing off against emotional responses: as Demeritt points out, the cultural politics of scientific practice play a part in framing "and in that sense, constructing for us the problem of global warming" (2001, p. 308). The Toowoomba water fight illustrates that when a community is faced with a significant risk question to decide, people cluster into interest groups which, under pressure, tend to present differences as more significant than an outsider might judge them to be, and which use public relations techniques to advance their viewpoint.

The result can be a deterioration in the social (and the economic) fabric of the community as position-taking deepens into social divides and community development becomes a matter of repair rather than growth. However, such an outcome need not be a given if public relations practitioners and those who deploy PR techniques are willing to recognise that "post-normal" conditions call for responses that move outside familiar boundaries. By way of analogy, in the field of food quality, it has been argued that issues including purity, safety and ethics can no longer be resolved through normal science; rather, a new sort of "post-normal" science is required (Ravetz, 2002). In Australia, and arguably elsewhere too, normal approaches are no longer sufficient when considering how to handle climate change impacts a drought considered to be the worst in over 100 years (*Farm exports to be hit by 100-year drought*, 2006). If that contention holds, then public relations people who seek to legitimize organizations and their behavior through "community relations" programs may need to do more. Such programs, designed or maintained in order to maintain a "social license to operate" (Nelson & Scoble, 2006) seek to build social acceptability and allay fears about perceived risks associated with corporate operations through tactics such as providing information, opportunities to visit industrial plants and consultation with organizational leaders. However, their focus may be on the short-term rather than on confronting the social concerns associated with a long-run risk such as climate change, whose impacts may be felt over decades or more.

In economics, a long-run risk is a source of uncertainty that produces low frequency fluctuations whose volatility is almost negligible over a short time horizon but is larger over longer horizons (Croce, 2006). For an issue of this order, organizational responses need to be scaled up to more closely match the size of the threat. This may mean extending community relations programs into community development – helping to deal not only with the dilemmas of the present day but also strengthening the ability of the community to handle major risk in future. It is not sufficient simply to assume that the company knows what the community wants. In

discussing “the community” we mean those people resident in a particular geographic area; in talking about “community” (without the definite article) we have in mind such sense as those residents may have of being connected together through communication networks.

Like ‘risk’, ‘community’ is a malleable term open to a wide range of interpretations, as Kruckeberg & Starck point out:

The meaning of “community” has been devalued, defaced, disfigured – mugged, if you will – to the point that the word, itself, has been rendered almost useless. Of course, the concept remains functional if only because – like a Rorschach inkblot – it enables us to project our own sense of meaning onto the term (2000, p. 2).

Community is a highly contested concept and multiple discourses attest to the positioning of community across a spectrum from coopted agent of government and tool of business organizations, to perspectives that demonstrate respect for the need and capacity of communities to exercise their own agency (Everingham 2002, Lynn, 2006). Hallahan describes community as “one of the murkiest concepts in the social sciences and humanities” (2004, p.234), defining it himself as “any group that shares common interests developed through common experience” (2004, p. 243). There is also *communitas* which denotes intense feelings of social togetherness and belonging (Anthrobase.com), a spirit to which Kruckeberg & Starck referred when they argued that public relations “is best defined as the active attempt to restore and maintain a sense of community” (1988, p. xi). Only in this way, they asserted, could public relations fully participate in society’s “information and communication milieu” (p.xi). They saw the public relations practitioner’s brief as wider than being a communicator. It should, they held, include “seeking out and promoting discourse along all avenues”, an activity “which can help to build a sense of community among organizations and their geographic publics” (1988, p. 112).

According to Kruckeberg & Starck, public relations practice exists because of a loss of this sense, resulting from the social effects of new means of communication and transportation. Therefore, they propose, “community-building must be regarded as the highest calling of public relations practice” – and as the best way to serve society as well as its organizations (2000, p. 4). However, it must be asked to what extent the pursuit of this high calling can proceed in “post-normal” conditions when the economic survival of a community is at risk. Kruckeberg & Starck acknowledge that discussion of contemporary community-building raises “a host of issues”, especially that community work engaged in by public relations practitioners on behalf of what are seen to be vested corporate interests (2000, p.6) – a point to be discussed below. They identify eight ways in which, they suggest, practitioners could “restore and maintain a sense of community in their organizations and among stakeholders/publics” (2000, p.9, referring to their 1988 work, pp. 112-117). The first of the eight is particularly relevant to the present discussion: “Practitioners can help community members and the organizations they represent become conscious of common interests that are the basis for both their contentions and their solutions” (2000, p. 9).

In a paper that encompasses an extensive literature review, Hallahan makes a similar case, contending that the field of public relations “might be better called “community relations” (2004, p. 233). His argument for the community as the theoretical foundation for public relations theory and practice rests on four foundations: the pervasiveness of the community idea and ideal in everyday life and contemporary scholarship; conceptual imitations of the focus on publics in public relations; the rise of community-related theories in public relations scholarship and “the strength of community-building as a philosophy to drive public relations practice” (2004, p.233). He notes that other scholars have followed Kruckeberg & Starck’s lead, with the two most

explicit arguments advanced revolving around the ideas of strategic co-operative communities and of communitarianism.

According to Hallahan, Wilson (1996) held that building community requires corporations to possess long-range vision, a sincere commitment to community service, not just profit; organizational values that reflect the importance of people; cooperative problem solving and empowerment and a relationship-building approach to public relations. Wilson envisaged a genuinely co-operative, non-exploitative relationship between organizations and the community. Two of his colleagues, Rawlins & Stoker, averring that organizations have become detached through callous exploitation of communities, made a case for genuine community that included promoting autonomy and independence among community members and a willingness to sacrifice self-interests to promote the community's ideals and values (2001, n.d., in Hallahan, 2004, p. 251). Hallahan also traverses the scholarship that suggests communitarianism is a community-based approach relevant to public relations theory and practice and the work of others who propose symmetric, dialogic and transactional approaches to community (2004, p. 252).

According to Hallahan, community-building involves "the integration of people and the organizations they create into a functional collectivity that strives toward common or compatible goals." (2004, p. 259). He contends that community building "redirects public relations' focus away from its institutional focus and slavish emphasis on achieving organizational goals to address community citizenship" (2004, p.259), squares with the idea of public relations as having to do with the building and maintenance of mutually beneficial relationships and moves public relations from an emphasis on control "to the two fundamental functions that public relations performs: providing counsel about community interests and facilitating communication" (2004, p. 259).

Hallahan's prescription for organizational community-building is three-fold: community involvement, community nurturing and community organizing. Community involvement has to do with PR practitioners facilitating an organization or cause-related group's participation in an existing community, including taking part in discussions and dialogue. Nurturing goes further, to "fostering the economic, political, social, and cultural vitality of communities in which people and organizations or causes are members" (2004, p. 261), while community organizing involves the grassroots creation of new communities among disparate individuals with common interests.

Hallahan's examples of community nurturing include sponsorship, volunteerism, and philanthropy (2004, p. 261), while community organizing might see public relations approaches used to improve economic or social conditions in a particular neighbourhood or for members of a particular minority group. He notes that while "community shifts the organizational emphasis from the cold treatment of impersonal, often adversarial publics, to a warmer, more enlightened emphasis on collaboration and cooperation with others" (2004, p.264) this does not mean that organizations will necessarily act more responsibly or ethically. Indeed, creating communities that communicate effectively does not imply an ideal consensus (2004, p. 263).

Heath advances a "fully functioning society theory of public relations" (FST) (2006, p. x). He notes that critics often claim that public relations inherently works against a fully functioning society because of a penchant for deception and various "base acts" that work against the public interest. He points out that organizations have replaced single individuals in the citizenship roles needed for a fully functioning society. These organizations engage in robust combat, dialogue and hegemony to influence agendas, to put facts and values into play and to frame arguments. At its worst, he says, the role is to propagandize. At their best, these

organizations employ tactics to increase awareness and attract others – whether followers, supporters or customers – to participate in a co-ordinated enactment based on shared meaning, that leads to and results from enlightened choice.

In Heath's view, public relations best serves society and the organizations that help form it by putting into place this shared meaning, which he suggests should be involved in listening to people, resolving conflicts, fostering dialogue and taking part in collective decision-making. Heath suggests that public relations' future may rest with attention focused on the good of society instead of the communicator or organization. He notes humans are "collectivist animals" who work out individual and collective interests through the creation of shared meaning in communication and decision making infrastructures. Improving these infrastructures "requires insights into community as a geographic and mental context in which collaboration can be ideal" (p.x). Risk is one aspect of community that requires this insight: citing Douglas (1992) Heath notes that society occurs for the collective management of risks as the generation and distribution of resources.

His exposition of the fully functioning society theory of public relations is worth quoting in detail:

The FST of public relations postulates that individuals (individually and collectively) seek to make rewarding decisions in the face of risks posed by uncertainties that require enlightened decision making by obtaining information (facts), opinions, and policy recommendations from various sources (in varying degrees of collaborative decision making and dialogue) that are variously trusted as legitimate participants in the community infrastructure to foster mutually beneficial relationships through balancing systems, responsibly using control and power to the advantage of the community, cocreating meaning as shared narratives and identifications, and through meeting of normative social exchange expectations.

This theory presumes that individuals, *qua* individuals and in collectivities, are confronted with a reality fraught with chaos, entropy, and turbulence to which they wish to bring order through enlightened decision making. To do so requires shared meaning that rests on interpretations of information, weighing of values, and consideration of policy. Broadly, these choices are traditionally addressed through publicity and promotion as well as in contests over issues, responses to crises, and discussions of risk management (2006, p. 99).

Heath notes that to achieve a fully functioning society, corporate responsibility initiatives "must entail choices and actions that go well beyond the organization's narrow self-interest" (2006, p. 103). We argue that this "beyond" could include working to strengthen the community's own ability to handle major risk such as extended drought in the future, to help develop community resilience and thereby build reputational capital as the same time as "social capital" is increased. "Social capital" is another murky concept. According to Harper there is consensus around a definition that emphasizes the role of networks and civic norms while "research undoubtedly correlates high social capital, in the form of social trust and associational networks, with a multiplicity of desirable policy outcomes" (2001, p.6). Strengthening these networks may not be part of conventional community relations programs – but doing so may enhance community resilience and self-efficacy in confronting long-term risks.

By community resilience, we have in mind the definition of the UN's International Strategy for Disaster Reduction:

The capacity of a system, community or society potentially exposed to hazards to adapt, by resisting or changing in order to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure. This is determined by the degree to which the social system is capable of organizing itself to increase its capacity for learning from past disasters for better future protection and to improve risk reduction measures.

(<http://www.unisdr.org/eng/library/lib-terminology-eng%20home.htm>)

Community development (CD) claims this community capacity-building as its own province. CD claims to be a field of practice founded on principles such as social justice, equity, human rights and both ecological and social sustainability (Ife 2002, Ife and Tesoriero 2006). Community development is, however, tough to define. Brennan notes that, “There is an inconsistency in the definition, usage, and general understanding of what community development represents” (2004, p.1). He names several conceptualizations, such as the following: Community development is about purposive activity designed to alter local conditions in a positive way; about pursuing specific projects with an emphasis on building social relationships and communication networks and about community residents working together to address common issues (cf. 2004, p. 2). The power imbalance between decision-makers and those for whom decisions are made is always significant, if not central in CD; however, this does not imply a single discourse or an assumption that communities hold a single view of the common good (Little 2002).

While public relations may operate in self-interested, self-advantaging ways (Moloney, 2006) community development’s *modus operandi* includes challenging established interests whose activities may not square with what is good for the community. Notwithstanding presuppositional and other differences, in the context of our discussion – in communities grappling with climate-related risk questions – public relations and community development specialists can, we believe, form productive partnerships. Such partnerships need to be founded on a recognition of the mutual gains available from collaboration in a post-normal situation. Public relations is unlikely to escape its brief to serve the interests of those who retain its services, and community development is likely to retain its inherent suspicion of both PR and its masters. However, both can benefit the other. Public relations may well have access to organizational resources of money, media access, personnel and political connections beyond the reach of community development practitioners. Equally, CD people know how to access the “invisible colleges”, the fundamental networks of communication and relationship that are essential strands in any community’s dynamic. Public relations may be in a position to enable some unheard voices to find a forum. CD may be able to help PR make connections otherwise not available to it because of suspicion of corporate motives.

Even acknowledging that neither field can claim to have a mortgage on morality, the contention that they can work together challenges conventional notions of professional identity. On this basis, our argument may be seen as idealised. Yet an idealised approach can stimulate intellectual inquiry, as in the public relations literature, James Grunig did with his symmetrical communication research, and serve as a model for new forms of organizational-community interaction. Such new forms, we suggest, could be based on public relations and community development professionals collaborating in strategy-building on risk issues. Such collaboration need not be motivated by more than enlightened self-interest. A PR practitioner may see community development as offering a useful albeit longer term approach to achieving the client’s desired outcome, which might, perhaps, be community support for radical water conservation measures such as the phased introduction of recycled effluent to drinking water

supplies. A community development practitioner may see collaboration with public relations as a means of influencing an organizational agenda and of eliciting tangible support for measures to enhance community risk-resilience.

For both professions, the rationale for collaboration is the proposal that communities facing significant risk such as a one-in-a-hundred-year drought will look not only for answers to the substantive risk issue but also to the need to strengthen their resilience in coping with such matters, both immediately and in the future. They may valorize social cohesion over economic outcomes, or view the risk scenario they confront as providing an opportunity to strengthen social cohesion in ways that may, or may not, align with public relations campaign objectives. In effect, it is possible for public relations to become hoist with the petard of community priorities, with a community development focus.

However, in our view, a dualistic opposition between public relations and community development need neither exist nor stand in the way of communities finding viable approaches to the risk dilemmas they face, such as – in Australia – the local impacts of drought and diminishing or fragile water supplies. Our contention takes into account the work of critical public relations studies such as those by Mackey, who talks of scholars who “write from the perspective of a preferred world view where organizations always use public relations to “serve” communities – never to exploit populations or to extract advantage from those less organised and less resourced” (2003, p.4). Mackey’s favored “take” on public relations aligns with that of Leitch and Neilson (1997), who highlight the question of power relationships inherent in PR interactions. He paraphrases their argument as opposing “suggestions that public relations can always be a disinterested, power-neutral activity even if it is supposedly practised ‘symmetrically’ or along some other professional-ethical guideline” (2003, p. 5).

If Mackey and others are right, public relations can never escape the coils of self-interest as it works on behalf of the resource-rich to persuade publics that the status quo is the natural order of things. Such a public relations practice would discard the idea of “corporate community investment” – defined as “business involvement in social initiatives to meet the needs of the communities in which they operate” (Moon & Muthuri, 2006) – as failing to offer direct bottom-line benefit. Our response to such a position is that it is not necessary for PR to pretend to a nobility of motive it may not possess. What is necessary is for it to interpret the means of advancing that interest differently. Investing in community development can help achieve some key PR goals: enhancing legitimacy and creating more sustainable reputational capital. In this way, PR can fulfil the vision of making a contribution to community-building, but do so on a foundation of better access to community networks and more authentic partnerships that might otherwise be the case.

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**Function of Media and Function of Public Relations at International Crisis Situations:  
'Genocide Bill' and Turkey-French Relations**

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The adoption of the 'genocide bill' at the French Parliament on October, 12 2006 created a very uncomfortable situation in Turkey. The bill which is not yet a law says that it is a crime to deny that Armenians were subjected to genocide at the hands of Ottoman Empire. Before it has been passed in the Parliament, there had been negative news about France in the media about this action. Also one of the reasons behind that attempt had been explained as an 'attempt to hinder Turkey's membership to EU.'

The study analyzes the strategy of French companies operating in Turkey. By means of content analysis covering the period of one month including before the bill has been passed and after, the study looks into the response strategy (defensive or other) of French companies. The daily newspapers chosen for this study are the three top ones in terms of circulation and they represent different ideologies.

The study looks also how the media is presenting the issue to the public, how the French companies handled the critical situation and finally how the media including the columnists dealt with the same issue. The media has created a 'crisis' and how that has been managed by the French companies/brands and communicated via mass media and and other NGOs strategies will be discussed. Also the study summarizes the indepth interview conducted with the the President of Turkish-French Chamber of Commerce.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Short Background: Turkey-Armenian Relations and the Genocide Bill**

Crises never in fact go away. Many of todays crises are global in nature and public crises which many public relations people deal with can be described as crises that can be described, predicted and categorized (Newsom et al, 2000, p. 480). Although there had been an ongoing, unsolved issue between Turks and Armenians on defining what has happened in the past, that topic of discussion had became the topic of discussion for France and all had again restarted.

On 12th of October, 2006, French Parliament decided to criminalize denial that Armenian killings during World War I constituted genocide. The bill is submitted by the French Socialist Party. Law has passed with 106 votes in favor and 19 votes not in favor in spite of lobbying. Ankara interpreted it as passing a bill that punishes who disagree with Armenian allegations is against the universal norm of freedom of expression promoted by the EU (<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?newsid=56286>).

The bill publicly denying genocide of Armenians between 1915 and 1917 calls for a four year imprisonment and a fine up to 45,000 euros. It will become law only after the Senate approves it and the French Presidency signs it into law (Kanlı, 2006). In 2001, France officially

recognized the Armenian massacres as genocide and there had been boycott of French goods at that time as well.

The passage of the “genocide bill” sparked protests throughout Turkey. The protests varied and they had been initiated by different groups. The French companies operating in Turkey had to react to this. Government, officials, EU delegates, historians, journalists, NGOs, consumers, etc. had acted and the French companies had to do something. Boycott ranged from extreme to mid level and opinion leaders had mixed thoughts on those.

### **Issues Management and Crisis Management**

There are many definitions of an issue offered both by professionals and academics. An emerging issue is a condition or event either internal and external to the organization and if it continues, will have a significant effect on the functioning or performance of the organization or on its future interests (Regeister and Larkin, 2005, p. 43).

Not everything that appears on public relations’ screening can be dealt with, but monitoring helps management to foresee when an opinion is likely to be built around incidents or trends. According to John Bitter, issues management is a cyclical process with five steps: 1) sensing the problem (research) 2) defining the problem (judgement and priority setting) 3) deriving solutions (through policy and strategy) 4) implementation and 5) evaluation (Newsom et al, 2000, p. 102).

Also the lifecycle of an issue is important how to deal with it. John E. Mahon has three strategies, containment for an emerging issue, shaping for one that has media attention and is on the public agenda and coping for issues that face legislative regulatory or interest group action. When an issue is emerging, he recommends dealing directly with it or with people who are promoting it. According to him the most aggressive thing an organization can do is to shape the issue in its own way. To name some shaping strategies, total resistance, bargaining, capitulation, termination and cessation of activity. If it reached to the coping stage, the organization has no other choice than change its behaviour (Newsom et al, 2000, p. 102).

Bland (1995) says that issues management and crisis management are similar in that they broadly involve the same considerations and techniques. The biggest difference is time scale and sense of panic. Generally issues develop over months, crises over minutes. Issues management ideally prevent crises (Davis, 2004, p. 141).

From the country officials perspective this is an issue and a crisis and also from the affected parties’ perspective, namely French companies operating in Turkey, this should be taken as an issue as well before 12th of October 2006.

Crises do not have boundaries. It strikes individuals, sectors and any type of organizations ranging from nonprofit organizations to government agencies, multinational corporations, or even organizations that we even work or support like religious institutions (Barton, 1993, p. 3). In other words, the crisis has many facets and can be a complicated issue. They can show themselves at different times and in various degrees. It can also hit countries and it could be a crisis that can go on for many years. World Trade Center, mad cow or bird flu disease are some of the many examples of it.

It is the unexpected nature of events that creates a crisis situation. The first thing to do in a crisis is to determine the type of crisis. A scholar has categorized eight types of crises caused by either environmental forces or management failures. These are natural, technological, confrontation, malevolence, skewed management values, deception, management misconduct and business and economic. Also some use the banana index to describe crises: green for new

and emerging issues and problem situations, yellow, current and ripe, brown for old and moldy. In that respect, it will be correct to give 'genocide bill' crisis, the brown colour.

Easy access to information with democratization and modern communication technology made it possible for crises to be heard easily. This has an advantage: It is possible to communicate with the masses in a more quicker way and actions to correct it can take it sooner. The downside of it is that it is possible than in the past to learn more about crises: either it involves you directly or indirectly. However, it first reaches to us through the media, on the basis of their reporting the events are described to us.

This issue between France and Turkey related with another country, Armenia involves many parties, member publics, community publics including community leaders, community organizations, government publics, consumer publics, international publics, media publics, investor publics and employee publics. So, to a great or lesser degree, each public may be affected by this directly or affect one another by some means or other. There is direct environment which is publics central to the organization and publics directly affected by the crisis. The indirect environment are usually involved in the organizations' ongoing relationships with constituencies. Nimbus is the group/s that are not normally identified as being the organization's publics, but become such publics as the result of the crisis (Newsom et al, 2000, p. 485).

### **Crisis, News Media and Agenda Setting Theory**

Ronald D. Smith (2002, p. 92) says that news judgment is relative and that although public relations people attempt to predict newsworthiness, it is finally the gatekeepers who decide on what is news and who control the flow of information. Power of news, media is an important point of discussion especially when it comes to crises. Some questions:

- Can they make us care about an issue or act on it in a certain way because they report it?
- Are they only information sources that are used by audiences at their own discretion?

According to the agenda-setting theory associated with Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, the news media raise up an issue both they and their audiences consider areas of public interest. This leaves us with another two set of questions which are:

- Does the issue move into the public interest because the media report it?
- Or the media report an issue because it is already a matter of public interest? (Smith, 2002, p. 93).

Agenda setting refers to the variable degrees of attention the mass media give to certain ideas, issues or themes lending them more or less significance. There is no clear-cut cause and effect in agenda setting, but the impact of mass media in calling attention to an idea is considerable. Also some evidence suggests that the power of agenda-setting is diminished when the issue is abstract, than it is more concrete (Newsom et al, 2000, p. 202).

Reporters, editors, columnists, photographers, television crews, talk shows, radio people webmasters form the news media. Editorial side (described as uncontrollable media) can either help or hinder your efforts to handle the management of a crisis situation. (Caponigro, 2000, p.190).

Even in the very-well coordinated crises, a crisis may generate contradictory information. Many things occur, a lot of things are said and then it is not possible to have a clear picture.

### **Crisis- Public Relations and A Typology of Public Relations Responses**

Public relations are influential in assisting the shape public opinion. Edward Bernays, in his work on public relations published in 1923 argued that corporations could no longer deny the existence of public opinion. He argued that the responsibility of corporations is to educate

employees, stockholders, and masses, to understand the pulse of these groups and to be prepared for crises and public recrimination (Barton, 1993, p.17).

It is possible to define principles of crisis communications as follows:

- 1) *The Relationship Principle*: An organization can withstand both issues and crises better if they have established good long-term relationships with publics who are at risk from the actions or decisions of the organization.
- 2) *The Accountability Principle*: Organizations should accept responsibility for a crisis even if it was not their fault.
- 3) *The Disclosure Principle*: At the time of crisis, an organization must disclose all that it knows about the crisis or problem. If it does not know what happened, then it must promise to give all the information fully when he gathers.
- 4) *The Symmetrical Communications Principle*: An organization must consider the public interest. Public safety should be as important as its profits. The organization should engage in socially responsible behaviour when a crisis occurs (Paine, 2002).

Proactive and reactive strategies are two broad categories of public relations responses which could be categorized within itself as well. For example, proactive strategies are divided in itself as action and communication strategies. Action strategies are: organizational performance, audience participation, special events, alliances and coalitions, sponsorships, activism. Communication strategies are; Newsworthy information, transparent communication: (it deals with the awareness objectives of increasing knowledge and understanding. It is making your case.)

When criticisms have been made, an organization is thrown into a reactive mode. In responding, organizations should develop objectives and crisis communication management is rich with many different response strategies. Reactive public relations strategies are: pre-emptive, offensive, defensive, diversionary, vocal Commiseration, rectifying behaviour strategies and Strategic inaction (For detailed information on strategies, Smith, 2002, p. 103-109).

When we look at the genocide bill issue and its effects on the country's officials, firms operating in the country and the NGOs, we can discuss whether strategies are proactive, reactive or a mixture of these strategies applied. The other set of questions could be how consistent those strategies are with the past practices and whether they are influenced by its managers/leaders.

The essence of crisis management says that warning signs are recognized. Although some crises are difficult to predict, most crises are preceded by an incident (Caponigro, 2000, p. 43-46).

## **RESEARCH**

The research looks at how the Turkish media cover and define the genocide bill before and after it passed at the French Parliament, its consequences to French corporations, reactions of Turkish people and society and the crisis strategy of French corporations in Turkey.

This study is an attempt through media content analysis to analyze an international political crisis which might have many effects, but focusing on the effects to international brands/corporations operating in the local market. It also discusses the public relations response strategies of French firms and others during genocide bill discussions through the content analysis of three daily newspapers with different ideological stances.

### ***Aim of the study***

This study aims to analyze an international political crisis which affects international brands in the local market as reflected in the media with different ideologies and how public relations crisis strategies are applied during genocide bill discussions.

### **Limitations and Extensions of the Study**

Different ideologies may interpret or report the same issue differently. What is news for one medium and how the news content is presented to the audiences are important aspects for public relations people to do their work properly and this becomes even more crucial for PR consultants during crisis management.

In our research, the media selected is three daily national newspapers with different ideological stances. Hurriyet is a liberal and a popular newspaper. Cumhuriyet represents leftist side and Zaman represents the conservative voice (Islamic) in Turkey. Of these three newspapers, Cumhuriyet belongs to a foundation, Hurriyet belongs to a major media group- Dogan Media Group- with several newspapers, magazines, TV channels and activity in different sectors. Circulation of the newspapers in month of October 2006 are: Zaman 497,547, Hurriyet, 576,019 and Cumhuriyet 71,975 (Basin İlan Kurumu).

The content analysis has been done for a period of one month. The period 1 to 31st of October 2006 is covered. The 'subject of analysis' relates to a specific date and for our research, it was 12th of October 2006. Although it has been centered around a specific event, the coverage of the subject in the media before and after that important date could frame the subject to us.

The selection of types of content depended on the rationale and objectives of the study. Key words searched are 'Ermeni, Fransız Parlamentosu, sözde Ermeni soykırımı, boykot' (Armenian, French Parliament, genocide bill, boycott). The whole newspaper excluding sports pages and supplements are read with respect to these key words. Also columnists coverage of the news have been analyzed.

Although the researchers have included in their content analysis, photo, headline etc. they were not discussed in detail in this paper. In the study, there had not been attempts to talk to or conduct survey with the French firms and other firms whose names were mentioned in the media with respect to how they handled the situation. The indepth interview with the President of Turkish-French Chamber of Commerce was helpful to the researchers for getting more information about the issue and the reactions of officials, NGOs and French companies.

### **METHODOLOGY**

In the research, content analysis is used. The analytical categories of Ericson and his colleagues are revised (Hansen et al., 1998, p. 108-109). Also in our research, we used also indepth interview technique with the President of Turkish-French Chamber of Commerce, Yves-Marie Laouenan and it took place on February, 21 2007.

Newspapers communicate cues about the relative salience of the objects on their daily agenda. The lead story on first page, size of the headline, length of the story, they all communicate information on the salience of the various objects on the news agenda. Repeated attention to an object by the media is the most powerful message about its salience. The public uses these salience cues from the media to organize their own agendas, to decide which issues, persons or other objects are the most important. Over time, set of priorities seen in the news media become the agenda of the public (Carroll and McCombs, 2003 p. 37).

### **Sampling and Analysis**

All the three newspapers were analyzed in Istanbul University library for 15 days. In every 3 hours, the researchers had a break because concentrating on it more than 3 hours may cause

missing important data. A total 396 news from three newspapers were analyzed with content analysis method. The content analysis was made according to the below coding sheet:

### **Content Analysis Coding Sheet**

#### **Coverage of Genocide Bill**

##### NEWSPAPER

- 1) Hurriyet
- 2) Zaman
- 3) Cumhuriyet

##### DATE- MONTH- YEAR

##### HEADLINE

##### REPORTER/AUTHOR

##### ARTICLE LENGTH Column/inch (st/cm)

##### PAGE NUMBER

##### TYPE OF ARTICLE/ITEM

- 1) Main news story
- 2) Newsreport
- 3) Column

##### SOURCE CONTEXT

- 1) Interview
- 2) Official meeting
- 3) Press conference
- 4) International news
- 5) Journalist

##### PHOTO

- 1) Yes
- 2) No
- 3) Space of photo

##### TONE OF NEWS

- 1) Objective
- 2) Supportive
- 3) Negative

How much focus did the publication put on this issue, the tendency of the article, journalistic genre, page where it has been published, size of the article, photo, headline are all analyzed.

The researchers made a note of and wrote down all the news which were related with boycott, economy and French corporations/brands. The photos that were related with boycott were taken by camera.

All the three newspapers had different measures for one column represented in 'cm.' For Cumhuriyet, 1 column is equal to 4,5 cm, for Zaman, it is 5,5 cm and for Hurriyet newspaper, it is 6 cm. When the column/inch of each newsreport had been calculated, this had been converted to the total area by multiplying the column/inch with the appropriate column measure. (1 inch is equal to 2,54 cm.)

The news' contents were reanalyzed with two reseachers again after library work.

#### Research Questions

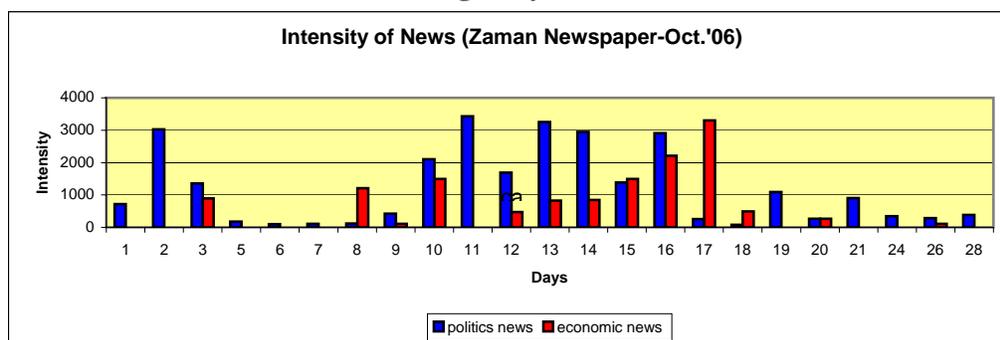
- 1) Are there any differences in approaching international crises among newspapers of the mainstream media that are ideologically different from one another?
- 2) What are reactive communication attitudes and its manifestation by the Turkish community including government, NGOs and other?
- 3) What are the proactive and reactive strategies of French companies/brands operating in Turkey with respect to how it was covered in the media.

## RESULTS

In all issues of three newspapers with different ideological stances, the tendency of the article (objective, supportive, negative) was investigated. Key words analysis has been done and content is read to find out about the strategies of NGOs, officials and French companies. Number of news in the medium with respect to the issue has been counted including the space that the issue has covered in the medium. On what category, the issue has been covered (page number or whether political/economical content) is also looked at. Photo, its space and title of the photo has been analyzed. Headlines have been noted and columnists' corners have been read to find about the tendency of the article.

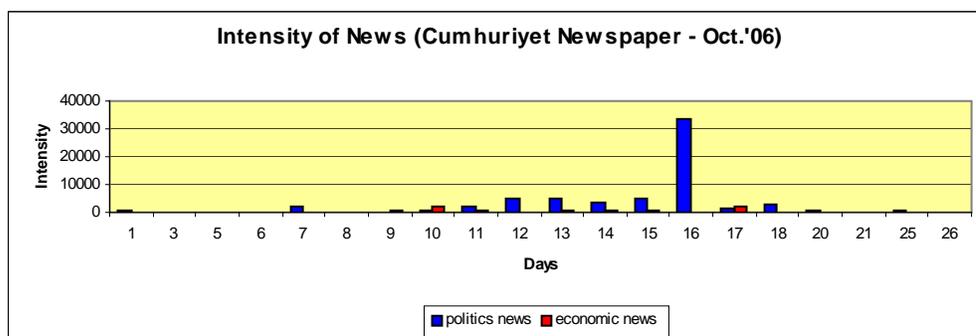
The below charts have been included to answer the research questions and the discussion of the study is made with respect to those.

**Q1: Are there any differences in approaching international crises among newspapers of the mainstream media that are ideologically different from one another ?**



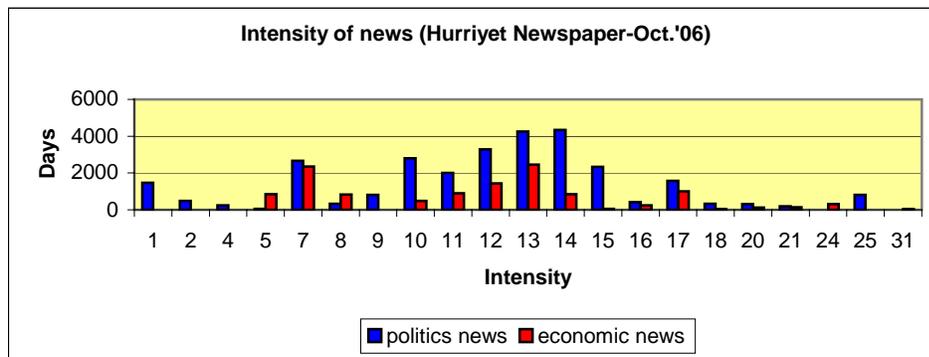
Graph: 1

Zaman newspaper compared to the other newspapers have covered the issue more starting earlier and going on all throughout the month regularly. The coverage is more on economics aspect and the subject has first appeared on 3<sup>rd</sup> and then later on 8<sup>th</sup> of October. Except for 11<sup>th</sup> of October, the period 10 to 18 October approaches the issue in economics and political perspective.



Graph: 2

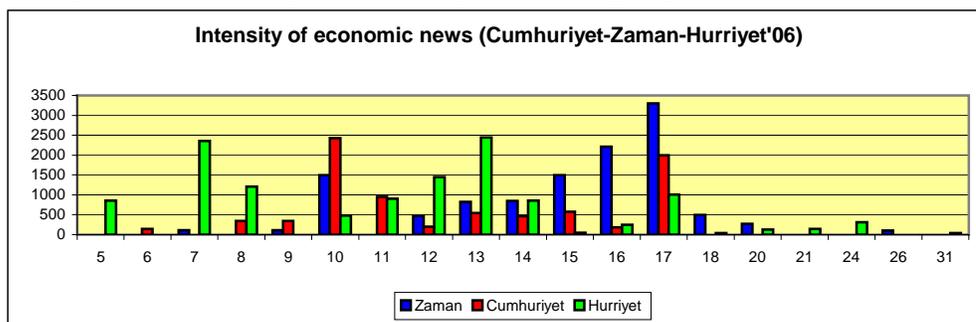
Cumhuriyet newspaper's coverage of the news is concentrated on 10 to 18<sup>th</sup> of October. It is at its peak on 16<sup>th</sup> of October. The issue is mostly approached through politics lenses.



Graph: 3

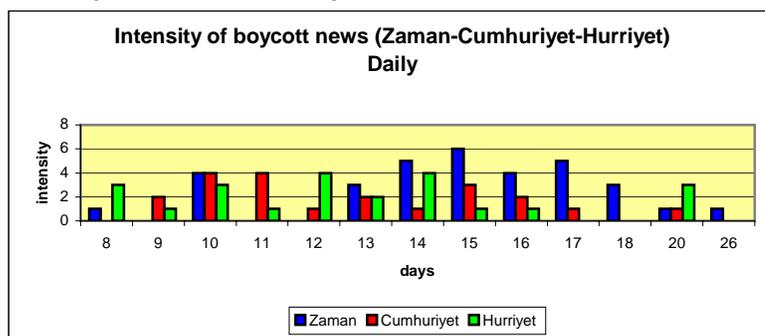
Approaching the topic through economics lenses first happens on 5<sup>th</sup> of October at Hurriyet newspaper. Except for 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> October issues, the topic is investigated in politics and economics till 17<sup>th</sup>.

In Graphs 1, 2 and 3 we can clearly see the intensity of political and economics news. Only in Zaman newspaper, economics news' intensity is higher than politics when compared with Hurriyet and Cumhuriyet. Cumhuriyet had rarely any economic news about Genocide Bill.



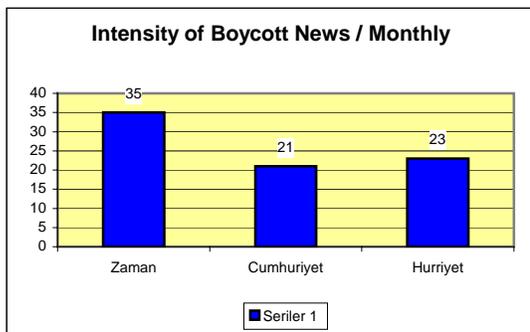
Graph: 4

Graph 4 shows the three newspapers with respect to differences and similarities to economics news. Especially after French Parliament accepts Genocide Bill on 12<sup>th</sup> of October, the intensity of economics news was higher in Zaman newspaper and mostly about boycott news. Only in 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of October the intensity of economics news are higher in Hurriyet and it had been always low in Cumhuriyet.



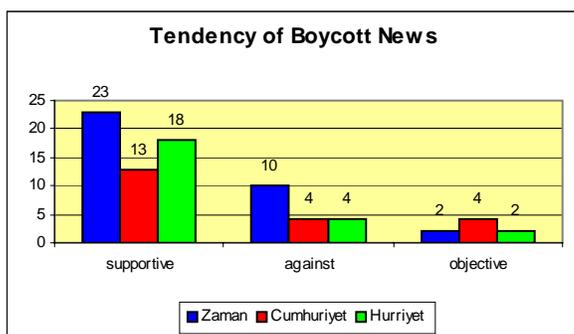
Graph: 5

Graph 5 shows how 'boycott' word among three newspapers is covered. The graph summarizes how many times each newspaper have used the boycott word each day. The days which 'boycott' word has not been mentioned are excluded. Zaman newspaper is the first to mention it and it deals with this longer than Cumhuriyet.



Graph: 6

In October, Zaman newspaper covered boycott topic more than the other two newspapers.



Graph:7

The news reports of all three newspapers are less objective, but more supportive (positive) of boycott. Zaman has 23 news reports that are supportive of boycotting and this is followed by Hurriyet (18) and Cumhuriyet (13). Cumhuriyet and Hurriyet had 4 articles which were against boycott, but this is 10 in Zaman.

None of the columnists in each newspaper wrote unfavourably about French companies. They were not in favour of boycotting. A total of 118 columns covered the subject in the month of October 2006. Of those columns, 34 are from Zaman, 37 are from Hurriyet and 47 are from the Cumhuriyet newspaper. (In Turkey the newspapers are very rich in columns. Although the columnists contribution each day for a newspapers vary, in average Hurriyet has 13, Cumhuriyet, 12 and Zaman newspaper has 7 columnists.

The three charts below summarizes how Zaman, Cumhuriyet and Hurriyet newspapers have dealt with boycott and how many times they have mentioned names of French corporations/brands. The black box in the charts shows the names of French corporations and brands to be boycotted and white box is indicating that they should not.



Chart 1  
Zaman Newspaper

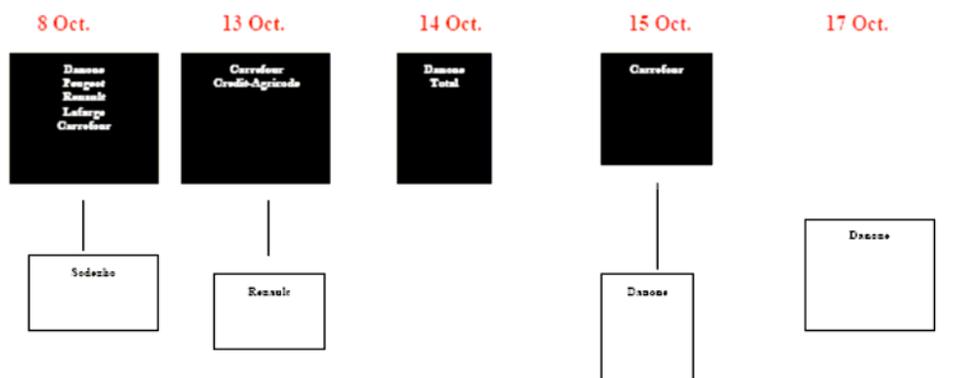


CHART2  
Cumhuriyet Newspaper

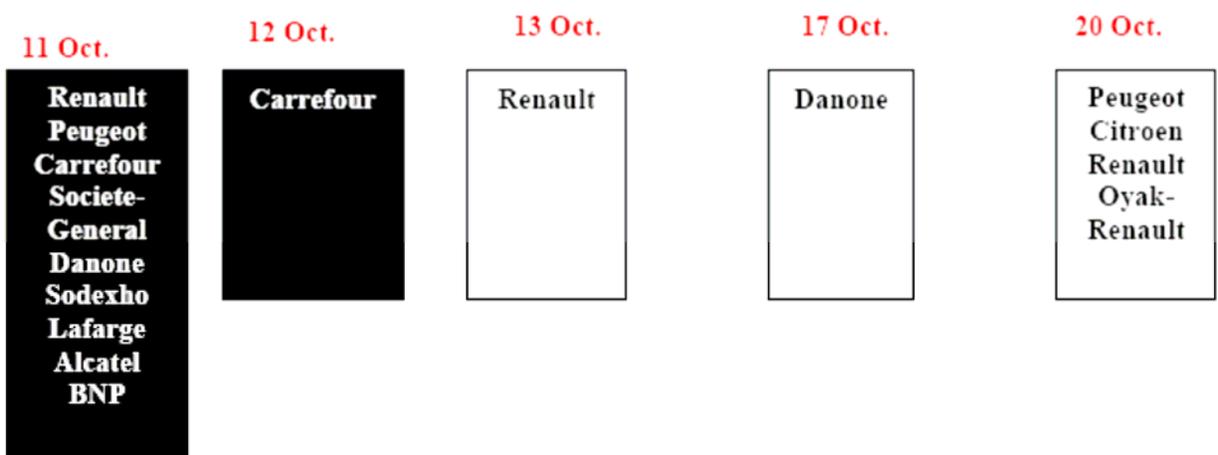


Chart 3  
Hurriyet Newspaper

When we analyze three newspapers; Zaman mentioned more and also more than once some French corporations and brands aggressively and only two days (16-17 October 2006) positively. Considering the intensity of boycott news in Zaman, Zaman had supportive tendency to boycott and it is the one which in a way provoked its readers to boycott. But, in Hurriyet only on two days which were in a way critical days (11 and 12th of October) the French brand names mentioned, and the other days French brand names mentioned in positive news. The percentage of boycott news in Zaman and Hurriyet are not so different in Graph 7, but from Chart 1 and Chart 3, we can easily conclude that more French corporations' names have been mentioned in Zaman than Hurriyet newspaper.

It has been noted that as a liberal newspaper Hurriyet is sensitive to boycott news and although it covers the issue, it had been sensitive not to mention the brands names. In the news, boycott events mentioned without giving names. Advertising revunes can play a role in not mentioning the brand names in Hurriyet. Zaman, on the other hand, is a more conservative newspaper and with nationalistic stance they had a tendency of supporting boycott with mentioning the French brand names. In addition to negative editorial content, we noticed that advertising of LCWaikiki in Zaman claiming that they are not a French company.

The advertisement says that in some e-forums and web sites, LCWaikiki has been identified as a French firm and therefore in order to correct this, this advertisement is given.

When compared with the other two newspapers, Cumhuriyet newspaper had a balance in reporting boycott. The brands names were few and even when there were boycott news, there positive news as well on the same day.

## **Q2: What are reactive communication attitudes and its manifestation by the Turkish community including government, NGOs and other?**

The below tables classifies the media outlets, the action/remark made in the media by dividing the one month period into before 12th of October 2006 and after 12th of October 2006. Also names of activists and French firms are mentioned. The column have not been analyzed. The first French firm to be mentioned in negative terms is Total. It is also the first one boycotted by the Consumers Union.

### **Cumhuriyet, 1-12 October 2006**

European Council criticized Chirac.
CHP and AKP representatives (members of Turkish Parliament) went to Paris
Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (TUSIAD). Turkish week in Paris. Comment by Tuzmen that economic relations can go wrong. Michel Melot (MEDEF) President. Turkish-French Business Council equivalent comment on economy
Spokesperson from External Affairs: Turkish French relations will be affected
Meeting of Prime Minister with representatives of French companies.
Algeria genocide by France and if denied they should be punished as well.
TUSIAD President talked with Peugeot, Renault, Lafarge, Carrefour representatives
Worker Party protests. Protest French products on 13th of October
Stop defense bid (helicopter) and nuclear facilities bids
Algeria will be discussed in the Turkish National Assembly
Armenians fought against Turkey: Turkish History documents
Prime Minister's freedom of thought message to Sarkozy:
France should look into its own business
Will damage Turkey's European Union membership
70,000 Armenians that work illegally in Turkey should be sent back
The Council of Higher Education (YOK) President Tezic wrote a letter to Chirac
French products will not be in bids. Red list from the military.
Not a direct message from the government, but will not prevent boycotting of the public of French products.
NGOs say if passes as a law, French products will be boycotted.
Ankara Chamber of Industry (ASO) do not burn French products on the streets
ASO President plan to visit Paris Chamber of Industry and Commerce
Consumers Union President, 'we will protest one product each week'
Ankara Textile Industry Association:we will cut our economic ties with France
Foreign Investors Association (YASED) President 'be careful with protests and boycotts'
Armenian Patriarch, politicians and opinion leaders are reactive to France
Istanbul Senate protested
French historian wants to be a Turkish citizen.

Algeria and Tunisia are given as examples. France should first clarify this
We will be in their position if we give Algeria and Tunisia as an example
Lang is against genocide bill.
Turkish French Chamber of Commerce do not boycott. Be organized for economic consequences
Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) went to Paris. Istanbul Chamber of Commerce (ITO) precautions should be made ASO: 'the industrialists should not buy French products.' French Arcelor is supporting Turkey.
Reaction from Lagendijk
Turkey Bar Association warned: 'we will cut our ties with France'
Turkey Textile Industry Association (TGSD)'economic relations should continue'

**Table 1****Cumhuriyet, 13-31 October 2006**

TGSD relationships will go on because this is mutual benefit
Turkey Tradesmen Association (TESK) wrote a letter of pressure.
TESK circular notice: 'do not display any French products'
Consumers Union: We will announce each week a French product to the public and we will spread the boycott
Statement of President that if it passes as a law, France will be a loser, not Turkey
Istanbul Bar President, Izmir Bar president, ASO, TUSIAD criticize, Hrant Dink (reporter) says accept it cool
Agaoglu Construction can break the agreement with Carrefour. Oyakbank-Credit Agricole also can have problem.
ATO declaration: French firms should not be included in public bids
TUSIAD the best reply: do not make any changes on our route to EU.
Renault said in Bursa 5,500 people work and in the last 10 years 200 million euro investment. Renault believes in Turkey
French historians/academics are protesting
President Sezer, not acceptable
Prime Minister suggests that buying or protesting French products should be given a second thought. Calculations should be made.
Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality: Algeria monument to be built in the French street
Consumers Union started boycotting each week French product, Total is the first one. 25 branches, brochures, local meetings, stands and through websites they will announce it.
Bahcesehir University: petition to European Human Rights Court (AIHM)
Workers Party demonstrations in Izmir. IP President tore apart French products
Attack to Gima market at Turgut Reis (Carrefour owns 60% of the market)
LCWaikiki advertised in newspapers by saying that they are not a French company
Danone will organize a press meeting. 'We grew up as a Danone Turkey family'
Turkish National Assembly will condemn French Parliament's decision
Turkey Youth Union (TGB) members protested
A market in Nigde removed French products from its shelves
A tie seller burnt French ties in front of Atatürk's monument
President of YOK returned its Legion d'Honneur
The first protested brand Total's sales had by decreased by 30%.
Danone petition campaign 23,000 signature will be sent to the French Parliament.
Turkey will open a court if it becomes a law
Letter to the French Ambassador
The Radio Television Supreme Court (RTUK) suggests not to buy French programs
Three lawyers from Ankara Bar claimed that Chirac humiliated the Turks
Amnesty Turkey criticized the French Parliament

**Table 2****Hurriyet 1-12 October 2006**

Belgium Prime Minister Deputy said 'I am on your side'
Response to Chirac from Ankara
French External Affairs Minister says that he supports Turkey's accession to EU
Letter of Sezer
Prime Minister's planned meeting with French businessmen.
Stalin and Hitler did what you have done.
Telephone conversation of foreign affairs Minister with French minister of foreign affairs. Forget about all bids.
Turkish General Staff (TSK): military relations will be suspended France will be hindered from defense bids.
Letter to members of ASO to write a letter of protest to Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry. We will not use French products and show a national reaction.
Limit the flights of Erivan and Istanbul. Prohibit France from public sector bids
Foreign Investors Association (YASED) President: do not bomb yourself, boycott can harm us
Turkish-French Commerce Association: This is a political thing and the solution should be political, not economic. French firms operating in Turkey employ 65,000 people
Turkish-French Commerce Association: sent 700 letters and we are giving powerful statement to the French media
Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce: if it passes, then we will warn our member firms not to do business with French firms. Also we will tell the public not to buy French products
Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce sent a letter to the French Chamber of Commerce
Consumers Union protests one French product each week if it passes.
Bid list
TOBB President went to Paris for a meeting with the French business people. Before his visit, visited Turkish President Sezer and Sezer told him to tell that the economic relations may go bad.
French writer wants to be a Turkish citizen to protest it
Lagendijk claims: draw back the law. He signed it with Holland Turkish Workers Union and sent it to the French Parliament
TOBB President visited the French businessmen. French businesspeople promised to be more effective and they are concerned that the French and Turkish economic relations will be damaged and they think it will pass in the Parliament
Ministry of Health formed a list of medicines, parfum, creams etc. and if it passes, their import from France will be stopped.
ASO President will visit Turkish associations in France.

**Table 3**

**Hurriyet 13-31 October 2006**

YASED: First go to AIHM, try to solve things through law, then we can look into what we can do. TUSIAD, do not change the route to EU. Turkey need consistent politics. TOBB President condemn what is happened. Istanbul Chamber of Commerce (ITO) give a reaction that matches with us.
TESK: Remove French products from shelves. Members of the Federation will be guided on this
Consumers Union: products that will be boycotted will be announced.
ATO: limit the bids. Let's have visa for France. Open a court against France, but do not put their flag under fire
Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (MUSIAD) President: NGOs should coordinate with one another with respect to how to react against France. People who have received medals from France should return them back
Young Businessmen Association of Turkey (TUGIAD) all sort of diplomatic and economic relations should be increased
French author will be a Turkish citizen
Gunduz Aktan says: A park against humanity should be built at Halic district.
In Ankara at Paris Street protests, demonstrations with drum and clarion
Prime Minister. We have to have second thoughts about boycotting. What we gain what we lose?
Travellers' boycott will be increase at 'Kurban' Holiday. There are no cancellations at 'Seker' Holiday
Association of Turkish Travel Agencies (TURSAB) President spoke about the cancellations of tours
Interview with a travel agency vice president: 'we have to take into consideration the reactions of the public'
Consumer Rights Association President: 'protest companies that do not invest in Turkey, that do not employ Turkish people and protest electronics, makeup, and durables.
Environment and Consumer Rights Association: Do not travel to France. Do not use any product with French patent
Consumers Association do not buy products which say made in France. Do not send children to French schools. Do not go to French restaurants. Do not consume French wine, cheese, and parfum.
Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association stopped agreements with French businessmen. 390 businessmen in Ankara said that they will not go to holidays and meetings. Ege Textile Industry Association decided not to participate in the fairs.
LCWaikiki gave an advertisement saying that they are not a French company.
Turkey Youth Federation has protested in front of French Embassy in Ankara
Workers Party protested in front of the consulate.
Independent Office Workers Association reacted in front of Ankara French Embassy. Opened protests signs.
Turkey Youth Federation President burned a coffin, song National Anthem and left black garlands
Workers Party, İzmir branch, Osmaniye Journalists Association and Active Reporters Association protested.
30 French journalists are in Turkey. Oya Eczacıbaşı hosted them
Tourism Volunteers Platform: flags in front of hotels should be hang half.
Touristic Hotels Association remove all.
Tezic, YOK President returned his legion d'honneur.
Danone from its press conference: started petition. Plan to gather 23,000 signatures till 30th of November. Their President wrote a letter to Parliament President. He also wrote a letter before 12th of October.
Automotive Distributors Association, Peugeot, Citroen, Renault They have many employees in Turkey. This is bad for us. We are expecting a regression in 2007
Oyak Holding General Manager claim that they will analyse their relations with French partners while taking into consideration Turkey's benefit. Renault has a press conference and supported it. Rather than having populist approaches, there should be more rational strategies and that the government should set the light.
Three lawyers have complained about Chirac for insulting Turks
Foreign Affairs vice president responsible for European relations: France's decision does not mean anything to us.
President of Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry is coming to Turkey to visit TOBB for a symposium. They are expected to see Erdogan and say that they do not agree with this decision.

**Table 4****Zaman, 1-12 October 2006**

Belgium Vice President: 'history is written by politicians only under totalitarian regimes.'
Emphasis on economics. Anxiety is great, serious uncomfot, a hit to relations. The Prime Minister calls the representatives of 30 French firms.
Turkish French Chamber of Commerce members sent letters to French senators and members and its 430 members started signature campaign (petition) Firms' name are quoted. Danone, Peugeot, Lafarge, Renault, Carrefour. Boycott is used for the first time.
ASO President ask for an appointment from President of Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry and is rejected. ASO has sent letter to 3,200 members as well.
Foreigners support Turkey
ASO President said not to boycott. Ankara Textile Industry Association, if it passes, we will cut the relations.
TekGıda Workers Syndicate boycott French products. Consumers Association President, if accepted, boycott a French product each week. Oyak-Renault, Citroen and Peugeot, if boycotted, we will be in serious trouble. Distributors claim that it will be bad for both countries
If law passes, nuclear energy bids will be barred from France. Erdogan first mentioned boycott, but he limits it to tenders
Prime Minister is lobbying. Sarkozy's speech on why the Turks do not recognize genocide.
What has France did in Algeria, Senegal, Tunisia and Cad? Erdogan's reaction
French historian wants to be a Turkish citizen. Quote from a French person that he loves Turkey.
Finnish President's support to Turkey
Turkey's Armenian Patriarch is against it
Chirac does not confirm the genocide bill in the French government
Armenians have opened court to Paris consul general. He has won the case because he rejected genocide on the Internet
Sarkozy's political consultant is against genocide bill
Reaction will not only be in political terms. French firms and French firms in civil and military bids will be thrown out. The public supports that.
French ambassador warned. Le Monde warned representatives of Parliament and Lagendijk warned as well.
Representatives of Turkish businessmen ara lobbying in France. President of Turkey-Armenian Businessmen Association says that this is not France's business. This is for hindering Turkey's membership to EU.
Le Monde newspaper has warned representatives of the Parliament. Paris Consulate Genereal Aydın Sezgin's case is discussed. Nazım Hikmet has been removed from citizenship because he said there is Armenian genocide.

**Table 5**

**Zaman 13-31 October 2006**

TOBB President said that he will not continue bids with French firms
TUSIAD: 'this is a mistake. Concentrate on reforms on freedom of speech and do not change route from European Union.'
Business people are reacting, but firms that do business with French firms prefer to remain silent. NGOs called for boycotts
ATO boycott
MUSIAD boycott
International Investors Association 'do not boycott firms that invest in Turkey'
TUGIAD: 'boycott will harm Turkey'
Software firm will not go to Paris to a fair on defense
Agaoglu Construction has broken the agreement on 'My Country' project with Carrefour
Turgay Ciner, owner of Sabah newspaper and ATV TV channel, cancelled the plane he will but from France.
Irem Tour's owner cancelled the helicopter order
Property Investments Partnership Association do not punish the firms without seeing the results
Oyak is silent, but its French partner Renault insists to be in Turkey despite differences in opinion
Tradesmen Confederation asked for not selling French products in shops. They claim to start the boycott with strategic products. For example, not with perfumes but with markets.
President of Consumers Association 'We will not buy products made in France. We will not send our children to French schools. We will not travel to France. We will not buy exported products.
Leading French firms have been mentioned.
Reaction from European Union member countries
Protests from Turks living in Holland
Lobbying of Armenians are strong, but lobbying of Turkish people's living outside Turkey is not.
Consumers will boycott a product each week. The list starts with Total.
LCWaikiki has an advertisement saying that they are not a French company
Kursat Tuzmen (official) said boycott. Consumers Association boycotts Total. Consumers Rights Association Consumers Rights Protection Association said boycott.
International Investors Association do not boycott. Irem tour has cancelled its two planes out of six because of boycotting. French firms' names have been mentioned.
Reaction from Total distributor
Do not participate in fairs in Paris.
Ankara Drivers Association black ribbon to 7,000 taxis.
Major general returned his medal
ATO president wears a pin with moon and star
Istanbul Municipality will place a monument of Algeria Independence at French street
Prime Minister says that we have to calculate the cost of our actions
Anavatan Party Group vice president wanted to change its Peugeot car
Chirac's apology
Kiler market decided not to sell French products
A shopping center at Konya put on labels to say that this is a French product on 100 French products
Real has labelled its products.
Malatya Municipality markets (11) started boycotting
Carrefour claims sales have gone down. Total also faces a sales decrease of 30%
Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association are selling their French cars.
Members of Anadolu Industrialists and Businessmen Association in Bursa have decided not to use French products. Members that are from tourism are cancelling France tours.
ASO is not favor of spilling yoghurt and burnings flags. Instead visa should be issued to France. Defence bids should not include French firms. Konya Chamber of Commerce President says that the dosage of boycott should be adjusted
LCWaikiki advertised saying we are Turkish company
Carrefour parking lot, empty. Weekends few people are visiting
Kiler market has put up posters saying they stopped selling French products. They claim to do it because their consumers want
Onur supermarket manager say that buyers of Danone brand bring it back, but not yet a big reaction
Integrated Brands Association: not a specific reaction now, but precautions should be taken
Denizlispor that has an agreement with Le Coq sportif is rethinking about cancelling it. Sivasspor will not buy French sports products. They may start game five minutes late to protest
Manisaspor President: black ribbon in the matches.
Ayhan Bermek give a logical reaction, suitable with UEFA.
Caykur Rizespor President says we can participate in the protests
Kayserispor Vice President says that will protest without being too much.
Pascal Nouma will shout 'no genocide'
Buyuk Birlik party's protest to France with eggs and yoghurt
President of Integrated Brands Association: shopowners' are concerned that the reaction should be transferred to action. A market in Erzurum removed French products from its shelves. A market in Nigde has burned the products. Sales of cosmetics have fallen down People who go to shopping do not visit shelves of Vichy and L'Oreal products. Consumers talk about how they have got rid of French products
Business world and consumers want the government to have force. Merkez Bank should withdraw money from France. A survey conducted among businessmen: 40% of them say no bids in public sector and warning. 32% agree on boycott. 5% say lobbying and similar thing should be done to France with respect to Algeria (18%)
Danone's press conference.
A market in Erzurum declares that they will not sell French products. Talked to consumers. In Nigde, French products have been burned. Begendim markets will not sell French products
Reaction from Armenians living in Syria.
French Embassy in Turkey. French firms employ 45,000 people in Turkey. French and Turks should get together and solve it.
It is not wise to boycott French firms with local partners. Firms such as LCWaikiki and Avon are assumed to be French and are also boycotted. International Investors Association boycott only the products imported from France. On the top list prepared by Consumers Association, Total is placed as number one. They remove Carrefour because it supports many sectors and employ many people. Consumers Association says that list on the internet is open to manipulation. President of International Investors Association says it is no good to punish firms that produce in Turkey and that pay their taxes here. Names of these firms are mentioned and also imported from France.
YASED President is against boycotting French firms that are with Turkish partners. Consumers Association claim that Total's sales went 30% down. Carrefour is removed from boycott list
Danone will send a letter to French Senate members. The letter will be signed by 23,000 people by of 30th November. They assume that sales of purchase points will

participate as well. Also before 12th of October, Danone President has sent a letter to the French Parliament head. They can advertise in French newspapers. Danone claim that their sales have not been affected.
President of International Investors Association 'this is a case that should involve legal dimensions and do not pull the subject to economic dimension.'
Consumers Association says that sales of Total has went down and they have been criticized for choosing a firm that has many employees. They claim they wanted to have a big effect so they start with it. Media coverage about boycott in the world press. He claims they are successful. Chirac said sorry.
Turkish assembly warned: two countries will have a blow on economic, military and political relations
TUSIAD equivalent in Paris claim that Turkey's reaction will be bad for French firms operating and investing in Turkey. Sabancı has invited the its President. TUSIAD says the French private sector should share what they are thinking to its own publics
ISO: 'boycott should not be a solution. Rather then cutting relations, dialogues should be developed
President of Kayseri Chamber of Industry: reaction should be legal and logical
A list of genocide done by European countries are being prepared.
RTUK's suggestion not to buy French produced communication products and broadcast
Turks in France, UNEFT President agree that they did not react enough.
15 pilots from private airlines say they will not drive airbuses
TUYAP: Armenian Publishing Association will not come to the book fair. Two French authors will not come either.

Table 6

As seen from the tables, Zaman newspaper had mentioned more civic groups and organizations and French brands than the other two newspapers during one month. When we look at the proactive/reactive strategies in terms of Smith's list, we see that there had been activism and alliances/coalitions in action strategies. What has been done, has been shared also with the media through interviews or official statements or meetings. In terms of reactive strategies, offensive strategy has been used. It had been in terms of attack, embarrassment and threat. Turkey thought that they are right in their claim and that they attacked in various degrees. Also they have reminded France of their colonial past, using threat and embarrassment.

A lot of denial strategies are noticed as well through the content analysis made. Turkey refused to except blame saying that the problem did not occur and even if it did, it is not related with them. They also used blame-shifting reminding France what they have done with Algeria, Tunisia etc. Accident strategy is used as well. (factors beyond anyone's control led to the problem) meaning that Armenians are killed but it is not genocide, and there was a reason for this dreadful thing to take place at that time. Also Turkey positioned itself as a victim (target of criminal). They interpreted it as what France is doing is political. They have a different agenda and Armenians are not the issue. They also put forward that this is done deliberately to hinder Turkey's membership to EU. Also they have used association strategy (the organization claims that it is an inherited problem). 'This has been done in the past during Ottoman Empire many years ago.'

Through content analysis, two things came forward. One is there had been support from foreigners and important famous people such as an officials from European Union or even individuals from France. The other dimesion related with this is that some actions taken by associations or public are very emotional and dramatic.



**Photo :** Zaman Newspaper "We don't sell. We boycott France which shows its real face by insulting our history through passing Genocide Bill and we do not sell French products in our stores." Kiler markets chain has stopped selling French products and Kiler is known as having a religious affiliation close to ideology of Zaman newspaper.

**Q3: What are the proactive and reactive strategies of French companies/brands operating in Turkey with respect to how it was covered in the media.**

The actual potential damage to the French corporations is not known and from the public side, since there is not public opinion surveys conducted, it is not exactly known what the public is thinking of France.

The French corporations acted as they were organized even though they were not prepared. They kept calm, they acted together and sometimes some firms such as Danone or French car industry leaders had taken the initiative. We see for example Danone organizing a press conference and petition campaign and taking the lead or Renault saying that they are employing many Turkish people. Some French firms localised themselves claiming that they are Turkish and focus on the benefits of being in Turkey. Carrefour, Renault and Danone emphasized this. Use of advertising has also been used by certain firms who have not been mentioned in the newspaper within the editorial context. For example, LCWaikiki used advertising, controlled media, to tell that they are a Turkish company. Avon tried to explain that they are not French. Total who had been attacked very much from the beginning did not step forward. Danone used an active strategy instead of a defense strategy than of all the mentioned companies

When we look at the newspapers reporting of the subject, we conclude that Zaman newspaper had an aggressive strategy. It attacked almost all French brands and firms and mentioned their names. There are only 3-4 positive pieces of articles. Cumhuriyet had fewer mention of brand names. It approached the topic from a political perspective rather than in terms of economy. It had more of ‘do not boycott news’ and more columnists wrote about that subject. Hurriyet newspaper did not mention names in an offensive way. Brands and firms have not been mentioned. This could be related to the fact that the since Dogan Holding has a very important share in the media sector and has advertising revenue from corporations, they may have been careful. The newspapers reported the case according to their ideological stances.

**DISCUSSION AND FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS**

In international crisis situations, the ideological stance of the media outlet is of importance because the content analysis of three newspapers show that each media outlet reports the story from its own lenses. Sometimes, it is the revenue of advertising, sometimes it is the ideology. However, columnists of all these three newspapers approach the topic as if they have agreed how, in a consensus independent of the newspaper’s ideology.

For public relations practitioners, some medium may not be of importance under normal conditions, however, when a crisis hits, there needs to be strategic communication and more attention should be attributed to those media. The nimbus environment becomes important and all stakeholders should be thought initially. Sometimes advertising may work to supplement public relations efforts. Also the fact that some media outlets are dependent on advertising may stop them saying negative things about their supporters. This had been also supported by the President.

Also if international brands enter a local market which is very nationalistic like Turkey, a small issue or a problem in the home country can easily turn into a crisis in the host country. Some remarks made by the President of Turkish-French Chamber of Commerce support our study’s result.

In-depth interview with the President of Turkish-French Chamber of Commerce Yves-Marie Laouenan summarized the strategies of French companies/brands operating in Turkey.

The in-depth interview questions also had made him comment on the specific subject and made him share his thoughts with the researchers.

He said that from France point of view, what we have been in Turkey experiencing as a major event is a minor point of discussion which has started because of political reasons and because of the 2006 elections in France. He claims that contrary to what Turkish people think, Turkey is not a major topic of discussion and except for business people and travellers, Turkey has not an image in France. The image of Turkey and Turkish people is limited to the Turks living and working in France. Because Turkey is not involved in public relations and he adds that only TUSIAD is now doing public relations, but even what it does involves dealing with groups who already know Turkey. His suggestion is that youth is the major target group that Turkey should promote itself to.

He agrees that the trade boycott had hit the French companies in Turkey. He gave the example of Carrefoursa during the religious holiday of Muslim people where the sales had dropped because of that. It may not be possible to learn from the companies about their sales, but the President thinks that the individual reaction is much more deeper than the trade reaction. Damage of friendship is the main point in this crisis.

Another point that should be made is that when international political crises hit countries, the corporations, brands should get support and guidance from the umbrella association such as it had been the case with Turkish-French Chamber of Commerce. A corporation's individual efforts in the international political crisis communication can be weaker than all corporations with common interest acting together. When governments are in the picture, acting as a brand or corporation can be less effective.

The chamber has opened a petition on its site on 6th of October and by of 8:00 pm on the same day, the number of signatures were 3,500. By of morning of 11th October, there had been 35,000 signatures. This has been communicated to the French President, head of French Senate, French Parliament and all the parties presidents in the Parliament. The campaign had not been supported only by firms (430 firms) that are members of the chamber of commerce, but also from the Turkish public including busines people, students, housewives (<http://auxelusdelenationfrancaise.com/default-tr.asp>). The chamber has been founded in 1885 and one third of the members are French companies.

The petition said that they have regretted that in 2001, France officially recognized the Armenian massaccres as genocide by 28 politicians and that on 12th of October 2006, there will be a new dimension added to the bill. That issue has to be left to historians.

Mr. Laouenan interprets The Prime Minister's proactive effort to have a meeting with the representatives of major French companies in Turkey, as a very valuable action. As the President of Chamber of Commerce, he tells that they have based their action plan on principles. They all acted reactive, but they organized a press conference and wrote letters to the President of French Republic, French Parliament and Senators.

In international political crisis, the role of NGOs should not be underestimated. They can have a key role in manipulating the local consumers so in proactive crisis communication NGO's must be considered as a main target group. NGOs in that issue analysed acted differently. The majority of NGOs pumped boycotting. Of those TUSIAD, YASED and ITO acted cool.

Also in globalization era the governments use economic relations as a main tool/threat for solving the political issues. The Turkish government was reactive initially. The meeting of Prime Minister with French company representatives before 12th of October was a very good proactive strategy. In EU, you cannot boycott a country. In other words, the government cannot give an

official statement to boycott a country. Private sector, consumers can boycott and according to Batu, retired ambassador, tourism sector boycott to France can be very effective (<http://www.digimedya.com/Content/News/148860.aspx>) In these circumstances, due to the hierarchic relationship under the umbrella of associations, international brands can communicate with governments.

Individual and organizational readjustment is required in crisis. The same crisis do not touch the companies in the same way. The strength of a firm (either through advertising, reputation, or partnership with a strong partner) affects the way it handles the crisis situation. In the case of Carrefoursa, it had not been protested later.

In a crisis situation, there are also victims and some companies that are by origin Turkish or USA, had to communicate that they are not French. LCWaikiki a textile firm and Avon had to deal with these rumours. These rumours have been mostly created through Internet.

The tactics used for that international crisis was mainly lobbying, grassroots lobbying, protests, boycott (trade-tourism) demonstrations, individual reactions (returning medals, not buying helicopters, etc.). There had also been emotional reactions such as burning and throwing products. Symbols are also used.

This study could in future have in-depth interviews at the presidency level with French companies and their communication managers in Turkey to have more specific information handling of the situation by each company. How prepared there were, how coordinated they have acted as French companies operating and how ready they are now for the future for any possible upcoming crisis of that kind? Information about the the media relations, press releases sent out, media conferences organized and interviews given by each particular French company should also enlighten the issue under investigation.

What can public relations people learn from this? Some questions to be discussed and to be addressed with respect to this and future studies:

- Public relations practitioners can have an influence on media coverage on behalf of their clients, but in international affairs how effective will this be with different ideological stances of the media?
- Should there be different and more individualised communication with media outlets on sensitive international issues?
- Is being proactive really works? On issues of international dimension where a threat is felt and which may involve a country's citizens active on the issue, can proactive measures be taken quickly?
- How do you deal with rumours that are not true? Is using controlled media more effective?
- How can you evaluate what you have achieved if the companies remain silent?
- Are the boycotting and protests differ from country to country, from issue to issues

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**Dialogic Public Relations and Health Wiki Users:  
Initial Findings**

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Wikis, a form of website increasingly popular with Wikipedia's growth, show potential for public relations. This study investigates how WikiHealth and Wikipedia facilitate dialogic principles. The wikis exhibited the principles of dialogic public relations more than other non-wikis. Additionally, the websites' individual characteristics did not hinder the dialogic principles.

Wikipedia, the well-known user-created encyclopedia is in its fifth year of growth with 5 million entries in 200 languages and visitors doubling every four months (2006, Dec. 10, CBS News). Beyond just being a popular website, it is also the most well-known example of a new kind of website—a wiki. What makes wikis different is that users are free to add and change the content and structure of the site thus wiping away the distinction between creator and viewer. Wikipedia might be the most visited wiki, but wiki usage is growing in areas as diverse as cake design and CIA intelligence gathering (Weisman, 2006). Signs of the growth include new wiki support in Office 2007, and Google's acquisition of JotSpot, an online provider of wikis (Gibson, 2006).

Investigating the nature of health wikis and wiki users is important, as this will inform our understanding of how a wiki environment supports the principles of dialogic public relations as defined by Kent and Taylor (2002). Wikis, a new form of media increasingly popular since the inception of Wikipedia, are breaking new ground in the areas of online health information and, potentially, public relations. Little scholarly research has investigated the nature of wikis, and none to date on the phenomena of health wikis. This pilot study investigates how two health wiki sites (health content on wikipedia.com and wikihealth.com) facilitate the co-construction of health knowledge specifically exploring how the sites uphold dialogic public relations tents as well as who uses the sites and their online information seeking.

*Public Relations and the Internet*

The potential for public relations and the Internet has been well discussed (Hallahan, 2004; Gregory, 2004; Johnson, 1997). Duke (2002) stated the web and e-mail are “arguably” the most important tools for public relations since the telephone and fax machine (p. 312). Hallahan (2004) summarized the influence of the Internet as a force that “dramatically changed” how practitioners “distribute information, interact with key publics, deal with crises and manage issues” (p. 255). Kent and Taylor (1998) advocate for using the web's unique characteristics to create, adapt and change relationships between organizations and publics (p. 326

Yet as organizations began using the Internet for public relations purposes, these new technologies were treated as extensions of traditional communication forms—memos became e-mails and brochures transformed into websites (Gregory, 2004). The Internet's unique characteristics and opportunities for dialogue were largely ignored. Practitioners saw the Internet as an important tool, but one with a low priority—“a ‘B-list’ task” (Hill and White, 2000, p. 38). A study by Porter and Sallot (2003) suggests public relations practitioners are no

longer lagging behind in using new technologies, but the study also suggests that most of the activity conducted on the Internet was either research or internally focused.

### *Dialogic Public Relations*

Kent and Taylor (1998) advocate for using the Web's unique characteristics to create, adapt and change relationships between organizations and publics (p. 326). They propose five principles to guide practitioners in using the Web to create relationships. The principles are having useful information, encouraging return visits, building an intuitive interface, keeping visitors on the website and promoting a dialogic loop (Kent and Taylor, 1998). This study focuses on the principle of the dialogic loop. A dialogic loop "allows public to query organizations and, more importantly, it offers organizations the opportunity to respond to questions, concerns and problems" (Kent and Taylor, 1998, p. 326). In short, websites should encourage dialogue. For a complete dialogic loop, organizations need to have specially trained public relations staff that quickly respond to and monitor the organization's website (Kent and Taylor, 1998).

Kent and Taylor (2002) further explicate dialogic communication by proposing five principles of a dialogic public relation theory.

These principles are

- *mutuality*, or the recognition of organization–public relationships;
- *propinquity*, or the temporality and spontaneity of interactions with publics;
- *empathy*, or the supportiveness and confirmation of public goals and interests;
- *risk*, or the willingness to interact with individuals and publics on their own terms; and finally,
- *commitment*, or the extent to which an organization gives itself over to dialogue, interpretation and understanding in its interactions with publics. (Kent and Taylor, 2002, p. 24)

Mutuality recognizes that the organization and public are interconnected. This principle emphasizes collaboration and a spirit of mutual equality (Kent and Taylor, 2002, p. 25). The second principle, propinquity, means that both the organization and public are consulted in matters that concern them. This principle encompasses a need for immediacy when deciding issues where affected parties are consulted during the decision-making process, and not after. Propinquity also requires temporal flow meaning that the organization's and public's pasts, presents and futures are recognized in building the relationship. The final feature of propinquity is engagement meaning that "participants must be willing to give their whole selves to the encounters" (Kent and Taylor, 2002, p. 26).

Empathy is the third principle and refers to creating a climate of trust, understanding and support. Supportiveness, as opposed to competition or debate, is a key part of empathy. Also important to empathy is a communal orientation between organization and public. Finally, empathy requires that all parties confirm their importance and contributions to the discussion (Kent and Taylor, 2002, p. 27-28). The fourth principle is risk. To truly be in dialogue, both parties must risk rewards that could be both relational and material. Being vulnerable and allowing for vulnerability is an important part of risk. Also, dialogic communication must allow for unanticipated consequences that come from being unrehearsed and spontaneous (Kent and Taylor, 2002, p. 28-29). A final aspect of risk is the recognition of all parties' uniqueness and individuality. The final principle is commitment that stresses genuine, honest dialogue with all parties being committed to the conversation and the process of interpretation (Kent and Taylor, 2002, p. 29).

These are lofty goals and difficult to implement in a website. For example, the principle of propinquity suggests that discussions be held in a shared space. Even a website with a discussion forum does not fully become a shared space. Furthermore, the forum's hosting organization holds more power than the public and thus does not have pure mutuality. Also, the forum is not truly spontaneous—the host controls the structure of the forum and determines what can and cannot be discussed. Other common forms of website feedback, as in e-mail and surveys, may strive to become dialogic, but cannot fully meet this standard.

#### *Wikis*

Traditional websites struggle to meet the principles of dialogic public relations. Wikis offer great potential to encourage dialogue. A wiki differs from traditional websites because the content is user created and dynamic. This type of website allows any user to create and edit pages from the browser. Users can edit existing entries, add new entries and even create new pages. The traditional tools of website design are available on the wiki; users can use hyperlinks, graphics and photographs. All of this occurs in an observable manner with all changes being logged and publicly viewable. The most visited wiki is the user-created encyclopedia, Wikipedia.

Wikis are based on the tenets of being open, incremental, organic and observable (Chawner and Gorman, 2002). Open meaning that any reader can edit any content at any time; incremental meaning that pages can be created as necessary; organic meaning that the structure will evolve as required; and observable meaning that activity within the site can be viewed by any user. These four tenets mesh with the five principles of dialogic public relations. An open and observable website promotes mutuality and empathy. Also, it is risky. A sponsor of a wiki risks much and has to trust the public. Additionally, incremental and organic websites allow for propinquity. Wikis allow for an immediacy of presence. The tenets of wiki set up a system that is reminiscent of Grunig and Grunig's (1992) call for organizations to "set up structured systems, processes, and rules for two-way symmetrical public relations" (p. 316).

A wiki "has some profound and subtle effects on Web usage" and "encourages democratic use of the Web and promotes content composition by nontechnical users" (Leuf & Cunningham, 2002, para. 5). The creation process is dynamic and ever evolving. Wikis change the role of the website user. No longer are they passive viewers of a document, but creators, partners, contributors and editors. In short, wikis have the potential to create a community of dialogue and co-ownership.

The dialogic public relations focus on collaboration, immediacy, support, understanding, spontaneity, honoring all perspectives and honest dialogue is truly put to the test in the context of health. In this unique wiki format medical training is not a prerequisite for participating in the co-creation of health knowledge. These dynamic spaces allow for those who have experienced illness to post their understanding of the illness, treatments, side effects, and the like. The dynamic nature of the health wiki also allows for others to change or add to what others post, thus, participating in a community co-creating our understanding of different health conditions through those participating at various levels with illness/health. Health wikis are thus a ripe place to study how dialogic public relations operate in a complex web environment. To that end, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1: Who uses these health wikis?

RQ2: Does the wiki tenets of being open, incremental, organic and observable foster the principles of dialogic public relations on these two wikis?

RQ3: Is there significant differences between how a large general information wiki with health information (Wikipedia) and a small nascent health-only wiki (WikiHealth) fosters the principles dialogic public relations?

## Methods

### *Design*

A link was posted to Wikipedia and WikiHealth publicizing the survey and the project. The link took users to the informed consent page. After providing consent, they were directed to the first part of the survey. Active users of the sites were contacted about the survey through the wiki feedback tool. The survey was available online for approximately two months.

Permission was gained from the websites Wikipedia and WikiHealth to study the sites' interactions and users. Wikipedia was selected because it the largest wiki on the Internet. A Google search about many health concerns will return a link to Wikipedia on the first page of results. WikiHealth is a smaller website that has a more intimate atmosphere and only focuses on health information. WikiHealth is also only about a year old and still building a user base.

### *Survey Instrument*

The online survey began with four general questions about the Internet and wiki usage. The survey then asked participants to report whether the Internet has improved the way they get information about health care a lot, some, only a little, or not at all. Participants then responded using a scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree to questions assessing their level of involvement and investment in the health wiki. Questions relating to each of the principles and sub-principles of dialogic public relations are included. The questions were based on the descriptions of the principles provided by Kent and Taylor (2002). Participants then responded to a series of questions using a scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree assessing the depth and trust/expertise of the health wiki site, intention to revisit the site, complexity of the search task, knowledge, and reliance on the wiki for information. These questions were taken and adapted from Hong (2006). Participants then indicated whether they had interacted with individuals outside of the wiki environment. The last component for this section of the survey asked participants two open-ended questions about why they use health wikis and how using health wikis affected their health. Those participants who indicated that they had used other health websites to search for information were prompted to fill out the same series of questions listed above for a health website.

The last section of the survey has participants report whether they rely on other sources for health information beyond their doctor, and to report on their health consciousness. These measures were taken from Dutta-Bergman (2005) from the 1999 DDB Needham, Inc. consumer survey. These questions were followed by demographic questions including country of residence, occupation, education, gender, age, income and race. This paper will report the initial findings about who used these wikis and the responses to the dialogic public relations questions.

## Results

The survey resulted in 65 participants: 16 from WikiHealth and 49 from Wikipedia. More participants would have been preferred, but these numbers allow for exploratory and preliminary findings. All participants were users of wikis, and 62 used non-wikis for health information. There were 15 different non-wikis used for the second set of questions; WebMD was reported by 45% of those listing a specific website. The second was e-medicine with 11%

of respondents. Sixteen respondents did not list a specific website for the second set of questions.

*RQ1: Who used these health wikis?*

In response to research question one, what is the demographic make-up of the these health wiki users we found some similarities to other Internet studies and some noticeable differences. The study participants were highly educated with 37.7% of participants having a four-year college degree, and 41% of participants having completed a post-graduate degree. Participants were primarily male (68.2%). The participants in the study were mostly young adults with 40.9% of participants between the ages of 18 and 29. Participants between the ages of 30 and 39 accounted for 24.3% of the sample, and participants between the ages of 40 and 49 accounted for 19.7% of the sample. A little over 10% of the participants were 50 or older (10.6%).

Participants in this study who made between under \$25,000 and \$49,000 accounted for 28.7% of the sample. Participants who made between \$50,000 and \$74,999 accounted for 10.6% of the sample. Participants who made between \$75,000 and \$200,000 or more accounted for 43.8% of the sample. Participants were not ethnically diverse with 80.3% white participants and only 7.6% of participants reporting Asian or Pacific Islander, 1.5% reporting mixed race and 3.0% reporting other.

Additionally, we found that participants tended to be medium or heavy users of the Internet on a weekly basis but varying in the amount of time spend using the wiki over the period of a typical week. Participants who reported spending between 1 hour to 10 hours online comprised 14.2% of the sample, participants who reported spending between 11 hours to 20 hours online comprised 38.1% of our sample, and participants who reported spending between 21 hours and more than 30 hours online comprised 47.6% of our sample. Participants who reported spending between 1 hour and 10 hours a week on the wiki comprised 66.7% of our sample, participants who reported spending between 1 hour and 15 hours on the wiki comprised 19.1% of our sample, and participants who reported spending 21 hours to more than 30 hours a week comprised 9.6% of our sample.

*RQ2: Does the wiki tenets of being open, incremental, organic and observable foster the principles of dialogic public relations on these two wikis?*

Ten questions were asked about the five principles of dialogic public relations. Respondents responded using a scale of one to five to indicate their agreement with five being the most positive. In all but one question, the wiki websites had significantly higher mean scores than the non-wiki websites. The largest difference occurred when the participants were asked about being free to contribute ideas to the website (wiki,  $M=4.35$ ,  $SD=.917$ ; non-wiki,  $M=1.85$ ,  $SD=1.083$ ). When responding to if they had used the website while making a decision, the wiki ( $M=3.47$ ,  $SD=1.197$ ) and non-wiki ( $M=3.52$ ,  $SD=1.243$ ) results were not statistically different ( $t(43)=.427$ ,  $p=.671$ ). See table one for means, standard deviations and t-test results.

Participants were also asked about the website being valuable to them and if they were committed to using the website in the future. The results are listed in table two. While the wiki websites ( $M=4.51$ ,  $SD=.598$ ) received a higher scores than the non-wiki website ( $M=4.31$ ,  $SD=.701$ ) on the question of value, the difference was not significant,  $t(43)=1.813$ ,  $p=.077$ . The finding about future commitment was significant and people responded more positively to using the wiki websites ( $M=4.50$ ,  $SD=.725$ ) in the future as compared to the non-wiki ones ( $M=3.56$ ,  $SD=.943$ ),  $t(44)=4.433$ ,  $p=.001$ .

Table 1. Dialogic Public Relations Questions by Wiki and Non-Wiki Websites

	Wiki			Non-Wiki			df	t
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD		
Mutuality I am free to contribute my ideas on this website.	60	4.35	.917	47	1.85	1.083	45	10.329**
Content on this website is developed by collaboration of ideas.	60	4.25	.773	47	2.62	1.033	45	7.146**
Propinquity This website is a shared space for communicating with others.	59	3.66	1.060	45	2.07	.837	44	7.900**
I come back to this website to see new content additions.	59	4.03	.982	46	2.91	1.262	44	4.774**
I sought information or posted information on this website while I was making decisions about this issue	57	3.47	1.197	46	3.52	1.243	43	-.427
Empathy My contributions to this website are acknowledged.	58	3.98	.827	43	2.19	.982	41	8.669**
I am treated as a colleague on this website.	59	4.07	.763	44	2.20	1.002	43	8.849**
Commitment On this website, my contributions will be received without ridicule or contempt.	60	3.90	.986	44	2.75	1.014	43	4.342**
My contributions to this website were genuine and honest.	59	4.63	.554	43	3.00	.655	42	11.795**
Risk								
I have self-disclosed personal information or opinions on this website.	59	3.14	1.181	44	2.00	1.057	43	4.408**

\*\* p < .001.

Table 2. Information Value and Commitment to Future Usage by Wiki and Non-Wiki

	Wiki			Non-Wiki			df	t
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD		
This website's information is valuable.	59	4.51	.598	45	4.31	.701	43	1.813
I am committed to using this website in the future.	60	4.50	.725	45	3.56	.943	44	4.433**

\*\* p < .001.

*RQ3: Is there significant differences between how a large general information wiki with health information (Wikipedia) and a small nascent health-only wiki (WikiHealth) fosters the principles dialogic public relations?*

No significant differences were found between Wikipedia and WikiHealth for the mean scores of the 10 dialogic communication questions. For both websites, the mean scores were high with most questions having a mean above 3.6. The question about self-disclosing information was the one exception. The WikiHealth score ( $M=2.92$ ,  $SD=1.115$ ) was slightly lower than the

Wikipedia score ( $M=3.20$ ,  $SD=1.204$ ), but the difference was not significant  $t(57)=-.732$ ,  $p=.467$ . See table three for the means, standard deviations and t-test results.

Furthermore, the two websites did not have any significant differences in the mean scores for the questions about website value and being committed to using the website in the future. For both questions, the means were higher for Wikipedia, but not significant. See table four for complete data about these two questions.

Table 3. Dialogic Public Relations Questions by WikiHealth and Wikipedia Websites

	WikiHealth			Wikipedia			df	t
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD		
Mutuality								
I am free to contribute my ideas on this website.	13	4.69	.480	47	4.26	.988	58	1.538
Content on this website is developed by collaboration of ideas.	13	4.31	.751	47	4.23	.786	58	.302
Propinquity								
This website is a shared space for communicating with others.	13	3.69	1.182	46	3.65	1.037	57	.119
I come back to this website to see new content additions.	13	3.77	.832	46	4.11	1.016	57	-1.103
I sought information or posted information on this website while I was making decisions about this issue	12	3.75	1.288	45	3.40	1.176	55	.899
Empathy								
My contributions to this website are acknowledged.	13	4.23	.599	45	3.91	.874	56	1.233
I am treated as a colleague on this website.	13	4.23	.599	46	4.02	.802	57	.871
Commitment								
On this website, my contributions will be received without ridicule or contempt.	13	4.23	.927	47	3.81	.992	58	1.376
My contributions to this website were genuine and honest.	13	4.54	.519	46	4.65	.566	57	-.650
Risk								
I have self-disclosed personal information or opinions on this website.	13	2.92	1.115	46	3.20	1.204	57	-.732

Table 4. Information Value and Commitment to Future Usage by WikiHealth and Wikipedia

	WikiHealth			Wikipedia			df	t
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD		
This website's information is valuable.	13	4.38	.650	46	4.54	.585	57	-.844
I am committed to using this website in the future.	13	3.85	.899	46	4.50	.691	58	.001

\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

### *The Users of these Wikis*

In regards to the first research question, the participants in this study were mostly well educated, affluent, white, young and male. This lack of diversity matches the overall lack of diversity in online health information seekers found in the USC Annenberg, Surveying the Digital Future Year Four Survey (Ybarra & Suman, 2006). Our study was more white, more male and younger than the USC study, but was similarly lacking diversity. Special care needs with this data since the sample size is so low, but if this is representative of wiki users, in general, interesting implications exist. These highly skewed demographics could be hindrance or benefit to organizations looking to build a wiki. For some organizations, this group might be the targeted public. If so, a wiki would be a good choice to build online relationships with that public.

Additionally, the participants were heavy Internet users and frequent visitors to the specific wiki. The participants spent large amounts of time online with almost half (47.3%) spending 21 hours or more hours on the Internet, and 49.2% spend more than five hours a week on the wiki. Again, this could be a detriment or benefit for an organization. If the targeted public is frequently online, wikis might be a good relationship building strategy. The commitment of time given by these users would be welcomed by most organizations. If your users are rarely online, wikis may not be the best choice for Internet communication. The expertise gained by being online all those hours might lead to special procedural knowledge about the Internet that makes wikis easy and effective to use. For example, our parents are casual online users and whizzes at basic Internet functions like e-mail and photo sharing, but the idea of creating and changing a website would be daunting to them.

### *Dialogic Principles*

Based on this study's data, the health wikis enabled the dialogic principles, and the answer to the second research question is yes. Wikipedia and WikiHealth participants reported that the dialogic principles were there and were stronger than found on non-wiki websites. These findings strongly suggest that if an organization has the goal of dialogic communication with a public, a wiki might be a good online tool.

Furthermore, this study found that users of both websites found the wikis more valuable and the users more committed to future usage as compared to when using a non-wiki health websites. These two findings are exciting for website designers working to conserve visitors and encouraging return visits. These two items are vital to website success (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003). Websites that funnel visitors to other sites or do not work to encourage return traffic will not be able to sustain itself in the long run. The increase in value and commitment for future usage advocates strongly for the wiki website form.

Wikis have had public success with projects like Wikipedia, but there has also be a significant adoption of the technology by corporations. IBM, Walt Disney, SAP and Motorola are all using wikis (Hof, 2004). One wiki software producer estimates that two-thirds of his users are businesses (Hof, 2004). These companies are not using these wikis with outside publics. Instead, wikis are being using internally for information sharing, project management and collaboration (Krause, 2004). The risk of posting a publicly editable website could be a factor holding back these companies from targeting outside publics. The risk is high, but the rewards could be substantial. Imagine a company that puts its latest product manual on the web as a wiki. Users of the product could tweak and add to the manual. The results would be a better manual and enhanced relationship building.

### *Wikipedia and WikiHealth Comparison*

As to the third research question, the individual characteristics of Wikipedia and WikiHealth did not hinder the websites' ability to foster the dialogic principles. Wikipedia and WikiHealth are very different in look, content, age, mission and number of users. Though very different, both are built on the same wiki structure of being open, incremental, organic and observable. By looking at both sites, the argument that the structure of wikis enabled dialogic principles is strengthened, as opposed to it being the result something unique about a particular site. This finding is beneficial in expanding what types of organizations create wikis and what the topics of those wikis are. Based on these initial findings, the type of organization or topic of the wiki should not negate the development of dialogue.

### Conclusions and Future Research

The potential for wikis in public relations is great. This form of website meets the requirements for dialogic communication. In terms of relationship creations, managements and enhancement, wikis could be an ideal form of Internet communication. The risk implicit in a wiki and with dialogic communication may be holding back practitioners from implementing the technology. Public relations practitioners need evidence that wikis works, but wikis aimed at an external public are very limited. Without an example of beneficial relationship building through wikis, few wikis will be built that aim at external publics, but without any external public wikis, no examples will exist. This lack of external focused organizational wikis led to the selection of health wikis as a proxy for this project. By studying the potential these health wikis have to create dialogue, the information gained informs public relations practitioners about the possible implementations of externally focused wikis. The data here encourages wiki use by organizations for public relations purposes.

Some limitations restrain that encouragement. First is the study of only health websites. Future research needs to examine internal wikis and search for an organizational external wiki. Second, this research only examined two wikis and a limited number of users. Additionally, those users were well educated and heavy Internet users. That might be typical for health websites users, but surely not for all other types of websites. These results should be used to promote and built larger and broader wiki research projects. Finally, the dialogic questions show possibility for future refinement and possibly a dialogic measurement tool. This research project was broad and also collected data on online health seeking behaviors. This limited the number of questions that could be asked about each sub-point of dialogic public relations. In the future, a more detailed set of questions could be developed that allows exploration of the influence and interaction of each of the sub-points.

Wikipedia is an Internet phenomenon, but most people today do not know what a wiki is. Wikis are coming quickly to organizations as internal communication tools, and this data encourages organization to go beyond that and use wikis to build and maintain relationships through dialogic principles. Kent and Taylor (2002) admit that "there are no easy answers to how to implement dialogic systems in organization," but in regards to websites, the structure of wikis support the dialogic principles and work toward the goal of using the Internet for relationship building.

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## **A Cross-Case Analysis of Five Chemical Manufacturing Sites' Technology Use During Emergency Response Efforts**

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Radical innovations in communication technologies spawned a wired society, which impact an organization's ability to manage communication and cultivate relationships with strategic publics. The nature, quality, quantity, and reliability of information changed due to the diffusion of communication innovations. These produced alternate distribution outlets: electronic mail, company websites, blogs, discussion board messages, instant messengers, and electronic newsletters. Current innovations render communication increasingly more complex, timeless, and dynamic with near spontaneous multidimensional synchronous interaction. The origination and strategic control of information (timing, placement, channel) becomes increasing problematic as an organization devises a communication response plan during crisis for distribution via multiple channels and linkage a local community and to a global marketplace. The results of this cross-site study suggest that the use of technology for communication with external stakeholders during crisis has not diffused. Practitioners' expertise with new communication tools alters how organizational spokespersons are trained to respond to crisis situations and how much information he or she imparts using specific communication channels at appropriate times.

### Industry Profile

Let's see if you can identify the industry described: For every job in this industry (900,000 total), five additional jobs are created elsewhere in the U.S. economy bringing the head count to 5.8 million or 4% of the U.S. workforce. This industry generates more than half a trillion dollars for the U.S. economy. What's the industry? More clues: known as the "innovation industry" and considered as a "transformative" segment of American life, this business also produces 27% of products consumed by the world and exports 10% annually. This industry is transformative because through its annual investment of billions of dollars in research and development, new products are created that alter the very products, services and lifestyle we enjoy on a daily basis. No, it's not Microsoft. Another clue: This industry launched a comprehensive public relations campaign to improve its image in 1988 and is still wrestling with public opinion regarding its manufacturing practices today. Last clue: modern civilization is built on this industry.

If you identified the chemical industry, you're right. The information shared with you was obtained from the September 22, 2005 news release, "American Chemistry Council Unveils New Public Education Campaign." Here's how the American Chemical Council (ACC), formerly the Chemical Manufacturers Association (CMA), describes its industry:

The business of chemistry involves problem-solving companies providing solutions to improve the world. It is a knowledge-based industry that is key to a sustainable world economy and a brighter tomorrow ([www.americanchemistry.com](http://www.americanchemistry.com)).

During the late 70's through the early 90's, public perception of the industry was negative for myriad reasons related to environment, health, and safety concerns from

manufacturing operations. To alter public perception, a public relations campaign was launched by the Chemical Manufacturers Association (CMA) in 1988 called “Responsible Care®. The initiative was designed to improve performance in six key areas of chemical manufacturing (production processes, pollution prevention, distribution, community awareness and emergency response (CAER), research and development, and product stewardship) and promote ten management practices.

In October of 2005, the “essential<sub>2</sub> life,” campaign was launched by the ACC. The campaign draws attention to the benefits the industry provides to mankind. From coast to coast, a series of billboards, four color full-page print ads and other electronic media buys tout the benefits of chemicals. Responsible Care® is now a global initiative and the message is being transmitted via diverse communication channels. The Environmental Working Group's Chemical Industry Archive at <http://www.chemicalindustryarchives.org/dirtysecrets/responsiblecare/2.asp> offers an alternative perspective of the contributions of chemical manufacturing.

Both sides provide evidence that the chemical industry’s roller coaster ride has been laden with thrills and pitfalls since production started in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Manufacturing facilities are located in every state, belching scrubbed air into pristine country sides, while others overwhelm freeways in the Galveston, Texas or Baton Rouge, Louisiana metropolitan areas. Following the footprint of the American media, the industry is struggling to own the “boardwalk” in the game of chemical company monopoly as companies jockey positions and redefine planning and growth strategies. In the aftermath, mom and pop plants have been consumed by industry giants in the convergence battles. Concurrently, global alliances have become a necessity as the costs associated with labor, raw materials, transport, and production have forced domestic enterprises to pursue options. Due to convergence and the dominance of larger multinational corporations, corporate resources, geographic distance, and competitive necessity fueled the diffusion of traditional communication technologies and spurred innovations in communication technologies designed to enhance return-on-investment.

This paper reports the results of a cross-site analysis of five chemical manufacturing operations located in diverse geographic areas of the United States. The study sought to understand if innovations in communication technology contribute to strategic public relations practices during crisis. An overview of crisis, innovation, diffusion and effective relationship building practices is provided, followed by the results of the analysis of the five simulation training exercises. The paper concludes with recommendations for best communication practices during crisis situations.

### Crisis in Public Relations

Crisis has been studied in diverse contexts by researchers from multiple disciplines. According to Pearson and Clair (1998), “[A]n organizational crisis is a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly” (p. 60). In essence, management failure or environmental forces are the root causes of crisis. Lerbinger (1997) identified eight types of crisis: natural, technological, confrontation, malevolence, skewed, management values, deception, management misconduct, and business and economic. The timing factor associated with the crisis also impacts an organization’s response efforts. Reinhardt’s (1987) three specific time frames were enhanced by Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006), and include 1) immediate crises which prevent sustained research and planning; 2) emerging crises which can be addressed with corrective action; and 3) sustained

crises, which despite numerous response strategies, leave the organization prey to rumors promulgating misinformation for long periods of time.

Players in the chemical industry manage emerging and sustained crisis daily. Due to the nature of the products produced, the industry must always be positioned for an immediate crisis. The concentration of companies in a geographic area dictates the level of efficiency and effectiveness of response efforts. For example, Galveston, Texas has streets lined with chemical manufacturing operations. The response effort is meticulously coordinated by Local Emergency Management representatives and all manufacturers participate. A site in rural central West Virginia doesn't have access to the same resources and as such emergency responders are trained on-site. Further, training for chemical response is costly; many companies situated in rural areas include local police and fire fighters in the emergency training effort. Katrina honed the reality that emergency plans must be practiced in real time to determine effectiveness.

A component of Responsible Care® is the CAER code, which requires chemical companies to create an on-site response plan. Community right-to-know legislation mandates that the plan be made available to the public. Annually, a majority of chemical manufacturing sites create and practice some form of emergency response simulation response effort designed to test the workforces' response abilities and involve emergency responders, such as fire companies, health care providers, and police. These test-runs prove beneficial as shortcomings are identified and addressed before a catastrophic immediate crisis occurs. However, few companies rehearse how to manage communicating with external publics, for example, the media, key stakeholders and stakeholders during crisis. Grunig (1992) explains that "publics arise on their own and choose the organization for attention" (p. 128) as we can deduce, a crisis creates publics for the organization which are typically diffused linkages (Grunig & Hunt (1984) as presented in Rawlins (2006).

In preparation, select management may attend half/full-day media training sessions where the focus is on how to manage the media; seldom message distribution across diverse channels and identification and prioritization of publics. Thus, strategically designed information can be distributed using diverse outlets if the organization has diffused technology across all segments of the organization and the corporate communications department has mandated such communication during crisis.

#### Communications Innovations as Public Relations Tools

Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990) define innovation as "the situationally new development and introduction of knowledge-derived tools, artifacts, and devices by which people extend and interact with their environment" (p. 10). It is this extension and interaction with the environment that appeals to practitioners who seek multiple methods to communicate with key publics. Innovations can be viewed as radical or incremental. Radical innovations require deep change in organizational culture and practices (Hamel, 2002) while incremental innovations require little adjustment and relatively minor changes in the business culture (Nork & Tucker, 1987). Prescott & Conger (1995) suggest that the type of innovation is determined by the culture in which the innovation occurs. For example, college students who study the practice of public relations today are familiar with and have access to the computer, the cluster technology of the internet and the World Wide Web. They are more likely to identify these technologies as incremental and contemplate including these mediums in their everyday message planning and distribution. Hyperlinks on a website were once highlighted words that "linked" users to other internet locations. As a result of radical innovation, today, hyperlinks instantly connect diverse media, such as API mashups, RSS feeds and tags. Convergence has sparked the interconnection among

cellular telephony, personal digital assistants, MP3 players, desktop computers, digital video recorders and billboards. Technological diffusion (Rogers, 1995) or the time it takes for a technology to be considered a norm alters the context for utilization. Today, the public relations practitioner has more tools from which to select when creating strategies and tactics to cultivate or enhance relationships, but he or she may not be aware of or have access to these tools.

The art and science of cultivating relationships with publics has evolved as innovations in communications technologies enhance practitioners' ability to communicate, and thus, cultivate and maintain mutually beneficial relationships (Tapscott and Ticoll, 2003). The tenets of relationship management were rooted in interpersonal scholarship and more recently extended to reflect the nature of organizational-public relationships (OPR) (Broom, Casey, and Ritchey, 2000; Coombs, 2000; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon and J.E. Grunig, 1999; Huang, 1997; Ledingham and Bruning, 1998). The scope, nature, qualities, antecedents and survival strategies associated with relationship building and maintenance has been a central theme in public relations research for almost a decade (see Hung, 2005 for comprehensive review). Hon and J.E. Grunig (1999) focused on the mutually dependent nature of the relationship: an OPR exists when organizations' actions affect publics and when publics' behaviors impact an organization. In the corporate environment, innovation is a necessity to garner return-on-investments for stakeholders. Analysis of the current use and application of communication tools to manage crisis in organizational settings promotes the economic and strategic use of such vehicles. Lewis, Goodman, & Fandt (2004) describe the new operating environment as "Hyperchange" or the context in which practitioners cultivate relationships that "involv[e] changes that come more quickly; are more dramatic, complex and unpredictable; and have more significant impact on the way organizations are managed than did the changes of the past" (p. 15). Innovations in technology contribute to the "hyperchange" environment, which now positions the stakeholder to expect information in a timely and on-going manner.

A review of the literature suggests that in the public relations arena, the impact of communications innovations on relationship building is relatively new, due in part to the developments in relationship management research, and to the timing of the diffusion of such technologies. However, it is becoming increasingly more critical as Flynn (2006) comments regarding the space shuttle Discovery, "technology now enables, or in this case compels, organizations to be almost nakedly transparent – communicating raw data in real time with little opportunity for analysis" (p. 193).

#### Relationship between communication technologies and public relations practices

Tornatzky & Fleischer (1990) described how innovations can be identified as product or process innovations. An example of an innovation that serves as a product would be the internet because it can be used to gather information and serve as a work tool. The Internet can also be considered a process innovation when it is used as a tool to promote public relations and marketing initiatives, such as web sites, home pages, locations for interactivity, etc. Kent and Taylor (1998) urged practitioners to not confuse technology with two-way symmetrical public relations because it is generally a one-way information flow situation. However, it follows that innovations in electronic communication distribution devices, such as electronic mail, company websites, blogs, discussion board messages, instant messengers, and electronic newsletters serve as both product and process innovations due to their work tool and organizational promotion potential and thus, may be intricate to the promulgation of relationship development, enhancement and maintenance during crises.

The inclusion of communication technologies in a crisis response plan supports the management function of public relations. Grunig's (1992) Excellence Project established the foundation for Vercic, L. Grunig and J. Grunig's (1996) excellent public relations principles, which situate public relations managers as significant contributors to overall organizational strategies. Further, strategic public relations practices were correlated with excellent organizations. Vercic and J.E. Grunig's (2000) research forwarded the notion of public relations as a management function and should be studied as such. Thus, strategic planning is focused on program goals and objectives delivered to stakeholders and stakeholders that inform policy generation and strategies. Organizations which practice excellent public relations during crisis will involve a public relations manager contributing to all phases of the emergency process.

The impact of radical innovation on public relations crisis practices

Innovations in the organizational setting are considered radical when they alter the culture and customs of the organization. Radical innovation of technology as product and process impacted by diverse contexts was witnessed globally during the Sago Mine disaster in the early days of 2006. The 41-hour ordeal converged politicians, reporters, mining officials and concerned citizens on the rural community of Tallmansville, West Virginia. Audiences were pensive as they prayed for a miracle that 13 miners trapped 260 feet underground would be alive. Information was reported 24-hours a day by the major media and additional information was available via blogs and websites to interested internet surfers. An emergency responder communicated information to an incident command team via two-way radio that ignited a series of miscommunications and faulty information dissemination. While an emergency response plan was in play, there were communication transactions instigated by those others than members of the response effort that wreaked a double dose of crisis on this situation. The Sago mining disaster reinforces two critical components of this research: understanding the impact of communications technologies on relationships, and the interdependent nature of the organization and its publics.

The Diffusion of Innovation

The study and assessment of communication innovations' contributions to effectiveness and productivity in the workplace is well documented and as different innovations infiltrate diverse environments they are said to be at a certain point of diffusion based on the number of potential adopters. According to Rogers (1995), diffusion is "the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system (p. 5.) Adopters or subscribers to a technology have been classified according to the social network and timing of their adoption decision; innovators adopt when the technology first enters the market. Early adopters sign on with little documentation that the technology is feasible and adopters are mainstream users who adopt after research supports the investment is worthwhile. Late adopters tend to subscribe to the technology when cost decreases and new products are about to enter the market. Laggards aren't likely to adopt the innovation at all.

Reber, Gower & Robinson (2006) indicated that "public relations practitioners are steadily incorporating the attributes of the Internet as an integrated part of their communication strategies with publics" (p. 27). Bauer, Grether, and Leach (2002) studied customer commitment, trust and satisfaction via internet communications. Their work suggests that availability, interaction and information exchange increase customer's organizational commitment. Callison (2003), Hwang, McMillan, & Lee (2003), and Gustavsen & Tilley (2003) identified correlations between company resources, sophistication of online presence, and resources. Thus, practitioners are adopting new communications technologies to establish,

maintain and cultivate relationships with key publics. Further, as Rogers (1995) suggested, allocation of resources will contribute to diffusion: there will be a divide between information rich and information poor with availability of resources accounting for the defining factor of how practitioners deploy communication. However, there is a dearth of literature relating the diffusion status of such technologies as a component of a crisis response plan. This analysis provides management-oriented evaluation about crisis communication techniques and distribution outlets during simulated emergency response drills. Organizationally, the ultimate goal of the exercises was to compile a list of potential training sessions and generate “public relations best practices during crisis,” according to the Director of Industrial Hygiene (personal communication 12/20/05).

### Method

Corporate management asked this researcher to serve as the trainer for the five sites’ emergency response drills. An ethnographic cross-site analysis was designed and conducted. In response to Denzin’s and others concerns that this methodology reaps a “smothered set of generalizations (p.194),” the researcher employed replication of key observation points (identified and described later) to determine initial observations and refine those points as the study progressed. Further, if new patterns of behavior deviated/matched the initial pattern, the adjustment was incorporated. Pattern clarification was employed to examine emerging themes and behaviors. Interviews with key management were conducted and the data was analyzed using finding themes analysis as well.

#### XYZ Corporation

The chemical company discussed in this study will be called the XYZ Corporation and it creates products used in construction, consumer electronics, pharmaceutical, agricultural, automotive transport, packaging, industrial and other areas of this market. The company advocates and rewards innovation, holding over 1,400 patents in the United States and abroad and serves 3,200 customers in its research and development units or plants located on almost every continent.

XYZ Corporation’s leadership is considered “obsessed” with safety (personal communication with employees, 7/15/05) and has invested considerable financial resources and personnel to promote safe work practices. Safety initiatives supported by the CEO are communicated via the Environmental, Health and Safety (EHS) hierarchy and are to be followed without exception. EHS is cutting edge; mandating plant managers and their employees pursue International Safety Organization (ISO) certifications and attain timely compliance with Responsible Care’s® vision of “no accidents, injuries or harm to the environment” (www.AmericanChemistry.com). The company is a pioneer in the establishment and maintenance of community advisory councils (CAC); its central Pennsylvania site boasting 15 years of relationship building with its’ economically challenged community (Jabro, 2003).

#### Simulated Emergency Response Drill Protocol

XYZ’s Environmental Health Safety (EHS) Vice President determined that all (5) domestic manufacturing sites must participate in a simulated emergency response effort requiring communication with external stakeholders. The community advisory council’s facilitator functioned as a broadcast journalist for the drill and provided feedback regarding the company’s performance, use of communication channels, relationship maintenance, and interaction with the media.

XYZ's corporate managers are available for consultation via telephone during the drill. Corporate EHS is notified immediately when a crisis occurs; each plant manager acts autonomously thereafter, although a manual was devised several years ago for emergency response. Contingent upon the severity of the mishap, one or a joint Incident Command Chief is positioned and the focus shifts to the identification and containment of the release or management of the crisis. A representative from Human Resources, Engineering, Environmental, or Health and Safety is typically the individual/s identified to communicate with the media and other publics. At all five sites, there was no on-site trained public relations representative.

The corporation and its subsidiaries serve as test sites for many new technologies involved with the creation, use and disposal of ingredients used in chemical manufacturing. Further, all sites use an intranet and host a corporate website. Both radical and incremental technologies have diffused throughout this organization and are viewed as tools to promote and market the services of the organization. It is also heavily involved in electronic-commerce. Thus, technology is used as both process and product innovations at XYZ Corporation.

The simulated drills occurred in January, June, July, and November. An oral debrief with corporate management, including the manager of corporate communications occurred in February, 2006. All drills followed the same procedure. One person from the company, the "mole" worked with the corporate EHS director to create a likely incident for the plant. Representatives from key publics were identified as call-ins, walk-ins, etc. and role cards depicting the caller's focus, personality, and level of persistence were provided to each participant. A videographer accompanied the trained journalist. During each exercise, community members or employees from other sites played members of the press, government agencies, and concerned family members. The drill was videotaped and later analyzed using pattern clarification and finding themes methodologies. After the drill, all participants met and debriefed about the experience, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the response effort while a scribe recorded the conversation.

#### Pre-Drill Planning

Interviews were conducted with corporate personnel and plant managers to ascertain specific expectations of the drill, shortcomings to manage, and areas of focus for the drill. Managers were flexible. Several themes emerged in the interview process across sites: 1) make it believable, 2) identify areas for growth as a result of the experience, 3) identify areas for improvement regarding communication practices, 4) lack of communication between the corporate communication manager and the facilitator during the 13-month cycle of drills.

#### Drill

The shrilling, ear piercing, high pitched, repetitive ringing of the siren jolted the plant workers' eyes toward the plume. The siren was a clear indication that something was amiss and employees should meet at the congregating area for a head count. Response efforts commenced. The response team scurried and within minutes the Incident Command structure was in place. The role players took the stage; bombarding employees with queries, site visits and media probes at their assigned times. Listening intently and with keen observation, corporate management and designated employees scribed notes as the scenario played out.

Each site managed the facilitator, her camera person and the members of the media entourage differently: on-going, highly interactive conversations to seclusion with two guards who hovered over them as they used the bathroom. All communication occurred face-to-face. Several requests for electronic mail updates or web postings were ignored.

Within two to four hours, briskly moving employees slowed and piercing eyes began to twinkle as the bubbles of stress burst. Emergency responders began to peel off their suits and make their way to the water fountain. The release was contained and cleaned up; the simulated incident was over. Media spokespersons announced that the “all clear” signal was given. At the conclusion of the drill, corporate summoned everyone to the training room for lunch and a debriefing. The media spokespersons (nine male, two females) offered insights about the experience which are presented based on themes: 1) valuable training exercise, 2) preference for a team reporting situation, 3) need to investigate electronic communication or web posting for internal and external updates, 4) explore impact of cellular telephony/internet on gathering and dissemination of information, and 5) additional media training for general and crisis situations.

#### Post-Drill Evaluation

The facilitator created a two-tier evaluation instrument. The first tier was devised from a review of current literature on technology and diffusion (1, 2), relationship management (5, 6), media training (7), and crises response (4) as per the earlier part of the paper. The second tier focused on the performance of company spokespersons during the drill (2,3), post-drill debriefing (7) and analysis of the videotaped performances (6). The data were displayed, analyzed for patterns of behavior, redisplayed and reorganized. Table 1 provides the outcome of the evaluative components which are discussed in detail below.

- 1) Comprehension of Technological Communication Innovations – Did the organization indicate that information could be posted on a website or intranet for employee distribution? 2) Use of technology: Did the spokesperson request e-mail addresses for press releases and fielding questions? Were digital news releases fed to the media and key publics?
- 3) Environment: Hyperchanged or traditional?
- 4) Public Relations as a Management Function: Did the spokesperson interact with corporate before meeting the media? Were prepared materials used to guide the interaction?
- 5) Excellent Organization: Would J. Grunig and colleagues identify the public relations/relationship management practices as excellent?
- 6) Relationship: Did the spokesperson’s communication confirm the events at the site or provide opportunities for meaningful exchange?
- 7) Response time: The amount of time taken to make contact with the media.

#### Lessons from the Frontline

From the analysis of the data, two points from the simulation drills emerged: 1) the organization’s crisis response plan is “detached” or “not connected”, and 2) the impact of technology on message dissemination is in the “dark ages” and must be addressed by the development of a plan and subsequent employee training. However, without the support of, and coordination by the corporate communication department, it would be difficult to generate and execute a unified voice and comprehensive plan during crisis. This concern prompted a meeting between the corporate communication manager, the EHS management team and the facilitator to discuss how to coordinate creating a plan and subsequent training.

Table 1: Results of Emergency Response Training Drill

	<u>Location</u>				
	<u>Site 1</u>	<u>Site 2</u>	<u>Site 3</u>	<u>Site 4</u>	<u>Site 5</u>
Media technology:	Frustrated	Prepared	None	Frustrated	Prepared
Use of technology:	None	None	None	None	None
Environment:	Traditional	Hyperchange	None	Traditional	Traditional
PR mgt. function:	No	No	No	No	No
Excellent org.:	Attempting	Yes	No	Attempting	Attempting
Culture/Tools:	Incremental	Incremental	Radical	Radical	Increment
Response time:	20 min.	25 min.	2:30:00	1:12:15	1:35:18

### Results

XYZ's Corporate Communications Manager has expertise in the marketing/sales area and was new to his position. With Blackberry in hand, he apologized for his lack of participation in the process and explained that he was deeply involved in the redesign of the organization's website and getting adjusted to tasks associated with his position. The facilitator offered a cogent synopsis of the five drills using the results in Table 1: No media spokespersons thought to provide updates via electronic mail or posting to the company website or internal television system, although all these tools were available. Once the identification of the chemical involved in the simulation was announced, a material safety data sheet was retrieved by the media and used during the next interview session. This empowered the media to control information flow and placed the spokesperson on the defensive. Spokespersons were surprised at how the information was presented and suggested the media was attempting to sensationalize the impact of the release.

Site 2 was more likely to embrace technology for relationship building purposes. Management discussed the benefits and shortcomings of immediacy and saw internal advantages of web postings and e-mail at the Incident Command center as well. Sites 1, 4 and 5 will be slower to embrace technology for external communication due to their geographic locations (lots of folks not wired), while Site 3's plant manager didn't believe the company needed to communicate with anyone! Technology as a communication tool would be an incremental innovation at Sites 1, 2, and 5; Sites 3 and 4 would be late adopters based on the sites' leadership. Also of interest is that the other sites used a team media response approach while Sites 3 and 4 sent the lone spokesperson to manage the hungry media.

At the corporate level, XYZ does not practice excellence in public relations; corporate management wasn't involved in any aspect of the process and there is no current unified plan. However, the individual plant managers at sites 1, 2, and 5 were committed to their communities and they or their media spokespersons made strong efforts to offer timely, comprehensive, honest and informative conversations with the media.

Site 2's media team included the EHS manager and plant manager. The Operations manager was sent to explain the response process off-camera and assure the media that an on-camera spokesperson was coming, while Site 1 used the EHS Coordinator and an LEPC responder. The other sites relied on the Human Resources Managers, who couldn't provide as much detail about the environmental and health impact of the release.

### Conclusion

The results of this cross-site analysis reveal several patterns and themes for consideration. XYZ Corporation is a multinational chemical company specializing in an array of products for consumer and industrial use. It is a player in the innovation industry, but has failed to diffuse communication technologies for public relations functions broadly, and sustained and emerging crisis specifically. This oversight is in part due to the low industry/injury rate, but, more importantly, linked to the task prioritization on the corporate communication manager's list.

Our hyperlinked society has come to expect immediate and accurate information on an on-going basis. The drills provided a learning opportunity for management to experience the impact of communication technologies on their media relations strategies, and to identify future training modules. As a result of the analysis, a review of the literature and interviews with management, a coherent list of potential best practices was formulated and presented in Table 2.

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Table 2: Potential Best Practices for Crisis Responses

1. Unified vision: Develop and promote a corporate communication philosophy statement for crisis situations.
  2. Unified voice: Develop and promote a "consistent" emergency response strategy that is aligned with corporate philosophy and implemented at individual sites.
  3. Response history: Develop a mechanism to better coordinate crisis response information from each site.
  4. Share the positive during the negative: Develop materials designed to inform the reader of the company's impact within the community and describe the on-site and off-site response plan.
  5. By all means: Different publics seek information from different dissemination channels. Evaluate the audience and select the appropriate communication tool.
  6. Be on the right side of the Digital Divide: In order to better maintain relationships with our publics, an effort to provide updated and on-going information is essential.
- 

Innovations can spur potential relationship enhancement during normal business operations and in times of crisis. XYZ Corporation can supplement its public relations strategies and tactics by embracing and diffusing communication technologies for on-going and crisis-oriented relationship development. If the effort is spearheaded by corporate management and supported by the CEO, the plan will be universally implemented and followed.

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## Exploring the Link Between Volume of Media Coverage and Business Outcomes

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Since the founding of public relations, practitioners have intuitively believed in the power of positive unpaid media to affect behavioral goals. But does it really work? If so, how much coverage is needed? This paper suggests a strong relationship between coverage volume and business outcomes, with three case studies looking at volume alone; tonality-refined volume, and message-refined volume.

Since the founding of public relations as a discipline, practitioners have intuitively believed in the power of positive unpaid media<sup>1</sup> to affect the cycle of *awareness, knowledge, interest and intent*<sup>2</sup> that is needed to achieve behavioral goals. Edward Bernays, who is often referred to as “the Father of Public Relations,” demonstrated the way to manipulate public opinion was through the indirect use of “third party authorities,” such as the media:

*“If you can influence the leaders, either with or without their conscious cooperation, you automatically influence the group which they sway.”*<sup>3</sup>

While the field of public relations has matured far beyond this early one-way model of communication, influencing the media remains the largest focus of the \$5.4-billion worldwide PR industry today.<sup>4</sup>

But does it really work? And if so, how much media coverage is needed to affect change? Like the old adage, “*if a tree falls in the forest, and no one is around to hear it, does it still make a sound?*”... is a company successful because it builds a terrific product or behaves as a good corporate citizen, or because people know about these things through the communicated word?” What good is the most provocative message if no one hears it?

This paper will explore the importance of **media coverage volume** in the effectiveness of a public relations program. According to the The Dictionary for Public Relations Measurement and Research, “Public Relations Effectiveness” is “*the degree to which the outcome of a public relations program is consonant with the overall objectives of the program as judged by some measure of causation*”<sup>5</sup>. While the challenge is truly finding ‘proof of cause’ in any PR campaign, we can still look for a “preponderance of evidence” of a meaningful relationship (correlation) between two variables. In this paper, the relationship would be between coverage volume and business outcomes<sup>6</sup>, such as medical procedures, sales and prescription volume.

This topic may appear to be very basic and fundamental, but it has not been addressed with specific evidence to date.

The case studies presented in this paper are among almost 200 executed over the past four years by a leading media research firm<sup>7</sup>. These studies involved an analysis of more than 10 million news articles that compared the **quality and quantity** of client media coverage with business outcomes<sup>8</sup>. While most of these studies focused upon *share* of qualified coverage

between competing organizations, the data yielded insights about the subject of volume itself, and the variables that affect its impact.

## **MEDIA COVERAGE VOLUME METRICS**

In order to better understand the issue of media coverage volume, it is essential to look at the various ways it is measured today.

Clip Counting – This is the most common, and most basic, way to measure volume. Articles are simply collected, sorted by subject or by date, and counted regardless of the size or quality of the story itself. Because it offers no qualitative information, it can be severely misleading as a measure of success. According to a 2003 *PR News* survey, “*Attitudes toward Public Relations Measurement & Evaluation*”<sup>9</sup>, a full 84% of respondents cited clip counts as their main method of measuring.

Audience Impressions – This is the second most commonly used method today, and consists of collecting print circulation figures, broadcast gross impressions and Internet “daily average visits,” and totaling them up as an estimate of audience reached. Various permutations exist, such as multiplying circulation figures by estimated pass-along rates. New research shows that using audience impressions to gauge effectiveness may be 11.6% more accurate than story counts<sup>10</sup> when correlating to outcomes; however, impressions can also mislead, since the size/duration of the story, and quality of the placement itself, is not considered. In the survey mentioned above, 51% of respondents claimed utilizing this method.

Media Value – Formerly referred to as “ad value equivalency,” “media value” refers to the practice of multiplying the space or time occupied by a story by advertising costs, and totaling them as a measure of success. While there is no ‘equivalency’ between the impact a story might have versus that of an ad, new research<sup>11</sup> shows that the information embedded in market-driven advertising costs do improve correlations between media coverage and business outcomes by 25.5% over clip counts, and 12.5% over impressions. However, while this method does capture the size/duration of a story, and is a good measure of prominence<sup>12</sup>, it lacks other qualitative factors such as tone, message appropriateness, etc., so is not an adequate measure alone. Media value was used by 45% of respondents in the *PR News* survey.

Qualified-Volume Measures – More progressive and accurate measures of media coverage volume include counting and comparing only those articles that have been “qualified” by factors such as:

- Tonality
- Prominence
- Target audience reached
- Contains key messages
- Contains accurate messages
- Contains messages placed within proper context
- Size or duration
- Dominance, and so on ...

While qualified-volume scores will always be lower in absolute value than non-qualified, they usually correlate much better to business outcomes than raw counts.

Media Analysis Indices – In an attempt to marry the best quantitative measures (clip counts, impressions or media values) with the best qualitative measures (tone, prominence, message, etc.), more and more analysis firms are offering single-metric indices such as the *VMS Media Prominence Index*<sup>TM</sup>, the *Delahaye Impact Score* and the *Carma Favorability Rating*

*System.* While no metric is perfect, media indices do go a long way toward quantifying coverage volume in qualitative terms that are meaningful, and certainly toward equalizing it for competitive analysis.

Share of Media Coverage – Finally, we must consider share of media coverage volume as a metric growing in importance today. As we will explore in a subsequent paper, overall coverage volume may have less to do with business outcomes than relative share of volume among competitors.

## ISSUES TO BE EXPLORED

While this paper will not attempt to address every variable discussed above, it will explore the importance of two of them: Tonality and Message, and how they modify the effect of pure volume.

## METHODOLOGY

The case studies that follow were executed through an advanced linguistics, artificial intelligence tool with human-like text analysis capabilities<sup>13</sup> that enabled the automated scoring of tone. Because of this technology, studies that would have normally been cost-prohibitive due to large clip volumes were done quickly and economically. The goal of these case studies, along with almost 200 others, was to determine how changes in public discussion (unpaid media) correlated to changes in business outcomes. These cases utilize sales, prescription volume and medical procedures as examples of desired, and undesired, business results.

Print, broadcast and Internet articles were imported into the Ai system from Lexis Nexis, Factiva and other electronic sources. Only the portions of each clip that were actually ‘owned’ by a client organization were counted for credit, and scored qualitatively and quantitatively. The examples that follow utilize Clip Counts, Impressions, and the Media Prominence Index™, with Pearson Product Moment Coefficient (r)<sup>14</sup> correlation comparisons to results.

## CASE STUDIES

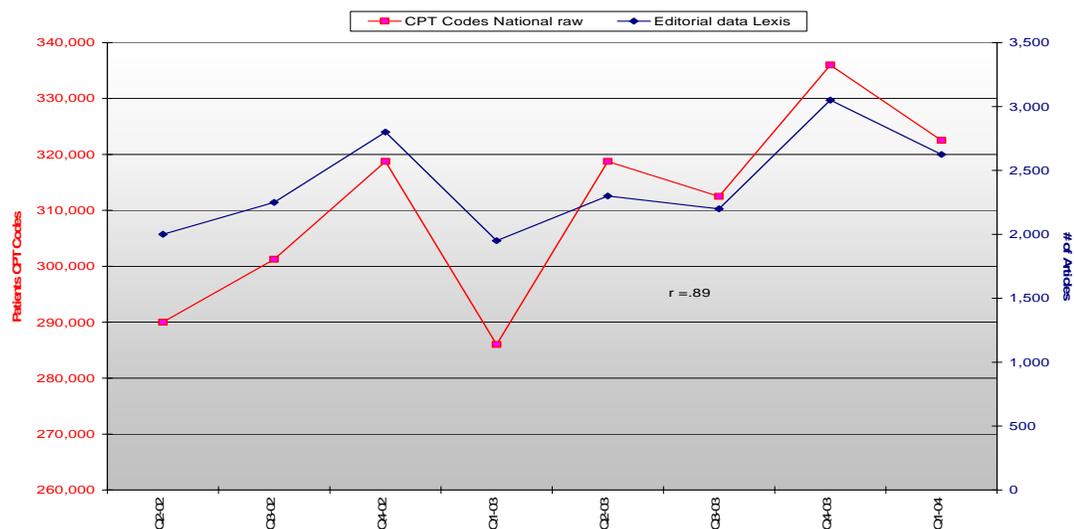
### Study One: Pure Volume

The graph below illustrates a study for a healthcare organization that had extensively publicized the importance of mammograms, but didn’t know if the effort had achieved its objective of driving patients to doctors’ offices for medical procedures. The campaign included no paid media or promotional activity, so was completely dependent upon media coverage.

The five-quarter study analyzed 47,000 articles, all of which carried clear messages of the importance of mammograms for the early detection of cancer. This was a particularly simple study in that the message itself was essentially neutral and factual, and therefore resonated well with the media. Also, there were no competitors with dissenting messages. The volume measurement used in this study was simple Clip Counts.

As illustrated in the chart that follows, the correlation between editorial coverage for this campaign and mammograms was a very high  $r=.89$ . Thus, it appears that there is a strong relationship between media coverage and business results, since procedures increased as the volume of press went up, and decreased when it went down.

## Correlations between Editorial Coverage for Mammography and Corresponding Medical Procedures (CPT Codes)



### Study 2: A Closer Look at Tonality

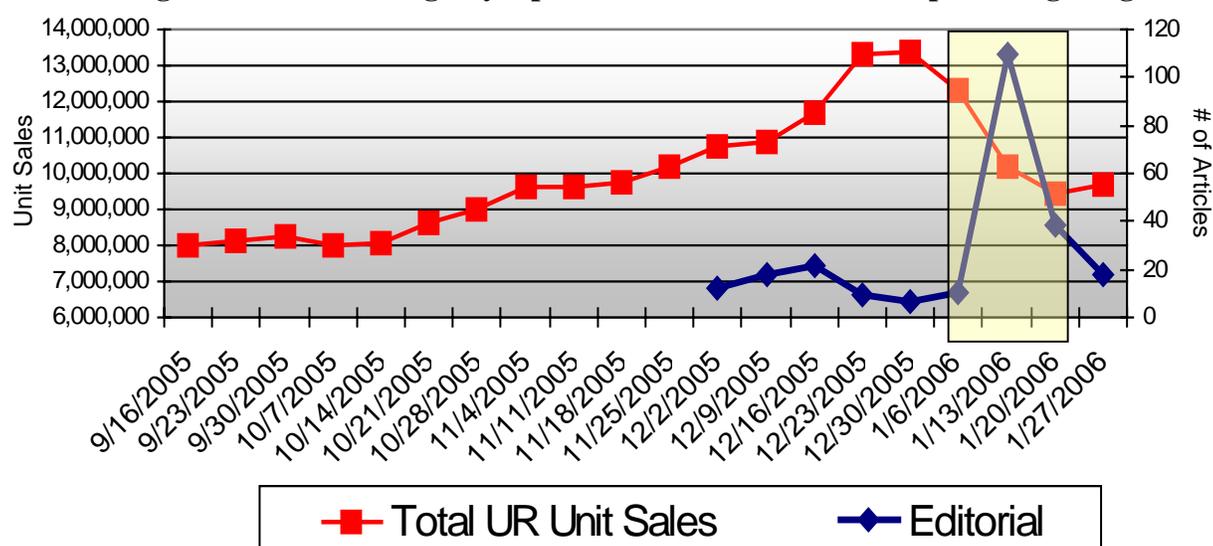
What we've demonstrated above is relatively simplistic: that in some cases where tonality and message are neutral and straightforward, a clear correlation exists between editorial volume and outcomes. But such an ideal situation is rarely the case in the real world.

This next study deals with the issue of negative news, which has an *inverse* correlation to desired outcomes. The old adage of, "there's no such thing as bad publicity," is clearly untrue. Bad publicity happens, and with it, undesired results.

On January 6th of 2006, The American College of Chest Physicians released a report saying that cough medicines were ineffective: "*There is no clinical evidence that over-the-counter cough expectorants or suppressants relieve cough.*" The articles went on to say that *allergy* medications *were* effective, however, due to their drying effects. This news story was immediately covered by all the major TV broadcasts (World News Tonight, Today, Early Show, Good Morning America) and most of the daily newspapers.

Regarding other marketing efforts, there was no change in any marketing mix variable during the short time period during which this news hit and sales dropped.

### Negative News on Cough Syrups Coincides with Severe Drop in Cough Segment Sales



The chart above illustrates the immediate impact of the surge of negative stories (blue line) on cough syrup unit sales (red line) in a very short time period. (Note: cough syrup sales had already started downward in December, which is standard during the Holiday Season; but the *rate* at which they dropped after the news broke, and the *degree* of the loss, was unprecedented). It also shows a slight rebound in sales once the volume of negative news eased up. The measurement metric used in this study was Tonality-Qualified Clip Counts, and the number of stories was several hundred.

Interestingly, one client's bad news may be another's good news. Corresponding measures to this negative publicity included a 12% surge in physician visits for respiratory illness for the week ending January 14<sup>th</sup>; and, allergy medicine sales soared reflecting the positive news in that same story. Bottom line, whether the tone is positive, negative or neutral, it appears volume links closely with business results – though the desirability of those results is another issue.

### Study 3: Is Tonality Enough? What about Message?

Here is an award-winning study from Porter Novelli<sup>15</sup> illustrating how media coverage that simply mentions a brand, but does not deliver meaningful or accurate messages about that brand, may not have much impact. As with the other studies discussed above, this product was promoted solely through unpaid media.

The product studied was a prescription medication for the treatment of overactive bladder, and the outcome measure was prescription volume. Some 3,000 articles were analyzed using a proprietary media index<sup>16</sup> that accounted for tone. The overall correlation between the primarily neutral and positive coverage and prescriptions was modest ( $r=.51$ ), suggesting that volume alone is not sufficient to produce desired results.

However, when coverage was limited to only that which contained *at least one key message*, and was then correlated to prescriptions, the  $r$  value soared to .97. Of further interest, only two of the six key messages appeared to be driving the results. Incidentally, this Porter

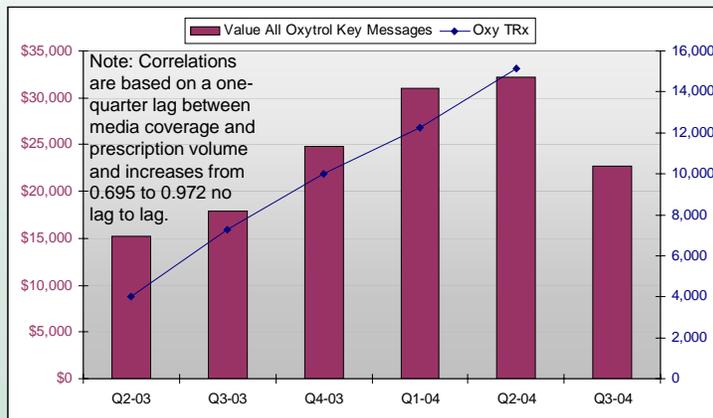
Novelli study won the **2006 Institute for Public Relations Jack Felton Golden Ruler Award** for excellence in PR measurement & evaluation.

### News with Key Messages Coincide with Prescription Volume

#### Correlation of Oxytrol Key Message Discussion and TRx



- The value of articles containing key messages correlates very well ( $r=.97$ ) with Oxytrol prescription volume.
- The chart below shows the net media value of Oxytrol media coverage containing one or more key messages versus Oxytrol prescription volume.



PRoof©

PN Key Message Optimization

9

These Porter Novelli findings dovetail with work done by David Michaelson, Ph.D, and Toni Griffin in their paper, “A New Model for Media Content Analysis.”<sup>17</sup> Michaelson and Griffin found that “between 60 percent and 85 percent of articles on the key issues of concern to MetLife included errors in reporting, a misrepresentation of key information or an omission of basic information that should have appeared in the context of the articles.”

Both studies illustrate the fallacy of considering a campaign a success if one gets lots of overall pick-up, and even “key-message” pick-up, without checking that the messages delivered were accurate and resonated well with the targeted audience.

### INITIAL CONCLUSIONS

As stated earlier, this paper only skims the surface of exploring the relationship between media coverage volume and related business outcomes. It cannot lay claim to proof of causation in any of the cases above, since experimental research would be required to make that leap.

But it appears there is a preponderance of evidence that suggests a strong relationship between the two. Certainly Bruce Jeffries-Fox, former chair of the Institute for Public Relations’ Commission on PR Measurement and Evaluation, found similar results in a series of studies he did for AT&T several years ago<sup>18</sup>. At the conclusion of his work, he wrote, “These data suggest that exposure to prolonged and highly positive news coverage can positively impact consumers’ attitudes toward and perceptions of a company.”

## IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSION

So media coverage volume matters; and, depending upon your business goals, tone and message also matter. Implications for the practice of PR seem obvious:

1. Establish clear, measurable business goals and objectives for your campaign.
2. Utilize formative research to establish key messages that resound with your targeted audiences.
3. Secure as much positive, on-message media coverage as is possible.

Implications for PR measurement and evaluation would include:

1. Measuring the volume of media coverage with Clip Counts may be sufficient for correlating relatively neutral, factual campaigns to business outcomes.
2. For more controversial, complex or commercial campaigns, volume can be better determined with more qualified measures that are sensitive to Tone and Message, if correlations are to be seen.

A second paper will follow exploring coverage volume in terms of competitive share, to see how relative volume plays into the mix.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>“Unpaid media” or “earned media” refers to news or editorial coverage that has not been purchased as advertising or advertorial.

<sup>2</sup> *A New Model for Media Content Analysis* by David Michaelson of David Michaelson & Company and Toni L. Griffin of MetLife, available through the Institute for Public Relations, [www.instituteforpr.org](http://www.instituteforpr.org).

<sup>3</sup> *Edward Bernays (1891 - 1995) as quoted in his 1928 book Propaganda*.

<sup>4</sup> Council of Public Relations Firms 2002 Industry Fact Sheet; [www.prfirms.org](http://www.prfirms.org).

<sup>5</sup> *The Dictionary for Public Relations Measurement and Research* by Dr. Don Stacks of the University of Miami, available through the Institute for Public Relations, [www.instituteforpr.org](http://www.instituteforpr.org).

<sup>6</sup> Outcomes are defined in *The Dictionary for Public Relations Measurement and Research* as “quantifiable changes in awareness, knowledge, attitude, opinion and behavior levels that occur as the result of a PR program or campaign.” “Business Outcomes” would refer to behavior changes such as an increase or decrease in sales, store traffic, product queries, intent-to-purchase, etc.

<sup>7</sup> PRtrak actually pioneered this research in the late nineties. It continues today under the auspices of VMS, which purchased PRtrak in September of 2005.

<sup>8</sup> See definition of “business outcomes” in Footnote #6.

<sup>9</sup> “Attitudes toward Public Relations Measurement & Evaluation,” a survey sponsored by PRtrak and published by PR News; designed and executed by David Michaelson, Ph.D, of David Michaelson & Company, LLC, and October, 2003. [www.instituteforpr.org](http://www.instituteforpr.org).

<sup>10</sup> “Close Correlations” white paper summarizes research done to compare the accuracy of using clip counts, audience impressions and media value when correlating to outcomes, from VMS, available at [www.vmsinfo.com](http://www.vmsinfo.com).

<sup>11</sup> “Close Correlations,” as above.

<sup>12</sup> “Advertising Value Equivalency,” an IPR Commission on PR Measurement and Evaluation white paper, by Bruce Jeffries-Fox; [www.instituteforpr.org](http://www.instituteforpr.org).

<sup>13</sup> This analysis tool is part of VMS’ editorial measurement system; [www.vmsinfo.com](http://www.vmsinfo.com).

<sup>14</sup> The Pearson Product Moment Coefficient is a measure of association that describes the direction and strength of a linear relationship between two variables; it is usually measured at the

interval or ratio data level. Definition is from *The Dictionary for Public Relations Measurement and Research* by Dr. Don Stacks of the University of Miami, available through the Institute for Public Relations, [www.instituteforpr.org](http://www.instituteforpr.org). Pearson Correlations were preferred by the authors of these studies since the qualitative data in social science research is inherently less precise.

<sup>15</sup> Study was entitled PProof© - Porter Novelli Key Message Assessment & Optimization” for Watson Pharma, Inc. on OXYTROL, with VMS’ editorial measurement system.

<sup>16</sup> VMS’ Media Prominence Index utilizes Media Value refined by Tone and Prominence (of client in article).

<sup>17</sup> “A New Model for Media Content Analysis,” by David Michaelson of David Michaelson & Company, LLC, and Toni L. Griffin of MetLife, 2005; available at [www.instituteforpr.org](http://www.instituteforpr.org).

<sup>18</sup> “Toward an Understanding of How News Coverage and Advertising Impact Consumer Perceptions, Attitudes and Behavior;” by Bruce Jeffries-Fox of Jeffries-Fox Associates; [www.instituteforpr.org](http://www.instituteforpr.org).

**Toward a Publics-Driven, Emotion-Based Approach in Crisis Communication:  
Testing the Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) Model**

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Extending current situation-based conceptualizations of crisis response, the authors have developed a more universal and systemic approach to understanding the role of emotions in crises. The authors' Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) model is based on a public-based, emotion-driven perspective where different crises are mapped on two continua, the organization's involvement with the crisis issue and primary public's coping strategy. The initial test suggested theoretical rigor in the model and found that publics involved in crises pertaining to reputational damage, technological breakdown, industrial matters, labor unrest, and regulation/legislation, are likely to feel anxious, angry, and sad. At the same time, they are likely to engage in conative coping and take active steps to restore some semblance of normalcy within their immediate environment. As counter-intuitive as this may appear, organizations embroiled in these crises need only to engage moderately, rather than intensely, in reaching out to the publics. This study is the first of a series of studies to generate what Yin (2003) termed "analytic generalization" (p. 33). The findings from this study, arguably, represent the imprints of an initial trail that may open up to a possibly new vista of research in crisis communication.

How to shape the appropriate strategies in response to a crisis is critical for any given organization and public relations practitioner working in the field of crisis communication. Given that the goals of crisis communication, defined as the "ongoing dialogue between the organization and its publics" prior to, during, and after the crisis (Fearn-Banks, 2002, p. 2) are to restore organizational normalcy, influence public perception, and regain and repair image and reputation, strategies used should be "designed to minimize damage to the image of the organization" (p. 2). Strategies, argued Massey (2001), are "message repertoires that are designed to repair the organization's image by influencing stakeholder perceptions" (p. 155). Ray (1999) argued that strategies establish and enact "control (at least in its appearance) in the face of high uncertainty" (p. 19). Lukaszewski (1997) argued that the strategic management of message response in crisis communication is a "fundamental communication principle" (p. 8). Designing sound strategic communications and tactics to communicate crisis so as to minimize damage to the image of the organization has been described as "management at its zenith" (Stocker, 1997, p. 203).

While most of these strategies are often characterized as direct responses to the crisis (Cowden & Sellnow, 2002; Fearn-Banks, 2002; Fink, 1986; Harrison, 1999; Massey, 2001; Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992; Seegar & Ulmer, 2002; Ulmer, 2001), Ray (1999) argued that

strategies would either, (1) deny the crisis exists; (2) provide “partial, inaccurate, or delayed information”; or (3) maintain an open communication channels with constituents (p. 20).

*Current Situation-Based Conceptualization of Crisis Response*

Arguably, the two dominant theories on crisis strategies, Benoit’s (e.g., 1994; 1995; 1997; 1999; 2004) image repair strategies, and Coombs’ (e.g., 1995; 1998) crisis response strategies, are designed to understand what strategies are relevant to use under what circumstances. These often stem from a *situation-based* response to crisis. The image repair theory is appropriate to be used when the situation leads to a loss of face. When face is threatened, face works is used to repair image, argued Benoit & Brinson (1994). This usually occurs when the accused is believed to have committed an offensive act by its salient audience (Benoit, 2004). Face, image, and reputation are extremely important commodities, argued Benoit and Brinson (1994), because, as a society, we pride ourselves on, and value those who enact tolerance, and sensitivity, to the feelings and traditions of others (Brinson & Benoit, 1999). Coombs’ (1998) strategies are positioned according to the situation based on the organization’s locus of control. On one hand, when the organization is deemed to have strong personal control over the crisis, more accommodative strategies like full apology are recommended for use. On the other hand, when the organization has weak control over the crisis, more defensive strategies like attack and denial are recommended.

*ICM Model: Conceptualizing Emotions in Crisis Responses*

While these situation-based crisis responses serve as vital roadmaps to understand the crisis situation, it is argued that a more universal and systemic approach would be to shape crisis responses from an *emotion-based* perspective: To understand what are the emotional upheavals that the publics involved in the crisis are likely to experience so that strategies can be streamlined to address their specific needs. Studies argued that the perception of a crisis, particularly from a given public, is not strictly a function of an environmental stimulus itself, but involves an interpretation of the stimulus (Carver & Blaney, 1977). Emotion is argued to be a critical stimulus. Lazarus (1991) defined emotion as “organized cognitive-motivational-relational configurations whose status changes with changes in the person-environment relationship as this is perceived and evaluated (appraisal)” (p. 38). In a crisis, as the conflict between the publics and the organization develops, emotions are one of the anchors in the publics’ interpretation of what is unfolding, changing, and shaping.

Jin, Pang, and Cameron (2007) have developed a new approach called the Integrated Crisis Mapping model (ICM) aimed at understanding the diverse and varied emotions likely to be experienced by the key stakeholders. Dominant emotions in the ICM model, developed from integrating works from psychology and crises literature, are extrapolated on two continua. On the X-axis is the publics’ coping strategy (from cognitive to conative coping), which consists of the primary public’s cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external or internal demands and on the Y-axis is the level of organizational involvement (from high to low). Different types of crises, drawn from the crisis literature, are mapped into each of the four quadrants, with the dominant and secondary emotions posited.

As an initial attempt to test the theoretical robustness and ecological validity of the ICM model, this study examines five crises posited in the first quadrant, crises we infer require the publics’ conative coping and high organizational involvement, where the primary emotion identified is anger, followed by anxiety. These cases are studied for their instrumental value rather than intrinsic value. In instrumental case study methodology, Stake (1998) argued that the cases are examined to provide “insight into an issue or refinement of theory” (p. 88). The five

crises examined are the pretexting scandal involving Hewlett Packard, an example of reputational damage; Dell's battery recall, an example of technological breakdown; the Sago mining crisis, an example of industrial crisis; Ford Motors' job cuts, an example of labor unrest/protest; and Military Commissions Act of 2006, an example of regulatory/legislative minefield. Data to examine the five crises come from content analyses of the population of stories published in the largest circulating and widely influential national newspapers, *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Washington Post* (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2006; Viguerie & Franke, 2004). To ensure that media coverage reflects organizational perspectives, the respective organizations' websites were accessed to analyze their official announcements through press releases. However, as such information were not available in two of the five cases, namely the Ford Motors and Military Commissions Act 2006 cases, the authors decided to analyze only media coverage for all cases for more comparable analyses.

This study pushes boundaries on four fronts. First, we attempt to understand how an organization and its primary public appraise a crisis; second, how different organizational involvement levels and public coping strategies can lead to different positioning on the crisis map driven by the primary emotion conjured in the primary public; and third, how different crisis mapping can impact organizational response. Fourth, and more significantly, this represents our initial attempt to build a new theoretical framework. Saunders (2004) argued that applying theory to real life situations is "useful towards theory building" because such situations "provide observations grounded in actual organizational efforts aimed at solving actual organizational problems" (p. 140). Five cases of the same phenomenon were explored in order to construct a more robust study (Yin, 1993). This study represents the first of subsequent empirical tests to understand the theoretical and practical rigors of our ICM model. The authors are excited to understand how well the hypotheses posited in our model hold up, and what subsequent refinements need to be made to stand the scrutiny of scholarship as well as its relevance to the practitioners' world. Through the building of this model, it is the authors' goal to advance our current understanding in crisis communication and offers practical insights to scholars and practitioners on how they can understand, with greater preciseness, the emotional upheavals their primary publics are likely to experience so that they can shape the appropriate crisis response and tools to manage the crisis with optimal effectiveness.

## Theoretical Framework

### *Primary Publics in Crises*

Publics are a "group of people who face a common issue" (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1996, p. 84). In a crisis, the publics have been defined differently, according to their importance to resolving situation, their functional roles, and their long-term influences. Lukaszewski (1997) argued that there are four key publics that the organization must communicate with, and priorities must be made to communicate with them as soon as possible. They are: (1) Those most directly affected, the victims; (2) The employees, who may bear the brunt of the wrath from the publics; (3) Those indirectly affected like families and relatives; and (4) The news media and other channels of external communication. Dougherty (1992) preferred to examine publics in terms of their functional roles. Enabling publics, which include shareholders, board of directors and regulatory agencies, have the power and authority to control the organization's resources. Functional publics mainly consist of the organization's consumers. Normative publics are formed because of shared values, like political or interest groups. Diffused publics are people who are not members of a formal organization, yet, nonetheless, powerful groups. Ulmer (2001)

categorized publics in terms of their long-term influences. He regarded the primary public as the community in which the organization works, and the employees. The customer and the media would be classified as a secondary public.

In crisis situations, we thus propose that the primary publics comprise the following characteristics: 1) They are most affected by the crisis; 2) They have shared common interests, and destiny, in seeing the crisis resolved; and 3) They have long-term interests, and influences, on the organization's reputation and operation.

*Range of Emotions in Crises*

*Core Relational Themes.* According to Lazarus (1991), core relational theme refers to person-environment relationships that come together with personal meaning and the appraisal process. In the processing of emotion in a crisis, the key lies in the central relational harm or benefit in the relational encounters that underlies each specific kind of emotion evoked by either party's expression and behavior. When the implications of well-being are appraised by the other party, each relationship may produce an appraisal and hence a response consistent with the theme and the emotion that flows from the expression or behavior of the other party.

*Appraisal.* Lazarus (1991) proposed that there are two types of appraisal: primary vs. secondary. Specifically, primary appraisal addresses whether and how an encounter or situation is relevant to one's own well-being. Its components include goal relevance, goal congruence or incongruence, and the involvement of the party. In the processing of emotion from the public's point of view, the central issue of the crisis is always goal relevance. Understandably, the goal relevance from the perspectives of both the public, and the organization, involved in the same crisis are likely to differ.

Secondary appraisal refers to an evaluation of one's options and resources for coping with the situation and future prospects (Lazarus, 1991), which means whether action is required, and if so, what kind of action ought to be taken. These comprise three components: Blame or credit, coping potential, and future expectancy. In a crisis situation, blaming takes precedence over credits. The coping potential, and future expectancy, specify any given action the public or the organization might take to prevent harm, and how it manages the demands of the crisis situation, and whether the strategy is feasible, and what result is expected.

*Public Responses Based on Key Emotions*

Based on the above appraisal model of emotion, Jin, Pang, and Cameron (2007) have proposed a theoretical framework to understand the primary publics' crisis responses, as evidenced by the predominant emotion elicited by different types of crises. In a crisis, Lazarus (1991) argued that there are predominantly six negative emotions (Anger, Fright, Anxiety, Guilt, Shame, and Sadness) based upon different appraisal, driven by different core relational themes. For the purposes of organizational understanding, we would argue that four of the six (anger, fright, anxiety, and sadness) are dominant emotions experienced by the publics, with guilt and shame secondary or subsumed emotions, particularly external publics, like victims, who are less subject to guilt or shame.

Insert Figure 1 about here\*

*Anger.* The core relational theme underlying anger is a demanding offense against "me" and "mine" (Lazarus, 1991). In crisis situation, the primary publics tend to experience anger when facing a demanding offense from certain organization against them or their well being. In an organizational context, the primary public will want to find out what the organization has been doing is relevant on two levels. First, the ego-involvement of the public is engaged to preserve or enhance their identity or benefit in the situation. Second, there is usually an issue of

blaming. Specifically, this blame derives from the knowledge that the organization is accountable for the harmful actions and they could have been controlled or even prevented by the organization. The organization is invariably the object of blame.

As far as coping strategy development and action tendency assessment are concerned, the primary public might potentially favor attack as the strategy in facing the organization. More specifically, if future expectancy of the attack is positive, they are more likely to put the attack strategy into practice. However, anger can disappear when the defense against the organization is successful. It will continue to fester when their initial self-defense failed. At the stance and strategy level, though sometimes the public may appear cooperative, anger can be expressed indirectly in passively aggressive tactics, which the organization would well seek to detect if it wants to identify the appropriate strategies to deal with such emotional outrage.

*Fright.* The core relational theme underneath fright is facing uncertain and existential threat (Lazarus, 1991). In terms of the public's appraisal process, they find the situation of dealing with the organization as goal relevant yet incongruent. Organization-based identity issue or ego-involvement issue might or might not be relevant in the fright. Secondly, given the nature of the crisis, the public may either blame the organization or not.

As far as coping strategy is concerned, the public is not certain about how to cope with the loss as well as how the involved organization may handle this situation. Depending on their resource and power, they may choose avoidance or escape from the crisis as a viable recourse (action tendency).

*Anxiety.* By definition, anxiety stems from the core relational theme as facing an immediate, concrete, and overwhelming danger (Lazarus, 1991). The public may feel overwhelmed by the crisis situation and look for the immediate solutions. Accordingly, the public may go through the following appraisal process: They may assess the situation as relevant but not congruent with their goal of survival. Their ego-involvement is evidenced as the effort to protect their own ego-identity against the organization whom they perceive to be the direct source of existential threat. Secondly, they might blame or not blame the organization depending on their environment assessment. Given the uncertainty of how to cope with the situation and what the organization might react, they tend to avoid and escape. Noticeably, the action tendencies of publics under fright and anxiety overlap. This may give crisis managers in the organization sufficient consolidation of resources to effectively deal with the publics under these situations.

*Sadness.* Having experienced an irrevocable loss in the core relational theme of the emotion of sadness (Lazarus, 1991). In those cases, the public suffers from tangible or intangible loss or both. Their goal of survival is threatened and this loss of any type of ego-involvement (e.g., esteem, moral values, ideal, people and their well-being, etc.) caused by uncontrollable sources may lead them no one to blame and in desperate need for relief and comfort. If they perceive the loss can be restored or compensated for, their sadness may not occur or will be associated with hope. For successful crisis management, the organization might consider creating a favorable expectation by associating their efforts with hope while disassociating the situation with hopelessness and depression. The action tendency of the public might well depend on what measures the organization may take.

The primary level emotion is the one the public experiences at the first, or immediate, instance. The secondary level emotion is one the public experiences in subsequent instances, as time goes by, and contingent upon the organization's responses to the crisis. The secondary level emotion may be transferred from the dominant emotion or coexisting with the primary level. In

this study, we focus on the Quadrant with Anger as the primary emotion and Anxiety as the secondary emotion as conjured by crises in reputational damage, technological breakdown, industrial crisis, labor unrest/protest, and regulation/legislation.

### **Operationalization of the ICM Model**

As Figure 1 illustrates, the ICM model is indicated by a crisis matrix based on two axes: The analysis of the organizational involvement level in the crisis that can be examined through a scale of high involvement and low involvement, and the primary public's coping strategy from conative coping to cognitive coping. It is argued that for effective crisis management, the organization, at varied involvement level in different issues, must understand the primary public's emotional demands so as to communicate accordingly and align with the coping strategy needed by the primary public (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007).

On the **X-axis** is the public's coping strategy. Adapting the cognitive appraisal theory in emotion (Lazarus, 1991), there are two types of coping: 1) problem-focused coping – changing the actual relationship between the public and the organization via actual measures and steps, and 2) cognitive-focused coping – changing only the way in which the relationship is interpreted by the public. As the key components of appraisal process, this involves coping strategies and action tendency. During the coping process, the publics can alter or revise their interpretations based on the exigency of the situation. For instance, an accident, which demands high involvement from the organization and necessitates a cognitive coping strategy, may begin with sadness as the primary level dominant emotion. A secondary level response might be fright, when the results are not evident or satisfactory, as they normally are, given the extenuating circumstances of the crisis.

Coping strategy refers to the dominant choice of the publics in dealing with the crisis situation: Either 1) cognitive coping – the public try to sort out a way of thinking or interpreting the meaning of the crisis with regard to their well-being, or 2) conative coping – the public try to manage the situation so as to alter a troubled relationship or to sustain a desirable one by taking actions or at least show their tendency of action. Anchoring these two coping strategies to the axis, different primary publics in different crises may choose different coping strategy along this continuum. Therefore, this X-axis consists of cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external or internal demands (and conflicts between them) that are appraised as exceeding the resources of the public.

On the **Y-axis** is the level of organizational involvement, ranging from high to low. In each of the quadrants are categorizations of crisis types, conceptualized based on three criteria: 1) Internal-external; 2) Personal-public; and 3) Unnatural-natural. An external-public-natural crisis, like economic downturn, natural disaster, and accident, would likely call for higher level of involvement from the organization. For instance, the 2005 Tsunami disaster that swept across most parts of Asia is one no government could ever plan for. Coombs (1998) categorized these events as external locus of control and weak personal responsibility on the organization's part. At the same time, some variations of catastrophe, involving internal-public-natural or unnatural, like labor unrest, and loss of reputation as a result of mismanagement, require high organizational involvement as well. While serious, some internal-personal-unnatural (i.e., man-made) crises, like human resource problems involving employees, or psychopathic acts, necessitate relatively less intense organizational involvement, particularly when the organization did not cause these problems to arise. Jin, Pang and Cameron (2007) defined high organizational involvement as intense, consolidated, sustained, and high priority in allocation of resources to deal with the crisis; on the contrary, low organizational involvement does not mean cursory or no

involvement, but that the organization devotes comparatively less resources, effort, and energy to deal with the crisis, either because the organization recognizes there is little it can do, or when the organization did not cause the crisis, it is depending on external help, like a regulatory agency, to help it resolve the crisis.

*Emotions and coping strategy.* The two axes further form four quadrants in the crisis matrix. In each of the quadrants is the dominant emotion, based on the confluence, interactions, and inter-relations of the publics' coping strategy as well as organizational involvement.

Quadrant 1: High involvement/Conative coping: Anger is fueled, and abated, by the organization's high involvement. On the immediate level, the publics may feel angry because they held the organization responsible. On the secondary level, they may feel anxious when they feel the organization is not doing enough. The conative coping strategy is driven by action tendency, the feeling that the public can, and must, something about the situation.

Quadrant 2: High involvement/Cognitive coping: The primary level emotion is sadness; and the secondary level emotion is fright. These are crises which give rise to emotion which primary publics can only comprehend at the cognitive level. With further comprehension based on coping strategy, these may give rise to a suppressed emotion.

Quadrant 3: Low involvement/cognitive coping: Conversely, the primary level emotion is fright, especially when the primary public realizes that there is little the organization can do, or the organization is devoting relatively less resources to the crisis. Fright may give way to sadness, a further manifestation of the helplessness of the situation.

Quadrant 4: Low involvement/Conative coping: Anxiety is caused by the perception of the organization's low involvement and possible inertia. On the immediate level, the publics may feel anxious because they felt the organization is not doing enough. This may give rise to anger, and anger may lead them to take matters in their own hands.

In this study, we focus on testing Quadrant 1 (High Involvement/Conative Coping), the first of subsequent empirical tests to examine the theoretical and practical rigors of our model. Given the proposed attributes of crises in this quadrant, we seek to understand, through the five cases,

*RQ1:* What are the primary emotions displayed by the primary publics, as evidenced in the news coverage?

*RQ2:* What is the extent of the organizations' involvements in the crises, as evidenced in the news coverage?

According to Lazarus (1991), after the evaluation of one's options and resources for coping with the situation, decision on future prospects needs to be made such as whether action is required, and if so, what kind of action ought to be taken. In a crisis situation, blaming takes precedence over credits. The coping potential, and future expectancy, specify any given action the public or the organization might take to prevent harm, and how it manages the demands of the crisis situation, and whether the strategy is feasible, and what result is expected. Thus, we seek to examine,

*RQ3:* What coping strategies were evident by primary publics, as evident in the news coverage?

*RQ4:* What, if any, is the difference in perception of the degree in organizational involvement in each of the crises between the organization and the publics?

*RQ5:* What, if any, is the difference in perception of the degree of the public's coping strategy in each of the crises between the organization and the publics?

## Method

We attempt to understand the veracity and rigor of our model using content analyses of cases, as evidence in media coverage. Case studies allow the researcher to delve into and explain, the uniqueness and complexity of organizational processes, and as Gummesson (2000) argued, to capture the essential processes of decision-making, implementation and change. The purpose of case studies is to empirically investigate a “contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” and address a “situation in which the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1993, p. 59). The five cases examined here would be what Stake (1994) described as the “epistemology” of the particulars and should thus not be regarded as a sample of two.

In this study, we adopt a multiple case study design within the same phenomenon, with the primary interest of understanding how our model works. The cases are thus studied for their instrumental value rather than intrinsic value (Stake, 1998). Though the cases are analyzed in detail, contexts examined, and activities explored, these play supporting roles to the researchers’ objectives, which are to facilitate understanding of how relevant they are to the model. Consequently, by applying the method on five disparately managed cases, Yin (1993) argued, is an appropriate initial attempt at theory testing (p. 64), with the aim of building “analytic generalizations” (Yin, 2003, p. 33) from the conceptualization.

Based on this approach, the authors seek to understand: first, how an organization and its primary public appraise the crisis; second, how different organizational involvement levels and public coping strategies lead to different positioning on the crisis map driven by the primary emotion conjured in the primary public; and third, what organizations can learn from this model.

### Sample

Five crises are selected based on the opinions and suggestions of a group of public relations practitioners and educators. Shin, Cheng, Jin, and Cameron (2005) found this to be a viable way of identifying the appropriate crises to analyze. The five cases are: Hewlett Packard case, an example of reputational damage; Dell’s battery recall, an example of technological breakdown; the Sago mining crisis, an example of industrial crisis; Ford Motors’ job cuts, an example of labor unrest/protest; and Military Commissions Act of 2006, an example of regulatory/legislative minefield. Data to examine Quadrant 1 of the ICM model comes from content analyses of the population of stories published in the largest circulating and widely influential national newspapers, *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Washington Post* (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2006; Viguerie & Franke, 2004).

News stories in the five major newspapers (N=259) were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words of the organization and the crisis. News stories were excluded if 1) there was no comment made by a spokesperson from the respective organization or official from the organization or no mention of any official communication from the organization; or 2) the stories were in the same publication or there was no mention of the crisis.

Hewlett Packard Case: HP’s internal leak crisis became public September 6, 2006 when the company filed documents with the Securities and Exchange Commission. Media coverage on the leak investigation lasted for months, but the articles analyzed focused on coverage until September 22, 2006, the day that the chairwoman of the board Patricia Dunn resigned. The population of HP news stories were obtained from September 6 to 22, 2006. News stories were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words (HP, H-P and Hewlett Packard) which yielded 135 stories. Stories that were relevant to the crisis were eventually filtered to 82.

Dell Case: The crisis surrounding Dell's battery recall began on August 14, 2006 with the organization's official announcement of the recall. The recall was voluntary and lasted until September 29, 2006 when the company announced an update on the situation. The majority of news coverage occurred during the first two weeks of the recall. The population of Dell news stories published on the five newspapers from August 14 to September 30, 2006, from the first official communication by Dell to one day after the last release on the topic by Dell. News stories were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words (Dell and battery) which yielded 31 stories. Stories that were relevant to the crisis were eventually filtered to 20.

Sago Mine Case: Media coverage of the Sago Mine accident began on January 4, 2005 with the statement given by the mine's owner ICG Group Inc. The bulk of media coverage occurred from January 6 to 13, 2006. The population of stories was accessed from January 4 to February 1, 2006, from the first official announcement from ICG to the last official statement by ICG on the crisis. News stories were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words (Sago mine and ICG) which yielded 135 stories. Stories that were relevant to the crisis were eventually filtered to 27.

Ford Case: Media coverage of the Ford job cutback crisis began on May 11, 2006, as newspapers reported on the mounting struggle of American automobile producers to keep pace with foreign competitors. Coverage intensified in August and September, following Ford's announcements that it would implement massive production cuts and manufacturing plant closings, as well as the buyout or layoff of tens of thousands of workers, as part of a massive corporate restructuring plan. The population of Ford news stories published on the five newspapers from May 10 to September 20, 2006, were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words (Ford and jobs) and stories that were relevant to the crisis were eventually filtered to 69.

Military Commissions Act 2006: The Central Intelligence Agency's crisis regarding the treatment of suspected terrorist conspirators imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, began on July 12, 2006. Responding to allegations of physical torture and unethical interrogation of detainees, American media questioned whether the constitutional rights of prisoners should be extended to alleged terrorists held abroad. President Bush and his administration acknowledged the existence of secret CIA prisons hosted by foreign governments, but declined to confirm the exact locations of these facilities. The population of CIA releases and news stories published on the five newspapers from July 12 to November 4, 2006. News stories were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words (CIA and Guantanamo) and stories that were relevant to the crisis were eventually filtered to 61.

### **Coders and Training**

Two coders, both graduate students and familiar with the content analysis method, conducted the coding. With the help of a codebook, the coders were given detailed instruction and description of the various categories used. Two practice sessions were held in December 2006 using samples of stories to familiarize with the coding instruments. The coders worked independently and were not allowed to consult with each other about the coding. The inter-coder reliability achieved .84 using Scott's Pi.

#### *Coding Instrument*

The unit of analysis is defined as a press release or a news story. This includes stories by the staff of the newspaper and wire stories from the editors. The content analysis instrument is designed to evaluate the appraisal of crisis involvement and coping strategies from

organizations' and their primary publics' perspectives. The 259 stories were coded for the following variables:

*Organizational Involvement:* First, organization's appraisal of the relevance between organizational goal and the crisis, measured on a 7 point Likert like scale, where 1 was "very low," and 7 was "very high". The scale was further operationalized from 1 = The crisis has nothing to do with the organization's goals, and is not likely at all to put the organization operation and reputation in danger; to 7 = The crisis hits the organization's goals and creates devastating damage. In cases where the issues are not addressed in the stories, we coded it as 99.

Second, organization's appraisal of its responsibility of the crisis (measured on a 7 point Likert like scale, where 1 was "very low," and 7 was "very high"). The scale was further operationalized from 1 = The organization has nothing to do with the crisis; to 7 = The organization takes full responsibility in the happening of the crisis; and 99 = Issue not addressed in the story.

The same set of involvement variables were also measured from the public's perspective as evidenced in the news stories.

*Primary publics' Coping Strategy:* First, primary public's willingness to change their opinion of the crisis (cognitive coping) (measured on a 7 point Likert like scale, where 1 was "not evident," and 7 was "very evident"). The scale was further operationalized from 1 = Public is willing to change its perception of the crisis, e.g. the crisis is what it is and there is no need to explain it further or change the angle of looking at it; to 7 = Public is extremely proactive in taking another look at the crisis and providing full explanation; and 99 = Issue not addressed in the stories.

Second, primary public's willingness to take actions to address the crisis (conative coping) (measured on a 7 point Likert like scale, where 1 was "not evident," and 7 was "very evident"). The scale was further operationalized from 1 = Public is not willing to take any action regarding the crisis; to 7 = Public is extremely proactive in taking actions with detailed plans against the crisis; and 99 = Issue not addressed in the stories. The same set of coping strategy variables were also measured from the organization's perspective as evidenced in the news stories.

*Public's Emotion Expressed* (from a list of sadness, fright, anger and sadness): First, primary emotion was measured on a 7 point Likert like scale, where 1 was "not evident," and 7 was "very evident", scoring the highest among other negative emotions. Second, secondary emotion was measured on a 7 point Likert like scale, where 1 was "not evident," and 7 was "very evident", scoring the second highest among other negative emotions. "Other Emotion" was required to be specified, if any, and coded in the same way. The scale was further operationalized from 1 = No trace of display of emotion; to 7 = Vivid and graphic description of facial expression of the public and direct quote on the emotion expressed; and 99 = Emotions not mentioned in the story.

## Results

### *Primary Emotions*

RQ1 examined the primary emotions displayed by the primary publics, as evidenced in the news coverage. For HP case, anger was displayed as the primary emotion ( $M = 2.22$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ) while anxiety as secondary emotion ( $M = 2.09$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ). Sadness ( $M = 1.12$ ,  $SD = .53$ ) and fright ( $M = 1.10$ ,  $SD = .45$ ) were also evident in the news coverage. There was no identifiable "other emotion". Anger and anxiety were highly correlated ( $r = .63$ ,  $p < .001$ ) but

there was no significant difference in terms of how evident they were in the news coverage ( $t = 1.02$ , n.s.).

For Dell case, anger was displayed as the primary emotion ( $M = 3.17$ ,  $SD = 2.08$ ) while anxiety as secondary emotion ( $M = 2.50$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ ). Sadness ( $M = 1.67$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) and fright ( $M = 1.00$ ,  $SD = .00$ ) were also evident in the news coverage. There was no identifiable “other emotion”. Anger and anxiety were not significantly correlated ( $r = .26$ , n.s.), and there was no significant difference in terms of how evident they were in the news coverage ( $t = 1.08$ , n.s.).

For Sago Mine case, anxiety was displayed as the primary emotion ( $M = 4.48$ ,  $SD = 2.06$ ) while sadness as secondary emotion ( $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = 2.00$ ). Anger ( $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = 2.01$ ) and fright ( $M = 2.92$ ,  $SD = 1.80$ ) were also evident in the news coverage. There were two identifiable “other emotions” (“joy” and “hope”, occurred three times and once, respectively). Anxiety and sadness were highly correlated ( $r = .60$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and there was significant difference in terms of how evident they were in the news coverage ( $t = 3.53$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

For Ford case, anxiety was displayed as the primary emotion ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ) while sadness as secondary emotion ( $M = 2.63$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ). Anger ( $M = 1.69$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) and fright ( $M = 2.23$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ) were also evident in the news coverage. There was no identifiable “other emotion”. Anxiety and sadness were highly correlated ( $r = .75$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and there was significant difference in terms of how evident they were in the news coverage ( $t = 7.96$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

For the immigration case leading to the Military Commissions Act 2006, anxiety was displayed as the primary emotion ( $M = 2.38$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ) while anger as secondary emotion ( $M = 2.02$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ). Sadness ( $M = 1.04$ ,  $SD = .29$ ) and fright ( $M = 1.04$ ,  $SD = .29$ ) were also evident in the news coverage. There was no identifiable “other emotion”. Anxiety and sadness were significantly correlated ( $r = .41$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but there was no significant difference in terms of how evident they were in the news coverage ( $t = 1.58$ , n.s.).

#### *Organizational Involvement*

RQ2 examined the extent of the organizations’ involvement in the crises, as evidenced in the news coverage. For HP case, the organization tended to perceive that the crisis is related to the organization’s goals but not closely related to the operation and/or reputation of the organization ( $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = .93$ ); in terms of crisis responsibility, it took somewhat responsibility and tended to stay neutral or balanced ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ). For Dell case, the similar pattern occurred: the organization tended to perceive that the crisis was related to the organization’s goals but not closely related to the operation and/or reputation of the organization ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ); in terms of crisis responsibility, it took somewhat responsibility and tended to stay neutral or balanced ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 1.83$ ).

For Sago Mine case, the organization tended to perceive that the crisis was somewhat closely related to the organization’s goals but not essentially relevant to the operation and/or reputation of the organization ( $M = 4.47$ ,  $SD = .84$ ); in terms of crisis responsibility, it took somewhat responsibility and tended to stay neutral or balanced ( $M = 3.64$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ). For Ford case, similarly, the organization tended to perceive that the crisis is somewhat closely related to the organization’s goals but not essentially relevant to the operation and/or reputation of the organization ( $M = 5.28$ ,  $SD = .83$ ); in terms of crisis responsibility, it took somewhat responsibility and tended to stay neutral or balanced ( $M = 4.30$ ,  $SD = .73$ ).

For the immigration case, the organization tended to perceive the crisis as related to the organization’s goals but not closely related to the operation and/or reputation of the organization

( $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = .70$ ); in terms of crisis responsibility, it took somewhat responsibility and tended to stay neutral or balanced ( $M = 3.90$ ,  $SD = .44$ ).

#### *Primary Publics' Coping Strategies*

RQ3 examined the primary publics' coping strategies, as evident in the news coverage. For HP, the primary publics tended to use more conative coping ( $M = 5.14$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) than cognitive coping ( $M = 4.53$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ) ( $t = 3.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ). For Dell case, there was no significant difference in its primary publics' coping strategy preference. For Sago Mine case, the primary publics tended to use more conative coping ( $M = 4.79$ ,  $SD = .78$ ) than cognitive coping ( $M = 3.96$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) ( $t = 2.78$ ,  $p < .05$ ). For Ford case, the primary publics tended to use more conative coping ( $M = 4.64$ ,  $SD = .96$ ) than cognitive coping ( $M = 4.27$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ) ( $t = 2.43$ ,  $p < .05$ ). For CIA case, the primary publics tended to use more conative coping ( $M = 5.40$ ,  $SD = .65$ ) than cognitive coping ( $M = 4.74$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ) ( $t = 4.70$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Except for the case involving Dell, the primary publics in all the other cases were more willing to take actions to address the crisis than to change their opinion of the crisis.

#### *Difference in Organizational Involvement Perception*

RQ4 examined the difference, if any, in perception of the degree in organizational involvement in each of the crises between the organization and the publics. For HP case, the primary publics perceived the organization's goals were more relevant to the crisis ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) than the organization perceived themselves ( $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) ( $t = 2.71$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The primary publics also perceived the organization had higher crisis responsibility for the crisis ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = .93$ ) than the organization appraised themselves ( $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) ( $t = 3.91$ ,  $p < .001$ ). For Sago Mine case, the primary publics perceived the organization's goals were more relevant to the crisis ( $M = 5.60$ ,  $SD = .70$ ) than the organization perceived themselves ( $M = 4.40$ ,  $SD = .70$ ) ( $t = 3.34$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The primary publics also perceived the organization had higher crisis responsibility for the crisis ( $M = 4.55$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) than the organization appraised themselves ( $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) ( $t = 2.81$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

For Dell, Ford and the immigration cases, there was no significant difference in perception of the degree in organization's goal relevance and crisis responsibility in each of the crises between the organization and the primary publics.

#### *Difference in Coping Strategy Perception*

RQ5 examined the difference, if any, in the perception of the degree of the publics' coping strategy in each of the crises between the organization and the publics. For the HP case, the primary publics were more willing to take cognitive coping ( $M = 4.53$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) than the organization ( $M = 3.86$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ) ( $t = 3.13$ ,  $p < .01$ ) perceived it to be. The primary publics were also more willing to take conative coping ( $M = 5.14$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) than the organization ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) ( $t = 3.44$ ,  $p < .01$ ) perceived it to be. The same pattern occurs in the immigration case leading to the Military Commissions Act 2006, where the primary publics were more willing to take cognitive coping ( $M = 4.74$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ) than the organization ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) ( $t = 4.07$ ,  $p < .001$ ) perceived it to be. The primary publics were also more willing to take conative coping ( $M = 5.40$ ,  $SD = .65$ ) than the organization ( $M = 4.91$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) ( $t = 2.49$ ,  $p < .05$ ). It seemed that the primary publics in these two cases were more active than the organizations in taking efforts to change opinions and the crisis situations.

For Dell case, there was no significant difference in the cognitive coping strategy taken between the primary publics and the organization ( $t = 1.48$ , n.s.). Interestingly, the organization was more willing to take conative coping ( $M = 5.92$ ,  $SD = .80$ ) than the primary publics ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ) ( $t = 3.78$ ,  $p < .01$ ). For Ford case, there was no significant difference in the

cognitive coping strategy taking between the primary publics and the organization ( $t = 1.44$ , n.s.). Again, the organization was more willing to take conative coping ( $M = 5.44$ ,  $SD = .91$ ) than the primary publics ( $M = 4.63$ ,  $SD = .98$ ) ( $t = 3.66$ ,  $p < .01$ ). It seemed that the organizations in these two cases were more active than the primary publics demanded in taking efforts to change opinions and the crisis situations. For Sago Mine case, there was no significant difference in the cognitive and conative coping strategies taking between the primary publics and the organization ( $t = 1.48$ , n.s.;  $t = 1.00$ , n.s., respectively).

### Discussion

The findings are distilled into two categories: What the evidence suggests as strong merit; and what the evidence suggests as some merit. Implications of the evidence are drawn, with suggestions to refine the ICM mode (see Figure 2).

#### *Publics' Emotional Response: New Variations of Emotions*

In crises which require high organizational involvement, and conative coping by the publics, the ICM model had posited the existence of two emotions: Anger as the primary level emotion which the publics experience in the immediate instance; and anxiety as the secondary level emotion which the publics experience in subsequent instances. The secondary level emotion may be transferred from the dominant emotion or coexist with the primary level. Our findings showed that anger and anxiety were evident in three of the five cases. Of the three, two showed that it was associated or co-existed with the other. Of the two emotions posited, anxiety was evident in all the cases studied, mostly as primary level emotion while anger was present in three of the five cases, either as primary or secondary level emotions. Another emotion, which we had posited in another quadrant, sadness, was evident in two of the five cases. Regardless of what the emotional combinations were, anger-anxiety, anxiety-anger, anger-sadness, anxiety-sadness, in four of the five cases, our findings found a high likelihood that one emotion co-existed with the other. Though anxiety is found to be evident in all five cases, it could not be said with certainty that anxiety was the more powerful or dominant of the two emotions. Evidence, thus, suggests strong merit in the existence of three variants of emotions, instead of two, in this quadrant. These are anger, anxiety, and sadness, with a high likelihood that one co-exists with the other. Evidence also suggests some merit that there may not be a distinction between primary and secondary level emotions, but that these emotions are often intertwined and interwoven with one another.

#### *Publics' Coping Strategy: Evidence of Conative Coping*

In this quadrant, our ICM model had posited that the publics engage more in conative than cognitive coping. In conative coping, we argue that the publics try to manage the situation so as to alter a troubled relationship or to sustain a desirable one by taking actions or at least show their tendency of action. On the contrary, in cognitive coping, we argue that the publics try to sort out a way of thinking or interpreting the meaning of the crisis with regard to their well being. Findings showed that as far as the publics were concerned, in four of the five cases, they engaged in conative coping and regarded their own abilities and willingness to take action to change their perception of the crisis situation. Consequently, findings also showed that because they were willing to take proactive steps to deal with the crises on their ends, these publics expected, in two of the five cases, the organizations to do likewise and similarly engage in conative coping strategies to deal with the crises. Evidence thus suggests strong merit in the conative coping strategies of the primary publics in crises relating to reputation, technological breakdown, labor unrest, industrial matters and regulation and legislation.

*Organizational involvement: Evidence of Moderate Involvement*

Though we had posited in our model that the organizations are likely to be highly involved, or rather, the organizations need to be highly involved, findings showed otherwise. In all of the five cases studied, the organizations maintained the crises did not relate to or affect their operations or reputations; they did not think their organization was fully responsible for the crises, and they engaged in a neutral stance with regards to dealing or resolving the crisis involving them. These appeared to dovetail with the publics' perception of organizational involvement: In three of the five cases studied, the publics shared similar perceptions with the organizations regarding the level of involvement of the organization. Only in two of the five cases did the publics want the organizations to do more. Evidence thus suggests strong merit that organizations embroiled in these crises need not be highly involved. A moderate level of involvement appeared to suffice, based on the evidence.

*Implications for ICM model*

Arguably, scant attention has been paid in the crisis literature to understand the emotions of the publics in crisis, be they crises involving reputation (for example, see Ihlen, 2002; Johnson and Peppas, 2003; Puchan, 2001); labor unrest (see Crandall & Menefee, 1996); or technological breakdown (see Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997), all have focused on organizational strategies and response. Thus far, studies on public perceptions have been limited to examining organizations' prior relationship to the crisis. Lyon and Cameron (2004), for instance, examined the organization's prior relationship with its publics and found the "halo effect" in organizations with firm reputations as "shining stars of social responsibility" (p. 231) to be usually afforded the benefit of the doubt in times of crises. Lee (2004), for example, sought to understand the publics' judgment, impression and sympathy of the organization during a crisis.

Yet, it is our thesis that studies analyzing audience reception in crises should increasingly dominate crisis scholarship for the simple argument that organizational strategies would be ineffectual if these do not appeal to the hearts and minds of the publics the organizations are trying to reach. Our emotion-based conceptualization is positioned as a nascent attempt to understand crisis from the perspectives of the publics so that organizational strategies and responses can be more appropriately targeted and honed. Both organizations and their publics respond not only intellectually, but emotionally, to the events around them that shape the reputation and future of their own lives to a greater or a lesser extent.

Given the evidence, what we can say with certainty at this juncture is that publics involved in crises pertaining to reputational damage, technological breakdown, industrial matters, labor unrest, and regulation/legislation, are likely to feel anxious, angry, and sad. At the same time, they are likely to engage in conative coping and take active steps to restore some semblance of normalcy within their immediate environment. As counter-intuitive as this may appear, organizations embroiled in these crises need only to engage moderately, rather than intensely, in reaching out to the publics. If this proves to be ultimately true, then it has tremendous implications on current emphasis on crisis strategies.

**Conclusion: What Next?**

This present study has investigated the viability of the ICM model by integrating crisis perspectives with psychological analyses. The ICM model is applied to an initial test of five types of crises that are posited to require high organizational involvement and high conative coping by the publics. Since this is the first empirical study exploring the model, it has provided

a fruitful exploratory area of research. Findings suggest theoretical rigor in the model, with room for further refinements. Admittedly, one limitation of this study is that the analyses are all based on media reports. Further research should include examination of messages disseminated through media releases as well as interviews with practitioners and focus groups with publics involved in the respective crises.

This study is the first of a series of studies before we can generate what Yin (2003) termed “analytic generalization” (p. 33). Analytic generalization is achieved by testing empirically a theoretical model to enhance its potency and rigor. Analytic generalization, or what Bennett (2004) called “theory confirming and infirming” (p. 22), is achieved when “two or more cases” support the theoretical assertions (Yin, 2003, p. 33). With the plethora of studies continuing to focus on the criticality of organizational response during crisis, researchers ought now to take a step back to examine what we argue to be a more universal and systemic approach based on publics’ emotions. The findings from this study, arguably, represent the imprints of an initial trail that may open up to a possibly new vista of research, with the potential of transforming the landscape of studies of crisis communication. As poet Robert Frost wrote in *Stopping By Woods On a Snowy Evening*,

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But, I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.  
Our trek has just begun.

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Figure 1: Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) Model (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007)

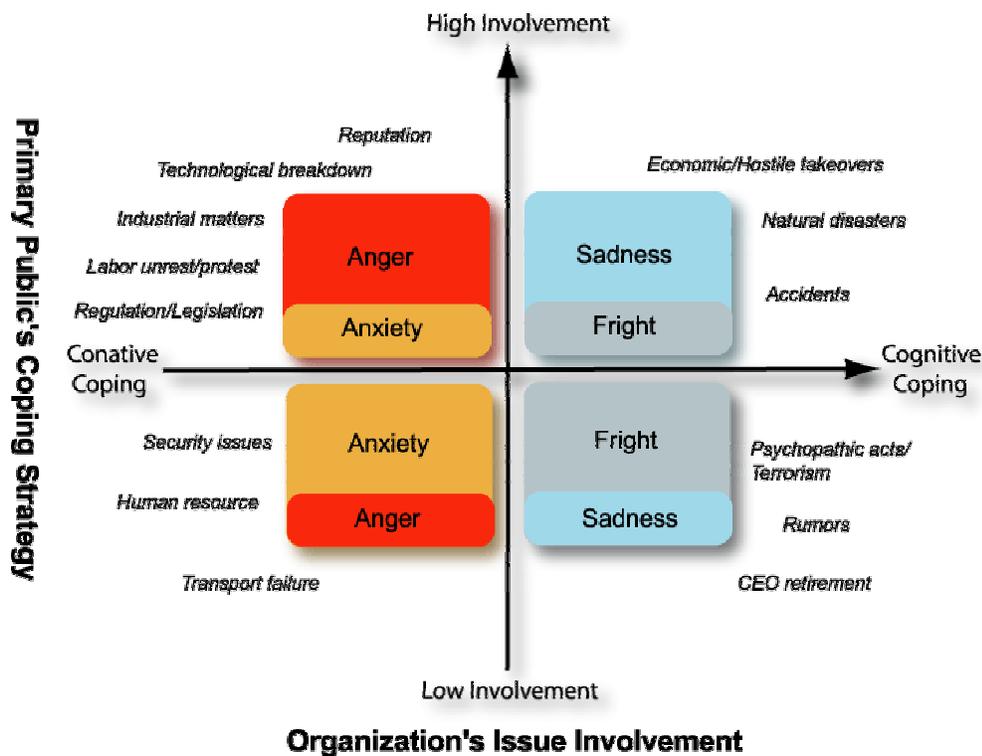
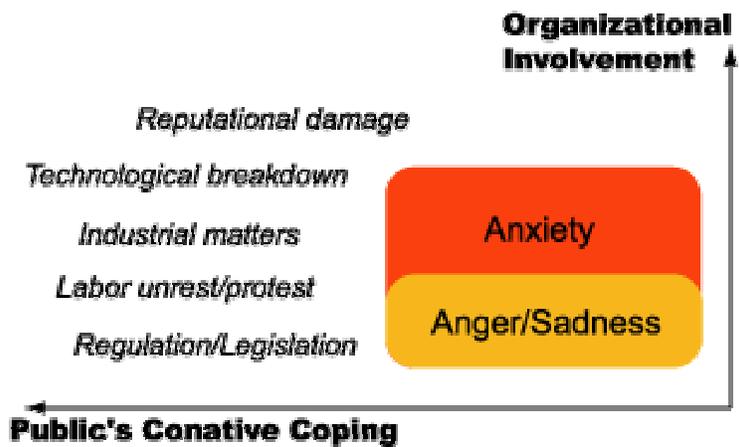


Figure 2: New ICM Quadrant 1



## **The Effects of Government Public Relations on International News Coverage**

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To study the effect of government public relations, this study proposed strong relations between three variables (newsworthiness, public relations involvement, and international news coverage) in the context of the South Korean Government's news releases. Grounded in gatekeeping theory, this study hypothesized a positive influence of newsworthiness and public relations efforts on international news coverage, one of the key sources for understanding other countries. Most of the hypotheses were statistically supported; the key finding of the research showed that the South Korean Government's public relations efforts have a positive effect on the relationship between newsworthiness and international news coverage. Regarding the implications of this current research for public relations research and practice, this study gives context to the understanding of predictors that determine the coverage of international news – and hence predictors for the effectiveness of government public relations.

Media impact is one of the popular subjects of social science study. Media helps citizens to understand social issues and to evaluate the importance of these issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Miller & Krosnick, 2000). Moreover, in public relations, favorable media coverage leads to the public's positive evaluations of organizational performance, which in turn will lead to the public's supportive behaviors toward organizational effectiveness such as increased sales of products or strong shareholder-base (e.g., Carroll & McCombs, 2003; Fombrun & van Riel, 2003). Therefore, organizations need to develop the effective function of media relations; the cultivation and management of positive relationships with media is one of the key factors of excellence in public relations.

In this global era, media relations between countries have become important management issues of governments. Specifically, each government tries to draw global awareness to events in the country, and thus creates positive perceptions for effective international relations. Regarding this aspect, for example, Han (1990) noted the link between international media coverage and the Country of the Origin effects: That is, if media coverage is favorable about a country, (a) global audiences will create positive perceptions of the country, and (b) such positive perceptions of the country can affect attributes of the products made in the country, which will increase sales of the products.

Given the positive effects of international media coverage on the global performance of a country, it is worth delving into how the media content of international media coverage is decided and how it affects the effectiveness of government public relations efforts. Shoemaker and her colleagues have developed newsworthiness indicators, suggesting that public relations is one of the most influential forces in deciding news content (e.g., Shoemaker, 1991; Lee, 2004). Thus, the purpose of this current study is (a) to investigate patterns of international news coverage to see the newsworthiness of international events and (b) to explore the influence of government public relations on the news selection process.

## **Literature Review**

To examine the effects of newsworthiness and public relations' efforts on international news coverage, the researchers reviewed concepts of (a) gatekeeping of international news, (b) newsworthiness of international events and (c) the role of government public relations in international media coverage.

### ***Gatekeeping of International News***

Mass media are the window through which people see the world; the world created by mass media is different from the real world (Shoemaker & Mayfield, 1984). Because of the limitations of time and space, the mass media select some events as more newsworthy than others. This process is known as *gatekeeping*. Mass media only shows events which are selected by gatekeepers, and there are several levels of influence on the news selection from the individual level to the social/country level (Shoemaker, 1991).

Focusing on the context of international news coverage, the researchers delimited the scope of this current study to "social/country level" gatekeeping. Especially in the international media coverage, governments' management of information flow is one of significant factors that affect gatekeeping (Shoemaker, 1991).

International news has an important role in building an understanding of the world. Because of physical and cultural distance, mass media are the main source for knowledge of other countries. Previous literature said newspapers play a key role in understanding a nation in terms of time and space, and people develop their country image based on the news to which they are exposed (Brookes, 1999). Especially, globalization has intensified the relationship of countries and increases the news coverage of international events.

Researchers found that international news coverage is different among countries, and various factors – geographic and cultural proximity and world systems – have an influence on the gatekeeping of international news coverage (e.g., Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Johnson, 1997; Chang, Lau and Xiaoming, 2000). Also, in Galtung and Ruge's (1965) international news coverage study, researchers proposed factors which decide newsworthiness, such as timeliness, proximity, importance, impact, and interest.

The factors of gatekeeping at the country level have been changed. The economic exchange has more important power than ideological relations in the globalizing world, and globalization has created new news values such as the environment, well-being (i.e., quality of citizen's lives), and market structure & policy (Wu, 2000; Cornwell & Drennan, 2004).

However, there is common newsworthiness in the international news as well as domestic news. Negative news such as a crime or violence is more easily selected than positive news. In the recent study, Shoemaker and Cohen (2006) have revised the relationship between newsworthiness and gatekeeping. Researchers indicated events' characteristics as *deviance* and explained that the *deviance* is an important point of newsworthiness and that people show interest in the deviant news (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006).

### ***Newsworthiness of International Events***

Researchers distinguished between news and newsworthiness, and explained that newsworthiness is one criterion to evaluate events' potential to be news covered in the media (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). Forty-two years ago, Galtung and Ruge (1965) examined twelve factors of news values in the structure of foreign news study; frequency, intensity, clearness, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, influence of elite nations, influence of elite people, influence of individuals and valence of news.

In this study, three types of newsworthiness were examined within the characteristics of international events: *deviance*, *social significance*, and *valence* of events. Shoemaker and Cohen (2006) suggested a complexity construct of newsworthiness where deviance and social significance determine the complexity. The researchers showed that the more deviant and the more social significant a news event is, the more the media cover the news.

***Deviance.*** *Deviance* is defined by three dimensions which are statistical, social change, and normative deviance. The three dimensions show how a news story deals with an unusual event, how a news story deals with an event which can threaten or change the social system, and if the news story deals with an event which breaks social norms or laws (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006).

***Social significance.*** *Social significance* is defined by four dimensions which are political, economic, cultural and public significance. The four dimensions show whether a news story has a potential impact on government activity, economic systems or business, social traditions or norms and the public's well-being, and researchers predicted that if a news story is more publicly significant, people are more affected by it (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006).

***Valence.*** Galtung and Ruge (1965, 1981) identified the influence of *valence* on news values and explained four reasons why negative news is more newsworthy than positive news: negative news is covered more frequently than positive news in daily newspapers, negative news easily earns agreement from people, negative news fulfills people's needs for bad news, and negative news is more unexpected and less predictable.

In a study, Homer and Batra (1994) have found that negative media messages have more significant influences on target audiences. Supporting their hypotheses, the researchers demonstrated that negative political communications are more successful and effective in changing voters' attitudes and beliefs toward the targeted candidate than positive communication. The more powerful the social impact to be expected, the more media cover the event. Hence, negative news has more newsworthiness than positive news. On the basis of the above discussion and review of the literature, this study suggests the following research hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1:* The more *deviance* an international news event has, the more likely it will be covered in the international news.

*Hypothesis 2:* The more *social significance* an international news event has, the more likely it will be covered in the international news.

*Hypothesis 3:* The more *negative* an international event is, the more likely it will be covered in the international news.

### ***The Role of Government Public Relations in International Media Coverage***

Newsworthiness is not the sole influence on selecting a news event (Shoemaker, 1991; Yoon, 2005). Researchers have found public relations activity is one of the primary sources of news (e.g., Shoemaker, 1991; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Public relations expertise announces an event to journalists and also guides how news media can handle the event or issue (Yoon, 2005). In her early study, Shoemaker (1991, p.66) states that all kinds of organizations conduct public relations campaigns, and media content is affected both directly (through the publication of press releases) and indirectly (through calling the media's attention to the problem) when the public relations campaigns are successful.

Government public relations' selection of news events has a role in building a relationship with other countries as well as with domestic publics. Additionally, government public relations' selection of news events is one of the most important influences on the

international news coverage. Governments distribute press releases and publications to help domestic and international publics understand the social issues of a country. Moreover, governments' selection of news events, by means of public relations efforts, increases the focus on certain important news events to the country. On the basis of the above discussion and review of the literature, this study suggests the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 4:* The more *deviance* an international news event has, the more likely it will be selected by government public relations.

*Hypothesis 5:* The more *social significance* an international news event has, the more likely it will be selected by government public relations.

*Hypothesis 6:* The more *negative* an international event is, the more likely it will be selected by government public relations.

Public relations expertise also plays an important role in news selection as well as in journalists' perceptions, and public relations efforts increase the chance to achieve media access (Yoon, 2005). Researchers supported that when public relations consultants work effectively, the issues they are making public become the issues that journalists and audiences are discussing (Manheim & Albritton, 1984). In short, public relations give a guideline to journalists and audience to decide newsworthiness and develop a perception of the events. Therefore, on the basis of the above discussion and the review of the literature, this study suggests the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 7:* News events selected by *government public relations* are more likely to be covered in international news.

### **Method**

The purpose of this current study is (a) to investigate patterns of international news coverage to see the newsworthiness of international events and (b) to explore the influence of government public relations on the news selection process.

Deviance, social significance, and valence of an event are three independent variables to determine newsworthiness (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006; Galtung & Ruge, 1981). The dependent variable is the news media coverage. Government public relations' selection of news events is another variable between news events and news coverage. Figure 1 shows three proposed relationships between news events and international news coverage, news events and government public relations' selection of news events, and government public relations and international news coverage. To test hypotheses which explain the three relationships, this study conducted a content analysis.

#### **Research Procedure**

"News event" was the unit of analysis in this study. News events were gathered from eleven newspapers' selection of various important issues of South Korea in 2005, as well as from "100 South Korean Society Issues," which also introduces important news issues of South Korea. Newsworthiness of an event was coded in terms of deviance, social significance, and valence by two coders. During the same period, publications of the South Korean government were collected to determine government public relations' selection of news events. News coverage was the dependent variable and it was measured by whether a news event is covered by media. In the study, we analyzed international news stories from the Associated Press from July 1, 2004 to December 31, 2005.

### **Sampling Procedure**

**Sampling news events.** News events were collected from news articles and “100 South Korean Society Issues,” a publication of South Korea. News articles which review important issues of South Korea in 2005 were selected from eleven newspapers; the newspapers are eight major newspapers (*Hankyrae, Chosunilbo, Dongailbo, Moonhwalbo, Hankookilbo, Kookminilbo, Segyeilbo, and Kyunghyansinmoon*) and wire/internet newspapers (*Yonhapnews, Chosun.com, and ZDnet Korea*). Also, ‘100 South Korean Society Issues,’ (2005) published by a journalism organization, ‘Issue Today’, contains important events/issues in Korea as selected by issue analysts. Theoretically, the events selected by media are the most important and famous issues of a society. Media only show news events which enter the gate, and the more newsworthy an event is the more media cover the event story (Shoemaker, 1991; Yoon, 2005).

**Sampling government public relations’ selection of news events.** To identify the influence of government public relations selection of news events on international news coverage, this study examined government public relations publications. The *Government Information Agency (GIA)* of South Korea is the national organization in charge of national public relations, including national image and international news releases. ‘*S. Korea Plus*’ is one of the publications of *Government Information Agency (GIA)*. ‘*S. Korea Plus*’ reviews government policies and social issues of South Korea. It is published twice a month, and 31 publications were selected during the research period.

**Sampling news stories.** A Lexis-Nexis academic database search was conducted on news stories of the Associated Press from July 1, 2004 to December 31, 2005. All news stories by eight South Korean correspondents who worked during the research period were selected. Originally, we designed a sampling process of newspapers with the five daily newspapers (*The New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, Chicago Sun-Times, the Houston Chronicle and the Washington Post*) in the United States. However, South Korean news events are rarely covered in major newspapers of the United States, and we could not find enough dependent variable data.

### **Coding Procedure**

**Newsworthiness of news events.** Shoemaker and Cohen (2006) introduced new constructs for studying the news. The researchers suggested two variables, deviance and social significance, and their constructs consist of, respectively, three dimensions (statistical, social change, and normative deviance) and four dimensions (political, economic, cultural and public social significance). In this study, each dimension of deviance and social significance was measured by 0 and 1 (0: not deviant or not socially significant and 1: deviant or socially significant). The coding result is the sum of the score for each construct of deviance and social significance. Deviance structure has 0 to 3 scales and social significance structure has 0 to 4 scales. The higher score means the more newsworthy a news event is (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006)

This study also considered whether a news event was negative or positive. The valence of a news event was coded by 3 (positive), 2 (neutral) and 1(negative). Negative events are expected to have more newsworthiness because of their sharper impact on society and the likelihood journalists and audiences will agree that they are newsworthy. (Galtung & Ruge, 1981; Homer & Batra, 1994). Eleven news topics were randomly selected out of 105 news topics, and two people coded the selected news topics using the same guidelines. Intercoder reliability was .85.

**Government public relations’ selection of news events.** Government public relations’ selection of news events was determined by whether a news event is addressed in the publication

of a government, with the result coded by 0 if the news event is not addressed and 1 if the news event is addressed in the government publication.

**News story coverage.** News story coverage was determined by whether a news event is covered in the newspaper, with the result coded by 0 if the news event is not covered and 1 if the news event is covered in international news coverage.

## Results

To explore the international news gatekeeping process and the influence of government public relations selection of news events, t-tests were run for the relationships among the newsworthiness of a news event, government public relations and international news coverage.

This study analyzed a total of 105 news events in Korean society (as identified by “100 South Korean Society Issues,” a publication of Korea), 72 South Korean government public relations article releases and 370 international news stories. The research period was from July 1, 2004 to December 31, 2005, and the unit of analysis for the study was the news events.

The characteristics of news events are described in Table 1, which shows the percentage for newsworthiness variables for all news events sampled ( $N = 105$ ), for news events selected by government public relations ( $N = 25$ ) and for news events covered by the media ( $N = 42$ ). Compared to characteristics of all news events sampled, news events selected by government public relations and media have a higher level of deviance complexity and social significance complexity. Also, table 1 shows that more than half of the news events are negative, and the percentage of negative and positive news increased for the news events covered by government public relations and media while neutral news decreased. Among 105 news events, only about 24% of news events were covered by government public relations, and 40% of news events were covered in the international news media (see Table 2).

The next two tables show the independent t-test results. Table 3 shows whether the characteristics of news events and government public relations’ selection of news events are different between covered and not covered international news. The complexity of deviance ( $p < .05$ ) and social significance ( $p < .001$ ) of events, and the government public relations’ selection of events ( $p < .001$ ) have significant mean differences within media coverage, but the valence of news events does not have a significant mean difference within media coverage. Similarly, Table 4 shows whether the characteristics of news events are different between covered and not covered government public relations’ selection. Only social significance complexity ( $p < .001$ ) has a significant mean difference within government public relations’ selection.

Table 5 shows that only the complexity of social significance of a news event is positively related to the government public relations’ selection of a news event in the relationship between the newsworthiness of a news event and government public relations’ selection of that news event. However, the complexity of deviance of a news event and the valence of a news event do not show significant relationships with government public relations selection of news events. In the relationship between the newsworthiness of a news event and international news coverage, the deviance complexity and social significance complexity of news events show significant relationships with international news coverage.

### **Overview of Hypothesis Testing**

As a result of t-test and correlations, table 3 and 5 show that the *deviance* complexity of a news event and *social significance* complexity of a news event have a positive relationship with international news coverage. Therefore, hypothesis 1, “The more complex deviance an international news event has, the more likely it will be covered in the international news,” and

hypothesis 2, “The more complex social significance an international news event has, the more likely it will be covered in the international news,” are supported.

However, *valence* of a news event has no significant relationship with news coverage in table 3 and 5. Therefore, hypothesis 3, “The more negative an international event is, the more likely it will be covered in the international news,” is not supported.

In the relation between newsworthiness and government public relations’ selection of events, the *deviance* complexity of a news event has no significant relationship with government public relations’ selection of news event in table 4 and 5. Therefore, hypothesis 4, “The more complex deviance an international news event has, the more likely it will be selected by government public relations,” is not supported. However, the same tables show that the *social significance* complexity of a news event has a significant relationship with government public relations’ selection of news events. Therefore, hypothesis 5, “The more complex social significance an international news event has, the more likely it will be selected by government public relations,” is supported. The *valence* of a news event does not have a significant relationship with government public relations’ selection in table 4 and 5. Therefore, hypothesis 6, “The more negative an international event is, the more likely it will be selected by government public relations,” is not supported.

*Government public relations selection of news events* was differentiated by the international news coverage variable and positively related to international news coverage (table 3 and 5). Therefore hypothesis 7, “News events selected by *government public relations* are more likely to be covered in international news,” is supported.

### Discussion

The purpose of this current study was (a) to investigate patterns of international news coverage to see the newsworthiness of international events and (b) to explore the influence of government public relations on the news selection process. The news selection process which is called “gatekeeping” has several influences, such as internal media routines, outside influences or press releases. International news coverage also has various subjects which are involved in the gatekeeping process. This study proposed that government public relations selection is one of the important influences on the international gatekeeping process, as is newsworthiness of a news event.

A government has the primary responsibility to build relationships with other countries, and its role becomes more important as international relations and networks grow. Public relations give a guideline to journalists and audience to decide newsworthiness and develop a perception of events. Especially, government public relations directly and indirectly affect the country’s image to other countries, and can cause an important gain or loss in political or economic relations with other countries. So, the effectiveness of government public relations is an important question.

This study suggests an international news coverage gatekeeping model with newsworthiness and government public relations involvement as an extra media influence. To explore each relationship among the newsworthiness of a news event, government public relations’ selections of news event and international news coverage, as figure 1 shows, this study proposed seven hypotheses.

In the first relationship, between newsworthiness of a news event and international news coverage, the researchers developed three hypotheses dealing with the deviance complexity, social significance complexity and valence of a news event as independent variables, and

international news coverage as a dependent variable. As the results show, the relationship between the complexity of deviance and social significance of a news event and international news coverage is supported. However, the relationship between the valence of a news event and international news coverage is not supported.

Shoemaker and Cohen (2006) studied news around the world and suggested several constructs of the complexity of a news event and supported the relationship between complexity of a news event and gatekeeping influence. This study result also showed that more complex news events are more likely to be covered by international news media as well as domestic news media. Researchers (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; 1981) suggested that negative news is more likely to be covered in the media. However, this study cannot support the relationship between the valence variable and the news coverage variable. One possible explanation is that both negative news and positive news events are more likely to be covered in the international news than neutral news events.

In the second relationship, between newsworthiness of a news event and government public relations, the researchers developed another three hypotheses, with the deviance complexity, social significance complexity and valence of a news event as independent variables, and government public relations' selection of a news event as a dependent variable. As the results indicate, only the relationship between the social significance complexity of a news event and the government public relations' selection of news events is supported. The relationship between the deviance complexity of a news event and government public relations' selection, and the relationship between the valence of a news event and government public relations' selection are not supported.

To explain such results, the researchers considered the difference between the roles of media and public relations, especially for government public relations. Even though one of the main goals of both news event selection processes is to draw the public's attention to a certain news event, the purpose and the responsibility of social services are different. Government public relations have more responsibility to announce correct information and important social news events to domestic and international publics. The complexity of social significance of a news event is determined by summing the political significance, economic significance, cultural significance, and public significance of the issue, and in total it represents the importance of the issue to a society. Also, one publication by a government public relations agency has a much smaller gate than the news media, such as the Associated Press as used in this study. Therefore, the entrance of news coverage is more selective, and the more important social issues are more likely to enter the gate.

In the last relationship to be examined, between the government public relations' selection of a news event and international news coverage, the researchers developed one hypothesis with government public relations' selection of news events as an independent variable and international news coverage as a dependent variable. As the results indicate, the positive effect on the relationship between the government's public relations selection of news events and international news coverage is supported. Hence, the present study suggests the role of the government's public relations as one of the predictors that determine the coverage of international news and emphasizes the effectiveness of government public relations.

#### ***Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research***

This study analyzed news events in Korean society from July 1, 2004 to December 31, 2005, and the news events were gathered from articles and publications of the news media. On average, 105 news events had moderate deviance and social significance complexity, and more

than half of the news events were negative news. Since most news events sampled in the present study were negative, the valence of a news event was not a significant independent variable. Thus, the hypotheses of the relationship between valence of a news event and either the government public relations selection or international news coverage was not supported.

Another limitation of this study was the low available number of news events, government public relations selections and international news coverage during the research time period. This study analyzed only the Associated Press in terms of Korean news events. The result of this study showed that only 40% of the news events (total 105 news events) were covered in the international news. The low amount of coverage necessitated using a categorical variable for prominence (whether or not an event was covered) instead of a scale variable (aggregate word count). This required a modification of the type of statistical analysis used for this portion of the research study.

After conducting this research, some new avenues of study were suggested. For instance, this study did not attempt to use independent variables describing the interaction between deviance, social significance, and valence with the government public relations' selection of a news event. By using these as independent variables, it would be possible to conduct a study exploring their interactions with the dependent variable of the international news coverage, and figure out the impact of the predictors on the international news coverage when the predictors interact with each other.

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**Table 1**

**Percentage for characteristics of events for all news events sampled (N = 105), for news events covered by government public relations (N = 25), and for news events covered by media (N = 42)**

Variables		All news events sampled (N=105)	News events selected by Public relations (N=25)	News events covered by media (N=42)
		%	%	%
Deviance complexity of event <sup>a</sup>	0	15.2	8.0	7.1
	1	20.0	8.0	9.5
	2	41.0	60.0	50.5
	3	23.8	24.0	33.3
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Social significance complexity of event <sup>b</sup>	0	19.0	8.0	9.5
	1	36.2	16.0	31.0
	2	33.3	48.0	33.3
	3	11.4	28.0	26.2
	4	0.0	0.0	0.0
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
Valence of event	Negative	55.2	56.0	66.7
	Neutral	29.5	16.0	9.5
	Positive	15.2	28.0	23.8
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Note.** <sup>a</sup>Additive index of the three variables which are statistical deviance, social change deviance, and normative deviance, ranging from 0 (no deviance) to 3 (strong deviance). <sup>b</sup>Additive index of the four variables which are

political significance, economic significance, cultural significance and public significance ranging from 0 (no social significance) to 4 (strong social significance).

**Table 2**

**Percentage for government public relations' coverage and media coverage about each news event (N = 105)**

Variables		%
Government public relations' selection of news event	Covered	23.8
	Not covered	76.2
		100.0%
International news coverage	Covered	40.0
	Not covered	60.0
		100.0%

**Table 3**

**Independent t-tests for characteristics of news events and the government public relations' selection of news events by international news coverage (N = 105)**

Variables	International events		t-value	df	Significance
	Covered	Not covered			
	Mean (& SD) N=42	Mean (& SD) N =63			
Deviance complexity <sup>a</sup>	2.10 (.85)	1.49 (1.01)	-3.20	103	<i>p</i> <.05
Social significance complexity <sup>b</sup>	1.76 (.96)	1.11 (.81)	-3.80	103	<i>p</i> <.001
Valence of the event <sup>c</sup>	1.43 (.86)	1.38 (.66)	-.32	103	<i>ns</i>
Whether covered by government public relations agency (1=yes)	.52 (.51)	.05 (.22)	-6.64	103	<i>p</i> <.001

**Note.** <sup>a</sup>Additive index of the three variables which are statistical deviance, social change deviance, and normative deviance, ranging from 0 (no deviance) to 3 (strong deviance). <sup>b</sup>Additive index of the four variables which are political significance, economic significance, cultural significance and public significance ranging from 0 (no social significance) to 4 (strong social significance). <sup>c</sup>Responses were coded: 3 (positive), 2 (neutral) and 1 (negative)

**Table 4**

**Independent t-tests for characteristics of events by government public relations' selection of news event (N = 105)**

Variables	Public Relations' selection		t-value	df	Significance
	Covered	Not covered			
	Mean (& SD) N=25	Mean (& SD) N =80			
<b>Deviance complexity of a news event<sup>a</sup></b>	2.00 (.82)	1.65 (1.03)	-1.55	103	<i>ns</i>
Social significance complexity of a news event <sup>b</sup>	1.96 (.89)	1.19 (.86)	-3.90	103	<i>p</i> <.001
Valence of a news event <sup>c</sup>	1.28 (.89)	1.44 (.69)	-.93	103	<i>ns</i>

**Note.** <sup>a</sup>Additive index of the three variables which are statistical deviance, social change deviance, and normative deviance, ranging from 0 (no deviance) to 3 (strong deviance). <sup>b</sup>Additive index of the four variables which are

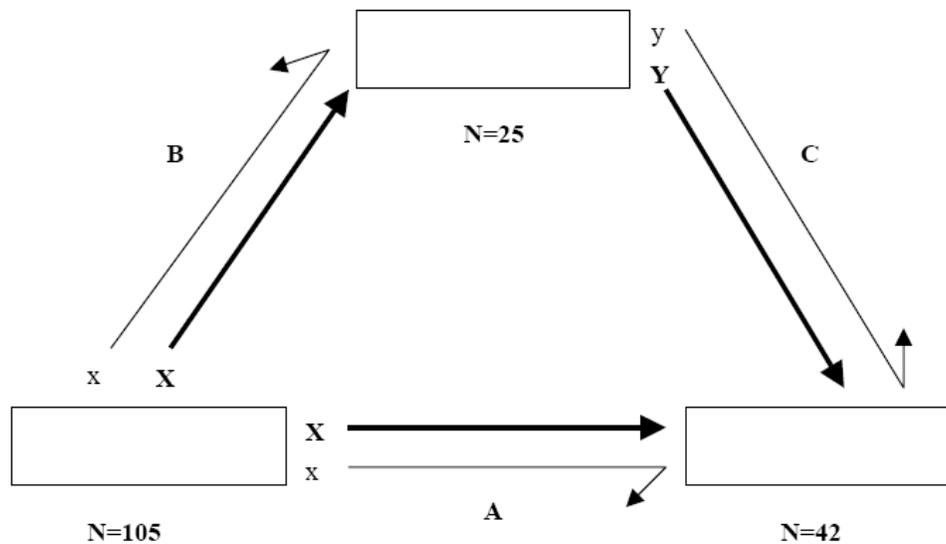
political significance, economic significance, cultural significance and public significance ranging from 0 (no social significance) to 4 (strong social significance). <sup>c</sup>Responses were coded: 3 (positive), 2 (neutral) and 1 (negative)

**Table 5**  
**Pearson correlation coefficients for the newsworthiness of “real world” news event with government public relations’ selection of news event and media coverage**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
<b>“Real world” news event</b>					
newsworthiness	1	.21* (.028)	.28** (.004)	.15 (.125)	.30** (.002)
1) Deviance complexity of news event <sup>a</sup>		1	-.04 (.711)	.36** (.001)	.35** (.001)
2) Social Significance complexity of news event <sup>b</sup>			1	-.09 (.356)	.03 (.75)
3) Valence of news event <sup>c</sup>				1	
<b>Government public relations’ selection of news event</b>					
4) Whether covered by government public relations agency ( 1=yes)				1	.55** (.001)
<b>International news coverage</b>					
5) Whether covered by media (1=yes)					1

**Note.** <sup>a</sup>Additive index of the three variables which are statistical deviance, social change deviance, and normative deviance, ranging from 0 (no deviance) to 3 (strong deviance). <sup>b</sup>Additive index of the four variables which are political significance, economic significance, cultural significance and public significance ranging from 0 (no social significance) to 4 (strong social significance). <sup>c</sup>Responses were coded: 3 (positive), 2 (neutral) and 1 (negative). \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Figure1. The proposed international news coverage gatekeeping process. News events are designated by the letter “X” and public relations’ selections are designated by letter “Y”**



## **Communication, Culture, and CSR: Public Relations in a Devolving Britain**

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This paper discusses how public relations is used to elicit greater corporate social responsibility (CSR) in support of U.K. regional and national cultures and culture-specific representations in electronic communication. It explores the strategies and impact of NGO viewer and listener broadcasting advocacy groups, community media associations, coalitions, and informal groups in advancing indigenous culture and getting government and media corporations to respond to these stakeholders and commit to policy and regulatory changes. Particular emphasis will be placed on CSR structures and vehicles for cultural expression in Scotland, Wales, the North, and other underrepresented regions and on examining if, and how, political devolution is intertwined with cultural agendas.

When we discuss public relations and corporate social responsibility (CSR), it begs a chicken-and-egg question: Does the global push for CSR stem from attention drawn to poor public relations practices or have effective public relations practices spawned an interest in CSR? Perhaps some practitioners would prefer to think the latter but, historically, CSR has emerged from less-than-stellar practices generating negative public reaction and consequently, organizational change. This author (2005) posited that CSR, as a “push from within,” is a higher commitment to public interest than accountability, which frequently is an externally-driven push. There also has been an historical, perceived inability, or even unwillingness, by broadcasters, government, regulators, and other institutions to address and represent the needs and interests of diverse viewing and listening constituencies. In the U.K, especially in underrepresented and less-empowered communities, this failure has provoked skepticism and anger at Westminster, where decision making powers concerning broadcasting are “reserved” for Parliament. The lack of devolved broadcasting power in Scotland, Wales, and the English North prompted activism and alternative vehicles for public discourse, consensus building, and action about cultural issues. A fine line exists between public relations and advocacy around public interest CSR issues.

This situation has provided a common thread among well-established as well as newer and disparate cultural entities with different agendas. Aggrieved constituencies are, in fact, formal and informal non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In this respect, broadcasting and cultural activists have followed environmental and other NGO by taking into their own hands what they feel others cannot or will not do. A growing range of strategies and alliances gives these NGOs a competitive “edge” in setting their agendas and in their overall impact on the policy process.

The study will explore how U.K. NGO broadcasting/cultural advocacy and community media groups and ad hoc coalitions, particularly in politically-devolved Scotland and Wales and to a lesser extent, the English North, practice public relations to preserve regional and national identity. U.K. activists act on a perceived failure by government and business to protect those identities. Their role in increasing CSR in the public interest is not to be underestimated. Even though their achievements are sometimes not tangible, the relationships they build with their

targets and their meetings provide forums for debate on issues that, long term, may lead to desired outcomes.

This study stems from over a decade of research into U.K. broadcasting activism at home, in Europe, and in global forums. Of the six U.K.-wide groups in the original study (Voice of the Listener and Viewer [VLV], Consumers Association, National Consumer Council, Mediawatch UK [formerly National Viewers and Listeners Association], Campaign for Quality Television, and the Deaf Broadcasting Council), some have forged alliances with each other. Only VLV, thhr Nig ough, maintains a high, consistent profile on cultural issues and active chapters with Directors in Scotland and Wales. The author has also tracked loose, ad hoc alliances and coalitions and smaller, less-renowned groups (particularly in Scotland), which will be cited here.

### **Making Sense of NGOs**

The concerns of the NGOs studied here are considered CSR issues because although they are not violations of human rights, fair labor standards, environmental regulations, or similar norms, cultural representation is clearly within a public interest broadcasting remit. Devolution has underscored broadcasters' obligations to provide vehicles for national and regional cultural expression; despite political overtones, broadcasters have CSR obligations that activists, whether grassroots associations or "name" groups with track records in generating public debate and modifying cultural policies in the public interest, expect them to fulfill.

Recently, the author researched the emergence, nature, goals, activities, and impact of NGOs. The focus was on their origins and how they became increasingly legitimized in a world where multinationals' powers may surpass those of governments (Kovacs, 2005, 2006). The NGO, like the CSR, literature, cut across business, management, political science, and other fields. To put U.K. NGO efforts to increase CSR into perspective, the author (2006) studied interdisciplinary frameworks for CSR and the role of the Global Compact, Global Alliance, and Business for Social Responsibility in raising the CSR bar. Bearing these frameworks and their normative CSR principles in mind, the author traveled, in spring 2006, to the U.K. to interview prominent stakeholders involved in communication and cultural policies in England, Scotland, and Wales. The current research revealed competing U.K. cultural interests in the Nations and the North.

### **Methods**

The seminal 1996-97 study involved over 43 interviews of broadcasters, activists, politicians, regulators, civil servants, academics and other interested parties (Kovacs, 1998). Many, although not all, of the interviewees were consulted on subsequent trips to the U.K. and some when they visited the U.S. This provided a longitudinal perspective. In addition, archival research at the now-defunct Independent Television Commission Library, the British Film Institute (now home to the ITC collection), the Yale Libraries, and the U.N.'s DPI/NGO Resource Center provided formal, informal, and unobtrusive documentation. The author, for over a decade, attended public meetings of activist groups, conferences, Media Society forums for debate, hearings in Parliamentary committees and in the Houses of Lord and Commons, and was a participant observer at the U.K. headquarters of VLV, the most widely recognized of the groups. The author also traveled to Welsh and Scottish broadcasting and regulatory offices (e.g., OFCOM in Scotland). In addition, activist, national consumer advocacy, government, and related Web sites provided updated information on issues, legislation, consultative documents and activist responses to them, official documentation of policy and programming changes, and

newsletters/brochures. The broadsheets' media pages publicized policy debates and dilemmas and the journalists themselves often became either the starting point or a conduit through which credible groups, such as the Voice of the Listener and Viewer, generated discourse on key issues.

### **Devolution and Culture in Scotland**

Mitchell (2006), veteran consumer advocate, a founder of the Telecommunications Ombudsman service, and an appointee to the U.K. regulatory Office of Communications (Ofcom), pointed to unresolved complaints about Scottish telecommunications and a national sentiment that Scottish content needs are not being adequately addressed. Recalling the 2006 hearings on the future of the BBC held in 2006 in the Scottish Parliament (with testimony on behalf of VLV) as “not without difficulty,” he felt that these policy matters should be co-determined by the U.K. and Scottish Parliaments. Nevertheless, he considered it impossible and not necessarily desirable for all Scottish content to be generated at home. Certain key areas, such as news on Scotland, he said, should be of local origin and express a distinctly Scottish view. Spain and Germany, his models of choice for devolved yet balanced broadcasting power, oscillated between the Basque and Catalan provinces and the Madrid government of Spain and between the German federal government and the lander, respectively (Power sharing among the latter avoids total media control, as under the Nazis regime).

### **How Demography Drives Scottish Cultural Expression**

Beveridge (2006), VLV Director for Scotland, outlined several socio-cultural issues that underlie current cultural debates—and their lingual and religious origins. Among the Gaelic speakers, many of whom are in the remote Highlands, coast, and Scottish islands, there is a high proportion of Catholics, who are far poorer than the Protestant Scots in the developed areas. So deep-set hostilities and religious and economic divisions creep into broadcasting policy issues. At great risk is Gaelic, primarily spoken by Catholic highlanders facing off against the Anglo-Protestant lowlanders who have dominated Scotland for over 250 years. These differences today play out in decisions over Gaelic hours and programming and are obscured by stereotypical representations of “Loch Ness” Scots. This monolithic perception of Scots is compounded by the fact that English domination contributed to a Scottish “inferiority complex,” with all things English perceived as superior. Scots who want to achieve, Beveridge (2006) said, go to London. This has been reinforced with historical retrospectives, such as expressed in popular accounts (*When Scotland Ruled the World*) of Scots influence as administrators in the British Empire.

### ***Scotland's Complex Political Mix***

Issues of Scottish culture are intertwined with those of independence. Despite the strong possibility of a U.K. breakup in the next 50 years, the above factionalism impedes prospects for an independent state. The dominant Scottish Labour Party, which opposed devolution, does not want to be seen helping the Scottish nationalists. Beveridge noted that Scottish factionalism, or rather English use of it, has weakened Scotland and Scottish interests. There surely will be more concentrated and urgent efforts to provide forums for Scottish representation/cultural expression given the resurgence of Nationalists' power in Scotland's Parliament (Vass, 2007; Smith, 2007) and the likelihood of a sympathetic ear by the EU (Gallagher, 2007; Global National, 2007).

First, the BBC, which will take the lead in building a digital Britain, was recently restructured to include a BBC Trust. The Broadcasting Council for Scotland is an advisory body to the BBC Governors. The new Trust will have national representatives for Scotland but it is unclear how accountable it will be to the Scottish Parliament. There is concern, said Beveridge, that the Scottish Consumer Council will be configured into a less independent different body.

NGOs work to effect policy change that is consistent with their views of social responsibility. Scottish and Welsh views and priorities have diverged from each other's and from those of the English, for hundreds of years. The perceived failure of Westminster, as representing southern England interests, to protect Welsh and Scottish cultural integrity, is the concern of loose, ad hoc coalitions, some mainstream U.K. advocacy groups, such as Voice of the Listener and Viewer, and smaller, lesser-known groups. These groups' issues can be considered CSR issues because cultural representation is mandated. According to a letter by Hay (2006), "Among VLV's plans are a country-wide campaign and a range of special events to raise awareness of the crucially influential role that broadcasting plays in British culture and democracy ...." How does Hay suggest that this influence and the resources needed to promote it will come about? It will be raised, she has stated, through social and fundraising events (such as an VLV evening of Gershwin played by the BBC orchestra), grants, the VLV Trust, and individual, smaller donations. VLV's national chapters, particularly Edinburgh, fully engage with local broadcasters and regulators around issues of cultural autonomy (Beveridge, Mitchell, 2006).

***Cultural norms shape communication expectations.***

In Scotland, some historical divisions have survived over time and with varying levels of intensity—Labor vs. Nationalists, Catholic vs. Protestant, Highlander vs. Lowlander, Islander vs. Mainlander, Gaelic vs. English speaking, to name some. Still, the predominant ingredients in the cultural mix were Scottish, English, Irish, with some French nobility of Norman descent thrown in for good measure. Now, as in England, and even more so in Europe, this is no longer the case. Large scale immigration of Asians, Muslims, and recently, East and other Europeans, is changing the cultural mix. Nevertheless, the long-dormant needs of ethnic Scots are being expressed in ways heretofore unknown, thanks to the Internet and local media that mobilize constituencies.

**New Challenges Catalyze New Activist Responses**

The digitalization of the broadcasting spectrum has presented nearly unlimited options for distribution (some would say democratization) of the broadcasting spectrum. At the same time, the costs of producing and distributing digital services is beyond the scope of many communities, and poorer constituents may only be able to access free-to-air and not subscription services. The Digital Dividend is one alternative that may alleviate both the spectrum shortage and the poor's inability to pay for additional services. Groups across the UK have voiced their views as to if and how the analogue spectrum that will be available for diverse nationals after digital switchover.

***Pending: The Democratization of the Airwaves***

As digital rollover (set to begin in Wales in 2008) gets underway, activists would like to see them used for "citizen-centric, in addition to this consumer-centric broadcasting" (Public Voice, 2007). Public Voice, a coalition of activist and voluntary groups which VLV and CQT participate, is spearheading a Web campaign and encouraging civic participation in submitting consultative materials to Ofcom, the national regulator, for decision as to future spectrum allocation. In addition to an independent reviewer, Ofcom's three-month consultation process in which broadcasting activists and voluntary group will voice their concerns and propose uses for the freed-up spectrum. Rushton (2007) Edinburgh-based Institute of Local Television, which lobbies on and advocates for community television access, published a series of documents and held meetings to discuss how the new spectra would connect local communities and their cultures. Public Voice (2007) hosted a conference on the Dividend in February 2007 and has

created both links to related public interest and community broadcasting organizations sites and a brochure/flyer that outlined the voluntary sector's interest in and possible uses for the spectrum.

Rushton (2007), articulated the function and reach of analogue spectrum:

...to explore new ways to regular Spectrum as a flexible, inalienable social asset which becomes immediately of interest to those who can receive a range of signals which might be many different channels to be sourced from the local transmitter (p.3).

Furthermore, without saying CSR, Rushton makes it clear that the reduction of regional and local television programs by national television networks is a CSR issue and is culturally problematic:

Bigger structures which ignore and eradicate differences are not the rational way ahead for a country that has lost touch with itself and with its communities—smaller, more flexible public service operations have greater capacity to survive, to reflect on local aspirations and to transform and innovate.

By quoting J. Clay Shirky he also sets this issue in public service and CSR contexts:

A public good, in economic terms, is something that is best provisioned by everyone (an economic characteristic called non-excludability) and which anyone can use without depleting the resource (a characteristic called non-rival use)—individual users aren't rivals for the resource (p.3).

In other words, activists' rhetorical approach posits that it is a win-win situation for communities to gain access to analogue spectrum, since no one person loses and everyone gains when information and local interest programming are made accessible to all.

The largest constituencies/voices in the "digital dividend" debate are U.K-wide organizations, and they have set their sights on a piece of the broadcasting spectrum. At the same time, numerous small, spontaneous community-linked groups both in urban centers and at the geographic outposts of Scotland and Wales have emerged and tapped into yearnings for cultural expression. At one extreme, Europe has provided one outlet for smaller Scottish groups such as the Saltire Society.. The Internet has provided an open-ended forum for such expression but lobbying at the European level has been an approach that Beveridge (2005) suggested is a strategy of choice for many Scottish entities as they believe their leverage and historical kinship will bring them more clout in Europe than it will with the British (see Kovacs, 2005). There is some truth to this as the Flemish were among Scottish rules and provided a rich cultural tapestry.

Similarly, the Welsh have a rich tapestry with their language as its standard bearer but the contrast with the situation in Scotland bears noting. Strategic public relations can be used to inform, mobilize, and tap concerned publics to advocate for integrity in both countries, yet the approach may differ according to realities of history, politics, topography, and demography.

### **Distinguishing Wales, Scotland, and the Industrial North**

To some extent, both Wales and Scotland have been "stepchildren," so to speak, of England, when it comes to cultural representation and the availability of resources for production. The desire to capitalize on Web-based learning and cultural opportunities is strong in Wales. Note:

A paradoxical outcome of Internet internationalism is the increased opportunity that now exists for the local and the specialist—for example, local cultures and languages, and specialist disciplines and hobbies—to claim their rightful place in cyberspace. Wales is no exception. We have a new stage on which to appear and project our individualities. (Green, 2005, p. 6)

The Institute for Welsh Affairs is one "rubric" organization that supports efforts towards maximizing Welsh use of the Web and immersion in cyberspace. Yet although Wales shares this

desire for greater online engagement with Scotland, similar difficulties in implementing and maximizing Web learning and digital TV exist. These are part economic, part topographic, and cultural. Wales and Scotland are both mountainous and in expanses of both countries, there is difficulty in getting quality television reception. The mountainous areas and those with poor reception are also those with the poorer constituencies, so in effect, it is a “double whammy” for groups that are on the low end of the socioeconomic scale. Perhaps that is why the first trial digital rollout of broadcasting services will take place in a mountainous region of Wales. If digital works there, it is a “plus” but will still not address other areas of deficit in those parts of Wales or similar areas of Scotland.

Yet Wales has made substantive strides in terms of a Welsh language revival and support broadcasting. Initially, the language success that resulted in S4C Welsh language channel came about through hard-line activist tactics (a hunger strike in the 1980s) but Welsh cultural demands on its governing Assembly and on Westminster is relatively de-politicized and not likely to result in any confrontation. The desire and support for programs for Gaelic broadcasting is stronger than previously in Scotland, but nowhere as strong or well coordinated or funded as are the programs in Wales. That could be because the Welsh are more homogenous culturally, religiously, and in terms of their comfort level in their relationship with Westminster, but they clearly do not manifest the same sense of urgency or political determinism as do the Scots, which might account for the greater number of Scots alliances forged at home and in Europe.

Public relations, even in Scotland, is more about strategic relationship building with key elites, opinion leaders, and like-minded citizens, creating awareness through careful framing of policy issues in the press and in the legislative bodies, and coalition building through networking and coordinating initiatives with other culturally focused and community based organizations..

#### ***Coalitions and New Power Structures***

Schlesinger, Miller, and Dinan (2001) explored the relationship between devolving power and power structures in Scotland after 1999 and communication around the emergent political processes and among its players. Although eight years later the devolved and “reserved” powers remain basically the same, some of the key players and groups seeking broadcasting and cultural change have had the opportunity to navigate around and iron out some of the “kinks” in understanding the way the committee system, advisory boards, and other entities work and to develop alliances. Some organizations have folded (like SACOT—a consumer advisory body that became defunct when Ofcom took over as a single regulator) but there have been increased opportunities for joint public relations and lobbying projects with groups that may not share the exact agenda but are united in their support for either greater Gaelic language programming or some other form of cultural expression and are too small, underresourced, or otherwise unrepresentative to be able to bring about change on its own. Aside from the coalition (Public Voice) of which VLV and CQT were a part, the late John Gray described how minute radio stations in the Hebrides and other remote locations, as well poetry and fine and performing arts groups, networked to influence policy and legislative change.

#### ***CSR in the Digital Age: The Responsibilities of the Public Broadcaster***

Much that concerns broadcast news and cultural representation in the nations and regions has historically fallen to the public broadcasters, most notably, the BBC. Channel 4 has a clear mandate for cultural representation and diversity. The BBC obligations to “inform, educate, and entertain,” (BBC, 1992). Green (2005) documents efforts to expand Welsh-language program offerings on the Web: The BBC, he said, has “built a formidable array of online services” and “In Cardiff, BBC Cymru/Wales has more than played its part. He points to three BBC-launched

Welsh initiatives: *Cymru r'Byd*, a rolling Welsh-language newspaper, *Digital Storytelling*, Real Media movies recorded by lay citizens in studios around Wales, and *Where I Live*, which provides directories, information, and feedback on specific regions of Wales. Nevertheless, according to Green, these new online resources are largely supplementary to the vast resources of BBC's radio and television archives. The BBC is undertaking a joint project with a Welsh company to digitalize much Welsh radio and broadcasting material. At the same time, the real challenge is provide permanent access for the public to these archives. Despite digitalization, much programming is what he refers to "ephemeral," (p.12). In other words, the broadcast may be a one-off experience because there will be no way of recalling the data. Thus, there is a heavy debt owed to the BBC in both Wales and Scotland, but what is really needed is a "democratization" of BBC cultural and educational resources to make them accessible across populations and class and economic barriers.

#### ***Media Economics, and Local Activism***

But when one looks at capital investment into and output from the nations and the North, Wales, Scotland, and the industrial North, they pale by comparison with the London-based South. In addition, Green (2005) points to the "shortage of expertise in Wales on assessing and exploiting the commercial viability" of publicly owned content (p. 14). Such an investment would give more autonomy to the North, where despite promises of a major BBC relocation to Manchester, regional production is declining and regional employment (of area natives) and representation is disproportionately low when compared with the output and employment levels in London and the surrounding areas. Justifying this, in itself, has been and will be a major public relations dilemma.

Nevertheless CSR would demand that an honest assessment of the relative regional stake be the impetus to perhaps what would be very profound and costly changes to swing the pendulum back towards the nations and regions.

### **Discussion**

This paper is a work in progress, given that the broadcasting and electronic landscape is not only changing at a dizzying speed but the political and social backdrop against which it is set shows signs of rapid change as well. There is ongoing restructuring and redefinition of the BBC's significant role in shaping program production and broadcasting in the North and the Nations. As its own financial base and structure may be yet again modified, the Beeb's role as torchbearer for cultural CSR may be questionable. In addition, with a concurrent call by Scottish nationalists for independence and a burgeoning of Asian and other minorities, a re-prioritization of CSR and resources for cultural representation in electronic communication may be warranted. Such a demographic shift may not decrease support for Gaelic programs and home productions but will increase calls for greater diverse representation as well. Public relations will need to deal, to an even greater extent, with requisite variety and demands for more custom tailoring of programs to the needs of niche, multicultural publics. In this newer tableau, the multicultural current may run in a different direction from that envisioned by nationalists or romanticized in *Braveheart*. It may require as much or more training in conflict resolution as in environmental scanning and research.

Given the uncertainty of the evolving, complex electronic communication environment, it is also unclear whether the Nations and the North will be able to rely as heavily as before on the BBC for both financial and technical help in developing and disseminating a plurality of cultural perspectives and representations. NGO Public relations will continue to play a critical role in

monitoring the electronic environment and publics in the Nations and the North to assess whether there exist adequate production and distribution resources for showcasing multicultural content. Regardless of devolution's ultimate outcomes, this role should reflect the cultural public interest.

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**NOTE: In-text references that do not appear below refer to interviews  
A complete list of interviews is available from the author upon request**

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## The Value of Investor Relations: A Delphi Panel Investigation

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Investor relations officers (IROs) say that one of the biggest challenges of their work is proving to the management that their activities contribute value to their respective organizations (Laskin, 2005). Indeed, one might consider it obvious that good investor relations is good for an organization; however, quantifying such "goodness" could prove to be a demanding task for an IRO or for an investor relations scholar. This study attempts to provide an initial step in evaluating investor relations' contribution to an organization's bottom line.

The appearance of the first shareholder can be traced back to the XVII century's Dutch East India company (Britannica, 2006) or sometimes even to the XIII century's Stora Kopparberg mining company (Wikipedia, 2006). In the United States, the first public company is believed to be Boston Manufacturing Company, founded in 1814 (Allen, 2004). When the owner of this company needed to expand the business, he sold the stock in the company to his associates. Nonetheless, the issue of communicating with investors and shareholders did not catch the attention of executives until one hundred and fifty years later (National Investor Relations Institute, 1985; 1989). David Silver (2004) elucidates that "investor relations emerged into its own in the 1960s, often associated...with the so-called dog and pony shows for sell-side analysts and retail investors, usually held at the offices of securities brokerages" (p. 70).

The academic research in the area of investor relations is still emerging today. Marson and Straker (2001) observe that "although there has been some academic research into IR carried out within the USA and UK, there have not been many studies to date" (p. 82). Several scholars conclude that academic journals mostly ignore studies of investor relations (Farragher, Kleiman, & Bazaz, 1994; Brennan & Kelly, 2000). Barbara Petersen and Hugh Martin (1996) claim that "theory building studies of investor relations as a function of corporate public relations are rare in the communication scholarly literature" (p. 173).

Even with this lack of research, investor relations as a profession has been able to achieve a rather prominent status and recognition at the majority of the largest U.S. corporations (Laskin, 2006). Stephen Schultz sees the growing demand in the investor relations services: "IR as a discipline is beginning to escalate within public companies" (as cited in McCartney, 2003). Professionals and scholars have been able to conclude that investor relations is capable of delivering competitive advantage to the corporations practicing in the right way. "In the post-Enron era, investor relations vaults to the top of the corporate agenda, as companies must begin to rebuild investor confidence," Allen says (2002, p. 206). In fact, today "trust will no longer be assumed" and thus, investor relations is recognized as an activity capable of creating "a competitive advantage" (Allen, 2002, p. 206-207) and enabling companies to compete for capital in an open market (Conger, 2004).

In fact, the slogan itself of the investor relations profession is "Enhancing corporate value through effective communication" (National Investor Relations Institute, 2004, p. 1). However,

this slogan does not explain how exactly effective investor relations communications contribute to the corporate value of the organization. This slogan also does not specify how big that contribution is and if investor relation is worth doing it at all. Thus, this study attempts to first provide a theoretical overview of suggested in the literature indicators of the contribution of investor relations function to the organizational bottom line. Such theoretical overview serves as a starting point for an empirical investigation organized as a Delphi panel. Investor relations officers from both corporations and from investor relations agencies are recruited to participate in the panel and share their practical insights in response to the theoretically identified indicators of investor relations value. As a result, the study allows first identifying what academic research considers an investor relations contribution and, second, evaluating these academic ideas by experienced investor relations practitioners. The evaluations by individual practitioners will be merged into one consensus answer, which becomes a snapshot of today's view of both academics and IROs on how investor relations contributes to the organizational bottom line. These consensus indicators of investor relations' contributions might also be used as a foundation for additional qualitative and quantitative studies.

### THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

This study first attempts to identify previous research in the area of investor relations. To do so, a search was conducted in academic databases. *Communication Abstracts* has references to only two academic publications on investor relations or shareholder relations. The search for academic publications in two of the EBSCO host research databases (Academic Search Premiere and Communication & Mass Media Complete) returns the same two publications plus two additional ones for the total of just four peer-reviewed articles on investor relations from the communication standpoint. These four articles are published in 2003, 2002, 1996, and 1992. The two most recent articles are concerned with investor relations in Great Britain (Dolphin, 2003) and in the Eastern Europe (Dragneva, 2002). Thus, there has not been a single academic communication article on investor relations in the United States in the XXI century.

Out of the two articles mentioning investor relations in the United States, one "Memory for investor relations messages: an information-processing study of Grunig's situational theory" by Glen Cameron published in the *Journal of Public Relations Research* in 1992 is not really concerned with the practices of the investor relations in the industry. The article tests the situational theory on undergraduate students in college settings. The other article, however, "CEO perceptions of investor relations as a public relations function: an exploratory study," by Barbara Petersen and Hugh J. Martin, published also in the *Journal of Public Relations Research* in 1996, is relevant to the current study. The authors survey chief executive officers (CEOs) in non-banking public companies in Florida to learn whether senior managers of the organizations perceive investor relations as a public relations function at all and what departments and employees are involved in the supervision of the investor relations functions. The authors observe, "Conventional wisdom among public relations scholars and practitioners considers the two functions bound together under the organizational umbrella of communication management. However, corporate reality is that the investor relations function only infrequently reports to public relations executives" (Petersen & Martin, 1996, p. 173). The study concludes that investor relations function is seldom managed by public relations practitioners not because the activities are essentially different but because CEOs of the companies "do not perceive investor relations to be part of the public relations function" (Petersen & Martin, 1996, p. 173).

The results of these searches indicate that perhaps previous communication research seems to distinguish itself from the area of investor relations, largely ignoring the field. As a result, an additional search is conducted in the business subject database. Business literature in fact has slightly more studies on investor relations; however, it is still far from being a well-researched area. The search in ProQuest<sup>1</sup> returned fifty academic peer-reviewed articles published in scholarly journals after January 2000 where investor relations is mentioned either in the title or in the abstract and another forty articles published before 2000.

These communication and business academic publications along with publications of the National Investor Relations Institute, Investor Relations Society, and the Institute for Public Relations become the basis for the identification of the potential ways in which investor relations can contribute to the organizational bottom line. As a result of the literature analysis, four major contributions are identified:

- Securities Valuation.
- Trading Volume.
- Analysts coverage.
- Relationship with the investment community.

#### *Securities Valuation*

As stated, the contribution of investor relations to the bottom line of an organization has not been studied extensively. Nevertheless, several authors suggested the areas where investor relations' contribution could be identified. Several studies link the effective investor relations and expanded informative disclosure with increased demands for the corporation's shares and lower risk premium, thus, the lower cost of capital (Gelb, 2000; Fishman & Hagerty, 1989; 2003; Benston, 1986).

Gelb (2000) suggests "that more informative disclosures, by allowing investors to monitor managers more effectively and efficiently, increase demand for the firm's securities and ultimately lower its cost of capital" (p. 171). The common logic might suggest that the most effective way to accomplish this is to have a company as transparent for an investor as possible. Financial results, as well as managerial discussions, future plans, and other information may be made available to shareholders. Jeffery Erber proclaims, "Transparency builds credibility" (as cited in McCartney, 2003). Fishman and Hagerty (1989) also suggest that "firms have the incentive to disclose too much information" (p. 643) because it leads to more efficient market valuation of such firm's securities. Gelb (2000) summarizes that the more informative the disclosures, the better it is for the company. Pekka Tuominen (1997), studying investor relations practices at the Finnish stock market, claims that "success in investor relations requires the companies to extend the scope of investor relations from a mere publication of obligatory annual and interim reports to more frequent, extensive, proactive and diversified two-way interaction and communication" (p. 46).

This extensive disclosure, in turn, can improve the financial standings of the company. The Investor Relations Society (n.d.) suggests that "investor relations can have positive impact on a company's market value and cost of capital relative to its industry sector and the overall economic climate" (p. 1). Similarly, the research commissioned by the Institute for Public Relations suggests that "the one bottom line measurement for the investor relations executive is achieving a fair market value for the stock" (Michaelson & Gilfeather, 2003, p. 10). The authors suggest using the Price/Earnings ratio in comparison with peer companies as an indicator of fair market value.

Mahoney (2001) suggests that “more volatile and risky stocks will not command as high a valuation as ‘safer stocks’... So information that helps create a fair value is a powerful weapon in reducing the cost of capital” (pp. 16-17). Starkman and Klingbail (2004) argue that the traditional belief in letting the market forces establish a fair price is unsubstantiated because “the capital market speaks its mind all the time” (par. 3) by pricing the securities of the companies it does not trust lower than the securities of peer firms. Pricing of firms' securities is among the major indicators of the success of public companies; “the ability to raise funds on the slightest margin above the government interest rate, or to show profits on a share – these are the name of the game,” Starkman and Klingbail conclude(2004, par. 4).

#### *Trading Volume*

Another benefit of an effective investor relations program is increased trading volume of securities. Although extremely high trading volume is as negative a sign as is extremely low volume, yet creating the liquidity for a firm's stock is an important goal of an investor relations department. Lack of liquidity prevents investors who look for a quick turn-around of their investments from purchasing the stock (Sinnott, 2002). Several authors (Michaelson & Gilfeather, 2003; Conger, 2004; Gelb, 2000) also mention increased trading volume and liquidity of securities among the benefits of the investor relations program.

#### *Analyst Coverage*

An essentially different approach is suggested by Michaelson and Gilfeather (2003), who, in addition to stock value and trading volume and similar indicators labeled “outcomes,” suggest looking at indicators they label “outputs” (pp. 9-11). According to Michaelson and Gilfeather (2003), outputs are the direct “results of communication program” (p. 9). Among such outputs, the authors mention analyst coverage of the company. Indeed, other authors (Conger, 2004; Mahoney, 2001) also mention analyst coverage as a basis for evaluation of investor relations. The analyst recommendations also provide an easily accessible database for evaluating and comparing investor relations program.

It is possible to approach the analyst coverage differently. One might look at the amount of coverage--how many analysts cover the company. One might also look at the actual recommendation issued by the analyst or at the accuracy of the analyst's coverage. All these approaches provide valid and valuable perspectives and may be combined in an empirical investigation.

The company needs to maintain a constant dialogue with the investment community to ensure the accuracy of its perception among analysts and other securities market professionals. The National Investor Relations Institute recommends, “The company's investor relations officer... should be required to meet with an independent committee of the board...to report feedback from investors and analysts” (Thompson, 2002, p.1). Indeed, it is vital for the management of the company to know who the organizations' investors are as such knowledge enables the company to serve investors better. Kevin Rollins, president of Dell Inc. explains, “We've also charged our investor relations team with sharing and interpreting feedback from the investment community for us... ultimately, my job and Michael's [CEO Michael Dell] job is to lead Dell in a way that drives sustainable, dependable shareholder value over time” (as cited in Conger, 2004, p. 3). Allen (2002) concludes, “Investor relations officers should heed marketplace rumblings about earnings measurers and understand exactly what analysts and investors of the company want, but may not be getting, from financial disclosures” (p. 210).

### *Relationships*

Finally, another potential contribution of investor relations to the company's bottom line is building relationships with the company's publics, and first of all, with investors. The investor relations' goal becomes not about providing up-to-date information but about relationship building. The scope of investor relations activities is constantly growing and becoming more than "answering and administering to the needs of shareholders" (Ainsberg, 2004). Laskin (2005) goes further when he claims that "investor relations is not about numbers any more, today's investor relations is about building and maintaining relationships." Minow (2002), editor and co-founder of *Corporate Library*, summarizes, "Markets do not run on the money; they run on trust." Furthermore, "creating stronger relationships with analysts, portfolio managers, brokers and individuals" is a task NASDAQ proposes for modern practitioners of the investor relations field (Mahoney, 2001, p.1).

Relationships, although difficult to measure, nevertheless, provide a clear advantage to the company. Starkman and Klingbail (2004) explain that a company which invested efforts into building relationships with its shareholders is often rewarded for these investments. Shareholders of such company do not sell off the stock as soon as it goes down or the company faces challenges.

The rewards of this relationship can be significant. Value gaps tend to diminish because investors believe management can accomplish what it says. Positive events and development earn higher stock gain rewards. A flat or down quarter isn't an automatic sell signal. Investors look for explanations and, when convinced that fundamentals are still strong and growing, are more likely to hold their shares or even increase their positions. Patience is more likely to be accorded. (Mahoney, 2001, pp. 9-10)

Building relationships with shareholders increases investors' confidence and trust in the company; all the information about the company will be interpreted through the lenses of such relationships. Peter Imlay elucidates, "Wall Street has so many information sources, but all of those numbers don't mean much if you don't trust those who are running the company. The only way to establish that trust: build relationships and consistently communicate clearly" (as cited in Cogner, 2004, p. 3).

Knowing investors and what they desire leads to better relationships between investors and a company, and in the long run, to better success of the company and higher stock prices. "Investors approving of certain corporate strategies and actions are likely to respond by buying shares, causing stock prices to rise" (Mahoney, 2001, p. 9). Altogether, the investor relations' role in building a relationship with the shareholder might be the cornerstone of investor relations; "the chief ingredient in all investor relations activities" (Chatlos, 1984, p. 85). Through relationship building, organizations and their publics, including investors, attempt to "co-create, co-manage, and co-define" meaning (Heath, 2001, p. 35).

Mahoney (2001) suggests that companies might develop a brand of their securities the same way as they do with their products and services. He elucidates, "In tailoring communications to different groups, companies can use their knowledge of investor behavior and appeal to individuals through brand awareness, local loyalty, good corporate citizenship, and consistent financial performance" (p. 16). Thus, relationship-building activities can provide value to the bottom line of the organization as substantial as operational activities. Yet, the measurement of relational contributions to the bottom line may prove difficult.

## DELPHI METHODOLOGY

It might be also beneficial to see how the theoretical statements about the investor relations' contribution to the organizational bottom line are being evaluated by experienced professionals in the industry. This allows bridging the gap between theory and practice, as well as paves a better way for future development of investor relations science and practice. One methodology that seems appropriate for this task is a Delphi panel.

"Delphi is the name of a set of procedures for eliciting and refining the opinions of a group of people," Dalkey states (1967, p. 1). He continues, "In practice, the procedures would be used with a group of experts or especially knowledgeable individuals." The Delphi technique originated in the late 1940s at the Rand Corporation. Many Delphi studies have been conducted since that time by both government and private sectors and all over the world (Sackman, 1974). Delphi initially was exclusively used for technological forecasting as a tool to see how the technology will evolve, especially in the context of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. Later, it was expanded to social science phenomena such as evaluation of services of the Jewish Community Federation (Reisman, Mantel, Dean, & Eisenberg, 1969), quality of life (Dalkey, Rourke, Lewis, & Snyder, 1972), and Internet usage by corporations (Weber, 2004). Turoff (1972) suggests that Delphi can be a general purpose vehicle for human communication and consensus, and for group problem-solving. Sackman (1974) concludes, "Applications have expanded until they are virtually indistinguishable from the questionnaire technique, broadly considered (p. 3).

The distinctions, however, do exist. One of the key differences is the selection of respondents. Although survey research often (although not always!) strives for the ability to generalize results through probability sampling, Delphi makes use of purposive sampling. The respondents are deliberately selected as experts in their industry. It is not uncommon for Delphi methodology to make use of snowball sampling, when recruited experts recommend other experts in their profession who also can be recruited for the study. Another key difference is the presence of feedback. When using a survey, researchers typically analyze the results themselves and provide their conclusions on their own; in Delphi methodology the researchers share their conclusions with the respondents and ask for an additional feedback. Thus, respondents have a chance to correct and clarify their positions, which adds certain validity to the results (Dalkey, 1969). These feedbacks in Delphi methodology are called "rounds". A Delphi study might have as many or as little rounds as necessary for participants to reach the consensus and agree on the one summative answer; the number of rounds can also be limited based on other considerations such as time or budget constraints.

Delphi then becomes a useful tool for inquires into a new area or an area that did not have much prior research done. A Delphi panel can serve as an exploratory investigation that provides a springboard into additional research projects. Sackman (1974) concludes, Delphi can present "an observed expert concurrence in a given application area where none existed previously" (p. 4). Delphi thus becomes "a meeting of the minds, consensus among the experts" (p. 45) achieved through "controlled and rational exchange of iterated opinions" (pp. 6-7).

Delphi methodology, however, has a variety of potential drawbacks. Among them is the potential influence of the researcher on the group's opinion, the groupthink effect that makes respondents change their minds rather than actual re-evaluation of their own opinions, the recruitment bias as to who can be considered an expert, and some others.<sup>2</sup> As discussed above, not much research has been done in the area of investor relations. The research on the investor relations' contribution to the bottom line of organizations is virtually non-existent. This suggests

that Delphi methodology may be an appropriate tool to conduct the initial inquiry into the area under investigation. The recruitment of experts-participants is conducted through the author's personal contacts in the investor relations profession, National Investor Relations Institute, and Financial Communications section of the Public Relations Society of America.

The questionnaire includes four questions, which correspond to four potential contributions of investor relations to the organizational bottom line as identified through the literature review. The participants are instructed to provide full and detailed answers without any specific maximum or minimum length required. The participants are asked to rely on the knowledge and expertise they have attained throughout their career in investor relations. In addition, in the first round the respondents are asked to provide some background information and are also asked what in their opinion is the biggest challenge in measuring investor relations' contributions to the organizational bottom line.

The research is conducted in two rounds. The respondents seem to have reached the consensus in the second round already. In addition, the budget and time considerations also limit the research to two rounds.

## RESULTS

The investor relations Delphi panel consists of twelve participants. All participants are practitioners in the area of investor relations. The participants are recruited from both corporations (nine participants) and from investor relations agencies (three participants). The experience of corporate investor relations officers ranges from three to over 20 years, with 11 being the average number of years in investor relations. On the agency side, the experience ranges from two to over 10 years, with six years being the average number. Nine of 12 participants were male and three female. The majority of participants hold a title of vice-president or director of investor relations ( $n = 8$ ); however, there is a corporate communications specialist ( $n = 1$ ) and assistant treasurer ( $n = 1$ ). The educational background of the participants is divided between business disciplines such as accounting, finance, and management ( $n = 4$ ) and communication related disciplines such as public relations, journalism, communication, or mass communication ( $n = 7$ ). The average age of the corporate investor relations officer is 40, while practitioners at agencies are on average under 30 years old.

### *Equity Evaluation*

The first question is focused on the equity valuation as the ultimate contribution of investor relations to the organizational bottom line. The question for the first round is the following:

*Investor relations activities are sometimes believed to increase securities valuations, all other variables held equal. What is your response to the following statement: "Investor relations provides informative and timely disclosure that leads to decreased risk and thus increased price for the firm's shares and ultimately lowers the firm's cost of capital."*

The majority of the investor relations professionals agree with this statement: "I believe that IR does facilitate the flow of information externally... Improved availability and quality of information externally should result in a more efficient market for the firm's stock."

Practitioners, however, caution that "this is not a black-and-white statement" because investor relations does not hold power to change valuation by itself. Investor relations activities are simply one of many factors that can influence the share price. One respondent elucidates, "I do not believe that investor relations activities alone can move the stock price. It is what is being communicated and the effectiveness of that communication that can move the stock

price...ultimately, the performance and prospects of the company drive stock price." Another respondent adds, "In order to support an increased share price – and lower the cost of capital--the company must perform and create value. If the company does not create sufficient value, IR will not have meaningful impact on share price."

Professionals also caution against the implied causality in the question. One respondent explains that a road from "a well executed investor relations program" to a lower cost of capital "represents a very long series of interrelationships that makes causation a difficult hypothesis to prove." Another respondent goes even further: "The impact that investor relations has on a share valuation is very, very minimal. Other metrics, such as earnings growth, profitability, management credibility, and others drive 99.9999% of the stock price". Another professional advises that "not all investors look at news in the same manner...What some investors may perceive as 'good news' versus another can hinge on an investor's investment style and thus impact what is considered decreased or raised risk, good news or bad news." Finally, another respondent elaborates, "I agree with the statement that investor relations leads to decreased risk, but that decreased risk does not automatically correlate to increased price for the firm's shares...If the company is not doing well, they won't buy the stock, no matter how transparent and helpful the investor relations person might be."

Another respondent summarizes that there are many other influences on the stock price in addition to investor relations communications, but "the important takeaway is for consistent, timely and thorough practice of IR to ensure that its role and influence, which varies from stock to stock, has the optimum chance to impact the cost of capital and the risk factor in a security."

Based on these responses, the consensus response is constructed to try to integrate all of the respondents' positions. The original question, along with this consensus answer, is sent back to the participants to check if it provides an accurate summary of their positions and that it in fact can serve as a consensus answer. Thus, the first question and answer pair of the second round of Delphi inquiry look like this:

*Investor relations activities are sometimes believed to increase securities valuations, all other variables held equal. What is your response to the following statement: "Investor relations provides informative and timely disclosure that leads to decreased risk and thus increased price for the firm's shares and ultimately lowers the firm's cost of capital."*

*ANSWER: This is not a black-and-white topic because IR does not have this kind of singular power to move the stock. Other metrics, such as earnings growth, profitability, and others mostly drive the stock price. The company must perform and create value. IR, however, can improve availability and quality of information to enhance the ability of the investors to understand the drivers of the company's performance and strategic vision and thus lead to a more efficient market for the firm's stock.*

The respondents are then asked if they agree or disagree with this consensus answer to the question and are also asked to provide additional comments. All of the respondents agree with the statement presented in the second round as an accurate representation of their opinions. No additional rounds are necessary.

Some participants also provide additional comments to expand the understanding of this type of investor relations' contribution. Some explain that investor relations enhances investors' understanding of "the company's business drivers" and thus provides a basis for the company's valuation. Another comment focuses on the way investor relations must be practiced to be successful--such as being proactive and targeted on specific audiences. Finally, another respondent adds an important observation that investor relations "has both a qualitative and a

quantitative role in the process and has grown increasingly important over the years as the discipline has matured."

#### *Stock Liquidity*

The second question with the focus on the increased liquidity of the stock as a contribution of investor relations to organizational bottom line asks in the first round:

*Sometimes investor relations is believed to increase the liquidity of the stock. What is your response to the following statement: "Investor relations programs increase trading volume and liquidity of securities."*

The investor relations officers who participated in the Delphi panel also agree with this statement with certain reservations. One panelist explains that although IROs need to put their management team in front of proper investors, it is the management who makes the final sale: "Like the old adage, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. The IRO's job is to make sure the horse is led to the right lake, i.e. don't bring a growth company trading at an all time high premium to a value investor... Assuming that management does their part in telling the story, then yes, the response should be an increase in trading volume and increased liquidity."

Several respondents mention the importance of a targeted outreach program that "a proactive investor relations program" must encompass in order to increase "the breadth and depth of institutional shareholders." As a result, such investor relations outreach "can drive demand for stock." Another respondent adds that expanded sell-side coverage will also drive the trading volume.

Other respondents question the idea of evaluating investor relations through the liquidity of stock. One of the respondents explains, "I am not sure one can conclude that increased demand necessarily leads to increased volume however, as supply may not increase." Even more, sometimes an investor relations program simply "does not want to increase liquidity," as another panelist elucidates. The same panelist adds, "We have been successful in building relationships with them [shareholders] and thus they have chose to hold onto the bulk of their shares." Another respondent suggests, "Increasing volume and liquidity may denote more hedge fund activity, which may not be desired but cannot be controlled."

For the second round of the Delphi panel, these answers are summarized and presented back to the panelists for approval. The second round's question and answer are below:

*Sometimes investor relations is believed to increase the liquidity of the stock. What is your response to the following statement: "Investor relations programs increase trading volume and liquidity of securities."*

*ANSWER: IR can positively influence trading volume and liquidity; however, not all investor relations programs have it as a goal. In addition, to the extent this positively or negatively impacts volatility and the stock's beta, one has to question the blind concept that it is always good. Good IR might lead investors to hold onto their shares leaving less available for purchase. Some programs, however, drive demand for the stock with an ongoing institutional outreach / targeting effort with the goal of increasing the breadth and depth of institutional shareholders and increase the number of analysts who follow a company. Ultimately, that comes down to the investors who are trying to determine if it is appropriate to invest in a stock. Therefore, once again, IR can tell the company's story to a wide range of investors; then many other factors would come into play like the fundamentals and investment merits of the story.*

All the respondents agree with this summary in the second round, and thus no additional rounds are required. Some also suggest additional comments. One respondent explicates, "The

answer above is well articulated. IR is properly concerned with helping to foster a fair, efficient and accessible market for equities (and bonds) through effective communication and transparency." Several others argue that there might be too many limitations expressed in the consensus answer. One of the panelists explains, "I agree, except for sentences two and three. There is always stock available for purchase, it just depends on the price. If good IR helps increase awareness and ultimately demand, the price will go up and this is in the interest of shareholders and the company." Another panelist adds, "No stock is a one size fits all – near term or over the longer term – it will be an appropriate investment for some but not for others. This supports the need for constant outreach." Yet, another IRO also emphasizes the need for constant outreach as it helps companies in "diversifying the shareholder base."

#### *Analyst's Coverage*

The third question presented to IROs probes the hypothesis that the contribution of investor relations to the organizational bottom line resides in the expansive and accurate analysts' coverage. The question is formulated in the following way:

*Sometimes the contribution of investor relations is believed to be generating analysts' coverage of the company. What is your response to the following statement: "Investor relations' purpose is ensuring that the company receives extensive and accurate coverage by financial analysts."*

The respondents again in general agreed with this statement. One respondent clarifies, "There is a marketing aspect to the IR job to identify appropriate firms who may end up following your company. I agree with both points in this statement that part of IR's role is to (1) increase the number of analysts covering the company, and (2) to improve their understanding of the company."

Another respondent, however, argues that not all the companies look to expand their coverage, "I have worked with companies who have 30 plus analysts covering them and they simply do not have the time to deal with all of them, especially the lower-tier firms." Several respondents also suggest that the focus should be on the quality of coverage rather than on the quantity. One panelist states, "Quality should trump quantity... There is a point of diminishing returns on sell-side coverage. In today's world of declining value of the sell-side model, investor relations' primary time and thrust must be spent with the buy-side, not attracting analysts' coverage on the sell-side." Another panelist agrees and adds, "It is important, however, that the coverage that does exist is as accurate as possible and that is achieved when practitioners communicate in a timely manner with analysts." Another respondent, however, calls attention specifically to the sell-side coverage, "Although 'independent' research is still trying to catch hold, it is still a critical element for investor relations to maintain / expand sell-side analysts coverage. That published research is then leveraged to reach a wider pool of potential institutional, and to a declining degree, retail investors."

Finally, some of the respondents argue if analysts' coverage can be used for evaluation of investor relations because it is not a goal in itself but rather a means to achieve a goal of increased valuation. One panelist explains, "It is more of a means to an end. Financial analysts are one of the main communication channels that company can utilize to help communicate the company's message in an effort to ensure the market in a company's stock is efficient." Another respondent explains that analysts' coverage "is just one function of a larger investor relations plan... To say this is the only function is to narrow the scope of the investor relations role." Another respondent summarizes, "One of the many responsibilities of investor relations is to develop sell-side coverage. I wouldn't characterize it as the 'purpose' of investor relations. Once

coverage is established, it is a responsibility of the function to work with the financial analysts to promote the factual accuracy of their reporting. As for 'extensive', I think each company has an optimal number of analysts. For a small company it may only be a few. For ... [company name is omitted here], a mid-size S&P 500 company, 10-15 is a good number. Microsoft or other larger firms are going to have even more."

For the second round, all of these responses are summarized into a consensus answer and presented back to the respondents. The question and answer are phrased in the following way: *Sometimes the contribution of investor relations is believed to be generating analysts' coverage of the company. What is your response to the following statement: "Investor relations' purpose is ensuring that the company receives extensive and accurate coverage by financial analysts."*

*ANSWER: This is an important part of investor relations, but not the primary one. In addition, quality should trump quantity and there is a point of diminishing returns on sell-side coverage. It is more important that the coverage that does exist is as accurate as possible and that it is achieved when practitioners communicate in a timely manner with analysts. IR should work to ensure the company is receiving accurate coverage and that the covering analysts have their facts straight, which can be done by educating analysts about company's operations. To an extent, IRO manages expectations and provides timely and accurate information to the investment community.*

The respondents generally agree with this summary, so no additional rounds are necessary. IROs, however, suggest that other limitations might also exist. For example, one respondent explains, "I agree to a point. In general it is the job of the IR department to increase coverage. However, a number of internal and external factors can impact this goal, as I have seen first hand. In such instances where a company does not have a defined peer group, it may be difficult to find an appropriate analyst to cover a company, seeing that Wall Street itself is organized by sectors." Several respondents also caution in the light of new regulations "not to get too close to the analyst forecasts so they do not become 'your own'."

Another respondent proposes cutting out "to an extent" addendum in the last sentence, "Definitely agree with the last sentence. In fact, I would cut the "To an extent" beginning--that is a large part of the role of investor relations." Several respondents, at the same time caution, that perhaps there should be two separate answers for buy-side and for sell-side coverage because IROs approach to these two different types of analysts would also significantly differ.

One panelist elucidates that although the statement is accurate for the sell-side, "Buy-side dialogue continues to increase in importance due to a reduction in the number and quality of sell-side analysts and because more buy-side firms are doing more of their own research." Another respondent expands this idea, "IR more and more is spending time and effort targeting the buy-side directly, especially as the role, value and sustainability of the sell-side model is becoming more suspect and its future is an evolving one that may or may not lead to more or less influence. With limited time and resources, marketing directly to one's customers is more important, especially with the rapid increase in the flow of communications in today's electronic world." Finally, another respondent tries to merge both of the groups of analysts together again and explains that it is now even more important for IROs to work with both buy-side and sell-side, "The quality of the sell-side research has been questioned by many on the buy side in recent years. Many buy-siders don't use sell-side research and instead rely on their own in-house work. As a result, those sell-side analysts who follow the company must understand it or their value to the buy-side will be further diminished and questioned."

### *Relationship Building*

The last question of the Delphi panel investigates the relationship building aspect of investor relations. The question is presented in the following way:

*Sometimes investor relations' goal is described as building relationships with investors and analysts. What is your response to the following statement: "The rewards of this relationship can be significant. Value gaps tend to diminish because investors believe management can accomplish what it says. Positive events and development earn higher stock gain rewards. A flat or down quarter isn't an automatic sell signal. Investors look for explanations and, when convinced that fundamentals are still strong and growing, are more likely to hold their shares or even increase their positions. Patience is more likely to be accorded."*

The respondents overwhelmingly agree with this statement. One respondent claims, "This is profoundly true. Building personal relationships with analysts (buy & sell-side), portfolio managers, and credit rating agency personnel is vitally important. Personal credibility can go a very long way to minimize the down-side of inevitable bumps in the road. This creates the "benefit of the doubt" that only comes with consistent performance over time." Another respondent adds, "This gets to the 'qualitative' aspects of IR and suggests why ROI for IR is difficult to measure in that it is such a major relationship function or business. The statement is accurate to the extent that IR is properly focused on building the correct and optimum relationships with investors and analysts. This gets to the issue of targeting and where one spends his/her time in IR, including the use of senior management." Another respondent suggests, "If investors and analysts feel they have a relationship, not only with senior management but with a department and/or specific person devoted to helping meet their needs, they will be confident they are dealing with an accountable and transparent company."

Several respondents point out the importance of the management team perception by the investment community and other intangibles. One panelist explicates, "Surveys of the buy-side indicate that more than 1/2 of investment 'criteria' are intangibles and regard for a company's management is one of the top criteria. Giving investors a chance to form an opinion about a company's leadership team does create some understanding and confidence during a period of below expectations results." The respondent persists, "This has been my experience. It also helps build a 'floor' on the stock price with investors who like the company, but are waiting for a lower entry point."

Another respondent adds, "I partially agree in that evaluation of the management team is critical to many firms' decision making process. IR can help ensure that investors have appropriate access to management to make this determination." The respondent continues, "Investors with a longer-term time horizon may be willing to hold through temporary blips in performance if they have a strong appreciation for and belief in the management team (accompanied by proper explanations of causes and action plans)." Others provide examples from their own companies, "I agree with this statement. Since we have invested the time and effort in building relationships built on full, open, honest, and proactive communication, we are given the opportunity to explain our results and strategies more fully, and have a better chance to be given the benefit of the doubt in situations where investors and analysts are being asked to trust your word than if we didn't establish the relationship."

One respondent however cautions not to overestimate the power of relationship building versus the actual track record, "I would argue that value gaps diminish because analysts and investors have been properly educated about a company's near-term and long-term growth

prospects, but also because management teams have a track record of execution.” The respondent explains, “If management consistently underperforms expectations, then it doesn’t matter what the IRO says, no one will believe him/her or what management is trying to sell this time around.” Another respondent suggests that maybe the relationship building might result in some benefits for the company, there is no certainty if and how it will work in each specific situation, “Investors who feel comfortable with management and the company’s strategy are naturally more likely to stick with a company’s shares when events are accurately and credibly communicated, but there is no guarantee.”

To summarize all these points, the consensus answer is constructed and presented back to the participants in the second round of the Delphi panel. The question and answer pair is formulated the following way:

*Sometimes investor relations’ goal is described as building relationships with investors and analysts. What is your response to the following statement: “The rewards of this relationship can be significant. Value gaps tend to diminish because investors believe management can accomplish what it says. Positive events and development earn higher stock gain rewards. A flat or down quarter isn’t an automatic sell signal. Investors look for explanations and, when convinced that fundamentals are still strong and growing, are more likely to hold their shares or even increase their positions. Patience is more likely to be accorded.”*

*ANSWER: This statement is generally true. This gets to the “qualitative” aspects of IR; for example, surveys of the buy-side indicate that more than half of investment “criteria” are intangibles and regard for a company’s management is one of the top criteria. Giving investors a chance to form an opinion about a company’s leadership team does create some understanding and confidence during a period of below expectations results. Not only must we build relationships, but we must help to manage analysts’ perception of the company as accountable and transparent and provide appropriate access to management to make this determination. Investors with a longer-term time horizon may be willing to hold through temporary blips in performance if they have a strong appreciation for and belief in the management team (accompanied by proper explanations of causes and action plans). Personal credibility and track record can go a very long way to minimize the down-side of inevitable bumps in the road. This creates the “benefit of the doubt” that only comes with consistent performance over time.*

The respondents agree with this consensus answer and no additional rounds are required. In fact, the majority of respondents claimed that they agree completely and “have nothing to add” to this summary. Others, however, provided some additional comments. Most of the comments suggest that importance of the relationship is so obvious, there is no need in clarifying statements and references to the team’s track record. One respondent explains that it is possible to delete the last three sentences because, “I believe the first part of the paragraph is the correct answer, while the part in orange [the respondent highlighted the last three sentences in orange color] is a bit redundant and drifts away from the role of investor relations and into the role of a credible/well performing management team.” Another respondent also argues with the necessity of the track record addendum, “Benefit of the doubt comes with consistent performance but I’ve also seen it even when that’s not the case. If the investors truly believe in the management, they might be willing to stick it out through longer periods of results below expectation.”

Another respondent reveals, “I continually hear about the importance of management credibility from investors. Consistently growing the company, creating value and building

relationships with investors along the way helps create ‘buy-in’ when an event occurs that the Street does not understand or does not like.” The respondent offers an example, “For example, investors who know the company understand its strategy and view management as credible may be more willing to support the company’s acquisition of a competitor even if the valuation is considered higher than other industry transactions.”

A word of caution comes from a respondent who suggests distinguishing between various types of investors as it is not necessarily equally beneficial to build relationships with all of the different kinds of investors, "I agree. I would only add that there are certain types of investors (short sellers, arbitrage investors) where they buy a stock with a certain preconceived notion/expectation, and no matter how much time an IRO spends trying to educate and convince the investor to look at the company from a different perspective, their approach will not change."

### MEASURING INVESTOR RELATIONS CONTRIBUTION

As was explained in the methodology section, in addition to the Delphi panel investigation on the ways in which investor relations contributes to the organizational bottom line, respondents are also asked about what they consider to be among the biggest challenges in measuring the investor relations contribution. The responses split evenly between those who do not believe there is a need in trying to measure such contribution and those who ask for better methodologies in such measurements.

The first group does not believe it is fair to investor relations to quantify its contribution. One respondent explains, "Getting people off focusing on the bottom line impact of investor relations is the biggest challenge." Another respondent adds that investor relations cannot be directly linked to any bottom line results of the company because "often times results can be intangible." Yet, another panelist adds that “the biggest challenge for most investor relations professionals would be convincing their senior management that investor relations will not always be able to quantify how they contribute to the bottom line."

The other group of respondent, although acknowledge the difficulties of measuring investor relations contribution, insists on the importance of such measurements and points out the need of finding better and reliable methodologies for such measurements. One respondent claims, "The single most important item we face...[is] showing our value without the executive suit and the senior corporate organizational chart. The challenge is to develop methodologies to better measure and quantify the impact of IR to the organization than merely showing the number of meetings/conferences attended, number of sell-side analysts and other 'score-keeping' items." Many others agree, while one respondent complains, "We have not found any objective way to correlate the effectiveness of our [IR] efforts to bottom line impacts."

### DISCUSSION

This study first conducted a theoretical inquiry into the contribution of investor relations to the organizational bottom line, and then subjected these theoretical propositions to scrutiny by the expert practitioners in the investor relations industry. As a result, this research attempts to identify points of intersections between the theory and the practice of investor relations. The outcome seems to suggest that theory and practice are close to each other in the area of measuring investor relations contribution. Practitioners generally agree with the theoretical propositions derived from the literature and are not alien to the issues raised in academia. This is a positive sign for further developing of investor relations body of knowledge and building strong relationships between academic and practice of investor relations.

The theoretical statements at the same time seem to lean to oversimplification, when many nuances of the practices are not fully taken into account or simply ignored. Practitioners feel the need to clarify every statement suggested and provide examples of various events that restrict and limit theoretical statements from being a true reflection of the investor relations practice. This might be a result of the general lack of research in the area of investor relations. When just a few scholars work in the area of investor relations, they do not have a chance to dwell deep into the issues as they try to draw the boundaries of the field and scratch just on the surfaces of issues. With additional scholarly interest in the area and the increased amount of research, there is no doubt more nuances will be studied and research will go deeper into the investor relations issues.

On the other hand, one of the goals of theoretical statements in general is to provide a generalization, thus sacrificing some nuances. Shoemaker, Tankard, and Lasorsa (2004), having looked at several definitions for theoretical models, conclude that in building a theoretical representation of reality we do not need to produce "a mirror image" (p. 110), but rather need to select just the key elements and ignore the non-essential nuances. They present an example of a model of a ship that is easily recognizable as a ship as it has all the key elements such as sails, deck, and hull, but would lack working engine, rudder, or lines. Such theoretical representation would be more useful to us than simply a one-one copy of the original reality because it "helps us focus on some parts and connections among those parts while ignoring other parts and connections. It is this simplifying and focusing that makes models particularly valuable as theory-building tools" (p. 110). In other words, the sacrifice of certain nuances that practitioners notice may serve a purpose of clarifying the distinct ways of investor relations contribution and highlighting what is most important in such contributions.

As for the specific areas of the investor relations contribution to the organizational bottom line, the research in general confirmed all four of these types of contribution with certain remarks. The value of a company's stock primarily depends on the company's performance and its business model rather than on the investor relations activities. However, investor relations is the channel through which investors learn about the company's business model, its financial forecasts, and its management team, and thus investor relations enhances the investors ability to understand and as a result to evaluate the company. In this sense, investor relations helps a share price to achieve a fair valuation and helps a company to tell a story about its future. Credibility becomes an important issue as any company's forecast is only as good as the people who deliver it. This is where the management and investor relations track record comes into play – how truthful they were before, how much we can trust them now. So as a result, in the grand scheme of events, the influence of investor relations on the share price is minimal in comparison with earnings growth, profitability, and sales. Yet, since investors are often concerned not with the past earnings but rather with the future ones, the way the company communicates that information through earnings releases, conference calls, and road-shows might break or make a deal, and this gives investor relations a chance to contribute to a company's fair value. Additional research might help clarify these suppositions.

The liquidity aspect of investor relations contribution seem to be more concerned with establishing a broad institutional shareholder base rather than with actual day-to-day trading activities. A successful investor relations program tries to make investors believe in the future of the company and thus make them hold on to their stock. At the same time, investors are not likely to enter an inefficient market with low daily trading volume. A good investor relations program may push the demand for stock up and thus stimulate positive changes in the share price

leading to more trading. At the same time, poor communications or consistently missing a company's own earnings forecasts may cause the liquidity to go up as well, with the share price going down trading on the negative information. As a result, in describing investor relations' contribution it might be more appropriate to talk about the size and scope of the company's investor's base and the company's outreach program rather than daily trading liquidity. In addition, one might try to focus on the efficiency of the company's securities' market rather than on an actual liquidity; for example, instead of measuring the daily trading volume, one might focus on the spread between bid and ask prices. Additional research is needed to evaluate these assumptions.

As for the analysts' coverage being the measure of investor relations success, the study concerns are with the importance of such evaluation. There is no doubt that analyst coverage is a significant part of IRO's work – especially in terms of the accuracy of such coverage. IROs take great pride in educating analysts about the company, showing them company's facilities, and establishing relationships with them. Nevertheless, as public relations practitioners moved away from measuring the success of public relations based on the amount of clips a story generated in the media and to the measures of attitudes and behavior in the target publics, investor relations officers need to look beyond the analysts' coverage to the actual effects of their efforts in investors. Analysts are intermediaries in IRO's effort to reach investors the same way as journalists are intermediaries in public relations practitioners efforts to reach their publics. Both analysts and journalists are of great importance, but evaluating one's success based solely on these measures does not answer the question of what the contribution to the bottom line is, because such contribution resides not in the intermediaries but in the target public--in investors for IROs. It is true that analysts' "buy" recommendation is more likely to generate demand for the company's stock than analysts' "sell" recommendation and that extensive and accurate coverage is more likely to attract the buy-side, an additional research is required to build a model of these co-influences.

The most intangible measure of investor relations, relationship-building, was at the same time the most supported by the panelists. Building connections between the company's management and the company's shareholders seems to be an important aspect of IROs work and contribution. This aspect, however, is rather challenging to measure. If stock price, trading volume, and analyst recommendations are readily available from several financial services companies, the indicators of relationships between IROs and investors are not available from any source and demand close investigation by an interested party. Relationship itself as a term is susceptible to different interpretations – various authors may define and operationalize what constitutes a relationship differently (Ferguson, 1984; L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Ehling, 1992; Bruning & Ledingham, 1999; Huang, 2001). Therefore, additional research is desired into the area of *investor relationships*, the area valued highly by practitioners but largely ignored by academic community.

The measurement of the investor relations contribution proves to be a difficult topic as respondents do not see any reliable way to link the investor relations activities with the bottom line effects for the organizations. One of the respondents even claims that "to know whether the communication efforts led to the ownership position is impossible." At the same time, practitioners say that showing value is important both internally and externally. Management wants to see value added, whether in quantifiable form or not. And investors want to see the value in the communications with the IROs rather than seeking a contact directly with CEO/CFO. Even showing investor relations' value to other organization's departments may be

important for coordinating efforts with public relations, marketing, or to organize investor visits to the organization's production facilities. Accordingly, much research needs to be done to develop ways in which investor relations contribution could be measured or to conclude that such measures are impossible to develop with at least some degree of certainty. Both academics' and professionals' collaboration in this area may help increase the value of investor relations itself as a profession and as a science.

This Delphi panel produced more questions than answers, yet it highlighted today's dominant views in the academic literature and in the professional community of the issue of measuring investor relations contribution to the bottom line and the ways in which such contribution can be operationalized. This is a small initial step on the road of developing reliable and valid measures of such contribution. Additional rounds of the Delphi panel would be helpful, and broader participation of professionals would also improve the validity of the study. Other research methodologies should also be employed in investor relations research in general, and specifically as it relates to the measurement of investor relations contribution to organizational bottom line. Quantitative studies could contribute to broader generalizability of findings, and qualitative studies would help deepen understanding of the profession. This paper is also a small step on the road to bringing together practitioners and scholars in the area of investor relations to work together on the issues that the profession faces today. Such collaboration, although rare across the various disciplines, can prove to be of a great importance.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> ProQuest is a database that contains business publications and combines content from ABI/INFORM Global, ABI/INFORM Trade & Industry, ABI/INFORM Dateline and the ABI/INFORM Archive.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed discussion of Delphi methodology, see a critical assessment of Delphi methodology commissioned by Rand Corporation itself that almost completely prohibited researchers from using Delphi for a couple of decades: Sackman (1974). Delphi assessment: Expert opinion, forecasting, and group process.

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## Resistance to Ethically Suspicious Video Spoof on YouTube: A Test of Inoculation Theory

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Raising a question about the effectiveness of unethical public relations campaigns on YouTube, we attempted to examine the effects of revealing the video's producer and sponsor on individuals' resistance to the intended effect, the producer of the video, and the campaign itself. In a posttest-only control group design with random assignment, a Web-based experiment was conducted by administering inoculation pretreatment only to the experimental group. Although the hypotheses drawn from inoculation theory were not supported, we found a backlash effect on the producer of the ethically suspicious video. Implications for public relations practices in social media were discussed.

Recent developments in Web-based technology have inspired organizations to pay special attention to social networking and video-sharing Web sites, because these sites offer an enormous potential for real and unfiltered communication. Recognizing this potential, a new breed of public relations consultants are also aggressively urging organizations to take full advantage of the Web's fledgling social media sites as influential tools for public relations. As the volume of businesses clamoring for online attention proliferates, so too do the instances of ethically suspicious public relations practices. As a consequence, opportunities and problems for public relations coexist when one observes the current state-of-the-art developments in social media public relations, which can be defined as online platforms where people share their episodic and semantic memories<sup>1</sup> using a variety of content forms such as text, image, audio, and video.

YouTube.com, a popular video-sharing Web site, lays at the intersection of such opportunities and problems. Recently, a video clip spoofing an *Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore's documentary film aimed at raising public awareness of global warming, appeared on YouTube with the claim that it was an amateur production created by a 29-year old in California. Controversy emerged when the producer of the video turned out to be the public relations and lobbying firm DCI Group in Washington, D.C., whose clients include Exxon Mobil (Regalado & Searcey, 2006). This case became well known worldwide due to *The Wall Street Journal's* scoop and also called the "YouTube pPenguin aArmy scandal," because the video spoof ridiculed Al Gore's documentary by featuring a group of Tux penguins, mascots of Linux, an open-source operating system.

Needless to say, the video's failure to disclose its sponsor or client in a public relations program is a violation of Public Relations Society of America's (PRSA) code of ethics, one of the most widely accepted and applied ethical guidelines for public relations practices ("Member Code of Ethics," 2000).

Although the producer and a presumable sponsor of the video were later disclosed, it was reported that more than 60,000 people viewed the video (Regalado & Searcey, 2006) before *The Wall Street Journal's* scoop revealed the story behind the video. This issue raised a serious

ethical concern commensurate with other unethical public relations practices such as undisclosed special interests in front groups (Bodensteiner, 1997; Conniff, 1997; Fitzpatrick & Palenchar, 2006), unidentified paid commentary (Elliott, 2005), and paid op-eds (Javers, 2006).

Like other similar cases in public relations, the unethical case observed in the YouTube Ppenguin Army scandal raised a fundamental question regarding public relations ethics: Does such an unethical public relations program ultimately help an organization achieve any intended communication goal? What if the public relations' disguised identity or its hidden client were to be revealed? The answers to those questions can be derived in part from previous case studies and tests of normative theory. For instance, scholars who have proposed a normative theory for public relations have demonstrated that a public relations program will not be effective unless it is ethically warranted (J. E. Grunig, 1992, 2001; L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002).

While we consider the normative approach essential to the discussion of public relations ethics, in this present study, we approached the issue from an attitude resistance perspective. More specifically, this study was designed to test the effect of disclosing the producer of an ethically suspicious public relations campaign on viewers' resistance to the intended persuasion, the producer of the controversial campaign, and the campaign itself. Thus, the goal of this present study is twofold. First, it broadens our discussion of public relations ethics beyond a normative approach to the issue. Second, it attempts to test the effectiveness of a refutational preemption strategy in reference to a person or an organization unfairly attacked by a disguised public relations campaign.

This study examines the role of inoculation in the process of resistance to persuasion attempted by the ethically suspicious video spoof. In an experimentally controlled setting, one group received the inoculation pretreatment, whereas a control group received no such alert message. All groups were then subsequently exposed to an ethically suspicious video spoof. Lastly, their resistance to the intended persuasion was measured to test the effectiveness of inoculation strategy in conferring resistance to an ethically problematic public relations campaign. This is a test of inoculation theory (Burgoon, Pfau, & Birk, 1995; McGuire & Papageorgis, 1961, 1962; Pfau, 1997) within the context of public relations ethics.

## Literature Review

### *Ethics and source disclosure in public relations*

In contemporary public relations, the credibility of which has been gradually tainted by numerous unethical practices, nothing is more important than ethics. Thus, many public relations practitioners and scholars would agree with the opinion that "public relations is a field fraught with ethical dilemmas" (Bowen, 2004, p.65). Indeed, during the past three decades, ethics within the field has become the most important issue among public relations scholars as well as practitioners (Edelman, 1992; Huang, 2001; Kim, 2003; Tilley, 2005).

As a result, not only have many professional organizations involved in public relations put heavy emphasis on educating their members regarding ethical standards, but they have also stipulated and mandated the official code of ethics as a guideline for ethical public relations practices (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006; Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, & Agee, 2006).

Among several available ethical guidelines, one of the most widely accepted ethical standards in the field is the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)'s Code of Ethics, which includes six core principles—'free flow of information,' 'competition,' 'disclosure of information,' 'safeguarding confidences,' 'conflicts of interest,' and 'enhancing the profession.'

Among the principles, the guide for “disclosure of information” seems to be the Achilles’ heel of the public relations practice, because it is a violation of the “disclosure” principle that most high-profile unethical practices engage in public relations ethics. Indeed, most public relations scandals that have occurred in the United States have stemmed from public relations campaigns that did not initially disclose the identity of sponsors or clients but whose involvement was later revealed.

One such case is the Armstrong Williams scandal in which the conservative television commentator did not reveal the fact that he was paid approximately \$240,000 by Ketchum, a public relations agency under contract by the U.S. Department of Education for his promotion of President Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” program (Kirkpatrick, 2005). In response to this case, Judith T. Phair, the president and chief executive of PRSA officially criticized Mr. Williams, stating, “as public relations professionals, we are disheartened by this type of tactic” (*Your leaders speak out*, 2005). She also claimed that “any paid endorsement that is not fully disclosed as such and is presented as objective news coverage is a violation of the group’s code of ethics, which requires that public relations professionals engage in open, honest communications and fully disclose sponsors or financial interests involved in any paid communications activities” (*Your leaders speak out*, 2005).

Fitzpatrick and Palenchar (2006) examined the controversy over front groups. The proliferation of front groups as a way of organizing grassroots public relations campaigns introduces a new concern for the field of public relations, because those groups often do not disclose the special interests behind their operations. Front groups are criticized because their real identities implied by their names are often confusing, if not downright deceptive (Wilcox et al., 2006). Engaging in organized and deceptive public relations campaigns, those front groups may mislead publics as well as policymakers regarding controversial public policy issues, which could in turn corrupt the policy-making process (Bodensteiner, 1997; Fitzpatrick & Palenchar, 2006).

In addition to the unidentified paid commentary, paid editorials or opinion columns are surprisingly pervasive in the market of opinions (Javers, 2006). For example, it was revealed that Douglas Bandow and Michael Fumento, two prolific opinion columnists, had received monetary compensation from special interests for their writing opinion columns on the behalf of their sponsors (Javers, 2006).

The problem with these widespread unethical practices is that they eventually hurt the reputation of the public relations industry. Many public relations scholars (Bodensteiner, 1997; Fitzpatrick & Palenchar, 2006; Hallahan, 2006) have argued that hiding the identity of sponsors and clients in making favorable commentary not only affects the credibility of the involved parties, but it also damages the credibility and reputation of the public relations field as a whole.

*Public Relations Ethics in Social Media*

With the Web’s evolution from digital interactive media (McAllister & Turow, 2002) to social media,<sup>2</sup> ethical issues have also emerged, some of which can be considered simply déjà vu of the previous occurrences. However, new types of ethical issues involved in making use of the social media’s unique characteristics also exist. Increasingly, public relations professionals are abusing the characteristics of social media such as user-generated content (UGC), word of mouth tactics, and anonymity. In such trends, some professional public relations or lobbying firms have started to engage in clandestine PR public relations campaigns that conceal their true identity or fail to reveal the sponsor of their campaigns. For instance, Edelman PR, one of the PR firms that is attempting to position itself as a social media stalwart, was under fire when it was

found to be involved in creating several fake pro-Wal-Mart blogs that were introduced to publics as “independent” blogs (Gogoi, 2006). Another controversial issue emerging from the social media phenomena is PR agencies’ use of bloggers for grassroots lobbying campaigns, as also seen in the case of the Edelman’s PR campaign that conveyed pro-Wal-Mart commentary to like-minded bloggers on behalf of its client (Barbaro, 2006).

In the midst of increasing debates about public relations ethics issues in social media, World of Mouth Marketing Association (*“The WOMMA Code of Ethics,”* 2006)<sup>3</sup> has recently been working to establish ethical guidelines that could be specifically applicable to marketing and public relations practices in social media. The core tenet of these guidelines is that social media users must be given enough information to understand the content and its sources in order to avoid any possible confusion or deception. Notably, WOMMA presents its core principles of the code of ethics utilizing the acronym “Honesty ROI,” which represents “honesty of relationship,” “honesty of opinion,” and “honesty of identity.” The first principle of ‘honesty of relationship’ is refers to an honesty policy that requires practitioners to reveal any relationship with a sponsor and/or any incentives or financial support that they may have received. The last code of ‘honesty of identity’ suggests that practitioners should not obscure identification that might ultimately confuse or mislead the publics as to the true identity of the individual with whom they are communicating.

Despite the existence of numerous professional organizations’ code of ethics, it is lamentable that those undesirable public relations practices remain prevalent in the field . Furthermore, there is an emerging question as to why some in the field retain such unethical paradigms of clandestine public relations campaigns. Presumably, they consider a secret public relations campaign to be more effective in terms of persuasion than a transparent public relations campaign.

If the unethical public relations practice is deep-rooted in our field and thus irreparable, then we need to find answers to other questions regarding public relations ethics: Is the unethical public relations campaign really effective? If the identity behind the clandestine public relations campaign is revealed, how will the audience react to the ethically suspicious campaign and to its producer?

To answer those questions, we have reviewed a relevant theory of persuasion. Inoculation theory is useful in addressing the aforementioned questions because it explains individuals’ tendency to resist an ethically suspicious persuasive attempt when the malicious persuasive attack is divulged before it reaches them.

#### *Efficacy of Inoculation in Ethically Suspicious Public Relations Campaigns*

*Main Effect of Inoculation.* In a biological analogy, McGuire (1964) proposed the concept of inoculation to explain a tendency to resist attitude change caused by propaganda. Similar to the act of immunizing individuals for virus by administering a weakened dose of a virus, an inoculation message was assumed to protect people from a persuasive attack by exposing them to weakened forms of the attacking message (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). The theory posits that refutational preemption triggers threat, motivating individuals to counter-argue a subsequent attack message, thereby conferring resistance to attitude changes caused by the persuasive attack (Pfau & Burgoon, 1988; Pfau et al., 2004).

Pfau et al. (1997) argue that inoculation works because people tend to strengthen attitudes against subsequent change after imminent attack, by employing content provided through refutational preemption in addition to their prior knowledge. In this process, threat or

forewarning are assumed to be important factors that confer resistance to influence by imminent attacks.

Numerous studies have examined the efficacy of inoculation preemption strategy in conferring resistance to the influence of attack messages within political/policy communication (An & Pfau, 2004; McGuire & Papageorgis, 1962; Pfau & Burgoon, 1988; Pfau et al., 2004; Pfau et al., 2001; Pfau et al., 1997), health communication (McGuire & Papageorgis, 1962; Pfau, Van Bockern, & Kang, 1992; Pryor & Steinfatt, 1978), marketing communication (Compton & Pfau, 2004) and crisis communication (Wan & Pfau, 2004) contexts. While those studies have assessed and shown whether the inoculation preemption yielded resistance to upcoming persuasive attacks, little research has been done to examine whether the inoculation pretreatment influences viewers' attitudes toward the attacker and attack message itself. However, knowing the effectiveness of inoculation pretreatment on influencing resistance to attackers and attack messages is important to practitioners in diverse communication settings. For instance, it is a matter of issue for political consultants whether negative political advertisements from an opponent candidate can trigger backlash against the attacker (Pinkleton, 1997). For public relations practitioners who need to manage an issue before it influences the public's mind, it is also crucial to counter upcoming attacks that are maliciously intended to hurt an organization's reputation. An organization can implement this strategy by providing either supportive defense messages or refutational messages (Wan & Pfau, 2004). During this process, an organization needs to examine if refutational preemption can effectively manage an issue by protecting its own reputation while also revealing the maneuvering of attackers from behind the scenes.

In addition, public relations researchers need to provide the effectiveness of inoculation preemption on conferring resistance to an unethical public relations campaign as in the case of the YouTube Penguin Army case. We assume that inoculation pretreatment will be effective by motivating and enabling people to engage in additional thought regarding the argument, (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) the attacker and attack message itself. Based on the aforementioned assumption, we assume that the inoculation message confers resistance to a malicious video spoof. As a result, participants to whom the inoculation message is administered prior to exposure to the video spoof will be more resistant to the negative attack, attacker and attack message. Thus, the following hypotheses were proposed.

H1. Participants who receive inoculation treatment will become more resistant to the denigration of Al Gore by an ethically suspicious video spoof than will those in the control group.

H2. Participants who receive inoculation treatment will become more resistant to the producer of the ethically suspicious video spoof than will those in the control group.

H3. Participants who receive inoculation treatment will become more resistant to the ethically suspicious video spoof than will those in the control group.

*Interaction Effect of Inoculation and Belief.* Some researchers (McGuire & Papageorgis, 1962; Pfau & Burgoon, 1988; Pryor & Steinfatt, 1978) even examined the efficacy of inoculation on attitude resistance in conjunction with individuals' beliefs such as political identification (Pfau & Burgoon, 1988). In Pfau and Burgoon's (1988) test, inoculation pretreatments conferred greater resistance to an attack message among receivers who more strongly identified with a political party. Their results indicated that stronger party identifiers were more resistant to an attack message, implying that inoculation was more effective among strong party identifiers. Thus, inoculation pretreatment conforming to one's prior belief is more effective in triggering resistance to upcoming attack message that contradicts their belief. On the other hand,

inoculation pretreatment that conflicts with one's ideological preferences will be ineffective due to the cognitive dissonance that is aroused (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). In a similar context, Burgoon et al. (1995) argued that the effect of advocacy advertising on attitude/opinion change is limited and is only effective as a vehicle for attitude maintenance rather than change. In other words, by outlining an issue that critics have raised or may potentially raise, an oil company (e.g., Mobile) will employ a refutational defense strategy for the issue, which only influences people who are already in favor the corporation's position on an issue (Burgoon et al., 1995).

Thus, we predict that inoculation preemption that threatens one's political belief will be more effective in conferring resistance to an upcoming attack. On the other hand, inoculation preemption that does not threaten one's political beliefs will be ineffective in conferring resistance to an upcoming attack. On the basis of this assumption, we proposed the following hypothesis.

H4. There will be an interaction effect between viewers' political identifications and inoculation pretreatment on their resistance to the denigration of Al Gore's character and image portrayed in an ethically suspicious video spoof.

#### *Roles of Issue Involvement in Resistance*

In previous research of inoculation theory (Compton & Pfau, 2004; Pfau et al., 2004), issue involvement was treated as a mediating variable, assuming that the threat elicited by inoculation pretreatment would boost base involvement levels. In contrast, findings in Pfau et al. (1997)'s study indicated that involvement may function as a prerequisite to threat and, thus, also to inoculation. In their structural equation model, involvement was paralleled with inoculation treatment, supporting the instrumental role of involvement in inoculation. It is noteworthy that involvement directly contributed to resistance to attitudes, whereas threat induced by inoculation treatment affected attitudes only on the low-involving and moderately-involving topics.

In this present study, we attempted to examine the role of involvement in the inoculation effect. Thus, we asked the following research question.

RQ1. To what extent does involvement eliminate the effect of inoculation treatment on resistance to the denigration of Al Gore by an ethically suspicious video spoof?

## Method

### *Overview of the experiment*

To test the hypotheses proposed, an experiment was conducted on the Web. In a posttest-only control group design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963), participants assigned to an experimental group read an inoculation message before they viewed the video spoof. Inoculation treatment was not administered to participants in the control group, however. Participants for both groups were drawn from the same pool and randomly assigned.

### *Participants*

Participants who signed up for this Web-based experiment included 210 students attending a large southeastern public university in the United States. An equal number of participants were assigned to either an experimental group or a control group.

### *Procedure*

Participants who registered for this study were invited to a Web-based experiment via email. The half of the participants who were randomly assigned to an experimental group read an inoculation message and then viewed a video spoof that ridiculed Al Gore's documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*. All other procedures were very similar to those of laboratory experiments aside from the fact that a Java script program strictly controlled the viewing time for

experimental stimuli. In other words, participants were expected to read the experimental stimuli during enforced time intervals by having a next button appear on the screen after the minimum passage of time. The participants were then asked to fill out questions regarding their attitudes toward Al Gore as well as the video producer and the video itself.

The inoculation message was not administered to the other half of the participants randomly assigned to the control group, though they watched the same video spoof. This group was also asked to rate their attitudinal evaluations of Al Gore, the video producer and the video itself. After recording their ratings, participants were asked to report their degree of involvement with the issue of global warming and indicate their political affiliation. Finally, participants answered five true-or-false questions regarding their knowledge of Al Gore.

#### *Stimuli*

*Video spoof.* The video spoof,<sup>4</sup> which originally appeared on YouTube.com, was downloaded and saved to a separate web site using Adobe Flash® video format. The spoof opens by showing a faux Newsweek cover with a quote from Eleanor Clift saying, "If you liked *March of the Penguins*, you'll love *An Inconvenient Truth*," and the first scene of the video shows a "grossly overweight," umbrella-wielding caricature of Al Gore ("Al Gore's Penguin Army video," 2006). Featuring a group of Tux penguins, the mascot of the open-source operating system Linux, the video spoofed Gore's global warming presentation by portraying the Tux penguins as either bored or surprised. In one scene, the Tux Penguins fell asleep and began to audibly snore. The spoof then attempted to give the audience the impression that Al Gore's global warming message is neither logical nor appealing by incorporating extreme slippery-slope type claims that portrayed Al Gore attributing clearly unrelated events (e.g., Boston Red Sox win World Series, Lindsay Lohan's skinniness, etc.) to global warming. The video also insinuates that Gore hypnotizes people. Finally, the video solicits support from Republicans by indicating that nobody is interested in Gore's documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, by showing the Tux penguins sleeping in a "Red State Theater."

*Inoculation.* An inoculation message was written to convey a threat to those who view the video spoof. This implied threat was operationalized as a warning of an impending and potentially influential attack against the participant's position regarding the issue (Pfau et al., 2001).

In an attack-only condition, participants viewed the video spoof in the absence of any threatening message. In contrast, inoculation pretreatment was administered to participants in an experimental condition prior to them viewing the video spoof. The inoculation pretreatment message consisted of a 436 word paragraph. In accordance with most research on inoculation theory (Compton & Pfau, 2004; Pfau & Burgoon, 1988; Pfau, Holbert, Zubric, Pasha, & Lin, 2000; Pfau et al., 2001; Wan & Pfau, 2004), the first paragraph was designed to elicit threat among the receivers. Thus, threat was operationalized as a warning of an impending and potentially influential attack against the viewers' attitudes toward Al Gore. Participants were warned that the video clip contains malicious content lacking factual information and that it attempts to present a decidedly negative image of Al Gore. Following the presentation of the warning message, the producer of the video was revealed along with information about the company's name, business type and location. The company was introduced with its real business name "DCI Group, a public relations and lobbying firm in Washington D.C." Finally, in the last paragraph, it was emphasized that the firm's clients include Exxon Mobile Corp, an oil company.

### *Covariates*

*Involvement.* Involvement in this study was defined as the “extent to which the attitudinal issue under consideration is of personal importance” (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979, p. 1915). Respondents were asked to rate the importance of the global warming issue to them personally as well as their cognitive devotion to the global warming issue, using a Likert-type 7 point scale.

*Knowledge index.* Knowledge is often operationally defined as factual knowledge in numerous knowledge gap studies. Participants’ factual knowledge about Al Gore was measured using five true-or-false questions, the results of which were then summed up to constitute a knowledge index.

### *Dependent Measures*

*Resistance to persuasive attack.* This study’s dependent measures focused on resistance to persuasive attempts by the video spoof, which was measured in terms of attitudes toward Al Gore, the producer of the video spoof and the video itself. Attitudes toward Al Gore were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with the following statements: Al Gore is (a) honest, (b) believable, (c) favorable, (d) intelligent, (d) serious, (e) right, (f) wise, and (g) ridiculous(R)<sup>5</sup>.

Six 7-point Likert-type items constituted the operationalization of attitude toward the video producer. Respondents indicated their degree of agreement with statements regarding whether the producer of the video was “trustworthy,” “believable,” “reliable,” “honest,” “truthful,” and “balanced.”

Seven Likert-type items were designed to measure the extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed that the statements of the video were “accurate,” “informative,” “boring (R),” “fair,” “misleading (R),” “suspicious (R),” and “amateurish(R).”

## Results

### *Reliability*

To examine the reliability of each index of dependent variables, Cronbach's alpha was calculated. Reliability of attitude toward Al Gore was the highest ( $\alpha = .94$ ) among all other indexes, followed by attitude toward the producer of the video ( $\alpha = .92$ ) and attitude toward the video spoof ( $\alpha = .76$ ). Thus, all the measures that constituted each of the indexes were either high or at least fairly high enough to serve as reliable measures of each construct.

### *Demographics*

The participants were asked several demographic items—gender, political affiliation, and ethnicity. Among the 161 respondents in the sample, 66% ( $N=106$ ) were female. Politically, 39% ( $N=63$ ) considered themselves democrats, 37% ( $N=59$ ) republicans, 17% ( $N=28$ ) independents, and 7% ( $N=11$ ) identified themselves as having “other” political affiliations. Ethnically, the sample consisted of 71% Caucasians ( $N=115$ ), followed by 13% of Hispanic/Latino background ( $N=21$ ), and 6% of both African ( $N=9$ ) and Asian ethnicities ( $N=9$ ).

### *Tests of H1, H2 and H3*

In H1, we predicted that participants who received inoculation treatment would become more resistant to the video spoof’s denigration of Al Gore than would those in the control group. However, Aa *t-test* revealed no difference between the experimental group and control group in terms of attitudes toward Al Gore (see Table 1). Thus, H1 was not supported.

In the following hypothesis (H2), we predicted “participants who receive inoculation treatment will become more resistant to the producer of the ethically suspicious video spoof than will those in the control group.” A *t-test* did not reveal a significant difference of attitude toward the producer of video spoof. Thus, H2 was not supported (see Table 1).

Finally, we predicted in H3 that participants who received inoculation treatment would become more resistant to the ethically suspicious video spoof than would those in the control group. Again, no statistically significant difference of mean attitude scores were found between the experimental and control groups; therefore, H3 was rejected (see Table 1).

#### *Test of H4*

In H4, we predicted there would be an interaction effect between political identification and inoculation. Before testing the hypothesis, we conducted an analysis of variance to examine the difference of mean attitude scores across different political identification groups (see Table 2). Respondents’ party identifications made statistical differences in the measures of attitudes toward Gore and the video spoof producer. Democrats, demonstrating the most positive attitude toward Gore ( $M = 4.4$ ,  $SD = 1.4$ ), were most resistant to the attack made by the ethically suspicious video spoof. On the other hand, republican identifiers were least resistant to the video spoof’s attack and displayed the lowest attitude toward Gore ( $M = 3.0$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ ). A result from an *F-test* indicated that the attitudinal resistance in terms of political identification was statistically significant,  $F(2, 158) = 18.43$ ,  $p < .001$ . A subsequent *Scheffe test* ( $p < .05$ ) showed that democrats and independents were more resistant to the ethically suspicious video spoof than were republicans.

Respondents’ attitudes toward the producer of the video spoof were also influenced along political party lines [ $F(2, 158) = 4.23$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. A *Scheffe test* ( $p < .05$ ) revealed that the evaluations between democrat ( $M = 2.2$ ,  $SD = 1.1$ ) and republican identifiers ( $M = 2.7$ ,  $SD = 1.1$ ) were significantly different. However, there was no statistical difference in the viewers’ attitudes toward the video spoof across different groups of political identifiers.

To test H4, a two-way analysis of variance was conducted by entering treatment (i.e., inoculation pretreatment) and political identification into fixed factors. No significant interaction was found. However, political affiliations were found to have strong main effects on respondents’ attitudes toward Gore [ $F(2, 155) = 18.07$ ,  $p < .001$ ] and toward the producer of the video spoof [ $F(2, 155) = 4.23$ ,  $p < .05$ ].

#### *Answer to RQ1*

To examine the influence of participants’ involvement on the results of H1 to H3, we posed a research question (RQ1) asking, “To what extent does involvement eliminate the effect of the inoculation treatment on participants’ resistance to the persuasive attack message?”

To answer the above the research question, a series of analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) were performed with the involvement and knowledge indices acting as covariates and each attitude index serving as a dependent variable. Table 3 displays results from the analysis of covariance on attitude toward Gore. Since no inoculation effect was observed in the test of H4, RQ1 warranted no need for further analysis. However, because there was a main effect of political identification on attitudes, we extended our analysis to include the effect of political identity on attitudes toward Gore and the producer of the video spoof.

The analysis of covariance using involvement as a covariate resulted in the same significant effect on resistance toward video spoof’s persuasive attempt as was demonstrated by political identification. Even when involvement and knowledge were controlled, the significant main effect of political affiliation [ $F(2, 152) = 14.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ] on attitudes remained,

demonstrating the robust effect of political identification on respondents' attitudes toward Al Gore. The findings indicate that involvement [ $(F(1, 152) = 5.37, p < .05)$ ] and knowledge [ $(F(1, 152) = 4.46, p < .05)$ ] were significant contributors to attitudes toward Al Gore, presumably suppressing the effect of inoculation on respondents' attitudes toward the person attacked.

#### *Post-hoc analysis*

While we failed in finding a significant main effect of inoculation on resistance to this ethically suspicious public relations campaign, a close look at the results implies that respondents' attitudes were lowest toward the sponsor of the video spoof. To examine if there was a statistical difference between participants' attitudes toward Gore, the sponsor of the unethical public relations campaign and the ethically suspicious video spoof itself, we ran a paired sample *t-test* across our dependent measures. The results of the *paired t-test* demonstrated that participants possess greater resistance to the producer of the ethically suspicious video spoof than they do to the video itself and its intended persuasive effort (see Table 5). As an aggregate group without attention paid to treatment and control condition, participants in our study demonstrated the most negative evaluations of the producer of the video spoof ( $M = 2.5, SD = 1.1$ ). Since the attitude toward the producer of the video is measured by the average of summed scores of Likert-type items on a 7-point scale, the lower the score, the more resistance a participant feels toward the producer. Participants in our study were also resistant to the ethically suspicious video. The mean attitude score for attitude toward the video was 3.2 ( $SD = 1.0$ ), which is below the median of the rating scale.

### Discussion

Despite diverse efforts made by public relations professionals and educators, unethical practices in the field continue to occur. In this study, we argued that ethics-related issues have already influenced the so-called social media environment, which has just begun to burgeon. Discussing the current status of public relations ethics in social media, we addressed a high-profile unethical public relations campaign that appeared on YouTube. Raising a question about the effectiveness of such unethical campaigns, we attempted to examine the effects of revealing the video's producer and sponsor on individuals' resistance to the intended effect, the producer of the video, and the campaign itself. To address the research problem, we based our study on inoculation theory.

Findings in our study were not favorable to the inoculation theory's prediction. The present study found that individuals might not be inoculated against an suspicious, unethical public relations campaign message despite pre-exposure to a weakened dose of the upcoming attack. While participants' attitudes toward Al Gore did not vary greatly between the experimental and control groups, their attitudes toward Gore did differ by their political identification. Considering that a political ideology is a belief (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003), the findings of our study imply that inoculation preemption may not be effective when an individual has strong prior beliefs regarding the issue being discussed in the warning message meant to elicit inoculation. Correspondingly, McGuire (1964) once argued that the effect of inoculation was likely to be superior when the individual's beliefs were not attacked or threatened.

Thus, we believe that the failure in rejecting null hypotheses in our study can be attributed to the limitation of our experimental instrument. This makes sense when we more closely examine the mean and standard deviations of attitude scores across the dependent variables. Apparently, participants had negative evaluations about the ethically suspicious video

and the producer. However, participants in the treatment condition were not influenced by the imminent threat presented in the form of a warning message in pre-treatment. Judging from the strong effect of political identification on participants' attitudes toward Gore, it is likely that they responded to the evaluative questions based on their prior attitudes and beliefs about Al Gore. Respondents identifying themselves as democrats may have responded more favorably toward Gore when they were exposed to the inoculation treatment, while republican identifiers maintained their prior attitudes in the face of warnings against the imminent persuasive attempt.

This tendency was also found in the analysis of attitudes toward the producer of the ethically suspicious video. However, we also found that the effect of political party identification was significantly lessened in respondents' evaluations about the producer. Finally, attitudes toward the video were not influenced at all by either inoculation treatment or political identification. Findings of our study imply that future research should test the hypotheses proposed by our study with a neutral stimulus for which subjects have no prior attitudes or belief.

We have also found other limitations during our experiment process. First, we did not consider communication modality when developing the inoculation treatment. While we provided participants with a campaign video clip, participants were given a text-based threatening message. However, a couple of previous studies (Pfau et al., 2000; Pfau et al., 1992) have examined the effects of different types of communication modality in conferring resistance. Considering that the campaign tested in this study was presented in a video clip format, we should have attempted to develop a video-based warning message for the experimental group. While results of previous studies on the different modalities in inoculation treatment are mixed, it is an important avenue for future research.

Finally, the reliability for attitude toward the ethically suspicious video ( $\alpha = .76$ ) was not very high as compared to reliability scores of the other two dependent measures. An additional factor analysis of the attitude toward the video yielded two factors for the measure, one of which is related to ethics while the other is more related to professional production (e.g., amateurish, boring). Since deletion of a certain item did not make any difference in the overall reliability score, we used the index as the original. Future research should aim to construct more reliable items that can effectively measure the ethics of video-based public relations campaigns.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For discussions about two systems of memory, see Tulving (1972; 1983; 1993; 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Social media are defined as on-line platforms where people share their episodic and semantic memories using a variety of content forms such as text, image, audio, and video.

<sup>3</sup> WOMMA is the official trade association for the word of mouth marketing industry. The official Web site can be assessable at <http://www.womma.org>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=IZSqXUSwHRI>

<sup>5</sup> (R) indicates reverse-coding.

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Table 1. Effect of Inoculation Treatment in Instilling Resistance to the Ethically Suspicious Video Spoof

	Attitude toward Gore		Attitude toward producer		Attitude toward video	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Control Group (N=85)	3.63	1.42	2.48	1.11	3.23	1.03
Experiment Group (N=76)	3.81	1.41	2.40	1.10	3.08	1.02

*Note.* None of the mean differences between the control and experimental groups were significant at  $p < .05$  (t-test). Each attitude index shows the average of summed scores of Likert-type items along a 7-point scale. In terms of attitudes toward Al Gore, higher ratings indicate greater resistance to the attack message. However, in terms of attitudes toward the video producer and video, lower ratings indicate greater resistance to the attack message.

Table 2. Resistance to the Ethically Suspicious Video Spoof by Political Identification

	Democrats (N=63)	Republicans (N=59)	Independent/Others (N=39)	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>
Attitude toward Gore	4.37 (1.36) <sup>a</sup>	2.96 (1.19) <sup>b</sup>	3.78 (1.27) <sup>a</sup>	2/158	18.43 <sup>***</sup>
Attitude toward the producer	2.16 (1.13) <sup>ab</sup>	2.73 (1.10) <sup>bc</sup>	2.47 (0.96) <sup>b</sup>	2/158	4.23 <sup>*</sup>
Attitude toward the video	2.99 (1.01)	3.31 (1.04)	3.21 (1.01)	2/158	1.52

*Note.* Numbers in each cell the mean and standard deviation (in parenthesis). Means with different subscripts within each measure differ by  $p < .05$ . (Scheffe test). Each attitude index shows the average of summed scores of Likert-type items along a 7-point scale. In terms of the attitude toward Al Gore, higher ratings indicate greater resistance to the attack message. However, in terms of attitudes toward the video producer and video, lower ratings correspond with greater resistance to the attack message. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*  $p < .05$

Table 3. Analysis of Covariance of Attitude toward Al Gore with Involvement and Knowledge as covariates

Source	<i>MS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	$\eta_p^2$	Power.
Constant	21.09	1	13.43 ***	.08	.95
Inoculation	.44	1	.28	.00	.08
Political affiliation	22.42	2	14.28 ***	.16	1.00
Involvement	8.43	1	5.37*	.03	.63
Knowledge	7.01	1	4.46*	.03	.56
Inoculation X Political affiliation	.92	2	.58	.01	.15
Error	1.57	152			

*Note.* The involvement index was the average of two involvement measures: “how important is global warming issue to you personally?” and “how often do you think about the global warming issue?” Knowledge about Al Gore was measured using five true-or-false questions with the results summed up to constitute a knowledge index. R squared = .24 (Adj. R squared = .20). \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*  $p < .05$

Table 4. Analysis of Covariance of Attitude toward the Producer with Involvement and Knowledge as covariates

Source	<i>MS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	$\eta_p^2$	Power.
Constant	60.79	1	52.90 ***	.26	1.00
Inoculation	.01	1	.01	.00	.01
Political affiliation	4.25	2	3.69*	.00	.67
Involvement	.37	1	.32	.00	.09
Knowledge	4.96	1	4.32*	.03	.54
Inoculation X Political affiliation	2.05	2	1.79	.02	.37
Error	1.15	152			

*Note.* The involvement index was the average of two involvement measures: “how important is global warming issue to you personally?” and “how often do you think about the global warming issue?” Knowledge about Al Gore was measured using five true-or-false questions with the results summed up to constitute a knowledge index. R squared = .24 (Adj. R squared = .20). \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*  $p < .05$

Table 5. Post-hoc Analysis: A Paired Sample T-test for the Mean Difference between each Dependent Measure. (N = 161)

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Pair 1	A <sub>Gore</sub>	3.71	1.41	8.65***	160
	A <sub>Producer</sub>	2.45	1.10		
Pair 2	A <sub>Gore</sub>	3.71	1.41	3.80***	160
	A <sub>Video</sub>	3.16	1.03		
Pair 3	A <sub>Producer</sub>	2.45	1.10	9.57***	160
	A <sub>Video</sub>	3.16	1.03		

*Note.* A<sub>Gore</sub> = attitude toward Gore, A<sub>Producer</sub> = attitude toward the producer of the unethical campaign, A<sub>Video</sub> = attitude toward the video. Each attitude index shows the average of summed scores of Likert-type items along a 7-point scale. In terms of attitudes toward Al Gore, higher ratings indicate greater levels of resistance to the attack message. However, in terms of the participants’ attitudes toward the video producer and video, lower ratings correspond with greater resistance to the attack message. \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed).

## **Agile PR: Concept Paper on a Performance-driven Strategic Public Relations Process**

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Agile PR is a strategic process to maintain effective relationships with critical stakeholders in a high-speed, digital and global environment. The continuous cycle of testing/ execution/ monitoring is characterized by short iterations, nonstop testing, self organizing teams, constant collaboration, and frequent adjustment based on current reality.

### **Part 1: What is Agile PR?**

#### **1. Definition and Characteristics**

Agile PR is a deliberate and disciplined approach to the process of managing relationships between an organization and its critical stakeholders. The process is an iterative and continuous cycle of tactical execution research/monitoring/evaluation, specifying objectives, creating, testing and executing tactics, monitoring and evaluation.

Agile PR is a model of the way public relations most effectively works in today's environment. While part of the industry continues to provide off-the-cuff, short-term projects, media-hype and stunts, others focus on long-term strategic public relations "campaigns." Agile PR is the logical extension of campaigns into a high-speed, digital age. Agile PR is characterized by short iterations, continuous testing, self-organizing teams, constant collaboration, and frequent re-planning based on current reality, rather than six-month- old plans.

Agile PR enables us to embrace change. Too often, a client's situation changes during a campaign. When this happens, we pride ourselves in flexible adaptation to the changing situation. In reality, we are always adapting and changing during the campaign. Fluid movement means we are conducting an ad hoc campaign – reacting on the fly while talking about the power of strategic communications. Agile PR uses change to a driver in the process – rather than change being something we begrudgingly accommodate.

Agile PR is a strategic process. The definition of "strategic" encompasses both the formulation of strategy and the execution of tactics to accomplish organizational goals. The process must be "line of sight" – all Agile PR objectives and tactics must have a measurable effect on the ability to meet business goals.

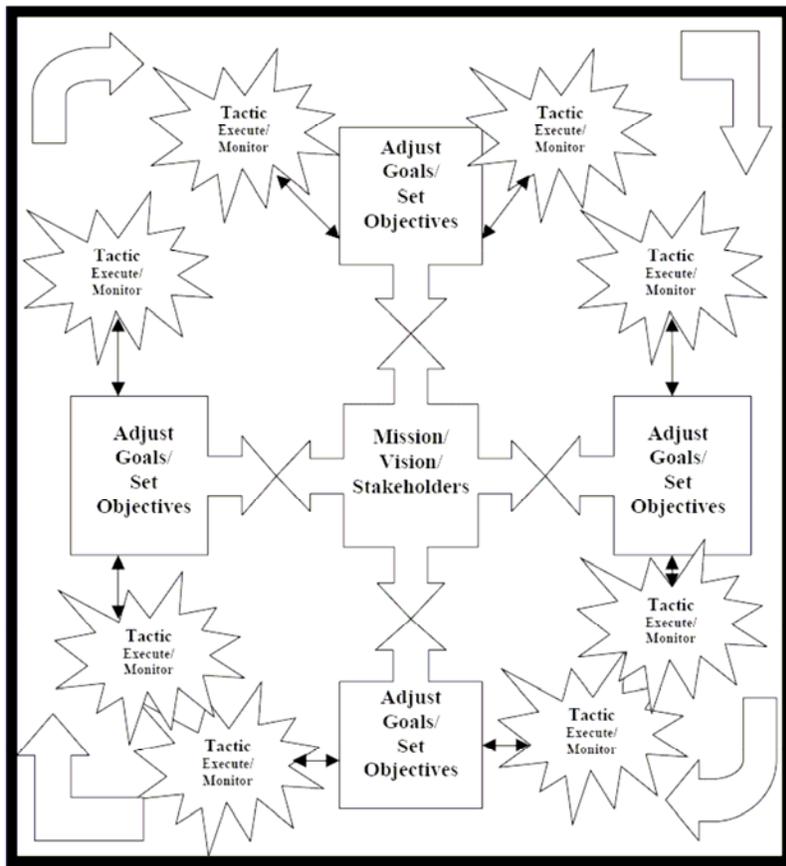
Agile PR is research/evaluation driven process. Research tests and evaluative metrics for monitoring provide a safety net for communicators and clients alike.

- Tests are created as the tactics are planned, while the tactics are produced, and after the tactics are conducted. It is an iterative process of testing, planning, testing, production, testing, planning, testing, production, testing, etc. The process speeds up or slows down to match the speed of change of the environment overall. The iterative testing cycle creates a safety net of tight mesh that does not let any strategic initiative drop through the net and does not allow non-strategic activities to waste resources.
- Agile PR metrics are combined with metrics from other sources for monitoring – preferably within a dashboard. Dashboards provide overall views by aggregating data from various sources and provide direct online access to information in a useful and navigable format.

Agile PR methodology also emphasizes teamwork. A virtual team dedicated to effectively managing relationships can be integrated into the process. Agile PR implements a simple, yet effective way to enable team process.

Agile PR is successful because it stresses “just-in-time” delivery of critical tactics to influence relationships. The process is designed to deliver the appropriate communications when it is needed. Agile PR empowers strategic public relations professionals to confidently respond to changing situations and needs.

## 2. Agile PR Process Model



## 3. Basic Concepts of Agility in a PR “Campaign”

The Agile PR process model is iterative, recognizing the environment is subject to constant change and evolution throughout the duration of the lifecycle.

The iterative model is different from traditional public relations campaign planning models that are, in their essence, but not necessarily in practical implementation, a sequential or “waterfall” model. Public relations campaign development is seen as flowing downward, like a waterfall, through the phases of research, planning, execution and evaluation.

A number of public relations campaign waterfall models have been proposed. A few include:

1. The Public Relations Society of America describes the four-step process: 1) Research, 2) Planning, 3) Execution, and 4) Evaluation
2. Hendrix's ROPE (Research, Objectives, Program, Evaluation)
3. Marston's RACE (Research, Action, Communication, Evaluation)

4. Cutlip, Center and Broom's four-step process (Defining PR Problems, Planning and Programming, Taking Action and Communicating, Evaluating the Program)
5. Kendall's RAISE (research, adaptation, implementation strategy, evaluation)
6. Smith put forward a four phase strategic planning process, (Formative Research, Strategy, Tactics, and Evaluative Research.)

When the term “campaign” is mentioned, we know that it encompasses the end-to-end campaign lifecycle. It is a process of planning, execution, and evaluation. Yet, in practical application, there is a strong emphasis on planning, perhaps at the expense of other important areas.

However, as stakeholder and business environments become more dynamic, the effective planning period becomes shorter. If we insist on holding to our planning-focused campaign approach and do not recognize the shifting field, we will be setting ourselves and our clients up for failure and frustration.

The “campaign” origins -- a series of related military operations designed to achieve one or more strategic or operational objectives within a given time and space – have been generally applied to communications -- a set of organized activities, directed at a particular audience for a specific period of time to achieve a particular goal.

In the agile environment, the process emphasis is moved from planning to execution. It is during PR campaign execution that crucial decisions are made which determine success or failure. This is not to say that the areas of campaign definition and planning will be ignored, just that their focus will shift to supporting decisions during campaign execution rather than making them all up-front.

To summarize the waterfall models, after researching and analyzing the problem to determine how to respond effectively and set objectives you want to accomplish, you execute a course of action. You measure the effectiveness of achieving your objectives and determine what needs to be done next.

To summarize the iterative process, knowing everything about a public relations problem or opportunity in the early stages of a project is not possible. The iterative process acknowledges that change will be a constant, and that change to the public relations process, if effectively managed, is positive.

## **Part 2: How Does Agile PR Operate?**

### **1. Aligning with Organization’s Strategic Direction**

“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.

“I don’t much care where –” said Alice.

“Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” said the Cat.

“—so long as I get SOMEWHERE,” Alice added as an explanation.

“Oh, you’re sure to do that,” said the Cat, “if you only walk long enough.”

(From *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll.)

For Agile PR to be successful for an organization, one of the first questions is always, “What is this organization trying to accomplish.” The answer requires addressing the right priority issues in strategic organizational alignment processes.

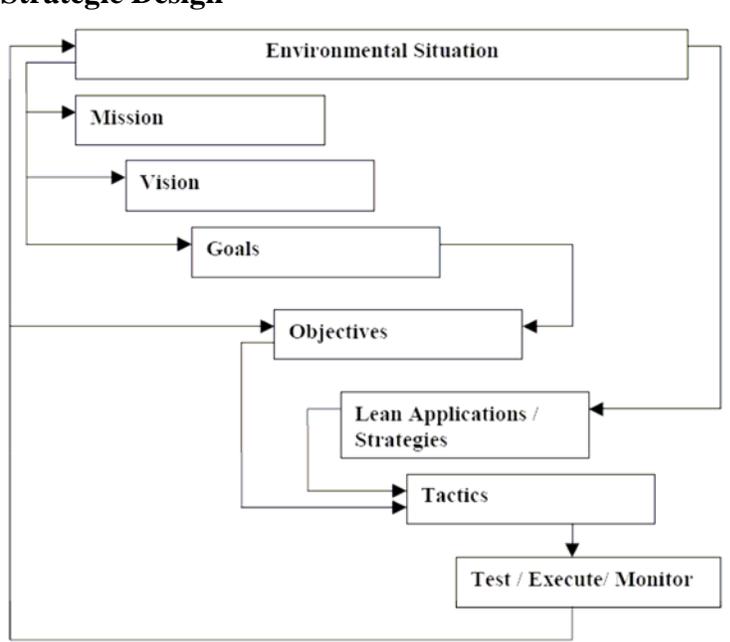
The concept of aligning an organization strategically is quite simple. The successful implementation process, however, is complex but worth the investment. Setting an overall strategic direction that is widely understood and supported is a critical step in reducing misalignment.

1. Define the direction I which to go.
2. Get everyone knowing and supporting the direction.
3. Ensure that all actions support moving in the right direction.

The purpose is to focus organizational time and energy on those things that add stakeholder value and, of course, to eliminate or reduce the time and energy spent on those things that do not add value.

Strategic direction-setting is a tremendous tool for making the organization more agile. All effort—every tactical execution – should support the strategic direction.

### Strategic Design



#### a. Environmental Situation

The environmental situation assessment delves into the interrelationships of the organization and its stakeholders within the changing environment.

#### b. Mission

From the environmental assessment, the organization can formulate its mission or what it stand for today. The mission should answer the questions who, what, and how:

- Who: Who do we serve? Who are our stakeholders?
- What: What do we offer? What are our products? What are our services? What differentiates us from the competition?
- How: How do we do what we do? How do we approach winning the game?

While a mission statement is often reduced from a meaningful description to a nearly meaningless, simplified slogan, a true evaluation of the mission of the organization is invaluable in understanding how an organization truly operates and what it stands for.

Statements like “We provide the highest value to our customers through the delivery of the highest quality products and services.” This statement provides little value in evaluating where the organization is today. But thoroughly answering the three questions will provide significant insights. For example by thoroughly examining the customers served and not served, the field of competition has been defined. By examining the products and services, the organization has not defined the limits of what it provides and does not provide. By describing how the organization intends to win, it will be able to define the basis of its competitive advantage.

While no one sees much value in creating slogan-like mission statements, it is easy to see the value in a thorough examination of the elements. This provides the focus. This provides insight on where the organization has placed its boundaries and it begins to identify some of the implications of those boundaries. Therefore, they can move the boundaries if they choose to do so, but first they have to recognize where they are.

### **c. Vision**

Where do we want to go? The organization must create its vision of what it wants to be in the future. To answer this question the organization must start examining possibilities. It may be very similar to the current mission or it could be quite different, but this is how the organization begins to define its business and its future direction. Defining a motivating, ennobling vision that challenges the organization to make progress can be extremely valuable in supporting organizational alignment and building support for implementation.

The vision addresses the questions of who, what, how, where and when. While the first three questions are the same as in the mission, they are now in the future tense.

- Who will be the organization’s customers and stakeholders in the future?
- What products and services will be offered in the future?
- How will the organization win the game in the future?
- Where will the organization physically be located in the future? Where will the organization’s customers be in the future?
- When will the organization make the transition from what it is today into what it intends to be in the future?

The examination of what the organization intends to be is critical. This is where the organization begins to decide where the new boundaries will be. The organization should thoroughly understand the implication of what is different when comparing the mission of today and the vision of the future. It is the understanding these implication that provides insight into required actions to move the organization along the appropriate path.

### **d. Goals**

By examining the gap between its current mission and its future vision, the organization can assemble goals. These goals more specifically describe the vision and serve as the basis for where the organization wants to go in the future. Goals are usually very few and longer-term in nature.

### **e. Objectives**

Associated with each goal is a set of objectives that further define the goals. These are more specific in nature, and shorter term in focus. Objectives are not a statement of well being. They must be measurable and specifically define the expected results, and they must define the deadline for the expected results. An organization needs to know whether it has met its objectives, and it needs to assess whether the objectives were appropriate. Objectives serve as mileposts against which progress will be measured, and indicate whether the strived-for goals are being approached. If a group of people were dropped in a desert, their goal might be long-term

survival. Their objective might be to find water within 24 hours, to find shelter from the sun within four hours.

#### **f. Strategies**

Strategies, taken as a set, should support accomplishing the set of goals and objectives. Understanding that is developed in the environmental situation assessment provide guidance in developing winning strategies and determining what should be done. Stakeholder key success factors, competitors, resources provide insight and limitations on what can be done.

Sorting through this to determine the appropriate set of strategies that will be used is critical to beginning the action stage. Many want to jump to the strategy step before they have really determined their true goals and objectives. This is like someone in Chicago jumping in the car and heading west before determining that the objective is to be in New York the next morning. Much waste is incurred this way with scarce resources of the organization used on actions not aligned with the direction in which the organization needs to go.

Strategy development is a creative process.

The strategy set must fit the capability and competence of the organization and must be aimed at achieving what the organization has decided it wants to accomplish.

Strategies do not necessarily line up one for one with the goals that have been set. For example, a goal for economic return can be impacted by a variety of strategies.

After completing the strategies, consider them in total. Will the organization be capable of implementing these strategies? Will the strategies work? If they are all completed successfully, will the organization accomplish its goals and objectives? How will the competition react to these strategies? Since these strategies will prescribe the tactics that the organization is going to take, are they sufficient or are additional actions required?

#### **g. Tactics**

Tactics are action initiatives to implement the strategies. The best approach is to start with the strategies and ask what needs to be done to implement each strategy. Each tactic goes through an “execute/monitor” iterative cycle. Detailed discussion of metrics is in the next section.

Relationship of Goals, Objectives, Strategy and Tactics.

	General	Specific
What	Goals	Objectives
How	Strategies	Tactics

## **2. “Execute/Monitor” Iterative Cycle**

### **a. Iterative cycle**

The key to the fast adaptation of Agile PR, especially necessary in our digital and global times, is the iterative cycle. This technique fully embraces the idea development public relations tends to be an organic process, subject to constant change and evolution throughout the duration of the lifecycle.

Knowing everything about a public relations problem or opportunity in the early stages of a project is not possible. The iterative process acknowledges that change will be a constant, and that change to the public relations process, if effectively managed, is positive.

The iterative process also provides the opportunity for full involvement and continuous feedback with the public relations team and client. As tangible and visible results are produced in short intervals of time, the feedback and further input to the process allows decisions based on immediate and firsthand knowledge.

An iteration is viewed as a mini-project in its own right, generally with clearly defined start and end points and specific objectives for the measurement and metrics.

### **b. Measurement and Metrics**

You are at a basketball game. The game is exciting with players exerting strong effort, running up and down the court, sometimes scoring, sometimes missing. You look up and realize there is not a scoreboard. You do not know the score or the time remaining in the game. You do not know how many fouls have been committed or who committed them. How exciting would it be for players or fans? Would this approach motivate players to perform their best? How would we know who was winning? How would the team decide when to slow the game down or call a time-out? Would anyone feel good about it? How many fans would be motivated to go to the game? (Shinkle, 2004)

Obviously, this would not be much fun. Many organizations operate without the benefit of keeping an accurate score. Most people want to be on a winning team and they need a scoreboard to know if and by how much they are winning. Measurement and metrics act as the scoreboard for an organization.

Measurement and metrics:

- Quantify successful accomplishment.
- Provide information to support decision-making and help to manage value-creation
- Drive the organization to work on the right things
- Encourage the desired behavior
- Drive individuals to do things the right way using the desired processes
- Minimize gamesmanship and number manipulation.

## **Part 3: Multidisciplinary Traditions of the Agile PR Process**

Agile PR draws from a multidisciplinary tradition including agile manufacturing, high-speed management, and agile programming.

### **1. Agile Manufacturing**

Four strategic dimensions of agile competition are: 1) enriching the customer by providing solutions to individual customer problems; 2) cooperating – internally and with other companies -- to enhance competitiveness; 3) organizing to thrive on change and uncertainty; 4) leveraging the impact of people and information on operations. (Goldman et. al., 1995)

A vision of an agile enterprise was first presented in a report published by Lehigh University's Iacocca Institute in the fall of 1991: *21<sup>st</sup> Century Manufacturing Enterprise Strategy: An Industry-Led View*. (Nagel & Dove, 1991). The Agile Manufacturing Enterprise Forum (AMEF) was created within the Iacocca Institute in 1992 and developed a variety of projects aimed at accelerating the acquisition of agile competitive capabilities by U.S. companies. By the 1995, Agile Manufacturing Research Institutes were in operation at various universities for industries in machine tool (University of Illinois), aerospace (University of Texas), and electronics (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute).

Other references deriving from the agile manufacturing disciplinary tradition include *Agile Competitors and Virtual Organizations: Strategies for Enriching the Customer* (Goldman et.al., 1994), *Cooperate to Complete: Building Agile Business Relationships* (Preiss et.al., 1996),

and *Response Ability: The Language, Structure, and Culture of the Agile Enterprise* (Dove, 2001).

## 2. High Speed Management

High-speed management theory argues that the key to an organization's success is making timely and appropriate adaptations to a complex and ever-changing environment, which spins off new opportunities and new threats. Alert companies monitor the environment for changes to be ready to grasp opportunities and make adaptations. (Martin, 1997)

The term "high-speed management" was first meaningfully used in 1984 by Susan Fraker in *Fortune* magazine. (Fraker, 1984) Cushman and Associates' (Cushman and King, 1993) seminal work structured the theoretical framework. High-speed management is chaotic change management in the volatile business environment.

The main components of the high-speed management system are (Cushman and King, 1995):

- 1) a sophisticated information and communication system;
- 2) environmental scanning;
- 3) speed-to-market;
- 4) corporate benchmarking;
- 5) value chain;
- 6) an informal organizational structure;
- 7) transformational leadership;
- 8) change-based corporate culture; and
- 9) teamwork.

Rapid environmental change also brings high-speed marketing communication responses. (Martin, 1997) The key elements of marketing communication in a high-speed environment are:

- 1) creation and communication of commercial values;
- 2) exploiting diversity by creating values relevant to the varied requirements and tastes, celebrating the pluralities;
- 3) participatory marketing communication with opportunities for consumers to engage in a dialogue and interaction with the brand rather than just sitting back, passively and patiently absorbing the advertiser's monologue.
- 4) true branding -- branding is the most important technique for packaging commercial values in an identifiable, competitive, reliable and communicable form; rather than a mere commodity with a name stuck on it, true branding keys are:
  - a. psychological and emotional benefits integrated and totally relevant to excellent functional performance
  - b. creating a coherent proposition that gives the brand a distinct and distinctive position in its category and market, defining its differences from competitive brands.
- 5) flexibility to break out of the bonds of hierarchical, segmented, and protective organizational structures and operating procedures.
- 6) coherence, consistency, and continuity in everything a brand communicates, in all media and in all vehicles of communication are essential to minimize the powerful forces of demassification in the volatile business environment pulling a brand in different directions.

- 7) recognize the importance of coordination and integration of their marketing communication efforts – media advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion, public relations, point-of-purchase, personal selling – to achieve efficiency and effectiveness.

Other references from the high-speed management disciplinary tradition include: *High-Speed Management and Organizational Communication in the 1990s: A Reader* (King and Cushman, 1994), *Communicating Organizational Change: A Management Perspective* (Cushman and King, 1995), *Communication and High-Speed Management* (Cushman and King, 1995), *Organizational Teamwork in High-Speed Management* (Ju and Cushman, 1995), *Continuously Improving an Organization's Performance: High-Speed Management* (Cushman and King, 1997), *Lessons from the Recession: A Management and Communication Perspective* (King and Cushman, 1997), *Warp-Speed Branding: The Impact of Technology on Marketing* (Winkler, 1999), *Excellence in Communicating Organizational Strategy* (Cushman and King 2001), *Global Teams: How Top Multinationals Span Boundaries and Cultures with High-Speed Teamwork* (Marquardt and Horvath, 2001), and *Communication Best Practices at Dell, General Electric, Microsoft, and Monsanto* (Cushman et.al. 2003).

### 3. Agile Programming

On February 11-13, 2001, at Snowbird resort in Utah, seventeen people met to talk, ski, relax, and try to find common ground. What emerged was the Agile 'Software Development' Manifesto. <http://www.agilemanifesto.org/>

The 12 principles behind the Agile Manifesto are:  
<http://www.agilemanifesto.org/principles.html>

1. Our highest priority is to satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery of valuable software.
2. Welcome changing requirements, even late in development. Agile processes harness change for the customer's competitive advantage.
3. Deliver working software frequently, from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, with a preference to the shorter timescale.
4. Business people and developers must work together daily throughout the project.
5. Build projects around motivated individuals. Give them the environment and support they need, and trust them to get the job done.
6. The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is face-to-face conversation.
7. Working software is the primary measure of progress.
8. Agile processes promote sustainable development. The sponsors, developers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely.
9. Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design enhances agility.
10. Simplicity—the art of maximizing the amount of work not done—is essential.
11. The best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organizing teams.
12. At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly.

Representatives were from SCRUM, Extreme Programming, DSDM, Adaptive Software Development, Crystal, Feature-Driven Development, Pragmatic Programming, and others

sympathetic to the need for an alternative to documentation-driven, heavyweight software development processes.

The agile programming systems give insights as to future directions of agile public relations.

**Extreme programming (XP)** Advocates of XP identify 12 rules or practices to follow during the development process: <http://builder.com.com/5100-6374-1046488.html>

- User stories (planning): The customer defines the desired features for the new application and describes each feature's business value and priority. These are to be kept brief, with only enough detail to give an understanding of the request. The project team will employ the user stories for cost estimating and project management.
- Small releases (building blocks): With XP, you develop and deliver the application in a series of small, frequently updated versions. As each new requirement is added, complete the system and re-release.
- Metaphor (standardized naming schemes): XP systems development requires adhering to a set of standards for items such as variable names, class names, and methods. Employing this system of names should allow for the intuitive understanding of each item.
- Collective ownership: No one person owns or is responsible for individual code segments. In turn, the code is reviewed and updated by everyone on the team, allowing for a more collaborative effort.
- Coding standard: All team members write code in the same way, using the same styles and formats. This allows for rapid code sharing and reduces the learning curve for other developers.
- Simple design: The best design is the easiest one that works. A correct design for an XP system is one that runs all unit and functional tests, meets the business value, and does it only once for each function.
- Refactoring: Refactoring is a disciplined technique for restructuring an existing body of code, altering its internal structure without changing its external behavior. Its heart is a series of small behavior preserving transformations. Each transformation (called a 'refactoring') does little, but a sequence of transformations can produce a significant restructuring. Since each refactoring is small, it's less likely to go wrong. The system is also kept fully working after each small refactoring, reducing the chances that a system can get seriously broken during the restructuring. Communication between team members is crucial. Each member should have a synchronous understanding of the application and should continually work to adjust and improve the code. This allows the system to be constantly revised without duplicating code.
- Testing: Each building block (small release) must be thoroughly tested prior to release. Write the tests first and develop the code to meet the requirements of the test. This allows for a clean application in the long term by flushing out problems before they get lost in a large application.
- Pair programming: XP programmers work in pairs. All code is developed by two programmers who work together at a single machine. The expectation is that pair programming produces higher quality code at the same or less cost.
- Continuous integration: Software builds are completed several times a day. This keeps all developers on the same page by keeping the application up to date with the most recent coding changes.

- 40-hour workweek: For XP practices to be effective, developers must be on top of their game. Experience has shown that tired or sleep-deprived developers make more mistakes and are more subject to burnout—resulting in lower-quality code.
- On-site customer: One of the most important concepts of XP is the need to have the customer as an integral part of the development effort. The customer must be available at all times to set priorities, deliver and establish requirements, and answer questions.

### Scrum.

Based on the empirical process control model the Scrum software development process:  
<http://www.controlchaos.com/ap.htm>

- Uses an iterative, incremental approach.
- Interaction with the environment (technical, competitive, and user) is allowed, which will change the project scope, technology, functionality, cost, and schedule whenever required.
- Controls are used to measure and manage the impact.
- Scrum accepts that the development process is unpredictable.
- The product is the “best possible” (or “good enough”) software, factoring in cost, functionality, timing, and quality.
- Scrum formalizes the empirical “do what it takes” software development process used today by many successful independent software vendors. (ISV’s). The empirical approach has been used by these ISV’s to cope with the otherwise overwhelming degree of complexity and uncertainty or chaos in which they develop products. The chaos exists not only in the marketplace where they hope to sell the products, but also in the technology that they employ to design and construct these products.

Several of the characteristics that guide Microsoft’s controlled-chaos approach to the development process are inherent in Scrum:

- It breaks down large products into manageable chunks – a few product features that small teams can create in a few months.
- It enables project to proceed systematically even when team members cannot determine a complete and stable product design at the project’s beginning.
- It allows large teams to work like small teams by dividing work into pieces, proceeding in parallel but synchronizing continuously, stabilizing in increments, and continuously finding and fixing problems.
- It facilitates competition based on customer feedback, product features, and short development times by providing a mechanism to incorporate customer inputs, set priorities, complete the most important parts first, and change or cut less important features.

Scrum as applied to product development was first referred to in “The New New Product Development Game” (*Harvard Business Review* 86116:137-146, 1986) and later elaborated in *The Knowledge Creating Company* both by Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi (Oxford University Press, 1995). Scrum was first formulated and presented to the Object Management Group in 1995. The Scrum process is fully described in a recent book from Ken Schwaber and Mike Beedle, *Agile Software Development with Scrum* (Prentice Hall, 2001).

The other agile programming systems are **Crystal**. *Agile Software Development: Software Through People* (Cockburn, 2001) <http://alistair.cockburn.us/crystal/crystal.html> ; **Adaptive**. *Adaptive Software Development: A Collaborative Approach to Managing Complex Systems* (Highsmith, 2000); <http://www.adaptivesd.com>;

<http://www.adaptivesd.com/articles/patterns.htm> ; **Feature-Driven Development (FDD)**. <http://www.featuredrivendevelopment.com/>; **Dynamic Systems Development Method (DSDM)**. *DSDM: The Method in Practice* (Stapleton, 1997); <http://dsdm.org>; **Test Driven Development (TDD)**. <http://www.testdriven.com> James W. Newkirk and Alexei A. Vorontsov, 2004. *Test-Driven Development in Microsoft.NET* Microsoft Press.

### Conclusion

The digital and global environment is changing the dynamics of strategic public relations planning and practice. This paper presents a concept for Agile PR, a new process of strategic public relations, drawing from insights and lessons learned by rapid-deployment computer software development teams called “agile processes,” agile manufacturing and high-speed management.

In short, Agile PR is a strategic process of effectively maintaining relationships with critical stakeholder groups in a high-speed, digital and global environment. The process is a continuous cycle of testing/ execution/ monitoring and adjusting objectives linked to mission / goals/ stakeholders. Agile PR is characterized by short iterations, nonstop testing, self-organizing teams, constant collaboration, and frequent re-planning based on current reality.

- Agile PR enables us to embrace change. Too often, a client’s situation changes during a campaign. When this happens, we pride ourselves in flexible adaptation to the changing situation. In reality, we are always adapting and changing during the campaign. Fluid movement means we are conducting an ad hoc campaign – reacting on the fly while talking about the power of strategic planning. Agile PR uses change to a driver in the process – rather than change being something we begrudgingly accommodate.
- Agile PR is a strategic process. All Agile PR objectives and tactics have a measurable effect on the ability to meet organizational goals.
- Agile PR is research/evaluation driven process.
  - The iterative testing cycle creates a safety net that does not let any strategic initiative drop through the net and does not allow non-strategic activities to waste resources.
  - Agile PR metrics are combined with metrics from other sources for monitoring – preferably within a dashboard.
- Agile PR methodology also emphasizes teamwork. A virtual team dedicated to effectively managing relationships can be integrated into the process. Agile PR implements a simple, yet effective way to enable team processes.
- Agile PR is successful because it stresses “just-in-time” delivery of critical tactics to influence relationships. The process is designed to deliver the appropriate communications when it is needed.

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**The Changing Roles of Women in our Field:  
Documenting the Work of AP Correspondent, Roosevelt Confidante,  
and Public Relations Practitioner Lorena Hickok**

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This historical analysis contributes to our understanding of early women public relations practitioners and the evolution of the public relations profession by providing contemporary information about the feminization of the field and by comparing and contrasting that with documentation of Lorena Hickok's public relations work.

In the last few decades a dramatic shift in employment trends in the public relations industry has seen women emerge as a clear majority of those who work in the field, and this trend is not abating.<sup>1</sup> However, such representation was not always the case. Some early women pioneers in public relations, such as Doris E. Fleishman, conducted their public relations work in a secret, behind-the-scenes manner to avoid the discrimination of male clients.<sup>2</sup> Legions of other women remained relegated to technical roles while their male counterparts advanced into management.

A few brave women challenged the conventions of society, choosing to work in male-dominated professions like journalism and public relations in a highly visible manner. One such trailblazer was Lorena Hickok, who outperformed many male peers as an AP reporter, worked in public relations, and advanced to powerful political advisory positions in public policy and strategy with the Roosevelt administration, government agencies, and the Democratic National Committee.

This paper explores how Hickok made her career moves, and whether her role was simply journalist-in-residence or the strategic position of issues management.<sup>3</sup> The theoretical basis for the advances of women such as Hickok and the implications for the public relations discipline in both theory and practice follow.

### **Literature Review**

*Equality in the U.S. Labor Force?* Modern day work in the United States is performed in roughly equal proportions by men and women; however, women still earn less on average than men. The trend of differential pay by gender is a historical one and is not new to those who study public relations. Scholars have found persistent gender discrimination within communication jobs, even in prestigious sectors such as the foreign service.<sup>4</sup> According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Equal Pay Act was signed into law by President Kennedy on June 10, 1963, with the intent of eradicating the practice of paying women less than men for equal work when all other factors are equal.

However, the salary gap by gender has actually widened nine times from one year to the next<sup>5</sup> and possibly widened further since that research was conducted. Women workers in the

U.S. still face obstacles in employment compensation. Recent headlines of retail giant Wal-Mart's discriminatory pay and promotion practices illustrate this point.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps one of the most high-profile industries in which pay inequity occurs is the public relations and communication management industry. After a brief grounding in public relations theory as related to feminist research, we will explore the role of pioneering practitioner Lorena Hickok to determine if her status as a pioneering AP newspaperwoman transferred into a managerial and higher paid position in public relations.

*Inequities Persist.* Recent surveys place the ratio of female practitioners in the U.S. between 69%<sup>7</sup> and 71.1%.<sup>8</sup> As the ratio of women in public relations has increased, salaries for women have not grown as we would expect if men and women were paid equally. Over time and on average, research shows that women in public relations earn somewhere between 38% and 45% less than men in public relations.<sup>9</sup> In the "glass ceiling" studies of public relations practitioners, what scholars Grunig, Toth, and Hon called "the largest samples of public relations practitioners ever compiled,"<sup>10</sup> researchers concluded that neither experience, age, nor education accounted for the persistent gap in the salaries of female versus male practitioners.<sup>11</sup> Recent study of this body of research concluded that gender discrimination is a very real and persistent problem in public relations, offering that in our field "women continued to earn about 60% of what men earned."<sup>12</sup>

Many avenues have been explored in the body of knowledge about why this discrepancy could exist and what exacerbates it: Do women chose to stay in the technical role? Do they get passed over for promotion? Does gender discrimination limit their career progression into management? Is this trend lessening as women become more educated and qualified in public relations? What are the indicators of women who have become leaders in the profession? Although we do not have conclusive answers, many researchers have offered progress toward a theory of women in public relations.<sup>13</sup>

Scholars find that, in comparing male and female managers in public relations, women managers perform more technical functions than do men.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps women aggregate in the technical role because they are not promoted as quickly as men,<sup>15</sup> are not perceived to be leaders who can move upward in management,<sup>16</sup> lack the power necessary for effective decision making,<sup>17</sup> are encouraged to remain in the technical role,<sup>18</sup> or they encounter outright gender discrimination.<sup>19</sup> Although mavericks—like Lorena Hickok—can sometimes find ways of overcoming these barriers,<sup>20</sup> studying the composition of the barriers helps more women to make progress, and such discussion helps the public relations profession to become a more equitable one.

One of the principal components of career progression in any organization<sup>21</sup> and for any professional in public relations is power.<sup>22</sup> It has been hard for women to gain legitimate power and authority in public relations, particularly in the corporate world when faced with gaining access to the dominant coalition.<sup>23</sup> O'Neill reports that women public relations practitioners experience diminished power in organizational decision making. Her findings argued that being a woman offers less opportunity in the formal organizational structure than is afforded to men; most of the women in her study did not have a direct reporting relationship with the CEO.<sup>24</sup> L. Grunig, Toth and Hon argued that "women must assimilate into the power structure even if doing so demands personal compromise."<sup>25</sup> Studying such early women practitioners as Lorena Hickok is an important area of research, as the implications for power in public relations are far reaching for practitioners, their organizations and clients, and for the practice itself.

*Feminist Theory in Public Relations.* Feminist scholarship, specifically since the women's rights movement, has focused on areas of common concern: the lack of female representation in corporate board rooms and executive offices; the lack of women elected representatives, particularly in the U.S. Senate and Congress; failure to rein in the entertainment and pornography industries' negative portrayals of women; and weak federal laws in the areas of maternity leave, child care, and reproductive freedom.<sup>26</sup>

As much of this feminist scholarship has been applied to public relations, a developing body of knowledge and theory has begun to develop toward a feminist theory of public relations. We now know that, in order for organizations to perform at their highest levels, they should value and promote diversity with internal publics,<sup>27</sup> and specifically within the public relations function.<sup>28</sup> Leadership also plays a vital role in public relations from a feminist perspective, as Aldoory argues: "Interactional leadership exhibits the use of negotiation and compromise, which also seem to be included in two-way communication important for effective public relations."<sup>29</sup>

After Hon's 1997 landmark work documenting the factors maintaining "the glass ceiling" for women in public relations, feminist public relations scholars began serious work on constructing a theory of women in public relations.<sup>30</sup> Using primarily qualitative research methods to uncover the hidden explanations of discrimination and power differentials, researchers have argued that a feminist theory connects the feminine ideals of an ethics of caring with the natural function of public relations, which is to maintain and build relationships with publics.<sup>31</sup> These feminist values, the scholars maintain, are the core purposes of public relations, and a feminist theory reinforces the value and function of public relations.

In a review of feminist thought in public relations, the approach is summarized in terms of these principles of a feminist theory for public relations: it uses multiple methodologies; it employs multiple feminist paradigms; it is critical of the status quo; it focuses on power; it is collaborative and collective, with a close relationship between researcher and researched; it is contextual; and it can be applied to real-life concerns of public relations practitioners, such as salary and promotions.<sup>32</sup>

Through the research questions posed herein, the career of Lorena Hickok is studied from a feminist perspective through historical analysis. The authors believe she used a feminist ethic of care to build a friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt. That friendship, in turn, provided her with the power necessary to battle gender discrimination, shatter convention, and rise from beat reporter to advising the highest levels of government.

*Who was Lorena Hickok?* Probably best known as Eleanor Roosevelt's long-time friend and confidante, Lorena Hickok wrote for her college newspaper and began writing professionally after only one year at Lawrence College. Born in East Troy, Wisconsin, on March 7, 1893, she began her career with the *Battle Creek Evening News* for \$7 a week.<sup>33</sup> While there, she covered train arrivals and departures and wrote personal interest stories.

She went on to work for the *Milwaukee Sentinel* as society editor, to follow in the footsteps of novelist Edna Ferber—a woman she considered a role model.<sup>34</sup> While at the *Sentinel*, she overcame the common gender discrimination against women by volunteering for night assignments with the hope of gaining favor with the city editor.<sup>35</sup> After the *Sentinel*, Hickok started her groundbreaking work at the *Minneapolis Tribune* in 1917.

"In the 1920s, such football legends as Knute Rockne and Red Grange earned all the ink," writes scholar Dave Kaszuba. "But it was a little-known [*Tribune*] football writer named Lorena Hickok who was behind the typewriter."<sup>36</sup> Even then, it seems, she was a good

promotional person, helping to catapult these men's careers and turn them into household names. And she reported differently from men.

"Hickok humanized [University of Minnesota] coaches and athletes more deftly than the male writers who stressed hype and play-by-play specifics," says Kaszuba.<sup>37</sup> He also notes that, as a 35-year-old reporter, she transcended the typical "women's angles" stories her counterparts were assigned. She also did not conform to other gender norms. Described as "a husky voiced chain smoker who was not averse to using profanity or engaging in a card game," Kaszuba notes that "Hick" rode the football team train to away games and stayed at the team hotel during an era when such association among members of the opposite sex was not deemed socially acceptable. For all intents and purposes, says Kaszuba, she was the first woman reporter to earn a beat covering a men's sports team.

However, historian Maurine Beasley writes that this work did not remain intriguing enough for Hickok, so she moved to the city desk and became known as a skilled interviewer. After traveling to New York City with the hope of covering World War I, she returned quickly after failing to adjust to big city life. Undaunted, Hickok worked to learn other aspects of the newspaper business.

In 1928, the Associated Press hired her to write feature stories. She quickly made a name for herself by covering politics and such dramatic stories as the Lindbergh baby kidnapping.<sup>38</sup> Her coverage of the sinking of the steamship *Vestris* earned her the distinction of being the first female reporter to have her name on a page one story in *The New York Times*.<sup>39</sup>

In the 1920s and '30s, there were few women who were able to succeed to the top of the man's world of journalism; however, Hickok showed her determination. Beasley writes: "She had finally broken into the male ranks of political reporting as the only woman assigned to cover Franklin Roosevelt when the 1932 campaign opened." Hickok was able to convince her editors to assign her to cover Eleanor Roosevelt during the campaign as well, and the two women quickly confided in one another, which gave Roosevelt the opportunity to speak honestly about politics and social issues should FDR win the election.<sup>40</sup>

Hickok was the first journalist to acknowledge the news-making potential in Eleanor Roosevelt. She advised Eleanor on how she could break down the walls that had previously trapped her White House predecessors. Hickok taught her "to trust women reporters and to use them in constructing an acceptable public role as first lady."<sup>41</sup>

Their campaign experience led to a lifetime of devotion to one another. "Hickok's inspiration would make Mrs. Roosevelt the focal point for a group of women journalists who would provide a lifelong network of support and friendship," Beasley writes. "They would help to make Eleanor Roosevelt into a symbol of womanly achievement that transcended partisan politics."<sup>42</sup>

As time progressed and Election Day grew closer, "Lorena Hickok was already living on two different levels. There was the top layer of the reporter for the Associated Press, covering a story with her usual brash competence. Beneath lay a woman whose feelings had started to interfere with her professional duties, or at least to limit what she told her office and her readers."<sup>43</sup> In 1933, Hickok made the difficult choice to leave the Associated Press because she realized that she could no longer be objective when covering the Roosevelts.<sup>44</sup>

After five years with the Associated Press (1928–1933), she joined FDR's administration in summer 1933, traveling the country and providing reports to her boss, Harry Hopkins of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, about people's living conditions and their reactions to the New Deal, the administration, and its policies.

It was Hickok who encouraged Eleanor to write the syndicated column “My Day,” for which she became more popular and well known, as the nation’s readers were exposed to her views and observations six days a week.<sup>45</sup> It was one of Hickok’s letters to Eleanor about her depressing stay in Youngstown, Ohio, in 1936 that became the copy for Eleanor’s first column, at the encouragement of the President.<sup>46</sup> In fact, Eleanor’s column would go on to have the flavor of her earlier letters to Hickok.<sup>47</sup>

*Research Questions.* This paper builds upon what is known about women in the public relations field and about Lorena Hickok and her public relations work to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What work did Hickok, an accomplished reporter and White House insider, perform for the New York World’s Fair?

RQ2: What can we learn about the working conditions at the Fair?

RQ3: How did she feel about her promotional work for the Fair?

RQ4: How does what we learn about her life and work fit in with what we know about other women public relations practitioners and feminist theory?

### Method

This historical analysis relies on secondary sources about Hickok’s life and on primary sources culled from personal correspondence and telegrams from the FDR Library in Hyde Park, New York; from business documents from the New York World’s Fair files at the New York Public Library in New York City; and from internal documents from the Tennessee Valley Authority Headquarters Library in Knoxville, Tennessee.

The majority of primary documents were obtained during summer 2005 and summer 2006.<sup>48</sup> The materials were then reviewed and sorted by year and then resorted according to information relevant to this study. A graduate student helped with sorting and identifying relevant information.<sup>49</sup>

In addition, the *Periodical Guide to Literature* was consulted and the articles about the World’s Fair were identified to try to link Hickok’s efforts to corresponding press.

Because the research questions are exploratory, the findings that follow are not explicitly grouped or divided by question. Rather, the findings describe Hickok’s overall experience, in the vein of historical scholarship, as can be ascertained via primary and secondary qualitative documents.

### Findings and Discussion

As a former reporter, Hickok proved to be a natural at observation, interview, and access, and as such was a valuable New Deal field researcher for Harry Hopkins and the Roosevelt Administration. In addition, she was savvy, understanding the power of political messages.

In a June 11, 1934, letter from the field, en route from Memphis to Denver, she wrote to Hopkins that the Scripps-Howard editor in Memphis was a Roosevelt supporter, but that he worried the Administration was not adequately telling its story to the public. The editor suggested that the administration give newspapers “the right kind of news,” not destructive—as Charles Michelson, Democratic Party strategist, had done to tear apart the Hoover administration—but “constructive propaganda.” After relaying this conversation in her letter, Hickok writes: “And, with 20 years’ background in the newspaper business myself, may I add that we must slip over the propaganda sugar-coated with news, so they don’t realize it’s propaganda they’re getting?”<sup>50</sup>

Despite this sense of purpose, according to biographer Doris Faber, Hickok missed her days with the Associated Press and decided to give up her work with the New Deal after a diabetes scare while on the road. It had happened before, and she knew it would happen again and that she had to change her lifestyle. Faber writes: “So right after Election Day [1936], no matter how the election went, no matter whether she had to go back to writing about ice-cream socials in Battle Creek, she would hand in a letter of resignation. She would stick it out with Hopkins until then.”<sup>51</sup>

With a tip about the World’s Fair position from Eleanor’s secretary, Malvina “Tommy” Thompson, Hickok gave up her daydreams of reporting on the current European crisis or getting a job with Roy Howard’s newspapers and pursued the possibility of working in New York City for Whalen Grover. Well known throughout the city, he was heading the World’s Fair project, and Tommy thought that with the scale and scope of the project, he would “be receptive to hiring a writer who happened to be a close friend of the First Lady.”<sup>42</sup>

“A few days after F.D.R’s smashing victory over Landon . . . she [Hickok] finally was summoned for an interview at the World’s Fair office in the Empire State Building,” writes Faber.<sup>53</sup>

Besides her 20 years of newspaper work and her three years as a confidential observer for Hopkins, Hick wrote to Eleanor that she told Whalen during the interview: “I have also done a little investigating for the President.”<sup>54</sup>

Whalen had indicated he would pay her \$100 a week—\$5,200 a year—and Hickok began to truly want the job. With the country still reeling from the Depression, the average salary for all employees in 1937 was only \$1,258 a year; Hickok’s World’s Fair salary in 2007 would be equivalent to about \$1,400 a week, or \$74,000 a year.<sup>55</sup> In a follow-up letter to Whalen, Hickok wrote:

As I told you yesterday, I am not interested in an executive position. I think I could do my best work for you in publicity or in some sort of “contact” job. Mrs. Roosevelt suggested that I might go out with a small model of the World’s Fair and sell the fair to small town commercial clubs, women’s clubs, and the like. I don’t mind travel. In fact, I love it!<sup>56</sup>

Hickok must have believed she would never secure an “executive” position with the Fair, even with her influential newspaper and political contacts, and so she opted to make it clear that this was not the type of position she sought. Regardless, Hickok was obviously excited when she shared the news of her position in a telegram to Eleanor: “I go to work January Fourth salary one hundred dollars a week happy relieved and very grateful to you and Tommy going to Washington tomorrow much love= Hick.”<sup>57</sup>

Eleanor obviously responded, for Hickok followed up with a letter to her on Nov. 17, 1936. “How very nice of you to reply to my wire,” Hickok writes. “I am pleased, naturally, to have it settled. It takes a big load off my mind. I don’t know just what I’m going to do yet, except that I’m to be in the promotion end under [Senator] Joseph Clark Baldwin (Don’t you love that?) at \$5,200 a year. I’ll probably be doing some traveling, I was told. And I report for work at 9 a.m. on January 4<sup>th</sup>.”<sup>58</sup>

Monday, Jan. 4, 1937, Hickok shared her first day at work in a letter to the First Lady: Well, I’ve completed the first day on the job, and I guess it’s going to be alright. Although I’m still in a good deal of a haze. Spent most of the day reading up on the World’s Fair and trying to familiarize myself with it. My first job is to be a kind of a survey of the whole organization – personnel, etc. – and a report to

Commander Flanigan, Grover Whalen's administrative assistant. Ye gods! And for the time being, I'm to have a desk in his outer office, with his two secretaries. After I finish that in a week or so I'm to go down into the promotions department where my first two jobs will be a poster contest for school children and some thrift plan, like the Christmas clubs – the idea being to encourage people to start savings accounts to come to the fair. Don't you love it? I like Senator Baldwin. And I think it will be fun, at that. Office hours, 9 to 5, with Saturday afternoons off. Pay days, 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>.<sup>59</sup>

A feature release about “the important role women are occupying in administering the affairs of the New York World's Fair” details a number of positions held by women. Among them, on page 6 of the release, it describes Hickok's role: “Miss Lorena Hickok is in charge of promotional work among children and young people. She works directly with the public, private and parochial schools ... Her work will attract the attention of children all through the United States and help them to develop an interest in the Fair....”<sup>60</sup>

The release goes on to say: “So, women are high-spotted in numerous interesting positions in the Fair, as they are in modern business corporations. They are secretaries to important officials, assistants to department heads. In fact, all of the working opportunities which women find in today's world have been opened to them at the Fair.”<sup>61</sup>

In other words, no matter how accomplished or connected, they remained in supporting roles. Perhaps this is why Hickok found the Fair work so difficult. Although on paper, Hickok's position was one of 48 listed “department heads and executives,”<sup>62</sup> her position as Director of Children and Youth Promotion was but one of many public relations–related posts; others included Director of Press, Director of Newsreels, Ceremonial Assistant, Assistant Director of Promotion, Director of Promotion, Director of Collateral Advertising, Director of Merchandising, Press Department, Director of Special Events, Assistant Director of Entertainment, Director and Assistant Director of Music, and Assistant Director of Radio.

One thing Hickok had that the other directors likely did not was direct access to the White House, and she was called upon to use these connections for her superiors. In a letter to Eleanor only two weeks after she began work, she explains that Senator Baldwin is to be in Washington to arrange a dinner for Whalen to give to the Diplomatic Corps the following month. She wonders if the First Lady will invite him to lunch or tea. She tells Eleanor that he's a liberal Republican who calls himself a conservative, and that he used to be either minority or majority leader in the New York state Senate. She likes him and notes he's married to the great-granddaughter of Jules Verne, but she warns he's a bit snobbish. He's her boss, she writes, but she says that she spends the majority of her time with Commander Flanigan, a former Naval Reserve officer, who was Whalen's second in command at the Fair.

After an apparent Eleanor phone call, Hickok gratefully writes of the accommodation on her behalf:

Thanks ever so much for taking care of all those people and for calling me today. I hate to bother you with these, but since I took the job, and since everyone in the organization apparently knows how I got it – well? I may as well do all I can, within reason, to make every body happy! Honestly I can't take most of them so very seriously! But it's a good salary and can be made interesting, I think, and it may eventually lead to something good. I'll try not to bother you too much.<sup>63</sup>

She later complained to Flanigan about such impositions, and he assured her that he would handle any future such requests for White House attention. In her biography of Hickok, Faber writes, “That left Hick just a silly and irritating job, instead of an impossible one.”<sup>64</sup> Although “silly” was not among the words found by the authors when researching this topic, Faber’s description portrays the feeling Hickok perhaps felt as an early woman hard news journalist who was now relegated to organizing a national children’s poster contest and working with school boards to encourage students’ fair attendance.

“After years of refusing to cover the Girl Scouts, now she was supposed to be something like a glorified Scout leader promoting entries into a competition among artistic tykes all around the country,” Faber writes.<sup>65</sup>

Hickok writes Eleanor about this responsibility and in doing so, provides an overview of her day with somewhat difficult “clients”:

A breathless day! Down at the office at 8 to write up the poster plan and write a new graph conforming with the ideas of the school people. At 10:30, accompanied by one of our stenographers, I went up to a conference at the Board of Education. The school people are nice, but, oh, so deliberate! At times my patience and tact are sorely taxed! But I must get along with them, for I have a good deal at stake! Lunched with Mr. Grant, art director in the public schools of NYC, at the Town Hall Club. He talked—and talked—and talked. And I was so sleepy. My eyes ached from trying to keep them open. Back to the office at 3. Conferences. Senator Baldwin. Printers. A note to Hendrick to tell him how much I liked his inauguration day broadcast. . . . A letter to [illegible]. At 5:30 I left the office on a run, dashed home, grabbing a bite in a “joint” enroute, with a glance at the evening paper.<sup>66</sup>

Hickok boasted in some October 1937 fair publicity material that “she has stood knee-deep in mud to get a story, has gone without food for forty-four hours, has been ‘asleep standing up but able to write a news story.’ . . .” Her feelings about working in the World’s Fair promotion department are evident, even in the Fair’s own publicity piece. It continues, “She is in the midst of an art poster contest for the children of this country and she finds it pretty remote from the exciting life of a newspaper reporter.”<sup>67</sup>

As 1937 ended, Hickok apparently had one of her worst days so far at the office. “The details were too tedious to bother E.R. with, but if Hick did not need the money—desperately—she would have quit in a minute,” Faber writes.<sup>68</sup> A Hickok letter, printed in Faber’s book, says: “I want to be interested in my job, dammit, and do it as well as I possibly can. But much of the time that only means being irritated. . . . But it’s been a miserably uncomfortable business, most of it, and I’m tired of it and bored with past, present and future.”<sup>69</sup>

Hickok had long struggled emotionally, and she realized that part of her dissatisfaction likely stemmed from her own personal proclivities. She also realized how lucky she was to have work—she was acutely aware of how many unemployed people were pleading for jobs at the Fair.<sup>70</sup>

“She [Eleanor] certainly realized that encouraging Hick to take the job at the World’s Fair had been a great mistake,” writes Faber.<sup>71</sup> But Hickok remained with the Fair for two more years, and her personal struggles continued.

By the summer of 1938, Hickok was deeply in debt. Faber writes that she had an old, undependable car; owed two women dentists a couple of hundred dollars each; was a couple of months behind on both her rent payments (her apartment in New York City and her house in the country, rented at a great discount from a friend); as well as numerous other bills totaling several

hundred dollars. “She even owed ten dollars to the farm stand where she picked up country eggs; quite a substantial arrears, considering that the price of those eggs was thirty-five cents a dozen.”<sup>72</sup>

By September, Eleanor was trying to help Hickok get another position by raising the idea of her doing publicity for the Democratic National Committee. “If you want to talk to Jim [Farley] about me,” Hick replied, “I think it might be a good idea.”<sup>73</sup> Farley was FDR’s Postmaster General and re-election campaign leader.<sup>74</sup>

But it would be some time before these connections would bear fruit, and in the meanwhile Hickok’s professional determination in her Fair work—and her spunk—remained. In a March 3, 1939, memo to Fair President Grover Whalen, Hickok discusses the “special guide service for groups of students on educational tours of the fair.”<sup>75</sup>

... I wish you to recall ... you and I had a brief discussion about the possibility of some sort of special guide service for groups of students coming to the Fair on an educational tour.

You told me that there certainly would be such a guide service, and you added: ‘I want you to see that this is done. Keep after me and don’t let me forget it.’

So, I am now carrying out your instructions: Beginning next Monday evening, March 6, I shall start camping on your doorstep with a carbon copy of this memorandum in my hand.

There is a considerable demand for this special service for student groups. It is reflected constantly in our mail. I have had inquiries from the New York public schools and from public school officials in many nearby cities. Practically every group writing in here about plans to come to the Fair asks if there will be such a service.

Hickok obviously had been boundary spanning—paying attention to the correspondence and wishes of her target audience. She goes on to propose that the guides should be of a “superior type,” that no tipping be permitted, and that there should be no “commercial color” to this service, meaning, it seems, no corporate sponsorship, which could be seen as inappropriately influencing youth.

She continues in her four-page memo that tour itineraries should be developed for students, so that younger children and high school students could have age-relevant activities and that there might be special tours for science and art students. She proposed a group prepare these and that the directors of seven other departments, plus herself, be involved in the process.

She also proposes two “outsiders” be part of the group to develop the itineraries “because I think it will do a great deal toward creating good-will toward the service.” She recommends the New York associate superintendent of schools and the president of the New York Catholic School Board.

This demonstrates her knowledge of segmenting audiences, of teamwork, and of using opinion leaders to help build external relationships. Although her knowledge of business protocol seems limited, in that her memoranda were typically very long while others’ memos held more to today’s standards of brevity, this verbose tendency could also be because she loved to write and had only the children’s promotional activities project as her focus.

A September 1939 memo offers additional evidence of her efforts in this regard. Addressed to “The Vice President,” it describes special emphasis on the changes in student group admission rates. She also describes how the railroads were offering drastic cuts in rates for these groups, as the busy summer season was over, and the fair was continuing to struggle financially, with plans to minimize losses by extending the Fair into 1940.<sup>76</sup>

Hickok says:

These railroads are really going to town on this thing. The rate is a quarter of a cent lower per mile than they granted for the [highly successful 1933–1934] Chicago Fair. I believe with all my heart that we should give them every bit of help we can to put this thing over. Incidentally, in addition to granting the reduced rate, they are putting on a good big advertising campaign, and some of the [rail]roads are going to send out traveling passenger agents to drum up this business. ...<sup>77</sup>

She goes to say that a “flyer” she’s developed will be used in the ad campaign, which the railroads will conduct in local newspapers, and that the railroads will mimeograph it for distribution on their end as well. Thus she saw the value of partnering with others whose objectives overlap with one’s own. She also noted her plan to mail it directly to superintendents and high school principals, with a future strategy to reach college students and teachers.

Although Hickok conscientiously continued her work, her desire to change positions remained. Writes Faber:

...it somehow took a full year for Jim Farley’s bland acceptance of the First Lady’s proposal to result in his hiring of Hick. First Farley had to make sure Charley Michelson, that old pro in charge of Democratic publicity, was agreeable. By the middle of February, 1939, Michelson was enthusiastic.

Call me Charley, he urged Hick when she went down to Washington to see him. But until Congress adjourned, they couldn’t really do anything. . . . Then after Congress finally quit in the middle of June, Charley had to go to California. In August when Mrs. Roosevelt prodded Farley, Michelson wired Hick that he was ready for her, except that there was a little problem about the money to pay her.

They would have to raise some extra money, he explained, as if a separate fund drive were required; indeed Charley called Hick in the middle of September to tell her they were having trouble raising the money to “finance” her. In October, Hick had to wire Charley because at the Fair they were making up next year’s budget and she had to tell them whether she was staying. Sorry, Charley wired back, completely stymied now. E.R. got busy again. In December, Jim told her he thought the job would be all settled by next week. And then it took only another four weeks.”<sup>78</sup>

During those last weeks with the Fair, Hickok remained busy promoting it to young people. In a memo dated Dec. 5, 1939, she writes a Mr. Wesson, and describes the “promotion program to be planned and carried out in public and private elementary and high schools between December 1 and the opening of the 1940 fair.” In a two-and-a-half page single-spaced memo, she proceeds to explain that “there should really be two programs: One for the schools of New York City, and one for out-of-town schools.”<sup>79</sup> She discusses the NYC promotions as being largely driven by the distribution of educational materials related to the Fair that they will develop, with the approval of the superintendents.

For the other schools, she recommends capitalizing on the interest of seniors who want to make their senior trips to the Fair. She proposes to do this by promoting their new discount rates through a circular to be mailed to all school superintendents, along with relevant, local transportation information and brochures. She also suggested that when Fair representatives are traveling that they stop and visit with superintendents and give speeches at high school assemblies. She obviously understood the power of interpersonal communication in persuading people to act.

She also suggested that trucks with World's Fair pictures travel to students, and discussed the success they had with this tactic previously: "Thousands of children turned out to see these things, schools were closed, and we had the very interesting experience of getting thank you notes from some of the southern school superintendents!"<sup>80</sup>

She concludes this memo: "I should like to start work as soon as possible addressing envelopes for that first big circularization, so that they will be all ready by January 1." It seems she wanted to make sure the project was under way and as far along as possible by the time she left.

The next correspondence found with any reference to Hickok is a Jan. 24, 1940, memo to the Executive Vice President from the Budget Director regarding termination pay.<sup>81</sup>

I think we would be making a great mistake in allowing termination pay to Miss Hickok. In no sense of the word has she been forced out of the organization. Her resignation is entirely voluntary and she is going to a better position with more pay....

The fact is, Miss Hickok has been given special consideration in that even though we knew that she was trying to get another position, it made no difference in her status here and she was given every encouragement to stay.

Furthermore, Miss Hickok was granted a two weeks vacation from November 20 to December 4.

A handwritten note at the bottom of the memo, from H.A.S., says: "Mr. Cobb – I have discussed with Mr. Gibson who approves. There are matters of major policy involved." Whether this note meant that Gibson approved of the memo, which made the case that paying Hickok termination pay under the circumstances of her departure violated their own policies and would set a bad precedent for others, or whether the note meant that Gibson ultimately approved issuing termination pay, we can't know.

What we do know is that a memo written the next day from the Vice President in Charge of Finance to the Secretary's Office states: "Commander Flanigan requests that we obtain authorization to make final payment to [Hickok and another employee, Ruth Howland] in accordance with the regular termination procedure that was used at the time of the Fair period. ... (The request should be presented as coming from the Executive Vice-President.)"<sup>82</sup> Handwritten notations on the memo show the amount paid to Hickok was \$206.33—the equivalent of about two weeks' pay.

The final World's Fair document concerning Hickok was a letter she wrote just five days later on Jan. 29, 1940, to Dr. Stephen Bayne, associate superintendent of schools, in New York. In it, she demonstrates her sense of humor regarding her new position with the DNC:

I am very sorry not to see you again before I leave. I am afraid that the nefarious practices of a publicity representative of the Democratic National Committee might not make me a particularly welcome visitor in 59 Street. Anyway, I do want to tell you before I leave—and lose my respectability—that it has been fun working with you and that I deeply appreciate your cooperation and the many kindnesses you have shown me....<sup>83</sup>

Even with the DNC position, Faber reports that Hickok still considered returning to newspaper work. "In New York, a new daily called PM was being started by a group of liberals and somebody had suggested that she apply for a job; although nothing was at all definite, she still felt she ought to let Charley Michelson know she was contemplating leaving. To her intense surprise, he not only asked her to stay on—he outright told her that he had taken her only because he'd had to, but now he'd hate to lose her."<sup>84</sup>

She also wrote that later, during a quiet moment, Charley had volunteered that “he did not know another woman he’d rather have fill the [DNC] women’s division slot that would open up once the campaign was over.”<sup>85</sup>

*Fair articles.* In an effort to try to link Hickok with possible World’s Fair articles, all such magazine articles were identified using the 1937, 1938, 1939, 1940, and 1941 editions of the *Periodical Guide to Literature*. Thirty-seven articles in all were located.

These included two in 1937: one in September in *Independent Woman* magazine, titled “They build the World of tomorrow; women’s participation” (which sounds as if it could have been based on the undated feature release discussed previously about the women employees of the Fair), and another Fair article in the June 5 edition of *Nation*, titled “No swastikas at the World’s Fair.”<sup>86</sup>

There were seven articles published in 1938, including two in *School and Society*; and the same article in both *Harper’s Magazine* and *Reader’s Digest*, called “Barnum in modern dress”; 22 in 1939, the Fair’s first year, including three in *Scholastic* and one in *Parents Monthly*, plus an illustrated piece in *Newsweek* titled “\$156,000,000 show.” In 1940, five articles appeared, and two were in *School Life*. Only one article appeared in 1941, and its title makes sense given that the Fair was then over: “That was the New York World’s Fair: Mr. McAneny and the little girl from Jackson Heights,” which appeared in the *New Yorker*.

Although a number of these articles appeared in educational publications, as noted above, there is no evidence of work written or pitched by Hickok—either in Fair documents or in the articles themselves. News releases about the Fair did not have specific contact information and were developed by the Press Department, so there were no releases that could be linked to Hickok either. While a surprise at first, the researchers concluded by looking at other Fair documents that this type of promotional work, even when the subject was children’s promotions, was likely under the purview of the Department of Feature Publicity.<sup>87</sup> The large number of promotional units and their decentralized nature likely made meaningful coordination difficult and perhaps this contributed to Hickok’s frustration with her work.

### Conclusions

Lorena Hickok understood reporting, politics, writing, publicity, and relationships. She found her work with the New Deal’s FERA both exhilarating and depressing, and she entered the formal world of public relations work with the Fair excited, but she soon found it tiring and frustrating. Part of it was her nature, part of it was her low level of influence, part of it was her growing financial debt (despite earning a very good salary), part of it was her desire to do more meaningful work than organizing a nationwide children’s poster contest, and part of it was a desire to be closer to those about whom she cared.

She tried to facilitate interactional leadership, with limited results it seems, and although she had a director title and good salary, it seems she had little legitimate power within the organization.

Hickok’s positions were attained through others, and she understood the value of relationships, both personal and professional, and understood clearly it was her connection to the First Lady that granted her access to the organization, in spite of her journalistic accomplishments.

Of course, the art of networking still reigns in the profession today, and good writing, initiative, contacts, and an understanding of news remain top skills. So too does discretion, and Hickok managed to be discreet about actually living in the White House, at Eleanor’s urging,

where she ducked reporters and lay low for four years, beginning in January 1941, while saving money and working for the DNC.<sup>88</sup>

By the time of her death on May 1, 1968, just shy of her 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, she had influenced American life in many ways: through her reporting, her field reports during the Depression, her friendship with Eleanor, her four books, and her public relations work.<sup>89</sup> Because she never married and had no children, and because it has been nearly 40 years since her death, it is probably impossible to find people who are alive who knew or worked with Hickok.

Future research will focus on extending this study to include her DNC activities—activities that the authors can only assume she found more rewarding than her Fair publicity work—by reviewing primary DNC documents of that era.<sup>90</sup> By doing so, the authors hope to add to the information about Hickok’s public relations work and contributions.

We know she lived an extraordinary life during extraordinary times and that she defied the status quo. From her early reporting days, her manner of covering sports elevated the figures about whom she wrote. Her political savvy when it came to reporting information about FDR’s New Deal initiatives and the public’s response to them, and her key encouragement to Eleanor to write a column are also examples of exceptional promotional acumen. Her individualism, strong professional background, and relationship with a powerful political personality, whom she helped create and whom she adored—some believe even romantically loved<sup>91</sup>—propelled her public relations work. It was Eleanor’s circle of contacts and Eleanor’s influence through whom Hickok ultimately was offered all of her PR positions, from her field observations—or boundary spanning roles—to her World’s Fair work—where she developed essential partnerships—to her position at the Democratic National Committee.

The World’s Fair feature release about women employees, mentioned earlier, ended as such:

“Women are making important contributions to the management and promotion of the Fair—make no mistake about that,” Mr. Whalen concluded. “They are proving themselves valuable and indispensable in many quarters and when the history of the New York World’s Fair 1939, is written, many important chapters will be dominated by the accomplishments of women.”<sup>92</sup>

Through this and further study, we hope to help complete an important chapter on the accomplishments and experiences of one of those women, Lorena Hickok, who’s been acknowledged as a well-known political personality and a talented writer and reporter, but who has remained largely unknown as an early and influential public relations professional.

### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> For example, ACEJMC–accredited journalism schools’ enrollment—where many public relations programs are housed—awarded 66% of their bachelor’s degrees and 65% of their master’s degrees to women. See “2005 enrollment report: Enrollment growth continues, but at reduced rate,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 61(3): 308.

<sup>2</sup> Henry, S. (1998). “Dissonant notes of a retiring feminist: Doris E. Fleishchman's later years.” *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 10(1), 1-34.

<sup>3</sup> Grunig, J. E., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

<sup>4</sup> Grunig, L. A. (1995). “The consequences of culture for public relations: The case of women in the Foreign Service.” *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 7(2), 139-161.

<sup>5</sup> Rigdon, 1993, as cited in Grunig, L. A., Toth, E. L., & Hon, L. C. (2001). *Women in public relations: How gender influences practice*. New York: Guilford.

<sup>6</sup> The class action lawsuit is estimated to include more than 1.5 million women, including current and former Wal-Mart employees. See "Historic sex bias case against Wal-Mart advances," Feb. 6, 2007. Agence France Presse. Accessed from Lexis-Nexis, Feb. 13, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Aldoory, L., & Toth, E. L. (2002). "Gendered discrepancies in a gendered profession: A developing theory for public relations." *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 14(2), 93-116.

<sup>8</sup> Andsager, J. L., & Hust, S. J. T. (2005). "Differential gender orientation in public relations: Implications for career choices." *Public Relations Review*, 31(85-91).

<sup>9</sup> Grunig, L. A. et al. (2001).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 98.

<sup>11</sup> Serini, S. A., Toth, E. L., Wright, D. K., & Emig, A. G. (1997). "Watch for falling glass.... women, men, and job satisfaction in public relations: a preliminary analysis." *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 9(2), 99-118, and Serini, S. A., Toth, E. L., Wright, D. K., & Emig, A. G. (1998). "Power, gender, and public relations: sexual harassment as a threat to the practice." *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 10(3), 193-218.

<sup>12</sup> Grunig et al. (2001), p. 203.

<sup>13</sup> See Aldoory, L. (2005). "A (re)conceived feminist paradigm for public relations: A case for substantial improvement." *Journal of Communication*, 55(5), 668-684; Sereni et al. (1997); Creedon, P. J. (1991). "Public relations and "women's work": toward a feminist analysis of public relations roles" in J. E. Grunig & L. A. Grunig (Eds.), *Public relations research annual* (Vol. 3, pp. 67-84). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; Hon, L., Grunig, L. A., & Dozier, D. M. (1992). "Women in public relations: Problems and opportunities." in J. E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp. 419-438). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; L. A. Grunig et al. (2001); and O'Neill, J. (2003). "An analysis of the relationships among structure influence and gender: Helping to build a feminist theory of public relations," *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 15(2), 171.

<sup>14</sup> Grunig, L. A. et al. (2001).

<sup>15</sup> Choi, Y., & Hon, L. C. (2002). "The influence of gender composition in powerful positions on public relations practitioners' gender-related perceptions." *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 14(3), 258.

<sup>16</sup> Hon et al. (1992); Aldoory, L. (1998). "The language of leadership for female public relations professionals." *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 10(2), 73-101.

<sup>17</sup> Berger, B. K. (2005). "Power over, power with, and power to public relations: Critical reflections on public relations, the dominant coalition, and activism." *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 17(1), 5-28.

<sup>18</sup> Creedon (1991).

<sup>19</sup> Hon, L. C. (1995). "Toward a feminist theory of public relations." *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 7(1), 27-88; Grunig, L. A., Toth, E. L., & Hon, L. C. (2000). "Feminist values in public relations." *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 12(1), 49-68.

<sup>20</sup> Hon, L. C. (1997). "'To redeem the soul of America': Public relations and the civil rights movement." *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 9(3), 163-212.

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- <sup>48</sup> These trips were supported through an Ohio University Baker Grant and a West Virginia University Faculty Development Grant, respectively.

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- <sup>55</sup> Yearly average salary figure was obtained from Kurian, George (Ed.). 2004. *Datapedia of the United States: American History in Numbers*. (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.) Lanham, Maryland: Bernan Press. The calculation for equivalent wages in 2007 was derived from the CPI Inflation Calculator, *Bureau of Labor Statistics*, (<http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>) accessed 6 March 2007. "The CPI inflation calculator uses the average Consumer Price Index for a given calendar year. This data represents changes in prices of all goods and services purchased for consumption by urban households. This index value has been calculated every year since 1913. For the current year, the latest monthly index value is used."
- <sup>56</sup> Hickok to Grover A. Whalen, 11 November 1936, from holdings at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.
- <sup>57</sup> Telegram, Lorena Hickok to Eleanor Roosevelt, 17 November 1936, from holdings at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.
- <sup>58</sup> Hickok to Eleanor Roosevelt, 17 November 1936, from holdings at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.
- <sup>59</sup> Hickok to Eleanor Roosevelt, 4 January, 1937, from holdings at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.
- <sup>60</sup> From file A3.6 (biographies), titled "Women." Undated document from the New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division, p. 6.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- <sup>62</sup> From file A.3.1 (Classification of Employees), from the New York World's Fair 1939–40 Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.
- <sup>63</sup> L.H. to E.R., 17 January 1937.
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- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, p. 238.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, p. 232.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 234–244.
- <sup>73</sup> Faber, p. 249.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p. 184

<sup>75</sup> Lorena Hickok memo to Grover Whalen, 3 March 1939, Youth Promotion files, New York World's Fair 1939–1940 files, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>76</sup> Lorena Hickok memo, 9 September 1939, Youth Promotion files, New York World's Fair 1939–1940 files, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library. The New York World's Fair of 1939 was a financial disappointment and resulted in the firing of President Grover Whalen and the appointment of a new fair president in late 1939. Some blamed the financial woes and lack of crowds on the Fair's "image" problem, as it had projected a high-class aura that made working people feel it was not for them. A false rumor that even hamburgers were very expensive at the Fair reinforced this image. The Fair worked to change this image for 1940; one of the authors plans to discuss these issues in an upcoming paper about the Fair's promotional strategies and failures overall.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> Faber, pp. 253–254.

<sup>79</sup> Memo from Hickok to Mr. Wesson, Dec. 5, 1939. Youth Promotion files, New York World's Fair 1939–1940 files, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

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<sup>82</sup> Memo, Vice President in Charge of Finance to Secretary's Office, 25 January 1940, World's Fair Files, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>83</sup> Letter from Hickok to Dr. Bayne, 29 January 1940, Youth Promotion Dept. files, World's Fair Files, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

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<sup>85</sup> Faber, p. 278.

<sup>86</sup> Nelson, J. (September 1937). "They build the world of tomorrow; women's participation," *Independent Woman* 16: 274–76; Villard, O.G. (June 5, 1937). "No swastikas at the World's Fair," *Nation* 144: 648.

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<sup>88</sup> Faber, p. 282.

<sup>89</sup> In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Hickok wrote four books: *Ladies of Courage*, *Reluctant First Lady*, *The Story of Eleanor Roosevelt*, and *The Story of Helen Keller*.

<sup>90</sup> A West Virginia University School of Journalism faculty research grant will enable the primary author to go to the FDR Library to review Hickok's letters to Eleanor during her time with the DNC and to travel to Independence, Missouri, to review DNC files from this time frame.

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## Is the Action Suited to the Word? How Public Relations and Other Related Terms are Portrayed in International Newspapers

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Shakespeare's Hamlet (2003) in Scene II said, "Suit the action to the word, the word to the action." Prior research has found that public relations, defined by Hickson as the management of credibility, may have a credibility issue itself (cited in Stacks, 2002). Pincus, Rimmer, Rayfield, and Cropp (1993) found journalists indeed have negative perceptions of public relations professionals. One of the influences of this negative perception may be the media. Jo (2003) found a close relationship between the negative connotations of the term *public relations* in network news and newspapers to the organization type. However, studies have not addressed other euphemisms of *public relations*, such as *corporate communication*, and have not looked at the use of the term *public relations* beyond a national scope.

This study will utilize a content analysis to explore the use of the terms *public relations* and its counterpart, *corporate communication*, to determine differences in its contexts and usage in three international English-speaking newspapers: *The New York Times*, *The Financial Times* (London), and *The Daily Yomiuri* (Japan).

### *Perceptions of Public Relations*

According to Morley (1998), many organizations believe "anyone can do PR," which has slowed the acceptance of public relations as "an important business discipline within countless companies and in the business community at large."

Pincus, Rayfield, and Ohl (1994) point out that understanding the current perceptions of public relations in certain influential areas such as business schools is a starting point to examine the future shape of public relations. Moreover, Morley (1998) suggests an important barrier in public relations may be people use the term to be synonymous with "publicity" or "propaganda."

Prior research has investigated the negative perception of public relations in business schools (Pincus, 1994; Carroll 2000; Williams, 1996). However, little research exists that has investigated the causes of these perceptions. Relating to business schools, Pincus (personal communication, 1999) said when references are made to public relations, they are generally inaccurate, misleading and/or derogatory in nature. Therefore, Pincus said the term *public relations* is relatively missing from the bigger discussion of "communications" as popularly defined in business schools. Instead of using the term *public relations*, Pincus suggested a title or label should be used that attracts business schools and that recasts public relations into a context that truly fits into the business mentality. Edelman Worldwide (1993) provided nine suggestions for improving the understanding of public relations in business schools; however, changing media perceptions was notably absent.

Few research studies have analyzed the use of the term *public relations* in the media. Henderson (1998) analyzed articles published between January 1995 and December 1996 in the *New York Times* and other periodicals to determine negative connotations of the term *public relations* in the print media. She found the majority of references were negative and inaccurate while only a small portion, less than 10 percent, were positive.

Jo (2003) investigated the connotations of the term *public relations* in both newspapers, such as the *New York Times*, and on major television networks. Using Hutton's six frameworks (persuasion, advocacy, public information, cause related, image-reputation management, and relationship management), Jo found similar results to Henderson's 1995 study. Twelve percent of the mentions were positive, more than 40 percent were negative, while the remaining mentions were neutral.

However, some aspects of public relations may be described by other terms or euphemisms. Many other titles are used, especially referring to an organizational department, such as *corporate communications*, *public affairs*, *corporate relations*, *reputation management*, *public information*, and *media relations*, just to name a few. Derogatory terms include *flack* and *spin* (Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, & Agee, 2003). While the term *public relations* may have perception issues, other terms such as *corporate communication* may be different and its use more appealing.

#### *Theoretical Basis*

Grunig's four models of public relations help to explain the behavior of public relations organizations and individuals, and also offer guidance for best practices (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). The four models of public relations are: publicity/press agency, public information, two-way asymmetrical communication, and two-way symmetrical communication. The first two models, publicity/press agency and public information, are traditional one-way practices whose purpose is to support activities of other departments, such as marketing. Public relations practitioners who perform the publicity/press agency model generate favorable publicity for the organization, while keeping unfavorable publicity out (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995). According to Grunig and Hunt (1984), practitioners in this model "spread the faith of the organization involved, often through incomplete, distorted, or half-true information" (p. 21). Evaluating a program's success in the publicity/press agency model includes focusing on outputs, such as counting the number of people who attended an event.

The public information model views communicators as "journalists in residence" who neutrally disseminate information, without acting as advocates or mediators (Dozier, L. Grunig, & J. Grunig, 1995, p. 208). Accurate information is disseminated but unfavorable information is not volunteered. In these one-way models the practitioners give information, but do not seek information from the organization's publics through research (Grunig, 1989). Evaluation in the public information model includes keeping a clipping file to determine the success of a program (Dozier et al., 1995).

The next two models are two-way communication models, which use formal or informal research to gather information about publics and to share that information with management. The two-way asymmetrical model uses information to manipulate or persuade publics to behave as organizations want them to behave (Dozier et al., 1995). This is why the model is asymmetric because the effects of the model are imbalanced in favor of the organization (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The asymmetrical model also utilizes attitude theory, in which the public relations practitioners analyze research to tailor the information in ways the publics would most likely accept, generally through an attitude change (Dozier et al., 1995). Evaluation in the two-way asymmetrical model includes performing research before and after the program to detect attitude changes.

The two-way symmetrical model emphasizes a change in the attitudes and behaviors of both the organization and its publics (Dozier et al., 1995). The public relations practitioner acts as a mediator to develop a mutual understanding between the organization and its publics.

Practitioners use tactics such as bargaining, negotiation, and strategies of conflict resolution to change ideas, attitudes, and behaviors of both groups (Grunig, 1989). Before starting a public relations campaign, surveys or informal research are generally conducted to determine the attitudes or behaviors of the organization and its publics. Research also should be performed to determine how much the organization and its publics understand each another, in which case the co-orientational model is useful. According to Dozier et al. (1995), even though symmetrical practices build the best long-term relationships with publics, practicing these models regularly can be very expensive.

Grunig and Grunig (1992) stated each of his four Grunig's models could be a normative theory for public relations, and Grunig's two-way symmetrical model "should be the normative model for public relations" (p. 291). Grunig (1989) said the four models of public relations "are representations of the values, goals and behaviors held or used by organizations when they practice public relations" (p. 29).

#### Method

This study investigated the use and context of term *public relations* and expanded Jo's (2003) study to include the term *corporate communication* in three international newspapers: *The New York Times*, *the Financial Times* (London), and *The Daily Yomiuri* (Japan). Jo's (2003) study used Hutton's (1999) six frameworks, but there may be some degree of overlap of the terms. Therefore, this study will use Grunig's four models of public relations in place of Hutton's frameworks.

A search of Lexis-Nexis from January 2005 to December 2006 found significantly more mentions of *public relations* (n = 3752) in articles than *corporate communication* (n = 216). *The Daily Yomiuri* had only three mentions of the term *corporate communication* in the two-year sample. Using a systematic random sample, 311 articles were selected for analysis from a population of 3968 articles. If a study mentioned a term more than once, the first three uses of the term were coded.

Jo's (1993) study removed the use of the terms *public relations agency*, *public relations firm*, and *public relations manager*. However, mere mentions may impact the perception of the terms especially dealing with executive or upper management promotions in major newspapers. Therefore, this study will include all mentions of *public relations* and *corporate communication*.

Latent content coded included the type of article, the connotation of the term, context in which the word was used, model of public relations used, whether the article was image control, and type of story. Type of article related to the desk where the article was published, such as business/financial, world, sports, etc. Connotation of the term was coded as positive (accurate meaning of public relations such as good PR or PR success), neutral, and negative (dilemma or failure of reputation management such as PR fiasco, spin, PR nightmare). Context in which the word was used included whether mention related to politicians, nonprofits, business organizations (which include corporations), and so on. Grunig's four models of public relations (press agency model, public information model, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical) were also coded. However, it should be noted if the mention was simply identification or information, it was coded as part of the public information model. The coders also determined whether or not an article tried to reactively improve the image of a person or organization. Finally, whether the article was hard news, soft news, or an opinion/editorial was determined.

Manifest content included the date of the article, column, page, and word count. An open-ended analysis of the term such as the phrasing or use of the term (e.g., head of corporate communications, public relations exercise) was also conducted.

#### *Intercoder Reliability*

To test for intercoder reliability during the pretest, two coders coded the same 20 articles. Differences were discussed and clarifications were made.

#### Results

This study examined differences of the terms *corporate communication* and *public relations* found in three international newspapers: *The New York Times*, *The Financial Times* (London), *The Daily Yomiuri* (Japan). Concerning the type of article, soft news/feature was the most frequent (65%), followed by straight/hard news (28%) and editorials (7%). The two terms were used most often in relation to individuals (51%) followed by business organizations (26%). Of the three newspapers, the term *public relations* in news stories had more negative connotations (24%) than *corporate communication* (1%).

#### *Term comparisons*

Table 1 demonstrates differences between the connotation of the term (positive, neutral, or negative) and the term itself (*corporate communication* or *public relations*). A chi-square analysis found significant differences amongst the terms and connotation. While there were no differences between the two terms and their positive connotations, there were significantly more negative occurrences with *public relations* (n = 42) compared to *corporate communication* (n = 1).

Significant differences were also found between the terms and Grunig's four models as indicated by a chi-square analysis (see Table 2). Most uses of *corporate communication* were present in the context of the public information model (88%). However, *corporate communication* (2.2%) had significantly fewer occurrences of the press agency model than *public relations* (35%). Twenty-five percent of *public relations* occurrences were negative compared to less than one percent of *corporate communication*.

When the relationship between the term and whether the subject of the article was reactively trying to improve its image was analyzed, significant differences were found (Table 3). Again, corporate communication (7.3%) was mentioned significantly less in articles that tried to improve an image compared to public relations (27%).

#### *Newspaper comparisons*

Differences among the three types of newspapers (*The New York Times*, *The Financial Times* (London), and *the Daily Yomiuri*) were analyzed using chi-squares (see Table 4). While the use of either term was similar between the *New York Times* and *The Financial Times*, *The Daily Yomiuri* had only three mentions of corporate communication in 2005 and 2007. There were not significant differences between the connotation of the term and the newspaper.

TABLE 1  
Term and Connotation of the Term

<i>Term</i>	Positive		Neutral		Negative		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Public Relations	18	10.3	114	65.5	42	24.1	174	100
Corporate Communication	15	10.9	121	88.3	1	.7	137	100
Total	33	10.6	235	75.6	43	13.8	311	100

Note.  $\chi^2(2) = 35.68, p < .01$

TABLE 2  
Term and Grunig's Four Models

Term	Press Agency		Public Information		Two-way asymmetrical		Two-way symmetrical	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Public Relations	53	30.5	104	59.8	6	3.4	7	4.0
Corporate Communication	3	2.2	117	85.4	17	12.4	0	0
Total	56	18.0	221	71.1	23	7.4	7	2.3

Note.  $X^2(4) = 58.08, p < .01$

TABLE 3  
*Term and Presence in article to reactively improve image*

Term	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Public Relations	47	27.0	127	73.0	174	100
Corporate Communication	10	7.3	127	92.7	17	100
Total	57	18.3	254	81.7	311	100

Note.  $X^2(1) = 19.89, p < .01$

TABLE 4  
Term, Connotation of the Term, and Newspaper

Term	Positive		Neutral		Negative		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<i>The New York Times</i>								
Public Relations	6	10.7	33	58.9	17	30.4	56	100
Corporate Communication	2	3.8	51	96.2	0	0	53	100
Note. $X^2(2) = 22.8, p < .01$								
<i>The London Times</i>								
Public Relations	7	13.0	28	51.9	19	35.2	54	100
Corporate Communication	13	16.0	67	82.7	1	1.2	81	100
Note. $X^2(2) = 29.8, p < .01$								
<i>The Daily Yomiuri</i>								
Public Relations	5	7.8	53	82.8	6	9.4	64	100
Corporate Communication	0	0	3	100	0	0	3	100
Note. $X^2(2) = .617, p = .74$								

### Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the use of the terms, *public relations* and *corporate communication*, in three international newspapers: *The New York Times*, *The Financial Times* (London), and the *Daily Yomiuri* (Japan). This content analysis expanded Jo's (1993) content analysis which only analyzed the term *public relations* in national newspapers and broadcast stations.

Findings indicate the term *public relations* was more likely to have negative connotations and be used in a press-agency sense compared to *corporate communication*. In addition, articles were more likely to use the term *public relations* when trying to improve their image than *corporate communication*. *Corporate communication* was more than likely used in a positive sense and used to describe company positions compared to *public relations*. This supports

O'Dwyer PR Services Report's finding that the most common term that described the public relations function in Fortune 500 companies was *corporate communication* (cited in Wilcox et al, 2003). Examples of some terms of how *public relations* was used include *public relations* hangover, *public relations* firestorm, *public relations* disaster, *public relations* campaigns, etc. *Corporate communication* was more likely to identify a position such as head of *corporate communications*. Other uses of *corporate communication* include phrases such as *corporate communications* world and *corporate communications* market lead. There were also several mentions of *corporate communications* as a descriptor of a telecommunications company.

Based on the above findings, negative views of the term *public relations* were overwhelmingly prevalent in the three newspapers compared to *corporate communication*. Future research should investigate other terms such as *public information* or *reputation management*, to name a few. Therefore, users of the term *public relations* should further analyze its use in case they may have to engage in a *corporate communication* campaign themselves.

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## **The Culture of Communication at Starbucks**

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This qualitative study examined internal relationship management efforts in an organization and its effect on employee trust and loyalty. It examined how Starbucks communicates with its retail employees, as well as determined if those communication methods built trust and loyalty. This initial study of employee interviews from a southern store revealed that face-to-face communication is the predominant method of communication at the retail level. The employees, both baristas and managers, understood the importance of communication both to motivate and support employees, as well as to facilitate a positive relationship with their customers. It also found that while face-to-face communication is considered “more rich”, reducing complexity and providing more information, the benefits of face-to-face communication suffer when an organization is experiencing stress, such as high turnover. Findings indicate that employees in a retail operation differ in their approach to their jobs, with those who are more career-minded focused on the positive aspects of face-to-face communication. Despite the split in the ways employees approached their jobs, they all agreed that the face-to-face communication made them feel like they were “more than just a number” in a very large organization. They also agreed that their interaction with customers was the most rewarding part of their jobs. Finally, they found that the close contact and communication in their jobs helped them to do their jobs of “making coffee” much more quickly and efficiently. The second study will examine communication efforts at a number of west coast stores to explore the similarities and differences in different parts of the country.

Internal communication between an organization’s leadership and its employees can be an important method for building critical relationships that harnesses the enthusiasm, loyalty (Reichheld, 2001), and trust (Mishra & Mishra, 2005) of an organization’s employees. Employees have important knowledge and skills about both their jobs and the organization, providing employees the opportunity to be ambassadors to the customer. This type of internal marketing to employees (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1992) leads them to be better customer ambassadors (Lowenstein, 2006). It has been demonstrated in the teams’ literature that happy employees lead to better service, which leads to happy, loyal customers (Mathieu, Gilson, & Ruddy, 2006).

However, relationship management expert Michael Lowenstein (2006) determined that “Only 24 percent of employees consider themselves truly loyal, committed to their organization and its goals.” In fact, even relationship management theory (e.g., Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, 2000) focuses on external publics to the exclusion of internal publics such as employees. As a result, employees can often feel left out of the entire process of creating products and services, thereby hurting the ultimate relationship with the customer (Lowenstein, 2006).

The purpose of this study is to examine the specific methods Starbucks employs to communicate with its employees and whether or not those communication methods build trust and loyalty with its employees. This study employs in-depth interviews with employees to reveal whether or not strong internal communication efforts are in place and whether those in turn lead to strong relationship-building efforts between Starbucks and its employees, hence creating strong feelings of loyalty to the firm.

This study will draw on concepts from several different literature in order to examine the many aspects of employee relations, including relationship management in the public relations and marketing literature; loyalty, trust, and organizational culture, which are found in the management literature; and internal communication, which is found in both the management and communication studies literature. The relationship management literature examines the relationship of an organization with its publics. The loyalty and trust literatures have focused on the importance of building loyalty and trust with employees for both retention and job satisfaction of employees. These two foundations can then inform the relationship management literature about the importance of including employees as key stakeholders. Finally, organizational culture and internal communication both potentially influence relationship management as well as a variety of outcomes, such as employee job satisfaction and commitment.

### **Relationship Management**

The focus on building relationships with customers, publics, stakeholders or constituents is found in both the marketing and public relations literature. In the marketing literature, it is called relationship marketing. The relationship marketing literature has focused on the importance of building long-term relationships with customers (Sharma & Sheth, 1997) by partnering with customers, suppliers, and allies to achieve long-term loyalty. While most of the relationship marketing literature focuses on the behavioral actions of the organization to customers, Stern (1997) emphasizes the role of “emotion management” in which it is possible to build a closer emotional tie to the consumer through well-trained employees who convey a sense of caring to the customer. She believes that by developing “intimate” or emotionally close, relationships with customers, employees create a stronger bond with the consumer on behalf of the company. The attributes of this organization-public relationship include communication, caring, commitment, comfort, and conflict resolution.

In the public relations literature, some scholars define public relations as relationship management (Ledingham & Brunig, 1998). This parallels relationship marketing in that it also calls for public relations to focus on “the development of relational responsibility” (p. 56). To build strong interpersonal relationships requires four dimensions of “investment, commitment, trust and a comfort with relational dialectics” (p. 56), or a comfort with two-way communication. These dimensions overlap with the emotional attributes of Stern’s (1997) relationship marketing efforts. Ledingham and Bruning (1998) found that “an organization-public relationship centered around building trust, demonstrating involvement, investment, and commitment, and maintaining open, frank communication between the organization and its key public does have value in that it impacts the stay-leave decision in a competitive environment” (p. 59). This statement implies that those strong relationships can prevent customers from switching to a new supplier because of factors such as price-sensitivity.

In a later study, Bruning and Ledingham (2000) found that community members’ perceptions of personal and professional relationships with their bank explained 75% of the satisfaction variance, indicating the benefit of building those relationships for customer

satisfaction. In both of these studies, however, the focus was on building relationships with customers, not employees. Whether building relationships with employees can indeed lead to employee loyalty and customer satisfaction is an area that needs to be explored. In addition, the relationship marketing and relationship management literatures are not clear about *who* in the organization is building these interpersonal relationships or specifically *how* these relationships are built. Whether or not the “organization” itself can build relationships is an area that remains unanswered.

### **Loyalty**

For a long time, loyalty was one aspect of relationship building that could not be quantified, but managers knew intuitively was a worthy goal. In 1996, Frederick Reichheld wrote “The Loyalty Effect,” which quantified some of the reasons for businesses to encourage loyalty among both employees and customers. Reichheld’s study demonstrated that it was more costly to gain new customers and employees than to retain existing ones. More recently, Reichheld (2001) defined truly loyal employees as those who have “responsibility and accountability for building successful, mutually valuable relationships” (p. 12). One of the organizations Reichheld (2001) highlights is Dell computer. Its founder and CEO, Michael Dell writes, “You need to engender a sense of personal investment in all your employees—which comes down to three things: responsibility, accountability, and shared success. Mobilize your people around a common goal. Help them to feel part of something genuine, special and important, and you’ll inspire real passion and loyalty” (p. 35).

A term used interchangeably with loyalty is commitment. In particular, Meyer and Allen (1997) noted that “committed employees are more likely to remain in the organization than are uncommitted employees (p. 11).” Meyer and Allen found three types of commitment: affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Affective commitment is a desire to maintain membership in an organization based on an emotional attachment, an acceptance of or identification with the organization’s values, and an involvement in the organization. Continuance commitment is “an awareness of the costs of leaving the organization” and Normative commitment refers to a feeling that an employee “ought to remain with the organization (p. 11).” While Meyer and Allen focus on the effect of management practices on commitment, there is no mention of the role of communication.

### **Internal Communication**

Internal communication is critical for building trusting relationships between employees and the organization (Mayer & Gavin, 2005) that are open and honest (Mishra & Mishra, 2005) but has often been overlooked as a less-important part of a manager’s job (Bobo, 2000). Communication efforts are often taken for granted as managers believe that employees already know what is happening in the organization or that they might not really care (Davis, 2000). Instead of relying on traditional ways of communicating via newsletters or weekly staff meetings, there is a new emphasis on promoting dialogue with employees and facilitating learning (Davis, 2000) both face to face and by utilizing new media, such as internal blogging and intranet forums.

Organizational communication has been characterized in terms of a manager’s use of “rich media” (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987), or media that varies in its ability to convey social cues in order to reduce uncertainty and equivocality. In a study of middle- and upper-level managers, Daft, Lengel and Trevino found that managers match the type of media used to communicate with employees with the task before them. Their typology of rich media ranges from high media richness (i.e., face-to-face communication ) to low media richness (i.e.,

unaddressed documents). In between the extremes they placed the telephone and addressed documents. They found that for tasks that are ambiguous, managers use more face-to-face, personalized communication, or rich media. In addition, they found that for tasks that are less ambiguous and more straight-forward, managers are more likely to employ less rich media, or communication that is written and less personalized. The concept of “rich media” is important to understanding how organizational communication is developed between managers and subordinates.

### **Trust**

Trust can be conveyed through effective communication (Mishra & Mishra, 1994) via openness and concern. Openness, which is also a dimension of relationship management theory (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998) is defined in terms of perceptions of openness and honesty, where “leaders who are more trusted are more effective in acquiring skills, retaining and attracting followers, and promotion change and innovation” (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991, p. 58). In addition, a cultural “performance” provides the executive the opportunity to show personal strength, or the strength of their character (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983, p. 141), as a way to build openness in the organization. “The extent to which the trusted person engages in undistorted communication then reinforces the trust (in terms of openness) placed in him or her” (Mishra, 1996). Previous research has found that trust is positively related to organizational commitment in a variety of corporate contexts, such as downsizing (Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002; Brockner, Siegel, Daly, Tyler, & Martin, 1997; Brockner, Spreitzer, Mishra, Hochwarter, Pepper, & Weinberg, 2004).

In summary, this exploratory study will examine the organizational culture of Starbucks in one retail operation, to determine whether or not Starbucks employees perceive themselves to be important stakeholders, in addition to the other publics they serve. The in-depth interviews with employees will provide a window into the shared world view of Starbucks employees to determine how internal communication affects the relationship between employees and the organization, including their perceptions of loyalty to the organization and whether or not there are feelings of mutual trust between Starbucks employees and management.

### **Methodology**

The data for this exploratory study were collected via in-depth interviews and analyzed qualitatively in order to ascertain how Starbucks employees feel about their jobs and the meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) that they make about employer relationships management and communication efforts. This author’s casual observation and rapport with the assistant manager of a local Starbucks store was the impetus for entry to the setting. This prior relationship was important to establishing trust and recognition of the language and culture of the organization (Fontana & Frey, 2000). In-depth interviews were conducted with four employees and a manager—all women. The interviews were conducted one-on-one, audio-taped, and transcribed for later analysis. Each interview lasted no more than one hour. Each Starbucks employee who agreed to participate was invited to meet at a time and place convenient to both them and the primary investigator. The interviews were conducted in either their own Starbucks store or another Starbucks store, which was mutually agreed upon by the interviewee and the interviewer.

The semi-structured interview (Fontana & Frey, 2000) included questions involving their employment at Starbucks and how their manager communicates with them on a daily basis. The primary questions were developed with the approval of the District Manager of Starbucks as well as Starbucks headquarters representatives in Seattle, Washington. The unstructured interviewing

style allowed the interviewer to ask each interviewee to expand on specific answers they gave that were unique to their understanding and interpretation of their job (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

All participants seemed open and honest in their responses, judging from their body language. When the questions became a bit personal, such as asking a follow-up question about the challenges as well as the positives about working for Starbucks, the participants were reassured that all of their responses would not be shared with Starbucks management in a way that would identify them. In all instances, the participants just shrugged their shoulders as if to say with their body language that anonymity was not important to them. In listening to their responses, I tried not to let my own experience color my thinking about their responses, good or bad. I do believe that my experience as a customer allowed me to have a better understanding of what they do on a daily basis, which allowed me to quickly establish trust with those employees I had not met before. I was sure to let them know that this was an opportunity for me as both customer and student to learn more about their job and the company they work for.

The interview data were coded using cluster analysis (Foss, 2004). First, the interviews were analyzed for key terms based on frequency or intensity. Second, the interviews were mapped for other terms clustered around the key terms, such as those that are found nearby a key term or that may connect to a key term. Finally, the analysis examined patterns of association or linkages to identify which clusters are most interesting or of greatest importance.

## **Results**

Using cluster analysis, several themes emerged analyzing the text of each employee interview: job vs. career, store communication styles, the people, making coffee, and working for Starbucks. Clusters of words that described both shared and individual world views surrounded those themes. The level of agreement about those themes seemed to be consistent with the employees' level of commitment to Starbucks as an organization where they would pursue a long-term career.

It was interesting to note that all employees found their job at Starbucks either through a friend, or from their mothers, who encouraged them to apply. In other words, word-of-mouth was a driving force in how these employees applied for jobs at Starbucks.

### **Job vs. Career**

In listening to the Starbucks employees describe their jobs and their perspective, the first thing that is quite noticeable is the distinction between whether or not they view their work as a *job or a career*. That distinction frames the way they describe their job, its activities, the communication process, and their satisfaction with their position. Those employees who use the words, "we" say things like they "love it so much, I want to make it my career." They also talk about how "if you're interested, Starbucks will work with you" making opportunities for advancement, training, and promotion. One employee mentioned that while she "would love to make it my career, but I don't want to move out of North Carolina." On the other hand, there was talk of "it is just a job. I want to do good work, but it is just a job. We don't do it because we want to increase the tremendous profit of Starbucks." This rhetoric affected the way employees evaluated the communication styles of their managers.

### **Communication Style**

Based on that split between a career-oriented employee and a job-only employee, there was a distinction between the ways they viewed their managers' communication styles, even across stores. Most employees had worked for more than one Starbucks store, so they drew on experiences from all stores when talking about managerial communication. There was

consensus among the four interviewees that communication between managers and employees was overwhelmingly face-to-face as there seemed to be ample opportunity to interact with managers as they were working side-by-side during a shift. One employee described her feeling that despite what she's heard people say about how large Starbucks is, she "doesn't feel like a number."

The respondents generally believe that the smaller stores, like the one where these employees all currently work, seemed to provide a more informal mode of communication since employees were all sharing jobs during a shift, as opposed to larger stores where they had previously worked that have a more formal distribution of duties. One employee noted, however, that "some managers are more diplomatic than others," further indicating that some managers had a way of constructively teaching employees while others were not as positive in their instruction. Good managers, with respect to communication styles, were described as "approachable," "open-minded," "receptive," and "willing to listen."

On the other hand, managers were also described as "receptive or not." Most employees talked about the "one-on-ones" that managers initiate with their employees to check-in and find out how things are and if they have questions or need help in attaining their goals, but in different ways. Some describe manager methods as helpful in attaining those goals, while others found that a manager might say "is there anything you want to tell me, but it is not clear that she really wants to know."

In addition, no matter how positive or negative their experience with their manager is, all employees agree that "information is not always clear" and that "information trickles down through the shift supervisors." One issue that became clear as this store is busy hiring new people is that "people get overlooked—we don't always tell partners (employees) they are doing a good job. We forget to encourage them." In addition, these employees believe that this store has a history of higher-than-average turnover (at least this is the employees' perception) which they think leads to a sense that they "don't always know that is going on with management changes." They expressed feeling "kind of in the dark." The manager I interviewed expressed frustration in not being able to find the right people to hire fast enough; rather, she said she prefers to find the best people rather than just anyone to fill the open positions.

Overall, the employees interviewed feel that when their managers are distracted, there is a change in their communication styles. On the one hand, they describe their managers as "approachable" and "willing to listen," but on the other hand, they describe communication in times of chaos, like now when they are hiring many new people, as "isn't always clear." One of the employees, who is a shift supervisor, a level between Barista and Manager, was very concerned about the impact of the chaos of new hires on communication with existing "partners." She said she was so concerned that she was working to implement a "Mug award" in her personal development plan. The Mug awards are opportunities for managers to give employees pins in the shapes of mugs when they see them doing a good job. This award is used throughout the Starbucks chain. It is supposed to be an informal way of communicating that they are doing a good job, but in the current chaos of turnover and new hires, the mug awards have not been used recently at this store.

### **The People**

Communication seemed to have an impact on how employees perceived their enjoyment working with co-workers or "partners" as well as customers. Overall, employees said they are impressed with their co-workers and it was obvious to them that Starbucks hires the right people with "the right personality." They articulated the term personality as a "passion for Starbucks"

or a “passion for doing a good job.” They described their co-workers as “awesome”, and as being “the best part of the job.” The manager I interviewed also articulated this view, saying that she spends a lot of time trying to hire the right people. She said that she doesn’t want to hire just anyone looking for a job, but wants to hire someone who seems truly interested in working for Starbucks.

They also thought that the staff reflected the diversity that Starbucks strives for in its mission statement. They commented particularly age diversity, as the managers had recently hired a 47-year-old barista, whom they all were surprised to enjoy. They also expressed surprise that most managers were so young (in this case, under 30). Overall, they described camaraderie among the staff that they think is important in bringing customers to “the third place.” This term was used by Howard Schultz in his book, “Pour your heart into it” (1997) in which he describes home and work as being the first and second places that people spend time, and his desire to create a “third place” where people prefer to relax in their free time.

The employees also said they love their jobs because of their customers. All of the interview participants expressed an interest in “serving customers 100%” and felt frustrated when they were not able to do that, because of the time it take to train so many new employees. They all said they enjoy the interaction they have with their customers and “feel like they help improve a customer’s day.”

The manager described her philosophy of customer satisfaction as “Just say yes.” She recounted how there are times that customers will walk in with obviously copied or fake coupons for a free drink, but she will still give them one. If a customer is dissatisfied and requests a new drink, “even if they come back in with only ½ of the drink left”, she said she will give them a new drink. “So what, that they are trying to get something for free. So what, that they drink most of a cup of coffee and just want a free second cup—we should just say yes—it will encourage them to come back satisfied the next time.” One employee said that she could see a difference between customers based on the stores she has worked at, describing some customers as friendly and some as cool. She also described how through working at Starbucks she “gets to know my community better.”

### **Making Coffee**

All participants agreed that while it is challenging to start working at Starbucks as a new employee, they eventually figure out their job and “should be able to make a drink in two to three minutes.” One other employee declared, “It’s not like it’s rocket science.” They learn how to make coffee from each other, their supervisor and “book-work.” They all described the “book-work” involved in learning the machines, learning how to make drinks, as well as doing “book-work” to move up in the organization. They expressed a level of comfort at the procedures and manuals available, which helped them to learn “the Starbucks way.” Because “everyone does everything” they said they felt like they were able to learn much faster from each other and that their partners were supportive in that learning process.

### **Working for Starbucks**

Everyone expressed their happiness with the benefits that Starbucks provides, saying that it is a combination of benefits and excellent pay that brought them to Starbucks in the first place. Starbucks also provides tuition reimbursement, which is probably why two of the four employees interviewed are working while going to college. Both of those employees are paying their own way through college, so the tuition reimbursement would be a valuable benefit. The biggest benefit they all described, however, is the “flexible schedule.” Most noted that they could not find another service job willing to be so flexible in scheduling their time. The two college

students believe that this flexibility made it easier for them to manage their schoolwork and job responsibilities. One employee mentioned her surprise at how strictly Starbucks followed state laws enforcing break times each hour, even though they must be paid during breaks.

### *Challenges*

While this was not the focus of the questions, each interviewee mentioned some of the challenges that they have encountered working for Starbucks. The biggest challenge everyone mentioned was working in the service industry. This employment entails direct contact with customers, which they believe means that they are always “on”, whether they feel happy or not. In addition, there are days that the customers are grumpy, which respondents believe makes it a challenge for them to do their job well. The manager recounted a story about Grumpy Bob, a customer who came in every day, but never smiled. Her staff all decided that they would make Grumpy Bob so happy with their service that he would eventually smile. She was happy to report that their hard work paid off and he is now one of their favorite (happy) customers.

As noted from earlier comments, this store has the immediate challenge of being understaffed, which puts pressure on the current employees to quickly train new ones, as well as to work with employees from other stores who are brought in to cover holes in the shifts. As previously mentioned, respondents feel that this challenge puts a strain on any positive reinforcement that managers usually provide their longer-tenure employees. They fear that strain might result in the more-experienced employees feeling slighted. Finally, one manager wondered about the effect of baristas of all ages working for younger and younger managers. She mentioned that “many of the baristas work here part-time, as a second job, and they are much older than the manager. It must be awkward for them to work for someone so much younger than they are.” This observation was based on her own feelings about the age discrepancy and not anything specific that an employee had mentioned to her.

One final worry the manager of this store mentioned was her concern about airport Starbucks--“I am concerned about our expansion into airports and similar venues because I worry that this will dilute the quality of our product. I often hear from our customers when they return from a trip how the coffee at the airport did not meet their expectations. This hurts our reputation, too.”

## **Discussion**

As George Cheney (1999) has pointed out, “In considering how democracy gets put into practice in the workplace or how values are maintained in an organization, we must look carefully at the role of communication, for language contributes greatly to shaping what we understand to be reality. Even during times of organizational chaos and disruption, communication can shed light on the values of the organization because they will most likely revert to the most common denominator in the way that they treat employees. I take a close look at what makes an organization (of any type) possible on a day-to-day basis: communication (Cheney, pp. 24, 31).” Overall, the Starbucks where these respondents work appears to be very aware of how communication between managers and partners affects their ability to do their jobs and feel good about their work. It also appears that there are many mechanisms in place to keep the channels of communication open, however, when a store is understaffed, like the store whose employees participated in these interviews, it puts a strain on those normally honest and open communication patterns.

Employees stressed the importance of face-to-face communication when getting information from their managers or approaching them with questions or sensitive topics. This

“rich communication” (Daft, Lengel & Trevino, 1987) seems to flourish in the small store atmosphere despite the sophisticated technological means of communication available to society. Cheney (1999) observed, “In most business situations, as on the street, face-to-face communication and one’s word are considered more reliable than letters, memos, or written reports. (p. 58).

Starbucks has been criticized in the press for expanding too quickly, and one negative result of growth and change in this environment may be that current employees feel left out. As Cheney (1999) noted in the growth of the Mondragon cooperatives, “To what extent is it possible for a business to maintain a core of social values—such as participatory democracy—while growing, becoming more complex, and being financially successful?” (p. viiii). This point becomes the question for Starbucks, as well, because the regional managers have more stores under their control and their attention is divided among those stores.

Employees varied in the degree to which they exhibited loyalty or commitment to Starbucks. As previously mentioned, there was a difference in the ways that employees described their roles at Starbucks as either “jobs” or “careers”. Examining Meyer and Allen’s (1997) definition of affective commitment, it would appear that there is a continuum of commitment, with those who view their roles as “jobs” having less emotional attachment, less identification with the organization’s values, and less involvement in the organization. Contrasting this view are those employees who described their role at Starbucks as a “career” and what the future held for them at Starbucks. These employees exhibited an emotional attachment, identified with Starbucks’s values, and felt involved in the organization enough to be concerned about whether customers and current employees were getting the short end of the stick as they trained new employees.

Cheney (1999) found in his research on the Mondragon cooperatives (1999) that “...some employees are now using the metaphor of ‘internal markets’ to argue strongly for their rights as ‘customer’ of management’s policies, (p. 162).” Is this positive or negative for the organization? One employee took a positive view by saying, “Starbucks has big company advantages in a small company atmosphere.”

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study is useful in understanding the perspectives of young Starbucks employees perceptions of their jobs and communication patterns with their managers. In order for these results to be generalizable, however, it would be necessary to interview additional employees from other Starbucks locations to examine the differences among managers and regions. In addition, it would be beneficial to interview a wider diversity of employees, including men and older employees to ascertain a breadth of employees’ perceptions.

The participating employees emphasized the challenges of operating in a service environment, and future research should investigate how the communication methods used by an organization contribute to the success of meeting service requirements in a service environment. As George Cheney (1999) has pointed out, “In my teaching and research about organizations for nearly twenty years, I have focused on two distinct arenas, treating the internal and external affairs of the organization largely as separate universes....However, it has become clear to me that these two domains of activity are necessarily interrelated (p. x).” It is clear that there are tensions for these service employees between how they interact with customers and how they themselves feel they are treated. Per Cheney (1999), “An organization’s internal and external affairs thus are intertwined in a number of important ways. Perhaps the best metaphor for those relationships is a ‘floating equilibrium,’ which suggests that they must continually be examined

and adjusted” (p. 120). The intertwining should be the basis for further research, to determine how internal affairs affect external affairs. As firms change and grow, the extent to which they include employees in their planning will affect how their employees positively impact their customers.

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#### **Appendix A. Interview Questions**

1. How long have you been working at Starbucks?
2. What is your favorite part of working at Starbucks?
3. If you were to write a recruitment brochure for Starbucks, what would it say?
4. Tell me about how you and your manager communicate.
5. If there is one thing you’d like me to know about your job, what would it be?

## **Linking PR Tactics to Long-Term Success: An Investigation of How Communications Contribute to Trust, Satisfaction, and Commitment in a Non-Profit Organization**

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This study measured the impact of communications on building trust, commitment, and satisfaction among donors of a large non-profit organization located in Fort Worth. Donors (N = 275) responded to a mail survey that included a modified version of the Hon and J.E. Grunig (1999) organization-public relationship scale and stewardship communication tactics. Regression analyses indicate that roughly 50% of the variance in trust, satisfaction, and commitment is attributable to a combination of communication tactics; most importantly, clearly communicating to donors how their donations help those in need. Implications for non-profit organizations and public relations relationship theory are offered.

Nearly twenty-five years ago, renowned public relations scholar James Grunig explained that “in order for public relations to be valued by the organization it serves, practitioners must be able to demonstrate that their efforts contribute to the goals of these organizations by building long-term behavioral relationships with strategic publics” (1993, p. 136). Indicators of long-term organization-public relationships have been conceptualized as trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality, or balanced power (Hon & J.E. Grunig, 1999). Recent public relations research has sought to demonstrate that these are valuable public relations long-term outcomes by demonstrating the link between them and behaviors (Bruning, 2000; Bruning, DeMiglio, & Embry, 2006; Bruning & Ledingham, 2000a; Bruning & Ralston, 2000, 2001; Ledingham, 2001; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, 2000; Ledingham, Bruning, & Wilson, 2000) and satisfaction (Bruning et al., 2006; Bruning & Hatfield, 2002; Bruning, Langenhop, & Green, 2004; Bruning & Ledingham, 1998, 2000a, 2000b) among strategic publics.

Ironically, far less attention has been given to examining the link between public relations tactical efforts and the impact they have on contributing to the long-term indicators of trust, commitment, satisfaction, and control mutuality. Thousands of public relations practitioners spend their days managing and executing routine, albeit essential, public relations activities, such as writing, design, and project management. Although most public relations practitioners and other senior managers from within their organizations may speculate that these promotional activities are necessary, very rarely are the direct contributions measured and evaluated. This empirical research is among the first to document the impact that public relations tactics have on creating strategic long-term indicators of value in the form of trust, commitment, and satisfaction.

### Review of the Literature

#### *Measuring and Researching Organization-Public Relationships*

In 1984, public relations scholar Ferguson recommended a shift in paradigms to relationships. According to Ferguson, the emphasis should not be “on the organization, nor the public, nor communication process” (p. ii)—but the relationship itself. The decade-long public

relations Excellence Study (J.E. Grunig 1992; L.A. Grunig, J.E. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002) also emphasized the importance of relationships and empirically concluded that public relations practitioners “develop programs at the functional level of public relations to build long-term relationships with these strategic publics” (J.E. Grunig, p. 13). Within the last decade, public relationship models, relationship theory, and empirical research on relationship indicators have emerged.

Multiple scales have been developed for measuring organization-public relationships. Bruning and Ledingham (1999) culled literature from interpersonal communication to develop questions that measured trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment. Their work also indicated that relationships consist of three relational dimensions: personal, professional, and community. Bruning and Galloway (2003) later adapted this same scale to include five dimensions: anthropomorphism, professional benefits/expectations, personal commitment, community improvement, and comparison of alternatives.

Huang (2001a) developed a cross-cultural, multiple-item scale that includes trust, control mutuality, commitment, satisfaction and face and favor. Adding the latter fifth dimension helped Huang “to acquire cross-cultural comparability so that the instrument can be used in both Western and Eastern cultures” (p. 62). Other work of Huang (2001b) demonstrated that conflict resolution was mediated by effective organization-public relationships. Based upon surveys with college students, community residents, and on-line customers, Kim (2001) developed an organization-public relationship scale composed of the following relationship dimensions: trust, commitment, local and community involvement, and reputation.

Culling primarily from interpersonal communication research, Hon and J.E. Grunig (1999) developed an organization-public relationship scale that includes indicators of trust, commitment, satisfaction, and control mutuality. The validity and reliability of this scale has been demonstrated in recent empirical studies (Hall, 2006; Hon & Brunner, 2001; Jo, Hon, & Brunner, 2004; O’Neil, 2006; Waters, 2006).

Aside from working to demonstrate the efficacy of organizational-public relationship scales, a second stream of public relations research has analyzed the link between perceptions of relationship dimensions, attitudes, intended behaviors, and actual behaviors of strategic publics. For example, perceptions of relationship indicators have been shown to be related to (a) awareness of corporate philanthropy and community relations (Hall, 2006), (b) satisfaction (Bruning et al., 2006; Bruning & Hatfield, 2002; Bruning et al., 2004; Bruning & Ledingham, 1998, 2000a, 2000b), and (c) intended and actual behaviors (Bruning, 2000; Bruning et al., 2006; Bruning & Ledingham, 2000a; Bruning & Ralston, 2000, 2001; Ledingham, 2001; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, 2000; Ledingham et al., 2000; O’Neil, 2006; Waters, 2006).

Less scholarly attention has been placed on examining organization-public relationships within the context of non-profit organizations (for exceptions see Hall, 2002; Kelly, 1998, 2001; O’Neil, 2006; Waters, 2006). Perhaps the most notable exception is the conceptual work by Kelly in which she draws from theory provided by the Excellence Study (J.E. Grunig 1992; L.A. Grunig, J.E. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002) to describe how to use procedures and techniques to build and maintain long-term relationships with an important stakeholder—donors. As part of the fundraising process, Kelly recommends a five-step process called ROPES that consists of research, objectives, programming, evaluation, and stewardship. The stewardship step focuses on nurturing the relationship between an organization and donor. Kelly posits that stewardship, “a step erroneously missing in public relations,” (p. 26) consists of these four elements: (a) reciprocity, appreciating and recognizing donors; (b) responsible gift use, using gifts from donors

for which they were intended; (c) reporting, informing donors of how their gifts were used; and (d) relationship nurturing, encouraging donors to renew gifts (p. 26).

O'Neil's (2006) and Waters' (2006) empirical research on non-profit organizations both revealed that the public relations relationship indicators of trust, satisfaction, commitment, and shared power differentiate donation giving amounts. Neither study, however, examined the way in which public relations tactics might contribute to the long-term indicators of success.

#### *Stewardship with Donors*

Literature on stewardship frequently reminds public relations and fundraising practitioners to provide excellent communications to donors. Clearly communicating the mission and work in promotional efforts is one way non-profit organizations can foster a strong relationship with donors (Bennett & Barkensjo, 2005; Hart & Holleran, 1998). Public relations practitioners are often charged with the task of telling the story of their non-profit organization in a compelling and complete manner. Fundraising expert Lee Jackman says that "the more that donors know about an organization, the more they empathize with it and the more likely they are to make larger and larger gifts to it" (2000, p. 34). Research also suggests that donors better relate to organizations whose services are "seen as important and involving" (Bennett & Barkensjo, p. 125).

Clearly demonstrating to donors how their funds will be used to benefit other people has also been touted as an important fundraising principle (Hartsook, 1996; Sargeant, 2001a & 2001b; Sargeant & Lee, 2002 & 2004). Fundraising consultant Hartsook says that because donors "make gifts for the benefit of other people," communication materials should highlight the ultimate impact of donations in various venues. (p. 40). In a study conducted with 10,000 donors, 36% of donors quit giving to a non-profit organization because they think another cause is more deserving (Sargeant, 2001a & 2001b). Sargeant's research further demonstrated that the problem partially stems from not giving donors adequate feedback about how their donations have been used. Donors participating in follow-up focus groups suggested the need for communications "to 'show people what gets done with the money' and 'provide more information about where the money is going'" (Sargeant & Lee, 2002, p. 79)

Communicating to donors the organization's responsible use of funds (Kelly 1998, 2001) is another prerequisite for fundraising excellence. In a focus group designed to pinpoint reasons for donor lapse, donors explained "'more of the money should go to the cause,' 'stop fat cat wages to management,' and 'cut excessive costs and perks for top staff'" (Sargeant & Lee, 2002, p. 79). In a 2003 Brookings Institution report, more than 60% of donors surveyed said that they believe non-profit organizations waste money (as cited in Waters, 2006). Due to the scandals of the United Way and American Red Cross, accountability of assets has assumed even greater importance for donors (Wilhelm, 2006).

Another caveat of donor stewardship is that donors be given the choice of when and how frequently they are solicited (Seargant, 2001b). Botton Village increased the loyalty of its donors to twice that of the national average by empowering donors to choose the timing and format of communications (Seargant, 2001b). Sargeant argues that communications with donors should be "informative, courteous, timely, appealing, and convenient" (p. 189). The focus is on meeting donors' needs, not the non-profit organization, a marketing concept that tends to be overlooked among many non-profit organizations (Bruce, 1995).

In summary, recent efforts in public relations scholarship has demonstrated the link between public relations indicators of trust, satisfaction, commitment, and shared power to the attitudes and behaviors of publics, such as donors. Trust, commitment, and satisfaction are

instrumental in not only increasing donor support, but they may also be important in helping a non-profit organization to collaborate more meaningfully and effectively with donors in order to build a strong future (Hall, 2002). Literature on stewardship communication is primarily anecdotal, and the empirical research that does exist has not examined the relationship between communication tactics and long-term indicators of trust, commitment, and satisfaction. This study investigates whether persuasive, responsible, and timely communications from a non-profit organization impact perceptions of the relationship indicators of trust, commitment, and satisfaction. The following hypotheses are presented:

H1: Communications that make donors understand how their donations will help those in need and that make donors feel the assets are used wisely will predict trust, satisfaction, and commitment among donors.

H2: Communications that help stimulate donors' personal interest and that really help donors understand the mission and work will predict trust, satisfaction, and commitment among donors.

H3: Communications sent at a time that donors find to be convenient will predict trust, satisfaction, and commitment among donors.

### Methodology

Donors of a large, non-profit organization called Tarrant Area Food Bank (TAFB) represent the sampling frame for this study. Located in Fort Worth, Texas, the mission of TAFB is to reduce hunger in a 13-county area through food donations, educational programs, and partnerships with outside agencies. In existence for nearly 20 years, TAFB works with more than 290 partner charities. In the 2004-2005 year, TAFB distributed 16.3 million pounds of food—enough food for 12.5 million meals—and volunteers provided nearly 33,000 hours of work.

#### *Sampling Procedures*

The sampling frame of donors was drawn from TAFB's database in October 2005. Every donor that had made at least one financial donation since January 2005 was included. The final sampling frame contained 1,042 individual donors.

#### *Data Collection*

In late October 2005, the questionnaire, a personalized cover letter from TAFB, and an enclosed, stamped envelope were mailed to the 1,042 donors. Due to financial constraints, a follow-up reminder was not possible. A total of 275 donors returned the survey instrument, yielding a response rate of 26%.

### Measurement

The questions designed to measure relationship indicators were derived from Hon and J.E. Grunig's (1999) *Guidelines for measuring relationships in public relations*. The survey instrument measured the strength of these three relationship items: (a) commitment, (b) satisfaction, and (c) trust.

As with Hon and J.E. Grunig's (1999) scale, the questions designed to measure commitment focused on the degree to which donors believe their relationship with TAFB is worth the effort to maintain, in terms of both emotional attachment and donor behavior. Satisfaction questions sought to measure the degree of satisfaction donors have when they donate and work with TAFB. The questions on trust measured the degree to which donors think TAFB treats them fairly, the ability of TAFB to keep its promises, and the ability of TAFB to achieve its mission and goals.

Fifteen items were used to measure perceived relationship quality; six to measure trust, five for commitment, and four for satisfaction. Items were presented in random order throughout the survey. Many items were also written in reverse format. All items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale with “Strongly Agree” and “Strongly Disagree” serving as anchors.

Internal consistencies of the three relationship outcomes were investigated and found to be acceptable. Results show that the coefficient alpha for satisfaction was .77 ( $M = 24.31$ ,  $SD = 3.89$ ), the trust dimension was .93 ( $M = 37.14$ ,  $SD = 5.50$ ), and the commitment dimension was .70 ( $M = 26.37$ ,  $SD = 4.86$ ).

Questions designed to measure communications were used previously in the research of Sargeant (2001b) and Bennet and Barkensjo (2005) and are provided in Table 1.

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*Table 1 about here*

Demographic questions were measured at the end of the survey and included gender, ethnicity, income, education, and age.

#### *Data Analysis*

Three stepwise regression analyses were conducted with the variables of trust, commitment, and satisfaction as the three dependent variables. The five communication tactics listed in Table 1 served as the independent variables in each of the three models. Results are reported in Table 2.

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*Table 2 about here*

## Results

### Description of Participants

Included in the sample were 60% females and 40% males. Ninety-six percent of respondents indicated they were Caucasian, 1% said African American, 2% indicated Hispanic, and 1% indicated either Native American or other. When asked to report household income before taxes, 2% said they made less than \$15,000; 7% said between \$15,001-\$30,000; 16% indicated between \$30,001-\$50,000; 23% said between \$50,001-\$75,000; 17% indicated between \$75,001-\$100,000; and 35% said more than \$100,000. The breakdown of ages includes: 2% (25-34), 11% (35-44), 23% (45-54), 24% (55-64), and 40% (65 or more). Overall, respondents are well educated. Less than 1% have not completed high school, 7% have completed high school, 19% have completed some college, 34% have a college degree, and 39% have a graduate degree.

The overall fit of the three regression models is relatively strong: 59 percent for trust, 49 percent for commitment, and 56 percent for satisfaction. All coefficients are positive, indicating that the use of the various communications lead to higher levels of trust, commitment, and satisfaction.

Hypothesis one predicted that communications that make donors understand how their donations will help those in need and that make donors feel the assets are used wisely will predict trust, satisfaction, and commitment among donors. As demonstrated in Table 2, communications that make donors understand very clearly how their donations will help those in need explained the most variance for trust, commitment, and satisfaction. Communications that make donors feel assets are being used wisely also emerged as a significant predictor for trust and satisfaction, although not for commitment. Hypothesis one is supported.

Hypothesis two predicted that communications that help stimulate donors' personal interest and that really help donors understand the mission and work will predict trust, satisfaction, and commitment. As shown by Table 2, communications that help donors understand the mission and work of the organization was a predictor for only trust, but not for commitment or satisfaction. Communications that stimulate donors' personal interest was a significant predictor for commitment, but not trust or satisfaction. Hypothesis two is not supported.

According to hypothesis three, communications sent at a time that donors find to be convenient will predict trust, satisfaction, and commitment. Timely communication was a predictor for commitment and satisfaction, but not for trust. Hypothesis three is thus partially supported.

### Discussion

The purpose of this research study was to assess the impact of communications in building greater amounts of trust, commitment, and satisfaction. As demonstrated by the high level of variance of the three models—around fifty percent—communications make a significant difference in predicting long-term attitudes among donors. This is a significant finding. The daily efforts of public relations practitioners in showcasing their organizations' efforts in a timely, thorough, and responsible way have a direct ramification in building trust, satisfaction, and commitment. A few empirical studies (O'Neil, 2006; Waters, 2006) have already demonstrated that increased trust, satisfaction, and commitment are related to increased donor support. Although this study is unable to demonstrate causality, it certainly provides the framework for future research to test the path stemming from the significant communications, which are predictive of greater trust, satisfaction, and commitment, which, in turn, are related to larger and more frequent donations.

Communications that help donors understand how their donations will be used to help those in need is the single most important predictor for trust, commitment, and satisfaction, and reinforces prior survey and focus group research (Sargeant 2001a, 2001b; Sargeant & Lee, 2002, 2004). Public relations and fundraising practitioners should ensure that they include an explanation of how funds are used in multiple venues. Program recipients could write a personal note or make a phone call. Stories of how recipients benefited from the donations could be placed strategically in email and mail newsletters. Stories can be shared in personal conversation in many ways.

Communications that help stimulate donors' personal interest and that really help donors understand the mission and work were not consistently predictive of the three dimensions of trust, commitment, and satisfaction. Why this is so is puzzling. It may be that these communication tactics are important for motivating a person to make his/her first donation, but they do not necessarily lead to more trust, commitment, or satisfaction among active donors.

Timely communications are predictive of commitment and satisfaction, but not trust. Intuitively, this makes sense. Conveniently timed communication pieces are more representative of high quality service, something more affiliated with commitment and satisfaction, but not necessarily trust. Organizations need to assess their donors' preference regarding frequency and timing of communication (Sargeant, 2001b).

Although the study examined perceptions of relationships and communications of only one organization, the findings nonetheless contribute to the growing body of knowledge and emerging theory about organization-public relationships by demonstrating the link between

public relations tactics and long-term indicators of success. Future research might qualitatively investigate the communication needs of donors and how they relate to greater trust, satisfaction, and commitment. Future work might also extend the public relations tactics to include published media stories or speeches to ascertain their long-term impact. The proposed path analysis that maps the link between communication, relationship indicators, and behaviors represents another fruitful possibility. Efforts such as these will help public relations practitioners to better explain the value they provide in both the short and long term.

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Table 1  
Descriptive Statistics for Communications

Statements	Mean (S.D.)
TAFB's communications make me understand very clearly how my donations will help those in need. (Bennet & Barkensjo, 2005)	5.87 (1.26)
TAFB's communications stimulate my personal interest in it. (Bennet & Barkensjo)	4.83 (1.62)
TAFB's communications really help me understand its mission and work. (Bennet & Barkensjo)	5.61 (1.33)
TAFB's communications make me feel that it uses its assets wisely. (Bennet & Barkensjo)	5.74 (1.42)
TAFB writes to me at the times of the year I find most convenient. (Sargeant, 2001b)	4.8 (1.37)

Questions were measured on a 1-7 point Likert scale, with 1 meaning strongly disagree and a 7 meaning strongly agree.

Table 2  
Regression Analyses for Trust, Commitment, and Satisfaction

<i>Variables</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	<i>β</i>
Trust as the Dependent Variable $R^2 = .587$ ; $F = 57.79$ ; $p = .000$			
Shows how my donations will help those in need	1.45	0.331	.331***
Help me understand its mission and work.	1.02	0.314	.248**
Make me feel that it uses its assets wisely.	1.18	0.247	.313***
Commitment as the Dependent Variable $R^2 = .489$ ; $F = 37.92$ ; $p = .000$			
Shows how my donations will help those in need	1.45	0.331	.331***
Writes to me at times I find convenient	0.971	0.233	.273***
Communication stimulates my personal interest in TAFB	0.415	0.207	.129*
Satisfaction as the Dependent Variable $R^2 = .556$ ; $F = 54.36$ ; $p = .000$			
Shows how my donations will help those in need	1.29	0.242	.408***
Make me feel that it uses its assets wisely.	0.577	0.188	.206**
Writes to me at times I find convenient	0.362	0.17	.124*

\*\*\* $p \leq .000$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ; \* $p \leq .05$

**New Rulers Redux:  
Now That We've Been Measuring and Evaluating Blogs, Wikis and Other Computer  
Generated Media for Three Years, What Have we Learned?**

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Three years ago, measuring blogs was for most organizations just a theoretical concept. We knew how to do it, but almost no one actually did it. And even fewer people knew what to do with the data once it was collected. But then along came scandals like “Dell Hell” and the Edelman/Wall-Mart flog (fake blog) that have raised the visibility of blogs within corporate board rooms. One in three main-stream journalists rely on blogs for story ideas and to dig up dirt.<sup>1</sup> As a result, more and more companies are demanding that their PR departments monitor and measure blogs and other consumer generated media. The question remains, what do you do with the data once you have it? Many of the US’s most respected organizations are in fact using the data to help them manage their reputations and gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

This paper will review the current state of the art in CGM measurement methodologies, and provide case histories of how a three leading organizations – an oil company, a university and a computer manufacturer – are using the information to improve their positioning in the marketplace.

## **CONSUMER GENERATED EVERYTHING**

To paraphrase Ken Kesey, in today’s media environment, the inmates are now in charge of the asylum. Thanks to advances in technology that have made it incredibly easy and virtually free to create content, consumers and the media they are creating at unprecedented rates are turning both the communications and PR measurement world upside down.

More and more people, be they journalists, pundits, experts or ordinary gadflies -- are taking to the Internet to put forward their views to anyone who will listen. A new blog is created about once every two seconds. And new videos are posted to YouTube even more frequently. Most PR people envision the blogosphere as yet another new medium to address, but in fact they need to completely rethink their entire approach from “pitching” to engaging in what Shel Israel refers to as “Naked Conversations.”

Within this environment, PR researchers need to rethink their approaches as well. The normal maxim for measurement is, "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it." The problem with measuring blogs is not how to do it, but rather that the nature of blogs renders management impossible. You simply can't "manage" what 100 million independent-minded, opinionated people are going to say. And woe to those who try, since the blogosphere resembles nothing more than a cornered porcupine that will automatically begin to throw darts the moment it sees someone trying to control it.

## **FIRST QUESTION: WHAT ARE YOU MEASURING?**

The first reality is that there are two completely different tasks involved in measuring social media: Measuring the effectiveness of a corporate blog and assessing what others are saying about you in the blogosphere. The tools and techniques for measuring corporate blogs are typically financial in nature – assessing ROI, impact on sales or lead generation. Measuring the impact of consumers are saying about your brand or your in their own blog is not all that dissimilar to traditional media analysis in which you are looking at the accumulated content of many blog postings and determining trends and tendencies based on that content.

### **To measure corporate blogs:**

Like any other form of communications there are essentially three things that need to be measured:

### **Outcomes: Measuring How Blogs Affect People's Behavior and Relationships**

Outcomes are defined by the Institute for Public Relations as (1) quantifiable changes in awareness, knowledge, attitude, opinion, and behavior levels that occur as a result of a public relations program or campaign; (2) an effect, consequence, or impact of a set or program of communication activities or products, and may be either short-term (immediate) or long term.

**Financial Outcomes:** In the blogosphere, outcomes can be financial or relational. If the objective of your blog is financial -- i.e. to raise money (e.g. [www.blogforamerica.com](http://www.blogforamerica.com)) or sell something ([fastlane.gmblogs.com](http://fastlane.gmblogs.com)) -- the metrics and the math are very simple. Start with the cost of the blog -- not just the cost of the service, but also for the time spent by the writer, and anyone else that is involved in keeping the blog up to date. Use that cost to calculate the cost per click through, cost per sale, cost per lead or the cost per dollar raised. To calculate ROI, you need to determine the value of the business generated and subtract from that the cost of the blog.

If the objective is not as directly commercial, e.g. you want to move people along the purchase cycle, you can measure the number of people who click through from a blog to your site. By assigning specific and unique URLs to links, it becomes very easy to track the click-through rate from individual blogs. To determine the efficiency, divide the cost of the program with the number of clickthroughs to get cost per clickthrough.

**Relationship Outcomes:** However, if your objective is to establish or improve relationships, the metrics are quite different. The strength and power of the blogosphere is in the networks it creates and the relationships you can form.

In the traditional marketing space, we would recommend surveying customers to determine the strength of their feelings towards your brands on issues like trust, satisfaction, commitment and control mutuality. However, the nature of the blogosphere is to eschew traditional marketing techniques in favor of far more direct interactions.

That's not to say that some attempt to measure relationships shouldn't be applied. You could create a mechanism (a contest, free white paper, etc.) to capture the emails of people who follow your blog and then conduct an email survey using Drs. Jim and Larissa Grunig's relationship measurement instrument (available from [The Institute for Public Relations](http://The Institute for Public Relations)).

However, that level of direct interaction with readers and posters is not possible with the vast majority of blogs. This leaves us several indirect measures.

Simply counting the volume of conversations, comments and trackbacks is one indication of the size and scope of the network surrounding your blog. Whether or not those comments are in agreement or disagreement requires content analysis, but presumably positive or neutral

comments would be indicative of a healthy relationship between the blogger and his/her audience.

Examining the credibility and authority of the people who are commenting and/or linking to the site is another way to assess the impact and importance of your blog.

### **Outtakes: Social Capital and Social Networking measures**

According to the IPR's Dictionary of Measurement Terms, "outtakes" are: (1) measurement of what audiences have understood and/or heeded or responded to a communication product's call to seek further information from PR messages prior to measuring an outcome; (2) audience reaction to the receipt of a communication product, including favorability of the product, recall and retention of the message embedded in the product, and whether the audience heeded or responded to a call for information or action within the message.

There has been extensive research done by Robert Putnam and others on the value of social capital and social networks. In essence, for an individual, the more relationships you have, the better your life is, the longer you live and the healthier you are. For a company, good social capital means that information flows more easily, innovation and efficiency increase and legal costs go down. You can extend this concept to the networks created by blogs. If a blog is generating favorable comments, engaging employees or customers in the business of the organization, and disseminating information quickly and accurately, it is contributing to the social capital of your organization.

### **Outputs: How many people are paying attention to your blog?**

The IPR dictionary defines outputs as: (1) what is generated as a result of a PR program or campaign that impacts on a target audience or public; (2) the final stage of a communication product production process resulting in the production and dissemination of a communication product (brochure, media release, web site, speech, etc.); (3) the number of communication products or services resulting from a communication production process, the number distributed and/or the number reaching a targeted audience. Obviously the first step is to count the number of communication vehicles that have been used, i.e. emails, newsletters etc.

The next step is to check your server log files to determine how many visitors have seen those messages, how long they stayed and where they came from. Of course the term "visitors" must be taken with a grain of salt, since the technology behind determining a visitor is far from perfect, as it makes very generalized assumptions about human behavior. More sophisticated tools like ClickTracks and WebTrends provide far more data and unlike your basic log files, can display it in an understandable way.

The next level of response is the clickthrough, literally, when a visitor clicks a link that enables him/her to take action -- e.g. donate money, buy something, ask for more information, or volunteer. The percentage of visitors who take action or click through is a fundamental measure of success. More importantly, if you factor in your budget, you will determine your cost per clickthrough which can be easily compared to other Web marketing tools.

**Rankings:** There are a number of sites such as Technorati ([www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com)) and Kineda (<http://www.kineda.com/are-you-an-a-list-bloglebrity>) that rank blogs in terms of their popularity. These rankings are generally based on the number of links to your blog. Of more importance is the number of links from Mainstream Media which is a better indication of the importance and likelihood of the blog subject becoming a hot topic.

## **Measuring reputation in the blogosphere -- how to find out what other bloggers are saying about you**

### **Outcomes**

Measuring what other people's blogs are saying starts with the same basic parameters as measuring your own blog: Outcomes, Outtakes and Outputs.

There's no doubt that a mention in an A-list blog can have both financial and reputational outcomes on your organization. Just ask Dell, whose customer service problems were brought to light by a blogger and the resulting outcome was a significant drop in the company's stock price. More typically, financial outcomes take the form of increased traffic to your web site or increased leads. Reputational outcomes require a longer term integrated approach to measurement. First you need to analyze how you are discussed in blogs, and then match the reputational characteristics that are coming out in those discussions with the perceptions that your audiences and stakeholders have of your organization.

### **Outtakes**

Think of the blogosphere as one enormous focus group with customers, prospects, employees and potential employees all constantly sharing their thoughts with the world. The blogosphere gives you the opportunity to listen in on their conversations. As a result you should have a much better understanding of how your audiences are responding to your initiatives. The words shared in the blogosphere are an important source of outtake information

Content analysis of blogs should look for messages and theme to determine how your customers and constituencies perceive your organization or brand. How does the blogosphere position your brand on issues like employer of choice, value, or customer service? A good analysis will pull out recurring themes, complaints, and messages and quantify them to determine if they require action or can be ignored.

However, just reading blogs is not a substitute for a well crafted survey. A survey is better used to determine what they have internalized and are taking away from all this chatter.

### **Outputs**

While it might give you a feel good feeling to know that your brand is being mentioned with increasing frequency in the blogosphere, it would be highly dangerous to simply assume this to be good news. Edelman did a lot better when it was one of the least mentioned PR firms in the blogosphere, than when it soared to the top of everyone's most talked about list. To determine the quality as well as the quantity of the discussion about your brand requires a thorough content analysis. Does this mean slogging through 1000 blogs a day? Probably not. You can generally cut down on the number of relevant blogs by making sure you search only those blogs with high authority.

There are several firms that scrape the blogosphere on a daily basis and will send you a daily update based on a selected set of search terms. One word of caution however, only a small percentage may be relevant to you. The vast majority of conversation is teenage chatter that may or may not be relevant to your stakeholders.

As with all media old and new, one needs to look beyond just quantity of postings to the quality of the dialog; postings and comments in blogs can take many different forms. Some may be complaints about customer service, others may be speculation on stock price, and still others may be protests over personnel policies. So the next step in setting up a blog measurement system is to make a list of the various categories the postings fall into and to prioritize the

categories. Are they all equally important, or are there some that are potentially more damaging or require faster action?

In the media and in most news groups the vast majority of what is said about a particular organization is neutral. But the unfettered and unfiltered nature of the blogosphere brings more opinions and frequently more negative opinions. Remember to step back as far as you can and remain objective. Think like your target audience. Just because someone leaked a piece of information or got a name wrong is not reason to respond or get involved in a discussion.

Some standard criteria to look for include:

1. Depth of Coverage: The number of times your brand or issue is mentioned within a posting.
2. Dominance: Is the posting exclusively about your brand, does the blogger go into the subject in depth with numerous links or is it just a passing mention?
3. Subject: What was the primary topic of the blog posting?
4. Tonality: Did the blog posting leave a reader more or less likely to do business with your organization?
5. Positioning on key issues: Did the posting discuss any of the key issues facing your industry and if so, how did the blogger position your organization?
6. Nature of the posting. Was the posting designed to solve a problem, compare different brands, or simply allow the author to rant?

There are three essential things that get measured in the blogosphere: links, hits/eyeballs and sentiment. Let's talk about them individually.

### **Quantifying the data:**

There are a plethora of services that measure links and rank the importance of various blogs. My particular favorite is Feedster (which maintains a ranking of the top 500 most interesting blogs), BlogPulse, Technorati, and BlogLines all rank blogs by the number of links to each blog.

**Measuring visitors vs. eyeballs:** The biggest problem in ranking blogs is that there really is no accurate count for the number of eyeballs (or, as we call them, Opportunities to See (OTS)) that view each blog. Nielsen and Comscore are both working on panels that will monitor where people are going in the blogosphere but they are still several months away from reality. There are some statistics that show the number of visitors, but so far there's no way to exclude the visitors counted every time you or anyone else does a search, so most of those numbers are hugely overstated. We assume that each link represents at least one pair of eyeballs. How many more, we have no idea. Comscore and Nielsen Net Ratings both include blogs as part of their panels, so you can sometimes figure out eyeball rates for the major blogs, but the vast majority fall into the "too small to count" realm.

**Measuring customer feedback:** Mark Rogers of Market Sentinel has developed a "net promoter's index" that takes the number of bloggers that would recommend your brand, subtracts the number that would not recommend your brand, and comes up with an index number. It's a simple approach, and we're always big fans of simplicity. We particularly like his recommendation that you look at the index competitively. Rogers claims that there is a direct correlation between the index and sales, and we can see his point. If the number of detractors

outnumbers the number of promoters, chances are your reputation is being trashed and sales will be impacted. Just ask Dell.

### **WHAT TO DO WITH THE DATA ONCE YOU HAVE IT:**

First, take a very deep breath. Do not -- do not -- go into crisis mode the first time you get a negative comment from the blogosphere. Do a bit of research first. Read the blogger's prior postings. See how many links he/she has, how many comments, how many track backs. If it's one or two, don't do anything, but watch the numbers, if they start to grow quickly, you may have an emerging crisis. If it's already in the hundreds, and/or if this blog is on the aforementioned Feedster's top 500 list, then you need to come up with a response.

If it's not a crisis, but there is someone who is consistently writing about you, take the wait-and-see attitude. See what kinds of comments are made, and how the blogger responds. Then start a dialog. Offer information, a perspective or insight on something the blogger will find relevant.

Do not spam bloggers! Generic press releases sent to bloggers will probably get you labeled as a "junk sender" and nothing you ever send will get through. Ever again.

Woe be it to the poor marketer who makes an obvious attempt to "manage" bloggers or somehow shield their company's reputation. The blogosphere is rife with snide comments and occasional downright hostility towards marketers' blundering attempts to interject themselves into a conversation.

The most important part of any measurement program is teasing insight from the data and drawing actionable conclusions. The most important analysis is to look at trends over time. What happened yesterday or last week is important, of course, but what you need to do is to see if complaints are going up or down over time, or if your relationships are getting better or worse over time, or if the ranks of complainers is growing faster than the ranks of supporters.

### **SO DO BLOGS REALLY MATTER AND WHAT DO I REALLY NEED TO DO ABOUT THEM?**

The quick answer is "Yes and No," If your audience is limited in size, and bases its decisions on RFPs, specifications and the personal sales call, then chances are you don't need to worry too much. However, you also should be aware that that most journalists today rely on blogs for story ideas, to check facts, track down rumors, and to investigate scandals and rumors. For a more careful and comprehensive look at the problem, you need to answer the following questions:

**Who is your audience and where do they get their information?** If you are a non-profit in a non-controversial area, you might not need to worry. On the other hand, if you sell computers, cars, consumer electronics, cell phones, printers or any number of consumer items that consumers research or talk about online, you need to pay attention. If you know that your customers are going online to do research before they decide what to buy, you need to know what those customers are seeing and reading about you.

If you are still up in the air about whether or not blogs are important for you, conduct a quick poll of your audience and find out just how influential the blogosphere is. There's lots of generic research out there, but most organizations would be better off surveying their own customers to find out just how big an impact consumer generated media blogosphere has. If there is definitely no clear tie between your organization's goals and the blogosphere, then exit out of

this article immediately and go learn about measuring more relevant media. (As in any communications activity, if it doesn't support a specific corporate goal, why are you doing it?)

On the other hand, if developing a network of influencers around your product, your idea or your service is important, then a blog will be a very useful tool.

Once you've answered these questions, you can move on to deciding how and what you want to measure

## **CASE STUDIES**

Many organizations both large and small are currently using CGM analysis to determine the impact on their reputation, as well as to identify opportunities for improvement.

A leading research university compared their MSM coverage with the topics on which they were discussed in CGM and determined that there were numerous topics that bloggers were enthusiastic about that weren't being covered in MSM. By analyzing the blogs, they were able to identify a number of hot topics that they could then pitch to main stream journalists.

A leading high technology company is using a competitive CGM analysis to determine customer response to their announcements as well as to identify areas where competitors are weak that might provide an opportunity for them.

A consumer electronics company compares CGM and MSM coverage to determine the effectiveness of their communications outreach efforts. By closely monitoring CGM in the two weeks after an announcement, they can gauge customer reaction. They were also able to determine how consumers were responding to a lawsuit.

A major oil company uses CGM analysis to determine how effective their outreach efforts are in calming environmental critics. By measuring response to and comments on their blog, they have a clear understanding of how people are responding.

A private conglomerate monitors CGM to determine whether the founder's family name and the corporate brand, which happens to be the same, are impacted by positions that family members take and take steps to correct problems before they become crises.

The lesson learned is that CGM measurement, once the exclusive province of a few early adopters, is growing in importance across all industries and types of organizations.

## **ENDNOTE**

<sup>1</sup> Euro RSCG Magnet. (2005, June 20). Great Thoughts: Turning Information Into Knowledge. Retrieved October 26, 2006, from [http://www.magnet.com/index.php?s=\\_thought](http://www.magnet.com/index.php?s=_thought)

**Crisis and Risk Communication:  
A Meta-Analysis of Symbiotic Research Streams**

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Crisis and risk communication are integrable functions. This project is in the initial stages of a meta-analysis of crisis and risk communication literature to identify and explicate symbiotic issues and research streams. Key uniting issues and research streams include: managing ambiguity, culture, narrative enactment, consumption of risk and responsible advocacy.

Risk and crisis are a part of everyday existence in a modern, industrialized society. Contemporary risks and crises mirror the increasing complexity and expansion of products and services and the ability to produce those products and services, which risk and crisis communication practitioners and researchers are challenged to manage. Indeed as Mary Douglas (1992) has argued, society is structured for the cooperative management of risk and by extension the cooperative management of crisis.

While there are many arguments about what constitutes public relations, it is clear that risk and crisis communication management are key elements and integrable functions within public relations. While numerous researchers (e.g., Coombs, Heath, Lerbinger) have discussed the interconnectedness of risk and crisis, no book-length systematic and integrated reviews of the histories of the two communication fields addressing their symbiotic research streams and implications on society has been published. With that in mind, the purpose of this paper is to initiate conducting a meta-analysis of the risk and crisis communication management literature in order to identify and explicate symbiotic issues and research streams. Five significant research streams that have so far been identified up to this stage in the research project include: managing ambiguity, managing culture, narrative enactment, the modern consumption of risk and responsible advocacy.

Six implications of this meta-analysis for public relations include: 1) a relationship to issues management, which argues that along with crisis and risk these public relations functions may be the three-pronged strategic infrastructure of public relations of which to unite a common definition and purpose; 2) psychometric variables uncertainty reduction, control and trust are crucial elements toward risk and crisis events that constitute a rhetorical exigency; 3) critical importance of a strong, smart defense and an opportunistic offense; 4) strategic management plans and specialized message development and response models can guide researchers future direction and practitioners' everyday challenges; 5) critical understanding of socially constructed perceptions of product, service and issues is foundational to identifying, understanding and communicating with key stakeholders; and 6) both processes are eclectic and require the integration of knowledge from a wide variety of fields, including interpersonal and organizational communication, risk management, risk assessment, evaluation methods, relationship management, environmental scanning, issues management, anthropology, psychology and social psychology.

## CRISIS COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT

How individuals and groups define social reality affects understanding and interpretation of experiences. Thus, to interpret media-covered crisis events, an understanding of a crisis and crisis communication management is required. While there are numerous definitions of a crisis from a variety of academic fields, within the public relations literature Coombs (1999) defined a crisis “as an event that is an unpredictable, major threat that can have a negative effect on the organization, industry, or stakeholders if handled improperly. A crisis is unpredictable but not unexpected” (p. 2). Guth (1995) stated that a “crisis has, in many respects, been subject to the level of same ambiguity as the term art. While one person’s trash may be viewed as another person’s treasure, one person’s incident is often viewed as another’s crisis (p. 125).

Additional crisis definitions include: “an event that brings, or has the potential for bringing, an organization into disrepute and imperils its future profitability, growth, and possibly, its very survival” (Lerbinger, 1997, p. 4), and “a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly” (Pearson & Clair, 1998, p. 60).

Other definitions provide additional elements such as a focus on publicity (Irvine, 1997), time compression (Lerbinger, 1997), uncertainty (Dutton, 1986; Lerbinger, 1997) and reputation (Fearn-Banks, 1996). Irvine (1997) distinguished two basic types of crisis: sudden (unexpected) and smoldering (ongoing problems), with additional typing of perceptual and bizarre crises. For the first-stage in this literature meta-analysis research project, a crisis is defined as a significant issue or event, which is sometimes predictable yet unexpected but ultimately inevitable, that has the ability – perceived, potential or realized – to damage or terminate an organization’s ability to functionally or effectively operate in their socio-economic-political-legal environment regarding production, services, products and reputation, which is typically characterized by substantial media coverage.

Lerbinger (1997) noted three classes of crises – of the physical world, of the human climate, and of management failure. Coombs (1999) included technical breakdowns in his typology of crisis types. These perspectives can be categorized as modern organizational crises that are part of “normal accidents theory.” Normal accidents theory is a school of thought that suggests that serious accidents with complex high technology systems are inevitable (Sagan, 1993). Perrow (1977) argued in his seminal essay that academic theorists suggest organizational models that are more rationale and effective than in reality (in terms of accidents). Such studies are:

More likely to reveal what most managers know but social scientists cannot afford to acknowledge, namely that complex social systems are greatly influenced by sheer chance, accident, and luck; that most decisions are very ambiguous, preference orderings are incoherent and unstable, efforts at communication and understanding are often ineffective, subsystems are very loosely connected, and most attempts at social control are clumsy and unpredictable. (p. 207)

Perrow (1984) suggested that serious accidents are inevitable no matter how hard organizations try to avoid them, especially related to hazardous systems such as commercial airlines, nuclear power plants, shipping and transportation, and the petrochemical industry. From the genome project to the International Space Station, organizations are increasingly operating in a complex and intimately linked society. “The incidence and severity of crisis is rising with the

complexity of technology and society. Fewer crises remain unpublicized as the number of society's watchdogs increases" (Lerbinger, 1997, p. 16). Overall, the increasing media coverage of hazardous incidents and related risks over the past two decades (Lichtenberg & MacLean, 1991) has increased the prominence of crisis management.

Some crisis management studies and prescriptions take an information-based approach that features a source, with scientific or managerial credentials, which offers a variety of approaches to dealing with crises. Such prescriptions do not incorporate issues of conflict and negotiation, or see the crisis from the perspective of concerned members of the community who believe they have reason not to trust any statement regarding the crisis situation.

Numerous definitions of crisis management exist, based on a variety of interpretations such as systems, management, economics, psychology, sociology, process or typologies to name a few. Fitzpatrick (1998) defined it as the process of anticipating and preparing for unexpected occurrences that can damage an organization's reputation with key stakeholders and influence the organization's survival. Fearn-Banks (1996) defined crisis management as "a process of strategic planning for a crisis or negative turning point, a process that removes some of the risk and uncertainty from the negative occurrence and thereby allows the organization to be in greater control of its own destiny" (p. 2).

Much of the traditional crisis management literature descriptively highlights the value of developing, implementing and maintaining a crisis management plan (Penrose, 2000). Crisis management plans are advocated to guide organizations during times of crisis. The crisis management plan or crisis communication plan are both considered primary tools of the field, to prepare for or follow when a crisis occurs. Fearn-Banks (1996) described it as "providing a functionally collective brain for all persons involved in a crisis, persons who may not operate at normal capacity due to the shock or emotions or the crisis event" (p. 7).

However, an unlimited amount and variety of crisis situations make a specific or paradigmatic guiding principle of crisis management nearly impossible (Burnett, 1998). Several problems persist in the development of these manuals, including providing a false sense of security, rarely a living document that is updated, lack of a temporal context and filled with irrelevant information (Pearson, Clair, Misra and Mitroff, 1997).

A spokesperson(s) is a critical element of crisis management plan. The spokesperson is often the perceived representation of the organization during a crisis or the voice of the organization during a crisis (Coombs, 1999). The spokesperson's main responsibility is an accurate and consistent organizational message (Carney & Jordan, 1993). Researchers and practitioners have thoroughly addressed tasks, functions, roles and technical communication delivery skills. Coombs (1999) provided a thorough list of task statements, knowledge and skills, addressing the role of organizational culture among the numerous crisis communication attributes.

Organizations communicate with key stakeholders prior to, throughout, and following a crisis. The essential role of crisis communications is to affect the public opinion process (Fearn-Banks, 1996). Part of affecting the public opinion process is getting key cultural message points about the organization, which are or should be imbedded in organizational mission statements.

Grunig and Repper (1992) identified characteristics of excellent public relations programs, and by extension excellent crisis management programs. One key element is that public relations is more likely to be excellent when it is an integral part of an organization's overall strategic management process. Part of that strategy is the development and use of mission statements to guide organization's actions and behaviors. As such, basic elements or key points

of mission statements should be detectable in key messages that crisis communicators use in communicating with key internal and external stakeholders before, during and following a crisis issue or event. As such, these key mission statement elements should be detectable in crisis media coverage to various extents.

Coombs (2005b) summarized many of these elements when he stated that while a crisis is unpredictable it can often be expected, has the ability to disrupt organizations' operations, and can threaten the organization, industry, or stakeholder. As such, when crisis is assessed from an organizational perspective, as with crisis management, the primary goal is to decrease damage inflicted by the crisis. Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer (1998) claimed that organizational crisis is comprised of several phases including a pre-crisis stage, before the crisis actually begins; an acute crisis stage, immediately following a dramatic event; and a postcrisis stage, when an organization must respond to the crisis. These responses are broadly defined as crisis communication. Coombs (2005a) addressed the need for crisis communication to serve the need for collecting and disseminating accurate information during a crisis while also repairing relationships with stakeholders.

A brief review of crisis communication management literature demonstrated a number of scholars and practitioners studying culture within crisis management (e.g., Fearn-Banks, 1996; Meng, 1992). Pearson and Clair's (1998) framework toward crisis management focused on psychological, social-political and technological-structural assumptions, and discussed cultural concerns as an element in "reframing crisis management." They defined organizational crisis management as "a systematic attempt by organizational members with external stakeholders to avert crises or to effectively manage those that do occur" (p. 61). The strength of this perspective lies in the sociopolitical view of crisis, which argues that "crises arises from a breakdown in shared meaning, legitimization and institutionalization of socially constructed relationships" (p. 63), core elements of culture as defined by many scholars (e.g., Douglas, 1992; Heath, 1997; Morgan, 1997). Pearson, Clair, Mirsa and Mitroff's (1997) work supported the concept of culture as an integral and maybe overarching aspect, of crisis management.

Pearson and Clair (1998) identified three social-political perspectives that provide a cultural understanding of crisis situations: (1) all crises share in common a breakdown in the social construction of reality, (2) organizations are likely to experience a crisis regarding cultural norms following a triggering event, and (3) internal members are likely to question their organizations' cultural beliefs. They also included beliefs and values (thus culture) in their definition of organizational crisis and crisis management.

Marra (1998) argued that more is required than a checklist of prescriptive advice for managing crisis situations, though these lists are critical for the development of best practices and descriptive research within crisis management. Marra found that the underlying culture of organizations is also a critical component of effective best practices in preparing for and during a crisis situation. Overall, crisis management is an organizational state of mind that should guide institutional thinking (Pearson, Clair, Misra & Mitroff, 1997). "In best cases, organizations facing crisis situations are guided by values that are deeply ingrained in their cultures" (pp. 52-53).

## RISK COMMUNICATION

The literature distinguishes two types of risk communication. One form centers on an individual whose medical history and/or personal health practice puts him or her at risk. This category of risk communication and the appropriate risk responses it seeks start with experts who determine health/safety related risks and suggest ways in which people can alter their awareness,

knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors to lead a more healthy and less risky lifestyle. Typical strategies include informing and persuading targeted audiences to adopt attitudes and take actions that reduce their risk or the risk of persons close to them. Typical tactics of this version of risk communication can include recommended diet guidelines, safe sex education materials, and buckle up for safety public education campaigns.

The assumption is that people often tend to underestimate the level of risk associated with their behavior. Once they realize that level of risk and know what to do to reduce it by changing awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, they will do so at the recommendation of risk management experts, such as physicians and public health officers. Such a statement captures the essence of that form of risk communication even if it over simplifies the challenge. In this case, risk communication is used to inform such people of the risks they take and to suggest preventative measures they can follow to reduce the risks to their health and safety.

The second kind of risk communication typically involves large organizations, such as chemical manufacturing facilities or nuclear waste remediation facilities, whose activities can pose a risk to community residents. Companies and governmental agencies attempt to share information provided through credible sources to interested stakeholders. Activism may result when stakeholders band together to pressure companies and governmental agencies into improved performance that reduces risk. The paradigm is to address and often allay the apprehensions and provide information to people who under-estimate or over-estimate the degree to which they are at risk because of what an industrial interest or governmental agency does or says. Communication based on this shared, social relations-community infrastructural approach works to achieve a level of discourse that can treat the content issues of the risk – technical assessment – and the quality of the relationships, as well as the political dynamics of the participants.

Early on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established risk communication as a means to open, responsible, informed, reasonable, scientific and value-laden discussion of risks associated with personal health and safety practices involved in living and working in close proximity to harmful activities and toxic substances (National Research Council, 1989). Dialogue about risk is a community infrastructure, transactional communication process among individuals and organizations regarding the character, cause, degree, significance, uncertainty, control and overall perception of a risk. The function of risk communication is to understand and appreciate stakeholders' concerns related to risks generated by organizations, engage in dialogue to address differences and concerns, carry out appropriate actions that can reduce perceived risks, and create a climate of participatory and effective discourse (Palenchar, 2005).

Disciplines do not agree and often assume substantially different interpretive approaches to risks. Althaus (2005) offered a provocative comparative analysis of the disciplines approach to risks by starting with “economic conceptualizations that distinguish risk from uncertainty and argue that risk is an ordered application of knowledge to the unknown” (p. 567). As such this review considered “each of the disciplines as having a particular knowledge approach with which they confront the unknown so as to order its randomness and convert it into a risk proposition” (p. 567). Rather than suggesting that one discipline's approach is superior to others, she reasoned that the various disciplines should work in concert to bring to bear on risk perception and interpretation the best each has to offer. This is an epistemological view of risk perception than “places the personal decision maker at the center of attention, forcing analysis to concentrate on the nature of uncertainty and the available knowledge that is brought to bear on

this uncertainty” (p. 567). Accordingly, each discipline is an epistemological system that focuses on risk matters with a unique set of bifocals and varying interpretive screens.

Five dimensions of risk are recognized from this epistemological approach. Each may vary because of heuristics and assumptions of each discipline. These dimensions are subjective risk, objective risk, real risk, observed risk and perceived risk (Althaus, 2005). Among the social sciences, anthropology views risk as a cultural phenomenon, sociology a societal phenomenon, economics a decisional phenomenon related to a means of securing wealth or avoiding loss, law as a fault of conduct and a judicable phenomenon, psychology as a behavioral and cognitive phenomenon, linguistics as a concept, history as a story, arts as a n emotional phenomenon, religion as an act of faith, and philosophy as a problematic phenomenon. Risk communication is also grounded in various other academic and applied orientations, including: actuarial approach utilizing statistical predictions, a toxological and epidemiological approach, an engineering approach including probabilistic risk assessments, and cultural and social theories of risk (see Althaus, 2005; Renn, 1992).

Summarizing these numerous view, Renn (1992) concluded that risk communication has evolved from at least three separate streams of thought to guide the way risks are calculated, evaluated and controlled: (1) scientific positivism, whereby data and methodologies of scientists dominate community efforts to ascertain the degree of risk and subsequent communications about the risk on behalf of the community; (2) constructivism/ relativism, which assumes that everyone's opinions have equal value so that no opinion is better or worse than anyone else's; and (3) dialogue, that through collaborative decision-making, scientific opinion becomes integrated into policies which are vetted by key publics' values. Such review “demonstrates that each discipline brings its own knowledge form to its understanding of risk” (Althaus, 2005, p. 580).

One common element of legal instruments, regulatory mechanisms and epistemological approaches to risk management is communication based on community-right-to-know initiatives. “Empowering the public with information helps assure [industry] compliance with existing laws and encourages companies to take additional measures to reduce industrial chemical releases” (EPA, 1997, p. 3). For example, the Superfund Amendment Reauthorization Act of 1986 (SARA), Title III, Section 313, requires companies to share information with the public concerning chemical emissions.

These laws and regulations, which were created by the U.S. Congress along with an array of city, county, state and federal governmental agencies as well as private industry, are intended to minimize the likelihood and consequences of catastrophic chemical and other manufacturing accidents. They are in part a response to a lack of oversight and a series of large chemical accidents in the United States and India during the 1980s (Belke, 2000). By 1986, 30 states or cities had some form of community-right-to-know requirements (Hearne, 1996), and every state presently has some community-right-to-know requirements, whether industry or government mandated.

Leiss (1996), having written extensively on the history of modern risk communication, described three eras of the field beginning with a source-oriented approach and ending with the present approach of communication that is based on shared, social relations. Along those lines, one of the most prolific lines of risk communication research involved residents living near risk environments and the concern that they rely on invalid assumptions of risk. Fischhoff, Slovic, Lichtenstein, Read and Combs (1978; Covello, 1983; Slovic, 1987), among others, initiated "expressed preference" research that involved measuring a wider array of attitudes than benefits to ascertain tolerable risk levels. The researchers found laypeople's risk ratings, unlike those of

experts, are not simply influenced by fatality estimates. Differences in judgments were affected by numerous qualitative factors such as relationships to other risk bearers, familiarity, uncontrollable or controlled by others, dread, acute, fatal, undetectable and artificial.

As such, there is no single psychology or sociology of risks. Risks are not necessarily selected and perceived due to their scientific merit or personal benefit, but out of a combination of social and cultural factors. Hadden (1989) observed crucial differences between what she defined as the old and new versions of risk communication. In the old approach "experts tried to persuade laymen of the validity of their risk assessments or risk decisions." This option is "impeded by lay risk perception, difficulties in understanding probabilities, and the sheer technical difficulty of the subject matter" (p. 301). In contrast, the new approach is based on dialogue and participation. In contrast, the new approach is based on dialogue, social relations and participation. According to Otway (1992), "Risk communication requirements are a political response to popular demands.... The main product of risk communication is not information, but the quality of the social relationship it supports" (p. 227). Strategic risk communication highlights the importance of a dialogic, relationship-building approach to addressing the concerns and perceptions of community residents and employees, and one of the keys to success is community-right-to-know initiatives.

#### METHODOLOGY

The authors are in the first stage of conducting a meta-analysis of the literature relating to risk communication management and crisis communication management. Primary collected materials include peer-reviewed journal articles. In addition, books, book chapters within edited books, non-peer reviewed journal articles, academic and professional conference papers, and trace journals are also being analyzed. Though no time frame was structured for this meta-analysis, both risk communication and crisis communication studies have exploded primarily during the past 30 years, and as such this first paper is more of an exploratory attempt to organize and categorize the contemporary literature into some early dominant research streams that will continue to develop, as opposed to a historical development of the field, though that is ultimately the overarching goal of the project.

#### RESEARCH STREAMS

With that in mind, the purpose of this paper is to start conducting a meta-analysis of the risk and crisis communication management literature in order to identify and explicate symbiotic issues and research streams. Five significant symbiotic research streams that have been identified up to this stage include: managing ambiguity, the role of culture, narrative enactment, the modern consumption of risk and responsible advocacy.

##### *Managing Ambiguity*

Aristotle (trans. 1932), in discussing *enthymene*, suggested that people do not have to deliberate upon which is certain. "No human action, so to speak, is inevitable" (p. 12). Rather, men have to deliberate upon what is uncertain, and on which their judgments are based no more than probabilities. The very nature of risk and crisis prohibits absolute definitions and knowledge.

The process of creating order has a tension that is a paradoxical process, that everyday life is constructed and deconstructed – as people make their way through this process they are maintaining and creating simultaneously. The artifacts, of which humans create, such as mission statements for organizations, are both catalysts and commodities that mediate these tensions in

the process of creating order. As such, it would benefit both risk- and crisis-generating organizations, and stakeholders who bear the risk and crisis, to acknowledge the uncertainty in risk and crisis assessments; do not trivialize this uncertainty but use it as an incentive for constantly seeking better answers to the questions raised by stakeholders and stakeholders.

A common definition of ambiguity is from the relativist view of meaning. This perspective is critical of the idea of logical empiricism (Rorty, 1979), rejecting the notion that an objective world is out there, waiting to be discovered. If no objective reality exists, the idea of literal language does not exist either, and then all language is seen as fundamentally contextual – created by individuals, in this case as part of the risk or crisis environment. According to this philosophy of ambiguity, language, perception and knowledge are interdependent – that the mind may not necessarily encompass a philosophical view about knowledge as something based on a “correct” theory. According to Rorty, there is no solution but only process. “It is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions” (p. 12).

Ambiguity plays an important role in organizations. It promotes unified diversity, facilitates organizational change, amplifies existing source attributes and preserves privileged positions (Eisenberg, 1984). Morgan, Frost and Pondy (1983) theoretical framework reflected a general willingness to accept the notion that organizational members strategically use indistinct symbols to accomplish goals. The explicit use of symbols, according to Eisenberg (1984), is a cultural assumption and not a linguistic imperative. “A culture viewed from an ambiguity paradigm perspective cannot be characterized as harmonious or as conflictual. Instead, individuals share some viewpoints, disagree about some, and are ignorant or indifferent to others” (Martin & Meyerson, 1988, p. 117).

Putnam and Sorenson (1982) suggested that oblique characteristics are present in all organizations, and the way individuals interpret and process this ambiguity is a key to understanding how organizations make sense of their activities. Part of that sense making is a fundamental role of risk and crisis communication. This vagueness, according to Putnam and Sorenson (1982) evokes multiple meanings that demonstrate that organizations should...

Emphasize process rather than clarity or perceptual distortion of messages. In particular, it demonstrates that organizational members process messages by selecting interpretations, by choosing rationale for acting upon messages, and by selecting communication cycles to channel these interpretations. Organizations should process highly equivocal information by increasing the number of plausible interpretations, by decreasing rules and regulations for handling the message, and by increasing the amount of interaction (p. 130).

Pervasive organizational ambiguity makes it difficult for management, such as problematic reliability of information, difficulty of finding specific problems, different value orientations that lead to political and emotional clashes inside and outside the organization, contradictions and paradoxes, and the utilization of symbols and metaphors for compromise, negotiation or to advance a position (McCaskey, 1988).

Lerbinger (1997) astutely noted that the stability and predictability sought by organizations regarding crisis and risk is increasingly difficult to attain. Correctly calling for an integrated approach to managerial problem solving, he suggested that a wide range of factors be considered, including economic, social, political, and environmental (along with real and potential stakeholders’ involvement).

Driskill and Goldstein (1986) defined uncertainty “as the perceived lack of information, knowledge, beliefs and feeling necessary for accomplishing organizational tasks” (p. 41). In this

vein, Albrecht (1988) defined uncertainty as the lack of attribution confidence about cause-effect patterns. Uncertainty motivates information seeking because it is uncomfortable. Using that principle, uncertainty reduction theory explains the human incentive to seek information (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Publics want information to reduce their uncertainties about the subjects under consideration and about the people who are creating those uncertainties. As the field of crisis and risk communication management evolves as part of the study of public relations, the field fundamentally remains a communication discipline functioning to reduce uncertainty in problematic situations, and that symbols and language are an integral part of the analysis of effectiveness and the development of future tenets and strategies.

In an interesting and ironic twist to those who suggest that organizations do all they can to eliminate ambiguity (e.g., Lerbinger, 1997), this too may actually add to the uncertainty. Kaufman (1985) argued that one reason organizations are not static is because they dislike uncertainty and try to eliminate it. But in the course of their efforts to eliminate uncertainty, they are causing changes, which ultimately will cause more uncertainty. Symbols are used to help people within the organization understand these changes (crisis), and if these symbols are ambiguous, then the very nature of organizations trying to eliminate risk or crisis ambiguity would ultimately create more uncertainty and change.

Crisis and risk communication scholars cannot disregard the increased role and use of ambiguous symbols. Ambiguity contributes to normal interaction, is not deviational and is one of the most dramatic aspects of organizations. These ambiguous instances of communication are those occurrences of communication that most influence people's lives (Brahnam, 1980).

#### *Culture*

Public relations can contribute and guide organizations in the understanding of and the relationship management of multiple cultures (Heath, 1994). In a similar vein, risk and crisis communication management can be viewed as the understanding of and building and maintaining of relationships of multiple cultures before, during and after a crisis. This view of risk and crisis communication management presumes that each society and each stakeholder – and within each are subcultures – develop a unique culture that reflects its view of what is and ought to be (Barnes, 1988). The culture of each group influences how it and society evaluates commercial and non-profit activities and governmental policies. How each organization forms and implements strategic crisis and risk management policy reflects that culture. How each organization communicates when addressing a risk or during a crisis with each key public – internal or external – reflects its culture and should be sensitive to the culture of each public (Sriramesh, Grunig, & Buffington, 1992).

Part of proactive communication management, according to public relations best practices, includes utilizing organizational mission statements to guide the thoughts, actions and responses – culture embedded in communication – during times of risk or a crisis. Cultures of each enterprise and any public may collide. With effective risk and crisis communication management, organizations can reduce cultural strains and thereby work to build positive and possibly beneficial relationships with key publics.

#### *Narrative Enactment*

Communities of risk can be considered a battleground in the marketplace of attitudes, opinions, ideas and perceptions over the distribution of resources. In this battleground, society is the collective enactment of that discussion via narratives (in harmony, in conflict, that build conflict) as shared meaning made public through voices in unified competition (Heath, 1994).

Some communication scholars regard narrative as the paradigm of all communication (Fisher, 1985a). People think and act in terms of narratives. Narrative form and content connect and give meaning to events. Narrative functions represent a universal medium of human consciousness (Lucaites & Condit, 1985) or a metacode for transactional transmission of messages about shared reality (White, 1981).

Narrative theory, devised by Fisher (1984, 1985a, 1985b), adds depth to the view that people enact their lives as actors in an undirected play (Pearce & Cronen, 1980; Cronen, Pearce, & Harris, 1982). Through narratives, people structure their experiences and actions. Narratives express a set of preferences, the values of the persons who ascribe to those narratives, and the ability to create and share a variety of social realities. In essence, the primary purpose of rhetorical narrative is to advocate something beyond itself, demonstrating the value for exploring narrative in the evolution of social and political consequences (Fisher, 1985b).

Aristotle pointed out that people do not necessarily experience organizations, but rather they experience the communication organizations utilize to explain their actions and the communication about organizations (Elwood, 1995). People, especially in more economic-based countries, have become accustomed to companies speaking as individuals, sharing their thoughts and perspectives on a range of issues, and not just those pertaining particularly to their company's or industry's core job functions. For example, chemical companies often voice their opinions about community affairs in which their plants are situated. A rhetorical view within risk communication perceives that it is a form of social influence, a view that treats persuasion as an interactive, dialogic process whereby points of views are contested in public and socially constructed. Knowing the common narratives of a group, organization or society allows risk communicators the framework for scanning, analyzing, identifying and monitoring community residents' perceptions, as well as participating in share dialogue and decision making, on issues and concerns related to living near chemical manufacturing facilities.

Quintilian (trans. 1966) noted, "For we must state our facts like advocates, not witnesses" (p. 109). Fisher (1985b) argued that the unities of direction and purpose combine to form discourse dependency. In this sense, rhetorical narrative is not complete and self-sufficient textually. The claim supported by rhetorical narrative must be articulated outside of the narration as part of a whole and changing world:

Because the speaker in a rhetorical situation always seeks material gain in some measure, he or she is literally invested in the outcome of the rhetorical process and is therefore expected by an audience to assert and accept responsibility for the power and veracity of the narratives that are featured in discourse. (p. 100)

Risk and crisis communication practitioners are the voice of this articulation outside of the narration. This view essentially supports Aristotle's (trans. 1932) contention that investigation of public discourse cannot be separated from the role of discourse in society.

Power is exercised by the groups who are able to frame their interests as those of other groups. In the time of uncertainty or ambiguity – such as risk or crisis situations – the interpretations or narratives offered to frame and explain this uncertainty favor those of the strategic communicators and their associated groups. Narratives are used to create, maintain and continue the interpretation and stabilizing the distribution of power within a society. In the marketplace of ideas there are many different stories interpreting any one event. The acceptance of one narrative or interpretation leads to the elimination or muting of the alternatives. Within crisis communication, this is often considered filling the crisis communication void. This in turn

also leads to the conclusion that a group can rise to power when its interpretations or narratives are accepted in the wrangle on the marketplace of ideas (Heath, 1994).

Within this dialogue and contest, words have propositional values (Burke, 1966) and the selection of those terms affects how information is considered, accepted, acted upon or altered – fundamental roles of risk communication. For example, the Texas City explosion on April 16, 1947, is an iconic narrative for residents along the Houston Ship Channel. Mention “the explosion” and everyone knows exactly what you are talking about, the loss of life, the community and industry destruction, the changes in legislation and enforcement of transportation codes, and the sense of risk that still resides in the local communities. Narratives are a way of ordering the events of the world during a period of heightened risk or crisis that would otherwise seem unpredictable or incoherent.

#### *Consumption of Risk*

Life hazards, and the collective management of those hazards, reflect industrialized and information-based societies increasing consumption of and continuous expansion of products and services. For better or for worse, the production and consumption of such risks have become equally if not more important than the production and consumption of goods and services (Beck, 1992) and that the emergence of the powerful consumer and the critical public is a symptom of the emergence of the risk society (Jones, 2002). Human decisions occur in a realm characterized by risk management due to the uncertainties that characterize human existence (2002; Palenchar & Heath, 2002). Part of these risk characteristics, especially concerning chemical manufacturing facilities, includes political and ecological destruction, human health impacts, poverty and corruption, and security arrangement and human rights abuses

In this context, public relations discussions center on risk and crisis communication management. People who are negatively affected by organizations are neither spurious nor false in their reasons and desires to be safe and healthy; they are and should be sensitive to the fairness and equality of risk distribution and the resulting environmental and aesthetic implications. These are among the numerous motivators people use when deciding whether a problem exists that affects them and deserves their attention, including the option of making personal responses or collaboratively seeking collective solutions by engaging in public policy struggles (Singer & Endreny, 1987). Risks and crises thus are embedded within and shaped by social relations and the continual tacit negotiation of our social identities (Wynne, 1992). These motivators and social relations, among others, have been at the forefront of public debates regarding risk and crisis and the development of the field of risk and crisis communication management during the past three decades.

#### *Responsible Advocacy*

Numerous researchers have noted a decline in the public’s confidence in the ability of government and industry to act responsibly in risk assessment and risk management (e.g., Palenchar & Heath, 2006; Juanillo & Scherer, 1995; Leighton, Roht-Arriaza & Zarsky, 2002). Similar lines of research have been identified in the crisis communication literature. This lack of confidence has created a public that is no longer the passive receiver of risk and crisis information. Large segments of the public now demand more involvement in debates over risk issues and challenge conclusions and recommendations from scientists and experts. Members of the lay public want to be a part of the risk and crisis communication process, but often have difficulty understanding risk messages, participating in discourse and trusting information sources, gaining access to decision makers, perceiving a lack of internal and external control over risks and crises, and lack an overall awareness of communication protocols (Palenchar &

Heath, 2002). Addressing these and other shortcomings, the following responsible advocacy guidelines have been posited within the context of strategic risk and crisis communication to guide ethical choices and strategic actions by public relations and risk and crisis communication practitioners, scholars and students (Palenchar & Heath, 2006, p. 140):

- Work with community residents to develop and use emergency response measures that can mitigate severe outcomes in the event of a risk event.
- Acknowledge the desires of, research into and appreciate the depths on the part of stakeholders to exert control over factors they perceive to have a negative effect.
- Work with community members to effectively participate in decision-making systems that they are a constructive part of the risk assessment and risk management process.
- Feature legitimate benefits while acknowledging harms in communications, but do not assume that all persons' decision heuristics or values lead them to the same weightings of risk harms and benefits.
- Recognize the value laden, personalized decision process community residents apply and frame the risk assessment accordingly.

### CONCLUSION

At the core of this literature review is Quintilian's (1951) principle of the good person communicating well as a foundation for fostering enlightened choices through dialogue in the public sphere. Each organization should strive to communicate to satisfy the interests of key markets, audiences, and publics that strive to manage personal and public resources, make personal and sociopolitical decisions, and form strong and beneficial relationships.

Quintilian (1951) considered social values to be an implicit or explicit part of each statement. The quality of discourse (risk and crisis communication campaigns) is inseparable from the character of the person who or organization that chooses the side of an issue as well as the form and substance with which to address it. As such, a "bad" organization can not communicate effectively or well for the long haul regarding risk or crisis. Eventually either the falseness of the arguments made or the unethical ends to which the organization works and communicates will be its undoing; it will be found out and discredited.

Risk and crisis communication can work to empower relevant publics by helping them to address issues such as health, safety and the environment. Organizations find reason to implement risk and crisis communication programs as a means for lessening the fear of the threatening unknown and of increasing trust. To do so requires that the companies evidence public interest in how they operate and communicate.

All of the risk and crisis communication efforts, both collective and individual, throughout history have often been easier to image and create than to implement successfully. Risk and crisis communication practitioners need to be certain that the overall objectives are not just to gain additional support for the risk- and crisis-generating organization, but rather a constructive dialogue that legitimately addresses risk and crisis assessment, abatement, policy and communication.

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**Consumer Health Crisis Management for the For-Profit Organization:  
Dealing with Public's Perception of Apple's Responsibility for iPod-related Hearing Loss**

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This study content-analyzed Apple's lawsuit concerning potential hearing loss, exploring how for-profit organizations manage health-related crises when products are suspected of adversely affecting consumer health. This study found that the greater the severity of the media portrayal, the more the people quoted in news coverage mention organizations' responsibility for crises.

On January 31, 2006, Apple was faced with a lawsuit in the United States over an argument concerning hearing loss that could be caused by its iPod headphones. John Patterson of Louisiana, who filed this federal lawsuit against Apple in the U.S. District Court in California, claimed that his iPod had dangerously high volume settings without sufficient warnings, and that the design of its white earbud headphones exacerbated the inherent risks. Unfortunately for Apple, this legal action came just weeks after the company announced the highest sales figures in its history. Subsequent worries were aired by Who guitarist Pete Townshend on his website in December, which warned the users of iPods and other MP3 players of "terrible trouble ahead." Not only did Patterson look for compensation, but also he wanted more prominent warnings to be displayed on the device, to upgrade software to restrict the volume to 100 decibels, and to better modify noise-canceling earbuds to protect users' hearing.

Interestingly, the suit did not note whether Patterson suffered hearing loss from the iPods that he purchased in 2005, and he did not even know whether the device had damaged his hearing. However, his attorney, Steve W. Berman of Seattle, Washington, argued that actual hearing loss was beside the point of the lawsuit. The potential of the player to cause irreparable hearing loss would be issue enough to fully pursue legal action. It is interesting to note that the iPod is not any louder than other MP3 players on loudness tests, and warnings from other companies are very similar or even less informative than the ones from Apple's iPod.

Furthermore, Apple had different regulations in European Union countries and the U.S. because in 2002, France required Apple to limit personal listening device output to 100 decibels. In response, Apple pulled its players from store shelves and upgraded the software in European models to limit their output to 100 decibels. This recall, however, did not change U.S. models because there were no such regulations on MP3 devices sold in the U.S.

Taking into account Apple's iPod lawsuit concerning hearing loss, this study attempts to explore how a for-profit organization communicates and manages health-related crises with multiple publics when its products are suspected of having a potentially devastating impact on consumers' health. Most health-related crisis cases have been examined with natural disasters, such as SARS or bird flu, and public health, concerns such as HIV/AIDS or cancer, which require more responsibility from governments to manage a crisis through prevention and recovery. Few research studies, however, have focused on consumer health crisis issues for the for-profit organizations. Thus, the present study attempts to explore the strategic health crisis communication of for-profit organizations by adopting a system of crisis situation analysis

developed by Coombs (1998) and linking this analytic system to Cameron (1997)'s contingency theory of conflict management and Coombs' (1998) crisis communication strategies.

This study used a content-analysis of 146 news stories on the hearing loss associated with Apple's iPod. Theoretically, this study not only synthesizes this crisis communication literature—enabling an accurate prediction of future crises related to consumer health—but also practically generates insight how a for-profit organization can manage potential consumer health risks related to its products. This study found that consumer perception of crisis responsibility for health is an important factor affecting the for-profit organization in determining stances and strategies with regard to consumer health crisis management.

More specifically, the present study suggests that the public's perception of crisis responsibility for consumers' health can be included in the situational variables of the contingency theory of conflict management because the larger the crisis responsibility, the more accommodative the strategies that the organization will employ during a crisis. Furthermore, the present study not only suggests that "corrective action" strategy would be most appropriate, which the public expects to be carried out in health-related crises, but also proposes that the severity of health damage depicted by the media is the most predominant factor in attributing crisis responsibility regarding health issues.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Importance of health issues exposed to the media***

Media outlets are key sources in defining the importance and relevancy of health issues, at first bringing potential health risks to light, then giving them deeper meaning, and finally shaping public perceptions of those responsible for solutions, and hence, policy decisions (Ratzan, 2002; Shuchman, 2002). In addition, the exposure and reach of media are more extensive than those of the health profession (Ratzan, 2002) and can play a significant role in disseminating. It is often that the primary source of health information informs behavior change or health care intervention (Schwartz & Woloshin, 2004). Some argue that journalism has the power to produce meanings and values of health issues, even though it is incomplete or inaccurate in the reporting of health issues (Silver Wallace & Leenders, 2004). Therefore, if any health issues related to products of a for-profit organization were exposed to media, it is probable for that organization to be faced with a crisis even though the health issues were not directly caused by its products.

### ***Contingency Theory of Conflict Management***

As seen in the iPod lawsuit, only Apple out of all MP3 player producers was blamed for its volume level and the design of its device. To analyze how Apple dealt with circumstances in which the company confronted the claims and attacks from a variety of publics, such as medical experts, musicians, hearing loss sufferers, and teenagers' parents, this study adopted the framework of the contingency theory of conflict management. Conflict with the public can result in a crisis for the organization when causes of the conflict are related to products or services of the organization (Burnett, 1988).

Cameron and his colleagues defined a characteristic of conflict which they called "dynamism." In a dynamic conflict situation, Cancel, Cameron, Sallot and Mitrook (1997) suggested a wide range of stances in which an organization can be placed toward its public. This range of stances can be defined by the idea of the advocacy-accommodation continuum (Cancel et al., 1997). On the continuum from pure advocacy, which is characterized as an exclusively

assertive argument for its own interests, to pure accommodation, which is then characterized as complete concession to the public, the organization's stance toward its public shifts based on the circumstances around the organization. Based on different degrees of advocacy and accommodation, most organizations fall somewhere in between the two extremes and usually move their position over time along the continuum (Cancer et al., 1997). At the same time, multiple publics are able to determine an organization's stance toward a crisis and also change their stance in response to the organization's stance change. In summary, the contingency theory focuses on the stance movement of the organization in dealing with a given public at a certain situation in order to understand the dynamics within and outside the organization.

This dynamic circumstance, which organizations confront, can be interpreted or categorized by contingency factors. The contingency theory offers a matrix of 87 contingent variables affecting the position of an organization on the continuum *at a given time* regarding *a given public* (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron 1999, p.172; Yarbrough, Cameron, Sallot, & McWilliams, 1998, p. 40). These factors are divided into categories on two dimensions of external and internal variables. The external variables regarding the environment and the characteristics of the public include such factors as threats, industry environment, political/social/cultural environment, external publics, and issue-under-question categories. Meanwhile, the internal variables related to the characteristics of the organization include the organization's characteristics, the PR department's characteristics, the management's characteristics, individual characteristics, relationship characteristics, and internal threats.

The contingent variables are also categorized into predisposing and situational factors through interviews with 18 public relations practitioners (Cancel et al., 1999). Predisposing variables are defined as the existing variables influencing an organization's stance along the continuum prior to the interaction with the external public before it is faced with particular circumstances. On the other hand, situational variables are factors influencing the shifts of the organization's stance toward the pure accommodation during the dynamic conflict situation. In other words, during specific situations, situational variables affect the distance of the organization from pure accommodation based on the organization's willingness to interact with the external public. Of the predisposing variables, well-supported variables are as follows: corporation size, corporation business exposure, public relations access to the dominant coalition, the dominant coalition's decision power and enlightenment, and the individual characteristics of involved persons (Cancel et al. 1999). Yarbrough et al. (1998) argue that situational variables have more power to influence the stance of the organization to change its predisposition to a particular stance on the continuum during an interaction with the external public. Well-supported situational variables are as follows: the urgency of the situation; characteristics of the external public; potential or obvious threats; and potential costs or benefit for the organization from choosing a particular stance (Yarbrough et al. 1998; Cancel et al. 1999; Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2001). By understanding these internal, external, predisposing, and situational factors along the continuum, the contingency theory can "offer a structure for better understanding of the dynamics of accommodation and advocacy" (Yarbrough et al., 1998, p.41; Cancel et al. 1999, p.173).

Previous studies concerning contingency theory focusing on health-related crises have considered only internal and external variables influencing an organizations' stance and its strategy (Jin, Pang, and Cameron, 2006). However, it is necessary to consider all variables, including predisposing and situational variables as well as external and internal variables. It is possible that predisposing variables forced Apple to face the hearing loss issue and that

situational variables influenced Apple's stance toward the public. Thus, this study analyzed Apple's iPod-related hearing loss case based on the contingency theory's structural framework. Thus, the following research questions are created to understand the organization's stance along the continuum and contingent factors affecting its stance, especially when the for-profit organization is faced with a consumer health crisis.

RQ1. How did the media portray Apple's stance regarding hearing loss issues toward the public?

RQ2. What is Apple's expected stance (by publics) for iPod-related hearing loss?

RQ3. What contingent factors affected Apple's stance for the hearing loss issue?

### ***Crisis Communication Strategy along the Continuum***

According to contingency theory, the stance on the full range from advocacy to accommodation undertaken by an organization toward its public drives strategies in public relations, which in turn elicits a stance from the public at the same time. Therefore, the strategy that should be implemented at a particular time can be determined by its location on the continuum. Coombs' crisis communication strategy provides seven strategies that vary from defensive to accommodative to fit an organization's position. (Coombs, 1998). The seven typologies are attacking the accuser, denial, excuse, justification, ingratiation, corrective action, and full apology. According to Coombs (1998), defensive strategies include attacking the accuser, denial, and excuse, while accommodation strategies include ingratiation, corrective action, and full apology. By integrating these seven crises communication strategies into the contingency continuum, the stance of organization can be determined by crisis response strategies along the continuum. Thus, the following research questions are created.

RQ4. What strategies are described by the media in shifting Apple's stance toward hearing loss issues?

RQ5. What strategies do the public expect from Apple to use in response to hearing loss problems?

### ***Crisis Situation Analysis***

Organizations during a crisis actively seek an effective communication with the public to decrease damage of their image. To find an appropriate strategy, various crisis situations should be considered because each situation influences selecting the best crisis responses (Coombs, 1998; Coombs, 2006). Specific elements of the crisis situation suggest certain crisis communication strategies while removing the necessity of others (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 1995). Thus, characteristics of the crisis situation should be assessed for the ability to choose the strategies that are appropriate either to advocacy or to accommodation.

This framework of crisis situation analysis is based on crisis responsibility. According to Coombs (1998), crisis responsibility is the degree to which stakeholders attribute the cause of the crisis to the organization. In other words, where the crisis responsibility placed is based on the perception of the organization's responsibility. Therefore, it is important to the organization, given that the damage to the organization's reputation increases as the attribution of crisis responsibility strengthens.

The attribution of cause is varied according to the locus of control. High locus of control is defined as an internal control: the degree to which the organization itself can control the crisis event. Conversely, low locus of control is regarded as an external control: the degree to which the

outside organization can control the crisis event. Coombs (1998) found that the public attributes a strong crisis responsibility to the organization when it perceives that the organization has a high locus of control, because the organization could have acted to prevent the crisis. In Apple's case, the company can be perceived to have a high locus of control or low locus of control encouraging each iPod user to take responsibility for controlling the volume of his or her unit.

The organization's performance history is the second element of the crisis situation affecting the crisis responsibility of the organization (Coombs, 1998). Past crises intensify the public's perception of the crisis responsibility and exacerbate an organizational negative image. As a precedent, similar European crises in the past, where Apple was regulated by the government, can be an important factor in increasing crisis responsibility.

Interestingly, Lyon and Cameron (2004) showed that participants' responses toward bad publicity could be different, depending on prior corporate reputation. Participants were asked to read different fictitious news stories describing corporate response strategies to the negative information. The results clearly showed that, in times of crisis, a company could have more broad response strategies if it had a good reputation prior to the crisis because consumers would be apt to believe the corporation's responses are more earnest than others. Thus, Apple can be affected by similar European crisis in the past or by its good reputation, such as announcing its high sales before the crisis.

This crisis responsibility can also be examined in terms of the severity of damage (Coombs, 1998). Minor damage increases the perceptions of crisis responsibility compared to severe damage. Coombs (1998) explained that the negative relationship between the severity of damage and the crisis responsibility is due to sympathy for the injured in case of severe damage. Thus, Apple in its management of crisis responsibility can take into consideration how severe the media has portrayed the hearing loss of iPod users.

Overall, Coombs (2006) argues that the crisis situation, determined by the attributed degree of crisis responsibility, should be linked to crisis response strategies in order to select an appropriate strategy for each situation. Thus, it is important to define the crisis situation of Apple's iPod in order to choose the proper crisis response strategies. These combined factors lead to this research question.

RQ6: How are three elements of crisis situation analysis—crisis attribution, organizational performance history, and severity of damage—portrayed in the news coverage of iPod-related hearing loss in attributing crisis responsibility to Apple?

### **Method**

This study employed a content analysis of 146 news stories on the hearing loss associated with Apple's iPods. The unit of analysis was a news story written by reporters. Editorials, opinions, commentaries and letters to the editors were excluded. They were searched with key words of "hearing loss," or "hearing damage," and "iPod" from January 1, 2006, when Apple first faced a lawsuit concerning hearing loss, to December 10, 2006. A total of 146 news stories were collected from the search engine Lexis-Nexis and coded for 13 variables (i.e. date, Apple's strategy, the public's expected strategy, internal/external factors, predisposing variables, situational variables, attribution of crisis responsibility, locus of control, organization's past performance, severity of damage, target publics, source, and focused topic).

The operational definitions of stances, strategies and contingent factors are based on the contingency theory of conflict management literature. One measurement of this study asked what contingent factors influenced the stance of Apple and its public, along 11 dimensions for

external/internal variables, and 20 dimensions for predisposing/situational variables. The crisis communication strategy was measured along seven dimensions based on the Coombs' (1998) crisis communication typology ranging from the most advocative stance, such as attack-accuser (1), to the most accommodative stance, such as a full apology (7). Definitions of seven crisis communication responses are as follows: (1) Attack the accuser: The organization defends itself against accuser aggressively; (2) Denial: The organization asserts that there is no crisis; (3) Excuse: The organization tries to avoid its responsibility for the crisis by denying any intention to cause a crisis; (4) Justification: The organization takes action to reduce perceived damage caused by crisis; (5) Ingratiation: The organization takes action to generate a favorable attitude toward it; (6) Corrective action: The organization fixes the problem and promises to prevent its recurrence by changing its initial positions or actions; (7) Full apology: The organization takes full responsibility, apologies, and asks forgiveness for wrongdoing, which sometimes includes monetary compensation.

Approximately 10 percent of the entire dataset ( $n=15$ ) was checked for inter-coder reliability. When checking the reliability with Scott's pi, the inter-coder reliability reached .85 with regard to all coded variables, which exceeds the minimum accepted reliability of .75.

### Result

RQ1 is related to the stance of Apple for iPod-related hearing loss toward its multiple publics. A frequency analysis was used for answering this RQ. In addition, Coombs' (1998) seven crisis response strategies, which can be placed on the advocacy-accommodation continuum, were adopted to explain Apple's stance. As a result, Apple's stance was not clearly described in the news coverage, that is whether it adopted an advocacy stance or an accommodation stance, because most of the news coverage of hearing loss associated with iPods did not take the trouble to contact Apple or explain the exact stance of Apple ("no strategy,"  $n = 94$ , 64.4 %). Right after the lawsuit, however, Apple showed a further advocacy stance by using "excuse" strategies ( $n = 17$ , 11.6 %), because Apple declined to comment to any other publications regarding the iPod lawsuit.

Later, Apple's initial advocative stance changed to a more accommodative stance because Apple adopted the "corrective action" strategy ( $n = 27$ , 18.5 %), falling into the accommodation continuum in order to meet the public's desired stance for Apple two months after the lawsuit. For example, Apple released a new volume-controlling software update as concerns about the hearing loss risks grew. With the announcement of Apple's new volume controlling software, Apple made its website immediately available for users to set volume ceilings on the device. The updated volume control setting also let parents control the maximum volume limits on their children's iPods with a combination code lock.

RQ2 concerns Apple's stance which is expected by the public toward the hearing problems. Most news coverage of hearing loss also did not mention the public's response to Apple's stance ("no strategy"  $n = 83$ , 56.8 %). However, the secondly most frequent used strategy which the public wanted Apple to take was "corrective action" ( $n = 59$ , 40.4 %). Thus, the public wanted Apple to take a more accommodative stance. For example, the complaints alleged that placing a warning about the dangers of listening to the iPod at a high volume on each device would be insufficient because it did not define what a high volume is or how it differs from a safe level; the public expressed that this warning might be as ineffective as the warnings on cigarette packages. In addition, "full apology," ( $n = 3$ , 2.1 %) indicating pure accommodation

was also depicted. Overall, the public sought a more accommodative stance from Apple toward the iPod-related hearing loss crisis.

RQ3 questions what contingent factors affect Apple's stance change for the hearing loss issue in the media. To answer this question, a frequency analysis was also used. Among internal and external variables, threat dimension ( $n=105$ , 53.8 %) in the external variables and corporate characteristics dimension ( $n=88$ , 45.1 %) in the internal variables were closely related to the Apple's stance movement. More specifically, the "level of technology the corporation uses to produce its product" ( $n=88$ , 45.1 %) in the corporate characteristics dimension in the internal variables mainly affected Apple's stance change. For example, the white earbuds of the iPod, which were inserted directly into the ear, were seen as a major factor related to hearing loss, because each earbud is so small and because it is placed in the listener's ear canal where there is less chance of dilution as the sound enters the ear.

For the threat dimension in the external variables, the most frequently-attributed factor to Apple's stance was "litigation" ( $n= 50$ , 25.6 %) followed by other external factors in the threat dimensions, such as "legitimizing activists' claims," ( $n= 25$ , 12.8 %), "scarring of company's reputation in the business community and in the general public" ( $n= 21$ , 10.8 %), "potentially damaging publicity" ( $n= 5$ , 2.6 %), and "government regulation" ( $n= 4$ , 2.1 %). For example, the lawsuit filed against Apple and warnings from audiologists and hearing loss sufferers were the major factors that generated Apple's stance change.

With regard to the predisposing and situational factors for Apple's stance, two predisposing variables that led Apple to face the hearing loss crisis were "corporate size" ( $n=130$ , 72 %) and "corporation business exposure" ( $n=50$ , 28 %). The fact that the market-leading iPod controls over 83 percent of the digital music-player market impacts Apple's response, forcing it to focus on the news coverage of hearing loss related to its portable music player. Moreover, frequent exposure to the media due to the news of the highest sales figures in its history and its amazing popularity makes the iPod relevant in news coverage concerning any kind of hearing issue.

Among the situational factors which had the power to force Apple to take more accommodative action during the lawsuit crisis over hearing loss, the most attributed factor was "characteristics of the external public's claim or request" ( $n = 74$ , 32.3 %). The second most attributed situational factor was "characteristics of external public" ( $n = 58$ , 25.3 %). Additionally, three other situational factors, such as "general public perception of the issue under question" ( $n = 52$ , 22.7 %), "potential or obvious threat" ( $n = 38$ , 16.6 %), and "potential cost for the organization choosing the various stances or strategies" ( $n = 7$ , 3.1 %) were also effective situational factors affecting the stance shift of Apple toward a more accommodative stance. For example, most of the news coverage of hearing loss cited audiologists or associations, such as the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. These external publics related the hearing loss issue to Apple's iPod. In addition, musicians who had suffered from hearing loss caused by loud sounds from bands or musical instruments were also focused on by the media, since they warned teenage users of the iPod of potential hearing damage and of the possibility of going deaf at the same time their parents would experience deafness.

RQ 4 concerns the strategies utilized by Apple. "No strategy" ( $n = 94$ , 56.8 %) was best explained in that most news coverage did not mention Apple's strategy or actions at all. Nonetheless, "excuse" ( $n = 17$ , 11.6 %), one form of advocacy stance, was adopted by Apple before it faced legal action. As mentioned in RQ1, for example, at the beginning of the lawsuit, Apple declined to comment on other publications regarding the iPod lawsuit case. Two months

after the lawsuit, however, in order to meet the public's demands or claims against Apple, the corporation took "corrective action" ( $n=27$ , 18.5 %) to shift its stance toward accommodation by releasing a new volume-controlling software update in response to the hearing specialists' warnings.

RQ5 is related to strategies which the public expects Apple to employ. Among the three strategies—ingratiation, corrective action, and full apology—all falling into the accommodation stance, Apple's "corrective action" ( $n=59$ , 40.4 %) was the most frequent strategy. The public expected this "corrective action" strategy to be conducted much more than a "full apology" ( $n=3$ , 2.1 %), which represents pure accommodation. For example, accusers requested modified headphones, more prominent warnings, and upgraded software, adequately restricting the volume level, rather than just compensation for suffering hearing damage.

RQ6 asks how three elements—locus of control, severity of damage, and performance history—in the framework of the crisis situation were described in the Apple crisis. Thus, frequency analysis and chi-square tests were adopted to answer how those three elements were portrayed in attributing the crisis responsibility of hearing loss issues. First, based on frequent analyses, the media considerably attributed the high locus of control ( $n=82$ , 56.2 %) to Apple, when compared to attributed the low locus of control ( $n=57$ , 39 %). For example, the complaints weighted the hearing-loss responsibility on the iPod headphone style, not on the iPod users' responsibility for controlling its volume. Thus, high internal locus of control for the iPod-related hearing loss portrayed in the media was related to the perception of Apple's crisis responsibility generated by people quoted in news coverage.

Then, in terms of severity of damage concerning hearing loss, high severity of damage caused by the iPod was predominantly presented ( $n=125$ , 85.6 %) compared to medium severity ( $n=12$ , 8.2 %) and low severity ( $n=8$ , 5.5 %) of damage. For example, the volume level of the iPod was described as equivalent to the sound of a jackhammer and was perceived as much more serious because earbuds were fitted inside the ear and played for several hours. Thus, highly severe hearing loss can be related to the attribution of the crisis responsibility. Based on a chi-square test between the severity of hearing damage and the attribution to the crisis responsibility for the public and Apple, there was significant differences between attribution of crisis responsibility and severity level of hearing damage ( $\chi^2(6, N=149) = 25.849$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). More specifically, the more severe the hearing damage portrayed, the more crisis responsibility was attributed to public and Apple (see Table 3). In addition, the attribution of crisis responsibility to Apple at the high severity of damage level (94 %) was slightly greater than the attribution of crisis responsibility to the public at the high severity of damage level (87 %).

However, when considering an organization's performance history, there were no significant differences between the focuses on Apple's good performance ( $n=15$ , 10.3 %) and the focuses on past similar crises, which indicates Apple's bad performance in Europe ( $n=11$ , 7.5 %). Most news coverage of hearing loss did not cover Apple's performance characteristics ( $n=118$ , 80.8 %). Thus, in the news coverage of iPod-related hearing loss, high locus of control and high degree of severity of hearing loss was heavily portrayed as a considerable factor attributing the crisis responsibility to Apple.

## Discussion

This study shows that perceived crisis responsibility is an important predictor in anticipating potential crises and that it should be considered when selecting crisis strategies regarding consumer health. Coombs (1998) determined that crisis responsibility is related to the

public's perception of the organization's responsibility for the crisis, not the actual responsibility causing harmful effects on the public. This study finds that the consumer health crisis of a for-profit organization also distinctively depends on the public's perception of the organization's responsibility for the health problem related to its products. In the case of Apple's iPod, no one discovered concrete evidence for how much hearing loss might be attributable to this music player. However, in the news media's coverage of hearing loss issues, medical experts, teenagers' parents, and even musicians who never used the iPod mentioned that the MP3 player was a potential cause of hearing loss, which adversely affected Apple's public image. However, the iPod is not any louder than other MP3 players in loudness tests and warnings from other companies are very similar or even less informative than the ones on Apple's iPod. Thus, this study examined the relationship between perceived crisis responsibility during the consumer health crisis and three elements of crisis situations—*attribution dimensions*, *performance history*, and *crisis damage*. As predicted in Coombs' (1998) crisis situation analysis, high internal locus of control was portrayed in the news coverage of the hearing loss issue and associated Apple with hearing loss issues. This study contradicts the results from Coombs (1998) in which severe crisis damage did not increase crisis responsibility. In the case of Apple however, the severity of hearing damage was significantly related to Apple's crisis responsibility because the iPod's ability to reach a volume of 130 decibels—as loud as an air raid siren or a jackhammer—was described as a cause of hearing loss. In addition, the terms indicating high severity of hearing loss, such as 'permanent,' 'unimpaired,' 'irreparable' and 'inherent risks' were reported in most of the news coverage of the issue. This different result from Coombs' (1998) experimental study can be explained based on the subjects who were influenced by severe damage. If the organization is the subject injured in the crisis, the crisis responsibility would be small in the case of minor crisis damage. Conversely, if the injured subject is the public, such as the case of permanent hearing loss, the crisis responsibility would be greater in the case of severe damage than with minor damage. For the performance history element of crisis situations, Apple's good or bad performance was not as important as the severity of the damage in attributing Apple's crisis responsibility for the hearing loss because there were no significant differences between the amount of news coverage demonstrating the iPod's increased market sales and the amount of news coverage revealing the similar crisis in Europe years earlier. Thus, the severity of health damage would be a predominant factor in affecting the organization faced with a consumer health crisis.

Furthermore, this study examined all contingent factors, including internal/external variable dimensions, as well as predisposing/situational dimensions. The most distinct factor in the internal/external variables was "litigation," which is in the threat dimension. For example, the lawsuit filed against Apple forced the company not only to confront the hearing loss issue but also to receive negative publicity. In addition, the most frequently cited factor in the external variables was "level of technology the corporation uses to produce its product" by mentioning the iPod's decibel level and comparing it to sounds of rock music, airport noise, or gunshots.

From the investigation of the predisposing variables affecting Apple's existing stance in the music player market, this study found that business size was the most important factor in generating a greater crisis responsibility and stance movement toward accommodation. Apple's preeminent market share and its MP3 player's popularity created an immediate association with any kind of issue related to music or sound. Whenever the issue of the hearing crisis was mentioned, Apple's iPod was exposed to the media whether or not it was related to the music player. The public relations practitioners pointed out that a corporation's large size brings about

high visibility, and the association between its business size and visibility raises a greater expectation of the crisis responsibility for the organization (Cancel et al., 1999). Thus, the present study found that business size is the primary predisposing variable, the one which led Apple to be faced with the hearing loss issue and to adopt more an accommodative stance.

This study also found that situational factors were closely related to Apple's stance during the iPod-related hearing loss lawsuit crisis when the public attributed greater crisis responsibility to Apple. The most often cited factors, such as "characteristics of the external public's claim or request" and "characteristics of external public," implied that medical doctors or medical associations were played a significant role in attributing the crisis responsibility to Apple. Most of news coverage of health-related crises usually cited medial experts or associations—Audiologists or the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association—as sources to increase news credibility. Cancel et al. (1999) argued those external publics have a negative effect on the organization due to their ability to get media coverage. Thus, medical practitioners' impacts on the stance movement of a for-profit organization would be powerful during a consumer health crisis.

The most frequent strategy the public appeared to want was "corrective action," which requires more adequate action to prevent hearing loss. In response to these claims and requests, Apple also took corrective action by releasing a free volume setting control to iPod users rather than making a "full apology," which indicates pure accommodation. In other words, in a health-related crisis, a for-profit organization would not need to adopt pure accommodation, because the public demands more adequate action than a sincere apology statement or compensation for their health problems.

### **Implications**

Theoretically, this study begins to link crisis situation analysis and the contingency continuum in a consumer health crisis based on the content-analysis of the iPod-related hearing loss issue. When the public's perceived crisis responsibility of a for-profit organization for the health crisis is weak, the for-profit organization would be better off choosing the accommodative stance. Conversely, an advocacy stance is more useful when the public's perceived crisis responsibility of a for-profit organization for a health crisis is strong. In other words, strong perception of crisis responsibility would be an important predictor of the appropriate crisis response strategy for a for-profit organization. Therefore, this study proposes that perceived crisis responsibility can be one of the situational variables in the contingency theory due to its impact on a for-profit organization, which communicates with the public in an accommodative stance in order to meet publics' expectations.

Based on the public's great expectation of a "corrective action" strategy rather than an "apology," this study anticipates that crisis response strategies "corrective action" and "apology" can be switched in a health-related crisis. In other words, it would be better to position the corrective action at the pure accommodation position on the advocacy-accommodation continuum when it is associated with health issues. Otherwise, pure accommodative strategy would not be the best strategy to communicate with the public on health risk issues. Coombs (1998) suggested that the organization which had a past crisis with a high internal locus of control can use the "full apology" strategy to respond to a strong perception of crisis responsibility. Lyon & Cameron (1999), however, found that the apology strategy only works when the organization has a good prior history, whereas this full apology worsens the situation of the organization with a bad history. On the other hand, in a health-related crisis such as with the

hearing loss issue, “corrective action”—a less accommodative strategy than “full apology”—would be more effective in response to the public’s perceived crisis responsibility of the for-profit organization. Health problems can not be solved merely by announcing a public apology or by providing monetary compensation because a health crisis can cause irreparable damage to consumers.

Regarding contingent variables in the contingency theory of conflict management, most studies conducting a crisis case study and a content analysis only consider internal and external factors to measure the organization’s or the public’s stance during a crisis. However, through a national survey of 1,000 public relations practitioners (Shin, 2006) and 18 interviews with public relations professionals (Cancel et al., 1999), predisposing and situational variables were identified as substantial variables affecting the stance movement of organizations between advocacy and accommodation.

This study also suggests that predisposing and situational variables should be considered by the organization in measuring the best stance movement and in choosing the best strategy in response to crises. For example, in the lawsuit against Apple’s iPod, the business size is a preeminent predisposing variable and the characteristics of the external public become an important situational variable, affecting Apple’s and the public’s stance. Thus, when the organization dominates the market, the public relations practitioners should consider the possibility for its products to be linked to any other potential health crisis. The larger the corporation’s size, the higher the visibility of the organization (Cancer et al. 1999). From this intertwined association, the corporation with the greatest market share can easily face health-related negative publicity, even though there is no evidence of harmful effects caused by its products or services.

Public relations practitioners also should remember that medical experts are some of the most important stakeholders. This external public has a great impact on crisis responsibility because journalists cite their opinions or claims regarding the health-crisis as credible. They can provide a source of credibility regarding the health risks to the public; therefore, the organization’s crisis responsibility can be varied based on where medical experts or associations attribute the internal locus of control through the media. Therefore, scholars and public relations practitioners should consider four variables—external, internal, predisposing, and situational—in the two different dimensions when they attempt to analyze the organization’s best stance movement and the appropriate strategy during a crisis.

In sum, this study proposes that public relations practitioners should determine the consumers’ perception of crisis responsibility when products or services are suspected of having a serious impact on consumer health. More specifically, since the severity of the media portrayal is positively related to the consumers’ perception of health crisis responsibility, a for-profit organization should consider adopting a “corrective action” strategy to meet the public’s expectations if severe health problems were to occur or if health problems are depicted through the media.

### **Suggestions for Future Study**

Based on the content analysis of news coverage regarding hearing loss, this study does not explain whether the perception of health-related crisis responsibility is really affected by the severity of health damage. Therefore, this study suggests future experimental study regarding a health crisis situation of for-profit organizations by manipulating the degree of health damage to look at the effects of health crisis damage on crisis responsibility.

By conducting an experimental method with the use of various news source channels and a survey of multiple publics of for-profit organizations, such as media experts, the younger generations, real product users, adults, or policy makers, the future study can also investigate a better way to deal with the public's perception of consumer health crisis responsibility when products of the for-profit organization are associated with consumers' health problems.

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## APPENDIX

**Table1. Apple's strategy**

	Frequency ( <i>n</i> )	Valid Percent (%)
No strategy	94	64.4
Denial	3	2.1
Excuse	17	11.6
Justification	3	2.1
Ingratiation	2	1.4
Corrective action	27	18.5
Total	146	100

**Table2. Public's expected strategy**

	Frequency ( <i>n</i> )	Valid Percent (%)
No Strategy	83	56.8
Denial	1	.7
Corrective action	59	40.4
Full apology	3	2.1
Total	146	100

**Table3. External/Internal Factors**

	Frequency	Valid Percent
<i>External Variables</i>		
(Threat) Litigation	50	25.6
(Threat) Governmental regulation	4	2.1
(Threat) Potentially damaging publicity	5	2.6
(Threat) Scarring of company's reputation	21	10.8
(Threat) Legitimizing activists' claims	25	12.8
Number of competitors/level of competitors	2	1.0
<i>Internal Variables</i>		
(Corporate Characteristics) Level of technology the corporation uses to	88	45.1

produce its product or service		
Total	195	100

**Table4. Predisposing/Situational Variables**

	Frequency	Valid Percent
<i>Predisposing Variables</i>		
Corporation's size	130	72
Corporation business exposure	50	28
Total	180	100
<i>Situational Variables</i>		
Characteristics of the external public's claim or request	74	32.3
Characteristics of external public	58	25.3
General public perception of the issue under question	52	22.7
Potential or obvious threats	38	16.6
Potential costs for the organization from choosing the various stances/strategies	7	3.1
Total	229	100

**Table5. Chi-Square test for the crisis responsibility according to severity of damage**

Crisis responsibility	Severity of Damage				Total
	None	Low	Medium	High	
Crisis responsibility of Apple	0	2.2	4.3	93.5	100
Crisis responsibility of Public	1.2	2.4	9.5	86.9	100

$\chi^2 (6, N=146) = 25.849, p = .000^{***}$

**New Media, New Spheres: Adding Science  
to the Normative Public Sphere and Social Responsibility Theories**

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Theories of the public sphere and the social responsibility are reviewed along with theories of corporate social responsibility (CSR). A new model is proposed that categorizes modern media and introduces audience involvement as a factor in newly conceived versions of public and private spheres. The model has implications for public relations being viewed as a vital component of civic discourse. A set of hypotheses is proposed to test the model empirically.

The concept of a “public sphere” as a conceptual space or forum in which citizens are free to engage in public debate about the government was popularized in 1962 by Jurgen Habermas (1962). This relatively broad idea has been the subject of discussion in many academic disciplines, including sociology and political science, for the obvious implications on social behavior and political discourse. But the public sphere has particular relevance to mass media studies because of the central role played by what Habermas called “publicity”—by which he meant publication of news in the media—in the formation and use of the public sphere.

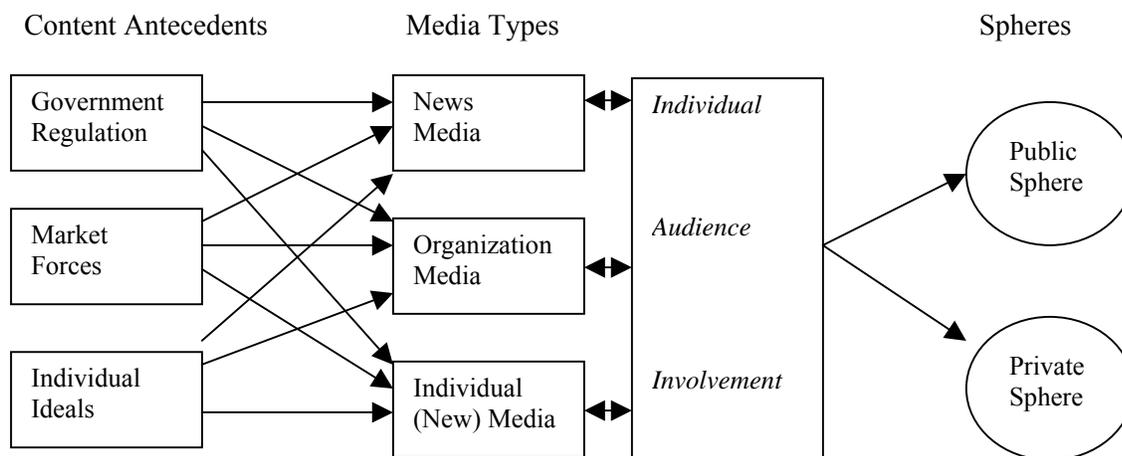
However, even Habermas conceded that a public sphere is an idealistic notion. For that reason, a public sphere and its impact on public opinion and policy cannot be realistically considered without notions of social responsibility on the part of all who engage in publicity—which today may include the press, corporate and other organizational entities, as well as an increasing number of individual communicators. This is particularly true given the rapidly changing nature of media in our society. Thus, a re-examination of the public sphere along with ideas about the social responsibility of the press and corporate social responsibility (CSR) in light of new media realities is instructive. Such a careful consideration of these combined ideas will lead to questions about the nature or actual existence of a public sphere and of “mass” media. A review should also move academic discussion of these concepts beyond normative notions of what the news media and public relations ought to be, and even beyond descriptive dialogue. Instead, these normative notions could be considered under the light of empiricism and testing of questions of why media information sources behave the way they do, and more importantly, how and why audiences and individuals use and react to various forms of modern media the way they do.

#### A New Model: New Concepts Of Media And Spheres

To address issues raised above, a new model of the public sphere is proposed here. It includes a re-conceptualization of “media” in the public sphere as institutional media (news, entertainment), organizational media (the public communication of corporations, nonprofits and other organizations, including advertising and publicity, Web sites, newsletters, etc), and individual media (blogs, Web sites, podcasts etc). Given the early normative theories’ admission that involvement in the public sphere may need to be encouraged or forced, the model includes antecedents or influences on media content for the public sphere: government regulation, market forces, and personal ideals. Consistent with original work of Habermas and subsequent critics,

the public sphere is recast as parallel to a private. The model also demonstrates that an active audience of individuals (not just the media) determine when receiving information whether the information is for the public or private sphere. Involvement, taken from the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty *et al.*, 1983), is the key factor or control mechanism for individuals determining whether information is in the public or private spheres. If an individual has high involvement with information, it will be in the context of the private sphere because of personal salience, as opposed to the common interest, and they will use central processing to consider the information. Low involvement, meanwhile, leads to perceiving the information as part of the public sphere/common good and more passive attention or peripheral processing (noted in H3 and H4 below). This assertion is based on Habermas' own view that publics became passive and uncritical, i.e. peripheral. The idealistic notion of public sphere debates about public issues has no place in this model. As other scholars have noted, that is an abstract construct exploited by rhetoricians. Instead, the public sphere is populated by individuals with high private interest, who come and go when they determine a subject is worthy of public discourse. Furthermore, individuals who are interested in the public sphere will seek information, and do so from sources beyond conventional news media. Thus the individual is the primary unit of analysis, more so than media structure. The new model is illustrated here:

Figure 1: Proposed New Model of the Public Sphere



A series of hypotheses related to the model include:

H1: Individuals with high involvement in a message subject will consider it within a private sphere context (of personal relevance).

H2: Individuals with low involvement in a message subject will consider it within a public sphere context (of public interest).

H3: Individuals who perceive information as being for the public sphere will process that information peripherally.

H4: Individuals who perceive information as being for the private sphere will process that information centrally.

H5: Individuals highly involved in public discourse will seek out that information, rather than receive it passively.

H6: Individuals highly involved in public discourse are more likely to seek information from individual media than news media.

H7: Individuals highly involved in public discourse are more likely to seek information from organizational media than from news media.

Explanations and support for this model and associated hypotheses follow, starting with a review of the original concept of the public sphere and its current criticisms.

### Revisiting The Public Sphere

In fact, Habermas leads the criticism of the public sphere. His book, “The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere” (1962) includes his own criticisms of a public sphere—begun as simple interpersonal dialogue in coffee shops—that was changing because of certain realities that were not matching his idealistic notion. Most fundamental among those realities was the nature of the “public.”

Originally, Habermas believed that the news media helped enhance the public sphere when news grew as a commodity and the public came to mean readers, or those who pay attention. Habermas described a “literary” public sphere that, including primarily information in newspapers, enabled discussion of art and literature for the first time. This matured into a “political” or fully developed public sphere, in which public issues and the common good were debated (Habermas, 1962). The news media was seen as the primary institution of the public sphere, playing its neutral “publicity” role by providing a forum for all citizens to discuss public matters without the threat of influence by the government or various private interests. At least that was the ideal. But there are several problems with the theory of a public sphere, involving both the individual level--audience characteristics and behaviors-- and the organizational level--media structures.

Habermas himself described the public sphere as a domain for the bourgeoisie, or middle class. This implies that the public sphere did not enjoy full participation even at its conception. Habermas decries the collapse of the “literary” public sphere as upwardly mobile groups split away from newspaper readership to seek status and legitimization with other forms of media. He concluded that the “world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in appearance only” (Habermas, 1962). This supports the model's depiction of public and private spheres, with individuals choosing for themselves the realm in which to participate (H1 and H2).

Similarly, Hannah Arendt (2000) also distinguishes between a public realm characterized by freedom of individuals from the political process and a desire for the common good, and a private realm or household sphere in which men are driven by their personal needs and wants. This notion is consonant with the ideas of relevance or involvement being a determinant of how individuals process information as articulated in H3 and H4. She describes public as meaning everything is seen and heard by everyone and has the widest possible publicity and a feeling of equality among participants, as opposed to a private realm consisting of personal property and characterized by inequality. Furthermore, Arendt posits, the location of human activity in either of these realms is determined by the individuals' need to remain hidden versus a need to be displayed publicly.

Questions about the varying degrees of participation in the public sphere have been addressed by more recent scholars as well. Hohendahl (1995) brings up the modern concern for multiculturalism and questions the existence of different cultures within the public sphere. He further questions whether various movements that have affected public opinion—he names “greens, gays, and women”—have made use of the public sphere or reshaped it. Because of this, he wonders if there is a public sphere at all, or whether there are multiple spheres. This is

consistent with his earlier view (Hohendahl, 1979) that a new public sphere would include grass roots interest groups that bypass standard channels of political communication. Similarly, Fraser (1990) calls into question the exclusion of gender and class from the public sphere and points out several limiting assumptions within the theory, including: “that people in the public sphere behave as if equal in status. . . .that a single public sphere is better than a nexus of multiple publics” (p. 62). She also rejects the idea that there should be a public sphere that requires a distinction between society and the state, or that dialogue should be limited to deliberations about the common good at the exclusion of private matters.

Kellner (2000) extends the notion of multiple publics with a positive view of the impact of new media in the public sphere. Noting that Habermas neglected to perceive of new social movements using communication media on their own to educate and organize groups that would in turn affect public opinion, he proposes that public spheres are proliferating and include a range from Internet to face-to-face interactions. This challenges the notion of the news media being paramount, or even necessary, in the public sphere, as is addressed in H5, H6, and H7. Kellner also asserts that, rather than further fragment people, new media technology will actually do more to empower individuals and contribute to original ideals of the public sphere as a forum for informed discourse: “Democratic politics will strive to see that broadcast media and computers are used to enlighten individuals rather than manipulate them” (p. 280).

Kellner’s point about the manipulation of individuals addresses concerns raised by other scholars that the public will become merely symbolic. In particular, Ku (1998) proposes a Theory of Boundary Politics, in which a symbolic public is called forth strategically to win political arguments. She identifies three media strategies used by politicians and other elites that affect the quality of information received by a “mass public” within the public sphere: openness, which wins support and attracts public opinion by attracting attention; secrecy, which covers up illegitimate purposes; and leak, which involves elites working to resolve a private conflict by discrediting an opponent in the realm of public opinion. Ku added to this idea (2000) when she likened contemporary mass media to a “sphere of manipulative, staged publicity that turns the once rational public of private individuals into a passive mass of privatized audience” (p. 222). She posits a Theory of Public Credibility, in which the public is an imagined entity used in modern politics as a reference in order to gain status. In other words, politicians and other elites in society refer to the “public interest” and appeal to a perceived public opinion only to add credibility to their own ideas and moral authority. She concludes that the public sphere is there, but that the public debate therein is being suppressed and appropriated for individual or private gain. It’s instructive to note that Habermas foresaw this when he noted that the “public is split apart into minorities of (1) specialists who put their reason to use nonpublicly and (2) the great mass of consumers where receptiveness is public but uncritical” (Habermas, 1962).

Such a decline of audience attention and participation in the public sphere is also due in part to changes in media structure, namely the commodification of information and the commercialization (or “market forces” in the model) of the media institutions. This was the central point of Habermas (1962) when he indicated that the function of the public sphere changed when the media, its primary institution, transformed. Essentially, he asserts that the media became an instrument of party politics (as addressed by Ku) and that it became too commercialized. Habermas (1962) blames the commercialization of the public sphere on the transformation of publishers from “merchants of news to dealers in public opinion” (p. 182). He asserts that the press was forced to take sides in debate, as opposed to merely providing a forum for them, when competition arose from other forms of media, namely scholarly journals and

political weeklies. Soon, publishers began to see the press as a commercial business more than a political tool, and certainly not as a societal role. Eventually, he claims, the public sphere became co-opted as a forum for advertising, which controlled the media. Public relations campaigns, he hints, at least considered the public sphere in civic versus commercial terms but was approaching them privately:

“Private ads are always directed to other private people insofar as they are consumers; the addressee of public relations is public opinion, or private citizens as the public and not directly as consumer.” (Habermas, 1962)

The role of organizational media, such as advertising and PR, in the public sphere was also noted by Negt and Kluge (1988). After reviewing various interpretations of the public sphere, they concluded that advertising and publicity campaigns of business, with their advanced production processes, create a “pseudo public sphere,” or what they called a “production public sphere” that overlays the classic version. They explain that these various organizational media efforts evade the elections and public opinion of the classic intermediate realm of the public sphere and instead target the private sphere of the individual. They assert that public relations and legal communication efforts are a more highly organized level of production than the conventional news media and are changing the characteristics of the public sphere. For example, the ideals of the classic public sphere gave way to the materiality of the production public sphere, reflecting a dominance of private over public interests. They also characterize a contemporary public sphere as not wholly transparent, and more conscious than real. This lends support to the notion in H7 that people might seek organizational media as much or more than news media for their interests that are private but they nevertheless perceive them as public.

Habermas wrote that the effect of private enterprise advertising in the public sphere was to give people the idea that their self-interested consumption decisions were actually made in their capacity as citizens. Therefore, he concluded, even the government has to address citizens as consumers, meaning that “even public authority has to compete for publicity in the public sphere” (Habermas, 1962). As recently as 2006 Habermas extended this idea and noted that there are five actors--in addition to politicians and journalists—among the elites in the public sphere: lobbyists and advocates for causes, which are consistent with the organizational media of H6, and experts, moral entrepreneurs, and intellectuals who make up the growing individual media depicted in the model and mentioned in H7 (Habermas, 2006). In this article, Habermas also concedes that the power structure of the public sphere includes political, economic, and social forces as well as the media. This is consistent with the content antecedents of the model.

The growth of individual media (H6) has been the most recent alteration of the public sphere. A white paper on the subject of Weblogs or “blogs” reported that 83 percent of 150 senior executives surveyed see blogs as “citizen journalism” because of the fact that anyone can publish a blog. Only 54 percent thought of blogs as a promotional tool (Goodman, 2006). Meanwhile, a content analysis of blogs and newspapers notes that blogs provide “mobilizing information” that mainstream media do not and that blogs are positively associated with an increased interest and participation in politics (Yamamoto, 2006). Both studies support the idea that individual media can be an alternative to traditional news media, as stated in H6. Future studies could also explore that blogs also motivate people to consider private interests, dependent on their involvement in the blog topic.

So, we have a public sphere that is currently described as being quite different from the original, ideal concept. It is a realm occupied not just by news media, but by business, government, and individual forms of “publicity.” Its occupants are consumers, more so than

citizens. The processes within the public sphere are driven by the audience, more than the media. And rather than a public, group debate, the public sphere is seen as a place for individual gratification, sometimes through manipulation of a public that is more conceptual than real and often with the complicity of an established media institution that panders to individual interests rather than inspiring public dialogue.

Perhaps it is because the reality of the public sphere diverged from its ideal that Habermas wrote “Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action” (Habermas, 1983). In it, he addresses three principles of discourse ethics, namely that everyone’s interests must be considered, that all agree on the norms of discourse, and that consensus can only be achieved if all participants do so freely and without coercion. A turn to ethics shows that a public sphere as a forum for public debate about public affairs does not happen naturally, but must be encouraged. This reality relates directly to theories about social responsibility.

#### Social Responsibility Of The Press

The social responsibility of the press is often traced back to the Hutchins Commission (Hutchins, 1947), a group of representatives of the press who were responding to criticisms of its “sensationalism and commercialism” (McQuail, 2005, p. 170). However, Siebert claims the essentials of what became the social responsibility theory of the press (Siebert *et al.*, 1956) had been expressed before the Hutchins Commission when Edmund Burke first referred to the press as the “Fourth Estate” of civil society, with the other three estates being the clergy, the nobility, and the common people.

Social responsibility was one of four theories of the press offered by Siebert to describe national media systems. Each of the four describe the media in terms of whose interest is served: an authoritarian press serves the interest of the government in power, a Soviet communist press serves the interest of the party, a libertarian press serves the interest of individuals in a free market of ideas. Social responsibility, according to Siebert, was replacing a libertarian theory of the press in democratic countries both in terms of thinking about the role of the press and in actual practice (p. 75). He saw the function of the press in his normative social responsibility of the press theory to include serving the political system by providing debate on public issues, enlightening the public, serving as a watchdog of government, remaining independent of special interests, and serving the economic and entertainment interests of society.

Just as Habermas had done with his public sphere, Siebert realized his social responsibility theory was idealistic and had criticisms of the press. Even in 1956, he was concerned that the press wielded power for its own ends, was subservient to business and higher socio-economic class, resisted social change, paid too much attention to superficial matters, and invaded individual privacy. His “theory” then became more prescriptive than descriptive when he advocated for government intervention in the media and even additional forms of media:

“Social responsibility theory holds that government must not merely allow freedom (of the press), it must actively promote it.....The government should help society obtain services it requires from the mass media...It may enact legislation to forbid abuses of the press and may even enter the field of media to supplement existing media” (Siebert *et al.*, 1956, p. 95).

While Siebert called for government intervention and even participation in the media, contemporary critiques such as Skjerdal (2005) point out that Siebert ignored the audience effect on shaping mass media. Skjerdal proposes a new model that uses a continuum of content and context, addressing the factors of media ownership as well as audience factors. In his model, content is the X axis of messages ranging from private to government, and context is the Y axis

of medium ownership ranging from private to government. He places Siebert's four types of national press systems on this model, with social responsibility located in the quadrant affected by private content and public media. The model is an interesting update of theories of the press, but Skjerdal admits his model is still normative. However, it does contribute to an idea that there are public and private realms (H1 and H2) and that individuals seek different types of media (H6 and H7).

Another press social responsibility model was offered by Jakubowicz (1998) after studying changes in government regulation of media in Eastern Europe. That context is an interesting "lab" for considering social responsibility of the press and the public sphere since these countries are making a transition from authoritarian to democratic systems. Jakubowicz notes a tension between press theory and practice in these emerging democracies similar to that seen in the U.S. and Western Europe. He points out that public expectations of the newly free media don't match the press performance. His model for the public sphere in a democracy proposes that the public sphere exist in the center of four dimensions—a democratic state, civil society, individual citizens, and a public media. Again this model expresses an ideal aspiration more than an actual description, and certainly is not an empirically testable proposition.

While some critical theorists conclude that government regulation of the press is the answer, others point to self-regulation by the press. This leads to calls for discussing social responsibility as an ethical imperative. The MacBride Commission of 1977-80 was international in scope and proposed universal ethical principles for a socially responsible press, including a plurality of sources and channels (Christians & Nordenstreng, 2004). The reasons for this ethical prescription had as much to do with audience behavior as with media structure, and again raises the possibility that audiences will seek information from sources other than the news media (H6 and H7).

In a comment germane to both social responsibility and the public sphere, Christians and Nordenstrang (2004) note that in the 1990s, American journalism saw "weak demand for serious news, cynicism about the news media, and flagging interest in civic affairs" (p. 11). Consequently, Gunaratne (1998) points out that the press changed to reflect the changes in their audiences, namely "people's predilection for entertainment rather than for knowledge of public affairs and political involvement" (p. 278). This shows the power of individuals to determine their sphere of interest (H1 and H2).

Because of this pandering to audience interest as opposed the socially responsible role of informing citizens about public policy, a call for "public journalism" emerged. It is interesting that there is a perceived need for a subset of journalism called "public," when in fact that was supposed to be the central role of the press in normative theory. As Christians and Nordenstrang point out, this move to public or civic journalism was an attempt to restyle the press toward greater citizen involvement and a healthier public climate" (p. 11). Put another way, it was an effort to reestablish the press as the premier institution in the public sphere. One advocate of public journalism likened it not only to re-characterizing the media structure, but changing the way the press sees individuals in society, by moving "from people as consumers....to seeing them as a public, as potential actors in arriving at democratic solutions to public problems" (Merritt, 1995, p. 114).

In their own critique of critical theories of the press and a call for more empiricism, Ostini and Fung (2002) assert that such an attitude change of the media toward the public will realistically happen at the individual journalist level. They proposed a model of state media systems that incorporates the autonomy of individual journalists' values (conservative or liberal)

and the political/social structures (democratic or authoritarian). They conducted a content analysis of media coverage of an actual public issue by media in the U.S., Japan, China, and Hong Kong. This resulted in placing the national media systems for the four countries in different quadrants of the model, but is again more descriptive than predictive and thus limited in theoretical value. Their study is also limited by a focus on newspapers reporting on a single story, and on ideology of journalists as a factor.

Gerald (1963) had earlier considered that the economic motivations of the press may be stronger than ideological factors. He also notes that the publishers and editors wield more power over media structure and behavior than individual reporters. In his practical theory of the press system, he pointed out that newspaper owners had discovered that human interest stories (versus public affairs stories) are marketable to a wider audience, and that the competition for circulation was driven by the solitary goal of providing space to advertisers: “although originally established for the intellectual task of purveying news and opinion [the mass media] ... have become factories geared for the mass production of advertising” (p. 167). If this is the case, it could be argued that the news media has ceded its place as the primary source of information for either public or private interest or spheres, as the model illustrates with the inclusion of organizational and individual media. It also shows, as indicated in H5, that the audience is more active in seeking information rather than being passive receptors, thus placing more power and interest at the individual level as opposed to consideration of media structures.

The fact that the news media provides information for both public and private spheres is also known as market-driven journalism. This concept was studied recently and empirically by Beam (2003) who specifically researched the relationship between a market-orientation and providing content for the public sphere. His study was a response to data showing a decrease in both readership and advertising revenue for daily newspapers in the 1980s and 1990s (p 369). A survey of 406 senior newspaper editors and a content analysis of their newspapers’ inclusion of content for the public sphere supported a series of hypotheses that predicted papers with a strong market orientation would have less emphasis on content for the public sphere and more on content for the private sphere, including sports and entertainment, than would papers with a weak market orientation.

A similar study of network television news revealed a need for the media to signify a relationship with their viewers in order to reach a mass audience. In their content analysis of network news over a 20-year period, Esposito and Koch (2000) defined “relationship” news vs. “interesting” news as co-orientational, behavioral relations between a viewer and a network. Relationship news was considered user-friendly and applicable to viewers’ personal lives, and characterized by the content, the sources, and the style of delivery. Their study showed a significant increase in the percentage of stories coded as “relationship” news from 1977 to 1997. They concluded that viewers are less concerned with politics, politicians, and foreign matters and more interested in personally relevant stories about family matters and health. Esposito and Koch also conclude that viewers have a greater role in determining what is “news,” and that sources are more often average citizens as opposed to elected officials. An update of the study in 1998 showed the trend of increases in relationship news and TV viewership continuing.

All of these critiques, models, and studies point to the mass media and public sphere being shaped by economic, social and individual audience influences, as included in the antecedents in the model. While some have mentioned that the conventional media should be regulated or even supplemented by other forms of media, few have studied this. But the public sphere and the role of the press are in fact supplemented, often by the domain of organizational

media—“publicity” or public relations efforts produced by businesses, nonprofits, government agencies and individual citizens who are not part of the media establishment or institution. Because of this, a realistic look at the public sphere requires a review of the concept of corporate social responsibility in addition to the social responsibility of the press.

### Corporate Social Responsibility

Public relations, which includes publicity seeking, has been described by Habermas and other scholars mentioned above for its role affecting public opinion in the public sphere. And in fact, the profession formally is cognizant of this role, as evidenced by the oft-repeated phrase “to encourage informed decision making in a democratic society” articulated in the Code of Ethics of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) (“PRSA code of ethics”, 2005). However, as with the public sphere and the press, PR struggles with a tension between aspirations embedded in its normative theories and the realities among practitioners of the profession. Nevertheless, it was public relations that started the movement toward corporate social responsibility, which is relevant to the public sphere as corporations and other organizations increasingly communicate directly with the public rather than in news-mediated contexts.

Grunig (1989) considered public relations the way Siebert viewed the press when he developed his four models of the profession: press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical. The latter is the ideal for Grunig and is characterized by mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their various publics. As such, it is a precursor to corporate social responsibility. However, Grunig admitted that the first three models remain the “dominant worldview of public relations, and that two-way symmetrical model is a break from that worldview” (p. 30). Grunig and Huang (2000) point out that PR scholars and practitioners started moving from studying one-way effects of communications to definitions and measures of two-way relationships in the 1970s. Outcomes of such a “two-way, symmetrical” form of public relations practice included control mutuality, trust, and commitment. Again, such normative models have looked more at the nature of such “mutual” relationships sought by modern public relations and not at the impact of such relationships on the public sphere.

But relationships are an important concept in public relations and corporate social responsibility. Broom (Broom *et al.*, 2000) encourages more research be done with relationships as the unit of analysis, the lack of which may be due to the fact that relationships are hard to define and measure. He notes that interpersonal communications scholars operationally define relationships as “a measure of participants’ perceptions or as a function of those perceptions” (p. 9). He also points out that systems theory is a useful framework for theory building in public relations, particularly the notion of interdependence. In other words, he concludes, “organizational-public relationships consist of patterns of linkages through which parties serve interdependent needs” (p. 12). Hung (2005) contributed to studies of organization-public relationships when she developed a continuum of eight types of relationships, ranging from exploitive/manipulative (self-interest) to mutual communal (concern for others’ interest). She points out that communal relationships enable an organization to pay more attention to their social responsibilities. Or put another way, such communal relationships, characterized by concern for public interest, is in fact related to the public sphere concept of a forum for discussion of mutual concerns. The other end of this continuum could be the domain of the private sphere as depicted in the model. Pearson (1989) notes that since the 1980s businesses have gone beyond a recognition of society’s needs and began to see themselves as active

participants in the political process. Pearson relates this notion of dialogue by citing Habermas' (1983) own perspective that dialogue in the public sphere is occurring when participants are able to move freely from one level of abstraction to another, to raise questions and challenge assertions.

Carroll's (1979) construct and definition of corporate social responsibility suggested four expectations society has of corporations: economic, legal, ethical and discretionary. The latter category was subsequently referred to as philanthropy, but it could be related to information and the public interest as well. In fact, Edmunds (1977) made the connection succinctly: "as business wields more pervasive authority, the decision parameters of management more closely coincide with public interest criteria of the citizenry....social responsibility implies a participative decision structure, rather than an adversary or regulatory one" (p38-39).

Carroll subsequently urged a move from normative musings about corporate responsibility into the realm of empiricism: "for these concepts to develop further, empirical research is doubtless needed so that practice may be reconciled with theory....more than likely we will see new realms in which to think about businesses' responsibilities to our stakeholder society" (Carroll, 1999, p. 292). The bulk of such empirical research has studied the effect of a company's CSR activities (transparent communication, philanthropy, environmental sustainability, demonstrated concern for public good) on reputation, consumer perception, and profitability.

However, some research has begun to connect CSR and public relations more directly to the public sphere. Shoemaker and Reese (1991), in a review of influence on mass media content, extend the idea that public relations may play a larger role in the public sphere today than the long heralded news institutions, largely because of the nature of journalistic routines. Specifically, they cite the prevalence of news "beats" that reinforce notions of what should get covered and discussed and limits access to new ideas and organizations. They stress that, as a result, public relations efforts may be the only way for certain groups to get coverage or to participate in public discourse. Similarly, in a study of the rise of public relations in Britain, Davis (2003) suggested that PR helps resource rich sources extend their control over the news, but at the same time helps resource poor sources gain media access. Noting that the influence of PR has become greater as news resources are cut, Davis posits that there may be a new meaning for media dependency—the media depending on PR professionals for information. Of particular relevance is his conclusion about the changing nature of participation in the public discourse: "the 1990s might be seen as a period in which alternative interest group PR began to break into established elite discourse networks to use the media to bring public policy debates more into the public sphere" (p. 41).

#### Conclusion: Implications For Public Relations

Some common themes emerge in theories and research about the public sphere and social responsibility of both the press and other organizations. One is that organizational media or individual media may well be as important in the public sphere as the traditionally conceived news media institutions, calling for a new conception of media. Secondly, there is evidence that all forms of media are influenced by individuals seeking specific information. So we should move beyond looking merely at media structure and pay attention to individuals as the unit of analysis. Finally, in both journalism and public relations there is a tension between norms and practice, so our theories about the public sphere should move from normative to empirical.

More empirical research related to the role of PR in the public sphere could also enhance the profession. Habermas wrote his original theory of the public sphere in German. It is interesting to note that the word for public sphere—*öffentlichkeit*—translates as “publicity.” It is the same used today in Germany to describe the public relations profession: *öffentlichkeitsarbeit*, or “publicity work.” If the proposed model withstands hypothesis testing, media scholars will have to reconcile the fact that information for the public interest, public debate, and public good is not automatically consumed by the public. Increasingly, in the “demassification” of our modern media environment, the public may need to be persuaded of the need to pay attention to and participate in matters of public affairs and policy even if such topics don’t seem to have high personal relevance for them. Those who do have an interest in the public sphere may increasingly rely on non-news media sources--i.e. the communication tools of corporations, advocacy organizations, government agencies, and even individuals—to attract interest and encourage civic discourse and involvement . Thus, public relations may become viewed less negatively as spin and more often as a vital player in the public interest.

Or perhaps an old concept will become new. *Öffentlichkeitsarbeit*: public relations as “public sphere work.”

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## Measuring Relationships in Strategic Communications for Public Relations

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*Strategic Communications* is the latest buzzword for public relations planning in the U.S. Army. At a “Deep Dive” Conference this past summer, which focused on measuring outcomes for its programs, the Army was not able to define strategic communications completely nor was it able to come up with adequate measurement tools for measuring relationships within strategic communications. It was able to arrive at measurable and motivational objectives somewhat and measurable process tools for media relations, but still lacked in measuring the qualitative relationships with key stakeholders. This paper proposes a definition of strategic communications. That is, the management of communications between the organization and its key stakeholders on a long-term basis to meet measurable objectives in a realistic timeframe. This definition is based on the Grunig and Hunt, 1984 definition of public relations. It intimates the concept of *relationships* as Grunig and Hunt did when specifying “between an organization and its key stakeholders. It is also strategic when using “management of communications,” “long-term,” and “measurable objectives.” The Army uses the term *strategic* when considering a theater and above level of operation, for example Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan or Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq.

This paper, then, proposes a converged relationship measurement tool based on a model developed by the leaders of the “measuring relationships” section of the “Deep Dive” Conference as well as models developed by Hon and Grunig, Huang, Hung, and Ledingham and Bruning, and possible proprietary models used by Edelman, Ogilvy PR Worldwide and other public relations agencies.

Measuring relationships is a recent phenomenon in public relations and measuring relationships in the context of a strategic communications campaign is unheard of. In the U.S. Army *strategic communications* is the latest buzzword for public relations planning. At a “Deep Dive” Conference the summer of 2006 at the Pentagon that focused on measuring outcomes for its programs, the Army was not able to define strategic communications completely nor was it able to come up with adequate measurement tools for measuring relationships within strategic communications. It was able to arrive at measurable and motivational objectives somewhat and measurable process tools for media relations, but still lacked in measuring qualitative relationships with key stakeholders. This paper proposes a definition of strategic communications realizing that the Army will rely on the Department of Defense definition for its official definition. That definition is the management of communications between the organization and its key stakeholders on a long-term basis to meet measurable objectives in a realistic timeframe. This definition is based on the Grunig and Hunt, 1984 definition of public relations. It intimates the concept of *relationships* as Grunig and Hunt did when specifying “between an organization and its key stakeholders. It is also strategic when using “management of communications,” “long-term,” and “measurable objectives.” The Army uses the term

*strategic* when considering a theater and above level of operation, for example Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan or Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq.

This paper, then, proposes a converged relationship measurement tool based on a model developed by the leaders of the “measuring relationships” section of the “Deep Dive” Conference as well as models developed by J. Grunig and L. Grunig (2001), Hon and Grunig (1999), Huang, Hung (2002), and Ledingham and Bruning, and possible proprietary models used by Edelman, Ogilvy PR Worldwide and other public relations agencies.

This model was critiqued and vetted through some 15 interviews with leading scholars in measuring relationships in public relations and officers in public affairs for the US Army. See Methodology for a full listing.

### Literature Review

This section will examine literature in measuring relationships as well as communications planning in the field of public relations. It will conclude with the tentative matrix to combine measuring relationships both quantitatively and qualitatively while conducting a campaign in public relations.

The genesis of relationships as a focus of public relations research is attributed to a paper presented by Mary Anne Ferguson at the AEJMC convention in 1984. She recommended that scholarship concerning public relations focus on the relationship or interactions between organizations and their publics. That idea bloomed further as a core of public relations when it was incorporated in Cutlip, Center and Broom’s (1987) textbook. The relationship management literature emerged further in the 1990s when Ledingham and Bruning (1998) identified the field of managing the organization-public relationship as “relationship management.” Their definition of relationship management is “the process of public relations professionals creating mutually beneficial relationships with a variety of publics. Broom and Dozier (1990) subsequently identified a co-orientation approach, identifying the issue as being the amount of agreement between and organization and its publics. It is not enough to ask the organization or the publics about the relationship, but to find out what their level of agreement is on an issue.

In 1997, Ledingham, Bruning and Lesko developed the notion of relational loyalty to assess the degree of commitment of publics to an organization. This concept of commitment came from Meyer and Allen’s (1993) book on commitment. These authors showed that both affective and continuance commitment were responsible for building trust and positive relationships between parties.

In 1984, 1989, and 1992, J. Grunig tied long-term relationships to the two-way models, and conflict resolution along with Plowman (1996). J. Grunig, L. Grunig and Ehling (1992) and Plowman also proposed that trust was an important component in these relationships. By 2000, Ledingham and Bruning were calling for relationship management to be a strategic communications function.

In 1990, Broom and Dozier realized there was a measurement problem and by 1999, Hon and Grunig had developed a measurement scale for assessing the levels of control mutuality, trust, commitment, and satisfaction between an organization and its publics. This quantitative measurement scale with agree/disagree questions and proven reliability factors is widely available for public relations practitioners on the Web site for the Institute for Public Relations Research. Also, available is a qualitative follow-up by J. Grunig and L. Grunig (March, 2001) that they developed for the U.S. Department of Energy. Other authors who have contributed recently are Kim (2000) who developed a scale measuring the dimensions of trust, commitment,

satisfaction, community and reputation, Kim and Samsup's (2002) study of the effects of relationships on satisfaction, loyalty and future behavior; and Triese, Weigold, Walsh-Childers and Friedman's (2002) research concerning relationships as an outcome of a public campaign.

As specified by Hon and Grunig (1999) the four major *cultivation strategies* as J. Grunig, now labels them (personal conversation, 2007) are:

- Control mutuality – the degree to which parties in a relationship are satisfied with the amount of control they over the relationship.
- Trust – the level of confidence that both parties have in each other and their willingness to open themselves to the other party.
- Commitment – the extent to which both parties feel believe and feel the relationship is worth spending energy on to maintain and promote.
- Satisfaction – the extent to which both parties feel favorably about each other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced.

Reliability of indices for the indicators or cultivation strategies for five organizations using Chronbach's Alpha are (anything above a .80 is very reliable):

- Control Mutuality -- .87 for a 5-item scale
- Trust -- .86 for a 6-item scale
- Commitment -- .85 for a 5-item scale
- Satisfaction -- .89 for a 5-item scale

Interviews with several subjects in Army public affairs and academe because of increased focus by the chain-of command confirmed the addition of transparency as an indicator or cultivation strategy, hereafter referred to as relationship strategies based on the emphasis of measuring relationships in this paper.

Rawlins (2007) recently developed a stakeholder measurement instrument of organizational transparency . It included the quantitative tools of factor analyses, structural equation models, and reliability alphas to indicate the three transparency reputation traits of integrity, respect for others, and openness as well as the four transparency efforts of participation, substantial information, accountability, and secrecy. The reliability alphas for each of these factors ranged from .93 to .78, all within the range for measurement of unique factors. For the purposes of this paper, these factors will be reduced to the more commonly known variables in the literature of information, participation and accountability.

The most recent confirmation of these relationship strategies was conducted by Hibbert and Simmons (2005) when they applied them to a study of the Australian Defence Force's Military Public Affairs Branch (ADF MPA) and the Australian political and specialist defence media during the 2003 Iraq war. The Australian media were not allowed to embed with Australian forces unlike other international media. One media participant characterized the relationship as a blanket of secrecy. The ADF said the policy was based on strategic and security issues, but many of the media believed that the Australian army was overly secretive, manipulative and out of touch with media needs. One on one interviews were conducted with representative from both sides. The results showed that the media were less satisfied with the defence-media relationship and there were mixed levels of trust felt by both parties. Each party was committed to what they described as an important relationship.

These five relationship strategies, then have been established and can be measured quantitatively as well as qualitatively. See Appendix 1 and 2 for questions that can be asked to measure both. Based on a workshop at the PRSA national convention held in Salt Lake City, November 2006 put on by Angela Sinickas of Sinickas Communications Inc., these five

relationship strategies can be placed as the left column of a matrix to measure these strategies in a strategic communications campaign (Initial Matrix). The term *control mutuality* was changed to *mutual influence* to comply with federal government mandates that public affairs in government not use undue influence on publics. Rather, information campaigns lay out the facts for different publics to decide issues on their own.

This abbreviated campaign is based on a Wilson and Ogden (2005) strategic communications matrix and a definition of strategic communications developed by Plowman (2006) for the 96<sup>th</sup> Regional Readiness Command (USAR) while serving as the public affairs officer for that command. That definition of strategic communications is “the management of communications between an organization and its key stakeholders on a long-term basis to meet measurable objectives in a realistic timeframe.” The DOD definition that the Army has complied with is:

(DOD) focused United States Government (USG) efforts to understand and engage key audiences in order to create, strengthen or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of USG interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all elements of national power.

In a January 2007 interview, Lieutenant General David Petraeus (now commander of forces Iraq) elaborated on strategic communications by saying it depends on its consequences. No matter who the spokesperson or what level of the organization that person is speaking from, if there are consequences at the strategic level (the DOD definition above), then the communication is strategic.

In both academic and military definitions, note the similarities of terms, as in stakeholders or target audiences. The author includes the term, long-term, because that helps guarantee that stakeholders will remain loyal in a win/win relationship. The author’s definition assumes that strategic communications is a communications plan that includes themes, messages and products. It also includes objectives that are measurable so they can be evaluated in a certain timeframe. Strategic communications in this instance does not include the controversy over mixing the Army’s information operations, public affairs, civil affairs or psychological operations. Strategic communications is simply the communications plan as espoused by the Defense Information School at Ft. Meade, Maryland.

Steyn (2007) agreed with LTG Petraeus and accorded a higher role to strategic communications and does not equate communication management to strategic communications. In fact, she says that public relations assists an organization to adapt to its stakeholder environment serving both the organization and the public interest. By acting socially responsible and building mutually beneficial relationships on which it depends to meet its objectives, an organization gains trust and builds a good reputation with its stakeholders. Steyn describes several functions of strategic communications but operationalizing public relations strategy as *deliberate*, she combines several elements of planning. This is a process that among other elements, emphasizes drawing a stakeholder map, thinking through the consequences of organizational goals on those stakeholders, and addressing those consequences by deciding what should be communicated (themes) and what should be achieved by this communication (setting deliberate objectives).

Likewise, Chia (2006) and Rawlins (2006) agree with Steyn in that outcomes and planning should be part of relationship planning, but of course, that planning is not part of the relationship itself. It is rather a tool, characteristic and metric to help gauge the state of that

relationship. As Chia said, “Measurement might be more appropriately focused on outcomes ... after public relations intervention has taken place” (p. 5).

### Initial Relationship Matrix for a Strategic Communications Campaign

<i>Criteria for Successful Relationship Strategies</i>	Stakeholder Perceptions	Stakeholder Expectations	Measurable Objective	Message Design	Tactics	Metric or Evaluation of Objective
Influence		Rating 1-10				
Trust						
Transparency						
Satisfaction						
Commitment						

This matrix then includes and adaptation of Hon and Grunig’s (1999) adaptation of criteria for successful relationship strategies plus transparency on the left and typical communications campaigns on the top. *Influence* is the degree parties in a relationship are satisfied with the amount of influence or power they have over the relationship. *Trust* is the level of confidence that both parties have in each other and their willingness to open themselves to the other party specifically for the factors of *integrity*, *dependability*, and *competence*. *Transparency* (adapted from Rawlins, 2007) is the attempt to make available all legally releasable *information* to enhance the *participation* of stakeholders and hold organizations *accountable* for their actions in the relationship. *Satisfaction* is the extent to which both parties feel favorably about each other because each is taking positive steps to maintain the relationship. *Commitment* is the extent both parties spend energy to engage in cooperative problem-solving to maintain and promote the relationship.

In a typical communications campaign a benchmark of stakeholder perceptions and their expectations for the relationship of both parties must be established to be able to measure change in that relationship at a later point in time. Along with a stakeholder benchmark, measurable objectives must be set to achieve with those stakeholders that are achievable within a reasonable amount of time in a strategic communications campaign. After that the self-interests of both the organization and its stakeholder should be determined so that they might be combined in a short message design tied to a slogan that can be applied to many stakeholders. Specific communication products tactics can then be determined to reach these publics through various communication channels. Finally, metric or evaluation criteria that restate the benchmark objectives can be measured as a post-test to assess the amount of change after the specified time-period of the original objectives. Those benchmark objectives can then be used to re-assess the amount of change that has occurred among the five relationship factors for the stakeholder perceptions and expectations. A chart like Figure 1 would be created for each stakeholder. A 1-10 scale could be used for many of these cells with 10 being high, to measure the degree there is for example, mutual influence attached to stakeholder expectations or communication tactics. This proposed metric tool to measure relationships in a strategic communications campaign for the U.S. Army acts as the research question. The methodology will critique or act as a qualitative pre-test of the instrument.

## Methodology

To vet or critique the Initial Matrix, this study was framed in the interpretative paradigm, using detailed semi-structured interviews that were directed by the response of the interviewees. Qualitative research design was selected because of the exploratory nature of the topic.

### *Participants*

For the purpose of this study, opinion leaders were chosen in public affairs leadership for the U.S. Army to attain their views of a reasonable model since research through the Army led to its questioning of measuring relationships in its communications planning campaigns. Relationship measurement models developed in the academic field of public relations led to interviews conducted with some of the principal authors of those models. Some 11 interviews were conducted with Army public affairs personnel and four interviews conducted with academics in public relations.

The strength of interviewing as a qualitative method lies in answering how and why questions, delving in-depth about a model in this case that can only be understood by seasoned practitioners of public relations and academics steeped in communications planning and relationship measurement. The great weakness, of course, is that findings cannot be generalized to a population, but the findings would be replicable – the standard for quality in this type of in similar circumstances. The findings, however, are generalizable to theory as in good case study research (Yin, 2004). Since this model was developed out of theory and verification of the reliability of the quantitative variables, it is with confidence by the researcher, that this model, once refined can be used to measure the relationships in subsequent strategic communications or public relations campaigns.

Bias in this study was controlled for by triangulation. Triangulation of theory occurred in the literature review. Triangulation of patterns and themes occurred using constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1977) among the various interviewees.

### *Procedure*

Collection of data has been covered in discussing the number of interviewees previously. Interviews began with brief introductions and then a conversation about the research project, moving toward the research questions. Most interviews began by asking participants about the problem of measuring relationships in the U.S. Army, in practice and in academia. Additional questions were then based on the responses of interviewees in order to capture the perspective of the interviewee and to keep the interviewer from directing the interview (Broom & Dozier, 1990; Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

### *Analysis*

The interviews were transcribed although the findings in the paper reflect only the notes taken from the initial interviews conducted in February 2006. Further analysis will occur as those transcriptions become available to the researcher. They will then be analyzed using the four step constant comparative method of thematic analysis. The data were also compared with the notes and observations of the researcher that were collected during the interviews. Each interview will be analyzed to identify themes and relationships discussed by the interviewee. The transcripts will then be compared against one another in order to glean and categorize all information into appropriate and comprehensive categories for analysis. The coding process incorporated an examination of metaphors, themes, case examples, and relationships mentioned in the interviews. The final goal of analysis will provide a descriptive, theoretical understanding of the process and application of the role of transparency government communication practices (Morse, 1994; Wimmer & Dominick, 2003).

### Preliminary Findings

Several patterns emerged in the interviews that caused re-thinking of the relationship/strategic communications matrix. Those revolved around the mutual influence strategy for measuring relationships, the transparency strategy, the usefulness of separate categories for stakeholder perceptions and stakeholder expectations and the placement of the initial measurable objectives.

In the interview with Dr. James Grunig, he argued for retention of the term control mutuality, in that the term does not mean control over other parties in the relationship but rather control in the relationship itself. The deputy director of the Planning Division for the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs and the deputy director for the entire office were put off by the term *mutual influence* because it connotes undue influence over stakeholders, the opposite of DOD's creed to simply inform key audiences by providing truthful, credible, accurate and timely information. However, other interviewees, specifically the director of the planning division scoffed at the notion that providing information does not influence stakeholder groups. It was apparent from the interviews that there was concern over the perception of the term *mutual influence* but the predominant pattern was the term was acceptable.

Transparency, as an addition by the author, was overwhelmingly accepted by all the interviewees. Transparency is the latest *buzzword* in Army public affairs and was even invoked in the recent controversy over the quality of housing at the Walter Reed Army Hospital. Public affairs guidance to the field about from LTC Wayne Shanks, director of the Media Relations Division of OCPA about the issue on March 5, 2007 includes:

Message to all PAOs

In light of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center ongoing situation, the public affairs community must be "painfully transparent" as a matter of course, but especially as it pertains to Army medical care. All public affairs professionals should immediately contact their local medical facilities to determine if they may have any issues which may draw media attention given the current media environment involving WRAMC. You must be willing to answer the hard questions in your lane while kicking those not in your lane to OCPA or MEDCOM, in compliance with any guidance coming from your command.

Also, please alert OCPA, through the most expeditious means possible, if you have any possible medical care issues with your unit/installation which may attract negative national media attention.

Please use the following as over-arching medical talking points:

- Soldiers are the heart of our Army and the quality of their medical care is non-negotiable.
- We are committed to outstanding professional medical care for Soldiers and their families.

As evidenced from this e-mail message, U.S. Army Public Affairs is committed to the concept of transparency.

Initially, the separate terms *stakeholder perceptions* and *stakeholder expectations* began simply as one term, *stakeholder*, realizing that a separate matrix would have to be constructed for each stakeholder group. Through preliminary interviews, a pattern emerged that this term should at least be stakeholder perceptions and that term evolved into stakeholder imperative and then the use of two terms, adding the second -- stakeholder expectations. The rationale from the

academic interviewees was that a benchmark for current perceptions of the relationship of a stakeholder with an organization should be established. At the same time, that stakeholder should have an idea of where that relationship should be going, as an expectation through the five relationship strategies.

The Army, as part of its strategic communications, has defined three main goals, one of which is to “maintain public support.” It has further segmented that *general public*, into an initial list of:

- Congress
- American Public
- Office of the Secretary of Defense/Sister Departments and Services
- General Officers, Senior Executive Service Civilians, Commander of Major Commands etc.
- Internal Army
- Think Tanks and Pundits
- Allies
- International Audiences
- Joint Staff/Command/Service Schools
- Federal Agencies
- Industry
- Veteran’s Organizations
- Military Service Organizations
- Government Agencies

As can be seen from this list, it is very broad and encompassing, and includes internal and external key stakeholders. It could be segmented further in increasingly detailed levels. The critical question here would be at what level of detail would it be productive to measure relationships and at what level of strategic communications campaigns would it be productive. That might only be answered by actually conducting a campaign with the relationships in mind. Given this possible level of detail, some thought might be given to collapsing these two stakeholder categories back into one as originally conceptualized.

That leads to the last major pattern of objectives. It might seem obvious here, as well, that specific objectives should be constructed that incorporate the relationships. So, instead of an objective reading: “Increase positive attitudes towards the Army by 5 percent in one year,” it might read: “Increase the level of commitment between Veteran’s organizations and the Army by 5 percent in one year,” thus measuring one relationship strategy. That latter objective, of course, begs the question as well, should the objective include the stakeholder in it. Under this matrix the stakeholder is all ready named, so it may not be necessary. Also, if the objective comes before the stakeholder on the matrix, then the relationship objective would predominate. If it comes after, then the objective might be perceived as subordinate to the stakeholders. The great consensus of interviewees said the relationship objective should come first, if only to guide the perceptions or expectations of the stakeholder towards the relationship.

#### Preliminary Conclusion

The matrix model, then as conceptually, should be modified in this pre-test before being applied to an actual strategic communications campaign. Influence should stand as it is as one of the relationship strategies. Transparency should be included as a relationship strategy as well. It is unclear if the communications plan steps of stakeholder perceptions and stakeholder

expectations should be collapsed together at this point and how a single step should be defined. The initial establishment of objectives should be switched from after the stakeholder steps to before so that the objectives are not affected by any one stakeholder group before being delineated. This will mean the objectives will come more purely from the issues and goals of the campaign rather than raising the possibility of not addressing the full problem if dictated solely from the perspective of specific stakeholders.

This approach ensures the academic and practical understanding that public relations is the management of strategic long-term relations "...away from the manipulation of public opinion and toward a focus on building nurturing and maintaining organization-public relationships" (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999, p. 158). It focuses the purpose of the practice of public relations on mutual and not just organizational benefit (Bruning, Castle & Schrepfer, 2004) and because relationships may provide a focus for the Army and other organizations that deal with a number of strategic communication campaigns, objectives and methods and have struggled to define even the concept of strategic communications and its value to the organization.

Hon and Grunig (1999) said the effectiveness of organizations is linked to their ability to select objectives that are worthwhile both the organization and its strategic stakeholders. They argue that in order to even select appropriate objectives, that organizations need to understand their relationships with their key publics or stakeholders. With the matrix and refined below, maybe the organization can achieve both campaign objectives and relationship objectives at the same time and relationship objectives might even be part of a campaign or the same objectives in a campaign. Relationship and communication campaigns could be integrated that closely. That integration could have the most powerful and longest term impact on the Army and any organization.

The downside of incorporating such detail in any communications campaign may make the complexity impossible to manage according to Chia, 2006. She lobbies for "parameters of best practice" to be able to deal with the volatile nature of relationships in an environment of constant change. The matrix of relationship/campaign measurement could provide such parameters. It will have to be applied several times in real strategic communications campaigns to know for certain.

#### **Final Relationship Matrix/Strategic Communications Campaign**

<i>Criteria for Successful Relationship Strategies</i>	Measurable Objective	Stakeholder Perceptions	Stakeholder Expectations	Message Design	Tactics	Metric or Evaluation of Objective
Influence		Rating 1-10				
Trust						
Transparency						
Satisfaction						
Commitment						

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## Appendix 1

### Quantitative

Measuring Relationships Against Strategic Communication Scales for the Army

Sample Stakeholder: Families of Soldiers 18-24 years old

#### Influence

1. The Army and my organization are attentive to what each other say.
2. The Army believes the opinions of my organization are legitimate.
3. In dealing with my organization, the Army has a tendency to throw its weight around. (reversed)
4. The Army really listens to what my organization has to say to them.
5. The leaders of the Army gives my organization enough say in the decision-making process.

Stakeholder Perception: 40% Positive

Stakeholder Expectation: 50% Positive

Measurable Objective: Increase mutual influence by 10% in one year.

Message Design: Family benefits through character-building, financial stability and future marketability of Soldier.

Slogan = Army Strong, Families Strong

Tactics: Regular counseling with families

Focus groups gauging family opinions

Direct mail to families about family issues

Equalize power relationship through family days

Publicize implementation of action resulting from listening

Extend Climate Surveys to Families

Tribute to Freedom

America Support Families

Family Readiness Contacts

Metric: Survey families with five questions above.

#### Trust

1. The Army treats my organization fairly and justly. (integrity)
2. Whenever the Army makes an important decision, it will be concerned about my organization. (integrity)
3. The Army can be relied on to keep its promises. (dependability)
4. The Army takes opinions from my organization into account when making decisions. (dependability)
5. I feel very confident about the Army's skills. (competence)
6. The Army has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do. (competence)

#### Transparency

1. I can find out pretty much what I want to about the Army. (information)
2. The Army doesn't have anything to hide. (information)
3. My organization can readily identify what kind of information it needs from the Army. (participation)
4. The Army is open to my organization contributing to its effort. (participation)
5. The Army reports its activities and policies as balanced and objectively as possible. (accountability)
6. The Army holds itself responsible for the information it gives out. (accountability)

#### Satisfaction

1. My organization is pleased with the Army.
2. Both the Army and my organization benefit from the relationship.
3. Most people in my organization are satisfied with the interactions with the Army.
4. Generally speaking, my organization is happy with the relationship the Army has established with it.
5. Most people in my organization enjoy dealing with the Army.

#### Commitment

1. I feel that the Army is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to my organization.
2. I can see that the Army wants to maintain a relationship with my organization.
3. Compared to other organizations, my organization values its relationship with the Army more.
4. I would rather work together with the Army than not.
5. The Army is willing to work together with my organization to resolve any issues.

## Appendix 2

## Qualitative

## Measuring Relationships Against Strategic Communication Scales for the Army

Sample Stakeholder: Families of Soldiers 18-24 years old

## Three Grand-Tour Questions

1. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the name of the U.S. Army? What else do you know about it?
2. Do you feel you have a relationship with the Army? Why or why not?
3. Please describe your relationship with the Army.

Influence

1. To what extent do you believe the Army is attentive to what you have to say? Why?
2. Can you provide examples that show the Army has actually taken your interests into account in its decision and behaviors or that show it failed to take those interests into account?
3. To what extent do you feel you have any influence over what the Army does that affects you? Why?

Trust

1. Would you describe any things the Army has done to treat you fairly and justly or unfairly and unjustly? (integrity)
2. Would you describe things the Army has done that indicate it can be relied on to keep its promises, or that it does not keep its promises? (dependability)
3. How confident are you that the Army has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do? Can you give me examples of why you feel that way? (competence)

Transparency

1. Do you think you can find out pretty much what I want to about the Army? (information)
2. Can you find readily identify what kind of information you need from the Army? (participation)
3. Do you think the Army holds itself responsible for the information it gives out? (accountability)

Satisfaction

1. How satisfied are you with the relationship that the Army has had with you? Please explain why you are satisfied or not satisfied.

Commitment

1. Can you provide me any examples that suggest the Army wants to maintain a long-term commitment to a relationship with you or does not want to maintain such a relationship?

## **Creativity Undercover: Teaching Stealth Marketing**

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*The next time an overly friendly blond sidles up in a crowded bar and asks you to order her a brand-name martini, or a cheery tourist couple wonder whether you can take their picture with their sleek new camera-in-a-cell phone, you might want to think twice. There's a decent chance that these strangers are pitchmen in disguise, paid to oh-so-subtly pique your interest in their product.*

-Daniel Eisenberg, Time Magazine, September 2, 2002

As audiences become more jaded about advertising and public relations, and technological sophistication increases, messages are getting lost in the clutter. The result is an industry conspiracy to change the way we reach consumers and a dire need to educate future practitioners. One of today's hottest trends is the use of stealth marketing. Also referred to as undercover marketing, the idea is to sneak your message to an unsuspecting consumer. Using that premise, an exercise in creative thinking was surreptitiously interjected into a class lesson on stealth marketing.

This paper will explore techniques for teaching stealth marketing in the classroom and the effectiveness of using this subject matter to enhance the students' creative thinking skills – with a goal to determine the benefits of requiring students to use creative skills taught in class to develop and execute a real-world stealth marketing campaign. The students involved were advertising and public relations majors enrolled in an introductory course in creative thinking. Objectives for this course include teaching students how to generate ideas, approach communication problems creatively, develop target-specific, multi-media solutions and evaluate the effectiveness and relevance of creative solutions through various assignments.

### **Why Stealth Marketing?**

The researchers chose stealth marketing because it has quickly become a popular method for reaching consumers, and it exemplifies creativity. According to Sony Ericsson's corporate vice president of global marketing Dee Dutta, "the most important element of a covert marketing campaign—the 'absolutely fundamental' requirement for a successful program—is creativity. We live and die on innovation. We want to do things that are not just cool, but different," he says (Branscum, 2004).

It is important to provide communication students with not only the necessary creative thinking skills but with knowledge of the most current marketing trends. A study of current practices supports the notion that future practitioners must be prepared to go undercover.

The traditional way of reaching consumers is growing less effective every day. A prime example is the 30 second television commercial. This one-time industry mainstay has been rendered largely ineffective by TiVo and other similar digital video recorders (Eisenberg, 2002). Traditional advertising vehicles are now facing so many roadblocks that companies need to find innovative, if not extreme, alternatives. The result is a variety of innovative approaches that are slipping past consumer radar and avoiding detection altogether (Ritter, 2003).

According to Gary McCarron, assistant communications professor at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, “the public is already immune to most mainstream advertising and new research indicates that advertising that doesn’t seem like advertising, is the new way to reach our jaded minds” (Ibid).

Now one of the most effective ways to reach consumers is to do so without the consumer realizing that he or she is the subject of a marketing message. Stealth marketing is about taking the right approach with the right people. Getting “regular people” to become word-of-mouth advocates for a product or service is the ultimate goal of the modern marketer (Taylor, 2003).

### **Creativity in the Classroom**

A study of literature on teaching creativity indicates that there are documented approaches on the subject; however none are directly correlated to stealth marketing. Teaching students to think creatively and to find many correct answers instead of the traditional academic approach of finding just one correct answer, is the challenge of today’s educator. For generations, formal education has been focused on teaching students how to analyze -- how to logically determine right and wrong, answers instead of how to explore ideas (Harris 1998).

Creative thinking is about more than finding answers -- it is about expanding the horizons of possible solutions. In other words, it is about thinking of new ways to think. Creative thinking should produce new insights, new ways of understanding, and new ways of questioning. Students need to learn how to question presupposed concepts in a manner that will produce new and imaginative insights (Facione 2001).

E Paul Torrance, teacher and psychologist, distinguished professor emeritus, University of Georgia, has done extensive research on the subject of creativity. According to Torrance, curiosity and a willingness to step into the unknown -- to discover, to invent, and to explore -- are the cornerstones of creative thinking. Students must also be able to clearly visualize the relationship between their education and their professional lives after schooling is complete. This, Torrance argues, makes the school responsible for enabling students to accurately visualize images of the future (Fryer 2003).

Traditional marketing education tends to ignore divergent thinking, focusing instead on the tried-and-true methods of yesteryear. This, coupled with many students’ misconceived notion that creative ideas are generated from some whimsical or mystical process, makes education reform imperative. Students need to be taught that creative thinking is a well-defined process that requires disciplined, systematic, and sustained thinking (Ibid).

The very nature of marketing requires practitioners to be experts at generating new and creative ideas. With millions of dollars at stake, innovation is a necessity for marketers. This is why it is imperative for today’s students to be taught how to generate, develop and refine fresh, new ideas.

### **Methodology**

This study was conducted over a period of three consecutive semesters, at a large metropolitan university in the southeastern United States. A total of 160 students participated in the research. All of the students were enrolled in a course designed to teach the basics of creativity. This three step process began with a lecture and discussion in the classroom to provide knowledge and assess perceptions on the topic. This was followed by the development and execution of a real stealth marketing campaign performed by groups of six students done in a

controlled setting. Lastly, students responded to a formal survey to determine the effectiveness of the teaching techniques.

### Lesson

The students' stealth marketing lessons began with the viewing of selected sections of *The Corporation* (Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbott and Joel Bakan, 2004), a Canadian documentary about the corporation's inner workings, history, controversial impacts and possible future. Approximately 30 minutes of the film is devoted to advertising and public relations practices of corporations. Sections entitled "A Private Celebration" and "Triumph of The Shill" reveal undercover marketing tactics that corporations are currently using. A brief discussion following the film confirms the students have gained a general understanding of stealth marketing prior to the lecture.

The lesson continues with a PowerPoint lecture based on the article *Stealth Marketing: How to reach Customers Surreptitiously* by Andrew M. Kaikati and Jack G. Kaikati, California Management Review Summer 2004. It is explained that a stealth marketing message can be conveyed physically, verbally, virally or virtually. The students are then introduced to a more detailed breakdown of stealth marketing that includes various real-world examples. After the lecture and a general discussion about stealth marketing, students are given the details of the assignment and asked to form teams of 6 (smaller teams are preferable but larger teams were a necessity with classes of 50-60 students).

### Assignment

Students were required to develop a stealth marketing idea for a product or service and execute it only on the university's campuses to a potential target audience of 38,000. They were also instructed to choose something unfamiliar to the target audience. Requirements included idea development, execution, and documentation of results as well as presentation of projects. Students were allowed to create a fictitious product or service as long as they were careful about collecting and destroying personal information. If there was secondary contact and personal information was given, students were required to let respondents know they had participated in a class project.

### *Student Project Examples*

- **Pantherdate:** One of the most successful student stealth marketing projects was a campaign for a fictitious dating website called Pantherdate. The students developed what appeared to be a dating website for students at their university. The home page asked for name, email address, age and gender. Once students entered the information and hit the submit button they received a message that said "thank you for participating in our class project. We are sorry that this is not a real dating website but we wish you luck in love and below are some links that you might find helpful." The message also assured participants that the personal information submitted was automatically deleted. The student's stealth marketed the website by leaving individual hand written heart shaped notes with the website address around campus – on the stairs in the classrooms, in campus restaurants, etc. They also went in to computer labs and brought the site up so students using the computers would see the Pantherdate homepage. Results: 235 people logged on to the Pantherdate site and 95% signed up for the service. 63% of those who signed up were female.
- **Brazilian Soft Drink:** Another group took advantage of an unfortunate series of hurricanes in south Florida for their stealth marketing project. Through a survey on campus, the students stealth marketed a Brazilian soft drink, Antartica, a product not

well-known in the US. While they were filling out the survey, subjects were given a small cup of Antartica which was highly visible in the survey area. The survey asked students how they thought the university handled the hurricanes with regard to classes and communication. Upon completion of the survey, participants were asked to include their email address if they were willing to be contacted. With the idea that if this were a real-world effort, anyone giving their email address would be sent more information about the soft drink. Results: 115 people filled out the survey and 57% gave their email addresses.

- **Panther House:** Students created a fictitious university reality TV show, Panther House. The goal was to generate interest and recruit participants for Panther House, using word of mouth, hand written notes left around campus and mysterious messages on classroom white boards. Each medium had a different code in order to record the precise way the person was marketed. The challenge for this group was that people had to send a text message if they were interested. Results: There were no responses to staged phone conversations and white board messages and only 3 responded to handwritten notes left around campus.
- **Zip Hand Sanitizer:** In an effort to surreptitiously promote a fictitious new brand of hand sanitizer, this team of students disguised themselves as psychology majors conducting a research experiment on campus. They set up a table in a high-traffic area with three mystery boxes, Zip Hand Sanitizer (their own creation) and free cookies. Participants were asked to explain how they felt after putting their hands in the boxes and touching something unknown and were then offered a free cookie as a thank you. An accurate assumption was made that each participant would use the hand sanitizer before taking the free cookie. All the participants were curious to know what was in the boxes but were required to visit a website to find out. When visiting the website they found an ad for Zip Hand Sanitizer, a thoughtful message explaining the (real) class project and a list of the contents in the box (gummy bears, pancake mix and floam). Results: 57% of the participants followed up with a visit to the website.

#### Survey Questions

1. Did the team project assignment (executing a campaign) help you to learn more about stealth marketing?
2. Did the team project assignment help you to learn more about creativity? If yes, what did you learn about creativity (and/or your own creative skills)?
3. Did the other teams' presentations provide you with additional knowledge/information? If so, what did you get out of the presentation?
4. Is there anything you would have changed with regard to the assignment or the way the information on stealth marketing was presented to you?

#### **Discussion of Results**

Survey results indicated that the lesson and actual execution of the assignment enabled students to gain an in-depth understanding of stealth marketing, as well as the importance of creative thinking. When students were asked if the assignment helped them learn more about stealth marketing 94% said yes. In addition, 90% of the students believed their knowledge of creativity increased. When asked specifically if the stealth marketing project helped them to learn more about creativity, one student replied "It made me think about things in a way that I never would have. It opened up my mind to creativity with a useful concept" (Student, 2006)

while another said “creativity is really something I pride myself on, but this project taught me to really think outside the box” (Student, 2005).

Viewing of other team’s presentations increased the understanding of 82% of the respondents while 18% did not agree. In the comment section of the survey, students indicated that the presentations were helpful because the presentations “strengthened what they already learned” and they got to see varied levels of creativity. When asked what they would change about the lesson and assignment, the students only complained about time restraints and group size.

The participating classes ranged from 50-60 students. For classes of this size it is necessary for the students to work in groups of 6-7 in order to facilitate the presentations within one class period. For smaller classes, groups of 3-4 are recommended. The first two study groups had 4 weeks to complete the assignment. After the students indicated that more time would be helpful, the assignment time period was expanded to six weeks and this was confirmed as a sufficient amount of time to develop, execute and determine stealth marketing results.

The researchers believe that a lesson in stealth marketing followed by an assignment to develop and execute a stealth marketing campaign is an excellent tool for enhancing the creative thinking skills. “Creativity has two parts: thinking, then producing. Innovation is embedded in the creative process. It is the implementation of creative inspiration” (Naiman 2004).

Surveys overwhelmingly demonstrated that the students themselves felt that the actual planning and execution of their projects expanded their ability for creative thinking. The students also indicated that collaborating with others added insight into their own creative thought process, as did the opportunity to view the projects of other teams.

It is also abundantly clear that stealth marketing is, in and of itself, a marketing technique students will need in the field. Professionals expect educators to prepare students to enter the communication workforce, and knowledge of stealth marketing may even provide students with a competitive edge when job hunting.

## **Conclusion**

Stealth marketing by nature requires innovation and the development of creative strategies. The research indicates that stealth marketing along with other marketing trends should be considered for creativity coursework for students studying advertising, public relations or marketing. The lack of empirically founded research validates the need for further work.

Further studies on students at various levels of education will help to confirm the need to incorporate these teaching techniques in to creative thinking lessons. This study should also be replicated at universities in other parts of the country. This would help to expand and diversify results.

Finally, future study might look at student perceptions on the controversy over the ethics of stealth marketing. The communication students surveyed for this research indicated that they thought stealth marketing was innovative and not unethical. A comparison to students studying other disciplines and could provide interesting results and consumer insights that could be shared with marketing professionals.

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## Measuring the Relationship Between Organizational Transparency and Trust

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The literature on transparency and trust suggest the two concepts are related. While this idea is logical on its face, would it hold true if measured? Using an instrument that measures both transparency and trust, analysis of employee opinion supports this notion. In particular, organizations that encourage and allow public participation, share substantial information so their publics can make informed decisions, give balanced reports that hold them accountable, and open themselves up to public scrutiny, are more likely to be trusted.

While trust in government and media continues to decline, the 2007 Edelman Trust Barometer shows increased trust in business for the first time since 2002. Michael Deaver (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2007) attributes this increase to strong economic growth and the rise of responsible business behavior. Certain measures to ensure more accountability and transparency in reporting financial and social responsibility indicators, such as Sarbanes-Oxley, have also contributed to this increase in trust. In fact, the literature often draws a relationship between trust and transparency.

The literature is clear; to increase trust, organizations must be more open and transparent with their communication. In fact, the idea of organizational transparency is mentioned several times in the 2007 Edelman Trust Barometer. Pam Talbot implies that customers will seek mutual benefits from companies, and that “mutual benefits imply trust, which in turn implies transparency and honesty” (p. 6). Richard Edelman said that “continuous, transparent—and even passionate—communications is central” to business success in today’s new environment (p. 2). Chris Deri advises nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to also be more transparent, because their entire value is based on trust: “they need to be laser-focused on the trust they earn and on their transparency about their own successes and failures” (p. 12). Employees also need their organizations to be transparent to them, according to Gary Grates: “today’s management must still hold true to some basic tenets: authentic communication, relationship-building methods, and a communication style that affords open, transparent, ongoing discussion, which allows people to drive business strategy, and, most importantly, to voice opinions and suggestions that ultimately affect performance and business outcomes” (p. 11). A survey of 25,000 employees by Towers Perrin also concluded that employees prefer “communication that is an open and honest exchange of information—both the good and bad—and materials that are clear and understandable (Strategist 2005, p. 4). Finally Nancy Turett counsels healthcare organizations to embrace transparency, and concludes with the following insight: “openness trumps an image of perfection” (p. 25).

Of course, the idea of a connection between transparency and trust has roots much older than the 2007 Edelman Trust Barometer. The trust crisis that followed some of the biggest corporate frauds in U.S. history—with Enron, WorldCom, Arthur Anderson and Tyco as some of the biggest culprits—resulted in a flood of demands for more transparency to restore trust in corporate America and the stock market. After studying this decline of trust and credibility, the Public Relations Coalition (2003), a summit of communications organizations representing

50,000 professional communicators, recommended that organizations, in particular corporations, “articulate a set of ethical principles,” “create a process for transparency that is appropriate for current and future operations,” and “establish a formal system of measurement of trust.”

The PR trade magazines declared that “ethical standards and transparency through every aspect” of corporate communications was critical to restoring trust (Savage 2005, p. 11). To restore that trust, a 2003 Golin/Harris survey reported that people want companies to be more “open and honest in business practices,” “communicate more clearly, effectively and straightforwardly,” and to show more concern and consideration for its stakeholders, such as employees and customers (Golin 2004, pp. 4-5). In an age when nothing can be hidden for long, everything depends on trust and transparency according to David Silver (2005). He also said that stakeholders were demanding that organizations become more transparent—which he defined as honesty and accuracy—not only “in the numbers the release but also in how they’re run” (p. 16).

However, transparency also requires trust. Being transparent requires a willingness to be vulnerable, because you can’t ensure how people will use the information you share. Therefore, organizations must also trust their stakeholders in order to risk being transparent. As the authors of “The Naked Corporation” put it, “If you’re going to be naked, you’d better be buff” (Tapscott & Ticoll, 2003). This is the intimidating part of being transparent, because when organizations aren’t buff or have done something that justifiably will raise criticism, the temptation is to keep quiet.

However, trust is a reciprocal relationship. Organizations can’t expect trust from stakeholders if they are not willing to trust them first or in return. In the case of transparency, the organizations must trust their stakeholders to use the information responsibly. As Fort (1996) explained,

Institutions that are trustworthy open themselves to criticism. Their decisions and the reasons for such decisions are open to examination and evaluation by stakeholders. Stakeholder management thus requires corporations to be accountable to questions similar to those of professions [such as law and medicine]. (Fort, 1996, p. 214)

Fort (1996) cited Koehn’s (1996) argument that “institutionalized self-critique engenders trustworthiness” (Fort, 1996, p. 214). Fort argued that through transparency, organizations encourage a similar self-analysis and ultimately a public accounting. In this sense, transparency, like trust, demands an act of good faith. Fort (1996) and Koehn (1996) referred to this act of faith as “willed trust” (Fort, 1996, p. 214; and Koehn, 1996, p. 201). Koehn categorized this faith in the good will of stakeholders as “trusting as a matter of policy” (p. 201). He explained,

Because human relations are extremely nuanced, involving risks we cannot calculate and conditions of action we cannot predict, and because descriptions of actions are open to dispute, we are, in this view, better off simply proceeding on the assumption that others mean well and will respond generously to our trust in them. (p. 201)

This paper takes a closer look at the two concepts, trust and transparency, that have received so much attention in the trade press and management books. In particular, care will be taken to define trust and transparency. Both concepts are complex and multidimensional. Then, the results of an employee survey will be tested to determine whether there is empirical evidence that trust and transparency are significantly related to each other. The survey included questions developed to measure their trust and their perceptions of their organization’s transparency. This

is the first time that the two multidimensional concepts have been measured together and the first time the intuitive notion of their association has been measured empirically.

## Literature Review

### Defining and Measuring Trust

“Trust is fundamental to functioning in our complex and interdependent society” (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy 2000, p. 549). There are few who would disagree with the above statement. However, trust has been difficult to define and measure (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). The attempts at defining trust have been called anything from a “confusing potpourri” (Shapiro 1987, p. 625) to a “conceptual morass” (Barber 1983, p. 1). At first, scholars treated trust as a single concept (Rotter, 1971), but recent research suggests it is multidimensional (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman 1995; Rousseau et al. 1998). Nonetheless, the literature isn’t entirely in agreement with the dimensions that constitute trust.

While some have claimed that trust is a feeling or an emotion (Swan, Trawick, Rink & Roberts 1988), others disagree. Zand (1971) wrote that trust is not a feeling but the conscious regulation of one’s dependence on another. Trust is the social lubricant that fosters interdependency on others. In these interdependent relationships, trust functions as a way of reducing uncertainty (Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Luhmann, 1979).

After a rather comprehensive and multidisciplinary look at the trust literature, Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2000) summarized the development of trust scholarship in the following way: in the 1960s trust was conceptualized as generalized personality trait (Rotter, 1967); by the 1980s it had turned to interpersonal relationships (Johnson-George & Swap, 1982; Lazerlere & Huston, 1980; Rempel, Holmes & Zanna, 1985); and by the 1990s, trust shifted to a focus on sociology (Coleman, 1990) and organizational science (Kramer & Tyler, 1996; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer, 1988).

Definitions of trust often include the following elements: willing vulnerability, benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, integrity, predictability, good judgment, concerned, and openness (Ellison & Firestone, 1974; Butler & Cantrell, 1984; Mishra, 1996). After summarizing several definitions, Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2000) provide a fairly comprehensive definition with the following: “Trust is one party’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is (a) benevolent, (b) reliable, (c) competent, (d) honest, and (e) open” (p. 556).

McKnight, Choudhury, and Kacmar (2002) identified four dimensions of trust: (a) disposition to trust, which is the extent one has a tendency to depend on others across a broad spectrum of situations and persons; (b) trusting beliefs, which is the extent a person is confident that the trustee has three qualities, namely competence, benevolence, and integrity; (c) trusting intentions, which is the extent one is willing to depend on the trustee; and (d) trust-related behaviors, which is a demonstrated dependence on a trustee that makes one vulnerable or increases one’s risk.

From an organizational perspective, trust is often a collective judgment of one group that another group will be honest, meet commitments, and will not take advantage of others (Bradach & Eccles, 1989; Cummings & Bromily, 1996). For organizations, trust is necessary for cooperation and communication, and the foundation for productive relationships (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy 2000, p. 55). According to Govier (1992), distrust impedes the communication that could overcome it, so that “suspiciousness builds on itself and our negative beliefs about the other tend in the worst case toward immunity to refutation by evidence” (p. 52).

Hon and Grunig (1999) identified trust as an essential component of satisfactory relationships between organizations and their stakeholders. They defined trust as “one party’s level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party” (p. 2). They then identified three dimensions to trust: integrity, or the belief that an organization is fair and just; dependability, or the belief that an organization will do what it says it will do; and competence, or the belief that the organization has the ability to do what it says it will do.

In an international study to measure organizational trust, funded by IABC, Shockley-Zalabak, Ellis, and Cesaria (2000) applied the trust literature to define organizational trust, which they concluded was “The organization's willingness, based on its culture and communication behaviors in relationships and transactions, to be appropriately vulnerable if it believes that another individual, group or organization is competent, open and honest, concerned, reliable, and identified with common goals, norms and values” (p. 8).

From this literature, the author focused on the concept of trusting beliefs, or judgments, and developed and adapted 13 questions that measured an overall willingness to trust (which included a sense of vulnerability) based on the confidence employees had on an organizations competence, goodwill (beneficence), and integrity. Some of the questions were adapted and modified from questions used by Hon and Grunig (1999), McKnight et al. (2002), and Paine (2003).

#### Defining and Measuring Transparency

The idea of organizational transparency isn’t new, but the use of the term “transparency” increased after the corporate scandals of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, such as Enron, WorldCom, and Tyco. The concept has not received as much academic attention as trust. Therefore, it is a little harder to define and measure.

The 2005 edition of the Miriam-Webster Dictionary defines transparency as “free from pretense,” “easily detected or seen through,” and “readily understood.” Simply put, transparency is the opposite of secrecy. In her book *Secrets*, Sissela Bok (1989) defined a secret as intentionally concealing information or evidence from another “to prevent him from learning it, and thus from possessing it, making use of it, or revealing it” (p. 6). Ann Florini (1998), of the Brookings Institute, states, “Secrecy means deliberately hiding your actions; transparency means deliberately revealing them” (p. 50). This definition is both broad in its generalization of transparency and specific in its application of transparent actions. This definition as a guideline would allow organizations to gauge their level of transparency by asking, “Am I trying to hide something by this action, practice or policy?”

But what are the elements of transparent communication? Balkin (1999) identified three types of transparency, which “work together but are analytically distinct” (p. 393): informational, participatory, and accountability. Transparency efforts of organizations need all three qualities in order to build and restore trust with stakeholders. Therefore, transparency is defined as having these three important elements: information that is truthful, substantial, and useful; participation of stakeholders in identifying the information they need; and objective, balanced reporting of an organization’s activities and policies that holds the organization accountable.

Transparent organizations “make available publicly all legally releasable information—whether positive or negative in nature—in a manner which is accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal” (Heise, 1985, p. 209). The goal of transparency is “to *truthfully* communicate the reality of a particular subject-incident-event-etc” (Martinson, 1996-97, p. 43). You can be truthful without revealing all information. But truthful information must meet a standard

Klaidman and Beauchamp (1987) call *substantial completeness*. This is the level at which a reasonable person's requirements for information are satisfied. Substantial completeness is concerned with the needs of the receiver rather than the sender.

Transparency cannot meet the needs of the stakeholders unless the organization knows what they want and need to know. Therefore, stakeholder participation elevates disclosure to transparency. Stakeholders must be invited to participate in identifying the information they need to make accurate decisions.

Transparency also requires accountability. Transparent organizations are accountable for their actions, words, and decisions, because these are available for others to see and evaluate. It requires that persons in transparent organizations contemplate their decisions and behaviors, because they will most likely have to justify them before an open court of opinion. As one author put it: "if you disclose, you hide neither your light nor your trash under a bushel; you get to shine, but you have to clean up your act, too" (Szwajkowski, 2000, p. 391)

In summarizing the elements found in the transparency literature, Rawlins (2006) developed the following operational definition: "Transparency is the deliberate attempt to make available all legally releasable information—whether positive or negative in nature—in a manner that is accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal, for the purpose of enhancing the reasoning ability of publics and holding organizations accountable for their actions, policies and practices" (p. 5). This definition contains the three elements of transparency found in the literature.

From this definition, Rawlins (2006) developed an instrument that measures stakeholder perceptions of organizational transparency. Communication efforts to be transparent were broken down into four elements that measure the dimensions of transparency: stakeholder participation, sharing substantial information, accountability, and secretiveness (a reverse item element measuring the opposite of openness). The *participation* component included statements about involvement, feedback, detailed information, and the ease in finding the information. The *substantial information* component included statements about the relevance, clarity, completeness, accuracy, reliability and verifiability of information shared. The *accountability* component included statements about the organization sharing information that covers more than one side of controversial issues, might be damaging to the organization, admitting mistakes, and that can be compared to industry standards. The *secrecy* component is composed of reversed-item statements that reflect a lack of openness, or attempts at secrecy. This includes statements about sharing only part of the story, using language that obfuscates meaning, and only disclosing when required. The questions measuring the four transparency components were used in this research to measure employee perception of organizational transparency.

### Research Questions

While the literature has drawn connections between transparency and trust, it has never been measured. The concept of "openness" has been measured as a part of the concept of trust, but not the more multidimensional construct of transparency. In part, this is because there hasn't been an instrument to measure transparency. With the Rawlins (2006) transparency measurement instrument, this question can be answered. This instrument has been tested for reliability and validity, and breaks down transparency efforts into four components: participation, substantial information, accountability, and secrecy (a reverse item component).

There have been many instruments that measure trust and its many dimensions. This project relies on questions measuring trust from Hon and Grunig (1999) and Paine (2003), and breaks it down into three trusting belief components: competence, integrity, and goodwill.

Additionally, three questions that ask about trusting behaviors, which are used as the overall trust construct. This trust instrument has been tested previously for reliability and validity (Hon & Brunner, 2002; Jo, Hon & Brunner, 2004; and Ki & Hon, 2007.). To see the questions used to measure trust and transparency, see Table 1.

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Insert Table 1 About Here

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Because these instruments are being used together for the first time, they will be tested for reliability and measured for their relationship to each other. In particular, this study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. Are the components of trust and transparency reliable constructs?
2. Are the components of trust significantly related to overall trust?
3. Are the components of transparency significantly related to overall transparency?
4. Is overall transparency related to overall trust?
5. Are the components of transparency related to overall trust and its components?
6. Which components of transparency contribute the most to overall trust and to the components of trust?

To measure the first research question, the individual items in each construct will be tested with reliability alphas. The last five research questions will be tested with correlations, using Pearson's R to test for significance, and regression analysis to determine which components contribute the most to the relationship.

### Methodology

A large regional healthcare organization agreed to participate in testing the relationship between trust and transparency with its employees. The not-for-profit organization had 25,000 employees and provided medical attention at 150 sites, including 21 hospitals, in two states. It also offered healthcare plans to individuals and employers. Employees were chosen because they were intimate enough with the organization to establish trust judgments and evaluate its efforts at transparency.

The organization had a stated mission that included values suggesting it would value trust and try to practice transparency. Those values were:

- Mutual respect: "We treat others the way we want to be treated."
- Accountability: "We accept responsibility for our actions, attitudes and mistakes."
- Trust: "We can count on each other."
- Excellence: "We do our best at all times and look for ways to do it even better."

### Survey Sample

The instrument was administered as a Web-based survey, through Survey Monkey. An email invitation, with a link to the survey, was sent to 1,200 employees. The survey was conducted over a 5-day period, and 385 surveys were completed for a 32% response rate. Twenty-four surveys were deleted because they were incomplete, leaving 361 surveys for analysis. The sample demographics matched approximately those of the healthcare organization's population. Seventy three percent of respondents were female (75% in population), 78% were full-time employees (65% in population), 47% were in positions that provided direct care to patients, such as doctors, nurses, and therapists (54% in population), 19%

worked in administration (8% in population), and 66% worked in a hospital (78% in population). Additionally, 57% had worked for the organization for 6 years or more, compared to 50% of the population.

### Results

The alpha reliabilities of items used to measure overall trust, overall transparency, and their component ranged from .79 to .93 (see Table 2), meeting the basic standards for reliability. Churchill (1979) has recommended that minimum reliabilities should be .6, which all of the measures exceed, some by a large margin. The reliability of the constructs were not improved by removing items, therefore the full set of items were used for subsequent analysis. The two measures that could be improved in subsequent research are the overall trust and secrecy constructs. This answers the first research question.

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Insert Table 2 About Here

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The first step to answering research questions 2 through 5 was a simple correlations matrix of all constructs, which shows that they are all significantly related to each other at the  $p < .001$  level (see Table 3). Of the trust components, all are significantly related to overall trust (RQ 2), with competence having the weakest relationship (.63), and integrity and goodwill strongly related (.82 and .81 respectively). The trust components are also significantly related to each other, with the strongest relationship being between integrity and goodwill (.89).

All of the component measures of transparency are also significantly related to the measure of overall transparency (RQ 3), with strong correlations of nearly equal value for the components of participation, substantial information, and accountability (from .80 to .81), and an inverse relationship with secrecy (-.65). The direction and strength of the relationships fit the model of transparency developed by Rawlins (2006). The participation, information, and accountability components have significantly strong relationships with each other (from .74 to .82). Since secrecy is a reverse construct of the concept of openness, it should have a negative relationship with overall trust and the other components, which the correlations matrix shows are weaker than the relationships among the positive components (-.62 to -.67). These correlations suggest that the components are strongly related to the concept of overall transparency.

The relationship between overall trust and overall transparency is strongly correlated (.75), which provides evidence that these two concepts are strongly related in the minds of the employees who participated in this study (RQ 4). The correlation matrix also shows significantly moderate to strong relationships among components of trust and transparency (from -.47 to .81). This answer to RQ 5, suggests a certain mental overlap of these concepts in the minds of the hospital employees.

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Insert Table 3 About Here

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A second analysis of the strength of the relationships between trust and its components, transparency and its components, and between trust and transparency was conducted by linear regressions. About 70% of the variation in overall trust could be explained by the three components of competency, integrity, and goodwill ( $F = 259.56, p < .001$ ). Using a stepwise

procedure, the model with all three components explained for the most variance. The standardized regression coefficients suggested that integrity (Beta = .44) and goodwill (Beta = .38) contributed the most to overall trust, while competency (Beta = .06) was not a significant contributor in a model that included all three components. While all three components are strongly correlated with overall trust, integrity and goodwill are more closely associated than competence among the hospital employees who participated in the study. (See Table 4 for all regressions.)

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Regressing transparency on its four components accounts for 78% of the variation in this measure ( $F = 267.88, p < .001$ ). The stepwise procedure indicated that all four components provided the model that explained the most variance, although it only increased the model without the secrecy component by one percent. The standardized regression coefficients suggested that participation (Beta = .26), substantial information (Beta = .27), and accountability (Beta = .39) contributed the most to overall transparency, while secrecy (Beta = -.06) was not a significant contributor in the model that included all four components. When secrecy is included in a model without participation, it is a significant contributor (Beta = -.25), but with is a weaker predictor of overall transparency when all of the other components are present. The correlation matrix shows that all four components are related to overall transparency, but accountability explains for more of transparency than the other components, with participation and substantial information making strong contributions. While all three components are strongly correlated with overall trust, integrity and goodwill are more closely associated than competence among the hospital employees who participated in the study.

While the correlations indicated that the components of transparency were also significantly related to trust, regressing overall trust to the four transparency components explained 55% of the variance ( $F=94.36, p<.001$ ). The transparency components aren't as strongly related to the concept of overall trust as they are to overall transparency, but the linear regression shows a definite relationship. Of the transparency components, accountability had the highest standardized coefficient (Beta = .31), followed by substantial information (Beta = .25), secrecy (Beta = -.14) and participation (Beta = .13). Interestingly, participation wasn't a significant coefficient. So, accountability, substantial information, and openness (reverse of secrecy) were the transparency components the hospital employees most closely associated to the concept of trust (RQ 6).

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Insert Table 4 About Here

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To further explore the relationship between trust and transparency, regression analyses were also conducted on the trust components (dependent variables) and transparency components (individual variables). When competence was regressed on the transparency

components, it produced an adjusted  $R^2$  of .52 ( $F=82.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Substantial information was the strongest predictor (Beta = .76) among the transparency components, while participation and accountability were also significant, but considerably weaker. Secrecy was a weak and insignificant coefficient.

The transparency components explained 75% of the variation of integrity. Substantial information (Beta = .41) and accountability (Beta = .36) were the major contributors, while participation (Beta = .13) was also significant. Again, secrecy was not a significant coefficient. This result is somewhat surprising, because one would suppose that being open (the opposite of secrecy) would be a central component to integrity. A regression model that includes secrecy and excludes accountability shows secrecy as a significant contributor. Secrecy has a significant negative correlation with integrity, but when all of the transparency components are present, secrecy doesn't help explain a significant amount of variation in the integrity measure.

For goodwill, the transparency components explained 72% of the variation, with participation and accountability as the strongest coefficients. Substantial information had a significant standardized Beta, but secrecy was insignificant again.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the correlations and regressions provide strong evidence that trust and transparency are positively related. As employee perceptions of organizational transparency increased so did trust in the hospital. Simple correlations indicate that overall trust and overall transparency are positively correlated. Additionally, the three components of trust (competence, integrity, and goodwill) and three components of transparency (participation, substantial information, and accountability) are positively related, while the fourth transparency component, secrecy, has an inverse relationship with the other components. The multiple regressions also support the evidence of the correlations that the concepts are related.

Regression analyses indicate that the employees found integrity and goodwill more important to overall trust than competency. Employee participation that leads to an organization sharing information that employees find useful and substantial, and that holds an organization accountable, are strongest predictors of overall transparency.

The regressions also found that certain components of transparency have stronger explanatory power in predicting the relationship between trust and transparency. Sharing information that is useful and that holds the organization accountable were the transparency coefficients that explained the most in the relationship between transparency and overall trust. Sharing substantial information was the most important transparency component for evaluating competence. When evaluating the integrity of an organization, the transparency components of accountability and sharing substantial information were the most important. Accountability and participation were the strongest transparency coefficients for explaining goodwill.

Overall, secrecy was the weakest component for explaining trust. The correlations showed moderately strong relationships, but as a regression coefficient it didn't show to be a strong or significant explanatory component for trust or its components. This could be due to the reverse relationship nature of the component. However, recoding the data to be scored on a positive scale did not improve secrecy coefficients in the regression models.

From this study, one could conclude that as organizations become more transparent they will also become more trusted. This study is limited to the perceptions of one stakeholder group, namely employees. Because this group has a unique relationship with the organization, the results of the study could be limited to employee perceptions of trust and transparency. A study

of shareholders, consumers, or members of the media, might yield different results. However, the statistical evidence of the relationship appears strong enough to suggest that the positive relationship exists, but that the components explaining the relationships may vary among different stakeholder groups. Further research should be conducted among different stakeholders to test these possible differences.

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Table 1  
Survey Items Used to Measure Trust and Transparency

**Statements using 7-point scale between Strongly Disagree and Strongly Agree.**

*Overall Trust.*

1. I'm willing to let the organization make decisions for people like me.
2. I think it is important to watch this organization closely so that it does not take advantage of people like me.
3. I trust the organization to take care of people like me.

*Organization shows competence*

4. I feel very confident about the skills of this organization.
5. This organization has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.
6. This organization is known to be successful at the things it tries to do.

*Organization shows integrity.*

7. The organization treats people like me fairly and justly.
8. The organization can be relied on to keep its promises.
9. Sound principles seem to guide the behavior of this organization.
10. This organization does not mislead people like me.

*Organization shows goodwill*

11. Whenever this organization makes a decision I know it will be concerned about people like me.
12. I believe this organization takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions.
13. This organization is interested in the well-being of people like me, not just itself.

*Overall Transparency.*

14. The organization wants to understand how its decisions affect people like me.
15. The organization provides information that is useful to people like me for making informed decisions.
16. The organization wants to be accountable to people like me for its actions.
17. The organization wants people like me to know what it is doing and why it is doing it.

*Communication efforts are participative.*

18. Asks for feedback from people like me about the quality of its information.
19. Involves people like me to help identify the information I need.
20. Provides detailed information to people like me.
21. Makes it easy to find the information people like me need.
22. Asks the opinions of people like me before making decisions.
23. Takes the time with people like me to understand who we are and what we need.

*Communication efforts provide substantial information*

24. Provides information in a timely fashion to people like me.
25. Provides information that is relevant to people like me.
26. Provides information that can be compared to previous performance.
27. Provides information that is complete.
28. Provides information that is easy for people like me to understand.
29. Provides accurate information to people like me.
30. Provides information that is reliable

*Communication efforts provide accountability*

31. Presents more than one side of controversial issues.
32. Is forthcoming with information that might be damaging to the organization.
33. Is open to criticism by people like me.
34. Freely admits when it has made mistakes.
35. Provides information that can be compared to industry standards.

*Communication efforts are secretive (reverse item)*

36. Provides only part of the story to people like me.
37. Often leaves out important details in the information it provides to people like me.
38. Provides information that is intentionally written in a way to make it difficult to understand.
39. Is slow to provide information to people like me.
40. Only discloses information when it is required.

Table 2  
Reliability of Trust and Transparency Measures

	alpha	sd	Item Mean <sup>a</sup>
Overall Trust (3 items)	.79	4.15	4.61
Competence (3 items)	.87	3.12	5.72
Integrity (4 items)	.92	5.57	4.98
Goodwill (3 items)	.92	4.87	4.29
Overall Transparency (4 items)	.91	5.84	4.61
Participate (6 items)	.92	8.74	4.20
Substantial Information (7 items)	.93	8.15	4.94
Accountability (5 items)	.87	6.38	4.29
Secrecy (A reverse construct w/5 items)	.79	5.63	3.20

<sup>a</sup> Mean score per item on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1=SD and 7=SA.

Table 3  
Pearson Correlations of All Constructs<sup>a</sup>

	TR	C	I	G	TY	P	SI	A	S
Overall Trust (TR)	—								
Competence (C)	.63	—							
Integrity (I)	.82	.76	—						
Goodwill (G)	.81	.62	.89	—					
Overall Transparency (TY)	.75	.65	.87	.88	—				
Participate (P)	.66	.55	.76	.80	.81	—			
Substantial Information (SI)	.67	.70	.81	.75	.80	.82	—		
Accountability (A)	.68	.56	.79	.77	.80	.74	.74	—	
Secrecy (S)	-.59	-.47	-.63	-.60	-.65	-.63	-.67	-.62	—

<sup>a</sup> All correlations significant at .001 level

Table 4  
Regressions

	UB	SEB	B	Sig.
Overall Trust <sup>a</sup>				
Competence	.08	.06	.06	.195
Integrity	.33	.06	.44	.000
Goodwill	.32	.05	.38	.000
Overall Transparency <sup>b</sup>				
Participate	.17	.03	.26	.000
Substantial Information	.19	.04	.27	.000
Accountable	.35	.04	.39	.000
Secrecy	-.06	.04	-.06	.109
Overall Trust <sup>c</sup>				
Participate	.06	.03	.13	.134
Substantial Information	.13	.04	.25	.001
Accountable	.20	.04	.31	.000
Secrecy	-.10	.04	-.14	.011
Competence <sup>d</sup>				
Participate	-.06	.03	-.16	.032
Substantial Information	.29	.03	.76	.000
Accountable	.07	.03	.16	.015
Secrecy	.02	.03	.04	.455
Integrity <sup>e</sup>				
Participate	.08	.04	.13	.019
Substantial Information	.28	.04	.41	.000
Accountable	.31	.04	.36	.000
Secrecy	-.04	.04	-.05	.243
Goodwill <sup>f</sup>				
Participate	.22	.03	.39	.000
Substantial Information	.09	.04	.15	.012
Accountable	.25	.04	.34	.000
Secrecy	-.04	.04	-.05	.253

<sup>a</sup> Adjusted  $R^2 = .70$ ,  $F = 259.56$ ,  $p < .001$

<sup>b</sup> Adjusted  $R^2 = .78$ ,  $F = 267.88$ ,  $p < .001$

<sup>c</sup> Adjusted  $R^2 = .55$ ,  $F = 94.36$ ,  $p < .001$

<sup>d</sup> Adjusted  $R^2 = .52$ ,  $F = 82.43$ ,  $p < .001$

<sup>e</sup> Adjusted  $R^2 = .75$ ,  $F = 219.62$ ,  $p < .001$

<sup>f</sup> Adjusted  $R^2 = .72$ ,  $F = 189.83$ ,  $p < .001$

**State Legislative Webmasters Tell All:  
The Internet as a Communication Tool for State Legislators**

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The use of the Internet as a political campaign tool has been studied extensively. While some researchers have examined whether the Internet aids politicians vying for positions higher on the political career ladder (Smith, 2003), others have focused entirely on the legislative website as a whole (Musso et al., 2000). However, there has been very little research in the area of how state legislators use the Internet as a public relations tool. Lang (2004) says local publics have been neglected as audiences in political communication studies. This paper's focus is state legislator homepages.

This study focuses on the extent to which state legislators use their homepages to communicate with constituents. In a nationwide study of state legislative websites, Narro, Mayo and Miller (2006) found the communication tools (i.e., weblogs, electronic newsletters, online polling) state legislators offer vary more from state-to-state than legislator-to-legislator. Taking their information into account, this paper addresses restrictions put on legislators' homepages. The author interviewed webmasters in 44 states and found allowing legislators freedom to manipulate their sites encourages them to utilize their homepages for active communication. Although most sites do not allow state legislators to use homepages as a campaign tool, some allow free flow of communication concerning policies and initiatives. The researcher found legislators would use their homepages more often if given the freedom. However, change begins with legislators who are the policymakers. Whether they have freedom is their own choice.

All 50 states have begun wrestling with implementation of digital government. Political professionals and scholars argue about how political web sites fit into the communication program during campaigns or while the official is in office. This paper focuses on local audiences by examining communication used by state legislators who must reach constituents with important messages about the issues, decisions and actions of legislature. Wilson (2003) says the Internet helps legislators, citizens, professional lobbyists and staff members keep track of legislative action and key issues both during and out of session.

Carey (1995) says a "modern political community must be, empirically, theoretically, and normatively, a community power not of discourse, an arena of naked and manipulative struggle between interest groups, another item in the culture of consumption and coercion. This is the way the world works and, in truth, the only way it can and ought to work" (p. 374). In addition, the simple act of voting can be considered as active political participation. Special interest groups and lobbyists make the political arena more active. The mass media help keep the public informed so they have knowledge of those topics that may otherwise not be visible on the political agenda. The public depends on the information media and political officials volunteer in order for them to be active participants in the political process (Glynn et al., 2004).

Continuing research is necessary to determine the effect technology has on voters' decisions, as well as their political activity and participation.

Pfetsch (2004) cites Baerns (1985) in assessing political public relations, saying the output of political communication concerns the "production, processing, and communication of political messages. The functional area of cross-border communication in the political system is political public relations. At the level of concrete organization, the job of political public relations workers is to generate issues, to frame and evaluate issues, and to time when they are to be made public" (p. 350). Atkin (1981) points to Hyman, Langton, Hess and Torney in defining political socialization as "a developmental process by which children and adolescents acquire cognitions, attitudes, values, and participation patterns relating to their political environment" (p. 299). The exposure people have to political officials may define this socialization. Families may influence political socialization as well. This term actually is older than the field of political communication, and its presence within the field is obvious. The goal of these subdivisions of political communication – political marketing, public relations and socialization – is to appeal to and familiarize a particular public with information – the same goal of any web site. Uslaner (2004) says the Internet neither increases nor decreases socialization, but it provides another avenue for people to gather information and interact with others. Those who normally have many relations offline are likely to have many relations online as well. Cornfield (2000) said citizens can remain faceless online and share their opinions without fear they will be publicly chastised.

According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), electronic media is the most important form of media expansion. Changing media can be attributed to social changes. Kaid (2004) says the Internet has both advantages and disadvantages due to its availability. It has been offered to the public since 1994, and was used exclusively for governmental matters for decades before, beginning in 1969 with the ARPA Net, which was the Internet service for the Pentagon's Advanced Research Projects Agency. Access to this communication system was limited to computer scientists at four prestigious universities. In 1994, the ARPANet inspired the Internet, which of course is the system with which we are familiar today (Browning, 2002). Since 1994, users have enjoyed much improvement in speed with development of DSL and high-speed cable modems. Also, interactive capabilities seem to be constantly improving, with such innovations as downloadable video, chat rooms and audio components.

Politicians can personally benefit from Internet e-mail campaigns, which have strengths such as reaching a large number of people quickly and mobilizing them for support. Studies show Internet users log on to gather information on items politicians support. Browning states, "If your site is easy to find and easy to understand – if it offers reliable, clear, direct information – you'll not only educate people who may know little about your issue but you may also win some new supporters for the cause" (p. 70). However, politicians also must be careful in their Internet endeavors. During their entrance into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, online political organizing efforts by candidates did not reflect concerns of the Internet users. Failed attempts were due to ignoring needs of users. Internet users already received loads of unsolicited e-mail (SPAM), direct mail, media ads, and telephone marketing. Their reactions to such interruptions are largely non-responsive (Mack, 2004).

The press also benefits from the legislative Internet web sites. In fact, in Louisiana, the government actually provides press with computer equipment to link them directly to legislative chambers (Downer, 2005). From the newsrooms, the press can download video of press conferences and air it immediately. Eveland (2004) says it is the media's responsibility to

educate the public so they can make “informed decisions about candidates, political, and current events information” (p. 177). The press often is seen as the watchdog over government. Of course, the press should make sure they are impartial and unbiased. Media should be knowledgeable about government processes in order to effectively cover workings of the organization. Their roles are as follows: to collect and present objective information; interpret news; represent the public vis-à-vis government; determine public opinion and to inform the public of government workings, as well as inform government about public opinion and participate in governmental process. Relations are determinant upon issues, personalities and pre-existing notions (Martin, 1981; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1981).

One of the problems legislators are running into where their communication online is concerned is regulation by state legislatures concerning usage of legislators’ home pages. Policies can limit information on sites, and limited staff to manage the site also can hinder online efforts. Whatever their limitations, lawmakers should consider their audience and purpose when composing web pages. Greenberg (2003) suggests including the following on the site: explanation of votes on issues, how a bill becomes a law and a personal biography. Changes and updates to the site keep citizens interested and coming back. In addition, seasonal links may keep constituents returning for new information (i.e., links to the electric company or weather information).

Gurevitch and Blumler (1990) say comparing communication tactics and strategies can answer questions and produce phenomena in the field of political communication. The authors suggest comparative analysis may define “the political” as an activity of governments, legislatures and executive bureaucracies; it defines communication as more than one-way; and it explains politics and media include both structural and cultural components. The problem with comparative measures is it is difficult to measure such variables as logic and influence. Much of the current research in political communication compares one candidate’s tactics and/or political language to that of his or her opponent. This paper will compare rules of state legislators in order to determine if guidelines influence availability of sophisticated Internet tools and constituent relationship-building tools as defined by Narro, Mayo and Miller (2006).

Rogers’ definition of diffusion of innovations dates to 1962, when he was studying the diffusion of agricultural innovations at his home in Iowa (Rogers, 2004). Most studies examine successes and failures after diffusion. The problem with this is ineffective recall for product users. Another methodological alternative to studying diffusion of innovations is a point-of-adoption study, where data is gathered from adopters when they begin using the innovation, which gives them better recall. In addition, archival records can help recall (Meyer, 2004). This paper, like that of Narro, Mayo and Miller (2006), was conducted during the diffusion process.

### **Methodology**

Narro, Mayo and Miller (2006) found differences in state legislators’ sites were more from state-to-state than district-to-district. Using data collected in that study, the researcher examined if flexibility or rigidity of rules governing state legislators’ use of their homepages determine use of sophisticated Internet or constituent relationship-building tools. The researcher studied diffusion through senders, or legislators and webmasters. The following research questions were addressed:

RQ1: To what extent do guidelines and policies dictated by state legislative webmasters and/or legislative committees relate to use of web sites by state legislators to engage constituents with issues, decisions and actions of the state legislature and/or their offices?

RQ2: What do webmasters feel are the results of implementing state legislative web sites?

Legislators are only able to include information on their sites within guidelines given them by their respective states (Broussard, 2005). Sophisticated tools, according to Narro, Mayo and Miller's (2006) assessment of the work of Park and Choi (2002) and Jewell (1982), included the following: chatroom, e-mail, online survey, photograph(s), video and audio capabilities, electronic town meeting(s), weblog(s), bill tracking, newsletter(s) with or without subscription, site map, menu of options, keyword search, alphabetical subject list and links to other sites outside of the legislative site. Constituent relationship-building tools included: information for lobbyists, biographical data, legislative calendar, committee information, personal messages, regional information, environmental issues, press releases, media kits, media information, links to offsite homepages, pending legislation, legislative decisions, government programs, business information, telephone numbers, mailing addresses and fax numbers. The following was hypothesized:

Hypothesis: State legislative web sites governed with flexible guidelines are more likely than state legislative web sites governed by rigid guidelines to use sophisticated Internet tools and constituent relationship-building strategies on their official legislative web sites.

Using content analysis, Narro, Mayo and Miller (2006) examined legislator homepages in all 50 U.S. legislatures. In this study, which builds upon the work of these researchers, the researcher used data from the prior research and then interviewed webmasters (See Appendix A) to examine capabilities of web sites against elements legislators actually utilize. The questionnaire determined the extent to which legislators are allowed to manipulate their sites within the main state legislative web sites to determine flexibility/rigidity of rules on sites, regulation/autonomy of content and frequency with which sites are changed to incorporate new tools. The interviews were constructed in a manner to yield quantitative information that could be measured with the information from Narro, Mayo and Miller's (2006) research. Legislative webmasters also were allowed to speak freely concerning results of Internet implementation and suggestions to encourage utilization.

## Results

For this study, the researcher attempted to contact webmasters in all 50 states. Forty-four state webmasters (88%) provided information for this study. The prediction in the hypothesis was pertinent to RQ1 (To what extent do guidelines and policies dictated by state legislative webmasters and/or legislative committees relate to use of web sites by state legislators to engage constituents with issues, decisions and actions of the state legislature and/or their offices?). The hypothesis predicted state legislative web sites governed with flexible guidelines (whether or not the legislators had the freedom to manipulate their sites, update them from their home offices, had limitations and whether their sites were monitored) were more likely than those governed by rigid guidelines to use sophisticated Internet tools and constituent relationship-building strategies on their web sites. Of 1,455 sites examined through content analysis, webmasters provided information for 1,187. It was found 435 legislators (36.1%) had freedom to manipulate their sites; 143 (12.1%) had the freedom to manipulate their sites from their home offices and 972 (82.4%) had limitations from the state level on the content of information on the site.

*Sophistication.* As for those legislators allowed to freely manipulate their sites, nine of 16 variables were found to be significantly related: whether sites included legislators' e-mail addresses,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 36.22, p = .000$ ; online surveys,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 5.13, p = .023$ ; photos,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 47.46, p = .000$ ; video,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 7.15, p = .008$ ; audio,  $\chi^2(1,$

$N=1,187$ ) = 9.6,  $p = .002$ ; bill tracking capabilities,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 15.14, p = .000$ ; subscriptions to online newsletters,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 36.84, p = .000$ ; online newsletters that did not require subscriptions,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 68.15, p = .000$ ; and links to other web sites,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 80.94, p = .000$ . Table 3 illustrates frequencies of inclusion of sophisticated tools on legislators' web sites for those who have freedom to manipulate their sites and those who do not.

Table 3

*Association of legislators' freedom to manipulate web sites with legislators' using sophisticated tools on their web sites*

Tool	those who do have freedom	those who do not have freedom
e-mail address	98.4%	88.7%
online survey	5.7%	3.1%
photos	99.1%	87.8%
video	18.4%	25.1%
audio	13.1%	20.2%
bill tracking capabilities	50.6%	30.9%
online newsletter subscriptions	12%	3.1%
online newsletter no subscription	16.6%	3.1%
links to other web sites	20.5%	4.1%

The researcher found those who did have freedom to manipulate their web sites were more likely to have more sophisticated tools. Of those tools significantly related to freedom to manipulate web sites, the only two tools more prevalent for those who *did not* have freedom to manipulate their sites were video and audio capabilities.

As for capability to update their web sites from their home offices, there were eight of 16 variables with significant relationships: whether sites had legislators' e-mail addresses,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,166) = 9.3, p = .002$ ; online surveys,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,166) = 49.61, p = .000$ ; photos,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,166) = 12.08, p = .001$ ; video,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,166) = 9.54, p = .002$ ; audio,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,166) = 6.83, p = .009$ ; bill tracking,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,166) = 29.96, p = .000$ ; subscription capabilities to online newsletters,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,166) = 4.30, p = .038$ ; and links to other sites,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,166) = 21.51, p = .000$ . Table 4 illustrates frequencies of those who have ability to update their sites from home and those who do not with sophisticated tools on their web sites.

Table 4

*Association of whether legislators who have the ability to update their web sites from their home offices with legislators' using sophisticated tools on their web sites*

Tool	those who do have the ability	those who do not have the ability
e-mail address	98.6%	91.3%
online survey	14.7%	2.4%
photos	99.3%	90.8%
video	12.6%	24.1%
audio	9.8%	18.7%
bill tracking capabilities	23.1%	46%
online newsletter subscriptions	8.4%	4.4%
links to other web sites	18.9%	7.2%

For those who did have ability to make changes on their sites from their home offices, sophisticated tools more common on their sites included e-mail address, online surveys, photos, online newsletters with subscriptions and links to other web sites. For those who did not have ability, video and audio capabilities, as well as bill tracking capabilities and presence of site maps were more prevalent. There was only one more tool that occurred more for those who had ability to manipulate their sites than those who did not.

As for those legislators who had limitations, there were 11 of 16 variables that had significant relationships: whether sites had e-mail,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 7.06, p = .008$ ; online surveys,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 41.45, p = .000$ ; photos,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 15.58, p = .000$ ; video,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 7.97, p = .005$ ; audio,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 26.4, p = .000$ ; bill tracking,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 41.68, p = .000$ ; newsletters to which visitors could subscribe,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 4.73, p = .030$ ; newsletters that required no subscription,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 20.05, p = .000$ ; site maps,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 23.74, p = .000$ ; menus of options,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 79.28, p = .000$ ; and links to other sites,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 5.98, p = .014$ . Table 5 illustrates frequencies of legislators who had limitations and legislators who do not with their use of sophisticated tools.

Table 5

*Association of whether legislators who had limitations placed upon them by their state legislatures with legislators' using sophisticated tools on their web sites*

Tool	those who had limitations	those who did not have limitations
e-mail address	91.2%	96.8%
online survey	2.5%	12.6%
photos	90.3%	98.9%
video	21.6%	31.1%
audio	18.7%	3.7%
bill tracking capabilities	46.9%	21.6%
online newsletter subscriptions	5.8%	10%
online newsletter no subscription	6.6%	16.3%
site maps	14.2%	1.6%
menu of options	53.7%	18.4%
links to other web sites	9.4%	15.3%

Those who had limitations had larger percentage of audio capabilities, bill tracking capabilities, site maps and a menu of options. Those who did not have limitations had larger percentage of occurrence of e-mail address, online surveys, photos, video, online newsletters with subscriptions, online newsletters with no subscriptions and links to other sites. As for sophisticated, those who had no limitations were more likely to have tools on their sites.

As for those legislators who had their sites monitored for content (considered only when legislators had ability to manipulate sites), six of the 16 variables had significant relationships: whether sites had online surveys,  $\chi^2(1, N=435) = 24.24, p = .000$ ; audio,  $\chi^2(1, N=435) = 10.62, p = .001$ ; bill tracking,  $\chi^2(1, N=435) = 157.49, p = .000$ ; newsletters that required subscriptions,  $\chi^2(1, N=435) = 6.72, p = .009$ ; newsletters not requiring subscriptions,  $\chi^2(1, N=435) = 22.64, p = .000$ ; and links to other sites,  $\chi^2(1, N=435) = 7.71, p = .005$ . Table 6 illustrates frequencies of those legislators who had their sites monitored and those who did not with whether their sites had sophisticated tools on their sites.

Table 6

*Association of whether legislators had their sites monitored with legislators' using sophisticated tools on their web sites*

Tool	those who were monitored	those who were not monitored
online survey	14.4%	2.3%
audio	4.8%	16.5%
bill tracking capabilities	3.2%	69.7%
online newsletter requiring subscription	5.6%	14.5%
online newsletter no subscription	3.2%	21.9%
links to other sites	12%	23.9%

Whether sites were monitored was considered only of those who were able to manipulate their web sites. Six tools were found to be significantly associated with whether legislators' sites were monitored. The only sophisticated tool that appeared more for those who were not monitored was the online survey. Those who were not monitored more likely included audio capabilities, bill tracking capabilities, online newsletter with subscription, online newsletter with no subscription, site maps, and links to other sites. Those who were not monitored were more likely to have sophisticated tools on their sites than those who were monitored.

When considering the legislators' freedom to manipulate their sites, 16 of 26 variables were found to have significant relationships: whether sites had press releases that originated at the legislators' offices,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 76.72, p=.000$ ; biographical information,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,186) = 17.8, p = .000$ ; legislators' committee assignments,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 12.32, p = .000$ ; whether personal information,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 95.95, p = .000$ ; local environment,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 15.40, p = .000$ ; link for the media  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 46.96, p = .000$ ; links to legislators' offsite homepages,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 33.78, p = .000$ ; district information,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 47.56, p = .000$ ; legislators' responses to concerns,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 27.04, p = .000$ ; legislators addressing change,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 30.8, p = .000$ ; information on government jobs,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 18.78, p = .000$ ; legislative calendars,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 6.13, p=.013$ ; information for businesses,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 11.9, p = .001$ ; legislators' telephone numbers,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 26.02, p = .000$ ; legislators' mailing addresses,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 42.6, p = .000$ ; and legislators' fax numbers,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,187) = 48.56, p = .000$ . Table 7 illustrates frequencies of constituent relationship-building strategies on legislators' web sites.

Table 7

*Association of legislators' freedom to manipulate their sites with constituent relationship-building strategies on the web site*

Tool	those who had freedom	those who did not have freedom
biographical information	84.8%	74.3%
committee assignments	99.8%	96.7%
personal information	25.1%	5.5%
local environment	9.4%	3.9%
press releases (from legislators' offices)	34.5%	13%
link for the media	9.2%	1.1%
link to the legislators' offsite homepages	12.2%	3.5%
information of district interest	43%	23.8%
legislators' responses	20.5%	9.7%
addresses changes	20.9%	9.4%
information on government jobs	13.3%	6%
information for businesses	8%	3.5%
telephone number	99.3%	92.7%
mailing address	99.3%	89.2%
fax number	48.7%	28.6%
legislative calendar	20.7%	27.1%

Those who had freedom to manipulate their sites had a larger percentage of occurrences of relationship-building tools. Only one tool, the presence of legislative calendars, was more prevalent for those who did not have freedom to manipulate their sites. Therefore, the researcher concluded those who had freedom to manipulate their sites were more likely to have relationship-building tools.

As for legislators who could update their web sites from their home offices, five of 26 variables were found to be significant: whether legislators included legislative calendars on the sites,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,166) = 49.03, p = .000$ ; information about local environment,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,166) = 5.81, p = .016$ ; press releases from legislators' offices,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,166) = 61.57, p = .000$ ; press releases from other offices,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,166) = 40.41, p = .036$ ; and information about government jobs,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,166) = 9.18, p = .002$ . Table 8 illustrates frequencies of including constituent relationship-building strategies when legislators had the ability to update their sites from their home offices.

Table 8

*Association of legislators' ability to update their sites from their home offices with constituent relationship-building strategies on the web site*

Tool	those who had ability	those who did not have ability
legislative calendar	1.4%	28.5%
information on local environment	10.5%	5.4%
press releases (from legislators' offices)	44.1%	16.2%
press releases (from other offices)	13.3%	8%
information on government jobs	2.1%	9.8%
telephone number	100%	94.2%
mailing address	100%	91.8%

Those who had ability to manipulate their sites from their home offices had a larger percentage of relationship-building strategies for five of the seven strategies found to be significantly associated. For those who did not have the ability, only the presence of legislative calendars and information on government jobs was more prevalent.

As for those who had limitations on their sites, 13 of 26 variables had significant relationships: whether sites had legislative calendars,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 48.50, p = .000$ ; personal messages,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 21.22, p = .000$ ; regional information,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 20.17, p = .000$ ; information about local environment,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 9.92, p = .002$ ; information of district interest,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 13.08, p = .000$ ; views of the legislator,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 3.93, p = .047$ ; information about appropriations,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 36.65, p = .000$ ; legislators' response to concerns,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 15.94, p = .000$ ; legislators addressing changes,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 14.12, p = .000$ ; information for businesses,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 6.15, p = .013$ ; legislators' telephone numbers,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 176.92, p = .000$ ; legislators' mailing addresses,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 97.67, p = .000$ ; legislators' fax numbers,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 5.17, p = .023$ ; and media links,  $\chi^2(1, N=1,162) = 9.79, p = .002$ . Table 9 illustrates frequencies of constituent relationship-building strategies on homepages when legislators had limitations placed upon them by their state legislatures.

Table 9

*Association of legislators' who had limitations placed on them by their state legislatures with constituent relationship-building strategies on the web site*

Tool	those who had limitations	those who did not have limitations
legislative calendar	27.8%	4.2%
personal message	10.9%	23.2%
regional information	2.7%	9.5%
information on local environment	7%	1.1%
information of district interest	31.5%	18.4%
legislators' views	25.7%	18.9%
information about appropriations	20.3%	2.1%
legislators' responses	14.9%	4.2%
addresses changes	14.8%	4.7%
information for businesses	6%	1.6%
telephone number	98.8%	75.8%
mailing address	96.1%	75.8%
fax number	38.2%	29.5%

Surprisingly, those who had limitations had more prevalence of tools significantly associated with whether legislators had limitations or not. Of 13 relationships found significant, only two were more prevalent for those who did not have limitations, personal messages and regional information. Therefore, the researcher determined those who had limitations on their sites were more likely to have relationship-building tools than those who did not.

Eleven of 26 variables concerned with whether web sites were monitored were significantly related: whether sites had biographical information  $\chi^2(1, N=435) = 22.23, p = .000$ ; personal messages,  $\chi^2(1, N=435) = 5.2, p = .023$ ; press releases from legislators' offices,  $\chi^2(1, N=435) = 5.9, p = .015$ ; information of district interest,  $\chi^2(1, N=435) = 49.08, p = .000$ ; information about appropriations,  $\chi^2(1, N=435) = 14.4, p = .000$ ; legislator's response to concerns,  $\chi^2(1, N=435) = 10.91, p = .001$ ; legislators' addressing change,  $\chi^2(1, N=435) = 11.73,$

$p = .001$ ; information for businesses,  $\chi^2(1, N=435) = 12.45, p = .000$ ; views of legislators,  $\chi^2(1, N=435) = 12.2, p = .000$ ; links to legislators' other homepages,  $\chi^2(1, N=435) = 7.10, p = .008$ ; media links,  $\chi^2(1, N=435) = 17.76, p = .000$ . Table 10 illustrates frequencies of constituent relationship-building variables on legislators' sites according to whether they are monitored.

Table 10

*Association of legislators' sites being monitored for content with constituent relationship-building strategies on the web site*

Tool	those who were monitored	those who were not monitored
biographical information	97.6%	79.7%
personal message	17.6%	28.1%
press releases (from legislators' offices)	43.2%	31%
information of district interest	16.8%	53.5%
information about appropriations	8%	23.9%
legislators' responses to concerns	10.4%	24.5%
addresses changes	10.4%	24.2%
information for businesses	8%	11%
fax number	31.1%	49%
views of legislators	16%	32.6%
links to other homepages	5.6%	14.8%

For those able to manipulate their sites (N=435), those not monitored had more prevalence of relationship-building strategies. Of those tools found to be significantly associated with whether the sites were monitored, only two tools were more prevalent on monitored sites, biographical information and press releases from legislators' offices. Therefore, the researcher concluded those who were not monitored were more likely to include relationship-building strategies.

It was determined guidelines and policies dictated by state legislative webmasters and/or legislative committees do relate to the use of web sites by state legislators to engage constituents with issues, decisions and actions of the state legislature and/or their offices. The hypothesis was supported by data in this research. As for RQ1, the researcher found flexible guidelines do relate to legislators having more sophisticated and constituent relationship-building tools on their sites.

RQ2 related to the results of implementing legislative web sites, according to the webmasters. Webmasters were asked to speak freely concerning results. For the most part, webmasters feel the Internet has been a successful tool for legislatures, as many indicated both advantages for the public and legislators. Webmasters said the implementation of the Internet has alleviated need for as much paper and mail, as well as phone calls. In addition, law schools and professionals use the sites to follow bills and activity. Press releases can be posted instantaneously from the governors and legislators. The implementation of the Internet has also increased the demands for information from legislatures. One webmaster said, "It's gone from people saying thank you for posting it this year to why didn't you have it up yesterday." Still, some legislators are resistant to the change. Some legislators still do not even turn on computers, much less try to utilize the Internet.

Webmasters watch what other states are doing. Many referred to successes in other states in determining what would work for their own. While some states offer more sophisticated tools, such as bill tracking, blogging and online polling, others are completely text-driven with

simple sites, offering little more than contact information and current laws. This may change with demands of constituents.

Finally, webmasters are doing everything they can to make sites inclusive of all individuals through offering handicapped accessible sites, as well as information in other languages. Legislatures are welcoming more and more people in with every additional tool; however, navigability is still key.

### Discussion

Lack of organization can be a concern for some Internet users, and it is important for state government to take control of this confusion and provide a central location for information about policy and pending legislation, as well as links to pertinent government information. State legislators should take note of concerns about the Internet as a tool of communication and envision opportunity to produce an avenue to encourage more involvement in the legislative process. This study proposed constructive use of the Internet might provide an avenue for constituents to communicate with government officials and for political leaders to communicate decisions and reasons for voting on a specific policy to their voting population.

Legislatures are currently experimenting with what content they will allow on their sites. The researcher found support for both use of sophisticated tools and constituent relationship-building strategies when their use was compared to legislators' flexibility. When determining whether legislators used sophisticated tools on their sites, exactly half of all variables tested showed a significant association. Almost half the variables tested for constituent relationship-building were found to have significant associations. The hypothesis was partially supported.

Those who had freedom to manipulate sites had more presence of sophisticated tools than those who did not have freedom. Likewise, those legislators who had ability to update their sites had no limitations set on content and did not have sites monitored also had more sophisticated tools. Legislators given freedom to manipulate sites and who control content can be more creative with their sites and provide a wider variety of information and tools. Legislators with flexible guidelines may change their sites without limitations and restrictions provided by the state, which can be a benefit to their constituents.

When considering constituent relationship-building tools on sites, those who had more freedom to manipulate their sites, had the ability to update their sites from their home offices and were not monitored had more tools on their sites to do so. However, those who *had limitations* (i.e., no direct attacks on colleagues, no fundraising and no party-affiliated messages) on their sites, although they were allowed to manipulate them, had *more* constituent relationship-building tools on their sites. Many of these tools are included in templates provided by state legislatures to legislators. In some states, legislators simply fill out a questionnaire and answers are loaded into a database that feeds the web site.

Legislators did not immediately have the luxury of adopting the Internet as a medium of communication because most did not adopt the Internet until the late 1990s, and some waited until after the turn of the century. Still, some states do not allow legislators to determine what is on their "member pages." State legislatures must take state laws of utilizing state funding into consideration when considering rules of legislators' use of their homepages within the sites, as most sites disallow political campaigning and/or fundraising from being associated with sites. Although some legislative sites do link to legislators' offsite pages, many do not allow linking capabilities because there exists a fine line between what is political campaigning and what is purely constituent information. At the same time, some states are putting pressure on other states

to provide more information and opportunities for citizens to participate online. Some webmasters mentioned they change with demands of constituents. As constituents get accustomed to benefits and find out what's offered elsewhere, they may begin demanding more.

In order to aid constituents in voting and to provide them information necessary to offer support or concern for legislators' decisions, it is important to keep them informed. An interactive and updated web site may provide them more thorough information than a telephone call or abbreviated newsletter. It is a must web sites conform to needs of constituents. A web site that aids only the legislator may be obsolete. Much of the work can only be accomplished at the state level. Those who control web sites at the state level must consider allowing legislators to take control of their homepages and use them as a real medium of communication with constituents in order to successfully employ strategies outlined by Park and Choi (2002) and Jewell (1982) as suggested by Narro, Mayo and Miller (2006). While some states have turned legislators' sites over to them for use, others are using the sites simply as a "bio page" for legislators, offering little or no interactivity or inviting element for visitors to return.

Even though legislators are bound by rules that govern the sites, sites are state-run, which means legislators can change policies if they so choose by appealing to the committee designated to drive policies of the sites, state legislative leaders or sometimes to the webmaster him/herself, depending on the state in question. As it has been found through interviews with state webmasters and through content analysis, states dictate what their sites have or do not have. Legislators define what the state allows, as well as whether legislators have control of their online communication through use of state legislative web sites. It is essentially up to legislators to control content of sites, and it is up to constituents to approach legislators if they are not happy with tools of communication offered on those sites. The fact of the matter is choices fall on the state. While deciding to make the legislative web site a true online community takes funding, hard work, and a dedication to updating and monitoring content, it is certainly a tool legislators may use to connect with constituents and encourage government participation. Flexible guidelines and polling constituency for needs may certainly provide surprising results for legislators who feel it is not worth time or money to invest more money and time in this medium.

The aim of this study was to determine how legislators are allowed to use their sites and whether they are using those sites to their potential. This study is limited in that the researcher interviewed one webmaster from each state, and each state has its own set of rules. Some states have more than one webmaster while in some states, the legislative web site staff consists of only one person. Even still, some states further divide responsibility between the House Democrats and Republican Parties and Senate Democrat and Republican Parties, each having their own separate web designers and capabilities. Future research may determine how the Internet can be a more *effective* medium of communication for politicians and target audiences.

Many webmasters seem to be happy with the way their sites are, as only 14 webmasters stated they had plans for changing their sites in the next two years. The rest indicated they were not interested in changing at all. Again, this may change with demands of constituents. State legislators have control to make changes in web policies by appealing to committees assigned to govern operations for the site. For those states that simply do not yet have a committee to handle the site, the first step may be to establish a committee to determine which tools, if any, they desire to offer for legislator/constituent online communication. Since each legislative site is controlled by the state, it is up to the legislature to make changes reflective of constituents' needs. A proactive approach in the Internet revolution is paramount to the reactive stance that seems to be in place at the present time. Since the Internet is the fastest growing, as well as the

fastest ever accepted, medium ever, and it has capabilities of so many combined media, it is important legislators realize the potential of the tool at hand and offer communication tools necessary to allow people “in” online.

## APPENDIX A

### Internet/Telephone Questionnaire of State Legislative Webmasters

Hi, this is Amber Narro, a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi. I am conducting research about state legislative web sites and have had this project reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Boards, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820. This research is completely voluntary and you may stop at any time. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete the survey, and I thoroughly appreciate your cooperation, as well as your complete answers to the following questions and statements. Do you wish to participate in the research?

1. The state in which the webmaster works:
2. Which of the following capabilities does your web site offer state legislators? Check all that apply.
  1. Chat room
  2. Web log
  3. Press releases
  4. Press information
  5. Bill tracking
  6. Civics education information
  7. Video of legislative sessions
  8. Audio of legislative sessions
  9. Regional information
  10. Online newsletter
3. For those elements that your web sites does not currently offer, are you looking to implement them within the next two years? Which ones?
  1. Chat room
  2. Web log
  3. Press releases
  4. Press information
  5. Bill tracking
  6. Civics education information
  7. Video of legislative sessions
  8. Audio of legislative sessions
  9. Regional information
  10. Online newsletter
4. Are the state legislators given the freedom to manipulate their sites?
5. In what year did (your state) implement the state legislative web sites?
6. Are capabilities the same for both representatives and senators?
7. What determinants do you feel affect whether a legislator actively uses his or her web sites to communicate with constituents?
  - a. Age
  - b. Gender
  - c. Demographics of district
  - d. Educational level
  - e. Longevity as legislator
  - f. Other, please indicate

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 5 representing strongly agree, please respond to the following statements.

8. Legislators' web sites communication through use of their home pages provided by the state legislators has increased over the last three years.
9. There is much resistance to legislators' communicating to constituents through their home pages.

10. Legislators could improve the quality of communication with constituents by utilizing their home pages more.
11. Legislators do use their web sites to their fullest potential.
12. Legislators fear new technological capabilities offered on the state web sites.
13. When new technology is introduced for the web sites, legislators need a lot of training.
14. Legislators often call to ask for additional resources for their web sites (i.e., online polling capabilities, press release links, etc.).
15. The visitors to the site significantly increase every year.
16. Visitors to the state legislature have increased since the inception of online government.

Please answer the following questions.

17. Whose responsibility is it to update the legislators' web pages?
  1. The legislator him/herself
  2. The legislative assistant
  3. The webmaster
  4. Other, please indicate \_\_\_\_\_
18. Can the legislators update their home pages from their home offices?
  1. Yes
  2. No
19. Are there limitations that you set for legislators? For example, is there any information that you disallow on the site?
20. Are the web sites monitored for content?
21. How are the policies regarding legislative web sites decided?
  - a. Individual legislators
  - b. Legislative committee
  - c. Legislative leader (Senate President and/or Speaker of the House)
  - d. Webmaster
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_
22. When was the last time these policies were changes or altered?
23. Why were they changed or altered?
24. Who was the initiator of this change?
  - a. Legislators
  - b. Legislative committee
  - c. Legislative leader
  - d. Webmaster
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_
25. Do you require that legislators routinely (at least once a month) update their web sites' information?
26. Please describe the results of implementing the web to state legislation.
27. What are your recommendations to encourage greater public acceptance of this technology?

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## **Persuasive Communication: The reflexes of Social Responsibility in the Image**

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This essay is a study about Social Responsibility and its reflexes in corporate image. The objective is analyzing companies that are investing in this kind of action and describing how it has been perceived by their target public. This is a very curious and interesting topic since many companies are including Corporate Social Responsibility in their market actions. From a theoretical point based on Levek and Ashley, which are authors who complement each other, the topic was discussed in its ethic aspects and also in the one that reflect in their actions. The research that was carried out had as its main focus evaluating the perception of listeners of two important radio stations in the south of Brazil.

This paper presents a qualitative research using in-depth interviews. For each one of the two evaluated cases, marketing professionals and the team responsible for the creation of the advertising campaign, identified as a Social Responsibility action, were interviewed, in order to identify the intended communication objectives. Later, interviews were carried out with a group of randomly selected radio listeners, aiming at evaluating the effect coming from the decodification of the actions refereed.

By observing in both cases the conflict between communication objectives regarding actions of Corporate Social Responsibility and the effects of message decodification by the consumer, we aim at collaborating for the evaluation about direct institutional gains when we intend to reach the common good.

This essay was written in order to study Social Responsibility towards communication and its results associated to customers/consumers. It is a very intriguing and interesting subject since many companies are including corporate social responsibility in their marketing actions. The research's main focus was to evaluate the perception of the listeners of two important radio stations in the south of Brazil. It is a qualitative research, with the purpose of clarifying how such action is being decoded, i.e., its impacts on the understanding or knowledge of the causes defended by the company and its reflections, such as feelings and perceptions which influence in the awareness of value and institutional image as well as brand.

By observing in both cases the conflict between communication action regarding corporative social responsibility actions and the effects of message decodification by the consumer we seek to collaborate in evaluating direct institutional gains when the intention is a common good.

### **Theoretical Grounding**

In this stage concepts of fundamental importance were discussed in order to achieve the Research in question which includes social responsibility, social marketing, identity and corporate image, persuasive communication, publicity, advertising message and its impact.

Social responsibility mentions ethics as a base of actions performed by all the public with which the organization can interact with, that is, its stakeholders: customers, employees, suppliers, shareholders, government, society, environment. (Moreira; 2002). From a wider point of view, Ashley et al. (2002, p. 6) defines “social responsibility as all and any action that could contribute to improve the quality of life of the society.”

Socially responsible private organizations use strategies aiming at long term sustainability. Besides logic performance and profit, they include concern with social and environmental effects from their activities in order to contribute to the common good and the improvement of community quality of life. (CAMARGO et al., 2001). In an organizational vision, corporate social responsibility can be understood as any commitment that an organization has to society, expressed by means of positive acts and attitudes in a community demonstrating a pro-active and coherent position of the company in what it refers to its specific role in the society and in rendering accounts to it (ASHLEY et al.; 2002).

Social responsibility is the corporate citizenship’s duty, and companies who wish to transmit an ethical and moral image can, in the future, be benefited by their attitudes gaining bigger appreciation of their products and services. (MELO NETO and FROES, 2001).

The authors Thompson and Pringle (2000, p.114) cite a research carried out in 1997 by Research International, in England, indicating that “64% of the consumers are willing to pay a little more for a product that is associated to a social cause, 20% of the population are willing to pay 10% more for the right cause, 61% of the consumers would go to another store if the other one was associated to a good cause”. This kind of research motivates companies to practice social responsibility, since this attitude also allows actions of social marketing using a cause which is regarded important, be it for its philosophy, for its mission or for its internal objectives. Ashley et. al (2002) cites a research carried out by the “Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada”. (IPEA) in which 90% of the companies that were researched state they had started investing in social actions since they believed it would improve their institutional image, and 19% believe that being socially responsible will enhance profitability. It is important to be aware of the interdependency between social advertising and social responsibility. Social Marketing starts as a true form of social responsibility duty and could make, in the long run, a distinction to its brand raising awareness of value of current and potential customers and thereby resulting in competitive advantages for companies. (Levek, 2002)

Social Marketing’s objective is to provoke changes in behavior and attitude which can be used in any type of organization (public, private, profitable or non-profitable) provided that its final goal is production and transformation of social impacts. (ARAÚJO, 2001).

Persuasive communication in advertising is one of the important resources used so that social marketing can achieve the desired behavioral changes in order to create a definite social impact.

According to Roiz (1992), in a general perspective, to persuade means to convince someone using reasons and arguments making somebody believe something or go into action: buying something, voting for someone, attending a program, or making him change his attitudes in relation to a product, a service or an idea. The author makes a special reference to the process of transmission of meaning whose scope of performance ranges from individual communication to mass communication (Roiz, 1992).

Persuasive communication in advertising as well as its effects is also treated by other authors. Lomas (1996) approaches the strong influence of the Cultural Industries (television,

advertising, cinema, the press) in the habits of people. These forms of communication guide our acts through several uses of verbal and non-verbal “persuasion”

In this aspect, it is observed that the procedures of persuasion seen as a means to convince practiced in Advertising in order to provoke an action, (Roiz, 1996) is among the most efficient tools when it comes to Social Marketing campaign. According to Morentin (1984) advertising is an effective technique that by means of rational use of information makes it easier for the company to achieve its institutional and commercial objectives. And adds: advertising activity as the producer of the message exceeds its basic functions becoming an important factor of social and cultural change

Aiming at getting greater effectiveness in advertising, Demartini Gomes (2003) cites some important questions to be considered during the elaboration of communication strategy.

Broadcasters and message encoders must know how the communication process works in the society, as well as the different values of its components: channel, message, source, and destination. They also need to know thoroughly specific aspects linked to the psychological and social characteristics of the receivers.

Advertising needs to be understood by all the public it is bound for and strives for a perfect understanding and interpretation of its messages. It is the creator of the message’s function, so much textual as illustrative, to find a simple and straightforward way, with quality, to communicate his message.

The definition of the axle (or approach) of the main subject of the campaign is not an easy task, and the message will be elaborated from the information obtained regarding the needs and values of the target audience. That is where the right motivation is found which will be present in the argument. (Demartini Gomes, 2004).

In general, to write the message, you start off with the emotional motivations and finish off with the rational ones. Not always are such motivations found in a unique and clear way among the demands therefore in some occasions it is required to choose the most convenient one and emphasize or overvalue its importance to the detriment of others for its power and for its persuasive capacity. Under these circumstances, when considering a social campaign, companies should carefully analyze which would be the most relevant cause of interest for their public; or otherwise the consumer could reject it. It is necessary to focus on the value of the brand which is important for most of the consumers, and afterwards, distinguish the causes which best represent value to the customer and to the company (SIMANTOB, 2002).

The chosen cause must, not only reflect concrete attitudes in terms of social responsibility but have a coherent relationship between identity and corporate image. Torquato (1991), states that identity is formed by values, principles, concepts and systems. It is the company’s identity, i.e. what the company is in fact, while image is what the company wants to project, it is the identity’s shadow. The more evident the company’s identity is, i.e., what the company is like, why it exists, its objectives, its beliefs, its values – the more coherent its objectives, behavior and actions will be. Also in this aspect it will more easily achieve the image it is looking for. Making an organization’s image compatible with its identity is one of the entrepreneurs’ greatest challenges today.

Orchis et al. (2002) also states that social responsibility could add value to the company’s image and, as a result, increase its competitive advantage, or even serve as a means to achieve the public that considers socially responsible attitudes as a prerequisite or distinction for the choice of their brand. The interaction between the organization and its public has the objective to conquer the public’s good will (Baldissera, 2001). Thus social responsibility acts performed

by companies need to have very well-defined objectives and need to be oriented for its main strategy, in the sense of creating and/or maintaining a favorable image to the people the company interacts with generating their empathy. According to Bueno et al. (2002) ideas which are said to be true form beliefs, and based on these beliefs which are associated to the company or product's ideas, the image of a specific organization will be created. This emphasizes the importance of coherence between what the company is and the way it wants to be seen by its stakeholders.

In this essay, Research will analyze two cases of social campaigns performed by radio broadcasters towards the young public who opted in using their own space in the media to make the young listeners (customers) aware of the risks of life when driving drunk. Since many car accidents in Brazil involve drunkard youngsters. This attitude demonstrates a citizenship attitude: Social responsibility from both of the broadcasters to the community and its listeners, who are daily exposed to traffic violence. Social campaigns are one of the tools employed by social marketing as a company strategy as well as in communication to divulge actions that are considered socially responsible. This subdivision in marketing has taken bigger and bigger proportions during the past years bringing benefits to the companies who practice it and to society. Companies will benefit from it since an image which is linked to a social cause brings transparency to its public and to its market. (...) the company will gain credibility, respect and most of all better results. (MELO NETO and FROES, 2001)

### **Methodology**

A qualitative investigation research of the two radio stations in question limited to the public listener (customers) was carried out in order to verify how Social Responsibility actions are being decoded, i.e. their impacts in terms of the awareness of the cause(s) defended by the company and its likely repercussion in the institutional image. The instrument used for the research was in- depth interview.

According to data found in Mc Daniel & Gates (2003) qualitative research can be used to analyze people's attitudes, feelings and motivations. As determined by Matter (1999): Investigative research seeks to provide the researcher with a greater knowledge about the subject or the problem of the perspective research. For these reasons, it is appropriate for the first stages of investigation when the researcher's familiarity, knowledge and comprehension of the phenomenon are normally insufficient or nonexistent.

In-depth interview was chosen as an instrument to gather qualitative data, since according to Malhotra (2001) it is an interview technique which is very little structured, and conducted by an experienced moderator with one interviewee at a time to obtain information about a determined subject. Its main advantage is the possibility of a bigger deepening of the subject.

The interviewees were invited at the researcher's criteria, according to Malhotra (2001) sampling by criteria is a form of sampling for convenience whereby the elements of the population are selected according to the researcher's evaluation. The researcher by exercising his sense of judgment or by applying his experience selects the elements to be included in the sample, since he considers them appropriate

First marketing professionals with knowledge related to the campaign communication's objectives which were identified by the researchers as a Social Responsibility action were interviewed in order to identify the intended communication objects. Afterwards the interviews were carried out with a group of randomly selected radio listeners, with the purpose of evaluating the effects coming from the decodification of the message.

The writers of this paper carried out the interviews themselves in order to identify information about the researched subject. The data was analyzed with the purpose of identifying the intended communication objects. Later a report based on the findings during the interviews was made distinguishing the most relevant subjects with the purpose of meeting this research's main objectives: which range from observing Corporate Social Responsibility actions to the effects of decodification of the message by the consumer, aiming to identify any possible reflexes of this strategy in terms of gaining an intuitional image when it comes to common good.

### Results of the Analysis

Advertising pieces used in the electronic media (radio) were analyzed, characterized by its text, as a Social Responsibility action. Therefore they are social institutional campaigns held concomitantly in the second half of 2006 by two radio stations which challenge the young public of class A, B and C living in Porto Alegre city in the state of Rio Grande do Sul – Brazil. From these two real cases we will be able to notice if in fact there are real gains for the institutional image when using social responsibility.

#### Scenario 1: Presentation of the messages used by the radio stations

Radio station 1	Radio station 2
1) ... don't drive if you are drunk 2) ... take a taxi if you drink	I was on my way back from a party at 4am and when I woke up I was in a hospital room all broken up. I was driving while I was drunk and hit a small wall on the side of the road. The guy that I gave a ride to died on the spot and I can't feel my legs anymore. Perhaps I'll never walk again. This story isn't really mine but it could be mine or yours. Be smart. Don't drink and drive.

Source: Data Collecting

The two radio stations, in spite of working on the same theme, in terms of communication, used completely different messages.

#### Scenario 2: Description of the piece's format used in the social campaign.

Radio station 1	Radio station 2
Vignettes inserted in the middle of the program reminding the listener in a very amusing manner, not to drive drunk	Testimonials inserted during commercial breaks. The speakers themselves appear as protagonists of a tragic accident caused the imprudence of drunken driving

Source: Data Collecting

It is observed that both social campaigns were created with different strategies leading to proposals with very strong identities.

### Scenario 3: Social campaign's communication objects.

Radio station 1	Radio station 2
<p>The object of the message is to remind the listeners constantly and make them aware of the dangers of drunkard driving. The language used is light-hearted and amusing trying to be casual which is the radio station's characteristic, even when the subject is serious.</p> <p>The radio station's advertising intends to remind youngsters to be less inconsequential in the traffic.</p>	<p>The object is to provoke a behavior change. The idea is to shock the young public showing the truth and its painful consequences. At the end a bit of the drama in the message is removed by saying that it is a warning and not something that happened in fact.</p> <p>It is believed that, in this way, the radio will be conquering a behavior change in its listeners, after making them see in a heavyhearted manner how important their responsibility in the traffic is.</p>

Source: Data Collecting

While one radio station chose to be amusing and lighthearted in its message in spite of its seriousness, the other station used tragedy appealing to the emotional in order to achieve the rational.

### Scenario 4: The target audience's eye related to the messages under study

Radio station 1	Radio station 2
<p>Most of the interviewees simply said that the message was great. Some of them added:..."Yes, indeed, we have to be careful..." And as to its effectiveness, in terms of behavior change, they said that they didn't believe that youngsters would stop driving drunk due to the radio campaign.</p>	<p>When asked about how they felt after listening to the message, the listeners showed different reactions: some said they got scared and said that it was as if they, in fact, had experienced the tragedy. And, from that moment on, started to be more careful in the traffic. Others said that it sounded like a bad joke, depressing and that's why whenever the message was announced, they changed stations.</p>

Source: Data Collecting

Radio station 1's listeners in spite of thinking the message was "great", did not believe that youngsters would change their behavior in the traffic due to the campaign. Yet, Radio station 2 while achieving part of its social objectives with a parcel of its public, faced some rejection from those who considered the message depressing. That is, Radio station 1 had a weak result as a social campaign; nevertheless, it caused a good sensation, which reflects a favorable institutional image. Radio station 2 was more effective in their social campaign; however, the more aggressive form of communication provoked rejection from part of their public which could reflect a negative corporate image.

### Conclusion

The research made it possible to verify some interesting questions related to social responsibility, its form of communicating and its impact in the institutional image.

Firstly, referring specifically to the two cases studied we realize that Social Responsibility alone does not add value to the image. What's more, A Social Advertising Campaign with the purpose of changing behavior and with positive impacts in a determined community needs to be carefully crafted in order to conquer its prime objectives besides creating positive feelings which, as a result, will reflect in its institutional image.

Secondly, depending on the message and its form, even if the organization seeks the common good, Social Responsibility could mean harm to its image and rejection from its public. This essay shows us from two real cases how to understand and use social responsibility, its

communication (the campaigns and social advertising) and its impacts in the institutional image. It is a “look at” practical examples with the intention of stimulating reflection on some theoretic statements and observing them in practice.

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## Consumer Responses to Green Cause-Related Marketing

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Ten long interviews explored consumers' perceptions of green cause-related marketing and responses to marketing practices that benefit environmental causes. Findings indicate that brands associated with environmental causes have a competitive advantage. The fit between the product and the cause as well as environmental practices of the company are important to consumers. Consumers have some skepticism about company motives and recognize the goal of cause-related marketing is to increase sales, but view the purchase of products that help a cause as a pro-social action that benefits nonprofits. Consumers want sufficient information to evaluate the level of support for the cause.

In the last few decades, cause-related marketing (CRM) has been increasingly refined as a strategy for companies to respond to what consumers say they want (Marconi, 2002). Cause-related marketing is the implementation of marketing activities characterized by an offer from a company to contribute to a designated cause when customers engage in revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988). Cause-related marketing should be distinguished from another popular marketing strategy, customer relationship marketing, also called CRM. Customer relationship marketing entails going beyond the point of sale to build relationships with customers in hopes of building brand loyalty (Izquierdo, Cillán, and Gutiérrez, 2005). In this paper, CRM refers only to cause-related marketing.

The 1983 American Express campaign to restore the Statue of Liberty is recognized as the pioneering cause-related marketing campaign (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988; Webb and Mohr, 1998). The company experienced a 28% increase in use of its credit cards, resulting in \$1.7 million contributed to the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation. However, the company spent \$6 million on its national promotional campaign. Regardless of this incongruence, the success of the American Express campaign encouraged other companies to follow suit.

Environmental causes were among the first to be pursued by companies interested in cause-related marketing. General Foods connected with nature-loving Grape Nuts cereal consumers in 1985, donating \$10,000 to the Marine Mammal Center through box top redemptions, and started a campaign to benefit California state parks (Wiegner, 1985). Patagonia, manufacturer of outdoor gear and clothing, began a campaign to support grassroots organizations concerned with the environment in 1986 and since has donated 1% of sales or 10% of annual profits (whichever was greater) to environmental groups every year. Companies adopted a number of environmental causes in the early 1990s, including MCI's relationship with four environmental nonprofits (Cramer, 1991), Mott's USA's National Park Foundation campaign, and Miller Brewing Company's heavily advertised \$1 million contribution to The Nature Conservancy (Zbar, 1993). In April 2005, Wal-Mart announced it will collaborate with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to donate \$35 million over the next decade to land conservation as compensation for land developed for its buildings (Chittum, 2005).

A 1995 issue of the *Journal of Advertising* featured the emerging phenomenon of green advertising and called for more study of green advertising, stating that the strategy was “in the introductory phase of its life cycle” (Zinkhan and Carlson, 1995). Kilbourne (1995) noted the need to examine more than just the green advertisements and consumer response, but also the extensive factors determining the success of the “greening of marketing.” However, few subsequent studies have examined green cause-related marketing.

This study focuses on “green cause-related marketing,” meaning marketing activities that communicate a company’s promise to contribute to a designated environmental cause when consumers engage in profit-yielding exchanges with that company. The purpose of this study is to gain understanding about how consumers perceive green CRM, and if and why they purchase in relation to those perceptions. Because the success of CRM depends on the believable connections that marketers generate among causes, consumers, companies, nonprofits, and products, the crucial role of consumer perception in this process should not be underestimated. Long interviews were conducted to explore consumers’ perceptions of and responses to green CRM.

### **CAUSE RELATED MARKETING AS A BUSINESS STRATEGY**

Adkins (1999) noted that “whatever cause-related marketing is, it is certainly not philanthropy nor altruism: it’s good business, and it’s good business for charities and businesses” (p. 12). Varadarajan and Menon (1988) articulated two salient points: companies occasionally spend more money on advertising their contributions and alliances than on donations, and second, contribution and promotional expenditures are tax deductible. They advised that managers create and encourage a corporate culture that will internalize the true philosophy of CRM.

Despite drawbacks, cause-related marketing is an effective marketing tool that can increase sales by adding an additional benefit to the product, help a product cut through advertising clutter, and increase its chance of reaching specific markets (White, 2005). The longer a company links itself to a cause, the more effective the CRM appears to be with consumers (Webb and Mohr, 1998; Dean, 2002). The earlier a company takes up a cause, the more likely the image transfer will be effective (Meenaghan, 2001). Varadarajan and Menon (1988) suggested several benefits of CRM to companies, including enhanced corporate image, increased sales, visibility, increased brand awareness, greater market segment reach, and ability to recover from negative publicity. Many consumers will switch brands and try new brands because of CRM (Mohr, Webb, and Harris, 2001; Ross, Patterson, and Stutts, 1992).

CRM has obvious benefits for charitable organizations, including increased visibility of both the organization and the cause, as well as financial support. However, CRM has pitfalls that charitable organizations must anticipate. Exaggerations of corporate generosity, shifting priorities to meet corporate demands, short relationships, and poor consumer reaction to the partnership can harm a charitable organization (Polonsky and Wood, 2001). Additional obstacles to CRM include consumer wariness of “big business” (Marconi, 2002; Iyer and Banerjee, 1992) or “anti-corporate biases” (Zinkhan and Carlson, 1995), cynicism about for-profit companies’ motives (Dean, 2002), general skepticism of advertising, perception of causes being over-commercialized (Webb and Mohr, 1998; Shrum and McCarty, 1995).

#### **Green Cause-Related Marketing**

A growing number of companies are tapping into green marketing. Zinkhan and Carlson (1995) suggested three reasons for companies to consider green marketing: the emergence of the

green consumer segment, the greening of other stakeholder groups, notably owners, and the increase in responsible business development. Some studies have evaluated consumer response to “greenwashing” and counterstrategies of insincere companies trying to tap into that universal appeal of environmental stewardship (Laufer, 2003). Marconi (2002) advocated specificity in selecting an environmental cause for CRM, citing companies that have used green marketing effectively including Tom’s of Maine, The Body Shop, and Ben & Jerry’s. Surveys of consumers’ general attitudes show that consumers are increasingly aware of CRM. A recent survey found “98 per cent of U.K. and U.S. consumers [are] aware of at least one CRM programme,” up from 88% in 2000. More consumers are seeking information about companies’ activities through the Internet (Bashford, 2005). The study of green cause-related marketing in particular has significance in that a growing number of consumers consider themselves “green.” Also, the wide selection of environmental causes to support allows for choices that are seldom controversial. That variety also eases the ability of companies to gradually build and adjust green cause-related marketing strategies based on the success of initial green CRM.

Banerjee, and Gulas (1995) addressed the consistency among companies’ practices, products, and partnerships. The authors discussed the levels of involvement available to consumers, from “shallow ecology” to “deep ecology.” In their content analysis of green advertising, they mentioned two appeals particularly salient to green CRM: the “goodness of ‘natural’ products and ingredients” as well as emphasis on companies’ social responsibility and green actions. The most common theme of the ads was “promotion of a green corporate image,” usually highlighting a companies’ general commitment to environmental protection.

### **CONSUMERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF CAUSE RELATED MARKETING**

More than 80% of consumers have regularly reported that they have a more positive image of companies using cause-related marketing (Mohr, Webb, and Harris, 2001; Marconi, 2002). If product pricing is competitive, even consumers with little involvement in causes find green marketing to be significantly more persuasive than non-green appeals (Schuhwerk and Lefkoff-Hagius, 1995). Corporate social responsibility and CRM strengthen employee motivation and morale in the workplace (Adkins, 1999; Smith and Alcorn, 1991). A 1997 survey of 2,100 MBA students found that more than 50% said they would accept a lower salary to work for a socially responsible company (Marconi, 2002).

The study of socially responsible consumer behavior corresponds to the environmental movement of the 1970s. Webster (1975) stated that the socially conscious consumer was “a consumer who takes into account the public consequences of his or her private consumption or who attempts to use his or her purchasing power to bring about social change” (p. 188). Webster’s study found such a consumer was likely to be female with higher household income than her less socially conscious counterpart. Decades later, Berger, Cunningham, and Kozinetz (1999) also noted effects of gender and heuristics in evaluations of corporate social responsibility. They found women were more responsive to CRM as heuristic cues, resulting in perception of increased brand superiority.

Webb and Mohr (1998) developed four consumer groups (skeptics, balancers, attribution-oriented, and socially concerned) to categorize socially responsible consumer behavior (SRCB). Individuals in their “socially concerned” group were so distressed about social causes they were willing to overlook the compromises that sometimes occur between companies and charitable organizations as long as the cause received support from the relationship. Mohr, Webb, and Harris’s 2001 study determined four categories of consumers based on their levels of SRCB.

These four consumer categories (pre-contemplators, contemplators, the action group, and maintainers) suggested how consumers' general preconceptions of marketing and causes affect their reception of CRM. Of these four categories, environmental issues were of highest importance to the "maintainers" in the study.

### **Consumers' Involvement with the Issue or Cause**

A consumer's level of involvement with a cause affects perception of and reaction to CRM featuring that cause. The higher the consumer's prior involvement with the cause, the more likely a consumer will process CRM messages and purchase (Broderick et al., 2003). More involved consumers have also been found to be more critical of businesses linking to causes (Iyer and Banerjee, 1992; Meenaghan, 2001). These "skeptical experts" look for signs of exploitation and can be critical of nonprofit organizations for pairing with for-profit organizations (Roy and Cornwell, 2004). However, if the relationship clearly expresses a company's genuine interest in the cause, the critical cause experts are likely to be supportive of the linkage.

### **Consumers' Involvement with the Purchase**

Low involvement purchases have been found to benefit from CRM. When brands appear similar, consumers have been found to choose the brand featuring CRM (Meenaghan, 2001; Berger et al., 1999). Barone, Miyazaki, and Taylor (2000) found that if brands appear homogeneous, as long as consumers perceived no tradeoffs, they tended to choose the brand marketed in relation to a cause. Additionally, if brands appeared heterogeneous, choice of the cause-related marketed brand depended on consumers' perception of both the size of the contribution to the cause and the company's motivation for support. High involvement, luxury and frivolous products can also benefit from cause-related marketing. The charity involved has been found to soothe consumers' guilt about the indulgence (Strahilevitz and Myers, 1998; Strahilevitz, 1999).

### **Ethics and Action: The Search for Meaning**

The feelings of advocacy and action associated with buying products promoted by CRM can result in consumers feeling personally involved in a cause campaign, as well as feeling a part of a collective (Broderick et al., 2003; Cornwell and Smith, 2001). Consumers have been found to take pride in buying the products of a company involved in CRM (Meenaghan, 2001). The feelings of charity and giving associated with making a cause-related marketed purchase can promote a sense of altruism in consumers.

Consumers' desire for altruism through purchasing affects consumer response to and perception of CRM in other contexts. Smith and Alcorn (1991) found that roughly one third of the study's participants were both willing to make purchases and switch brands in response to a company's cause-related marketing, especially if the cause was local, even if meant forgoing the use of coupons.

### **Green Consumers**

Shrum and McCarty (1995) defined "green consumers" as anyone whose purchase behavior is influenced by environmental concerns. They added that green consumers consider themselves to be opinion leaders, are interested in new products, actively exchange product information, are careful in their shopping habits, and are price sensitive. Green consumers were also found to be generally more skeptical of advertising (women more so than men), with television being the most mistrusted media. The authors suggested that brand loyalty could be established with these consumers by being the first to adequately meet their "environmental needs."

The division of green marketing into distinct and necessary categories (Kilbourne, 1995; Banerjee and Gulas, 1995) as well as the segmentation of green consumers into more precise groups (Shrum and McCarty, 1995; Webb and Mohr, 1998; Mohr, Webb, and Harris, 2001) calls attention to the complexity of consumer response to and perception of green marketing. More research is needed to explore green consumer perceptions.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The overall research question for this study is, How do consumers perceive green cause-related marketing? The next question is, How do consumers respond to green CRM? Of particular interest is, Does the response lead to purchasing behavior? Since research suggests that involvement with a cause facilitates reception of cause-related marketing, the third question is, How do consumers' levels of involvement with environmental causes affect their responses to green CRM? Levels of involvement and types of purchase have been found to influence perceptions of CRM, which leads to the fourth question: How does the level of purchase involvement affect consumers' response to green CRM?

This study also explores how consumers' views of green CRM might have implications for nonprofits' other efforts for environmental causes, which leads to the question, Do consumers view green cause-related marketed purchases as pro-social acts? Finally, the study looked at how consumers evaluated actual claims and information provided in a variety of green CRM examples, asking How do consumers react to examples of green CRM from companies involved in environmental cause support?

### **METHOD**

The use of long interviews allowed consumers to express the meaning of green cause-related marketing and shopping experiences in their own words, providing context and specific reasons for perceptions and behavior. McCracken (1988) described eight interviews as a sufficient number toward achieving understanding. In the current study, redundancy in responses was apparent after ten interviews. Each interview lasted 60 to 90 minutes.

Participants were recruited from stores carrying "green" products, including Aveda health and beauty products, Patagonia outdoor gear and clothing, Kalahari Tea, Stonyfield Farms dairy products, Endangered Species Chocolate, Barbara's Bakery food products, and Ben & Jerry's ice cream. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, participants were selected based on their awareness of environmental cause support. The small sample size and greenness of the companies serve as a precursor to broader exploration of cause-related marketing phenomena. A short close-ended questionnaire screened for individuals' awareness of green cause-related marketing. Six females and four males were interviewed. Five participants were between the ages of 21 and 30, four were between 31 and 40, and one was between 51 and 60. Participants' occupations included nutrition professor, art teacher, private school teacher, social worker, contractor, biologist, sales associate, GIS technician, and student.

The interviewer used a discussion guide formatted according to McCracken's grand-tour suggestions to focus participants' attention on potential influential factors (see Appendix 1). Each interview was recorded and transcribed, and verbatim transcripts provided to each participant for his or her review served as a member check. Member checking not only provides additional feedback from participants, but also reaffirms the equality between the researchers' and participants' understandings, crucial to the constructivist paradigm of this study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Transcripts were analyzed using McCracken's (1988) five-stage process,

comparing and contrasting for consistencies and contradictions in respondents' answers. Influential factors that could establish consumer categories, themes, and key terms participants use when discussing green CRM were identified.

## FINDINGS

### How do consumers perceive green cause-related marketing?

All of the interviewees in the study believed that green cause-related marketing showed, as one participant said, "good environmental stewardship," and that "all companies have environmental issues they need to be addressing." Even when participants mentioned skepticism of businesses because of perceived inconsistencies in environmental practices, most said green CRM was a step in the right direction.

Most of the interviewees evaluated company motives for partnering with nonprofits as two-fold: financial and genuine concern for the environment. Companies' concerns for the bottom line were described as "just part of life." The participants in this study expected and accepted companies' mixed motives.

Skepticism toward companies surfaced when addressing inconsistency with companies' actions and cause support. Participants in the study sought balance between a company's environmental practices and cause support. Most participants evaluated the fit, or match, between a cause and a company by looking at the product—its origins, resources used, "naturalness," and packaging—checking for environmentally responsible consistency. The link between the characteristics of the product and the green cause was noted, such as Ben & Jerry's ice cream figuratively "cooling" global warming, and Aveda's hairspray as part of "air control" for air quality initiatives.

Many participants also evaluated fit based on the price of the product: the higher the price, the more money they expected to go toward the cause. In addition, they considered information available about the resource-gathering process and company practices, citing consistent qualities such as "shade grown," "organically grown," "locally grown," and "reduced emissions." Two participants also considered the treatment of employees, questioning products from outside of the United States and suspecting sweatshop conditions.

Information on packaging was reported to be highly influential to participants' perception of a brand and product. Respondents said they rely heavily on packaging for information about nutritional information, natural and/or organic processing, recycled/recyclable packaging, cause support, and animal testing. Four participants mentioned their frustration with ecolabeling, the use of "organic," and USDA regulations. One participant explained:

*I try to rely more on other sources of information because there's a lot of misinformation out there. I know one of the products in particular that I have seen—the food phenomenon is kind of iffy. Just knowing that there's no real standard of what organic is, there's a lot of people who will have a label that says organic, because they can, because there's no regulation that says you're allowed to call it that or not. So to some degree, you have to be careful.*

Respondents reasoned that buying local or regional products not only contributed to their regional economy, but also that less transportation resulted in fewer vehicle emissions. This concept was one of many that figured into participants' buying heuristics as part of their "big picture philosophy," as one respondent labeled it. Companies' support of more than one cause and nonprofit, including causes outside of direct environmental advocacy such as humanitarian cause support, was perceived as also being part of the "big picture" of protecting the environment.

### **How do consumers respond to green CRM?**

The interviewees responded positively overall to green CRM, giving brands that support causes the competitive edge over other brands. All ten interviewees were able to offer examples of companies, products and/or brands promoted through green CRM. Six of the ten participants recalled specific causes supported, but none recalled specific nonprofit partners. All ten said they make a point of buying brands that support environmental causes, but price was a concern. One respondent said that companies were raising the prices of products, forcing the consumer to compensate more for the cause support. However, most respondents commented that they had “realistic” expectations of amounts companies could donate, and that the cost of a product was “relative” to perceived importance of the cause. Many respondents said any little contribution helps, and several cited “raising awareness” of environmental issues as an important contribution of green CRM. Participants liked reading about amounts donated, but often found figures and percentages difficult to evaluate due to a lack of information about the context. The majority of respondents said that they rely on both packaging and advertising for information about support for green causes.

One participant who disliked being target-marketed to because of his age demographic said green CRM is “different,” and was more like being targeted for having “taste.” Other participants responded similarly, describing themselves as different from “the average consumer,” aligning themselves with “elite customers,” and implying that they were sharper than “the general public,” careful not to be “duped” or “fooled” by vague advertising claims. Some respondents were skeptical of the environmental information presented in ads, wanting more details or source information to help them evaluate the accuracy of the claims. A few participants showed skepticism of television commercials, but many provided positive examples of print and radio advertisements from which they received useful information about green cause-related marketing.

### **How do consumers’ levels of involvement with environmental causes affect their responses to green CRM?**

All participants expressed strong interests in protecting the environment and promoting social responsibility for companies and consumers. Most stated that they recycle, try to buy responsibly, and stay informed about environmental issues. One respondent said she never feels she is doing enough. Six of the participants reported lower environmental cause involvement, citing limited incomes as preventing direct donations to nonprofits and environmental causes. These low cause-involved respondents showed some guilt, fatigue, and frustration at the “extra” time and effort socially responsible consumer behavior requires. However, the six low cause-involved participants reported that they choose products with green CRM when they are already buying such a product and it meets their other criteria including affordable pricing. Four of the six low cause-involved participants said they were suspicious of large corporations and mentioned several corporations they wished to boycott, but said that determining which brands were owned by the “bad” corporations was nearly impossible or too difficult. These individuals raised the question of who has the responsibility of making corporate activities known. Similar to the high cause-involved participants, they were more dedicated to avoiding brands perceived as irresponsible, than to supporting socially responsible brands. In contrast to high cause-involved participants, these individuals were not as likely to maintain a boycott or to pay much more for a brand from a socially responsible company.

Four respondents reported high involvement with a cause, currently donating time and money to specific environmental nonprofits, regardless of income limitations. The high cause-

involved participants reported feeling more skepticism toward advertising and businesses, yet showed more enthusiasm about the opportunities for sincere companies to engage green CRM. These participants reported more willingness to compromise (i.e., buy less overall) in order to afford the expense of products perceived as socially and environmentally responsible. All four cause-involved participants reported buying green cause-related marketed products if the product met their standards, such as a originating from a small company or a parent company known for corporate social responsibility. As with the low cause-involved participants, these individuals described green CRM as more of an “extra” and not so much of a criterion for purchasing. They expressed familiarity and strong brand loyalty to companies perceived as being consistently environmentally responsible. Three of the four reported boycotting large corporations including Con Agra and Coca-Cola.

### **How does the level of purchase involvement affect consumers’ response to green CRM?**

All participants reported responding positively to green CRM for purchases they described as low-involvement or routine as well as those described as high-involvement purchases. Routine purchases of products featuring green CRM were described as important because of the cumulative nature of donations associated with frequent purchasing. One participant explained that even small amounts of cause support would provide competitive edge for a more competitively priced product, what he called the “cheaper feel-good option.” All participants believed that knowledge of the environmental issues surrounding routine purchases as important. As one participant stated:

*I think this kind of stuff, for me personally, because I may not eat a lot of ice cream, but everybody—including myself—we always use, like, products, like hairspray or whatever, and there’s a lot of packaging that goes into that, too. I tend to be more concerned with a lot of this stuff, a lot of the things that we use on a daily basis. It’s important for us to take into consideration where it comes from and hope that these companies will take care—you’d think they would because their products depend on it!*

The more often a product was purchased, the more concerned individuals were about its ingredients, origins, and the company’s practices. Several respondents showed willingness to research routine purchases further, “I guess if it was something I was putting, like, \$20 a week into, I’d definitely want to make sure—I wouldn’t want to buy something from like some crap company, even if I did buy it like once a year.”

In this study, green cause-related marketed, high-involvement products were repeatedly perceived as having the competitive edge over products that did not support a cause. Most participants reported feeling better about the luxury or indulgent purchases if they knew part of their payment went to support a cause, especially if the purchase was perceived as “unnecessary” indulgent consumption. Even for smaller indulgent purchases such ice cream, cause support was reported to be an influential competitive edge for a brand because it eased guilt. Respondents also reported looking for other cues, such as locally produced or handmade, when making luxury purchase decisions. One respondent said he would like to see cause support with “big-ticket items” such as hybrid vehicles and houses.

### **Do consumers view green cause-related marketed purchases as pro-social acts?**

Participants’ evaluations of the pro-social aspects of purchasing products from companies who support green causes triggered responses about the difference of individuals who actively choose to buy products associated with a green cause. Many participants felt it separated them from other consumers, whether by aligning them with “elite customers,” “socially responsible

consumers,” or distinguishing them from the less sharp “average person” who is not proactive with his or her dollar. The old axiom “every dollar is a vote,” and similar sentiments were expressed. One high cause-involved participant said she felt opposite of “irresponsible consumers”:

*It makes you so much more aware, and that has a lot of other ramifications—like, I love wild open spaces. That has a lot to do with the way I consume products, and I love clean air, and that has to do with the way I consume products. It has a lot to do with doing things automatically, and doing things deliberately. I try to do things deliberately, I think, whereas some people have a routine. They get in their minivan, go to the store, buy a bunch of crap, and it’s just so bland! That lifestyle is just so bland! I like to think of myself as more interesting.*

For interviewees who said they were not actively involved in supporting environmental causes, buying products that support green causes is an “easy” way to feel a part of a cause. For most high cause-involved individuals, green CRM is an additional, consistent choice in their lifestyle. Every respondent expressed that consumers drive change and believed consumers perpetuated green marketing practices. Several participants emphasized that green CRM can generate awareness by encouraging consumer word-of-mouth advocacy of the green cause-related marketed brands, causes, and nonprofits.

Participants said that purchasing green CRM products made them feel as if they were living “consistently” with their “values.” Even so, the majority of participants responded that green CRM purchases were not enough to fulfill one’s obligation toward environmental responsibility. Only one respondent believed if she made several routine green CRM purchases that she would feel she had done “enough” to support environmental causes. However, all respondents described green CRM purchases as “easier” or more convenient donations, and said that they were giving and shopping simultaneously, not strictly one or the other. A few participants felt green CRM facilitated giving from consumers who would never consider donating directly.

### **How do consumers react to examples of green CRM from companies involved in environmental cause support?**

All participants evaluated examples of green cause-related marketing practices. The examples used were: Ben & Jerry’s web pages describing the Lick Global Warming Campaign and a Ben & Jerry’s Thoughts on Global Warming pamphlet from its store; Aveda two-page magazine ads about conservation efforts; Endangered Species Chocolate Company packaging; a Patagonia “1% for the Planet” print ad; Kalahari Tea packaging describing support for the African Wildlife Foundation and the Kalahari People’s Fund; Barbara’s Bakery Puffins cereal packaging describing its support of the Puffins Project; and Stonyfield Farm yogurt packaging describing its support of alternative energy. (Company profiles are found in Appendix 2.) After gathering initial impressions, the participants were prompted for impressions about the cause support.

**Initial impressions.** The amount of information provided in the ad or package directly related to positive reception of the claims about cause support. All but one participant responded with suspicion about green activities of the Kalahari Tea Company because there was so little information on the package. One respondent commented that the small space allotted suggested that the company did not take “pride” in its cause support, resulting in her conclusion that it must not be providing much. The one exception said he thought the “understated” green CRM made Kalahari Tea look less exploitive of the cause support. Ads and packaging listing the nonprofit

organization partners, the amounts given, details of the cause support, and specific information about the cause(s) received positive responses from all respondents. The extensive information on Ben & Jerry's website was perceived positively by participants, even those who had begun to doubt Ben & Jerry's environmentalism since they had heard the company had been sold to Unilever.

Patagonia's "1% for the Planet" ad caused the most consternation. Participants liked the mention of "to date, Patagonia has donated more than \$18 million to grassroots organizations," but the actual date was not given, prohibiting evaluation of that claim. Participants also said 1% was difficult to judge as a donation amount, considering the ad did not explain the total figure from which the 1% was taken. This lack of information resulted in many participants going with their initial impression that 1% was a "bare minimum," especially since Patagonia products are somewhat expensive.

Without prompting, several of the participants compared Patagonia's 1% donation to Endangered Species Chocolate's 10% of profits donated. All perceived 10% as better, or "fair." One respondent said, "the actual amount Patagonia donates may be greater than the chocolate company, but 1% compared 10% just sounds worse—it's a psychological number I guess." Regardless, all participants gave Patagonia the competitive edge over competing companies that showed no cause support.

Participants sought balance and congruency among a company's environmental practices, its products, and the cause supported. The poor match between Stonyfield Farm dairy company and environmental causes provides an example of a participant sensing incongruence:

*They're reducing tons of global warming emissions, but I have to question how much they're generating by using such a small package, and the distribution, and the product itself—the manufacturing, and the product packaging. So, like with Ben & Jerry's, I'm very skeptical with a dairy product that's trying to be environmentally friendly, because there is no good way to make them and not do damage. I think it's a contradiction with a dairy company.*

About half of the participants liked causes featuring wildlife conservation with aesthetically appealing images of animals. The remainder of participants saw the use of attractive animals as distracting from the "big picture" of ecological preservation:

*People give a lot of money for elephants and lions and tigers. I don't consider them as important—they're important, but a lot of money gets wasted on things that are fuzzy, interesting animals. I'm an aquatic biologist—I like the little guys. The big picture, Ben & Jerry's is the big picture with global warming. But it's also the little stuff. Aveda seems to go big and little. Big picture stuff is more appealing to me because throwing million and millions and millions of dollars at one species is not going to do a lot for that species.*

**Influence on purchase behavior.** The majority of the participants gave green cause-related marketed products the competitive edge over non-green brands, even without prompting. When asked how the green CRM would affect their purchase behavior, most participants volunteered, despite whatever doubts they may have had about the claims, that they would rather put their dollar into a company "doing something" for the environment than one making no such promise. If they liked the green CRM enough, even those who said they did not buy that type of product said they would consider it for a gift, or recommend the brand to others. Many respondents were familiar with and were already buying the brands included in the examples. Most said they would feel even better about buying the brands now that they had learned more

about the cause support. About half said the new information would cause them to choose those brands more often. One participant boycotting Patagonia because of suspicions of sweatshop use said she respected the company's cause support, even though it did not end her boycott.

Two factors had a negative impact on intent to purchase. When participants perceived the information provided as inaccurate, they were reluctant to accept the green CRM positively. Ben & Jerry's claims about global warming conflicted with two respondents' experiences; therefore, they did not respond positively to the green cause-related marketing, but neither respondent seemed ready to blame nonprofits involved. The other factor mitigating the positive influence of green CRM was the perceived inconsistency between the cause and the type of company or the cause and the company's practices. Three participants who were critical of Stonyfield and Ben & Jerry's for the energy used and waste produced by dairy farms said that these companies would be better matches to environmental cause support if they changed their practices to be more consistent.

**Perceived beneficiary of cause-related marketing.** When asked to judge the biggest beneficiary of the partnerships expressed in the green CRM examples—the cause, the nonprofit, the company, or the consumer, most participants cited the company. A few participants said that the companies would not partner unless it was proving profitable. Other respondents said they understood that companies stood to profit from green CRM, but it was better than not partnering. However, with a few of the examples many participants said they perceived a win-win situation for all involved. Barbara's Bakery's support of the Puffins Project received win-win responses for its details about the cause, clearly outlined goals, and mention of "time and energy" donated. The Endangered Species Chocolate Company also received many win-win responses because of the details included on the packaging, and the 10% promised to conservation organizations. These products were also perceived as "good" or "quality" products, sold by responsible companies, produced through socially responsible practices, and packaged in recycled paper.

A few participants cited nonprofits as the biggest beneficiaries. One participant perceived Stonyfield Farm's 10% donation claim and feature of nonprofit NativeEnergy as a substantial boost to that nonprofit. Another participant found Barbara's Bakery's support of the Puffins Project as a significant contribution to the Audubon Society, and the Endangered Species Chocolate Company's 10% donation as significant to its nonprofit partners because of the higher-end price of the candy bars.

Only one respondent said that the consumer is the biggest beneficiary. For this participant, every partnership promoted the environment, which in her eyes ultimately benefited the consumer the most. Repeatedly she said that the government was not doing enough for the environment, and that the private sector was stepping in, giving consumers a chance to protect their environment, therefore protecting themselves.

## CONCLUSIONS

The consistent theme found throughout all of the interviews is that cause-related activities give a company, brand, or product a competitive advantage. This appears to be true for low-involvement, routinely purchased products as well as high-involvement purchases.

Companies can enhance the advantages of cause-related marketing as well as reduce skepticism by providing sufficient information about the cause and the amount of money donated. Participants in this study said they would be less critical of the amount donated to the cause, if it were clearly explained. Marketers could cultivate positive responses by proactively

addressing the paradoxical relationships among advertising, consumption, and ecological stewardship, as suggested by Kilbourne (1995).

Consumers look for a fit between the company, including its socially responsible practices, the product, and the cause. Ben & Jerry's was perceived as a good fit with its environmental campaign against global warming for multiple reasons—its “cool” ice cream, the “old hippies” who started the company, and the long term commitment it has had to the environment. Consistent with previous research about socially responsible consumers (Shrum and McCarty, 1995; Mohr, Webb, and Harris, 2001), boycotting brands and companies was apparent in this study. All but one interviewee reported boycotting brands, avoiding certain brands, and/or the dislike of supporting irresponsible companies. Many respondents were suspicious of larger parent companies like Con Agra, Monsanto, Proctor and Gamble, Unilever, and Johnson and Johnson, even if the subsidiary was more socially responsible. Companies should consider fits between their product, region and resources, and company image.

The nonprofit partners in cause-related marketing activities benefit greatly from the marketing activities. In addition to dollars, they gain exposure, and may reach consumers who would otherwise be unaware of the causes, such as one participant in this study who expressed an interest in wind turbines as an alternative energy source once she saw NativeEnergy advertised by both Ben & Jerry's and Stonyfield Farm. Participants in this study reported feeling “part of a collective” and perceived purchasing products associated with a cause as an easy way to become involved with a nonprofit. No negativity toward the partnering nonprofits was evident in any of the interviews. Local cause support may also prove effective, as suggested by this and other studies (Smith and Alcorn, 1991).

A limitation of this study is that participants were recruited from stores that sell products associated with green cause-related marketing since the purpose was to explore the perceptions of green consumers. Future studies could study the effect of green cause-related marketing on consumers who were not as environmentally active and aware.

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## **Cultural and Historical Variances of Multinational Corporations' Social Responsibility**

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This study explored the ways in which Japanese and Korean multinationals perceived and implemented their CSR strategies in China, and the effect of societal culture and historical relations between the three countries on these strategies. It concluded with a positive impact of historical relations but a mixed effect of culture.

Research (e.g., Arthaud-Day, 2005; Cumming, 2001) has demonstrated the increasing importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on multinational corporations' (MNCs) strategic agenda. Most related studies so far have primarily explored CSR at the domestic level, i.e., in the home countries of multinationals, mostly Western nations (Jackson & Artola, 1997). Arthaud-Day (2005) noted the significance of investigating CSR strategies by multinationals from Asian countries that have been expanding rapidly. Therefore, a need exists to extend research on CSR in host (not only home) countries, particularly in Asia, "in order to develop a deeper understanding of the profound impact MNCs can have on a less developed country" (Arthaud-Day, p. 16). This study followed this call and expanded research on CSR strategies by Asian MNCs in a less developed host country—China.

There have been large-scale anti-Japan protests and demonstrations in China. Media across the world, such as the BBC World, New York Times and People's Daily, reported that at the center of the controversy was Japan's new history textbook that "plays down Japan's wartime atrocities" (Rupert, 2005) and Japan's UN bid for permanent membership of the Security Council, among other issues. In contrast, Sino-Korea relations appeared to be friendlier. Many Chinese government agencies and government newspapers set a more positive tone when touching upon Sino-Korea relations, compared with Sino-Japan relations. For instance, China Communist Youth League Beijing Committee's Web site commented on the friendly relations between China and Korea in foreign trade and cultural exchange, and common grounds in many other international issues (Zhang, 2006). China's government newspaper People's Daily co-sponsored "The Past, Status quo and Future of the China-ROK Relations Workshop" with the Korean newspaper Dong-a Ilbo in Seoul, in order to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the victory of the antifascist war. A few days after this workshop, the People's Daily interviewed the former Korean ambassador to China who advocated joint efforts between the two countries to combat the right-wing tendencies in Japan's political circles. Furthermore, thousands of Koreans joined the Chinese in an online petition against Japan's UN bid, according to the Korean Times.

In this context, inevitably the questions were: Did the historically hostile Sino-Japan relations and recent surging anti-Japan sentiments change the ways in which Japanese MNCs in China sought to be socially responsible? How did this contrast those CSR strategies by Korean MNCs? Little scholarly attention has been devoted to address these questions. This study therefore filled this void and explored the ways in which Asian MNCs perceived and implemented CSR strategies in a host developing country, and the extent to which historical relations and culture affected these strategies. It helped to extend the CSR research to an

international setting, and expand our understanding of the connections between culture, historical relations, and CSR strategies by Asian MNCs.

#### Organizations Studied

The four Asian MNCs chosen in this study were: Samsung China, LG China, Sony China and Toyota China. All of their parent companies were listed in the Fortune 2005 Global 500 Index. Established in 1995, Samsung China has been involved in electronic components, chemical, textile, architecture, financial services and so on. It boasted more than 90 branches and 50,000 employees in China. Its sales volume in 2004 reached \$24.3 billion. Having been operating in China for 12 years, LG China consisted of 35 branches and more than 30,000 employees. With product lines ranging from chemicals, electronic products, home appliances, and so forth, LG China reported a gross sales volume of \$7.5 billion in 2003. Sony China entered its 10th year of operation in China in 2006, remaining a giant force in electronics, games, music, movies and financial services. It had more than 30 branches and six joint ventures in China. East Asia (including mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea) was the second largest overseas market of Sony Global. Toyota China began its business in 1997, now with 10 branches and nearly 10,000 employees. It was second only to Toyota U.S. in terms of number of employees.

#### Literature Review

Researchers (e.g., Carroll, 1979) consider Howard Bowen's 1953 text *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman* as the first book on CSR in the modern era. Scores of research has touched upon the conceptualization of CSR and its dimensions. Globalization also spawned studies on MNCs' CSR strategies, and the effect of culture on MNCs' CSR. It was hard, if not impossible, to locate studies that examined the impact of historical relations upon MNCs' CSR strategies.

##### *CSR Conceptualization and its Dimensions: Contestation and Recurring Themes*

Despite more than five decades of research on CSR, its conceptualization is still elusive. Researchers have used other terms that are closely tied to CSR to refer to the relationship between businesses and the larger society. They included "corporate social performance" (e.g., Carroll, 1979; Clarkson, 1995; Simerly, 1997; Swanson, 1999; Wood, 1991), "corporate social responsiveness" (Frederick, 1994), "corporate social activity" (Lerner & Fryxell, 1994), "corporate ethics" (e.g., Donaldson & Dunfee, 1999; Langlois & Schlegelmilch, 1990), "corporate responsibility" (e.g., Global Compact, 2005), "public responsibility" (e.g., Stone, 2005) and corporate good citizenship, corporate accountability and philanthropy (e.g., Cumming, 2001; Epstein, 1989).

Therefore, this study used the following basic and general synthesized definition of CSR: the responsibility of businesses to contribute to building a better society. This responsibility is not only at the philosophical level, but also at the operational level. Furthermore, it is concerned with not only the role of businesses in society, but also the tangible response processes and evaluation of such behavior.

The dimension of CSR also remains a contested area. Some scholars identified CSR as a continuum (e.g., Stone, 2005) consisting of mandatory, assumptive and discretionary corporate public responsibilities. The three parts differ from each other in whether a business causes a problem for society, such as environmental harms, and the extent to which the business actively resolves the problem. Based on these criteria, the famous Johnson and Johnson Tylenol crisis in

1982 is an example of assumptive responsibilities. However, the continuum appears too simplistic to account for the complexity of corporate decisions on CSR-related problems.

Other researchers (e.g., Quazi & O'Brien, 2000) regarded CSR as a two-dimensional concern including corporate responsibility and outcomes of social commitments. The dimension "corporate responsibility" spans from a narrow view emphasizing profit maximization in the short term, to a broad perspective focusing on serving the wider expectations of society in areas such as environmental protection, community development and philanthropy. The second dimension of outcomes of social commitments of businesses ranges from concern with the cost of social commitment in the short run, to attention to long-term benefits from social commitments for businesses. Still, this either-or approach by this model appears too linear to understand the tensions involved in corporate decisions regarding CSR. The two ends of each dimension may not necessarily be mutually exclusive. It is possible that corporations have mixed motives when fulfilling their corporate responsibilities. In other words, they may attempt to achieve both profit maximization and serving the wider societal demands at the same time, and bear in mind the short-term costs as well as long-term benefits.

Still others (e.g., Global Compact, 2005; Holme & Watts, 2000; Sagar & Singla, 2003) simply considered CSR as a set of social issues in areas of environmental protection, community involvement, etc. This approach has been widely used in existing literature and helpful for understanding the universality of some CSR issues. However, its explanatory power seems to lessen when analyzing the different connotations of CSR in different societies. For example, Ite (2004) pointed out the difficulties of applying universal, often Western, CSR standards to a developing country—Nigeria. He concluded that Nigeria's dependence on MNCs in the oil industry even in part led to "the absence of social justice and equity in the distribution of the oil wealth" (p. 9). Also, Holme and Watts (2000) argued in their study conducted in the Netherlands, Taiwan, Thailand, the Philippines, the United States, Ghana, Brazil, and Argentina that different societies demonstrate significantly different understandings of CSR issues, such as human rights and environmental protection. Some participants in their study strongly objected to having "Western concepts" imposed upon them.

Yet another approach understood CSR as a three-category concept. Grunig and Hunt (1984) asserted that organizational responsibilities consisted of "the performance of the organization's basic economic functions (e.g., providing employment or refraining from restraint of trade)," "responsibilities arising from performance of basic functions (e.g., equal opportunity employment or prevention of pollution by industrial operations)," and "responsibilities for aid with general social problems (e.g., prevention of urban decay)." The first category of responsibilities lies at the core; the second category occupies the middle circle; and the third category lies in the outmost circle. This delineation has elements from Quazi & O'Brien's (2000) two-dimensional concern including corporate responsibility and outcomes of social commitments, and Carroll's (1998) conceptualization of economic, legal, ethical and discretionary social responsibilities.

Clearly, there is no consensus on how to define CSR and what it comprises. For the purpose of this study, CSR was broadly defined as the responsibility of businesses to contribute to building a better society. Whether CSR consists of a continuum, or two-dimensional concern, or merely a set of social issues, or other possibilities was examined in this study.

#### *Managing MNCs' CSR Strategies*

Many researchers (e.g., Amba-Rao, 1993; Arthaud-Day, 2005; Broadhurst, 2000; Hopkins, 2003; Quazi & O'Brien, 2000) have recognized the significance of CSR for MNCs

operating in a developing country. There are only a few studies shedding light on the implementation process of MNCs' CSR strategies. For example, Wartick and Wood (1998) spelled out three major structural factors for managing CSR: Establishing a code of ethics, reducing the inducements for misdeeds, and raising the risk of exposure (e.g., hotlines, ethics ombudsmen).

A second useful tool for MNCs to carry out their CSR strategies is Hopkins' (2003) 20-item Corporate Responsibility Index Through Internet Consultation of Stakeholders (CRITICS). Hopkins built CRITICS by assessing whether a company has a statement of mission and values of corporate responsibility, ethical audit, a code of ethics, employees' access to this code of ethics, training pertinent to the code of ethics, the extent to which the company contributes to projects for the local community, etc. He described what areas MNCs' CSR strategies should cover, and the importance of employees' involvement in operationalizing CSR strategies. CRITICS served more as a "what" guide than a "how-to" manual.

The more compelling tool for implementing CSR was presented by Werre (2003). He proposed a four-phase CSR implementation model: Raising top-management awareness of core values and sensitivity for external driving force, formulating a set of CSR vision and core corporate values, changing organizational behavior, and anchoring the change. Werre clearly illustrated the model step by step through a case study of a Latin-America-based MNC. This model is a good starting point for MNCs to develop and implement their own CSR strategies. This study did attempt to take the aforementioned factors into consideration to understand the implementation process of MNCs' CSR strategies.

#### **Effect of Culture on MNCs' CSR Strategies**

There are three main approaches to the effect of societal culture on MNCs' CSR strategies: Multinational, global and transnational. The multinational approach emphasizes the attention to local contexts where businesses operate. Manakkalathil and Rudolf (1995) expressed their preference for such an approach by stating the difficulty of developing and enforcing universally applicable code of ethical standards. Also, McLeod (2001) noted that CSR is perceived differently by governments, businesses and NGOs, and that each country in her study shows a distinctive pattern of CSR strategies. From her perspective, MNCs are expected to create culture-specific CSR strategies for every society they enter. Holme and Watts (2000) further presented supported this approach with a cross-cultural study of participants' (members of the general public and business people) perceptions of CSR issues. They found that the definition of CSR varies across cultures, as do the social issues pertinent to CSR (e.g., human rights, employee rights, and community involvement).

Contrary to the multinational approach, the global perspective features a universal set of corporate ethical behavior (e.g., Global Compact, 2005; Langlois and Schlegelmilch, 1990; Quazi & O'Brien, 2000). MNCs utilizing this approach often apply universal codes of conduct to their subsidiaries in different cultures. For example, Langlois and Schlegelmilch's study of 189 largest European companies and their affiliations in the United States suggested that most corporate ethical issues can transcend national borders. However, at the same time, they warned that MNCs that embrace national identity as part of the company's culture should be aware of the difficulty of implementing standardized codes of ethics across national boundaries.

Similarly, a report presented by the Global Compact Office of the United Nations requested businesses, governments and civil societies to connect their CSR strategies with some global issues of sustainable development, such as environmental protection (Global Compact, 2005). In this report, CSR strategies were organized around eight global issues: poverty and

hunger, universal primary education, gender equality, child mortality, maternal health, HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, environmental sustainability, and global partnership for development. The Global Compact Office deemed that a consensus on the fundamentals of CSR is a prerequisite for all parties to work together to bring about global changes.

Lastly, the transnational approach has called for applying general CSR strategies locally. It acknowledges the existence of a universal set of MNCs' CSR strategies, while emphasizing the strategic adaptation of these strategies in different cultures. Donaldson and Dunfee (1999) provided a good example of this approach with their Integrative Social Contracts Theory (ISCT). ISCT posited that businesses cannot "claim that their set of ethical norms is necessarily universal; they must exercise tolerance of some approaches from different communities" (p. 47). At the very center of ISCT lie hypernorms, shared values among all cultures that can be used to judge all other norms. Then, there are three types of micro-level social contracts: Consistent norms, moral free space, and illegitimate norms. Consistent norms refer to social standards that are more culturally specific than hypernorms, but are consistent with hypernorms and other legitimate norms. Most companies' vision statements can be examples of consistent norms. Moral free space includes norms that are sometimes inconsistent with other legitimate norms or hypernorms, and embody unique but strongly held cultural beliefs. Finally, the illegitimate norms violate hypernorms, such as disrespect for basic human rights.

Apparently the transnational approach appears to be the ideal for MNCs in the international arena because it simultaneously addresses the need for adaptation to a host culture as well as complying with the broadest global standards. This study utilized this approach as a criterion for measuring the effect of societal culture on CSR strategies by Asian MNCs.

#### Research Questions

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, the researcher used the following research questions to guide the study:

RQ1: How are Japanese MNCs' CSR strategies being carried out in China?

RQ2: How are Korean MNCs' CSR strategies being carried out in China?

RQ3: Are these strategies influenced by historical relations?

RQ4: Are these strategies influenced by culture?

Themes that emerged from Web content of the two largest Japanese and two Korean MNCs in China answered the four researcher questions by offering characteristics of the implementation process of CSR strategies by Asian MNCs, and the connections between the strategies and culture and historical relations.

#### Method

This study used qualitative content analysis to examine the two research questions. Stempel (1981) broadly defined content analysis as "a formal system for doing something that we all do informally rather frequently, drawing conclusions from observations of content" (p. 119). Krippendorff (2004) referred to content analysis as a research technique that allows researchers to make "replicable and valid inferences" from the content to their context (p.18). According to Krippendorff (2004), researchers often use content analysis when it is impossible to directly observe phenomena of interest. For this reason, it seemed natural to employ content analysis in this study.

Qualitative content analysis has proved to be an important research tool in political analysis of foreign propaganda, in psychotherapeutic and ethnographic research, in discourse analysis (Krippendorff, 2004). Because of the "reductionist" nature of quantitative content

analysis ((Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998) that reduces a communication phenomenon to manageable data, and due to the fact that qualitative content is better at revealing the underlying meanings of messages than the traditional quantitative approach (Buddenbaum & Novak, 2001), a qualitative content analysis was more appropriate for the purpose of this study.

Qualitative content analysis is non-obtrusive. Researchers examine data only after they have been generated, which helps retain the “natural flavor.” In other settings, such as experiments, focus group or interviews, participants may not behave in their natural ways, or the reactivity effect is present (Buddenbaum & Novak, 2001). Also, it is convenient in that the analysis can be done in any place at any time that the researcher prefers (Buddenbaum & Novak, 2001). Besides, qualitative content analysis is sensitive to context, allowing the researcher to “process as data texts that are significant, meaningful, informative, and even representational to others” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 41).

#### *Context of Analysis*

This study chose three cultures as the context of analysis: China, South Korea, and Japan. The historically complex relations and cultural similarities between these three cultures make the Japanese and Korean MNCs in China perfect cases to examine the impact of historical relations and culture on the ways in which these MNCs sought to be socially responsible.

China has influenced both South Korea and Japan in terms of language, philosophy and religion. South Korea was a protectorate of China during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, then a colony of Japan (Wikipedia, 2005). During the Second World War, Japan invaded both China and South Korea, among others. The sensitive issue that remains at the center of Sino-Japan is Japan’s attitude towards its invasion (Feng, 2005). Sino-Japanese relations have undergone various ups and downs since the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, from hostility and an absence of contact to cordiality and extremely close cooperation in many fields (see Table 1). One recurring Chinese concern in Sino-Japanese relations has been the potential remilitarization of Japan. On the other hand, some Japanese were afraid of the rising economic and military power of China (*Xinhua News*, 2004).

China and South Korea have been criticizing Japanese history textbooks that downplayed the past Japanese invasion, which was taken as evidence of the rise of militarism in Japan, according to China’s government newspaper *China Daily*. Every year, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s visits to the Yasukuni Shrine that honors 14 Class A war criminals can lead to surging anti-Japanese sentiments in the other two nations (Feng, 2005). Another dispute over the Senkaku Islands also resulted in clashes between the Chinese and the Japanese governments (*People’s Daily*, 2005a). Also, the Japanese government’s supportive standing towards the “Taiwan Independence” issue invited fierce criticism from China (*People’s Daily*, 2004). The latest dispute that stirred up anti-Japanese sentiments was Japan’s bid for permanent membership on the UN Security Council. Large-scale violent protests occurred in a few Chinese cities (Rupert, 2005). The Korean media also reported widespread anger at this move in South Korea.

On the other hand, the host Chinese society has been friendlier towards South Korea than Japan (see table 2). China’s government newspapers often covered South Korea more positively (*People’s Daily*, 2005b; Zhang, 2006). It is common to read such comments as “South Korea and China both suffered terribly in the anti-fascist efforts, and have worked closely against outside invasion, [which formed a basis] for their friendly relations” (*People’s Daily*, 2005a).

In this context, it seems necessary to identify myself as a researcher in this particular study. As a native Chinese, I completed my undergraduate education in Beijing with a major in English literature. I also spent nearly two years studying Japanese during my college years.

Having worked as a journalist covering international news for an English-language magazine under the State Council of China, I have written a great deal in English on Sino-Japanese relations. I have been exposed extensively to both the Japanese and Korean cultures through a variety of ways, such as personal contacts with friends from those cultures, exposure to their media, and communication with scholars on international relations. I am familiar with the historical relations and cultures involved in this study, and therefore sensitive to themes related to the research questions. In addition, my language skills in both Chinese and English greatly helped the data analyses. Nevertheless, it was likely that I had biases towards Japanese MNCs because of my background. I tried to reduce this effect by including some media coverage.

#### *Procedure*

Based on the Fortune 2005 Global 500 Index, I first identified four of the largest Japanese and Korean corporations as defined by revenue rankings: Toyota Motor, Sony, Samsung and LG. This decision should also be partly attributed to my background, and my familiarity with the three cultures and historical relations between them. I examined the Chinese Web sites of the four corporations for their information of any form related to moral, ethical or social responsibilities, including press releases, online advertisements, newsletters, event calendars, vision and mission statements, and CSR reports in recent two years, among others. This search yielded hundreds of pages of downloadable documents. I then included media coverage on the events that the companies' CSR initiatives in these two years.

#### *Data Analysis*

After the data collection process, I carefully reviewed the Chinese data (both texts and images) and compared them within and between the Japanese and Korean groups to identify patterns and unique characteristics. First, I categorized the Web data for each company by the types of issues it handled, including environmental protection, education, art, community and so on. I highlighted the issues for each company, and compared the specific CSR events by the two Japanese companies to each other to locate similarities and differences. I did the same for the two Korean companies. I then compared them with related media coverage. I read all the documents again and again to minimize personal biases. Next, I related these issues and images to historical relations of different periods of time to see if any changes in the latter might have affected these events and Web images. I also compared their values explicitly stated and embedded in these texts with the Chinese culture. Then, I aggregated the data of the Japanese companies to represent the Japanese group, and those of the Korean companies to represent the Korean group. I repeated the process of relating these data to historical relations and culture to look for clear similarities and differences between the two groups, and relating them to media coverage. I also compared the CSR management systems of the MNCs' parent companies with these MNCs, to explore how culture influenced their practices in China. Finally, all the themes were back translated into English to answer the research questions.

### Results

Themes emerged from the analysis are presented below to answer the four research questions. Quotations were literal translations. Overall, data for the four companies showed that they were all committed to building a better Chinese society. There was no clear-cut definition for CSR on their Web sites, but they all used the word “*gong yi*” (overall public good) to present CSR. *Gong yi* in Chinese means that companies do certain things for the wellness of society, expecting nothing in return. This coincided with the definition used by this study for CSR: Responsibility of businesses to contribute to building a better society. At the philosophical level,

the four companies expressed their commitment to be part of the Chinese society through such words as “aiming for long-term development in China” and “standing together with the Chinese people.” At the operational level, they sought to be socially responsible in different areas. Environmental protection and education were two common issues that the companies all dealt with. Other areas included as public safety (Toyota China), art and culture (Sony China), economic development in rural China (Samsung China), and employee relations (LG China). The findings suggested that these MNCs perceived CSR broadly as “social wellness” and operationalized their strategies in a variety of issue areas.

*RQ1: How are Japanese MNCs’ CSR strategies being carried out in China?*

The study found that the two Japanese MNCs differed in the extent to which they relied on the CSR system of their parent companies. But the CSR strategies of both Japanese MNCs were closely tied to the areas of their businesses, and often actively elicited the involvement of Chinese government agencies or organizations.

*Different roles of parent company.* The two Japanese MNCs differed from each other in terms of the relationship with parent companies while managing CSR strategies. Toyota China utilized the research program of the Toyota Foundation, a multi-purpose grant-making foundation of Toyota Global, to fund many projects to preserve, compile, and annotate indigenous documents in China’s Yunnan region. In contrast, the six foundations of Sony Global did not operate in China, although its Chinese branches used the global CSR system to organize local employees’ volunteer initiatives, consisting of “Someone Needs You” and “Sony Matching Gift Program.”

*Organizing CSR strategies around business.* Besides education and environmental protection, which were included as global concerns by Global Compact (2005), the two Japanese MNCs devoted their CSR endeavors to fields that were more related to their own businesses. Sony China mainly contributed to art and cultural exchange between China and Japan. As a giant in arts and culture, Sony China introduced to China a well-known TV series titled Sony World Heritage that was produced by Tokyo Broadcasting System and the UNESCO, promoted activities to commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations, and had sponsored the Beijing Music Festival every year since 1998, and so on. Likewise, Toyota China mostly dedicated its CSR efforts to public safety. For example, the company funded several public service advertisements for Chengdu Urban Transport Bureau, donated 80,000 “Yield” signs to elementary schools in Beijing and so forth.

*Macro-level activities and joint efforts with government agencies.* Most CSR activities by the Japanese MNCs were more at the macro-level and usually involved government agencies or organizations, compared with their Korean counterparts’ community CSR strategies. For example, through the China Youth Development Foundation, Sony China donated school supplies worth of 1.2 million RMB (\$150,000) to eight provinces in 2003 and 2004, then eight other provinces in 2005. Also, former President and CEO Nobuyuki Idei of Sony Global acted as chairman for the “China Year project to commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of normalization of Sino-Japanese relations,” and helped collect 300 million yen from more than 100 Japanese companies for this project.

Similarly, Toyota jointly sponsored a “grand reforestation project with the China-Japan Scientific Technology & Economic Exchange Association of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the Hebei Province Forestry Bureau, and NPO Green Earth Center.” The more than \$3-million project was designed to “eliminate desertification in China.” Toyota China also spent nearly \$800,000 setting up a research center with Tsinghua University, one of the best universities in

China, and donated approximately \$1.3 million to two party organs, i.e., the Communist Youth League of China and All-China Youth Federation, to set up the “Toyota Environmental Protection Aid Program for China’s Youth.”

*RQ2: How are Korean MNCs’ CSR strategies being carried out in China?*

The Korean MNCs appeared to have boasted of well-developed CSR management systems, attuning to specific local needs of the Chinese society. They skillfully coordinated CSR strategies with employee recruitment and training. Employees not only carried out CSR strategies but also benefited from these activities. In addition, a long-term relationship with local communities was one of the most important goals of the Korean MNCs’ CSR strategies.

*Well-developed CSR management systems.* The two Korean MNCs appeared to have more developed CSR managing systems in China than their Japanese counterparts. They not only worked closely with the global CSR foundations of their parent companies, but also set up their own CSR systems in China to better meet specific local needs. For instance, given the increasing importance attached to balancing the economic development between urban and rural areas by the Chinese government, Samsung China began the “One Heart, One Village” CSR project in September, 2005. More than 30 local branches carried out this strategy and built partnerships with nearby villages. Some “donated Samsung products, school supplies and books” to these village partners, some funded “agricultural projects,” some purchased “villagers’ produce,” others offered “free on-site customer services” and communicated with villagers through cultural events or basketball games. Most of these activities took place simultaneously across China, some of which received extensive local and national media coverage.

Samsung China also built CSR into the day-to-day agenda of local branches to ensure a sustainable CSR management system. Branches, such as the one in Tianjin, formed their own CSR teams both organization-wide and department-wide. Different teams took turns to engage in CSR activities.

Similarly, LG China set up various foundations to manage CSR. Also, it adopted a “One plus One Club” policy for CSR fund-raising. According to this policy, company leaders should donate 1 percent of their salaries and other employees 1 percent of their bonuses. Then, the company would match the amount of money donated by its employees as the CSR fund.

*Building CSR into recruitment and training for new employees.* LG China made extra efforts to build their CSR practices into the recruitment process. For example, its Yongxing branch tied their scholarship policies to the campus recruiting system. Through setting up scholarships in universities and colleges where they attempted to organize campus visits and recruitment activities, LG Yongxing branch succeeded identifying excellent talents as potential employees. Also, the Yongxing branch invited outstanding students for factory visits and introduced them into their internship programs, preparing some students to work for the company in the future. In addition, the Yongxing branch helped fund school research projects, to keep abreast of the latest technologies. In an online newsletter, LG China applauded these CSR strategies by the Yongxing branch, saying that it helped “build a good corporate image among these schools and students, but also benefited the company for future development.”

Samsung China made CSR a “compulsory part of training sessions for all new hires.” One of its Tianjin branches, an active player in environmental protection activities, organized different groups of new entrants to clean local squares every month from June to September, 2005. Similarly, one branch in Suzhou led 37 new employees to clean sidewalks along a major local lake in September, 2005. The new and more senior employees were then divided into

groups to communicate with each other, so that “the newcomers could better understand essence of CSR strategies by the company.”

*Integrating CSR strategies into employee benefits.* The Korean MNCs tried to cultivate awareness of CSR among the employees, but also included employees as beneficiaries of CSR activities. A Tianjin branch of Samsung China visited one local Children’s Home for the Handicapped, and donated two plasma air purifiers. After talking with the kids, one employee remarked that she was “deeply touched by the yearnings in the eyes of the children, and strongly motivated to engage in more CSR activities.” Another Tianjin branch of Samsung China included seven family members of employees into their project of providing underprivileged people with eye cataract surgeries. Then, it invited these family members to visit their company. One employee who underwent the surgery together with his grandfather represented other employees to express their gratitude, writing in an open letter that he felt “so proud and fortunate to work in this company, and grateful that his grandfather’s wish to see the world with his own eyes finally came true.”

LG China also implemented CSR activities for their own employees. It offered free English trainings to employees “to meet the needs of globalization and be prepared for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing.” Some employees at their Beijing branches participated in two pilot training sessions. In addition, LG China adopted a nationwide “e-hour learning system” to make itself a learning organization. They set up a Web site for this particular purpose and encouraged employees to engage in online learning for at least one hour each month, hence keeping abreast of organizational policies, issues and businesses.

*Aiming for long-term relationship with the local community.* Cultivating long-term relationships with local communities remained one of the most important parts of the CSR strategies of the Korean MNCs. According to the two MNCs’ newsletters, they hoped “to become an integral part of the community.” The Suzhou, Shenzhen and Tianjin branches of Samsung China were all involved in CSR activities in the local communities where their companies operate. For example, two Suzhou branches of Samsung China regularly cleaned a local agricultural park, and neighborhood nearby their factories. Two Shenzhen branches also “cleaned local parks on a regular basis.” A Tianjin branch moved one step further by naming a local square as “Samsung CSR Square.” They organized different employee CSR teams to clean the square regularly, striving to “raise awareness of environmental protection in the local community.”

LG China also has extensively invested in education of local communities for many years. A Nanjing branch established scholarship programs in local universities and colleges in 2003. It also “built partnerships with three local high schools,” “offered to pay for students’ tuitions” and providing schools with various equipments. A Huizhou branch helped renovate local school buildings, “donated computers and printers,” and provided scholarships to these schools. One Shenyang branch built “LG elementary schools” and “LG villages” in five different local districts.

*RQ3: Are these strategies influenced by historical relations?*

Themes suggested that historical relations between the China, Japan and South Korea did influence the CSR strategies by these four MNCs, particularly the Japanese ones. The two Japanese MNCs strongly tied its CSR strategies with government relations and macro-level development of China, and emphasized their special efforts to boost Sino-Japanese relations. In contrast, the term “Sino-Korean relations” or anything of a similar nature did not appear on the Web sites of the two Korean MNCs. Furthermore, their actual CSR strategies appeared to be

more at the micro-level, i.e., events serving local communities, even though they sponsored one or two events to promote friendship between the two countries.

Sino-Japanese relations remained high up on the agenda of the Japanese MNCs' CSR strategies. When reviewing its development in China, all the photos and messages on the Web site of Toyota China were about meetings between Chinese government leaders and its CEOs and Chairpersons, and visits by top Chinese government officials to its local factories. Then, when introducing its relationship with China, it posted messages about visits by Chinese automobile industry leaders to Japan in 1972, saying "the exchange helped improve political atmosphere at the beginning of establishment of Sino-Japanese relations." Toyota China also stressed the contributions by Toyota to China's automobile industry since late 1980s. Besides, the company pointed out the deep concerns by former Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji towards desertification in Fengning city where the company launched its seven-year-long two-phase reforestation project together with many government organs.

In addition, Toyota China stressed its contributions to China's sustainable development. The company established the "Center for Industrial Development and Environmental Guidance" at the School of Public Policy and Management at Tsinghua University, one of the best universities in China. The center was supposed to receive nearly \$4 million from Toyota China in five consecutive years. Its research focused on China's sustainable development including industrial development, environmental protection and structural reforms. The first international symposium hosted by the center invited more than 100 Chinese government officials, researchers and members of the public.

Similarly, the section on CSR activities on the Web site of Sony China had four categories, two of which were "promoting art and cultural exchange between China and Japan" and "actively enhancing Sino-Japanese foreign relations." With the help of the former President and CEO of its headquarters, Sony China raised more than 300 million yen for the China Year project to commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of normalization of Sino-Japanese relations. It also held many other large activities to enhance cultural exchange between China and Japan.

Unlike their Japanese counterparts, the Korean MNCs did not place much emphasis on its friendly relationship with the Chinese government agencies and its officials. In contrast, although the two Korean MNCs hosted similar activities, they made no reference to "Sino-Korean relations" or the like. For example, a Shenyang branch of LG China hosted a "Sino-Korean singing competition" to boost cultural exchange between the two countries in May 2005. Samsung China funded a "Sino-Korean Youth Green Messenger Exchange Program" that was initiated by a Korean non-governmental organization. More than 100 college students from both countries participated in the one-week event to investigate the conditions of desertification in three northern cities in China.

*RQ4: Are these strategies influenced by culture?*

The data suggested that all the four companies appeared to be transnational in terms of their CSR strategies in China, though the two Korean MNCs showed a more transnational tendency than their Japanese counterparts. To begin with, they all recognized universal CSR codes, in this case environmental protection and education, but also adapted themselves to satisfy local needs from China, even though the Japanese MNCs' CSR strategies were more focused on their business-related concerns. For example, Samsung China was largely involved in community relations and disaster relief, LG China in sports and employee relations, Toyota China in public safety, and Sony China in arts. On the other hand, the MNCs emphasized the strategic importance of customize CSR strategies to the local market. Samsung China displayed

through a big banner on its homepage their dedication to “become an enterprise that is contributing to the Chinese society and respected by the Chinese people.” LG China expressed its devotion in the slogan “weathering hardships together with the Chinese people.” When interviewed by *Guangming Daily*, one major government newspaper in China, LG’s CEO asserted that they wanted to be “the favorite enterprise for China and be a corporate citizen that is passionate about China.” Sony China held their guiding principle as “being part of China, aiming for long-term development.” Toyota China asserted that it strived to be an “excellent and trustworthy corporate citizen.”

Nonetheless, an interesting phenomenon was that few specific Chinese cultural values appeared to be applicable in the Japanese MNCs’ CSR strategies. In contrast, the Chinese culture affected these CSR strategies by Korean MNCs in many ways. First, both Korean MNCs emphasized a harmonious relationship between the Chinese and Korean cultures. Each issue of the e-magazine by LG China had a section on Korean culture and some Chinese employees’ experiences in Korea, which often touched upon the similarities between the two cultures. Also, in the 2005 brochure of Samsung China, a marketing director commented “the close cultural ties between China and South Korea made it easier for our brand to be accepted by the Chinese people.”

Second, the importance played upon respect for seniors, children, soldiers, and family by the Chinese culture was clearly evident in the Korean MNCs’ CSR strategies. For instance, a Dongguan branch of Samsung China paid visits to firefighters, sent birthday gifts to soldiers, and played basketball with them. They named this event as “salute to the most lovely people,” because soldiers have been called as “the most lovely people” in China since 1949. Another branch organized some employees to go fishing with old soldiers who were former members of the Red Army of the Chinese Communist Party. Also, many other branches visited local nursing homes and orphanages, invited blind school children to museums, organized outings with elementary school students from poor areas, provided school uniforms for students, etc. Many press releases on the Web site of Samsung China mentioned that their CSR strategies observed the Chinese cultural value of respecting the elders and caring for children. Furthermore, a message from the CEO of Samsung China held that they “strive to make their company as warm as a family,” a typical cultural value in both Chinese and Korean cultures. Likewise, LG China sponsored frequent visits to nursing homes and orphanages in the local communities.

Finally, the Korean MNCs organized their CSR activities around traditional Chinese holidays. For example, they hosted outings with school children on June 1<sup>st</sup>, the Children’s Day in China. Other holidays included September 9<sup>th</sup> in the lunar year, a Chinese holiday to pay tributes to senior citizens, and June 6<sup>th</sup>, the National Chinese Healthy Eye Day.

### Conclusion

Findings from a qualitative content analysis of the Web sites and some media coverage of four Asian MNCs enhanced our understanding of MNCs’ perceptions of CSR, and helped expand our knowledge of the effect of historical relations and culture on CSR strategies in a non-Western host country. This study also served as a starting point to explore the role of public relations in fostering MNCs’ CSR strategies.

In summary, the study found that the four Asian MNCs all perceived CSR as “*gong yi* (overall public good),” which bolstered the broad synthesized conceptualization of CSR as the responsibility of businesses to contribute to building a better society. Results also indicated that historical relations played a big role in the Japanese MNCs’ CSR strategies. Their Web sites

clearly articulated the strategic importance of enhancing Sino-Japanese relations through their CSR activities.

Furthermore, it is evident that the Chinese societal culture did not affect the Japanese MNCs as much as the Korean ones. All MNCs acknowledged the existence of some universal CSR issues, and emphasized strategic adaptation to the needs of the Chinese culture. Nevertheless, the Japanese MNCs organized their CSR strategies mainly around their business—public safety (Toyota China) and art (Sony China), or Sino-Japanese relations, and paid little attention to traditional Chinese cultural values. In contrast, the CSR strategies by the Korean MNCs appeared to be more transnational, appealing to both global CSR themes (e.g., environmental protection and education) and local Chinese cultural needs.

One possible explanation for this finding may be that the effect of societal culture was shadowed by the tension around Sino-Japanese relations, because the Japanese MNCs felt more urgent to ease the pressure caused by historical relations. Apparently, future research is needed to examine the interaction between culture and historical relations on MNCs' CSR strategies. This will be a particularly interesting research topic to pursue if one noted that Toyota China had to apologize for its advertisement depicting stone lions, a traditional sign of Chinese power, saluting and bowing to a Prado Land Cruiser sport utility vehicle, interpreted as (*China Youth Daily*, 2003). The Chinese government newspaper *People's Daily* (2005c) commented that many Japanese corporations underestimated the cultural differences between China and Japan, which gave rise to confusion and misunderstanding.

It will also be intriguing to explore the decision-making processes of MNCs' CSR strategies, and the role of public relations in it. Kantanen (2005) questioned the missing link between CSR and public relations, saying "If PR is a professional management function that initiates or maintains relationships between an organisation and its public, where is its role in ... CSR processes" (p. 13)? Scholars who viewed public relations as "boundary-spanners" between organizations and publics advocated the strategic role of public relations in managing social responsibilities. However, little research has looked into this phenomenon.

Finally, this study is limited in a few ways. First, if the study were combined other research methods, such as interviews, the findings would be better supported. Future research needs to employ multiple methods, rather than only analysis of Web sites. Also, extending the study to a wide array of less developed host countries as well as home countries of the MNCs will enhance international CSR theory building. Finally, future research linking public relations with MNCs' CSR strategies is much needed for the measurement of the effectiveness of public relations function in an organization.

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Table 1. Sino-Japanese relations.

Date	Event
1931-9-18	Japan launched an attack on Manchuria, China. Within a few days Japanese armed forces had occupied several strategic points in South Manchuria
1932-3-9	Regent of Manchukuo established to rule occupied territory
1937-7-7	Japan bombarded the Marco Polo Bridge, formally invaded China
1945-8-15	Japan surrendered unconditionally, occupation ended
1972-9-29	Normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan
1982-6	First history textbook controversy (Japan denied invasion)
1982-89	“Honey-moon period” –frequent official visits and cultural exchanges
1994	First dispute over the “Taiwan independence” issue
1996	First Sino-Japanese territory dispute over Senkaku Islands
1996, 2004-2005	Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and Junichiro Koizumi respectively visited Yasukuni Shrine (regarded by China as a symbol of Japan’s wartime imperialism as the shrine houses tablets for 14 Class A war criminals who were tried by the courts after World War II)
2001-2005	Japanese history textbooks accused by Chinese and Koreans for playing down its wartime atrocity
2001-2005	Sino-Japanese territory dispute over Senkaku Islands again
2004-9-22	Japan bid for permanent membership of the UN Security Council
2005, Apr.-May	Large scale anti-Japan protests in more than 20 Chinese cities, triggered by textbook dispute and Japan’s UN bid

Source: <http://www.china-japan21.org.cn/chn/zrgx/t202821.htm>

Table 2. Sino-Korean relations.

Date	Event
1983	First official contact between two governments. China referred to South Korea as the “Republic of Korea,” rather than South Korea
1986/1988	China sent delegates to the Seoul Asian Games and the Olympics
1992-8-24	Establishment of diplomatic relations
1993-2004	Frequent head of state visits, high official visits and cultural exchanges between the two countries, contrasting the distrust and confrontation between South Korea and Japan
2002	“Sino-Korea cultural exchange year”
2003	South Korea President announced that “Taiwan is China’s sovereign state”
2004	Peak of Sino-Korean trading relations
2004-2005	More exchanges in culture, education, and technology between the two countries
2005-1	Echoing its Chinese counterpart, South Korean government requested Japan to admit its “criminal acts” in the past millennium, esp. its invasions
2005	Thousands of Koreans joined Chinese in protesting against Japan’s UN bid

Source: <http://www.ckstc.gov.cn/second/showhgdtd.asp?id=778>

<http://news.tom.com/hot/chaoxian/>

**Mavens of New Media: Exploring How Blogs Have Expanded  
the Role and Scope of Public Relations Practitioners**

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Some 57 million blogs are monitored daily by search engine Technorati, and more than one fourth of Internet users read them, according to the most recent Pew research study (Rainie, 2005). With the growing influence of citizen journalism in a burgeoning blogosphere, more and more public relations practitioners are widening their scope to include blogs, both in their research and in their strategies. In some cases, PR writers create blogs for client organizations. In other instances, strategists spend hours monitoring blogs to identify emerging issues from online conversations.

The advent of blogging raises many questions about the ever-changing scope of public relations. To what extent do PR practitioners monitor blogs as part of their role? If they do, how so? What do they look for? How do they use the information? Does the organization use its own blog for a particular public? These questions laid the foundation for this web-based survey of public relations practitioners.

Although recent studies have examined organizational policies regarding employee blogging (Wright & Hinson, 2006) and corporate perspectives on blogging (Goodman, 2006), few studies have considered the logistical impact of blogging on the practitioner. This is a study to determine what role blogs play in the public relations tool kit, including if and how practitioners use blogs and how they monitor them. It seeks to further earlier research about the Internet's impact on public relations (Wright, 2001), a necessity because of the rapidly changing nature of technology and blogging. This research is important to an industry struggling to stay abreast of new media technologies.

The remainder of this paper reviews the literature about blogging, details the methods used in this study, presents the findings, and discusses implications for PR.

#### Literature Review

In the past few years, blogging has become a buzzword that has been linked to personal, academic and organizational settings, just to name a few. In fact, "blog" was Merriam-Webster's word of the year in 2004 (Kelleher & Miller, 2006). Blogging and other forms of social media are transforming the way public relations professionals communicate with key audiences. Yet a limited amount of scholarship has been conducted in this area. For example, an audit of articles published in the *Journal of Public Relations Research* since 2000, reveals that none focused on blogs and only a few emphasized online communications. Most recently, researchers found that litigation public relations principles work well on the Internet and suggest the Web as a means for message dissemination and control (Reber, Gower, & Robinson, 2006). Others examined Web characteristics on relationship-building (Jo & Kim, 2003) and online activism (Reber & Kim, 2006). All identified a need for further research into new media and their implications on public relations.

Before a thorough analysis can be done of how blogging is impacting public relations, it is necessary to examine what constitutes a blog, what defines public relations, and how the two are intersecting in dynamic ways.

### *Introduction to Blogs*

The term blog is short for weblog. A *weblog* is an online news forum or diary that is updated on a regular basis and contains links to news items from across the Internet (Trufelman & Goldberg, 2003). Unlike an online message board, which can have a seemingly unlimited number of authors, a blog has only one or a select few authors who create new posts (Holtz & Demopoulos, 2006). While some blogs do have collective authorship, most are maintained by a single blogger and deal with a single topic (Trufelman & Goldberg, 2003). For example, Steve Rubel's blog, *Micro Persuasion*, examines how social media are affecting marketing and public relations. Winer (2003) defined a blog as a "hierarchy of text images, media objects and data, arranged chronologically, that can be viewed in an HTML browser." In terms of what constitutes a blog post, Winer cited three basic elements: title, link and description, all of which are optional. He also noted that blog posts tend to be short and usually don't constitute more than a few paragraphs. Blogs tied to businesses and official organizations tend to have more conservative names than personal blogs (Holtz & Demopoulos, 2006).

Access and engagement characterize blogging. Most bloggers allow readers to make comments to their posts, which makes blogs a "conversational network" (Holtz & Demopoulos, 2006). Boyd (2006) developed a "conversational index," which measures a blog's success via the ratio between posts, comments, and trackbacks. If the ratio is less than one, it means a blog has more conversation than posts—the formula for success. Simply stated, for a blog to work, it must generate a lot of conversation. Scoble and Israel (2006) credited the popularity of blogs to the fact that blogs are the first to allow a conversation to go global instantly. The blogosphere has a strong sense of community that thrives on posting links to other blogs and Websites (Bacon's Media Source, 2005). Bacon's reported that timeliness and immediacy also contribute to the popularity of blogs. Therefore, it's not surprising that the most popular blogs tend to be the most frequently updated ones. In addition, several blog-hosting services on the Web offer the service free, so it doesn't take someone with deep pockets to become a blogger.

Because blogs are inexpensive to maintain, they give people who believe their ideas are not being presented in the mainstream media an avenue to express their opinions (Bacon's, 2005). As Hiebert (2005) noted, radio and television were once seen as the saviors of the United States from big newspaper domination. But recent deregulation has allowed for a handful of major media corporations to control most broadcast outlets. These companies have "come to dominate the world's public sphere" (Hiebert, 2005, p. 3). New online communication tools, such as blogs, allow people to more easily serve as watchdogs of the activities of these powerful media conglomerates. Farhi (2006) described how the political blog *Little Green Footballs* uncovered a Reuters' photo, showing the aftermath of an Israeli airstrike on Beirut, had been doctored. That same political blog was one of the leaders in raising questions about the CBS report that made damaging allegations about President George W. Bush's National Guard service. These incidents, known as "Reutersgate" and "Rathergate" (Farhi, 2006), illustrate how the blogosphere enables almost anyone to become a "citizen journalist." As Brown and Heinrich (2005) stated, "Citizen reporters are breaking stories on their blogs, and the good ones are making sure they get their facts before they post" (p. 23).

### *The Influence of Blogs on Traditional Media*

In the broadest sense of the term, anyone who gathers and disseminates information is a journalist (Huslin, 2005). This definition would include bloggers. Yet, just as all newspapers do not have the same amount of readership, all blogs do not receive the same amount of attention. In Hollywood, there are A-list actors and B-list actors. In the blogosphere, there are A-list blogs and B-list blogs. The A-list blogs are “widely read and trusted” (Holtz & Demopoulos, 2006, p. 5). These blogs can receive tens of thousands of hits per day. These A-list blogs are rapidly becoming “authoritative news sources” (Trufelman & Goldberg, 2003). Although traditional news outlets have a professional code of objectivity, readers often trust bloggers more than journalists because bloggers do not have gatekeepers editing the messages (Bacon’s, 2005).

This has led many to question, “Who is a journalist now?” Garrett Graff, the first blogger to get a White House press pass, argued that the real question “is less who is a journalist and more who is practicing journalism” (“Who is a Journalist,” 2005, p. 8). Regardless of how this debate is framed, the true importance for PR lies in the impact that bloggers are having on the way public relations is practiced.

### *Using Blogs in the Practice of Public Relations*

It is easy to see the potential for blogging on PR, which is “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center, and Broom, 2006, p. 5). The characteristics of blogging mesh well with the relationship- building role that is detailed in the Excellence Theory (L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig & Dozier, 2002). Because building effective relationships goes beyond communication, the way an organization acts is just as important as what it says. Reber and Kim (2006) noted that, “Tactics and behavior of an organization are antecedent to relationship building” (p. 330). Given the interactive nature of the Web, it comes as no surprise that new online tools such as blogs present beneficial ways for practitioners to engage key publics.

Although the rise of blogging may be viewed negatively by traditional news outlets that view the blogosphere as increased competition, blogging represents another avenue for public relations practitioners to strategically communicate with key audiences. PR professionals have utilized blogs in different ways. One way has been to pitch stories to blogs. Most blogs cover a single topic, so placing stories on blogs allows PR people to reach highly targeted audiences (Trufelman & Goldberg, 2003). Moreover, a single placement on a blog can garner a lot of mileage for a story because cross-linking between blogs will likely expose many readers to the story (Trufelman & Goldberg, 2003). Even if a story appears on a mid-tier blog, all it takes is one person to link to the story to start a potential wave of conversation about it (Holtz & Demopoulos, 2006).

In addition, because readers trust bloggers to tell the “straight story,” landing a story on a blog can yield credibility. For example, as GM became mired in controversy when it pulled advertising from the *LA Times* after receiving unfavorable coverage from the *Times*, GM chose not to address the issue on its own blog. Instead, it targeted Automoblog (a popular blog with gearheads), which gave credibility to GM’s response (Holtz & Demopoulos, 2006, p. 81). Moreover, a 2005 Edelman/Technorati study found that bloggers do have an interest in companies and products. According to the study, 51% of bloggers view company communications as “highly trusted” or “somewhat trusted” (Edelman, 2005). Therefore, opportunities for story placements on blogs are evident.

Aside from placing stories on blogs, many corporations and organizations also run their own blogs. Vorvoreanu (2006) said that “one important site of relationship building is the organizational Website.” It’s not a stretch to believe that company blogs can also facilitate relationship building. In fact, because of the interactive nature of blogs, they may be even better suited for PR’s relationship building function. In a study of Web characteristics as they relate to public relations, Jo and Kim (2003) found that interactivity has a significant impact on relationship building. Earthlink is one company that has embraced social media. Earthlink launched its first corporate blog in 2005 and then later re-launched the blog, applying lessons it learned from its first blogging experience. In addition, Earthlink hired a full-time blogger to make regular posts and to ensure a level of consistency (Greenfield, 2006). Blogging is becoming more than a hobby; it is becoming a profession. The surge of companies adding bloggers to their communications departments led the *Dallas Morning News* to declare, “Blogging sprouts as a career path” (Jacobs, 2005).

The credibility of corporate blogs is on the rise (Goodman, 2006), although the Edelman Trust Barometer (2007) indicated that company blogs still remain less credible than traditional news sources. Nonetheless, Trammel (2006) noted that “blogs are useful tools in building logical arguments that may become difficult to refute” (p. 405). Barkow (2004) added, “By creating a corporate blog, you offer customers and prospects a deeper view into a company and a valuable feedback mechanism” (p. 40). Yet, the benefits of blogging are not limited to external audiences. Thanks to blogs and other emerging technologies, the internal communications programs of many organizations will take on “new life” (Brown & Heinrich, 2005, p. 24). Companies are using internal blogs to facilitate two-way communication with employees. A survey by the Guidewire Group and iUpload reported that improved internal communications is a key factor driving the corporate adoption of blogging (“Blogging in the Enterprise,” 2005).

Baker (2006) reported that although many companies are shying away from public blogs, they’re using blog software to overhaul internal communications, restructure Intranets and communicate with suppliers. The fact that such efforts are “interactive and cheap to deploy” makes them attractive (Baker, 2006). Microsoft and other companies even encourage employees to create their own blogs (Barkow, 2004, p. 40). This encouragement resulted in a stark increase in the number of employee bloggers at Microsoft. During the summer of 2003, about 100 Microsoft employees had blogs. A year later, more than 800 Microsoft employees were blogging (Barkow, 2004, p. 41). Such evidence demonstrates Microsoft’s belief in the benefits of blogging.

#### *Corporate Adoption of Blogs*

Research remains mixed regarding whether other companies are beginning to realize the benefits of blogging. The Guidewire Group and the iUpload 2005 survey that polled corporate marketing and communication professionals concluded that corporate adoption of blogging is entering its “hyper-growth phase.” It also reported that the barriers of blog adoption are limited in scope compared to other technologies. While the survey’s results can be generalized, such generalization should be done with caution, given the survey’s low response rate (141 of 5,000). Also, the survey represented more small companies than large companies (“Blogging in the Enterprise,” 2005).

That could, in part, explain why the findings are at odds with those from the Makovsky 2006 State of Corporate Blogging Survey, which polled 150 senior executives from a cross-section of Fortune 1000 companies. According to the Makovsky study, only 5% of top executives are convinced to “a great extent” that corporate blogging is growing in credibility as a

communications medium (Goodman, 2006). Plus, only 22 of the largest U.S. companies operate public blogs (Baker, 2006).

Perhaps this could be linked to the fact that 62% of American Internet users don't know what a blog is (Rainie, 2005). This may not be surprising given that only 27% of Americans read blogs as compared to 74% of Japanese ("A Corporate Guide," 2007). While such findings can throw the power and reach of blogs into question, even the Makovsky study's executive summary noted that:

Clearly, we are seeing a snapshot of the beginning of a corporate activity and a medium which is set to grow rapidly and which will become increasingly important to corporations around the world. Companies that do not recognize this trend and take action to capitalize on it will miss out on valuable opportunities. They will also put themselves at risk of being blindsided by unfavorable publicity (Goodman, 2006).

Holtz and Demopoulos (2006) agree that, "Blogs are already at the point where businesses can no longer ignore them."

#### *Dangers of the Blogosphere*

While blogging may become increasingly important to companies, it also contains some inherent risks. If a corporation enters the blogosphere and makes too many missteps, the results can be damaging. Posting misleading information on a company blog is one of the quickest ways a corporation can get itself into hot water and tarnish its reputation (Bacon's, 2005). The blogosphere thrives on truth and transparency. Another mistake is for a corporation to run a blog and try to make it seem as if the blog is unbiased and independent of corporate influence (Bacon's, 2005). Such blogs are becoming known as "flogs" (Kramer, 2006). The recent Edelman flog scandal highlighted this. The Edelman PR firm developed a fake blog, which Wal-Mart used to spread the message of how it helps communities. The blog followed the journey of a couple who traveled the country, stopped at different Wal-Marts along the way, and documented their experiences (Stoff, 2006, p. 12). The posts often included interviews with Wal-Mart workers, who always seemed happy about their employment situations. The truth was that the blog was set up by the Edelman firm to shine a light on Wal-Mart's good deeds (Stoff, 2006, p. 12). Regardless of whether the accounts presented on the blog were true or false, setting up a blog under false pretenses cast both Edelman and Wal-Mart in an unfavorable light.

Even if an organization makes a decision not to enter the blogosphere to avoid such missteps, public relations practitioners still must take it upon themselves to monitor what's being said about their clients in the blogosphere and other online media. The fact that only 12% of companies are regularly monitoring blogs could result in their own peril (The American Marketing Association, 2006).

In the late 1990s, an email hoax claimed designer Tommy Hilfiger had uttered racial slurs on *Oprah*. In reality, not only had Hilfiger not used racial slurs, he never even appeared on that TV show ("Tommy rot," 2006). It's not unreasonable to see such an incident happening in the blogosphere, emphasizing the need for blog monitoring.

If such a situation were to arise, relationship building through blogs could be a powerful tool. In such a situation, an organization can call on bloggers with whom it has positive relationships to help snuff out the lies and bring the truth to light (Aftab, 2005). Building such relationships should be easier than ever, because the Web is the "perfect medium for building relationships with your publics" (Paine, 2002, p. 2).

Besides outsiders using the blogosphere to tarnish a company's reputation, sometimes the employee blogging that Microsoft so strongly encourages can also cause harm to the corporation. Some employees will write virtually anything about the organization where they work, thinking that the First Amendment will protect them. Although the First Amendment may protect their speech, it doesn't protect them from having their employment terminated. In fact, nearly 2% of employers have fired employees for offensive blog postings (The American Marketing Association, 2006).

Despite documented transgressions on the part of employee bloggers, only about 15% of employers have policies regarding work-related blogging (Employment Law Alliance, 2006). However, Wright and Hinson (2006) reported that 89% of those who responded to their international blogging and ethics survey said they believe it's acceptable for companies to conduct research on information their employees are blogging about. Plus, of the respondents whose companies do not monitor blogs, 46% said they believe their companies will eventually start measuring employee blogging. Couple that with the fact that 77% of senior executives believe their organizations should adopt corporate blogging policies (Goodman, 2006), and the evidence is strong that an increasing number of companies will adopt blogging policies in the future.

While such policies will help to curb malicious blogging by employees, the problem may not be as bad as some fear. Wright and Hinson (2001) indicated that employees tend to be writing more positive than negative things about their organizations (p. 16). According to Wright (2001), 98% percent of public relations professionals believe new online technologies have impacted their work, and for good reason. In a study of public relations roles and media choice, Kelleher (2001) examined managers' and technicians' use of various media, including email, which consume a large amount of practitioners' time. He cited a need for further research that looks at the context of media use and choice among practitioners, particularly looking at new media.

Taking into account the opportunities and dangers that the blogosphere presents, it is clear that the way public relations professionals operate is entering a new age of communication. Yet, while the channels of communication may be changing, "The most powerful weapon in human communication still is the truth" (Hiebert, 2005, p. 6).

### Method

Singleton and Straits (1999) said, "Exploratory studies are undertaken when relatively little is known about something, perhaps because of its 'deviant' character or its newness" (p. 90). Clearly, blogging falls into this category. Data for this exploratory study were gathered Jan. 8-12, 2007, from an online survey of the client base of BurrellesLuce, the media monitoring and analysis service that sponsored this research.

Approximately 8,700 practitioners, clients and prospective clients of the media monitoring service, were invited via email to participate in the survey, which was posted to the Web-based site, SurveyMonkey. As an incentive, participants' names were placed in a drawing to win an iPod. This non-random sample and self-selection process, while appropriate for exploratory research, do not allow for generalizations to be drawn; however, the size and scope of this study yielded valuable data for purposes of description. The response rate of about 11% represented 928 respondents. A lengthier survey period and follow-up emails would likely have precipitated a higher response rate.

The initial survey comprised nine closed-ended questions and one open-ended question. The survey was followed by more in-depth interviews with 54 practitioners, who volunteered to participate in post-survey interviews Jan. 22-31, 2007, about how they use and view blogs.

### Summary of Findings

The goal of this study was to explore how the new phenomenon of blogging has affected the role and scope of public relations professionals. Results are presented in two parts. First is a review of data from the 10-question online survey of Jan. 8-12, 2007, with brief discussion. Following that is discussion and interpretation of comments from the 54 respondents who agreed to be interviewed as a follow-up to the survey.

Of the survey respondents, 33.6% identified themselves as working for PR firms or communications agencies; 28% corporation/business; 22% nonprofits; 3.3% government; and 13.1% "other." Agency personnel also represented the largest group of those agreeing to in-depth interviews, 23 of the 54. Nonprofits were next with 11, followed by corporate practitioners with seven, and government practitioners with four. The other nine represent news media, entertainment, higher education, and associations.

### Detailed Review of Online Survey Data

Although nearly 90% of respondents (of the selected population) would like to know what's being said by bloggers about their organizations, as the data below reveal, less than 20% reported formally monitoring blogs. Even fewer use blogs to communicate.

*RQ1: Does your organization have a formal procedure for monitoring the content of blogs that may impact your business?*

No formal process for monitoring blogs	72.3%
Formal process for monitoring blogs	19.7%
Don't know	8.0%

*RQ2: If you do monitor the content of blogs, how do you accomplish that task?*

Internal staff	55.4%
External services	9.6%
Combination of internal staff and external services	38.0%

*RQ3: Whether or not you currently monitor blog content, what type of information would you most like to have from blogs? Information about:*

The organization	89.5%
Issues and trends in the business	70.6%
Competitors	59.4%
Trends in pop culture that affect the business	39.4%
Trends in politics and world affairs that affect the business	32.6%

It is hardly surprising that PR and marketing professionals desire to learn what bloggers are saying about their organizations, their competitors, and business issues affecting them. Such fact-finding, after all, is part of the intelligence-gathering process in any public relations effort. Practitioner interest in learning what blogs are saying "about pop culture trends," may simply be a result of making it an optional response, but it also could suggest that practitioners see blogs as bellwethers for pop culture. It certainly suggests an area for additional exploration into the impact of blogs on social trends.

*RQ4: Does your organization currently use its own blogs to facilitate communication with any of its key stakeholders?*

While nearly every respondent wants to know more about blogs, far fewer, just 18.5%, use organizational blogs as strategic communication tools. Of those, the favorite target of their blogs is the customer.

*RQ5: Which of the following stakeholder groups is the focus of your blog activities?*

Customers and end users	78.3%
News media	42.8%
Employee publics	39.9%

Other stakeholder groups targeted by strategic blogging activity include “wholesalers, dealers and resellers,” “investors,” and “contractors and vendors.”

*RQ6: What are your organization’s primary objectives for its blogging activity?*

Enhance branding efforts	63.2%
Offer 2-way communication for key stakeholders	57.1%
Improve trust with key stakeholder groups	46.0%
Pique media interest in a topic	37.4%
Discuss issues the media aren’t covering	36.2%
Correct public misperceptions	32.5%
Generate sales leads and inquiries	23.3%
Enhance relationships with employees	21.5%

Respondents said their objective for most blogging efforts is to support branding (62.3%); 37.4% use blogs to “pique media interest”; 23.3% use blogs to generate sales leads and inquiries. While one might expect practitioners to seek bottom-line marketing value from blogging activities, more than half of those who use blogs in their communication (57.1%) say they use them to create two-way communication opportunities with key stakeholders; and 46% use them to “improve trust” with key stakeholders. These practitioners appreciate the blogosphere’s much-discussed potential to establish and maintain the conversation.

*RQ7-RQ9: Are you aware of any employees whose blogs discuss work-related topics? Do you monitor employee blogging activities? Do you have in place a written policy covering work-related blogging by employees?*

Ever since Heather Armstrong was immortalized as the first blogger fired for posts critical of her employer (Scoble & Israel, 2006), the issue of corporate blogging policies has been part of the discussion of social media. Ironically, Armstrong worked for Internet giant, Yahoo, a company at the center of the social-media movement.

Most respondents to the survey skipped questions related to employee blog monitoring and employee blog policies. Only 146 of 938 answered the question, “Are you aware of any employees in your organization whose blogs discuss work-related topics?” Fewer than half that number answered follow-up questions related to monitoring of blogs and employee blog policies. Responses to the follow-up interviews may provide an explanation for the low response on these questions, as a vast majority of those interviewed said they don’t perceive a need to monitor employee blogging activities. A typical response: “It’s not an issue.”

Of the small group that did respond to the employee-related questions, most say they are unaware of employee blogging activities (83.5%). Almost as many (76.7%) say they don’t

spend time or resources monitoring employee blogging activities. Nearly 9 of 10 (89.3%) say they have no policies related to employee blogging.

The absence of employee blogging policies could become a serious legal issue, should an employer claim damage to reputation or bottom-line results based on employee blogging activity. The literature offers many cases of employees fired for their blogging activities, demonstrating that it can, indeed, “happen here.”

#### *Data from the Interviews*

Researchers posed 10 open-ended questions to those respondents who expressed, in their initial survey, willingness to share more information. Little of the data produced by these 54 interviews is quantifiable, but it does suggest some of the concerns practitioners have about blogs and their motivations for acting or not acting on them.

#### How Blogs are Affecting PR Practitioners' Jobs

Nearly all respondents said blogs have changed the way PR people do their jobs. One area of concern is that blogs create more work and more stress for practitioners:

- PR staffs must spend more time monitoring this new medium while continuing to monitor traditional mainstream media.
- PR professionals must be ready to respond quickly to breaking stories thanks to the compressed and round-the-clock news cycle of the blogosphere.
- PR professionals express concern about the loss of control over organizational messages in the blogosphere. This concern is coupled with worries about the absence of journalistic standards among the bloggers, standards such as objectivity, fairness and fact checking perceived as present in the mainstream media.

Practitioners perceive blogs as having the potential to influence public discussion and public opinion about their clients or employers. But many of them express concern over what they see as the complex, and sometimes overwhelming, task of monitoring millions of blogs. Part of this concern involves resources.

“We just don’t have the people, the time or the money to do it,” said one corporate practitioner. Said another, “They (blogs) add more work, but they also open up more opportunity.”

A practitioner from a nonprofit group said her small staff finds the time to check out key blogs: “We are an understaffed advocacy group, so no one needs more duties! But everyone here is very passionate about our issues, so we’re monitoring key blogs anyway, in our spare time.”

Others remain unconvinced that blog monitoring is worthwhile. These comments come from respondents whose organizations or clients have yet to embrace blogging:

“Right now it (blogs) is not impacting our organization,” said one corporate practitioner. An agency PR professional said: “Blogs still generally have little impact on branding or sales. The best use of PR efforts remains reaching out to the wider audience consuming information from mainstream media.” The sentiment that blogs have yet to impact operations is fairly common among those in the interview group – even among those who are actively tracking blogs.

Still others say they see potential in the blogosphere and are making it part of their PR strategies or are planning to very soon.

“Blogs are becoming more influential than traditional media outlets, and PR professionals must include bloggers in their pitching efforts,” said an agency practitioner.

Said another: “The lines between traditional and consumer-generated media are blurring more and more every day. Bloggers are quoted as experts on subjects they write about and their posts are being re-published by traditional media. Public relations professionals must identify, establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with this increasingly influential medium to their publics.”

Referring to blogs as a “paradigm shift,” yet another agency respondent said, “Blogs represent a huge opportunity for reaching an increasingly fractured audience, and PR professionals need to add blogs to their scope of work.” Someone from nonprofit PR said blogs “offer an inexpensive way to extend messages to difficult-to-reach audiences.”

A select few in the follow-up interviews referred to blogs as feedback mechanisms for their companies and clients. “They (the blogs) are ‘the voice of the people’ and can provide valuable feedback on situations.”

While most respondents say they don’t monitor blogs, most also appear unaware that their own media monitoring and analysis service, BurrellesLuce, recently added the service as part of its standard package. Most respondents in the survey are BurrellesLuce clients, but the service is relatively new and has not been heavily promoted.

Only a handful mentioned online blog monitoring tools such as Google Alerts and Technorati searches, both effective ways to track blogs using keyword combinations, and both available free to anyone with an Internet connection. One can assume that as search engines and filters become more sophisticated and well known that blog tracking will be seen as a less-daunting task.

#### *Engaging Stakeholders*

Blogs create opportunities to tell stories and engage stakeholders. When asked to discuss positives and negatives of the blogs on their organizations and clients, interviewees tended to focus on blogs as additional avenues for messaging.

Practitioners say that blogs offer them more ways to get the organization’s “message out.” By far, this is the most prevalent comment when interviewees were asked to speak to the positive impact of blogs. They seem to perceive blogs as a way to expand their messages and to reach more people with those messages. One agency respondent said he sees blogs creating more work for his shop and “an opportunity for more billable hours.” Said another, “We want to include in our services to clients blog strategies.”

So PR professionals, at least in their role as publicists, seem to view blogs as vessels of opportunity. Not only do blogs present many new avenues for pitching stories, they also offer the publicist a chance to focus those stories on the niche audiences that so many bloggers cater to.

Those who mentioned blogs as a publicity vehicle significantly outnumber, by about 2 to 1, those who mention blogs in the context of discussion, feedback or dialogue. Most seem to view the new social medium not as a sea change in communication but as another messaging tool. This view of blogs, more as a one-way communication vehicle than an interactive one, may be an anomaly of the survey sample. Since BurrellesLuce clients tend to be practitioners charged with generating and tracking publicity, that mindset may carry over to blogs.

Practitioners who treat bloggers simply as targets for pitches do so at their peril, as the blogging community seeks not to be an outlet for promotional stories but a conduit for discussion and interchange. Practitioners working with bloggers will need to adopt a more “give and take” attitude toward the new medium or face the hostile barbs of bloggers.

### *The Impact of Blogs*

Half of those responding to the follow-up questions see blogging as a positive development for PR practitioners. Another group, about one-third of the respondents, said they see both positive and negative aspects of the trend toward social media.

“Bloggers are now providing the conversation that PR professionals long for for their clients,” said an agency professional, adding, “Blogs now have to be a PR professional’s best friend.”

Those who see blogs as a negative force base their concerns on the absence of fairness and objectivity.

When asked to forecast the impact of blogs in the short term (two-to-three years), almost all said that blogs will likely become more influential. But at least a third of those responding spoke of a “shakeout” or a “leveling” that is likely to come in the blogosphere. Most believe a sizable group of bloggers will gain influence and readership, but that many others will fade into obscurity.

Some representative comments:

- Blogs are popular now, but whether the citizen journalists creating them will sustain their interest, this remains to be seen.
- I think that the popularity of these postings as communication tools will wear thin with many in the near future.
- There could be yet another technological advance that renders blogs ‘five minutes ago,’ and that prompts even further discussion/examination.

It’s worth noting that two recent surveys, Pew and Gallup, support the notion that participation in the blogosphere – both by bloggers and readers – is leveling.

There remains a core, about one in five of those interviewed, who don’t foresee a bright future or a lasting impact for blogs, viewing them more as fad or fancy. Those who doubt the future impact of blogs tend also to be those who say they have witnessed no tangible impact of blogs on their own organizations or those of their clients.

Said one agency professional, “I don’t feel blogs have reached critical mass of influencing public opinion or purchasing decisions.” Said another, “At this point, blogs have not affected our clients’ bottom line.” A practitioner in the construction field says the importance of blogging depends on context. “I still encounter people who don’t use email – which is why I suspect blogging is not very effective in my industry.” In contrast, a respondent from the real estate industry said her company pitches bloggers and encourages employees to blog as a means of driving traffic to the corporate website.

### Discussion

Data gathered both in the survey and follow-up interviews led to several observations, all of which are worthy of additional investigation:

- A vast majority of public relations and marketing practitioners surveyed have yet to implement a formal procedure for monitoring blogs. In the follow-up interviews, most attribute their inaction to either lack of resources to do that monitoring or absence of perceived need to do it. Many also expressed concern that blog monitoring would be a complex task.
- Fewer than 20% of those surveyed have used their own organizational blogs to communicate with stakeholders. In the follow-up interviews, respondents cited lack of time and resources as the reasons for not making strategic use of blogs (similar to

reasons given for not monitoring them). Also in the follow-up interviews, many expressed concern over the blogosphere's complexity, as well as the practitioner's inability to control messages and outcomes.

- An overwhelming majority of those surveyed say they believe blogs will become a more important part of the communication mix over the next two to three years. This response points to a disconnect between values and actions, since most practitioners say they have no formal process for tracking blogs or for using them in their PR strategies.
- Very few organizations appear to be tracking the blogging activities of employees; nearly as many have no policies or guidelines pertaining to employees who blog about work-related topics. Follow-up interviews indicate that most practitioners see little need for such policies, and they express little concern about employee blogging activities.

Blogs still are an uncommon tactic among PR professionals surveyed. While only a handful of those responding use blogs to facilitate communication with stakeholders, about twice as many say they are considering it for 2007. "It's such a new thing, we haven't had time to formulate a plan," one respondent said.

Two respondents pointed to blogs as useful tools for search engine optimization, since blogs generate the page views and links that contribute to Google rankings. Several others say that bloggers' impact has been to drive coverage in mainstream publications, since many mainstream editors rely on blogs for story ideas. Still another said her organization's blog resulted in a sizable turnout for a fundraising event.

Employee blogging remains a non-issue. Not one interviewee admitted to having a specific policy to cover employee blogging, but several said that existing employee communication policies would extend to blogs, thus making a specific policy on blogs unnecessary. While that may be true in terms of reining in renegade employee bloggers, it also indicates little interest in proactively educating employees on how to stay out of trouble, or better yet, how to support the employer's efforts with blogging.

Despite Microsoft's 800 employee bloggers, research turns up only isolated cases of companies that have braved the risks to promote employee blogging – or at least accept it – on a broad scale. The unwillingness of businesses to promote employee blogging raises several questions worthy of investigation: First, are we failing to tap our most valuable resource when we discourage employees from sharing the good word about our organizations? Second, since the concept of employee blogging flies in the face of conventional PR wisdom to "speak with one voice" – does employee blogging make sense at all? Finally, have the social media rendered the one-voice principle obsolete?

### Conclusion

The goal of this study was to explore how the new phenomenon of blogging has impacted the role and scope of public relations practitioners. This study is not intended to be representative; however, because of the size and quality of the sample, it does provide rich exploratory insight into blogging as it relates to public relations. Further, it is hoped that this research will stimulate future studies to examine how blogging and new media are affecting the role and scope of public relations practitioners.

While most PR professionals in this survey seem to understand the potential of social media to impact their organizations, far too few have taken the steps necessary to monitor social-

media activity. To ignore the blogosphere means these practitioners are ignoring an essential part of the day-to-day research that has been a part of professional public relations practice for more than a half century. Practitioners face the challenge of persuading management to provide resources needed to monitor the blogosphere. In addition, practitioners must invest time to learn basic blog monitoring techniques, but thanks to the growing sophistication of search engines, that task is not as daunting as many perceive it to be.

Practitioners see the potential for blogs to become part of PR strategies, but most remain focused on blogs as a way to “get the word out.” This lopsided focus on the publicity function and the one-way practice model to which it is tied should serve as a warning signal for the profession at large. Perhaps it points to the need for more and broader education on the topic of social media, both in trade and professional publications, as well as professional associations. The fact that nearly all respondents have yet to see discernable impact from blogs could explain the lack of urgency practitioners show toward them. But such an approach is akin to considering fire safety and prevention just after the house has been set ablaze.

In-house, practitioners ignore employee blogs largely because employee blogs ignore them. While this approach may work indefinitely for many companies, it also opens the door to legal and human-resource management challenges. Companies need blogging policies now, not after the subpoenas are delivered and the lawsuits initiated.

As bloggers become more a part of our media culture, PR professionals will need to implement plans and procedures to monitor and manage their impact. In this brave new world of social media, the most difficult step will be the first one.

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### Appendix A: Survey Questions

Administered via Survey Monkey, Jan. 8-12, 2007

Sponsored by BurrellsLuce, Inc., New York, N.Y.

1. Does your organization have a formal procedure for monitoring the content of blogs that may impact your business?
2. If you do monitor the content of blogs, how do you accomplish that task (check all that apply)?
  - In-house staff
  - External service
  - A blend of in-house and external
3. Whether or not you currently monitor blog content, what type of information would you most like to have from blogs? Check all that apply.
  - What bloggers are saying about the organization
  - What bloggers are saying about issues and trends in the business
  - What blogs are saying about competitors
  - Trends in pop culture that affect the business

- Trends in politics and world affairs that affect the business
  - Anything else you'd like to learn from blog content? Enter it here.
4. Does your organization currently use its own blogs to facilitate communication with any of its key stakeholders?
  5. Which of the following stakeholder groups is the focus of your blog activities? Check all that apply.
    - Employees
    - Customers/end users
    - Dealers/distributors or other resellers
    - Investors
    - Contractors and vendors
    - News media
    - Other (please specify)
  6. What are your organization's primary objectives for its blogging activity? Check all that apply.
    - Improve trust with key stakeholder groups
    - Offer 2-way communication opportunities for key stakeholder groups
    - Enhance branding efforts
    - Discuss issues the media aren't covering
    - Pique media interest in a topic or idea
    - Correct public misperceptions
    - Generate sales leads and inquiries
    - Enhance relationships with employees
    - Other (please specify)
  7. Are you aware of any employees in your organization whose blogs discuss work-related topics?
  8. Do you monitor employee blogging activities?
  9. How do you monitor employee blogging activity? (open-ended response)
  10. Do you have in place a written policy covering work-related blogging by employees?
  11. Which of the following best describes your employer?
    - Public Relations/Communications Agency
    - Corporation/Business
    - Nonprofit Organization
    - Government
    - Other (please specify)
  12. Please indicate the department/division that best represents where you work in your company/organization.
    - Corporate Communications/Public Relations
    - Employee Communications/Relations
    - Human Resources
    - Marketing
    - Public Affairs
    - Other (please specify)
  13. Your name
  14. Your phone number
  15. Your email address
  16. Would you be willing to talk with a Kent State researcher further about this topic?

## Appendix B: In-depth Interview Questions

### General questions

1. How do you see weblogs (blogs) changing the role of public relations and the scope of PR professionals' work?
2. Overall, do you see the blogging phenomenon as positive or negative for public relations? Why?
3. Do you foresee blogs becoming more or less important in the overall communication mix in the next 2-3 years?

Please add any additional comments you might have about blogging and its impact on your organization.

### Follow-up questions about last week's survey

4. If your organization has NO formal procedure for monitoring blog content, please tell us why no such policy has been established.
5. If your organization DOES have a formal procedure for monitoring blogs, please describe that procedure and estimate how much time you and your staff spend on it each week.
6. If your organization USES ITS OWN BLOG or blogs to facilitate communication, please tell us who writes those blogs and what types of issues the authors address in them.
7. If your organization USES ITS OWN BLOG or blogs to facilitate communication, please share any examples of tangible results you have seen from this blogging activity.
8. If your organization uses its own blog or blogs to COMMUNICATE WITH NEWS MEDIA, please comment on the effectiveness of this blogging effort, referencing specific examples when possible.
9. If your organization USES ITS OWN BLOGS to facilitate communication, what control, if any, does the public relations function exercise over those blogs?
10. More than 90% our survey respondents said they have no formal policy related to employee blogging. If you are among that group, please tell us why you have no employee blogging policy at this time.

Please add below any additional comments you'd like to make regarding the monitoring of blog content.

## **A Crisis in Loyalty: Virtuous Versus Non-Virtuous Loyalty in Public Relations**

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Loyalty suggests that PR practitioners owe loyalty to the broader public good when that good conflicts with company interests. But this paper contends that narrower loyalties take moral precedence. Interviews with practitioners revealed that they struggle with conflicting loyalties. Identifying and internalizing loyalties would help resolve these moral conflicts.

*“A very wide loyalty looks more like a pure ideal than does a narrow loyalty.”*

*-Andrew Oldenquist*

In 1998, the movie *Primary Colors* was released in theaters nation wide. Although the movie failed to become a blockbuster hit, its discussion of several important public relations issues facing the practitioner today marked it as a significant film in the media's ever more prevalent inward reflection. Perhaps the most profound aspect of the film was its examination of Henry Burton, a character closely modeled on Bill Clinton presidential campaign aid George Stephanopoulos. Throughout the course of the movie, Burton's character is slowly forced to acknowledge that his candidate is morally corrupt. The struggle throughout the movie, therefore, becomes one between Burton's own personal values, his career and the public. In the end, Burton chooses to act against his personal values and follows the president on to victory, but Burton, just like the real life Stephanopoulos, never seems to be completely at peace with his decision (Corliss, 1998; and Stephanopoulos, 1999).

Deciding loyalty is never easy, and it is made doubly hard when the person is constantly in the spotlight, as the public relations practitioner certainly is. In their position as liaison between company and public, practitioners find themselves in a unique position of being a member of the organization but a representative of the public. This double position inevitably causes problems for practitioners, such as Henry Burton who found himself choosing between his own personal values and loyalty to his cause.

To whom do practitioners owe their loyalty, and how do they ethically choose between seemingly contradictory loyalties? In recent years this topic has made its way increasingly to the forefront as the demand for public accountability increases for corporate America. There seems to be little real consensus on how the practitioner should evaluate the situation and act according to loyalty principles. Many say that practitioners owe loyalty to the public. Those trained as journalists may still hold to the media's traditional role as a watchdog for the public. They see themselves as advocates for the client and the public. Public relations education has reinforced these mutual but sometimes conflicting loyalties by placing emphasis on professionalism and professional standards. Offering a service that benefits the public or the public interest is inherent in the concept of professionalism. Is it, therefore, the practitioner's duty to protect the public, even at the expense of the company? While this idea does have some merit, upon closer examination it seems that blindly supporting the public often not only fails to help the situation but may cause more harm than good. Similarly, blind obedience to the company without question is obviously not the ethical choice either.

The three-fold purpose of this paper is to first, examine the concept of loyalty to determine what virtuous loyalty entails; second, to review public relations research to see how researchers have attempted to resolve loyalty issues in the field; third, report the results of qualitative interviews with practitioners to determine how they resolve loyalty issues, and fourth, develop a model to help practitioners ethically choose between seemingly conflicting loyalties.

## Loyalty

Before a discussion on virtuous and non-virtuous loyalty can take place, it is important to understand what it is that we are referring to when we speak about loyalty. Although often referred to as a virtue in and of itself (“He was loyal until the bitter end”), when one looks closer at the concept of loyalty, one finds that loyalty, instead of being a virtue or a vice is actually the foundation for such qualities. As R.E Ewin (1992) stated, “I want to suggest that loyalty is the emotional setting for the virtue and vices; it is not in itself a virtue or vice, but is the raw material for them” (p. 410).

It is important to make this distinction because, unlike virtues and vices that are morally defined in and of themselves; loyalty in itself appears to be a non-moral trait, leaving it morally neutral. As a morally neutral trait, therefore, the morality of loyalty is determined, not by the quality of loyalty itself, but by what that loyalty is placed on and how it is used. According to Ewin, then:

It follows that mere blind obedience to every wish of the person who is the object of loyalty is not loyalty, it is a perversion of loyalty. There is no moral value to it at all, since it is not something that is morally due. (p. 404)

This idea of loyalty would seem to indicate that loyalty, instead of being a demanded or expected by certain ideas or things, is instead wholly voluntary. This would point toward the idea that the quality of loyalty is a deeply personal and narrow and is defined not by the public but rather by the person.

It is often argued, in fact, that loyalty can only exist as a personal quality because the foundational aspect of loyalty is ownership, as Andrew Oldenquist (1982) explained: “when I have loyalty to something I have somehow come to view it as mine; it is an object of non-instrumental value to me in virtue of it’s being mine” (p. 175). In this way, Oldenquist treats loyalty much the same as pride. Individuals can have no pride in something unless it is somehow viewed as theirs. I can admire another person’s artwork, but I cannot have pride in it until I come to see that artwork as mine. In the same way I can admire the work of AIDs relief workers in South Africa, but until I come to view myself as somehow connected to that work I cannot have true loyalty to the cause.

When loyalty is seen as something to which a person claims ownership, “a very wide loyalty looks more like a pure ideal than does a narrow loyalty” (Oldenquist, 1982, p. 179). This is mainly due to the fact that it is very hard to claim ownership of broad, all-encompassing ideals. Of course, a person can be loyal to an ideals, such as freedom, but those loyalties are indistinct and not easily defined because the personal ownership of such ideals are often vague. It is generally not until these broader loyalties are somehow threatened in some specific way, tying the person to the idea, that such loyalty becomes more defined and stronger. As Block (1966) explained:

To the group, an abstraction, we are never truly loyal. To the group, the living embodiment of all those things we believe, do and feel, we cheerfully give our allegiance because in doing so we are simply gazing at ourselves in social breadth. These, then,

constitute not the basis of our loyalties but our deepest loyalties. For the constancy of a relationship to some group persists only as long as the group stands for these underlying activities, whether in actual or symbolic reference. (p. 52; also cited in Stoker, 2005, pp. 274-275).

Block brought up a very interesting point in the above quote. According to Block, the only reason a person is ever loyal to “the group” is that the group is a reflection of themselves and their own personal values. Like Oldenquist (1982), Block (1966) pointed out that if these wider values did not reflect our own persons, we would have no feeling of possession tying us to them. Without these feelings of possession, the feelings of loyalty could not exist. In a way then, there is no such thing as a wider group loyalty; there is simply the projection of loyalty to personal values on a wider scale. Wider loyalties, therefore, cannot take precedence over narrower loyalties. In fact, because wider loyalties are simply echoes of personal loyalties, it is intuitive to think that those personal loyalties actually take moral precedence.

As Oldenquist (1982) noted, “it is not obvious that wider loyalties always take precedence over narrower ones. The demand for impartiality is never true impartiality; it is merely an invitation to give one’s loyalty to a larger whole with which someone identifies” (p. 181). Giving your loyalty to the general public, then, is not declaring impartiality on a matter (as many journalists often claim); rather it is stating your bias in favor of whatever values are motivating the public to which you declare your allegiance. The question, then, becomes can such a surrender of personal loyalty to a broader ideal ever be considered virtuous? And if not, what exactly is virtuous loyalty?

#### Virtuous vs. Non-Virtuous Loyalty

Virtuous, loyalty in any profession, but especially in the public relations profession, can be difficult to determine. With so many stereotypes of loyalty existing in the media and common culture, it is hard to distinguish what is virtuous and what is non-virtuous. In the end though, keeping the above definitions of loyalty in mind, it is clear that virtuous loyalty is to be loyal to your own deeply held beliefs and ideals.

As Calhoun (1998) explained, “the rational response to conflicts between one’s own moral conscience and one’s group is to defer ultimately to one authority alone, namely one’s own conscience” (p. 10). Because loyalties are in and of themselves inherently personal, it makes rational sense that when personal loyalties are in conflict with broader loyalties, one defers to the personal loyalties. Of course, this does not mean that personal loyalties cannot be altered. If, after examination, personal and public loyalties are found to be compatible, then the conflict is naturally resolved. It is only when, after examination, personal and public loyalties remain at odds that the choice has to be made between the two. To choose against personal loyalties in favor of public loyalties would be non-virtuous because by doing so the person is relinquishing his or her own self to the whole, an action which is inauthentic at best and immoral at worst.

In addition to this, to defer to the authority of another source, namely the broader good, is at best an amoral act because by allowing the group to make the decision for them, the actor relinquishes his decision-making to the group. In effect, the actor has stopped being a free acting individual and has become a drone. Actions taken in this drone state have no real moral value because the agent is not actually making decisions; decisions and actions being required prerequisites for morality. We cannot claim that a bee’s actions are either moral or immoral because the bee has little if any free will to choose his own actions, similarly, “if one does the right thing

only fortuitously or for non-moral reasons, the one's action has no moral value worth acknowledging" (Calhoun, 1998, p. 11).

Putting public loyalties above personal loyalties allows the individual to avoid taking responsibility for a particular action. Any credit or blame goes to the group, freeing the individual from public judgment (see Gert, 1998). Right action in these cases speaks to the moral character of the group, not the individual. Wrong action speaks to the lack of moral character of the group. The individual has no moral worth, no moral responsibility, and no moral character. These attributes have all been surrendered to the group. One also cannot claim moral 'credit' because one is not in fact an active participant in the act; if one acts immorally because of the group, you can similarly not blame the group for immoral actions because by doing so one has failed to use the rationality that differentiates humans from animals. As Calhoun (1998) explained, "the general moral to draw from the story of Hitler and the Third Reich is that no one should submit to the dictates of a group when they conflict with one's own personal moral convictions. It is no one's duty to acquiesce to the will of the group" (p. 6). In fact, it is often the duty of the individual to act against the will of the group and instead uphold his own personal beliefs. Inaction, in the face of blatant dissonance between personal and public values is often as much or more of a declaration of loyalty than overt action. Using the example of the Third Reich, this principle is immediately apparent. It is true that it was a relatively small percentage of the German population in World War II actively took part in the genocide of the Jewish people, but by their inaction, the majority of the population allowed the Holocaust to happen.

In defense of their actions during the Third Reich, many German people claimed that they bore no responsibility, the entire German population was swept up with the ideals of Nazism, how could a nation be wrong? The moral from this story is clear. There is no moral basis for claiming that a large number of loyal followers is reason enough to give loyalty to that same cause. If there is not reason enough for to give loyalty to something without the pressures of the group, then all the people in the world being loyal to something does not provide added reason for loyalty. Any loyalty given under such pressure remains non-virtuous. As Calhoun (1998) explained,

If a given policy or principle is advocated by a group, then, according to those who believe in the value of loyalty, each individual should agree to it in the name of the group even if it conflicts with the individual's personal values. But, as the anarchist correctly recognizes, the group's favoring a policy or principle is not a moral reason for adoption of it. Either sound reasons for adoption exist or they do not. That others accept it is not, in and of itself, a sufficient reason for accepting it. (p. 13)

As strange as it is to hear that the anarchist has a valid moral point, Calhoun is correct. It is never virtuous to do something just because everyone else has. How many times have parents said to their children, "Well, if Jimmy jumped off a bridge would you jump off too?" The only virtuous form of loyalty is that which is given because the object reflects our own personal values. If what we give our loyalty to has no personal ties to us then we're like the poor prisoners of Plato's cave, worshiping faint shadows of other people's values instead of the sun of our own convictions.

#### Loyalty to public vs. loyalty to company

A concern that often arises when speaking of loyalties as something so personal is the fear that a society of people who are loyal to themselves before the community will eventually collapse as everyone fights for self. As social beings, humans are drawn to community by nature

and so it is important to act toward preservation of the community and not against it as the anarchist would suggest. Although counter-intuitive at first, when one understands the nature of loyalty it is apparent that devout loyalty to personal values actually supports the community as a whole better than a vague support of community values.

Integral to the idea of rational personal loyalty in a public sphere is the reality that community, just like loyalty, is an inherently personal ideal. Oldenquist (1982) noted, “the object of community loyalty is a particular, and this means that our special concern for it does not depend on our thinking that its differentiating features making it better than others, our concern depends on our thinking that it is ours” (p. 192). Personal loyalties then, allow individuals to take these broad, far-reaching ideals, such as community, and make them theirs. Only when they are personal can they truly function in a community setting. Without this sense of ownership that is inherent in personal loyalty, the public is not real to them. It is like a movie: people can see it and understand it but it has no real influence on them or their daily lives so they see no real reason to preserve it. Only when it is theirs by virtue of being tied to them through their personal values do they see a reason to preserve it.

Loyalty to the company or organization to which the person is affiliated, then, takes an interesting role as the intermediary between the person and the community. Because loyalty is a deeply personal quality, virtuous loyalty is more easily found and functions in entities closer to the person, the company being one of these entities. Of course it is imperative to this function of the company that the practitioner chooses a company which aligns itself with their own personal values. If there is dissonance between a person’s values and the company’s values then any loyalty given to the company will inevitably be non-virtuous.

Because the company is closer to the person, in cases between company loyalties and broader, public loyalties, it should not automatically be assumed that public loyalties are automatically virtuous. According to Oldenquist (1982), “more is not always better because it is not always more of the same thing. Hence, without further argument it will not due to claim, in the name of speciesism, that nationalism, community loyalty and family loyalty count for less because they count for fewer” (P. 182). Obviously, virtuous loyalty in this case is not a case of how many people are involved and what far-reaching ideals are being preserved. Loyalty is a matter of which entity supports the practitioners’ own personal values.

#### Loyalty in the public relations field today

With a definition of virtuous loyalty in mind it is now important to understand the current landscape of loyalty in public relations. Although generally discussed in terms of brand or customer loyalty, as one of the six professional values listed on the Public Relations Society of America’s code of ethics, traditional loyalty obviously plays an important role in the public relations profession. The main guidelines, however, for loyalty in public relations are relatively vague, listed only as remaining “faithful to those that we represent, while honoring our obligation to serve the public interest” (PRSA Code of Ethics).

This definition, while noble, fails to create any guideline for actions when the interests of the public and the needs of the client seem to conflict. An example of this lack of direction comes from a case study from the PRSA Board of Ethics Case Studies where it claims, “the public relations professional’s greatest loyalty is to his/her client/employer; however, the professional is obligated to provide counsel and actions that serve in the best interest of the public. Responsibility advocacy requires that the interests of those affected by this decision be

preserved” (PRSA Case Study #3). Again, the case study has given the possibility for conflicting loyalties without any real way to decide between the two loyalties.

A recent study conducted by Brennan (2006) revealed that decisions between conflicting loyalties are prevalent in the public relations work place. For example, in a survey conducted by Brennan, one in eight practitioners reported pressure to compromise standards at the work place and two in five didn’t report such misconduct in fear of being labeled as a troublemaker. A further 40% of those who do report such misconduct say that they are not happy with the organization’s response. Of the people surveyed, only 53% of respondents said they were comfortable proposing alternative courses when faced with ethical dilemmas (one could argue that this is just another way to say conflicting loyalties) (Brennan).

In a further study Brennan (2006) discussed ways that public relations practitioners tried to cope with these conflicting loyalties. According to the survey, there were two main ways in which practitioners tried to resolve conflicting loyalties: peers and the PRSA code of ethics. Although, the numbers were not encouraging in either case with only 19% of respondents turning to the code of ethics and 53% turning to peers. Obviously there is a significant lack of both understanding of the nature of loyalty and effective action guiding models in regards to loyalty in the public relations work place.

This lack of real understanding of the nature of virtuous loyalty causes immense problems in the public relations world. As business writer John Ellis stated,

The truth matters. Loyalty matters. Lies matter. Values matter. You know a Dilbert company the minute you walk into it. Dilbert-company employees know the exact calibration of corporate dishonesty. An organization's ethics flow from the top down and back up again, and permeates throughout the company mindset.

Not only are ethics important to the public relations practitioner simply on the basis of them being human, but ethics and loyalty are incredibly important to the public relations industry as a whole. It is the public relations practitioner’s job to create a company that not only looks good for the public but *is* good for the public and if the practitioner is practicing inauthentic and non-virtuous loyalty then their ability to do so is compromised. What’s worse, there’s no whitewashing in ethics, it may be possible to hide non-virtuous loyalty and lax ethics temporarily, but like Ellis says, eventually the person with those qualities will be found out, and once the public relations practitioners’ image is tarnished, it is almost impossible to repair the damage.

Despite the prominence of loyalty conflicts in the workplace, little scholarly research has been published on loyalty in public relations. Most of the research shows a bias for choosing broader loyalties over narrower ones. Parsons (1993) argued that broader loyalties to society subsume narrower loyalties to self, profession, and organization. Choosing any alternative to a broader loyalty would require “significant reasons” (p. 56).

Another approach might be appropriately referred to as the professional model. A leading advocate for this approach was Martinson (1995/1996). Serving the interests of the client serve the interests of the public. Unlike Parsons (1993), Martinson placed one’s professional duty to the client as the first priority because serving the client’s needs would ultimately achieve the utilitarian value of serving the best interests of the public. For Martinson, one could morally justify choosing the narrower loyalty to the client or organization if one’s choice did not harm the public or the public interest. This view that professionals serve the public interest is by championing the cause of their clients also was advocated by Bivins (1993).

A third approach was proposed by Stoker (2005). Based on philosopher Josiah Royce's (1908) *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, Stoker (2005) urged practitioners to unite with organizations that shared not only their values but values that could be shared by others. Personal values must pass the test of showing loyalty to loyalty, meaning one must universalize loyalties by asking whether all persons could show loyalty to an object of loyalty. Ethical loyalty, as defined by Stoker (2005), should align with one's authenticity, one's character and integrity. Personal loyalties are ethical only if they can be universalized to lay claim on the loyalties of all individuals.

All of these approaches assume that the individual practitioner can achieve an objective ideal of being able to step back from his or her own values and beliefs and decide what is best for the public interest or what one believes might be a worthy object of loyalty for a widely pluralistic public. The research conducted for this study seeks to determine how practitioners resolve the conflict between broader and narrower loyalties and then develop a model that would allow them to ethically place personal loyalties ahead of public loyalties.

### Research

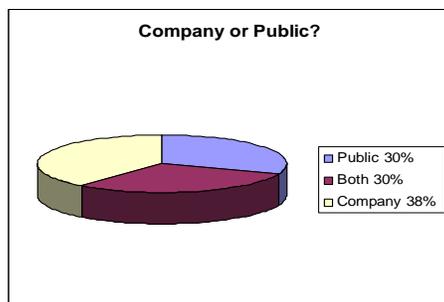
The main body of unique research was completed in two distinct parts. First, thirty interviews of PR professionals were conducted by Drs. Brad Rawlins and Kevin Stoker from Brigham Young University. Second, sixteen more interviews were conducted the paper's co-author. Those interviews covered a more specific set of questions regarding loyalty in order to determine an overall picture of loyalty in the modern public relations field.

These interviews were then analyzed in relation to the previous research in philosophical and communications studies literature to determine how close the modern concept of loyalty aligns with the ideal. The research was qualitative and the results are also presented in narrative form, except for some frequencies tabulated from the responses of those interviewed. This data, however, is not quantitative and cannot be generalized. It does provide insight into the loyalties of those interviewed.

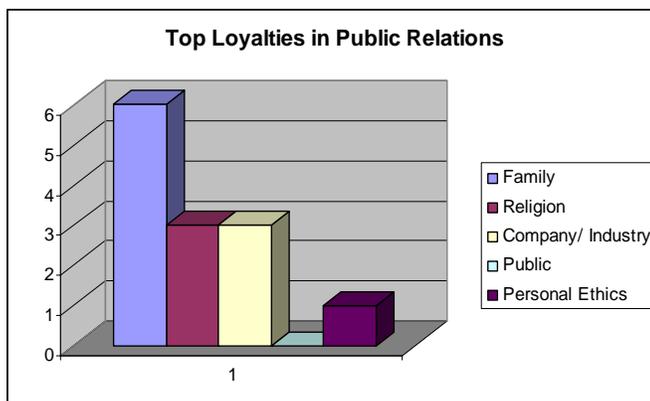
The final step of the research was to create a model to guide ethical decision making in public relations when differing loyalties are called into question.

### Findings

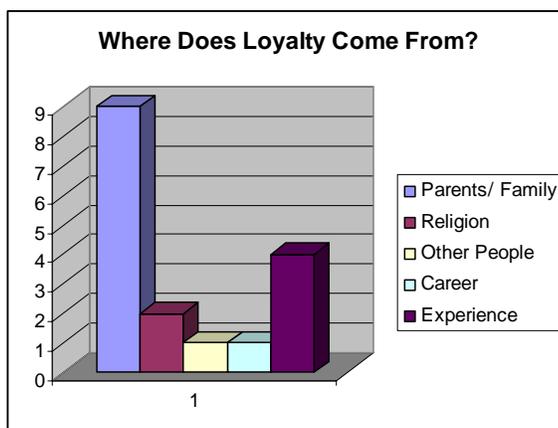
After analyzing the research there were three main findings that presented themselves: The first was the relationship between company and public loyalty. Of those interviewed 30% of respondents said they were loyal to the public and 38% said they were loyal to the company. The surprising statistic was that 30% of respondents claimed loyalty to both the company and the public generally dependent upon the circumstances. This phenomenon will be discussed in length later in the paper.



When pressed further about what their true loyalties were to, it came as little surprise that the overwhelming majority of respondents said that their most intense loyalties were to deeply intrinsic and personal values such as family and friends. Nearly half of all respondents cited family as the number one loyalty in their life with religion and company tying for second place, each chosen by a fifth of the respondents. Interestingly, not a single respondent claimed ultimate loyalty to public or public ideals when asked about their top loyalties. This would seem to indicate that practitioner's deepest loyalties are not actually to the public or company as they answered above, but rather to their own selves and ideals.



A final question that provided very interesting results was that of where loyalties originated from. Again, the overwhelming majority of respondents said that their loyalties originated from family and friends. Of the respondents, 64% said that they learned their loyalties from family and friends. Another 28% of respondents said they learned loyalty from personal experience. Of the respondents, less than 10% cited other people (as in not family or friends) or career as a basis for learning loyalties. It is interesting to note, that of the responses given, only the last two are sources for loyalty that are not deeply personal. The consequences of this internal source of loyalty in relation to the question of company versus public loyalty will be discussed later in the paper.



Another interesting finding was the fact that while many respondents claimed that they would do nothing that violated their personal ethics or went against the PRSA code of ethics. When asked what they would do or had done in cases when asked to do something unethical, many responded similar to this answer. "I was hired by a PR agency that advocated that they never accept work associated with smoking or breast implants. A few years later, the agency was handling that very exact line of clientele. I resigned when the right kind of new opportunity presented itself."

Obviously, this situation is a contradiction between what is said and the actions actually taken. While the respondent has claimed that his personal values lead him away from industries such as tobacco and plastic surgery, his actions proved him willing to work with such clients until 'the right kind of opportunity presented itself.' This shows a clear contradiction between personal loyalties and actions which will be discussed later in the paper. Interestingly enough, this type of contradiction was more prevalent among male respondents than female respondents.

## Discussion

After reviewing the research it has become clear that there is a contradiction between the deepest loyalties held by public relations practitioners and their action-guiding loyalties. This contradiction in loyalties has led to an inauthentic form of loyalty among many public relations practitioners today, which is non-virtuous in nature. An interesting result of the research, however, was that this non-virtuous form of loyalty did not take place in the expected loyalty to aesthetics versus loyalty to self; instead the non-virtuous loyalty was exhibited primarily through both responsibility avoidance and surrender of self to company/ society.

When conducting interviews with current public relations practitioners, a statement commonly heard was something like this comment from a practitioner in Florida, "Would I be loyal to my client versus the public? I guess it just depends on the situation. If it was something unethical, I would take the ethical side." Or, even more common was the comment that the practitioner was loyal to both. While it may initially appear that by claiming loyalty to both sides the practitioner is being balanced and unbiased, in reality what is happening is that the practitioner is refusing to declare loyalty. In this way they are exhibiting classic signs of responsibility avoidance.

Responsibility, the act of taking accountability for your actions or the actions of those you associate with, is an inherently vital part of both public relations and loyalty. In the Dictionary of Philosophy, Paul Edwards (1968) stated that:

We must ask what loyalty demands of a person. The etymology of the word 'loyalty' gives a clue, for it comes from the French word *loi* and thus means something akin to 'legality'. Loyalty, strictly speaking, demands what is morally due the object of loyalty. (p. 98)

One such thing that is "morally due to object of loyalty" is necessarily responsibility toward that object. Through the research, however, there is a decided lack of real responsibility toward loyalties shown. Responses such as, "I'm not loyal to one or the other, you just have to follow ethical guidelines," or "I guess it just depends on the situation," show a real lack in substantial responsibility toward a specific loyalty in the public relations field today.

This type of responsibility avoidance mainly took the form of two distinct classes of avoidance: depending on outside sources for answers on how to decide between conflicting loyalties and pretending that conflicting loyalties do not exist. The first type of responsibility avoidance shows a very clear example of non-virtuous loyalty for very obvious reasons. If an

outside source is dictating how to resolve issues of conflicting loyalties then it is chancy at best that they will present a solution that will align with your own personal values. How can they choose such a solution? They are not you, they do not have the experience with your values that you have. Furthermore, “Of the 600 adults polled last year [1997] by Franklin Covey, more respondents rated themselves as trustworthy than their co-workers. In other words, you can trust me, but I’m not sure I can trust you” (McCune, 1998). If a practitioner does not even trust the person next to them, then how is it ethical for 53% of respondents (according to Brennan’s [2006] study) ask that person for advice on how to resolve conflicting loyalties?

Of course, not all practitioners cited co-workers as their outside source of advice. Many, 19% according to Brennan (2006), turned to the PRSA Code of Ethics. This, perhaps, is even more problematic than asking a co-worker. As Marvin Oasky (1985) explained, “careful readers of the Code noted immediately that the articles on what could be called social responsibility had a glittering lack of precision, adherence to generally accepted standards of good taste, allowed many questionable practices to continue” (p. 2).

The PRSA Code of Ethics, although noble and necessary, provides very little guidance on how to proceed when conflicts of loyalty arise. In fact, when it comes down to it, the code of ethics is startlingly vague. Practitioners who turn to the code of ethics by itself without consulting their own ethics first is in reality giving themselves a *carte blanc* to do whatever it is that they want. The public relations practitioner is a master of making black seem white when they want, doing so is highly discouraged, but no one doubts that the practitioner has the skills needed to justify nearly anything in the name of ‘good taste’. As Oasky (1985) explained, “what some call the Code’s “cop-out”, that germ ‘generally accepted standards,’ is clearly not good enough. We may look for truth in the public opinion, but it is rarely there.” (p. 6)

By asking another person or the code of ethics to decide between conflicting loyalties for them, the practitioner is becoming what Calhoun (1998) termed a “drone.” As discussed earlier, the drone behavior has no moral worth because the person is not actively taking part in his or her own choices. Drone behavior, which creates submissive, non-questioning employees, is inherently non-virtuous in nature. According to Stoker (2005),

The submissive employees transform loyalty into a vice because they no longer choose their loyalties. They become pawns, having their loyalties chosen for them. According to Josiah Royce (1971), an ethical loyalty must be freely chosen or it will undermine the validity of all loyalty. (p. 7)

This lack of actively taking responsibility for conflicting loyalties has created many problems for the public relations industry as a whole. According to Plaisance (2000), “the ability – and failure – of the American press to make itself accountable for its behavior has affected both the shape of its existence today and public acceptance and use of it” (p. 259). This statement is perhaps more true for the public relations practitioner than the journalist as the public relations industry as a whole has suffered under the negative stereotypes arising from the lack of real responsibility for conflicting loyalties almost from the inception of the industry. If practitioners continue to act according to this non-virtuous form of loyalty, the likelihood of changing this stereotype in the near future is very slim.

More troubling than this drone-like behavior discovered through research is the fact that the research also showed that practitioners identify their personally held values as those most important to them. If those values are the most important to them, but they are not being expressed in their actions, the only logical assumption to be made is that the practitioner is subverting their identity to a larger identity, be that the company or the general public. Either

way, this shows an inauthentic existence for the practitioner which is inherently non-virtuous in nature.

In 1972 a study was conducted to determine the nature of personal ethics in public relations. Twenty years later in 1992 the study was re-conducted to see how personal ethics had changed in the public relations industry over time. Interestingly enough, “all groups agree that personal ethics ultimately govern the quality of professional performance.” (Newsom et al., 1992, p. 40). The question then arises, if the practitioner knows that personal ethics (and by extension personal loyalties) ultimately “govern the quality of professional performance,” why do they not act in accordance to those personal ideals?

One reason for this lack of consistency between belief and action is proposed by Stoker (2005) when he writes, “Thus, employees avoiding work or sabotaging the operation would be considered disloyal because they would undermine the loyalty of others” (p. 8). However, Stoker is quick to point out that this action due to fear of being seen as disloyal, “also fails Royce’s loyalty-to-loyalty test because it releases customers and employees from any moral obligation to try to correct problems. Silent suffering is not loyalty but submission.” (p. 8). This type of submission to another’s loyalty is non-virtuous for many reasons. First, by acting against their own personal values and ideals individuals are, in effect, denying who they are. This leads to an inauthentic existence where the person believes one thing but acts another way. Obviously, such a contradiction is non-virtuous in nature. As Calhoun (1998) stated, “we see no rational grounds for believing that other people are better equipped to discover moral truths than we are.” (7).

The question here remains, if people are so willing to blindly submit their loyalties to the company are their true loyalties really what they say they are or are they simply ashamed of their true loyalties and unwilling to face those. For example, if as one of the participants stated, their personal loyalties were against such practices as selling cigarettes and breast implants, but they only left the company that represented such industries when “a better opportunity came along,” can they really say their deepest loyalties were against such things? Here the answer is both yes and no. On the deepest level it is clear that the practitioner is being honest, and he is personally against such ideals. However, another deep loyalty that is evident is the more aesthetic value of job security and monetary value. If he did not have this personal value there would be no reason for him to remain with the company any longer. The fact that he does not admit this value and instead tries to hide his allegiance to the aesthetic value by retroactively explaining his disgust at the company’s actions does not deny the fact that at the time he acted in accordance with this second-level loyalty, even though it was contrary to his deepest and most personal loyalty. This violation of his most deeply-held loyalty has rendered the practitioner’s actions non-virtuous even though in the end he did eventually act in accordance with his loyalties.

Like responsibility avoidance, submission of self to a larger, non-personal loyalty, has also created many long standing problems in the public relations field. As Newsom et al. (1993) stated,

If professionals submerge their own ethical values on behalf of the client, this may result in personal and organizational mind sets that ‘anything goes’. This produces breeches of ethical behavior that usually invite additional problems. This is hardly the mark of a true professional in whom management has enough confidence to seek policy guidance and implementation. (p. 39).

This analysis is very telling and can certainly be taken on yet another level. If it is true (and there’s no reason to believe that it is not) that it is the submergence of ones personal ethics to another’s is “hardly the mark of a true professional,” it is equally true that such submergence is

hardly the mark of a rationally thinking, ethically acting human being. Most intelligent animals can be taught tricks and told how to act. What differentiates humans from animals is that we have the ability to question those orders and even act against them if we feel that our those orders are incorrect. The failure to do so represents a denial of that which makes us human and so is intrinsically non-virtuous.

### Model

In order to give the practitioner a way to ethically and more easily decide between conflicting loyalties, a model was created based on literature and interviews. This model is designed with similar components to the Potter's Box for ethical decision making and if used correctly will give the practitioner a framework for working through conflicting loyalties. The end product of the model is not necessarily to automatically tell the practitioner what to do, but rather to help the practitioner identify their own personal values and how those values tie in to the situation in order to help the practitioner act in accordance with those values.

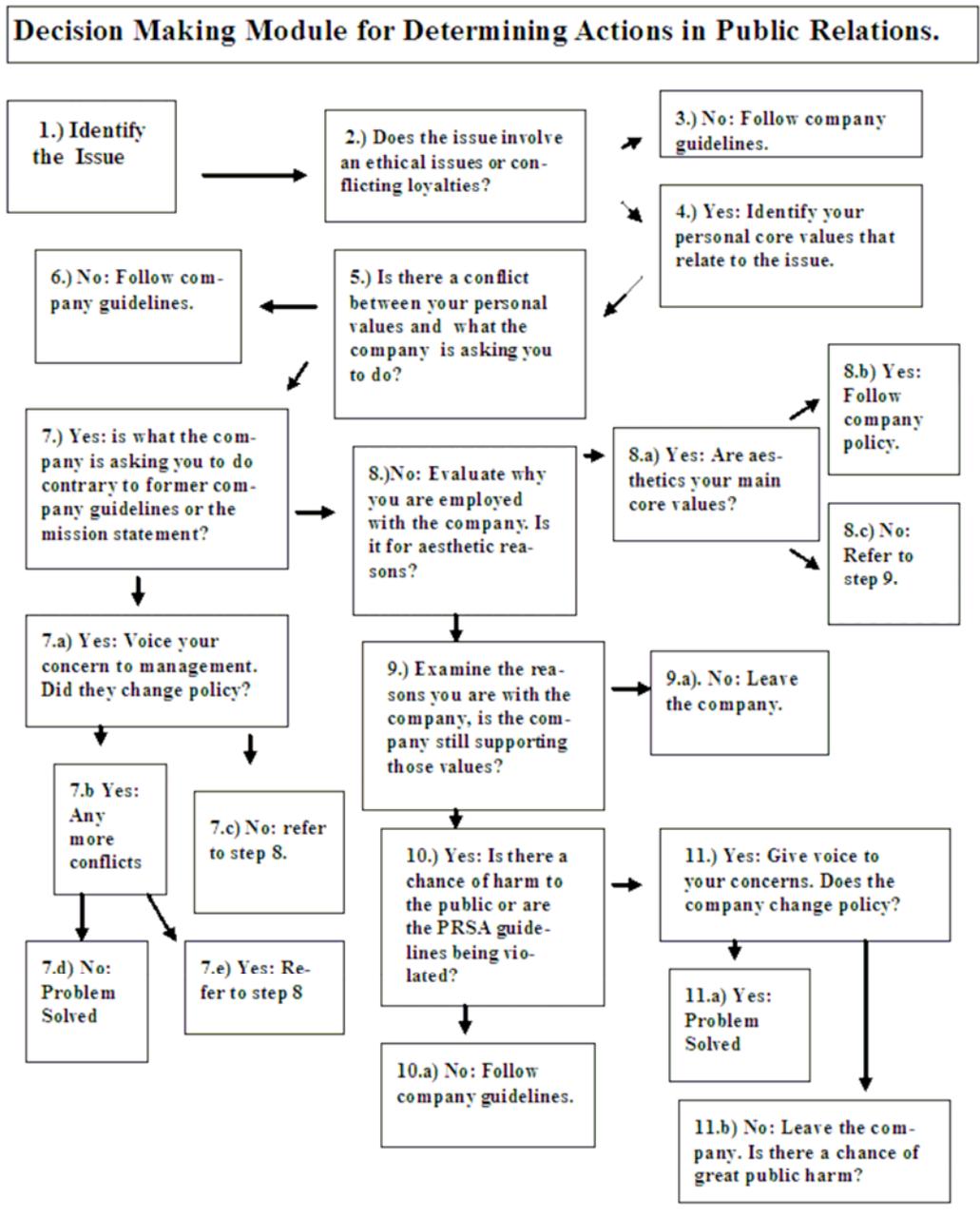
One important thing to note when using this model is that its aim is to lead the practitioner toward actions that align with their own personal values. If the practitioner's values are unethical or aesthetically based then that is where the model will lead them to act.

The main premises of the following model can be summed up in the following heuristics for action:

- **Identify:** What issues are involved? What is the loyalty conflict?
- **Internalize:** What are the personal ideals or ethics involved in the issue?
- **Prioritize:** Which loyalty is a reflection of your values?
- **Publicize:** Make public your personal values that determine your loyalties?
- **Align:** Do your broader loyalties reflect your personal loyalties? Are your values and loyalties congruent?

### Conclusion

After completing research on the topic of loyalty in public relations, it has become immediately clear that authentic loyalty is not social responsibility and it is not the avoidance of personal responsibility in favor of loyalty to society's norms. Rather, truly virtuous and authentic loyalty is only that loyalty which has its roots in the practitioners own personal values.



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## Comparisons of Perceptions by International and Domestic Students in the Field of Public Relations

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Few would question the assertion that we are living in an ever-changing world. Some would even suggest that the world in which we live is changing at “Trekian” warp speed. While such change is a given, neither the direction and nature of such changes nor our ability to adapt to them is that obvious.

As many have observed, a good part of the global village predicted over 40 years ago in the visionary work of media scholar and philosopher Marshall McLuhan is here (McLuhan, 1964). Further exploration of this “village” is provided by McLuhan and Powers in the last decade (McLuhan and Powers, 1992). The authors suggest that differing worldviews are “slamming into each other at the speed of light,” demanding a drive toward simultaneous understanding.

Exacerbating this phenomenon of differing worldviews is the sheer amount of information to which we are and will be exposed. It is overwhelming:

The sum total of humankind’s knowledge doubled from 1750-1900. It doubled again from 1960-1965. It has been estimated that the sum total of humankind’s knowledge has double once every 5 years since...It has been further projected that by the year 2020, knowledge will double every 73 days. (Appleberry, 1992)

Few individuals and no viable profession can ignore such developments. What must be done, and, hopefully will be done, is taking steps to understanding the nature of such changes. In other words, if we are to adapt to changes, we first ascertain what comprises such changes. This paper is a start in that direction. It provides a framework for assessing the issues and the positions on such issues as expressed by developing public relations practitioners in various parts of the world of 2007.

### International Public Relations

John Wiley Hill (Hill & Knowlton) started the first “international public relations” office in the middle 1950’s. His goal was to set up an international office *in the United States* to deal with public relations issues that affect the US and other countries. The field of public relations in Hill’s time was, admittedly, much different than it is at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

There are now estimated to be some 9000 public relations firms in the United States and approximately 250,000 practitioners in this country. And, it is estimated, there are at least that many more in the rest of the world. Edelman, recognized as the world’s largest *independent* public relations firm, now has 2,200 employees and 46 offices worldwide. Fleishman-Hilliard reports 80 offices while Porter-Novelli lists over 100 offices globally in 60 different countries (PR Week, August 7, 2006, pp. 55, 57, 69). Financially, a corresponding picture has consistently emerged with worldwide revenues in the billions.

Considerable research and writing have been produced emphasizing concern with public relations practices in the international realm (Stone, 1994; Taylor and Kent, 1999; Vasquez and Taylor, 1999; Culbertson and Chin, 1996; Botan, 1992; Epley, 1992; Grunig and White, 1992; Hiebert, 1992; Sharpe, 1992; Sriramesh, 1992; Wouters, 1991). More specific to present concerns, research has also been conducted concerning the education of practitioners for a role in

the unfolding dynamic of international public relations (Lee, 2005; McCleneghan, 2005; Stone, 2005; Bardhan, 1999; Freitag, 1999; Wakefield, 1999; Kruckeberg, 1998; Culbertson and Chen, 1996; Pratt and Ogbondah, 1996; Sommerness and Beaman, 1994; Neff, 1989).

At the turn of this millennium, Newsom and her colleagues (2001) addressed international PR education as an emerging issue when they noted

Public relations now is being taught worldwide, and increasingly so in universities. Yet what is this subject? Is it an art, a craft, or a social science. Is it pre-professional training? Uncertainty about public relations as an area of study has had much to do with the many variations of its practice that have grown up in all sorts of ways throughout the world (p. 649).

These prominent educators in the discipline continue by observing that “there is still debate about what public relations people do” as well as expectations about their role and function” (p. 649). “Global education,” they continue, “for public relations is in its infancy, but demand for such education is critical” (p. 658). This demand comes from both students and practitioners, with many of the second group devoid of public relations training themselves. (A situation earlier noted by Newsom and Carrell, 1994).

Perhaps no place is the concern for this emerging international issue more poignantly expressed than in *The Professional Bond* (2006).

Many of these public relations programs have developed their own schools of thought concerning the role of public relations in society and how best to teach the practice of public relations. Educators have studied the development and placement of public relations programs within universities in different parts of the world. (Turk, ed., 2006, p. 38).

#### Perceptions, Attitudes, Behaviors

For most people, perception is reality. And, while such perceptions may not necessarily be shared by others, they most often dictate *our* actions. As Dr. Alan Gevins of EEG Systems Laboratory in San Francisco observes:

Perception isn't a passive process where stimuli come from the environment and impinge on our sensory organs. Perception is a very active, probing process. I have an idea in my mind . . . I look for information. I compare that information with the model in my mind. And then I take some action (Restak, 1988, p. 258).

With few exceptions, we behave in a manner that is consistent with our views or perceptions of “our world.” To do otherwise would cause dissonance (Festinger, 1957) or psychological imbalance (Heider, 1958). Such a belief in this perception-behavior relationship is one of the underlying tenets of the present research. In our efforts to better understand the future of international public relations, we decided to begin “building this picture” via the responses of students in the discipline.

In part, support for the desirability of obtaining such data as this study is attempting to discover comes Newsom and her colleagues when they noted in their most recent text:

When taking this all into consideration, you need yet another piece of information when you are working with a PR “partner” in a global effort. You need to know what education and preparation that person had for the

job. In many parts of the world, on-the-job training is all the training people get, and the quality and depth of that training matters a great deal. . . . the person probably learned public relations as it is practiced in his or her country . . . This still is not the same as yours, because the public relations field still lacks and informational body of knowledge from which to frame education for public relations in any sort of international model (Newsom, et. al., 2007, pp. 346-47).

We are fully aware of the arguments that have surrounded the “attitude predicts behavior” paradigm (LaPiere, 1934; Saenger and Gilbert, 1950; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Schuman and Johnson, 1976; Kahle and Berman, 1979; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Hill, 1981; Jaccard and Becker, 1985; *ad infinitum*). We accept such limitations but have found no data nor trends in the data collected to this point that would suggest the invalidity of our instrument or the premises underlying its use in reasoning to the conclusions we advance.

### The Survey Instrument

After a consideration of the literature in international public relations education, a multiple-question survey instrument was developed (Appendix A). The major thrust of this questionnaire was to ascertain the position of learners in various educational settings in the world concerning some of the major issues with which public relations practitioners are faced daily. Such areas of concern related to personal perception of the professional nature of public relations, the perceived perceptions of others regarding the public relations profession, the general evaluation of the ethical nature of public relations practices, reactions to the need for ongoing professional development, an personal assessment of the public relations education in preparing for a career, and the relative optimism level of respondents concerning the public relations profession.

In addition, considerable demographic data was gathered concerning the age of respondents, their sex and current student status/grade level as well their “experience levels in public relations. Additional questions related to career preference(s) *within* the profession and the respondents reaction to a “variety of terms frequently used to describe the field” (i.e., public affairs, integrated marketing communications, public relations, corporate communications, etc.)

This instrument was prepared using WebSurveyor and sent to email addresses of students in both the United States and other countries of the world. More specifically, universities involved in this study we located in the United States, England, the United Arab Emirates, Germany, Spain and Italy. We fully expect that as we continue our efforts to collect data, other universities will “join” in our efforts to assess the perceptions of students from around the world concerning their chosen profession.

Following is precise listing of the questions and the response “categories” that were provided:

1. In general, I consider public relations to be:
 

Very Professional	43%
Professional	48%
Not Very Professional	1.2%
No Opinion	0%
  
2. In general, I believe people outside the field view public relations as:
 

Very Professional	1.2%
Professional	31.4%
Not Very Professional	66.3%
No Opinion	1.2%

3. In general, public relations contributes significant social value (Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements).
- |                |        |
|----------------|--------|
| Strongly Agree | 30.2%  |
| Agree          | 55.80% |
| Neutral        | 11.0%  |
| Disagree       | 2.0%   |
4. In general, public relations practitioners are ethical (Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements).
- |                |       |
|----------------|-------|
| Strongly Agree | 4.7%  |
| Agree          | 50.0% |
| Neutral        | 36.0% |
| Disagree       | 8.1%  |
5. In general, people outside the field believe most public relations practitioners are ethical. (Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements).
- |                   |       |
|-------------------|-------|
| Strongly Agree    | 0.0%  |
| Agree             | 8.1%  |
| Neutral           | 24.4% |
| Disagree          | 53.5% |
| Strongly Disagree | 11.6% |
6. Compromising ethical standards is sometimes necessary to do what is expected in public relations (Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements).
- |                   |       |
|-------------------|-------|
| Strongly Agree    | 2.3%  |
| Agree             | 24.4% |
| Neutral           | 10.5% |
| Disagree          | 30.2% |
| Strongly Disagree | 31.4% |
7. How troubled are you by the variety of terms frequently used to describe the field, for example, public relations, corporate communications, public affairs, public information, publicity?
- |                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| Very Troubled       | 2.4%  |
| Somewhat Troubled   | 42.9% |
| Not At All Troubled | 50.0% |
| No Opinion          | 4.8%  |
8. Do you plan to work in public relations after you graduate?
- |           |       |
|-----------|-------|
| Yes       | 75.3% |
| No        | 9.4%  |
| Uncertain | 15.3% |
9. If you answered "yes" to the question above, what is your first preference for a career?
- |                         |       |
|-------------------------|-------|
| Agency                  | 43.8% |
| Corporation             | 37.5% |
| Non-Profit Organization | 12.5% |
| Government              | 6.3%  |
| Other                   | 0.0%  |
10. How optimistic are you about a career in public relations?
- |                           |       |
|---------------------------|-------|
| Very Optimistic           | 37.7% |
| Optimistic                | 50.6% |
| Not At All Optimistic     | 10.4% |
| No Opinion/Not Applicable | 0.0%  |
11. How important do you believe ongoing professional development and training will be in your public relations career?
- |                           |       |
|---------------------------|-------|
| Very Important            | 66.2% |
| Important                 | 33.8% |
| Not At All Important      | 0.0%  |
| No Opinion/Not Applicable | 0.0%  |
12. How valuable do you feel your public relations education has been in preparing you for a career?
- |               |       |
|---------------|-------|
| Very Valuable | 37.7% |
| Valuable      | 54.5% |

	Not At All Valuable	7.8%
	No Opinion/Not Applicable	0.0%
13. What is your current student status/grade level?		
	Freshman/First-Year Undergraduate	0.0%
	Sophomore/Second-Year Undergraduate	3.9%
	Junior/Third-Year Undergraduate	11.7%
	Senior/Fourth-Year Undergraduate	59.7%
	Graduate Student	24.7%
	Other	0.0%
14. What is your experience in public relations?		
	None	100.0%
	Internship(s)	
	Part-Time Job	
	Full-Time Job	
	Other (Please Specify Below)	
15. What is your sex?		
	Male	16.7%
	Female	83.3%
16. What is your age?		
	10-19	0.0%
	20-29	98.8%
	30-39	1.2%

### Discussion/Implications

Nearly two decades ago it was argued the field of public relations should carefully examine its presuppositions to understand where the field currently is and, more important, where it is going (J. Grunig, 1989). And, while much has been accomplished since the time of that (and similar) observation(s), the rapidity with which the public relations profession, albeit the entire world, is changing has served to exacerbate this need for understanding. We were told just over 10 years ago that there were few offerings of university courses offering international public relations courses across the United States, despite global trends underlining increased internationalization (Sommerness and Beaman, Spring, 1994, p. 89). courses.

The lack of internship experience in foreign settings is somewhat distressing but not surprising. In addition, practitioners and educators might well be concerned with the perception(s) of image that learners feel the general public has of our profession. Additional concern should be given to the somewhat alarming attitude concerning ethics and the “need” to compromise standards in order to achieve goals or objectives in professional applications.

This project is an attempt to start on the “ground floor” in assessing the perceptions of those studying for entry into the profession of public relations as they “see” their chosen life’s work from a number of differing perspectives in addition to ascertaining how these respondents believe others see the profession.

Taylor’s (2001) observation seems highly appropriate as she noted:

The practice of public relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century presents both opportunities and challenges for practitioners. Increased education, cultural sensitivity, and increased professionalism are the best responses to these challenges. We still have a lot to learn about international public relations. Because public relations has the ability to build relationships, however, it no doubt will serve as an important tool for organizations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Taylor, 2001, p. 637).

Public relations professionals—both educators and practitioners—as well as students of public relations, have both an obligation and a responsibility to develop and refine the goals, principles, and materials inherent to understanding and successfully practicing public relations on an international level. Such practice should be replete not only with the knowledge necessary for success but the ethical and value-laden foundation that will move the public relations practice to even higher levels of professionalism in the eyes of an ever-expanding world.

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## **Participatory Change Communication and Motivation: An Action Research Case Model**

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This paper will report on the initial stages of a participatory change management model being used in a research project for the transport and logistics industry in Australia. We plan to use action research to determine, with full participation of all involved, what changes should be made, and how they should be managed. We aim to create a change model to motivate people and relieve problems affecting skills and reputation relevant to this predominantly blue-collar industry.

The overall aim of this research project is to investigate the communication systems and attitudes of transport workers and other key stakeholders of this industry in Australia. Through a consultative change process within this complex and dynamic environment, we intend to provide guidelines that will contribute to positive workplace conditions, safer road use, improved reputation, and healthier work-life balance for transport workers. This paper will report on the problem statement, theoretical background and methodology of this research as a work in progress. ( Because of the bureaucratic systems at work in all government related projects, as well as the distance between researchers involved, this project has had a slow start. We have had difficulties getting funds transferred into accounts needed to get our initial focus groups going, and therefore have only completed one focus group, with two others being cancelled at the last minute. For that reason we have no results to report as yet, but hope to report those as soon as possible.)

The research project is the set off of a grant in partnership with the New South Wales Road Transport Association (NSWRTA). The grant was awarded by WorkCover New South Wales. WorkCover promotes workplace health and safety, and provides a workers compensation system for the employers and workers of New South Wales. WorkCover NSW is a statutory authority within the Minister for Commerce's portfolio. The goal of the research, in terms of the grant, is to examine issues surrounding the changing environment of the Australian transport industry and identify the needs of the industry to manage these changes specifically to the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Long Distance Truck Driver Fatigue) Regulation 2005. However, the grant is being extended to further research related to other areas of road transport communication and change by an internal grant through the University of Technology, Sydney.

The NSWRTA, the industry partner in this research project, has been continuously operating since 1890 and is a not-for-profit Incorporated Association. Its primary role in supporting its member companies (Transport and Logistics Companies) include all facets of their operations: focusing on industrial relations, general business advice, insurance, training and community/government relations. The NSWRTA has an elected council and specialist sub-committees for particular issues regarding transport workers. They also provide training in all relevant areas.

The NSWRTA is the premier state and federal transport association, affiliated with the Australian Trucking Association and also have state and federal government participation. The

association has over 1000 members in New South Wales, as well as affiliated national membership of over 7000 companies. Their three key roles are to represent industry in industrial relations issues including awards, government lobbying, and industry training including skills upgrading. Through the NSWRTA there is constant dialogue with unions, such as the Transport Workers Union (TWU). The reliance on industrial relations has created a situation where there is no strong culture within the industry to resolve workplace problems without advocacy (provided by NSWRTA), or an independent umpire to guide the participants and assist in decision making.

## **BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Transport and logistics underpins every industry and forms the basis of our everyday lives. The transport industry employs over 422,000 people, or 4.35 percent of employed Australians. It also contributes about 5 percent of Australia's Gross Domestic Product (ANTA, 2004). The predominantly male workforce of the industry is considered an ageing workforce compared to other industries – the average age is 45 years - and this industry has a workforce with lower levels of educational qualifications compared to other industries.

The transport and logistics industry has been and continues to go through major reforms with the impact of new technologies, increased competition, customer demands, globalisation (ANTA, 2004) and the workplace legislation in Australia. Major political changes, economic changes such as increases in fuel prices, environmental demands, and workforce issues are creating a chaotic and complex transport and logistics environment. The industry is furthermore facing skills shortages because of problems such as the image and reputation of the industry and the lack of clear career paths (NCVER, 2002). This is the result of poor relationships with its major stakeholders because of issues such as impact on traffic flow, accidents, image of transport workers, poor safety procedures and impact on the environment. The knowledge and experience base of the ageing workforce is also not being transferred relating to loss of significant skills and corporate memory. An Industry Skills Report by the Transport and Logistics Industry Skills Council (ANTA, 2004) has identified that these drivers of change require management skills at all levels, and more particularly change management skills, to keep up with increase in demand and improved knowledge management systems. Skill development will be required in new technologies, supply chain management, customer service and relationship management skills, as well as higher order thinking skills.

Because of the vast travelling expanses in Australia issues such as exhaustion, sleeping, eating and exercise habits are furthermore crucial to road safety. The distances also have an influence on family patterns, which influences life style. These issues are of concern to the morale in the industry, but more importantly they also have a direct influence on the relationships of the road transport workers and the public. The reputation of the industry is directly related to these issues.

The biggest concern regarding the need for change in the transport and logistics industry is the strategic direction and methodologies that should be used to transform the blue-collar workforce and improve the reputation of the industry. Of particular concern are the communication strategies to be employed in order to change and transfer the knowledge base of the industry. Although difficulties in recruitment and retention of skilled labour in the road freight transport industry is in part a product of the cyclical nature of the industry, skill shortages seem to be more a result of the structure of the industry, which has a significant proportion of owner operators (NCVER, 2002).

It seems that together with the need to upgrade the skills of older workers in the transport industry, and securing knowledge transfer from these experienced labourers, comes the added problem that these workers are often self employed owner operators. They do not fit into the traditional organisational structure that has built-in control mechanisms. This situation is not typical of the white collar change management model where top management makes the decisions regarding necessary changes, communicates it downward, regulates the process, and employees are managed to buy into the transformation process. In this case the 'employees' are blue collar, predominantly older males, with relatively lower levels of educational qualifications and more importantly, who mostly function independently from organisational control systems. This poses a new challenge in terms of blue collar change management approaches in this complex environment. In the past there was no real need to consider blue-collar workers as such because there was no shortage of blue-collared workers in the industry. However, a scarcity in the labour market has increased the need to consider the unskilled levels in industry. Firms that can find ways to increase loyalty amongst their blue-collar workers, and can encourage them to make changes will have a competitive advantage and reduce the costs of labour turnover.

Against this background this research project aims to work together with the NSWRTA in changing current poor relationships between relevant stakeholders through the facilitation of attitude change of transport workers toward important issues influencing road safety, workplace conditions, knowledge management, and healthier working environments. In order to do this we aim to create a participatory change model for blue collar workers through action research and bottom-up communication channels. The next section of this paper will explain how we plan on achieving this goal.

This project takes a uniquely multidisciplinary approach involving change management, relationship management, corporate communication management, semiotics, reputation management, and industry input. The contribution from the humanities and social sciences veers away from the traditional business management focus to change management, bringing a societal and human perspective into play. Using action research as a change management strategy for blue collar workers in an organisational environment as complex as the transport industry is highly innovative. This should ensure full participation of all stakeholders and will thus lead to improved relationships and positive change. Creating healthier relationships will have a positive impact on broader societal and economic level. We furthermore aim to contribute to change management theory and relationship building by filling a major gap in the industry concerning change management strategies for blue-collar workers.

Because of the bureaucratic systems at work in all government related projects, as well as the distance between researchers involved, this project has had a slow start. We have had difficulties getting funds transferred into accounts needed to get our initial focus groups going, and therefore have only completed one focus group, with two others being cancelled at the last minute. For that reason we have no results to report as yet, but aim to report those as soon as possible.

## **PARTICIPATION AND RELATIONS BUILDING IN CHANGE MANAGEMENT**

This project will employ participative approaches to change management and research. Participative approaches recognise that highly dynamic environments demand methods that are flexible to achieve maximum fit with the ever altering environment. Participative approaches have been developed out of a basic disbelief in the effectiveness of the planned change approaches (Burnes, 1996) in dealing with unpredictable environments organizations are faced

with (Sherman & Schultz, 1998:22), such as is the case within the transport industry. These emergent approaches to change are more participative, culture-focused, reliant on dialogue, and they develop organizational capabilities (Beer & Nohria, 2000: 4).

Research (Holtzhausen, 2001; Ströh, 2007) has shown that a positive relationship between the organization and its stakeholder groups will lead to greater communication effects and a greater willingness to change. When a problem is recognized (eg. issues such as new workplace legislation), and constraints are low in terms of communication, a group feels connected to a situation and feel that something should be done about the issue. The likelihood of processing and actively seeking information on those issues increase. Furthermore, the communication effects will be strong and people will change their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours (Grünig & Repper, 1992). An assumption can further be made that this stakeholder group will also have a positive relationship with the organization.

There is also the viewpoint that participatory change management approaches can waste critical resources and can also take a limited view of what extent of participation is necessary (Kerber & Buono, 2005). Top down and planned change efforts often fail because stakeholders get alienated from the decision making process. Ongoing change cultures, where constant reflection and learning guide the change process, can lead to innovative solutions and continuous improvement. Kerber and Buono warn that this could lead to chaos and frustration. They suggest that in organizations where there is low complexity with clear and simplified business processes, a planned change approach is most suitable. However, when complexity increases together with high uncertainty in the organization, more iterative methods are required where the capabilities and implicit knowledge of all employees needs to be tapped. Experimentation helps to achieve the best overall solutions and outcomes. Other factors that play into the chosen change strategy is the urgency needed to change, as well as the capacity to change. It seems thus that a more contingent approach to change methodologies could be suggested taking into consideration various characteristics of the organization and the environment at a given time (Beer & Nohria, 2000; Kerber & Buono, 2005; Ströh & Jaatinen, 2001). In this specific case we will be working with a highly complex environment where business processes are not very clear, and people are working in a fast changing environment. They are also not highly qualified workers, and have not been trained in decision-making and leadership. If they can be equipped with the skills and knowledge to reflect and learn, their change capabilities will be improved, whilst at the same time their trust and power equality will be increased. Transparency and openness, together with involvement create individuals with courage and ability to change (Näslund, Olsson, & Karlsson, 2006). We argue that if employees can be empowered to learn through participation, and in that way gain the confidence to be engaged in decision-making, the overall relationships will improve and change will be facilitated.

The quality of relationships can be increased by facilitating participation and communication in all directions and overcoming barriers to knowledge-sharing (Marlow & O'Connor Wilson, 1997: 68). Building relationships will provide a strong basis to manage any crisis from, as well as assist in change management processes. Strong relationships will gear the organization for any possible scenario it may be faced with. This will lead to a higher morale and positive climate and culture in the organization. Participation will encourage a more ethical, energetic and empowering process (Dunphy, 2000). Empowering employees to contribute and “granting workers new responsibilities and respect can benefit the entire organization” (Shaw, 1999, p. 262). Productivity is also consistently higher in organizations where there is an organized program for employee participation.

Participation of employees in decision-making and in driving change processes should be facilitated by providing channels to transmit, analyse, and discuss change issues. The organization should also facilitate interactions that respect people and build their confidence and trust (Burnes, 1996);(Weick, 2000). This respectful discourse has an intrinsic power for change. If transport workers are approached with respect and trust it will increase their confidence and build a positive reputation from within.

Organisations process information because they need to effectively manage complexity and uncertainty (Marlow & O'Connor Wilson, 1997; Zaremba, 2006). In order to be effective organisations also need to identify what issues are of concern, what people's needs are concerning those issues, and also what media options are available in order to communicate about those issues. In order to effectively manage knowledge that will lead to change all the communication systems and applications need to be understood (Earl, 1997). The appropriate change methodology should also be followed (Kerber & Buono, 2005).

Because of the need for knowledge transfer, the highly complex environment within which the transport industry functions, and the large amount of stakeholders involved, we have concluded that participatory action research might be the best model and change methodology to follow. Through this research design we argue that transport workers will be involved in a reflective process where they learn skills to fully participate and lead their own change process. This empowerment will have long term effects of a more positive change culture and self managed responsibility.

## **ACTION RESEARCH**

There is a big difference between participatory research as a mean, and as an end. The difference lies in the extent of true participation in the research process (Deetz, 1995). For true participation to take place all decision-making processes should be codetermined by all being influenced and by a decision outcome. The only way for decision outcomes to be ethical and moral is by equable participation (Davenport, 1999). Answers lie in ongoing negotiation processes, not in the outcome of negotiations, that is, especially if the negotiation processes are governed by strategy put together by powerful dominant groups.

Action researchers aim to use participatory methodologies to nurture relationships between organisations and their internal and external publics (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). When researching a change it can be done in such a way that the research process in itself becomes a change methodology (Näslund et al., 2006). Through action research the industry benefits from theory, but theory also builds on the experience from industry. Another important requirement is that action research processes provides goal attainment for the participating organization, but at the same time it also provides a scientific goal for the researchers to create a model for change that can be applied to other organizations (Näslund et al., 2006).

Participatory action research methodologies are well suited to further research within complex environments such in the transport and logistics industry. Participatory action research (PAR) requires two steps: the first is participative action and the second involves critical reflection (Näslund et al., 2006). The role of the researcher is to both actively contributes to the change process, but also constantly evaluates the change process through reflection. This becomes a cycle of planning and action that lead to reflection, analysis and evaluation, which in turn leads to further planning and implementation (Ballantyne, 2004). The most important function of the researcher is to facilitate the process and to constantly step back to reflect and analyze.

PAR involves the participants to the extent that these participants help to set the research agenda, participate in data gathering and processing, and share in decisions about the use of outcomes (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). In other words, participants share ownership of the total research process. PAR, furthermore, has a strong emphasis on power sharing between the researcher and the researched. It is a valuable tool in creating change while studying it. As Babbie & Mouton (2001) point out, “PAR aims towards social change or transformation” (p.64), that is, where actions towards the upliftment and empowerment of people are the outcomes.

Mediating discourse is the idea of democratic dialogue between theory and practice (Gustavsen, 2006). Senge and Scharmer (2006) described the process of action research as fostering relationships as embedding change processes within larger communities of practitioners, consultants and researchers creating settings for collective reflection. This project will provide a learning organisation where the combination of the researchers can, together with the collaborating organisation, become involved in the change process through action procedure (creating dialogue through focus groups and interviews) and reflective processes (through discourse analysis and feedback). Throughout the action research process various communication spaces will be analysed through discourse analysis. This will be the key method of reflection to feed back into the dialogue and discussions surrounding the issues involved. Reflective stages of action research are typically used to analyse discourses and gain feedback from participants. Gustavsen (2006) refers to mediating discourse and explains that communication action is the point between theory and practice. Results from the discourse analysis are then used as inputs into further discussions about the issues involved. Organisations can maintain strong relationships with stakeholders by conducting action research with full participation of all involved, constantly sharing open and honest information, and getting involved in discussions and discourse regarding shared interests. Participative research provides a deeper understanding of contexts and behaviour.

The focus of this research project will thus be relationship processes, that is, of engagement and enrichment through constant dialogue, debate and discourse. Organizations can maintain strong relationships with stakeholders by conducting action research with full participation of all involved, constantly sharing open and honest information, and getting involved in discussions and discourse regarding shared interests. Participative research provides a deeper understanding of contexts and behaviour.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this research study we will initialise the project by doing a pre-study survey to determine the current state of affairs in the industry regarding communication systems and attitudes of transport employees. This survey will start off with feedback from 8-10 pre-study focus groups and 20-30 interviews with key opinion leaders in the transport community. The interviews and focus groups will be conducted on all levels in the organisation. These results will feed into a survey questionnaire.

We will use an online based survey within selected transport organisations contacted through their membership to the Road Transport Association. A broad representative random sample of 8000 (population of an estimated 40000 road transport industry employees) from all levels and layers of employment, including contractors and subcontractors will be drawn. An outcome of 1000 realised responses will be the target. The survey will consist of semantic differential and Likert type attitude items covering issues such as road safety, environmental

awareness, life-work balance, and knowledge transfer. The results may provide an initial general starting point for discussion, but will evolve and change as the study progresses.

The second phase of the research project will involve participatory action research, which will commence with focus group interviews to further guide research design and methodology. This is a time intense process, but not cost intense process, as facilities are supplied by the partner institution and cost relates to time of the chief investigators. Five focus groups with representatives from the operational level, supervisory level, and managerial level each, totalling 15 focus groups, will be used to commence the process. These groups will provide the structure and methods to be used for the rest of the program and the ripple effect of their involvement will expectantly have a greater effect to wider concern. In this way the dialogue regarding issues in the work environment will spread further to all concerned and create awareness of the issues as well as of the process. As people get more involved, they will gather more information, and healthy relationships between employees and organisations should result in changes in attitudes.

In depth interviews with opinion leaders and key groups/individuals in the industry will also be used to gather information and initiate the discussion process. Together with the participants the researchers will determine the issues of concern, the research methodologies that will be relevant to use, as well as the desired outcomes of the process. The researchers will facilitate this process. This will involve much more than merely participant observation, or a participant-as-observer role. The facilitation of interaction, debate, and discourse actually simultaneously becomes the research and change process (Näslund et al., 2006). The researchers and 'subjects' will be equal and active participants in the research process. Other channels that could be used in the gathering and creation of information and interaction could involve web logs, narrative observation, discourse analysis, graffiti wall analysis, or any other research methodologies that may provide information as to the attitudes and issues involved. The key is that these will be determined by all participants in the research process and should not be predetermined by the research team. The researchers will document, structure, call for feedback, and summarize the process. However, the researchers' roles will extend further to also listen, guide articulation, link themes, reflect and thus become part of the 'narrative' and 'conversation' of the organization. Discourse analysis will be conducted to create meaning from the process.

A post research survey will then be conducted to ascertain whether, or what kinds of changes have occurred on the same basis as the pre-survey. At first the organisations directly linked to people used in the action research groups will be surveyed to determine any changes in organisations directly involved in the action research process. Thereafter the larger population of member organisations will be surveyed by drawing a random and representative sample to ascertain whether a ripple effect of the action research process has occurred. The same instrument will be used as in the preliminary quantitative survey. This is thus a longitudinal comparison study ascertaining pre and post benchmarking, differences between managerial and operational level attitudes, and differences between member organisations in terms of Small-office-home-office (SOHO), Small-to-medium enterprises (SME) and Enterprises.

The most important contribution of this chosen participative action research process is that it should provide channels and processes that will continue to provide change within the industry long after the chief investigators have completed the formal part of the research study and withdrawn their participation. It thus becomes part of the culture and a way of continuous change management that shape the future of the industry (Sarantakos, 1998). This may provide a model for change management that can be transferred to similar industries on national and international level.

## LIMITATIONS

An important limitation of action research is that it is often criticized for not being generalizable and also for the lack of possibilities to construe causality (Näslund et al., 2006). This can be alleviated by replacing reliability and validity with authenticity and trustworthiness, and the cyclical research process of combined reflection on the action steps may provide this. By sharing our research methodology and inviting constant dialogue to improve our process, as well as publishing the results of our research, we believe that it has a heuristic function and can contribute to theory building. A further limitation to action research (Näslund et al., 2006) that we aim to cope with is that this form of research is often more consulting work than actual research. Through rigorous documentation by all the researchers involved, and constant reflection that feed into implementation steps, we hope to provide a more scientific approach to the process.

## NATIONAL BENEFIT FOR AUSTRALIA

The research process of this project is designed specifically to involve all stakeholders of the road transportation industry. This will facilitate long term changes that will improve the general infrastructure of Australia on a societal, economic and political level. We hope that this research will bring about attitude changes toward environmental concerns regarding transportation. This will encourage thinking about alternative transport technologies to reduce and capture greenhouse gas emissions.

A further aim of the research is to address regarding road safety and work-life balance that will contribute to healthier attitudes and working habits, translating into healthier communities and less conflict between the transport industry and the general public. The focus of the transport industry is changing from logistics and technical industry to a people industry and therefore a deeper understanding of the human and communication needs are crucial to the future of the transport industry. The transport industry needs to manage its mostly virtual workforce and this research project aims to provide guidelines that will contribute to achieving ongoing transformation and positive attitude change through active participation. Through this research we aim to establish a best practices change model through the research process with the full participation of all stakeholders involved. This can be used as a benchmark for the wider transport and logistics industry, as well as be applied to all blue collar industries, and on an international level.

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## Corporate Bloggers and the Commercial Speech Legal Bog

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The role and scope of Internet activity in public relations continues to grow as corporations and public relations (PR) firms enter the Internet Age and actively begin strategically using the Internet and blogs<sup>1</sup> to advocate positions. In October 2006 it was estimated that 8% of Fortune 500 companies had active public blogs hosted by company employees and directed at the company and its products or services.<sup>2</sup> At one such corporation, Sun Microsystems, more than 3,000 of its employees publish company-related blogs.<sup>3</sup> Corporate public relations interests, independent PR consultants, educational institutions teaching PR, and professional PR organizations have also launched a wide array of blogs.<sup>4</sup> This increased activity has the potential to increase the legal exposure of both public relations practitioners and corporations, particularly in the area of commercial free speech following the Supreme Court's non-decision in *Nike v. Kasky*.<sup>5</sup> This paper analyzes the potential legal problems associated with Internet blogging sponsored by or connected to a company.

There have been public relations missteps with blogs that have attracted considerable, and generally unfavorable, media attention. One of the public relations firms that has led the way in Internet-based strategies, including blogging, is Edelman Public Relations Worldwide. Unfortunately, Edelman also led the pack by becoming one of the first public relations firms formally criticized by the industry when it used undisclosed employees to blog for Wal-Mart, a major client. In its October 23, 2006, issue, *PRWeek* reported that even Edelman had acknowledged "mistakes" in the matter. The crux of the problem was the lack of disclosure – transparency – in a blog ([walmartingacrossamerica.com](http://walmartingacrossamerica.com)) funded by Working Families for Wal-Mart, which was established to portray the company favorably. *PRWeek* reported that Edelman CEO Richard Edelman conceded that though disclosure "is implicit in everything we do," his employees failed to "do so in this case."<sup>6</sup>

Three months later, *PRWeek* reported a second problem for Edelman. This time the agency had offered 90 computer-industry bloggers free high-end laptop computers loaded with Microsoft's Vista operating system. (Microsoft hired Edelman to lead the January 30, 2007, launch of Vista through Edelman's Me2Revolution office.) Although Edelman "covered all disclosure bases," the outcry in the blogosphere was fast and furious with bloggers criticizing the tactic as an attempt to influence bloggers to post positive reviews of the operating system.<sup>7</sup> Another corporate blogging problem occurred in December 2006 when it was revealed that a blog featuring posts from a supposedly cool hip-hop artist who desperately wanted a Sony PSP for Christmas was actually a viral marketing campaign undertaken on behalf of Sony Computer Entertainment America.<sup>8</sup> Even a city government has entered this ignominious picture when an official engaged in "flogging" or fake blogging. Peter Ragone, the director of communications for embattled San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom, recently admitted to using a false identity to attack the mayor's critics in local blogs.<sup>9</sup> There is also a burgeoning pay-to-blog niche business developing on the Web. For a fee, these online services will connect advertisers with bloggers who are paid to post reviews of the company's products or services, sometimes without notification of the paid nature of the post.<sup>10</sup>

None of the incidents has yet resulted in any known or significant legal action of precedential value.<sup>11</sup> The potential legal risks of corporate blogging for public relations purposes

are undeniable, however. In both of the Edelman instances, critics (be they specialist bloggers, the news media or consumers) concluded that a public relations entity (a firm in this case) employed a strategy by which readers would either (1) think that they were reading real, independent blogs written by actual shoppers visiting Wal-Mart (not Wal-Mart's employees or representatives) or (2) think that they were getting unbiased reviews of the Vista operating system. Leaving aside the interesting ethical issues involved with the sponsorship or support of blogs that do not disclose a potential bias, there is the question of potential legal liability. Is there some liability for deception or error – real or perceived? Is this corporate free speech? What are the lines that distinguish blogs for which the corporation or public relations firm may be responsible (legally as well as ethically) and those that are truly independent and for which the corporation or firm has no liability? Does the adoption of a corporate policy<sup>12</sup> on employee or agent blogging solve the problem or make it more complicated and potentially worse? These are questions with which the industry and courts are just beginning to grapple.

As two commentators recently observed, “[n]o laws specifically regulate ‘blogging,’ and there is virtually no case law to provide guidance.”<sup>13</sup> The law of agency and other settled legal principles can provide at least some of that missing guidance, however. This paper addresses these and related questions in four sections. First, the paper surveys the traditional law of agency or vicarious liability as a means of analyzing and assessing the liability of a business for blogs associated with it. The law of agency is a fundamental set of legal doctrines that will affect any legal analysis of a corporation's responsibility (i.e., liability) for a blog, particularly those the corporation or public relations firm may have assumed were independent. Second, the paper applies these agency law principles to establish a methodology for distinguishing and evaluating corporate blogs based on crucial factual distinctions. Any assessment of risk must account for meaningful factual distinctions separating one class of blogs from another. Third, the paper applies and reexamines this methodology in the specific context of defamation law and with specific attention to Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996.<sup>14</sup> Fourth, the paper examines the state of the constitutional regarding commercial speech – one of the reasons the content of these blogs matters and can be tricky for some businesses. The paper concludes by evaluating the apparent conflict between Section 230-based immunity in some cases and a more traditional agency-based analysis and by drawing some lessons for public relations practitioners as well as counsel and corporate clients.

### **The Law of Agency and Vicarious Liability for Corporate Blogs**

This section examines a fundamental legal doctrine, the law of agency or vicarious liability, that is common to any effort to determine when a corporation might be liable for the communications actually published by another person or entity. When a corporation directly publishes a blog, or anything else for that matter, it should come as no surprise that the corporation has liability for that which it publishes – as it would for any of its other forms of expression, from press releases to advertising.<sup>15</sup> When the corporation retains an outside public relations firm or consultant to prepare and publish its corporate blog, the only difference may be the availability of two potential litigation targets or defendants (the corporate client *and* the public relations firm) in the potential legal action by the private plaintiff or government regulator. The two parties may by contract shift the risk or liability between them through an indemnification clause, insurance or other device, but that is purely a matter between them. Generally, no agreement between them will affect the rights or suit filed by the aggrieved private

party or the action by the regulator, though it might affect who ultimately pays what to whom if there is litigation.

The interesting problems, and occasional surprises, come when the corporation, or public relations firm, did not itself publish the blog in question (or any other form of communication), but is held responsible for the publications and words of someone else under the law of agency or respondeat superior – often known as the *doctrine of vicarious liability*.<sup>16</sup> These doctrines determine when a principal (i.e., the corporate client) is liable for the acts of someone deemed to be the agent or legal servant of the principal. These doctrines have the practical impact of making the business responsible for the costs (e.g., liability for defamation, copyright infringement, and regulatory violations) associated with the business by first deciding who is acting as an agent for that business and then determining if that agent's acts should be ascribed to the business because the acts were within scope of the agency or employment.<sup>17</sup>

The three key elements of any agency relationship include (1) *consent by the principal and agent*, (2) *control by the principal of what the agent is doing*, and (3) *conduct by the agent on behalf of the principal within the scope of the relationship*.<sup>18</sup> Consent may be shown by an agreement or by mutual benefit to the two parties – though the benefit need not be the same or even monetary. Control – often described as the essence of the test for an agency relationship – can be shown by actual direction of the means of accomplishing the work or by the right to control, even if it was not exercised in a specific instance.<sup>19</sup> Conduct within the scope of employment or the agency relationship requires that the action be deemed part of the general purpose for which one is serving the principal (formerly known as the master in this master-servant relationship), though scope is often a broader term than one might assume.<sup>20</sup>

The dividing line between corporate liability and non-liability for any communication published by someone or some entity (i.e., a third party) is complicated by the fact that these so-called third parties may fall into one of three different categories that have different consequences for corporate liability.

1. The third party may be entirely unrelated, perhaps even unknown to the corporation. The corporation is least likely to be liable for this type of blogger, though as shown below one cannot necessarily assume there will never be any liability.

2. The third party may be an independent contractor of the corporation for which the corporation generally would not have liability beyond its own actions or uses of the results of the independent contractor's work. These relationships generally reduce corporate liability, but true independence of the contractor is often difficult to prove and thus this relationship with its legal shield is often elusive. Furthermore, if the end result for which the corporation contracted with the independent contractor is public relations or even blogs, then the likelihood of the corporation escaping liability for the blog or related public relations effort is further reduced, particularly if the blog or published statements bear the corporation's name.

3. The third party may be an inside person or entity (though not necessarily an insider in the technical sense used in the securities laws) such as an employee or agent acting within the scope of employment or the agency relationship with the corporation. It is the line dividing true independent contractors from agents or employees that is often most difficult for courts and businesses to discern. Although many tests exist for determining whether an entity is an independent contractor or an employee (or agent), the central issue is generally the degree of control or right to control by the principal or corporation. Control or right to control (even if not exercised) of the manner and means as well as the results of the work of the contractor is a hallmark of an employment or agency relationship for which the corporation will have liability.

Other factors are also important. For example, *performance of the work* (e.g., blog writing) *at the direction of the principal or corporation* (as opposed to work done without direction or supervision) *and work done with tools, office space, supplies or other resources provided by the corporation* would weigh in favor of holding the corporation responsible for the blog of an agent or employee. Bloggers not engaged in an occupation or business distinct from the business of the corporation would be more likely deemed the employees or agents of the corporation as well. In effect, these questions seek to determine who should have the responsibility for the costs associated with what business. In summary, the liability exception for independent contractors is meant to exclude from the liability of the corporation those risks that are not an integral part of its business.<sup>21</sup> And, while one might quibble that a false or otherwise problematic blog posting could never be part of an employee's or agent's scope of employment or agency with the corporation, the law is not so neat. *If the blog is deemed within the scope of the employment or agency, then even false, illegal or otherwise problematic postings by that employee or agent may be deemed within the scope of expected activity on behalf of the corporation and there will be potential liability.*

In practical terms, this means that corporations and public relations agencies must examine the totality of circumstances surrounding a particular blog to assess potential liability. For example, the following factors should be carefully analyzed before coming to a conclusion about liability.

1. Control or the right to control (e.g., edit, review, or hold) a blog may alone be sufficient to deem the blog a corporate blog under the law of agency.
2. Even if the corporation doesn't edit the blog, other facts may suggest corporate control and responsibility. Use of corporate computers, time, office space, servers, information, and other resources may all be cited to argue that the corporation or public relations firm is liable for the blog postings of an employee or agent, even if the corporation itself considered the blog an independent voice and not a corporate communication outlet.
3. The scope of this liability could certainly include retained public relations firms and their employees or agents.
4. The terms of any corporate policies and the facts of past practices may be relevant to the inquiry.
5. A likely inquiry will be the benefit to the corporation of a blog, even if the benefit was not solicited by the corporation.
6. The liability might extend beyond even employees and retained public relations contractors to others supported, and arguably controlled, by the corporation.
7. And, even the blog of the unrelated third party may under some circumstances lead to claims of corporate liability.

The easiest case should be the last one in the preceding paragraph – the unrelated third party (neither an employee nor an agent or contractor of the corporation) who blogs about the corporation or its business interests without using any corporate resources (e.g., servers). One might assume there is no “employment” or contractual agency relationship and, therefore, no control by the corporation. Typically, this will be true. The facts may warrant a closer examination, however, particularly with regard to the questions of consent and benefit. If one could show that corporation (through its executives or responsible agents) had no knowledge of a blog (unlikely as that may be in an age of electronic clipping services and search engines), then any argument for corporate liability for that blog would defy common sense and fundamental fairness. If the corporation in fact had knowledge of the blog, however, and the blog somehow

benefited the corporation, then other questions might arise. For example, did corporate representatives grant interviews, provide access and information, otherwise assist or feature the blog in its internal employee or external public relations materials? Is the corporation an advertiser on the blog? Positive answers to any or a combination of those questions might lead to the argument that the corporation is exercising sufficient *de facto* control over the blog or at least a sufficiently close relationship to lead to liability. The mere act of responding to interview requests by a blogger, without more evidence of a strong connection, would be a thin basis for corporate liability, however. Significant advertising purchases and special access to information coupled with a benefit to the corporation may, however, change the liability equation by making the third-party blogger seem more related than unrelated. In this situation, the independence of the blog from the corporation generally will be an important factor. Just as under the independent contractor tests and the vicarious liability doctrine courts will often look at the contractor to see if his or her business is real (e.g., it has significant other customers as well as its own investment, capital, employees and facilities), the courts will likely look at the evidence of independence for the blog. *Time* magazine, for example, and its blogs will almost certainly be viewed as independent of General Motors no matter how much advertising the automobile maker buys. The same cannot necessarily be said about much smaller publishers or bloggers for whom an advertising purchase from one company might mean the difference between continuing to function and folding. Even the apparently unrelated blog is, therefore, potentially a matter worthy of a careful evaluation.

If one cannot dismiss out-of-hand potential liability for even the unrelated third-party blog, then one must be particularly vigilant with blogs by related parties or insiders. Again, this is a fact-intensive inquiry and a question of degree. An employee blog may not be a risk if the employee publishes the blog on his or her own time and computer and for his or her own reasons (i.e., not because a manager or executive encouraged it or because it fits into his or her bonus goals or job description). In other words, the employee publishes the blog beyond corporate control and for his own benefit or amusement and not specifically for the benefit of the corporation, though the two may overlap. Related to these factual questions will be the question of the apparent authority or relationship of the blogger. If on the face of the blog, the reasonable reader might conclude the blogger is writing from position of corporate authority or knowledge and thus rely on the blog, then there may be potential liability if the corporation had knowledge of those circumstances and did nothing to counteract the appearance of authority.

Assuming the corporation is deemed to have knowledge of the employee's independent blog, one must then consider the consent and benefit (even if indirect) issues. One might argue that acquiescence by the corporation to the employee's blog is indicated by a failure to take any action against the employee, though frankly this would seem contrary to fundamental free expression values (though it might well be permissible) absent some direct consequence of the blog for the corporation.<sup>22</sup> The consequence could come in the form of a benefit (e.g., pumping the stock market or endorsing products) or even a detriment (e.g., criticism of customers or products). In either case, one key question will be the terms of any applicable corporate policy or code of conduct. Whether the very existence of such a policy or code increases or decreases the likelihood of corporate liability for the blog will depend on its terms and the particular factual scenario in which it is applied. A policy that requires or even merely permits prior review of a blog before publication or corporate post-publication removal of the blog would tend to support corporate liability because it would tend to indicate corporate control. Similarly, any policy

directing or attempting to direct the content of the blog would be ill advised if the corporation is not prepared to risk liability for control.

So, what should or might a policy include if the corporation wants to distance itself from the blog, reduce the risk of control-based liability, respect the expressive rights of its employees, and not act irresponsibly? Five policy considerations should be addressed to *reduce* (not eliminate) the likelihood of a finding of corporate responsibility:

1. A policy merely providing that if employees blog about the corporation, or anything else, they must do so on their own time and with their own resources and without suggesting any role or endorsement by the corporation would tend to support non-liability.

2. Policies stating employees must take specific and reasonable steps to inform readers they are not speaking on behalf of or with the endorsement of the corporation and are merely acting as individuals might also help in terms of distancing the corporation from the blog and its effects on readers. If the employee's connection to the corporation would be known to outsiders and possibly misleading, requiring a plain disclaimer might not only be appropriate, but prudent.

3. Policies stating that employees are expected in any blog, as they are in matters generally, to respect all applicable laws and the rights of others would seem to state a rather unobjectionable goal. One might even include specific examples, including, without limitation, intellectual property rights, reputational and privacy rights, the securities laws, antitrust laws and consumer protection laws.

4. The policy should refer the employee to the corporation's general personnel handbook or policies and state the corporation reserves the right to take appropriate action should an employee violate any of those policies.

5. The policy should emphatically state that the employee agrees that he or she is not blogging at the request of, under the direction or control of, or for the specific benefit and purpose of the corporation.

This leaves the question of corporate-supported, but not directed or controlled blogs. Is the corporate client always on the legal hook for these blogs because the bloggers use company computers, time, financial support or other resources? The simple answer is probably yes — but not necessarily. The essential question here is whether the corporation is better off staying out of the content-control business or should just jump into the matter and control the content to limit liability by presumably fixing the problems before they are published while accepting ultimate responsibility and liability. Again, corporate policies will be very relevant, as shown above in the context of unsupported employee-agent blogs. Here though, more expansive and detailed policies might be advisable — in part as a condition of allowing the employee-agent to use corporate resources. For example, the policies might demand more explicit disclaimers and content standards to protect the rights of others as well as the corporation. Training should be considered. Topics might even be limited to those not likely to generate damages or losses to third parties. However, corporations might take the approach of simply playing the role of access provider, while insisting the blogger in no manner associate the blog with the corporation, as a means of taking advantage of the protections possibly afforded under Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996 for Internet service providers who are not acting as publishers of content.<sup>23</sup> This gambit may have its risks, however, as shown below in the context of defamation law.

### Classification of Corporate-Reflective Blogs

Based on the law of agency as set forth above, corporate-reflective blogs can be generally classified as shown below in Table 1. Any chart or table purporting to delineate legal risks in any activity must of necessity be general. Legal risks are fact-sensitive and rarely fall neatly into boxes in a diagram, but generally range along a continuum from higher risks to lower risks. Nonetheless, aids such Table 1 can visually provide some guidance if used with those caveats in mind.

Corporate-reflective is used to describe these blogs because the distinction between them and all other blogs turns on their relationship to or content about or affecting a particular business or enterprise. These blogs raise issues of *corporate control and responsibility* because they may reflect, positively or negatively, upon the enterprise, its products or services, its competitors or its business environment and thus influence customers, shareholders, and the public generally. A corporate actor has varying degrees of potential legal exposure and responsibility for any blog that affects the business of the corporate actor and is somehow supported, operated or, perhaps, at least tolerated by a corporate actor directly or through its agents. Under the law, not all corporate-reflective blogs are necessarily the same when it comes to attaching liability or responsibility to the business about which the blog relates. The place to begin, therefore, is the classification of the various types of these blogs.

	Content: Directly Favorable to Corp.	Content: Indirectly Favorable to Corp.	Content: Directly Unfavorable to Corp.	Content: Indirectly Unfavorable to Corp.	Content: Unrelated to Corp.
Corporate Directed & Controlled Blog: Internet/Intranet	L LL	L LL	L LL	L LL	L LL
Corporate Supported, But Not Directed or Controlled: Internet/Intranet	VLL LL	VLL LL	VLL LL	VLL LL	LL PL
Corporate Employee or Agent w/o Corporate Support, but with Acquiescence: Internet/Intranet	PL PL	PL PL	PL PL	PL PL	UL PL
Known to Corp., but Unrelated Outsider (i.e., Third Party)	UL	UL	UL	UL	NL
Unknown to Corp. or Opposed by Corp. * (*Any liability for manner of Opposition is Beyond the Scope of this Paper.)	NL	NL	NL	NL	NL

Although questions of degree and emphasis suggest a continuum of blogs rather than neat, discrete boxes or groupings, corporate-reflective blogs may be classified generally according to two key criteria that form the axes of the graph shown in Table 1 above. First, there is the *corporate control, resource or sponsorship criterion*, which is divided into five levels, though three of those levels consist of two subcategories – one for Internet-based blogs and one for Intranet-based blogs. This is the “y” or vertical axis of Table 1. Second, there is *the nature of the content of the blog generally or of a particular statement or post in a blog*. This is the “x” or horizontal axis. Taken together these criteria classify blogs into 40 groupings (including the sub-categorization distinguishing between Internet-based blogs and Intranet-based blogs, which by definition can exist only when a corporate Intranet is available). These groupings have varying risk levels in terms of corporate liability (which would include the liability of a client corporation or business or the public relations firm depending on which is the subject or beneficiary of the blog).

On the high end, **corporate control**, we have the blogs that are written and posted by employees or agents (e.g., public relations firms) for the corporation and at its expense (within the scope of the employment, agency or contract and for payment of some form of compensation). The next level, **corporate support**, includes blogs written and posted by employees or agents without actual compensation or direction by the corporation, but with the support and use of corporate resources (e.g., information and information technology, time, encouragement and use of trademarks or other intellectual property of the corporation). This could include, for example, the hosting of the blog on a company server. On the third level, **corporate acquiescence**, are blogs that are neither directly nor indirectly supported by the corporation, but are known and at least tolerated by the corporation and operated by an employee or agent who may have access to corporate information and, more importantly, may be seen as authoritative by the reading public as a result of his or her connection to the corporation. On the fourth level are blogs **known** to and tolerated by the corporation, but operated by someone with no present connection to the corporation and without the use of corporate resources or support. Finally, there are the **unknown (to the corporation) or actively opposed** blogs (opposition could come, for example, in the form of legal action, non-cooperation, or public statements or other actions that distance the corporation from the blog). These five categories form the “y” axis of Table 1.

The second key criterion, or “x” axis in Table 1, is the content criterion. This looks at the information conveyed, or omitted, by the blog generally or by a particular post on the blog. First, there is content that is **directly positive** about the corporation, including, for example, its products or services, its financial stability, its future prospects, its environmental record, and its labor practices. Second, there is content that is **indirectly positive** in that it favorably reflects upon a matter of interest to the corporation without directly involving or mentioning the corporation. Third, there is content that is **directly unfavorable** to the corporation’s interests. Fourth, there is content that is **indirectly unfavorable** to the corporation or that reflects poorly on some matter of interest to the corporation. Fifth, there is content that is or appears **unrelated** to the corporation or its interests. Including negative and unrelated information might strike one as needless until one considers the potential exposure a corporation may have both for incorrect negative information that drives a stock price downward or defamation liability generally.<sup>24</sup>

Two related matters deserve consideration. One is the distinction between Internet-based and Intranet-based blogs. This is an important distinction that is really a matter of accessibility to the blog. One could argue that a limited-access, password-protected Intranet site intended only

for employees or some other limited class of users, should not subject the corporation to liability for broader public distribution or consumption of the information any more than the theft and subsequent publication of corporate secrets should subject the corporation to liability. This is perfectly logical in the abstract, *provided access is truly controlled and limited* — and the number of corporate agents, employees or insiders with access is not so large that secrecy is all but impossible. The distinction provides less protection, however, when the essence of the complaint against the corporation is that relevant information (perhaps negative information about financial performance, sales or test results) was shared with a select number of people, but denied to the public at large.<sup>25</sup> For example, DaimlerChrysler AG operates a by-invitation only blog used to brief journalists on the back-story about the company.<sup>26</sup> The distinction between internal and external blogs is further blurred with the recent introduction of software that allows blog owners to install variable access control to individual blog elements they publish.<sup>27</sup> This explains in part the need to consider both positive and negative content and the three subcategories shown in Table 1 for Corporate Directed & Controlled, Corporate Supported, and Corporate Employee/Agent blogs.

The other consideration is essentially the source of the content. However, *the source question is what this entire inquiry is designed to resolve and not a separate inquiry in itself*. Absent special circumstances, a corporation is responsible legally for statements of which it is the source – whether through the oral or written statements of or made through its agents (e.g., public relations personnel) or its employee-spokespeople.<sup>28</sup> The statements can be, for example, press releases, advertisements, annual reports or information provided to news reporters and others.<sup>29</sup> This is already black-letter law and not controversial. The inquiry here asks when blogs and other similar Internet-based forms of new communications are likely or unlikely to be attributed to the corporation or, in other words, viewed as communications for which the corporation will be deemed the source for liability purposes. The easiest to evaluate fall, as one would expect, on the two extremes of Table 1: the Corporate-Directed & Controlled (clear liability) and the Unknown & Unrelated Blogs (no liability). It is the definition of the different levels and the murky zone in between that is less than clear and highly dependent on the facts of each blog. It is also this murky zone that may prove problematic in assessing the applicability of certain statutory defenses as explained in the next section of the paper.

### **Corporate Blogging, Defamation Law and Section 230**

A key example of the substantive liability that can arise from any corporate communication, including a blog, is the law of defamation. This section applies the methodology of the previous section and the general agency law principles to this specific legal context and examines a specific statutory defense that may apply in some cases – not only in the context of defamation claims, but in any claim whatsoever if the corporation or public relations firm is deemed the equivalent of an interactive computer service provider and not the publisher of the information.

Although a thorough examination of the elements of and defenses to defamation claims is beyond the scope of this paper, a summary of the essence of these claims will be useful. To win a defamation claim, a plaintiff must, at a minimum, identify the defendant (i.e., the publisher) and establish that the defendant

1. published, uttered or disclosed to at least one third person
2. a false statement
3. of fact

4. concerning the plaintiff (an individual or business) that
5. defamed or, in other words, injured the reputation of the plaintiff
6. causing actual injury (i.e., losses) to the plaintiff
7. under circumstances that were not privileged or, in other words, protected by law and
8. that demonstrated the fault of the publisher defendant.<sup>30</sup>

Jurisdictional questions (i.e., what courts – state or federal, homegrown or foreign) are among the most interesting and vexing when dealing with Internet-based communications, but those are largely beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>31</sup>

The defamation element at issue in this inquiry is the basic or threshold element: **Identification of the publisher or defendant.** The methodology of section one and the basic laws of agency show this is a fact-sensitive inquiry. Defamatory content published on corporate directed and controlled blogs (that is, with corporate control and sponsorship) will generally trigger liability, at least for content authored by either a company employee or agent, such as a CEO or an employee of a contracted PR firm. Potential liability would likely extend to both blogs published on the Internet and on the company's Intranet, even though in the latter case actual publication may not be as widespread and thus may affect damages. If access to the Intranet is so narrow that one could argue that communication was not in fact published beyond the corporate actors protected by a legal privilege to communicate amongst themselves on matters of mutual interest related to the enterprise, then liability may possibly be avoided altogether.<sup>32</sup>

Liability for the corporation in the second classification—where the company deploys its resources but does not actually direct or control the blogs written by its employees or agents (corporate supported blogs)—presents a more complicated, and often closer, case. Nevertheless, making corporate resources available to facilitate business-related blogging efforts by employees or contracted agents is likely to trigger liability. As the amount of corporate support for such blogging efforts increases, the more likely the corporation will be deemed the publisher of the allegedly defamatory statements under agency law. Hosting business-related employee blogs on company-operated or controlled servers may alone be sufficient to trigger liability, but additional company actions would bolster the case for liability. For example, encouraging employees to set up blogs about the company, providing technical assistance, and publishing codes of conduct for those engaged in blogging activities would all point to the company as being responsible for the publication of allegedly defamatory material by an employee or agent. These factors, alone or in some combination, could suggest both some degree of corporate control as well as consent and benefit.

The third category of blogs, those published by an employee or agent but neither directly nor indirectly supported by the corporation (corporate acquiescence), presents a murkier situation. In this case, a number of factors are likely to be taken into consideration by the courts. Assuming that the company was at least aware that the private employee blog existed and discussed company matters, whether the company encouraged or merely acquiesced to the employee's blogging may be of some decisional significance. *Companies encouraging their employees or agents to establish private blogs in an attempt to reach out to business associates or the general public could well face liability.* Indeed, companies are increasingly subjecting employees to discipline or termination for content posted on private blogs. *Additionally, if the blogger would be seen by readers as an authoritative representative of the company (a determination that may be influenced by the employee's position in the corporate hierarchy or inferred by the blogger's access to corporate information reflected in the postings) liability*

*might attach*. While defamatory comments posted on a loading dock worker's private blog about a shipper's deficient on-time performance may not extend to the company, the same comments on a private blog by an executive vice-president for shipping operations could trigger primary publisher liability.

Liability is unlikely to attach in the last two classification categories. Defamatory comments published by a person unrelated to the company, even if the person and the private blog are known to the corporation, will not meet the publication requirement required in a libel action (known, but unrelated to the corporation). For example, the corporation could not be held responsible for the comments of a former employee made on that person's private blog. Of course, if a corporate representative responds to an interview request and is quoted, there may be liability depending on the comment, but that is liability flowing from the comment. Further, if the corporation so involved itself in this otherwise unrelated blog (perhaps, by granting special access, by promoting the blog, by purchasing significant advertising, or otherwise assisting the blogger), then the blog would appear less an unrelated blog and possibly more of a blog that is somehow connected to the corporation. The easiest case would be the fifth classification (unknown or opposed by the corporation), where the private blogger is unknown to the corporation and consequently any suggestion of liability would defy common sense.<sup>33</sup>

Another source of potential liability with corporate blogs, and one of the reasons for paying particular attention to each of the categories set forth above, is *the potentially defamatory comment posted by a third party responding to the blog*.<sup>34</sup> Many corporate blogs allow readers to post reply comments that are automatically published and appended to the appropriate thread on the blog. Because interactivity and linking are the hallmarks of blogging, the third-party post may also quickly replicate itself on other servers via RSS feeds or even cutting and pasting.<sup>35</sup> Even though a defamatory comment may be removed from a company's server (thereby blocking access via permalinks), the information may nevertheless remain prominent in the blogosphere.

In traditional defamation cases, publishers of defamatory comments by third parties are liable for damages, reflecting the old adage that tale bearers are as bad as tale makers.<sup>36</sup> For example, a newspaper's publication of defamatory quotations attributed to a third party does not absolve the paper from potential liability, even if the publication was in the form of a signed letter to the editor.<sup>37</sup> *A comparable situation exists, but only in part, for the blogosphere*. If a blog publisher affirmatively places the defamatory comments of a third party as part of his or her own posting, the publisher (and company at least in the circumstance where the blog had sufficient linkages to establish company involvement) would face potential liability. However, if the blog functions in such a manner that third-party readers may independently post their defamatory replies or comments on the blog, then there is a substantial argument under current federal law that the publisher (including the company) would likely escape liability.

This broad protection against primary publisher liability appears to apply even in cases where the blog owner exercises some editorial discretion by deciding to publish, withdraw, or make minor alterations in third-party content. This broad based immunity has evolved through judicial decisions interpreting section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996 (CDA).<sup>38</sup>

The U.S. Supreme Court struck down the indecency provisions of the CDA in *Reno v. ACLU*,<sup>39</sup> and heralded the Internet as "a wholly new medium of worldwide human communication,"<sup>40</sup> concluding that its prior decisions "provide no basis for qualifying the level of First Amendment scrutiny that should be applied to this medium."<sup>41</sup> However, left untouched

by the Court was section 230(c) of the law, the so-called “Good Samaritan” rules that protect publishers who screen and block offensive material on the World Wide Web. The law states that “No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider.”<sup>42</sup> It would appear that the owners of business blogs that provide for interactivity would fall under the law’s definition of an interactive computer service and, similar to ISPs, chat rooms, bulletin boards, listservs, and newsgroups, be immune from liability for third party content.<sup>43</sup> The key to the availability of this immunity will be keeping the corporation or PR firm from being deemed a publisher of the content – essentially the same analysis one would perform under the agency doctrine explained above.

A long line of case law has been generated by an expansive judicial interpretation of section 230 to Internet Service Providers (ISPs)<sup>44</sup> and other types of information service providers that post third-party content.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, a number of judges and commentators have argued that *the law should not be read to support immunity in cases where the interactive computer service provider has knowledge (i.e., corporate sponsored, assisted or acquiesced)—acquired by a complaint or independently—that material posted on their service contains defamatory content.*<sup>46</sup> Their core argument is that Congress never intended to extend immunity to entities acting essentially as distributors who, under the common law traditions of defamation law, would be held responsible for failing to act once they know that potentially libelous material may be contained in publications they are distributing.<sup>47</sup> As the Seventh Circuit put it: “Why should a law designed to eliminate ISPs’ liability to the creators of offensive material end up defeating claims by the victims of tortuous or criminal conduct?”<sup>48</sup> It may be that the current interpretation of section 230 is on a collision course with the U.S. Supreme Court, the Congress, or both.

### **The Commercial Speech Conundrum or Why All Content Matters**

Corporate and public relations bloggers must consider the risk that any speech by them will receive, even if it is not related to the sale of goods, services or securities, lesser constitutional protection than would the same or similar speech by someone not tied, by choice or circumstance, to the business or commercial enterprise.<sup>49</sup> Commercial actors – be they corporations, public relations firms, or even individual business people – have to assume that any speech by them, if it even remotely relates to their commercial function, will be deemed **commercial speech** by the courts and therefore not as fully protected under the First Amendment as are other types of speech (e.g., political speech, the arts or the sciences) that might also be motivated, in some instances, by economic interests. This is the result of the prevailing approach to commercial speech – an approach that the failure of the Supreme Court to render a decision in *Nike v. Kasky* left in place.<sup>50</sup>

The prevailing law of commercial speech under the First Amendment is set forth in *Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corp. v. Public Service Commission*.<sup>51</sup> At issue in *Central Hudson* was advertising placed by a publicly regulated utility. The Court articulated a four-part commercial speech test that asked

1. if the advertising was deceptive, false or for an illegal product or service;
2. if the asserted governmental interest behind the regulation was substantial;
3. if the regulation directly served that substantial interest; and
4. if the regulation was narrowly tailored to that interest.<sup>52</sup>

Had the Court in *Central Hudson* limited applicability of this test to speech (i.e., advertising) that proposed or somehow directly affected a commercial transaction, the test (which by its nature and terms dilutes the protection of the First Amendment) would have been unobjectionable and even logical. Unfortunately, the Court muddled the commercial speech category and appeared to suggest that speech by any commercial entity with any economic motive was commercial speech and, therefore, less deserving of First Amendment protection.<sup>53</sup> Justice Powell, writing for Court, began with language indicating the value of commercial expression, but he presupposed a definition of commercial speech that was broad and an invitation to judicial assessments of the interests behind speech:

The Commission's order restricts only commercial speech, that is, expression related solely to the economic interests of the speaker and its audience. [Citations Omitted] The First Amendment, as applied to the States through the Fourteenth Amendment, protects commercial speech from unwarranted governmental regulation. [Citations omitted] Commercial expression not only serves the economic interest of the speaker, but also assists consumers and furthers the societal interest in the fullest possible dissemination of information.<sup>54</sup>

Justice Powell then applied this broad definition as if it were derived from a narrow distinction rooted in common sense:

[O]ur decisions have recognized "the 'commonsense' distinction between speech proposing a commercial transaction, which occurs in an area traditionally subject to governmental regulation, and other varieties of speech." [Citations Omitted] The Constitution therefore accords a lesser protection to commercial speech than to other constitutionally guaranteed expression. [Citations omitted] The protection available for particular commercial expression turns on the nature both of the expression and of the governmental interests served by its regulation.<sup>55</sup>

This reasoning is problematic. The first paragraph above does not logically follow from or lead to the second paragraph. "Economic interests" is a broad phrase and not limited to the commercial transactions. If a public interest group had published advertisements encouraging the use of electricity rather than natural gas, it is hard to imagine any court seriously enforcing a state regulation prohibiting such speech. If, however, the utilities falsely or deceptively offered for sale or promoted electricity or appliances, it is easy to imagine courts enforcing state laws against deceptive commercial practices. The fact is the state in *Central Hudson* was regulating the content of the advertisements and the state's purpose was the control of expression.

In *Central Hudson*, the communications at issue were forms of expression or they were commerce or a mix of the two and the purpose or target of the regulation was either expression or commerce. At times that line may be a bit unclear, but doctrinally the communications and the legislative purpose should have been characterized as one or the other, or a mixture. If the advertisements constituted speech (which they did), the regulations were just old-fashioned state attempts to control the content of speech without evidence of deception, fraud or illegality. This attempt to straddle the fence by characterizing these advertisements as forms of speech related only to the economic interests and then basing a test on that characterization resulted in doctrinal confusion and ultimately the litigation in *Nike v. Kasky*.<sup>56</sup>

The litigation in *Nike* arose following the company's public relations campaign responding to a mid-1990s public campaign criticizing its manufacturing and labor practices in Southeast Asia. Having been savaged in newspapers and on television by labor unions, labor activists and others accusing the company of underpaying and inhumanely treating workers

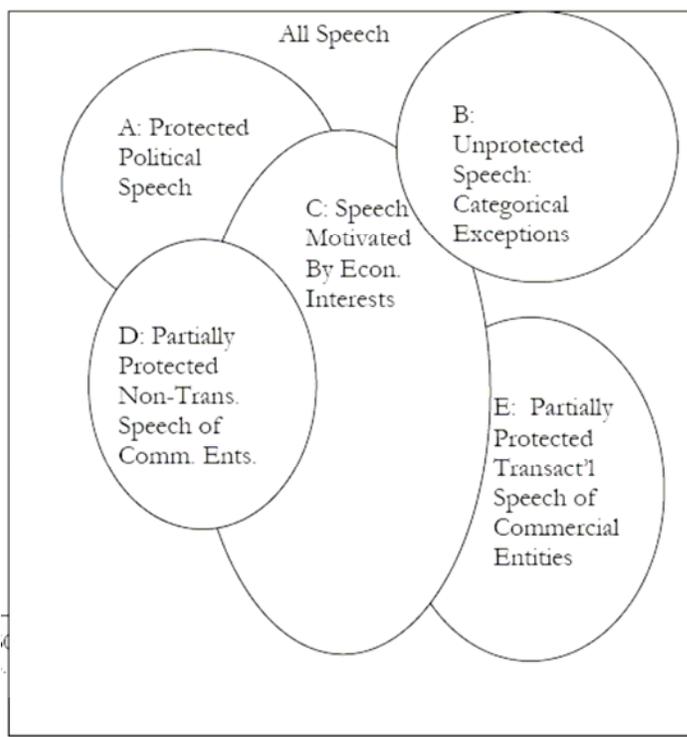
through its contractors, Nike proceeded to respond with advertisements, mailings, columns, and other public relations efforts designed to tell its side of the story. Mr. Kasky, a resident of California, disagreed with Nike's take on the situation and sued under the then existing version of California's false advertising and unfair competition laws,<sup>57</sup> though he admitted he had not been deceived or in any manner influenced in the purchase of any Nike products. He simply had a different view of the facts.

The trial court dismissed the case and the intermediate appellate court in California affirmed the dismissal on the ground that the expression by Nike was not commercial and, therefore, was protected by the First Amendment.<sup>58</sup> The appellate court held that lawsuit implicated a "public dialogue on a matter of public concern" –the question, among others, of "employing low-cost foreign labor for work once performed by domestic workers" –and therefore, was fully protected by the First Amendment and was not mere commercial speech.<sup>59</sup>

The California Supreme Court, however, held that the issue-oriented advertisements could be deemed commercial.<sup>60</sup> The 4-3 vote reinstated the Kasky suit because, according to the majority, (a) Nike was engaged in commerce, (b) the intended audience was likely to be actual or potential buyers or customers or persons acting on their behalf or with influence on such potential customers, and (c) the factual content of the messages described business operations, policies, products or services and for a significant segment of the buying public, labor practices do matter in making consumer choices.<sup>61</sup> The California Supreme Court thus defined commercial speech very broadly to include speech likely to influence the buying decisions of consumers.<sup>62</sup> The Court did not find persuasive the argument that Nike was simply responding to a debate in the marketplace of ideas. The majority also dismissed the risk that its ruling would inappropriately chill commercial entities from making statements about their business operations.<sup>63</sup>

It was this state of confused legal reasoning that landed in the Supreme Court of the United States only to see the case sent back by the Court to the California courts with no decision because, the a majority of the Supreme Court reasoned, review had been improvidently granted and the case needed further development at the state level. The dismissal of certiorari in *Nike v. Kasky*<sup>64</sup> did nothing to resolve these conflicting arguments, but the dismissal was not a mere one sentence order and several of the justices vigorously disagreed with the decision to return the case to California with no decision.<sup>65</sup>

Figure A: Fully Protected, Partially Protected and Unprotected Speech



The bottom line after years of the *Central Hudson* regime and after the failure of the Court to clarify the definition of commercial speech as a category of speech is that the content of any speech by a commercial entity or actor must be examined to determine its status under the First Amendment. Thus, in the context of corporate blogging *one cannot assume there is First Amendment speech protection for the blog if the blog does not publish information related to a commercial transaction or possible transaction and even if there is no evidence the blog affected the buying actions of any consumer*. In other words, even a blog about politics or art or science must be examined if it is a corporate blog because the very corporate status of the blogger (either direct or through agency law principles) makes that blog a candidate for reduced constitutional protection under the First Amendment. As represented in Figure A above, the categories of speech are not mutually exclusive and many types of speech (some fully protected, some partially, and some not protected at all under the First Amendment) may be motivated by economic or financial interests. Corporate blogging is no different. Content about matters unrelated to commercial transactions – actual or intended – ought to have the same constitutional protection as other, non-commercial speech. It does not, however, and as a result the legal analysis of corporate blogs demands both an examination of all forms of content as well as the questions related to agency and vicarious liability.

### Conclusion

Corporate use of blogs for public relations and other purposes is certainly a development that can be neither denied nor reversed. This paper does not argue that it should be denied, reversed or even resisted. The liability and risks that come with blogs also cannot be denied, however, and for that reason corporate clients and public relations firms must take a close and

fact-sensitive look at the different types of blogs that might be relevant to the corporation. This paper sets forth a methodology and system of classifying blogs as a matter of both convenience and heightened sensitivity to the relevant considerations, but the world of the Internet, as with communications and public relations generally, does not always fall into neat categories or boxes on a chart. Therefore, corporate clients and public relations specialists need to be aware of at least the fundamental legal doctrines that may drive the analysis of blogging liability because those doctrines may drive one blog from a presumably safe or safer category into a category with higher risk. Although this paper looked only at the law of defamation as one example of the application of an agency-law-grounded classification of blogs, other legal fields deserving of attention include, for example, antitrust law, securities law, consumer protection and advertising law and intellectual property matters.

The challenge facing public relations corporate departments and the firms who often represent them is what to do in an area that is admittedly a “slippery slope.” There are benefits and liabilities of having in place firm policies regarding blogging practices for organizations and its employees. However, the balance of information flow versus corporate or third party responsibility is unclear and exists in a landscape of change. Today’s mole hills are more than apt to become mountains – as found in *Nike v. Kasky*, where the intent to communicate may have been theoretically appropriate but legally questionable in some states.

Communication scholars studying persuasive messages have long argued that intent is the crux of whether a communication is persuasive or not and they have also argued that traditionally a source must intentionally send a message to a receiver who intentionally receives it.<sup>66</sup> The act of blogging could be argued to operate similarly. The concept of relational persuasion, a process that clearly underlies public relations practice, opens the definition of persuasion to more than a simple one-way, intended act. Instead, much like “nonverbal persuasion” in which a receiver can perceive intent on the source’s part, these blogs can be considered communication and persuasive.<sup>67</sup> Blogging fits this expanded definition and further complicates the nature of responsibility for both internal and external audiences

This paper began by questioning the responsibility of corporate blogging – questions arising in large part from the legal problems faced by Nike in the 1990s (and the resulting unanswered questions regarding the First Amendment and commercial speech) and then expanded upon by current public relations firm practices that have come under fire in the last two years. It is clearly an area that will require continued attention as the courts begin the long and deliberate process of deciding who is responsible for blogging for, about, or against corporate and public relations firm interests and strategies. Added to this problem is the real possibility that Congress will once again introduce itself the milieu, possibly redefining current legislation to better fit how it sees the Internet and blogging practice.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The term blog is short for Web log. Being a popular web term it is only fitting that one should refer to one of the most popular of web-based general-interest sites for a definition: Wikipedia defines a blog as “a user-generated site where entries are made in journal style and displayed in reverse chronological order. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, Web pages, and other media related to its topic.” See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog>. One popular content aggregator, Technorati, currently tracks 69 million blogs. See <http://technorati.com/about/>.

<sup>2</sup> Fortune 500 Business Blogging Wiki, (2006),

[http://www.socialtext.net/bizblogs/index.cgi?fortune\\_500\\_business\\_blogging\\_wiki](http://www.socialtext.net/bizblogs/index.cgi?fortune_500_business_blogging_wiki).

<sup>3</sup> Marcy Gordon, *SEC Chief Suggests Blogs for Disclosures*, ASSOCIATED PRESS, Nov. 7, 2006 (Business News).

<sup>4</sup> Constantin Basturea, *PR Meets the WWW*, (Jan. 7, 2007), <http://blog.basturea.com/pr-blogs-list>.

<sup>5</sup> 539 U.S. 654 (2003).

<sup>6</sup> Hamilton Nolan, *Edelman Acknowledges Mistakes in Blog Matter*, PR WEEK, Oct. 23, 2006, at 3; *see also* Laurie Sullivan, *Hard-Lessons-Always; Wal-mart's Cybereducation*, INFORMATION WEEK, Oct. 30, 2006, at 17.

<sup>7</sup> Keith O'Brien, *Edelman Defends Ethics of Vista PC gifting Tactic*, PR WEEK, Jan. 8, 2007, at 6; *Are Freebies A Blogosphere Taboo*, PR WEEK, Jan 12, 2007, at 18 (News Analysis).

<sup>8</sup> Shankar Gupta, *Sony Confesses to Creating 'Flog,' Shuttters Comments*, ONLINE MEDIA DAILY, Feb. 14, 2007,

[http://publications.mediapost.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=Articles.showArticleHomePage&art\\_id=52541](http://publications.mediapost.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=Articles.showArticleHomePage&art_id=52541).

<sup>9</sup> Celeste Altus, *Ragone Admits to Blog Fraud*, PRWEEK, Feb. 12, 2007, at 3.

<sup>10</sup> Kate Kaye, *Paid Blogging Trends Hits a Nerve, Spurs Competition*, CLICK Z NETWORK, (Dec. 4, 2006), <http://www.clickz.com/showPage.html?page=3624104>.

<sup>11</sup> Although there may be litigation pending somewhere, a search of the Lexis database and related industry literature has turned up no appellate decisions directly addressing corporate blogs at this time (Feb. 2007). *See also* Gordon and Franklin, *infra* note 13.

<sup>12</sup> A discussion of corporate and agency policies was the focus of the Arthur W. Page Society Spring Seminar, New York City, 2005, where senior corporate communication and senior public relations agency executives examined potential blogging strategies. The discussion continued at the following year's Spring Seminar in New York City.

<sup>13</sup> Philip L. Gordon & Katherine Cooper Franklin, *Can Law Firms Keep the Blogosphere at Bay?* (Nov. 1, 2006),

<http://www.law.com/jsp/legaltechnology/PubArticleFriendlyLT.jsp?id=1162289116513>.

<sup>14</sup> 47 USCS § 230 (2007).

<sup>15</sup> The terms "published" and "publication" are used herein to indicate speech by the corporation through its spokespersons, agents, executives, employees and anyone else for whom the corporation may bear legal responsibility and it assumes that it was read or heard by at least one person other than the corporate author or speaker. These terms are also legal terms of art in some contexts, including the law of defamation, discussed *infra* pp. 18-24. *See generally* Ostrowe v. Lee, 175 N.E. 505 (N.Y. 1931).

<sup>16</sup> *See* RESTATEMENT(SECOND) OF AGENCY §20, 220 (1958); *see generally* Fleming James Jr., *Vicarious Liability*, 28 TUL. L. REV. 161 (1954). The terms has been defined as "[i]ndirect legal responsibility; for example, the liability of an employer for the acts of employee, or a principal for torts and contracts of an agent." BLACK'S LAW DICTIONARY 1404 (5<sup>th</sup> ed. 1979).

<sup>17</sup> Paula J. Dalley, *All in a Day's Work: Employers' Vicarious Liability for Sexual Harassment*, 104 W. VA. L. REV. 517, 540-42 (2002); Nancy J. Whitmore, *Vicarious Liability and the Private University Student Press*, 11 COMM. L. & POL'Y 255, 259-62 (2006).

<sup>18</sup> *See* RESTATEMENT, *supra*, note 16, at § 1.

<sup>19</sup> *See* Dalley, *supra* note 17, at 535; *see also* RESTATEMENT, *supra* note 16, at § 225.

<sup>20</sup> *See* RESTATEMENT, *supra* note 16, at § 228-229. For example, the conduct must be of the kind for which the agent or employee was engaged, must occur substantially in the time and place

authorized, and must be actuated at least in part to serve the principal (*i.e.*, the corporation). If the conduct has the same general nature of what was authorized or incidental to or commonly part of what was authorized, then the conduct will be held within the scope. *Id.* For example, if a corporation uses an employee or agent to blog, even a defamatory entry – though not what the corporation wanted – will be likely deemed within the scope of that activity.

<sup>21</sup> Fleming, *supra* note 16 at 193-94.

<sup>22</sup> See generally Paul S. Gutman, *Say What?: Blogging and Employment Law in Conflict*, 27 COLUM. J. L. & ARTS 145 (2003).

<sup>23</sup> See discussion *infra* pp. 18-25.

<sup>24</sup> For example, a blog that opined on a regulatory matter that might affect the assets or prospects of business and did so to manipulate the market or public opinion for the benefit of a business or investors would be a blog worthy of inquiry even if it did not mention or even allude to the corporation by name. Similarly, a blog that defames a competitor may benefit a corporation even if the beneficiary corporation is not identified. This is not included to suggest that corporations and public relations firms must become the police of all blogs, books, newspapers or other forms of communication. But, in light of the reach and speed of the Internet and the potential for anonymous communications or communications attributed to others when in fact they may be directed or motivated by an otherwise unseen and undisclosed corporate agent, these issues may take on greater importance in future litigation and regulatory activity.

<sup>25</sup> Interesting examples from the field of securities law and regulation abound in this regard. Regulation FD (meaning “Fair disclosure”) became effective in October 2000 to address selective disclosure of relevant business information to a favored few investors and analysts to the disadvantage of the larger public. The regulation provides that when a securities issuer (which could be any number of publicly traded corporations, or person acting on its behalf, discloses material nonpublic information to certain persons (*e.g.*, securities market professionals and holders of the issuer’s securities who may trade based on the information) the company must make public disclosure of that same information simultaneously (for intentional disclosure) or promptly (for non-intentional disclosure). See 17 C.F.R. § 243.100-103 (2000). The potential applicability of these and other related regulations to blogging is obvious. And, whether the corporation releases, or fails to release, the information itself through its own blog, through an Intranet-based form of communication (as opposed to a more open Internet-based tool) or does so more surreptitiously through blogs that might not be readily identified with the corporation will likely be a difficult, if not outright poor, defense stratagem. Courts and investigators will, and should, quickly pierce any digital veil obscuring corporate misdeeds.

<sup>26</sup> Brian Carroll, *Blog On! Social Networking Redefining Marketplace; The Hard Part: Figuring Out How to Make it Work for Your Business*, FURNITURE TODAY: SPECIAL REPORT; RETAIL PLANNING GUIDE, Dec. 25, 2006, at 52.

<sup>27</sup> Ross Fadner, *Next Trend in Blogging: Privacy*, Online Media Daily, Oct. 27, 2006, [http://publications.mediapost.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=Articles.show/Article&art\\_aid=50309&passFuseAction=PublicationsSearch.showSearchReslts&art\\_searched=&page\\_number=0](http://publications.mediapost.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=Articles.show/Article&art_aid=50309&passFuseAction=PublicationsSearch.showSearchReslts&art_searched=&page_number=0).

<sup>28</sup> See, *e.g.*, TSC Industries v. Northway, 426 U.S. 438 (1976); FTC v. Colgate-Palmolive, 380 U.S. 374 (1965).

<sup>29</sup> See, *e.g.*, Central Hudson Gas & Electric v. PSC of New York, 447 U.S. 557 (1980); Pittsburgh Press Co. v. Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations, 413 U.S. 376 (1973).

<sup>30</sup> See REX S. HEINKE, *MEDIA LAW* §§ 2.1-2.16 (1994); ROBERT D. SACK, *SACK ON DEFAMATION* §§ 3-1-- 3-5 (3d. ed. 2006); see generally *New York Times v. Sullivan*, 376 U.S. 254 (1976).

<sup>31</sup> Given the ubiquitous nature of the Internet, it is not always clear how the site of publication is determined or which state or country should hold jurisdiction. Once the jurisdictional issue is settled it must then be determined which state or country's law should be applied in the case. Jurisdictional cases without the Internet complication have often asked if the publisher targeted a plaintiff or readers in a particular state before deciding to allow jurisdiction in that state even though the publisher had no or very limited physical contacts with the state. See, e.g., *Calder v. Jones*, 465 U.S. 783 (1994); *Burger King Corp. v. Rudzewicz*, 471 U.S. 462 (1985). The same rationale has been employed in Internet cases. See, e.g., *EDIAS Software Int'l v. Basis Int'l. Ltd.*, 947 F.Supp. 413 (D. Ariz. 1996); *Blumenthal v. Drudge*, 992 F.Supp. 44 (D.D.C. 1998). Other courts have held that posting on the Internet is reason enough to know the information would be received or the harm felt in another state and thus would be a basis for jurisdiction in that state. See *Panavision Int'l v. Toeppen*, 141 F.3d 1316 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1998); *Telco Comm. v. An Apple A Day*, 977 F.Supp. 404 (E.D. Va., 1997). Of course, jurisdiction might be defeated if the court concludes there was insufficient evidence of targeting or focusing on residents in some distant jurisdiction. See, e.g., *Revell v. Lidov*, 317 F.3d 467 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2002); *Young v. New Haven Advocate*, 315 F.3d 256 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2002). Or, one could be hauled into a very distant court as happened to Dow Jones over the online content of Barron's magazine in a decision of the High Court of Australia in *Dow Jones & Co. v. Gutnik*, [2002] HCA 56 (10 December 2002)(found at <http://www.4law.co.il/582.htm>)(the case subsequently settled during an out-of-court mediation).

<sup>32</sup> The common law and a number of state statutes provide specific defenses or privileges that protect certain communications from defamation liability, including, for example, those privileges that protect members of a common enterprise, association or business who are communicating amongst themselves, provided generally they are doing so in good faith and only on matters of interest to the enterprise. See *RESTATEMENT (SECOND) OF TORTS* § 596 (1977); SACK, *supra* note 30, at §9.2.3. In addition, many states protect good faith communications from a past employer to a prospective employer (i.e., reference checking) about an employee's work performance and credentials. See *RESTATEMENT (SECOND) OF TORTS* §594 (1977); SACK, *supra* note 30 at 9.2.2.1; see, e.g., In addition, many states protect good faith communications from a past employer to a prospective employer (i.e., reference checking) about an employee's work performance and credentials. See *RESTATEMENT (SECOND) OF TORTS* §594 (1977); SACK, *supra* note 30 at 9.2.2.1; see, e.g., § 768.095 Florida Statutes (2007)(the Florida statute, like many others, provides civil immunity to the employer responding to inquiries from a prospective employer (or the employee) for references "unless it is shown by clear and convincing evidence that the information disclosed by the former or current employer was knowingly false or violated any civil right of the former or current employee" under state law).

<sup>33</sup>A related issue with a twist concerns the anonymous blogs or postings to blogs. To some degree this question is little different from anonymous publications generally. Before any plaintiff can sue for defamation (or anything else) he or she must determine who published the offending statements. Although the Web and various software tools provide means of concealing one's identity, the Web also provides search clues and technological strategies that will be useful depending on the relative sophistication of both the publisher and the potential plaintiff. New software products that could be used to authenticate the identity of posters are now

being developed. If such digital identity products become available and sufficiently functional, corporate-reflective blogs might consider requiring that posters verify their identities before being allowed to publish comments.

<sup>34</sup> See Stephanie Blumstein, *Note: The New Immunity in Cyberspace: The Expanded Reach of the Communications Decency Act to the Libelous "Re-Poster,"* 9 B.U.J. SCI. & TECH. L. 407 (2003).

<sup>35</sup> An RSS feed is essentially a series of various formats for feeding or publishing on the Web frequently updated contents such as blogs or podcasts. The differences between the various formats are beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>36</sup> This is commonly known as the law of republication under which the republisher of a defamatory statement is as liable as the original publisher absent a legal privilege protecting the republication. See, e.g., *Liberty Lobby v. Dow Jones & Co.*, 838 F.2d 1287 (D.C. Cir. 1988)(republication liability generally); *Edwards v. National Audobon Society, Inc.*, 556 F.2d 113 (2d Cir. 1977)(media neutral reporting privilege for matters of public importance).

<sup>37</sup> See, e.g., *Madsen v. Buie*, 454 So. 2d 727 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1984)(letter to editor questioning qualifications of psychologist, including statements of fact, held possible basis for defamation suit against newspaper republisher); see generally Donna R. Euben, *Comment: An Argument for an Absolute Privilege for Letters to the Editor After Immuno AG v. Moor-Jankowski*, 58 BROOKLYN L. REV. 1439 (1993).

<sup>38</sup> Public L. No. 104-104, § Sec. 502, 110 Stat. 133 (codified at 47 U.S.C. § 223).

<sup>39</sup> 521 U.S. 844 (1997).

<sup>40</sup> *Id.* at 850 (quoting *ACLU v. Reno*, 929 F. Supp. 824, 844 (E.D. Pa. 1996)).

<sup>41</sup> *Id.* at 870.

<sup>42</sup> 47 U.S.C. § 230(c)(1).

<sup>43</sup> 47 U.S.C. § 230(f)(2) defines "interactive computer service" as "Any information service, system, or access software provider that provides or enables computer access by multiple users to a computer server, including specifically a service or system that provides access to the Internet and such systems operated or services offered by libraries or educational institutions."

<sup>44</sup> See, *Zeran v. American Online, Inc.*, 129 F.3d 327 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1997), *cert. denied*, 524 U.S. 937 (1998)(America Online not liable for delay in taking down allegedly libelous postings of a third party); *Blumenthal v. Drudge*, 992 F. Supp. 44 (D.D. C. 1998)(same); *Ben Ezra, Weinstein, and Co., Inc. v. America Online, Inc.*, 206 F.3d 980 (10<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2000), *cert. denied*, 531 U.S. 824 (2000)(AOL's e-mail requests to third-party content providers to correct stock quotation errors insufficient to overcome section 230 immunity); *Green v. America Online*, 318 F.3d 465 (3<sup>rd</sup> Cir. 2003)(ISP immune from tort claims under section 230 for defamation occurring in chat room);

<sup>45</sup> *Dimeo v. Tucker*, 433 F. Supp. 2d 523 (E.D. Pa. 2006)(Allegedly defamatory posting by a third party on operator's Web site's message board protected by section 230); *Carafano v. Metrosplash.com, Inc.* 339 F.3d 1119 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2003)(Web based Internet matchmaking service an interactive computer service provider immune from liability under section 230); *Batzel v. Smith*, 333 F.3d 1018 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2003)(Museum Security Network Web site immune under section 230 for third party posting); *Gentry v. eBay, Inc.*, 99 Cal. App. 4<sup>th</sup> 816 (2002)(online auction Web site an interactive computer service immunized by section 230 against claims under California law for negligent misrepresentation when eBay did not sell or offer to sell sports collectibles); *Schneider v. Amazon.com*, 31 P.3d 37 (Wash.. Ct. App. 2001)(Online Web site operator and bookseller is interactive computer service provider and not liable under section 230 for allegedly defamatory comments in book review supplied by third party or breach of contract

for failing to remove comments from its site); *Patentwizard, Inc. v. Kinko's, Inc.*, 163 F. Supp. 2d 1069 (S.D.S.D. 2001)(Copy center serving as interactive computer service provider not liable under section 230 for allegedly defamatory comments made in chat room by customer using copy center computer); *Barrett v. Rosenthal*, 146 P.3d 510 (Ca. 2006)(Operators of Web sites devoted to exposing health frauds not liable under section 230 for defamatory comments posted by third party on Web site and in email).

<sup>46</sup> Andrea L. Julian, *Freedom of Libel: How an Expansive Interpretation of 47 U.S.C. § 230 Affects the Defamation victims in the Ninth Circuit*, 40 Idaho L. Rev. 509 (2004).

<sup>47</sup> See, e.g., Blumstein, *supra* note 32; see also Jonathan A. Friedman and Francis M. Buono, *Limiting Tort Liability for Online Third-party Content Under Section 230 of the Communications Act*, 52 FED. COMM. L. J. 647 (2000); David Wiener, *Comment, Negligent Publication of Statements Posted on Electronic Bulletin Boards: Is There Any Liability Left After Zeran?*, 39 SANTA CLARA L. REV. 905 (1999)

<sup>48</sup> *John Doe v. GTE Corporation*, 347 F.3d 655, 658 (7<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2003).

<sup>49</sup> See Samuel A. Terilli, *Nike v. Kasky and the Running-But-Going-nowhere Commercial Speech Debate*, 10 COMM. L. & POL'L 383 (2005).

<sup>50</sup> 539 U.S. 654 (2003).

<sup>51</sup> 447 U.S. 557 (1980).

<sup>52</sup> *Id.* at 564-67.

<sup>53</sup> Terilli, *supra* note 49, at 397-99.

<sup>54</sup> *Id.* at 561-62.

<sup>55</sup> *Id.* at 562-63.

<sup>56</sup> 539 U.S. 654 (2003).

<sup>57</sup> Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code 17200 et seq. (2003) and Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code 17500 et seq. (2003)

<sup>58</sup> *Kasky v. Nike, Inc.*, 93 Cal. Rptr. 2d 854 (Cal. App. 1 Dist. 2000).

<sup>59</sup> *Id.* at 860-61.

<sup>60</sup> *Kasky v. Nike, Inc.*, 45 P.3d 243 (Cal. 2002).

<sup>61</sup> *Id.* at 257-59.

<sup>62</sup> *Id.* at 261-62.

<sup>63</sup> *Id.* at 260-62.

<sup>64</sup> 539 U.S. 654 (2003).

<sup>65</sup> *Id.*

<sup>66</sup> See, e.g., G. R. Miller and M. Burgoon, *New Techniques of Persuasion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

<sup>67</sup> See M. L. Hickson, D. W. Stacks, and N. Moore, *Nonverbal Communication, Studies and Applications*, 1-36 (4<sup>th</sup> ed., Los Angeles, Roxbury); Stacks, D. W., M. L. Hickson, and S. R. Hill, *An Introduction to Communication Theory* (Fort Worth, TX: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1991).

## A Description of Lobbying as Advocacy Public Relations

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This study defines lobbying as advocacy public relations. Data were collected from self-administered surveys of 222 registered lobbyists in Oregon. This study provides insight into a specialized group of public relations practitioners.

Lobbying, as an accepted and legal process, allows the voices of citizen groups, associations, labor unions, corporations and others to be heard in the political arena. Lobbyists break down complicated issues and present the most pertinent information to legislators, staff members, or committees in short documents or in quick one-on-one exchanges. These activities add to the extensive research and evidence that usually accompanies proposed legislation. Increasingly, lawmakers rely on lobbyists for information. Yet, the concept of lobbying as an information-providing communication process is rarely discussed in the public relations body of knowledge. cursory descriptions constitute the extent of public relations research on lobbying.

### *Lobbying: A Constitutionally Protected Communication Process*

Lobbying has been part of the American political and legislative system from the beginning (Zorack, 1990). By definition, lobbying usually involves attempting to influence legislation. Zorack explains:

Lobbying has been defined in many ways but, in essence, it is the right of any citizen or interest group to petition government or Congress and provide information designed to influence the passage or defeat of any legislation of the United States. (p. 24)

The Woodstock Theological Center, a non-profit research institute at Georgetown University, defines lobbying as “the deliberate attempt to influence political decisions through various forms of advocacy directed at policymakers on behalf of another person, organization, or group” (Arroyo, Connor, Gardner, Lacovar, & McCarthy, 2002, p. 82).

In 1960, Lester Milbrath, the so-called “father of lobbying research,” first analyzed lobbying from a communication perspective (Koepl, 2000). Milbrath (1960) claims, “Communication is the only means of influencing or changing a perception; the lobbying process, therefore, is totally a communication process” (p. 32). Forty-five years later, Dondero and Lurch (2005) write, “Lobbying is a two-way communication process” (p. 87). They describe lobbyists as “great” communicators to legislators because they serve as liaisons between constituents and legislators.

Although it has always been a communication process, Koepl (2000) and Terry (2001), suggest that the practice of lobbying has evolved since its inception. Koepl (2000) defines lobbying as “the attempted or successful influence of legislative-administrative decisions by public authorities through interested representatives. The influence is intended, implies the use of communication and is targeted on legislative and executive bodies” (p. 71). According to Dondero & Lurch (2005), lobbyists perform three primary functions in the legislative arena: 1) disseminate information needed for crafting legislation to legislators and their staff, 2) aggregate public opinion around major issues affecting their clients, and 3) help set the political agenda by creating coalitions to support or oppose specific bills (p. 86). In effect, lobbyists are the eyes and ears of the public, information providers, representatives of their clients and constituents, shapers

of the government agenda, movers of legislation, coalition builders, and campaign contributors (p. 87).

*Lobbying, Public Relations and Advocacy*

Lobbying is often considered a specialization of public relations. Undergraduate public relations textbooks, for example, tend to define lobbying as a function of public affairs: Heath and Cousino (1990) describe it as a function of issues management; Toth (1986) recognizes it as a specialized area of public relations; Guth and Marsh (2000) suggest that lobbyists pass on persuasive information to government officials; and Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2000) define it as a function of public affairs that builds and maintains relations with government primarily for the purpose of influencing legislation and regulation. cursory descriptions constitute the extent of the public relations curriculum on lobbying.

Such cursory examination is unfortunate because as players in the political arena lobbyists represent, educate, and advocate on behalf of their clients' interests. Mayhew (1997) succinctly describes lobbying as "a process of influence that travels along routes sustained by exchanges of information" in which "both parties have an opportunity to make their message influential as well as informative" (p. 218). Therefore, lobbyists develop various methods, strategies, and tactics to gain access, inform, influence, and pressure policymakers who make policy decisions that affect the well being of their clients, the American public, the local, national, and international communities, and present and future generations of citizens. Lobbying efforts have become highly sophisticated and multidimensional, relying on a complex array of persuasive devices.

Multiple case studies (see, for example, Birnbaum, 1992; Goldstein, 1999; Mackenzie, 2002; Milbrath, 1963; Rosenthal, 2001; Zeigler & Baer, 1969) explaining methods, practices and models have been written to demonstrate the functional nature of lobbying. Browne (1998) finds this sort of research necessary because as he explains:

"Their techniques are many. This certainly seems a big change, at least at first glance, from the early days of American government when lobbyists were named for their simple penchant for hanging out in congressional lobbies – the halls – waiting to corral a passing legislator. Modern lobbying involves far more. In reality, it always did – more than most people realize. Its techniques include not only the contacts made to advocate issues, and the research needed to make any deal, there's also a great amount of what might best be called lobbying foreplay." (p. 62)

Furthermore, he stresses that lobbyists need to be ready at all times to cover every base because the interactions are "much more than just a pleasant interlude between a lobbyist and a public official" (Browne, 1998, p. 63). Current theories and social science models agree that information is at the heart of the lobbying process (Mayhew, 1997, p. 219). Dondero and Lunch (2005) note, "lobbyists today rely on more businesslike relationships built on delivering credible information" (p. 89).

The above definitions reveal that lobbying is a communicative process that attempts to persuade public policy makers on behalf of interest groups. The American League of Lobbyists, the national professional association dedicated exclusively to lobbying, defines lobbying as "advocacy of a point of view, either by groups or individuals," (ALL, n.d.) and the Capitol Club, a professional association of state lobbyists in Oregon, describes itself as "an organization of professional advocates" (Capitol Club, n.d.). This research defines lobbying as "the act of publicly representing an individual, organization, or idea with the object of persuading targeted

audiences to look favorably on – or accept the point of view of – the individual, the organization, or the idea” (Edgett, 2002, p. 1).

The words advocacy and advocate are frequently found in discussions, definitions, and descriptions of public relations and lobbying. For instance, the American League of Lobbyists and the Capitol Club use the terms advocacy and lobbying interchangeably. Additionally, advocacy is one of the professional values included in the Public Relations Society of America’s “Member Code of Ethics.” Upon joining PRSA, the world’s largest organization for public relations practitioners, members pledge to serve the public interest by acting as responsible advocates for those they represent by providing a voice in the marketplace of ideas, facts, and viewpoints to aid informed public debate (PRSA, n.d.).

To differentiate between lobbying and advocacy, Ezell (2001) considers lobbying one of many advocacy tactics that seek to shape social institutions and direct public policy. Advocacy consists of purposive efforts to change specifically existing and/or purposed policies or practices on behalf of or with a specific client or group of clients (Ezell, 2001). This research defines advocacy as such. In their book on argumentation, Rybacki and Rybacki (1991) also note the primacy of enacting change. They define advocates as individuals who argue in favor of a change in belief or behavior. In her framework for ethically desirable public relations advocacy, Edgett (2002) defines advocacy as “the act of publicly representing an individual, organization, or idea with the object of persuading targeted audiences to look favorably on – or accept the point of view of – the individual, the organization, or the idea” (p. 1). Thus, advocacy is a central function of both public relations and lobbying.

The conception of lobbying and the public relations roles lobbyists enact can be extracted from this research, but the relationship is not explicitly discussed. The current study seeks to formalize this relationship by addressing the following research question:

RQ: Do lobbyists define their work as advocacy?

## METHOD

This research employed quantitative research methodology because it seeks to describe the behavior of an unstudied population.

All registered lobbyists in Oregon were invited to participate in a self-administered survey of perceptions of the lobbying profession. A census was conducted for the current study because it was practical and valuable to this particular research. Because the types of state lobbyists vary tremendously, from contract lobbyists to full-time public agency employees, it was necessary to reach as many members of the population as possible. A total of 719 surveys were mailed to registered Oregon lobbyists, and 222 responses were received, resulting in a 32.5% response rate.

Of the total respondents, 66.2% were men and 33.7% were women. Nearly all of the respondents identified themselves as White/Anglo, with only four percent of the respondents identifying themselves as either Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latino, or Asian/Pacific Islander. The majority of the respondents (60.1%) were between the ages of 40 and 60, and 76% of the respondents were over the age of 40. The respondents to the current study are well educated, with more than 90% of the respondents earning a bachelor’s degree or higher. More than half (51.8%) reported earning an advanced degree: 25.2% reported earning a master’s degree and 26.6% reported earning either a Ph.D., M.D., or J.D.

Ginny Lang, president of the lobbyist organization the Capitol Club, agrees that this profile fits her perceptions of the make up of Oregon lobbyists. However, she recognizes that

more women and younger people are entering the field. “In 1990, I was still among only a handful of women who were lobbying in Oregon,” said Lang (Lang, personal communication, May 23, 2006)

More than one third of the respondents to the current survey reported their current organizational setting as a non profit organization. Other respondents identified their current organization settings as: public sector (23%), lobbying firms (13.5%), corporations (10.8%), and university (4.5%). Only five percent of the respondents reported their current organizational setting as either a public affairs agency or a public relations agency. Additionally, respondents who checked ‘other’ for their current organizational setting reported a range of settings: unions, law firms, trade associations, state agency, consulting firm, community college, public corporation, and health care professional association. Thus, the organizational environments of lobbyists in Oregon represent a broad range of interests, purposes, and settings.

Twenty percent of the respondents reported being contract lobbyists, individuals who are hired to lobbying on behalf of a group, and 19% reported their current job title as public affairs. Only five percent reported public relations as their current job title. Fifty-six percent of the respondents to the current survey reported ‘other’ as their current job title. More than 35 different job titles were reported by respondents. The most common job title was director, including executive directors, program directors, policy directors and organizing directors. Twenty respondents specified their current job title as either governmental relations or governmental affairs. Other job titles reported include: attorneys, elected officials, university presidents, environmental advocate and radio/TV co-host and co-producer.

More than 60% of the respondents belong to the Capitol Club, the professional association of state lobbyists in Oregon. Nine respondents reported being members of PRSA while only one respondent reported being a member of the American League of Lobbyists, the national professional association dedicated exclusively to lobbying. Forty-three percent of the respondents reported being members of other professional organizations, with the Oregon State Bar being reported the most. Respondents to the current survey report belonging to professional organizations that are particular to their specific line of work. For example, respondents reported being members of the following professional organizations: Association of Counties, Oregon Dental Hygienists Association, and American Fisheries Society.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The research questions asked if lobbyists define their work as advocacy where advocacy is defined as “the act of publicly representing an individual, organization, or idea with the object of persuading targeted audiences to look favorably on – or accept the point of view of – the individual, the organization, or the idea” (Edgett, 2002, p. 1). Overall, respondents (N = 222) agreed that this definition describes their work (M = 4.18, with 5 = strongly agree and 1 = strongly disagree). Thus, Edgett’s definition of advocacy serves as an appropriate definition of lobbying because more than 85% of respondents to the current study agreed with the statement as a description of their work.

Respondents whose full-time job is lobbying (N = 78) reported greater agreement with the definition (M = 4.29, SD = .65) than respondents who lobby part-time (N = 136, M = 4.12, SD = .84). However, the results of a *t* test for independent means did not reveal a significant statistical difference between these two groups, ( $t(212) = 1.60, p = .110$ ). These findings indicate that both full-time and part-time lobbyists agree that Edgett’s definition of advocacy defines their work.

Using Edgett's definition of advocacy to define lobbying strengthens current definitions and characterizations of lobbying found in the scholarly literature and promoted by professional organizations and institutions. Most importantly, defining lobbying as advocacy affirms its fit with the agency model of professional-client relationship, which creates a framework to discuss the ethics of lobbying.

Influence is a consistent theme in the descriptions and definitions of lobbying (Arroyo, Connor, Gardner, Lacovar, & McCarthy, 2002; Koepl, 2002; Mayhew, 1997; Zorack, 1990). For example, the Woodstock Theological Center defines lobbying as "the deliberate attempt to influence [italics added] political decisions through various forms of advocacy directed at policymakers on behalf of another person, organization, or group" (Arroyo, Connor, Gardner, Lacovar, & McCarthy, 2002, p. 82). Zorack (1990) explains lobbying as "the right of any citizen or interest group to petition government or Congress and provide information designed to influence [italics added] the passage or defeat of any legislation of the United States" (p. 24). Defining lobbying as "the act of publicly representing an individual, organization, or idea with the object of persuading targeted audiences to look favorably on – or accept the point of view of – the individual, the organization, or the idea" (Edgett, 2002, p. 1) demonstrates the purpose and function of lobbying without specifically referring to influence.

Yet, the notion of persuasion may still create negative connotations of the practice because both scholars and practitioners argue that lobbying is much more than persuasion. For instance, Berry (1977) notes that lobbyists must serve as experts, providing both technical and legal information during the communication process, because knowledge is more important than persuasion. When given the opportunity to describe their work, some respondents to the current study compared themselves to teachers who educate legislators.

Respondents who disagreed with the statement (N = 10) were asked to describe their work in one sentence. Many of these descriptions included some type of educational component because the information lobbyists provide to legislators is crucial to the decision making process. For example, a full-time lobbyist who represents both corporate and non-profit organizations wrote, "Lobbying is very much like being a teacher; one must take very complex information and synthesize it into easily understood materials to provide legislators with facts upon which to make decisions." Another respondent who lobbies full-time for a labor union described his job as "primarily educating those who can make a decision." Other respondents felt that Edgett's definition of advocacy overemphasizes the persuasive nature of lobbying and fails to include its educational element. For example, a full-time lobbyist who works for a non-profit organization noted, "it is not just persuading but educating them on the issue at hand – or results of choices." A veteran lobbyist of 15 years who agreed with the offered definition added, "It's not all persuasion. Presenting the full range of facts and educating the public also creates a more favorable response." These statements indicate that education and persuasion often work in tandem during lobbying campaigns.

Although lobbying is rarely described specifically as an educational activity, this function can be explicated from definitions that characterize lobbyists as information purveyors (Dondero & Lunch, 2005; Zorack, 1990). Arroyo, Connor, Gardner, Lacovar, and McCarthy (2002) describe lobbying as "a valuable educational function, because honest, well-informed lobbyists provide policymakers and their staffs with relevant information and incisive arguments and analysis bearing on matters of public debate" (p. 86). Disseminating information to legislators and their staff is a primary function of lobbying. Lobbyists often break down complex policy issues for legislators who do not have the time to thoroughly examine all of the information;

therefore, lobbyists play a vital role in the formation of public policy. Nevertheless, their role as advocates could diminish the educational function of lobbying because lobbyists “make their messages influential as well as informative” (Mayhew, 1997, p. 218). This exchange of information is a crucial communication process in our democratic society, but since lobbyists have a particular end goal in mind, the passage or defeat of legislation that is in their clients’ interests, labeling them as educators may be a mischaracterization.

## **IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

The purpose of this study was to define lobbying as advocacy public relations. As the first research study investigating this area, this study systematically and scientifically examined attitudes and practices of a specialized group of public relations practitioners. Consequently, this study has generated numerous findings and provides directions for several areas of future research. On a theoretical level, this study supports the advocacy function of public relations by examining a specialized group of practitioners. This study also provides implications for practitioners because it validates the practice of lobbying as an information-providing communication activity.

A main limitation of this study is that it was conducted in a single state: Oregon. Because of its political culture, Oregon may be a special case. Thus, the results of the current study may not be generalizable to lobbyists in other states and federal lobbyists. Oregon lobbyists indicate a high sense of identification with their occupation, which Zeigler and Baer (1969) attribute to the existence of the Capitol Club.

Oregon may also be a unique case because “during the last two decades of the twentieth century, Oregon’s politics became increasingly volatile, with environmental and natural-resource issues, field burning, gay rights, taxes, doctor-assisted suicide, school funding, and vote by mail elections among the more controversial matters before the public” (Robbins, 2002, Section 7, ¶ 1). At this point it is unknown how Oregon’s political culture could have affected the results of the current study because every state has a few issues that are salient to it. To be able to further generalize the results of this study, the self-administered mail survey could be sent to a random sample of registered lobbyists in multiple states.

Oregon State Law requires citizens, university presidents, CEOs and any other persons who spend more than 24 hours per year lobbying to register with the Oregon Government Standards and Practices Commission as lobbyists. Thus, the number of respondents who reported lobbying as their full time job (N = 85) limits findings from the current study as lobbying may be one of many responsibilities for respondents. It was beyond the scope of this study to assess how the part time nature of lobbying affects role performance. Memberships of state lobbying organizations should serve as populations for future research studies. This method would eliminate potential respondents who do not lobby as a practice or as a business but are registered lobbyists because of their personal interest in one particular bill.

Even with these limitations, the current study has contributed to the public relations body of knowledge because it examined an overlooked specialized group of public relations practitioners.

Furthermore, this research is important because it demonstrates that the information-providing role that lobbyists perform in the public policy arena is underplayed in academic literature while the persuasive aspects of the profession are overemphasized. McGrath (2005) points out, “Lobbyists certainly do a great deal more than pure lobbying” (p. 128). An

exaggerated portrayal of lobbying that fails to embrace its theoretical, legal, and communication foundations is most often accepted in public vernacular.

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## Mayhem in the Magic City: Corrective Action in a Communication Train Wreck

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Corrective action is one of several strategies for image restoration available to organizations facing crisis situations. This study explores the relationship between corrective action and rebuilding legitimacy. Specifically, the corrective actions taken by the City of Minot and Ward County officials in response to the emergency communication breakdowns during the 2002 Canadian Pacific train derailment and anhydrous ammonia spill are analyzed. The study concludes that corrective action when employed as organizational learning can expedite image restoration by rebuilding legitimacy and better prepare organizations for future crises.

On January 18, 2002 at 1:34 a.m. a Canadian Pacific train derailed about 1,000 feet from the Tierrecita Vallejo neighborhood near Minot, North Dakota pouring 250,000 gallons of anhydrous ammonia onto the ground. Exposed to the bitter-cold air, the chemical vaporized into a toxic cloud that hung over the Souris River Valley. One man died, more than 1,600 people were injured, and about 15,000 people were affected. The 350-foot-tall vapor cloud settled over an area five miles long and 2.5 miles wide covering about 40 percent of *The Magic City* (Wagner, 2002a; 2002g). When the haze lifted the terrifying scene of twisted metal, poisoned earth and toxic fumes lingered, and city and county officials faced another train wreck, metaphorically speaking, caused by poor communication systems during the crisis.

Crisis is defined as “a specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threat or perceived threat to an organization’s high priority goals” (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 1998, p. 233). The train derailment caused the deadly vapor to drift over the Minot area, but the crisis for city and county officials was caused by multiple breakdowns in emergency response communication exposed by the morbid mist. In a joint press conference the City of Minot and Ward County initially claimed the emergency response efforts were a success, however, this hasty declaration exacerbated the crisis. Residents were outraged and demanded a response. City and county officials sought to rebuild legitimacy through corrective action to demonstrate they had learned from the crisis.

### Image Restoration

Since crisis often necessitates the deliverance of *apologia*—a justificatory form of discourse that may or may not offer an apology (Hearit, 1994; Ice, 1991; Scott & Lyman, 1968; Ware & Linkugel, 1973), researchers concentrate on the post-crisis rhetoric that influences the impact of a crisis and the image restoration of the individual or organization affected (Benoit, 1995a, 1995b, 1997, 2000; Dionisopoulos & Vibbert, 1988; Hearit, 1994, 1995a; 1995b, 2001). “When a reputation is threatened, individuals and organizations are motivated to present an image defense: explanations, justifications, rationalizations, apologies, or excuses for behavior” (Brinson & Benoit, 1996, p. 30). In many cases that motivation is the demand for an explanation from the multiple publics affected by the crisis. Sellnow, Ulmer, and Snider (1998) state that “Organizations must engage in a discourse with their public that provides an adequate justification for whatever actions are under scrutiny” (p. 62). The purpose of the discourse is to

“respond to criticism or accusations of wrongdoing, and move past the crisis as quickly and easily as possible” (Seeger et al., 2003, p. 76). When city and county officials were challenged to answer the many questions and complaints of area residents, they sought to repair the damage caused by past communication breakdowns.

Building on the literature of apologia and accounts (Scott & Lyman, 1968; Ware & Linkugel, 1973), Benoit (1995a, 1997) offers five broad categories of image repair strategies: denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. Within each broad category, Benoit details variants of the message options. Denial can be classified as simple denial or shifting the blame to another party. Evasion of responsibility includes the variants of provocation, defeasibility, accident, and good intentions. Reducing offensiveness of the act includes bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking the accuser and compensation. Corrective action and mortification do not have subcategories, but are often used in conjunction with other image restoration strategies. According to Sellnow et al. (1998) “individual strategies used to restore an image may interact with other strategies” (p. 69) and “one image restoration strategy can imply or combine with other strategies” (p.71).

Benoit (1997) also addresses the issue of not responding. In identifying the options of redefining the attack, refocusing attention, and simply ignoring the issue, Benoit contends that an organization does not need to respond to accusations. However, even by doing nothing, the organization is still responding. Ignoring the issue is an attempt to reduce the offensiveness of the act with a silent message that it is not important enough for a response (Veil, 2005). While it is true that if the issue is not important it will likely go away, it is not the organization’s perception of the issue but the public’s perception that determines if a full-blown crisis will be avoided by ignoring the situation. As Benoit (1997) suggests, “The key question is not if the act was in fact offensive, but whether the act is believed by the relevant audience(s) to be heinous” (p. 178).

Initially, city and county officials perceived the emergency response to be a success. However, that was not the perception of area residents. City and county officials sought feedback from outside sources and engaged in corrective action to alter the negative perception. Sellnow et al. (1998) point out that “corrective action can be taken by an organization even in cases where the organization is not viewed as responsible for the crisis” (p.61). Minot and Ward County officials did not cause the train derailment, but the corrective action taken to improve the emergency response communication efforts helped restore residents’ confidence in the systems. According to Heath and Millar (2004) the goal of the communication efforts is to notify all parties affected by the crisis how “to prepare for, accommodate to, and recover from the disruptive events” (p. 6). This communication “entails providing information that demonstrates how, why and when the organization has put things right as well as what it plans to do to prevent the recurrence of a similar crisis.” (p. 8) “The messages of the organization need to responsibly define the actions that need to be taken, the actions that will be taken, are being taken, or have been taken” (p.9). City and county officials had to demonstrate they understood what went wrong with the response in order to gain the trust of the public as they took corrective action.

#### Learning through Crisis

Crisis is most often characterized as an unexpected turning point in an organization (Fink, 1986; Gottschalk, 1993; Lerbinger, 1997; Mitroff, 1988; Ray, 1999; Seeger et al., 1998; Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003; Sellnow, 1993). In a crisis, positive outcomes can surface out of negative consequences. By acting as a stimulus for improving the organization and legitimizing

the need for transformation, crisis prepares members of an organization for change by reducing resistance and thereby heightening consideration of alternate strategies (Lerbinger, 1997). Huber (1991) notes that “An entity learns if, through its processing of information, the range of its potential behaviors is changed” (p. 88) and argues that the more an organization changes as a result of an event, the more the organization has learned.

As an “unplanned opportunity,” crisis can be viewed as a trigger point to a valuable organizational learning process (Murphy, 1996, p. 108). Through the natural system of renewal, crisis can effectively purge system elements that are outdated and inappropriate and create new and unexpected opportunities for an organization (Seeger et al., 2003). This natural process has been described as an awakening. “The things we fear most in organizations—disruptions, confusion, chaos—need not be interpreted as signs that we are about to be destroyed. Instead, these conditions are necessary to awaken creativity” (Wheatly, 1999, p. 21). For some organizations, crisis is less a gentle awakening and more a lightning bolt as it shocks organizational systems out of complacency and into the pursuit of radical learning through the realignment of basic assumptions (Seeger et al., 2003). Through this radical learning, organizations can learn and take corrective action, thereby inoculating the organization from experiencing a similar crisis in the future.

Emergency response workers were stunned by the backlash from area residents. A response they deemed successful was perceived as a catastrophe. City and county officials learned the public had much higher expectations for emergency response efforts. Image restoration strategies that did not demonstrate a willingness to improve response efforts would have lengthened the crisis and further damaged the reputation of emergency response workers. Despite limited budgets, city and county officials had to do more than fix the communication breakdowns. They had to communicate that they were effectively spending tax dollars on new systems to improve response capabilities. While Hearit (1995a) concludes that organizations are more likely to choose financial competence over community concerns, the case studies of Cole Hardwoods, Malden Mills, and Schwan’s (Seeger & Ulmer, 2001; Sellnow, et al., 1998) demonstrate that stakeholders respond more favorably to organizations that place community concerns over financial competence. “Regardless of how competent an organization is financially, it must still satisfy the social expectations of its stakeholders to maintain legitimacy” (Veil, Liu, Erickson, & Sellnow, 2005, p. 19). Organizations that “seek legitimacy must balance both competence and community concerns” (Hearit, 1995a, p. 3). Veil et al. (2005) classify competence as the ability of the organization to perform effectively within financial constraints, while character refers to “the organization’s willingness to do what is perceived as right by the public” (p. 19). Seeger et al. (2003) distinguish that “Crises ultimately serve as an impetus for the realignment of the organization with the values and needs of society” (p. 260). In some ways crisis can be in the organization’s best interest by forcing change to systems that could lead to future crises. “There is ample evidence to suggest that the extreme discomfort and uncertainty that cause organizations to abhor crisis also offers opportunities that may benefit organizations and society” (p. 257). The crisis uncovered many lapses in the emergency response and forced city and county officials to open communication with area residents, learn from the errors identified, and take corrective action to improve the emergency response system in order to rebuild legitimacy.

## The Crisis

### *The Morning of the Morbid Mist*

When the residents closest to the derailment in Tierrecita Vallejo awoke to the screeching sound of metal on metal and the putrid smell of ammonia seeping into their homes they were bombarded by the stressors Reynolds (2002) identifies in the initial phase of a crisis: “threat to life and encounter with death; feelings of powerlessness; loss; dislocation; feeling responsible; inescapable horror; and human malevolence” (p. 29). Residents felt compelled to flee their homes and take action and yet felt trapped by the vapor. Those who did try to outrun the cloud crashed into vehicles and mailboxes as they frantically tried to escape (Wagner, 2002b). According to Reynolds (2002) “During the stage of acute danger, the priority for all is basic safety and survival” (p. 26).

The stressors brought on by acute danger were compounded by a lack of information. The residents needed only to look out their windows and take a deep breath to know something was wrong. What they did not know is what to do about the situation. Weick’s (2001) theory of sensemaking demonstrates that ineffective or lack of communication with stakeholders leads to the collapse of sensemaking or a “cosmological episode” causing confusion and increasing the severity of the crisis. The people of Tierrecita Vallejo needed an emergency response message to relieve their stressors, but that message would not come.

According to Reynolds (2002)

“In the initial phase of a crisis or emergency, people want information—*now*. They want timely and accurate facts about what happened, and where, and what is being done. They will question the magnitude of the crisis, the immediacy of the threat to them, the duration of the threat, and who is going to fix the problem.” (p. 8)

When the eyes and throats of Minot area residents began burning from the deadly chemical cloud, they listened for the sirens to sound; they tuned in the emergency broadcast station on their televisions and radios; they called 911. They heard silence, static, satellite music, and a busy signal. The city was not prepared for a crisis of that magnitude. Effective procedures were not in place and systems had not been tested. As each emergency response track was laid, an error in the system would derail the message.

### *A Communication Train Wreck*

Following the timeline of the message attempts and failures throughout the morning as reported in the *Minot Daily News* and *The Forum*, three key areas of emergency response communication failed: the emergency sirens, the media alert system, and the 911 emergency system. Each breakdown in communication amplified confusion and frustration inciting panic and outraging residents.

At 2:39 a.m., over an hour after the train derailed, Minot’s siren warning system sounded as emergency officials sought to alert people to the anhydrous ammonia spill (Schramm, 2002). However, not all of the sirens worked. Those that did were only sounded once: “After the initial alarm, officials feared people would go outside, exposing themselves to the cloud. They didn’t sound them again” (Wagner, 2002e, para. 10). Originally erected as civil defense sirens during the Cold War, the sirens are used to give warnings of approaching bad weather (Schramm, 2002). The sirens do not work well in cold weather when people are closed up in their homes, so even if city officials had decided to keep sounding them, most residents would not have heard the alarm. Ironically, the failure of the siren warning system likely saved lives by allowing residents to sleep through the disaster and thereby “shelter in place” as recommended.

While the failure of the sirens may have saved the lives of sleeping citizens, the residents awakened by the railcars crashing were not warned to stay inside their homes, causing many to be enveloped in the poisonous vapor. Residents sought out the media for more information but did not get the information they needed. “The biggest complaint about Minot’s emergency plan was the failure to reach radio and TV stations early to put safety instructions on the air” (Wagner, 2002f, para. 11). The message failure that took place in the media was threefold: the emergency alert system was not executed, the TV stations were off the air, and the radio stations were running satellite programming (Wagner, 2002f). According to Reynolds (2002)

“Today the United States does not have a self-contained method to instantly communicate with its citizens, such as an emergency broadcast system that would reach everyone who may need important emergency information about what actions to take. The private media serve as an emergency broadcast system during a crisis... If you ask someone where they go to get up-to-date information during an emergency, they will mention radio, TV, and, today, Web sites.” (p. 129)

According to Wagner (2002f), “Police called the TV and radio stations responsible for broadcasting emergency messages, hoping to spread the safety instructions, but the two local TV stations were off the air, and the radio stations were playing programming piped in by satellite” (para. 12). Despite Minot police’s claim that they tried to contact the media immediately, a conflicting story emerged in the media. A broadcaster was on duty at Minot’s emergency radio station and said the early warning system was never triggered nor did he receive a phone call from the police until 3:00 a.m. The broadcaster claimed to be receiving calls by 1:45 a.m. from listeners who told him about the train derailment. He said he tried to call the police station numerous times to confirm the accident but only received a busy signal (Minot Daily News, 2002). Whatever story is true there remained a serious lack of communication.

Nearly 90 minutes passed before local TV and radio stations broadcast the first emergency message informing residents to “shelter in place” or remain in their homes (Wagner, 2002c). Reynolds (2002) states that “The absence of mass media [makes] it nearly impossible for emergency operation centers and public officials to communicate the nature of the crisis and the appropriate actions citizens should take to mitigate morbidity and mortality” (p. 129). Sue Ellen Johnson, who huddled in a neighbor’s basement with her family, experienced similar frustration as they awaited information about a rescue effort. “They were telling us the time and the weather . . . nothing on the radio, just program stuff. We were like, ‘Please, please, something’” (Wagner, 2002c, para. 70).

Perhaps the most disturbing failure was the ineffectiveness of the 911 emergency call center. At 1:39 a.m., officials from the Canadian-Pacific Railway phoned the Minot Police Department to say one of its trains had derailed just outside of Minot. Worse, among the tangled pile of freight cars were chemical tankers leaking poisonous gas into the air. “Within minutes 911 emergency calls began swamping the police department’s dispatch center” (Johnson, 2002, p. B1). “The 911 phone system jammed when calls flooded operators” (Wagner, 2002a, para. 58). The thousands of incoming calls to Minot’s 911 system flowed through four designated emergency dispatch lines, which overflowed to seven additional lines normally used for police administration work (Johnson, 2002). The dispatchers scrambled to answer over 2,800 calls from panicking residents on only 11 phone lines. While the dispatchers did an excellent job of pushing the message to “shelter in place,” there were simply not enough lines to allow residents to call in for help.

In a personal account of his experience during the crisis, Karel Sovak (*Minot Daily News*, 2002) discussed his frustration with the lack of communication during the crisis:

“Dialing 911, I found it was busy. ‘How can 911 be busy?’ I yelled to myself . . . I turned on the television, only to find a commercial. The radio only gave me music . . . Sir Francis Bacon said, ‘Knowledge is itself power.’ I can attest that in hindsight, I was powerless. Information that was badly needed to make a decision was absent” (B1).

#### *Public Outcry*

While failed communication efforts caused a break in the track, it was an early press conference that derailed the confidence of area residents in city and county officials. During a press conference the day after the spill, Chief Haustad said “all of the agencies had been working hard to prepare for just such an emergency and how to handle it properly if it did arise” (Crites, 2002a, p. A1). Ward County Emergency Manager Mellum said things ran smoothly at the center with everyone knowing what to do and when and how to do it. “We have been working, training and drilling for just such a disaster.” North Dakota Governor John Hoeven announced that he was “impressed by the actions taken by local authorities to handle the situation” (Crites, 2002a, p. A1).

The train derailment caused the deadly vapor to hover over the Minot area, but it was the attempt to bolster the image of the city and county emergency response workers that caused the crisis to hover over the heads of area officials. The reputation of emergency response workers was threatened, not by the putrid haze drifting over the city, but by the premature claim that the situation had been handled successfully. A public meeting to discuss the disaster “became intense” as residents demanded answers (Baker, 2002, p. A1). Residents were appalled that officials seemed to be patting themselves on the back for a job well done. One outraged resident said what bothered him more than the “botched 911 rescue was that it was stated at the initial press conference that the evacuation was successful;” another resident was exasperated, “For the governor to come in and say great job to the response – response to what?” (Baker, 2002, p. A1).

Ward County Sheriff Vern Erck said rescue workers did everything they could to help residents that night. “I think this derailment would have overwhelmed even the best emergency services in the country” (Wagner, 2002c, para. 31). Minot Rural Fire Department Chief Bob Wetzler added “The rescue efforts were difficult, our firefighters were working above the level of their training. We’re not supermen. We don’t wear red capes. We don’t leap tall buildings in single bounds. We’re human” (Wagner, 2002c, para. 40).

Ward County Emergency Manager Mellum, who “appeared as stunned as the rest of the panel while hearing the testimony said, ‘This is all very painful, but I think we need to hear it’” (Baker, 2002, p. A6). The public meeting was not the last place officials heard about the downfalls of the emergency response. Aside from the public meeting, in the days following the derailment, the opinion columns and letters to the editor in the local paper were awash with criticism for the emergency response of the city and county. As part of its investigation of the derailment, the National Transportation Safety Board asked residents what they thought about rescue efforts. Surveys were sent to 81 families, only 13 were returned, 10 of which rated emergency efforts as poor (Wagner, 2002c).

#### *Looking for Answers*

Facing an upheaval from the distressed citizens, city and county officials decided to look deeper into the crisis. A committee was formed to address future safety issues and emergency plans in case of another major disaster; city and county emergency people met with representatives of the electronic media to solve some of the communication problems brought up

in the public meeting; and a third-party expert was commissioned to look at the disaster and evaluate the response. According to Rafferty (2002a) “Through whatever comes out of the accident, most people agree that the community should evaluate what happened during the accident and rescue effort and learn from it” (p. A8). Fire Chief Harald Haustad said, “We want to solicit as much input as we can” (Rafferty, 2002a, p. A1).

Media representatives stressed the importance of “having officials on the air giving people official information and advice on what to do” (Crites, 2002c, p. A6). The overall theme of the meeting focused on educating the public as an important part of the notification process. Suggestions from the meeting included an increase in the testing of the emergency broadcast system, installing hotlines for questions, and having portable radios with fresh batteries readily available so individuals can tune into the emergency broadcast system station in case of a power outage (Crites, 2002c).

The third-party critique conducted by the Emergency Response Management Consulting firm of Edmonton, Alberta also offered many suggestions to improve communications. “According to the report, the largest problem that people came across when dealing with the disaster was trying to find some kind of information while they were trapped in their homes” (Rafferty, 2002b, p. A1). “There were a number of problems encountered in trying to notify the public about what was happening. Some of them involved communications between Minot Central Dispatch and the community’s three primary alerting systems – radio and TV stations and sirens” (Crites, 2002c, p. A1).

The report suggested that a second line of call takers, such as the police department’s tactical team, be available to take the pressure of the 911 call center. Since the call center was close to the spill, and it came very close to being closed, the report recommended the center be sealed in the event of another similar event so dispatchers are assured breathable air. The report also advised the implementation of a reverse 911 system that can call 1,000 residents at a time to notify them of the situation. Another promising idea was to have the National Weather Service office in Bismarck relay emergency information via weather radios (Crites, 2002c). Chief Haugstad said it will take time to sort through all of the options but it is important to find better ways to handle disasters. “We want to prepare the community to handle the next disaster more efficiently. We would be fool hearted to think there won’t be another disaster” (Rafferty, 2002a, p. A1).

#### *Rebuilding the Track*

In comparison to the extreme loss of life characterizing recent natural disasters, the Minot crisis was very small. It is important to note, though, that the city of Minot has less than 35,000 residents. The emergency responders and city and county officials went to the same churches as those affected. Their children went to the same schools. The crisis was personal for almost everyone in Minot, requiring a resolution that allowed the city to move past the crisis. While some projects are still awaiting funding, changes were evident in the weeks and months following the derailment. Chief Haugstad said all of the standard operating procedures used during the disaster response had been reviewed and updated where needed, the fire department had been emphasizing training staff for emergency response, and area emergency responders were coordinating their efforts to make improvements to the way they respond to disasters. Chief Haugstad said, “The major part of getting emergency responders to work together is to have effective communication between agencies and to the public” (Rafferty, 2002d, p. A1).

Whereas the siren warning system was up and running within a few days, the other communication systems took more time to get back on track “On the morning of the derailment

police weren't able to contact the media to get information on television and radio as quickly as they would have liked to through the Emergency Alert System" (Rafferty, 2002, p. A1). Lieutenant Fred Debowey said there were power problems with the Emergency Alert System the morning of the derailment, but those problems have now been worked out. Since the Minot radio and television stations are not always staffed, officials made arrangements with stations in Bismarck, North Dakota to interrupt the satellite broadcasts. Arrangements were also made with the National Weather Service to broadcast emergency information over radio and television.

The 911 emergency system is seeing changes as well. Emergency officials have established an alternative location to conduct emergency operations and an alternative location for Minot Central Dispatch has been set up. Lieutenant Debowey said, "All we'll have to do is grab a few laptops, papers and we're gone." (Raferty, 2002d, B7). The reverse 911 system has also been installed. This system allows the municipal emergency response personnel to automatically call people at home with updated information.

City and county officials have gone beyond the recommendations and are providing emergency information in the back cover of the phone books including guidelines for emergency planning, making home survival kits, and following "shelter in place" tips, which are used to inform people when to stay indoors during some disasters. Ward County Emergency Manager Mellum said, "With the information in the phone book, we can feel confident that we have reached nearly every home with it" (*Minot Daily News*, 2002).

After weeks of continuous criticism on the opinion page of the local paper, once the report was released and officials began to make changes to the systems, support began sieve through the backlash. According to the editors of *Minot Daily News* "Perhaps the most important part of the report is the willingness of area emergency officials to look for ways they can improve, to learn from what happened" (Eyky, Obenchain & Johnson, 2002, p. A4). A letter to the editor agreed, "Minot and Ward County governments did the right thing by immediately having their emergency response evaluated" (Greenwood, 2002, p. A4). Even state government officials commended the effort. During a visit with emergency management people after the derailment, Representative Earl Pomeroy said he "was impressed that local officials had hired an outside expert to critique the actions they took. "I commend you for this...this is full accountability" (Crites, 2002b, p. A1).

#### *Rebuilding Legitimacy through Corrective Action*

Case study research is often refuted for the method's inability to generalize to populations; however, the lessons learned in this case provide significant insight into the evaluation of a crisis response. What makes this particular case different is the identification of communication as a key aspect in emergency response, the public demand for corrective action, and the relative size of the crisis to the local population. When city and county officials initially labeled the emergency response a success, residents were outraged. Rather than alleviating the crisis, this discourse expounded the reputation tailspin of emergency response workers and city and county officials. Residents demanded action to assure emergency response communication would be improved. "For an organization facing a crisis situation, taking some degree of responsibility for the crisis during critical periods and providing corrective action can expedite the organization's effort to rebuild its legitimacy" (Sellnow et al., 1998, p. 61). Ward County Emergency Manager Mellum admitted, "The derailment pushed us to change some things and improve some things" (Rafferty, 2002, p. A1).

"Previous studies indicate that corrective actions which seek to prevent similar crises in the future tend to be more effective in the re-legitimation process than routine solutions"

(Sellnow et al., 1998, p. 63). While city and county officials cannot depict the exact circumstances of the next crisis, through corrective action, they are able to demonstrate they are now better prepared to handle a similar crisis. Lieutenant Debowey said, “We have no control over when the next emergency will occur, but when it happens we will be much more aware of what to do” (Crites, 2002b, p. A1).

Crises allow organizations to have “the potential to emerge from crisis with an enhanced public presence and with a more responsive structure” (Seeger et al., 2003, p. 264). “If organizations embrace the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and to enact new strategies, they can emerge from crises with renewed vitality” (p. 266). Minot City Manager David Waind said officials, even those outside the Minot area, can learn from the derailment and emergency response, “It took an event like this to see the shortcomings of our notification system. Multiple layers of notification are necessary” (Wagner, 2002c, para. 35). City and county officials not only learned of the breakdowns in the emergency response communication system, but also learned that area residents have high expectations for how those systems should work in an emergency. Minot City Manager Waind said, “When you have an event, you have to learn from it. I hope people realize we will continue to make changes” (Wagner, 2002c, para. 36).

Now that the haze has lifted from “The Magic City” and the twisted metal, poisoned earth and toxic fumes have been cleared away, the memories of the communication breakdowns that incited panic and outraged residents the morning of the morbid mist have also evaporated. Citizen outrage transferred to the Canadian Pacific Railway and the cause of the crash. While the railway continues to face litigation five years after the crash, by utilizing organizational learning and corrective action discourse during the height of the crisis, the City of Minot and Ward County officials were able to rebuild legitimacy for the emergency response system and clean up the train wreck caused by poor communication.

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**Retrospective on *World Class* Public Relations:  
Are Multinational Organizations Prepared to Manage Reputations Across Borders?**

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In 2000, the author conducted a study for Edelman Worldwide that led to a Theory of World-Class Public Relations (the term “world class” was derived from the book *World Class*, by Kanter, 1995.) The study measured public relations structures and strategies in 25 multinational entities, and particularly their ability to anticipate and respond to issues that, in today’s global communication environment, can quickly cross cultural and political boundaries. From the study, a model was created that could predict the quality and reach of public relations programs in any multinational organization. This paper presents preliminary results of a replication study to determine whether the model is still applicable, especially in response to the dramatic spread of the Internet, its increased use by global activist groups and bloggers, and the resultant ability of crises to cross borders at an even more rapid rate than in 2000.

Over the years, the landmines of cross-cultural operations have mired the reputations of many multinational entities as they have plied their wares or services in the various countries of the world. Strategic and tactical missteps have relegated multinationals like Parker Brothers to the history books (Maddox, 1993) or firms such as Union Carbide to “flea market” sales (Mackenzie, 2002). Entities like Coca-Cola (Wakefield, 2000a), Nike (Lewis & De Tienne, 2004), and Royal Dutch Shell (Ogbondah & George, 2003) have suffered from crises in Europe, Southeast Asia and Africa, respectively, for months or even years before restoring their reputations.

So why did bad things happen to these companies? Were the entities particularly adept at making mistakes in other cultures? Were they victims of bad luck? Were they socially irresponsible? Or, is it more realistic to support the argument of practitioner and scholar Dejan Vercic (2003): that operating in the international arena is inherently more complex than what companies face in their own home countries, and the entities stumble when they lack the increased understanding and sophistication required of global reputation management and relationship building?

And where is public relations in this equation? In addressing the Institute for Public Relations, Harold Burson (2004) noted the function’s advancement from in-house journalist into a seat at the management table protecting chief executives from these horribly damaging mistakes. However, he questioned whether practitioners are qualified to deal with the elevated responsibilities or if these managerial and advisory roles will continue to gravitate toward attorneys and management consultants. This may be especially true when handling issues across cultural, political, and economic boundaries.

In 1999 Larry Foster, who had helped guide Johnson & Johnson through the Tylenol crisis, spoke to the Public Relations Society of America about the state of public relations in the international environment. He said:

... many large multinational companies (make) international public relations management the victim of benign neglect. As a result ... the international public relations/public affairs function has not developed in large corporations as it should. While this may seem to bode well for the public relations agencies and consultancies that are filling the void ... over the long term it can spell trouble (Foster, 1999, p. 3).

At that time, research was underway to clarify whether such assessments of modern global practice were accurate. Was it true that the public relations industry was insufficiently prepared to help organizations build and maintain reputations on a global basis? Were special skills or sensitivities needed for practice across borders? The research explored such questions, concentrating on the structuring and sophistication of reputation management practices in multinational entities. The research, conducted over a five-year period in the late 1990s, resulted in a *Model of World-Class Public Relations* (Wakefield, 2000a). The model offered a benchmark by which organizations could assess the levels of effectiveness in their international public relations efforts.

But more than seven years have passed since the *Model of World-Class Public Relations* was developed, and societal and technological shifts likely have changed the way public relations is practiced in multinational entities. Norman Mineta (2007), vice chair of Hill & Knowlton, recently said that Web 2.0, around-the-clock global media coverage and other technological changes and global issues have radically affected the practice. He explained that both large and small entities need to have a “global footprint” to compete today (p. 8). Despite these changes, he claimed, “Americans continue to be myopic in terms of our worldview” (p. 11). GolinHarris chief executive Fred Cook (2007) added that in the “global marketplace ... barriers to business may be at an all-time low, but [the need for] cultural sensitivities have never been higher (p. 30).

Sensing these changes, this author is replicating his studies that led to the *Model of World-Class Public Relations*, to determine whether, or how, the dynamics have affected public relations structures and programs in multinational organizations. Included in this assessment is an evaluation of whether the model needs adjustment in light of any potential changes. The study still is in the early data gathering phase, but initial input is suggesting that the changes are having some of the anticipated effects.

This paper is intended as a preliminary report on these replication studies. The paper first will outline the original studies that led to the Model of World-Class Public Relations (including rationale behind the name of the model). It will describe the replication process, and will then explain some of the early patterns that indicate possible needed changes in the model based on these patterns. The author reemphasizes that these results are still limited, and that the model will be changed only when there is more evidence to support these early indicators that some change may be needed.

### **State of Research in the 1990s**

In the early 1990s, literature specific to international public relations was scarce. Culbertson (1996) divided the existing research into *comparative public relations*, which explores practice between countries, and *international public relations*, which looks at the practice in organizations that operate “in an international or cross-cultural context” (p. 2). Most of Culbertson and Chen’s (1996) book, *International Public Relations*, looked at specific countries, and Culbertson found scant research in the latter area. Later, Molleda and Laskin (2005) agreed that even today, few of organizational studies are available.

It is strange that just a decade ago there were limited theories to guide public relations in multinationals. These entities have an enormous global impact and are easy targets for activists around the world. These organizations must understand international complexities so as to proactively communicate and build relationships wherever they operate and to avoid the mistakes that damage so many multinationals. Yet, Pavlik (1987) said that “international public relations is one of the most rapidly growing areas of the profession, and one of the least understood” (p. 64). With such minimal guidance, most companies were subjecting themselves to these catastrophes (Wakefield, 2000a).

Reviews of the literature in the 1990s showed that one main challenge for multinationals in carrying out their communications programs was navigating between global demands and local sensitivities. Theoretical basis for this balance was already established in other disciplines (Adler et al., 1986; Baalbaki & Malhotra, 1993), and it was mentioned in certain public relations contexts as well (Ovatt 1987). Anderson (1989) observed that entities preferred either: (1) creating programs at headquarters and implementing them in all markets with minor adaptations, or (2) placing resources and decisions in the local markets where the needs and demands of local audiences were best understood. The few others in the discussion usually defended one side or the other of this equation (Anderson, 1989; Dilenschneider, 1992).

Some experts proposed that multinational public relations programs must respond to *both* global and local imperatives—that responding to either pole at the expense of the other could actually be problematic (Botan, 1992). Traverse-Healy (1991) said that such a balanced program should centralize overall policies and messages and then localize strategies to adapt to language, customs and politics. Morley (1998) later said, “there is not likely to be a phrase you will hear in ... public relations as often as ‘think global, act local’.... The idea is that a good product, service, or communications strategy can achieve global success as long as it is customized to meet local tastes” (p. 29).

The key, then, to successful international practice was to discover exactly which combination of global and local variables would be the most effective. The critical question was what strategies or tasks would be important to maintain on a global scale and what things were best addressed in the various markets? Again, cues to this issue came from research in related disciplines and from public relations itself.

### **Foundation for International Excellence**

The Study on Excellence in Public Relations Management (J. Grunig, 1992) is perhaps the most extensive compilation of benchmark data ever for the industry. Over several years, the Excellence team gathered theories inside and outside of the field and tested them in all aspects of the practice. The result was a set of principles to define and guide effective practice in public relations well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The project also broached the international context.

For example, the Excellence study embraced contingency theory, which is especially salient in the complex and diverse global realm (Negandhi, 1983). Larissa Grunig (1992) characterized publics in the global environment as “increasingly more unfamiliar and more hostile ... more organized and more powerful” (p. 130). This extension of the Excellence study across international boundaries also seemed appropriate because many of its variables were drawn from theories that had originated or been accepted outside the United States. It was felt that this research could be incorporated into a foundation for excellence in international public relations.

One contingency theory that was relevant to global practice was Brinkerhoff and Ingle’s (1989) *theory of structured flexibility*, a contingency theory created for the developmental

management domain. Their theory identified a combination of functions that were generic to good performance—that could be universally applied—or that were “specific” to local contingencies. Their generic variable included creation of short- and long-term objectives, consensus on policies, establishment of responsibilities, overall strategic plans, and budget management. The specifics accounted for the flexibility to modify and implement centralized themes in specific regions or countries as necessary.

From the Excellence study, it was possible to propose eight variables on global effectiveness—called the *generic* variables in accordance to Brinkerhoff and Ingle’s (1989) model. Wording for these variables needed to be slightly modified from the Excellence Study, however, so as to be more suited to the international context. It was believed that the successful multinational would value and implement these generic principles universally. The variables were:

1. The multinational entity has a global philosophy of communication that fosters trust and seeks mutual understanding between the multinational and its publics worldwide.
2. This same two-way symmetrical philosophy is reflected within the organizational culture and internal communication worldwide.
3. Public relations is a strategic management function worldwide, working with the dominant coalition both at headquarters and in each of the local units to make decisions related to communication, and not subordinated simply to carrying out or communicating the wishes of senior managers.
4. The public relations function is integrated, meaning that its practitioners worldwide work as a single unified unit as well as reporting to their own local management.
5. Public relations is not subordinated to marketing, legal or other departments so that it can properly carry out its strategic mission.
6. Senior practitioners in the lead public relations position at headquarters and in every local unit will be trained in public relations and able to perform managerial roles of boundary spanning and advising senior management (obviously, some variations would be necessary in given cultures where public relations training may not be available.)
7. Hiring and promotional practices will value and foster diversity by offering equal opportunities to women and to whatever minorities may be resident within given cultures where the multinational operates.
8. Because multinationals face turbulent, dynamic environments, public relations is structured to globally adapt to rapid changes anywhere in the world that would affect the organization’s operations or reputation.

In addition to these generic variables, it was believed that entities with excellent international public relations programs would interact with publics in response to local factors. The researchers again examined theories outside of public relations and identified six *specific* variables that would apply.

The *specific* variables included level of development, political environment, cultural variances, the potential for activism, and the reach and influence of the mass media in given countries. These variables have since been summarized in treatises by Sriramesh (2003) and Wakefield (2000b), so this author will forego an extensive explanation here, with one exception: language differences.

Having twice been a global communication manager, this author felt from the start of the original study that language should be separated from the cultural variable. Others wrapped it

into the cultural framework (Vercic, et al., 1993). This is understandable given that it is difficult to distinguish whether language begets culture or vice versa. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the impact language has on international practices. Many nations have multiple official languages and dialects, taxing organizational budgets and resources to make required translations (Newsom et al., 1996). English has become increasingly universal: “nearly a quarter of the world’s population is already fluent or competent in English” (Crystal, 1997, pp. 4-5). Yet, its dominance is often resented, bringing even more public relations issues. As Crystal said, “If English is your mother tongue, you may have mixed feelings about the way it is spreading.... And if you live in a country where the survival of your own language is threatened by the success of English, you may feel envious, resentful, or angry” (p. 2).

Miscommunication across cultures also mandates cross-cultural public relations responses. It argues for giving local practitioners the autonomy to communicate directly with their publics rather than being forced to parrot global verbiage. While consistency in organizational messages is important, they must be broad enough to allow for local adaptation.

### **The Research Process**

With the generic and specific variables identified, it was time for a test in the multinational entities whose success depends on understanding the nuances of operating across cultural, political, and economic boundaries. The intent was to create a normative theory of excellence in international public relations. Normative theory would explain how public relations *should* be practiced, as opposed to positive theory that describes how it *is* practiced. However, the best normative theories also guide actual practice (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1991), so we believed that creation of a good normative theory on international public relations would be useful for practitioners as well as scholars.

The research began in the mid-1990s and evolved into three cumulative studies that combined the wisdom of 79 public relations experts in 30 countries. This author’s dissertation research, a Delphi study of 23 veterans from 18 nations, served as the initial international test of the variables. That was followed by a survey of 31 experts in 11 more countries, replicating the second round of the Delphi. In 1998, this author was asked to conduct a study for Edelman Public Relations into the worldviews and activities of 25 multinational corporations using the aforementioned variables as the measuring stick. That project led to a model for effective international public relations. Below is a more detailed summary of each project.

#### **The Delphi Study**

The Delphi method collects knowledge from experts in a process where there is an “incomplete state of knowledge concerning ... the nature of the problem” (Delbecq et al., 1975, p. 5). In the 1990s, we felt that this was an early exploration into what factors would be effective in international public relations, so a Delphi study was appropriate. The method involves experts without having to gather them in one place—perfect for a study that included respondents from 18 nations.

The study progressed in two rounds, the minimum necessary for a valid Delphi. In the first round, 50 potential respondents were given the 14 propositions along with related questions: Does the proposition apply in your country; can it hold up in an organization that crosses borders; and so on. The purpose was to generate dialogue and examples as to why the propositions would or would not be appropriate in an international context. After the first round, the responses were converted into 78 declarative statements that were again sent to the study participants for a second round. Next to each statement was a Likert scale that measured to

what extent the respondents agreed or disagreed with the comment. From this process it was possible to reach conclusions about how the 14 propositions held up to international scrutiny.

### Results of the Delphi

The Delphi achieved considerable consensus. Thirty-four of the 78 declarative statements achieved mean scores above four or below two on the five-point Likert scale (5.0 or 1.0 representing complete consensus for or against the statement; to see what statements earned the strongest consensus, see Table 1). The panelists' similar thoughts suggested that certain fundamental principals of public relations are becoming universal. Several respondents, particularly in Europe, also commented that public relations practice is gradually moving closer to the normative ideals proposed in the study.

**Table 1: Responses to Declarative Statements**

*Statements Which Received the Most Consensus (4.5 or higher, 1.4 or lower):*

- International PR is exponentially more complex than domestic PR
- Two-way symmetrical communication is desirable
- Organizations should be more concerned with sales turnover than with public credibility (generated strong *disagreement*)
- If headquarters involves local practitioners in planning, it can gain insights about local conditions and resources and profit from global thinking
- PR should be separate from marketing, working independently but closely with marketing, etc.
- An ideal qualification for PR education and training would be clear understanding of local politics, media, culture, language, etc.
- Headquarters must understand and have empathy for local cultures to ensure that decisions do not insult local populations or harm the organization
- A local component of a multinational organization should build relationships with local media

*Statements Which Received the Least Consensus (2.8 to 3.2 on five-point scale):*

- Most multinationals don't care about benefits of external publics
- Multinational PR programs should be run inside the multinational organization, not be handed over to an outside PR firm
- It's cheaper to hire a local PR firm than to hire an inside PR staff person
- When talking about strategic planning, a PR background will hardly suffice
- If development means GNP per capita, it doesn't affect PR practice
- In political systems without freedom of speech and other freedoms, there is no room for PR

Seven generic variables generated consensus. It was seen as desirable to foster two-way communication throughout the world, both internally and externally, but was noted that multinationals rarely achieve this ideal. A common global strategy was seen as wise, as long as it was not imposed from the top. Respondents concurred that a globally integrated public relations unit would be ideal but improbable in today's business world. There was consensus that public relations staff in multinationals should be qualified around "international standards of public relations education," and should not be subordinated to marketing or other units. There also was consent that the multinational, more than domestic entities, must be able to anticipate and adapt to issues.

There was disagreement over the need to hire for diversity, including practitioners who would represent minority groups in various countries. The majority of respondents concurred that multinationals should consider local cultural mores in the hiring of employees. Their thoughts were best represented by the declarative statement, "the only criterion for hiring should be, is this the best person for the position?" Interestingly, Nancy Adler (1993), a cross-cultural

scholar, has written that multinationals are breaking down long-standing, rigid employment norms in many nations.

The six specific variables proposed as influences on local public relations also elicited support from the respondents. It was agreed that variables like culture, language, and developmental differences require distinct approaches not only between countries but within countries. The novel element was that activism and the role of media were beginning to be seen as influences spreading beyond individual countries, therefore necessitating consideration in global public relations programming.

### **Delphi Follow-Up**

After completing the initial Delphi this author wanted to determine whether the initial results would hold up in even more cultures. So, using contacts made since starting the first study, the author sent out the declarative statements from the second round of the Delphi. The attempt generated 31 more responses from 11 different countries than in the initial pool. This pushed the total sampling to 54 responses from 29 countries. The results yielded similar comments to the first study.

### **The Edelman Project**

The final study was completed in 1998, when several clients of Edelman Public Relations were expanding their operations and asking how to carry out their international public relations to be most effective. A few months earlier, Edelman executive Michael Morley and this author had presented together at a public relations conference in the United States, so he requested a study for his organization and its clients.

The research consisted of lengthy telephone interviews with public relations supervisors in 25 multinational firms headquartered in 12 nations. Eighteen of the companies were on the 1997 *Fortune* Global 500 list, and the smallest earned close to \$2 billion that year. The interviews examined each entity's public relations structuring and programs; communication between headquarters and local units; budget centers and processes for public relations programs around the world; processes for anticipating and dealing with major challenges; uses of public relations agencies; and strengths and weaknesses of agency assistance.

One significant impact of the Edelman research was to verify the applicability of the Excellence Study in international public relations. While the Excellence Study was a groundbreaking compilation of theories, it was seen as abstract and not relevant to everyday realities of public relations (Dozier, J. Grunig, and L. Grunig, 1995). While evidence was already accumulating against these claims, the Edelman study offered confirmation of the Excellence variables from senior public relations people who were orchestrating strategic activities around the world.

### **Global Excellence: *Model of World-Class Public Relations***

With their cumulative data, these studies helped confirm what comprises public relations excellence in multinational organizations. Certainly, there is no "one-size-fits-all" prescription; entities will always differ in philosophy and structure depending on their industry, country of origin, size, financial resources, and other factors. However, the studies disclosed certain universals that can give multinationals of any type greater chances for public relations success. The Edelman study, in particular, delineated variances of success in the practices of different entities based on these principles.

With these characteristics in place, it was possible to develop a model for public relations practice in the multinational. The model could help evaluate a multinational's public relations program and predict its potential for maintaining a solid reputation around the world, as opposed

to just in the organization's home country. The model was called the *Model of World-Class Public Relations* after a book entitled *World Class*, by Harvard professor Rosa Beth Moss Kanter (1995). She said that successful multinationals incorporate the best thinking and resources from anywhere in the world, not just from hometown roots. Using that same reasoning, this author placed the term "world-class" into the model of global public relations.

With the *Model of World-Class Public Relations*, every Edelman study participant could be placed into one of four classifications. These ranged from no real resources or staff members to full global staffing of qualified personnel who actively cooperate to achieve mutual goals. Of course, local public relations officers should work closely with their unit managers; but these same officers are also integral to a global team that preserves reputation worldwide. Consider, for example, what a waste it is for an entity to hire qualified practitioners in all local units only to restrict their activities to adapting and carrying out global vision set by someone else? Wouldn't it be better to harness these great ideas for the entire global strategic team? That is what the global strategic team is about—using the public relations staff (and perhaps agencies, as well) throughout the world in a horizontal planning and implementation capacity, while simultaneously having the individuals carry out their own local assignments, as well.

At first, the classifications were based on supposed evolution. Multinationals with no international public relations were *early evolution*, and as the program expanded it would fall into the *moderate evolution* phase. More resources or sophistication reflected *advanced evolution*, and full-scale programs were in *complete evolution*. However, while the research was underway, two Korean firms were severely affected by a temporary collapse of that nation's economy. Both firms drastically reduced their public relations staffs and their international programs dropped from advanced to barely emerging status.

Based on the Korean example, the author dropped "evolution" from the model. The term implies slow but steady growth, yet reality does not work that way. Instead, the categories should depict the current status of public relations, which could differ from what it was last year or will be next year. As a result, the names of the classifications were changed to *Dormant Program*, *Emerging Program*, *Sophisticated Program*, and *World-Class Program*. These classifications are explained in Table 2.

### **Core Findings from the Edelman Study**

Once the model was created, it was possible to make interesting observations about the firms that participated in the Edelman study. These observations indicated that many of even the largest multinationals had insufficient public relations programs at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, only four of the 25 firms had *world-class* status.

**Table 2: Four classifications of the Model of World-Class Public Relations**

Dormant Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No real support from dominant coalition for PR</li> <li>• Function mostly one-way publicity/marketing support</li> <li>• Few/no PR resources and activities outside headquarters</li> <li>• No cooperation between headquarters and local units</li> <li>• No strategy for handling PR issues across borders</li> <li>• All international PR is reactive</li> </ul>
Emerging Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing resources, but staffs still incomplete in local units</li> <li>• PR at headquarters still conducts mostly one-way publicity tasks and has little or no authority to influence local PR</li> <li>• Still little interaction between headquarters and local units</li> <li>• Local PR people are not trained or are not well qualified</li> <li>• International PR is still reactive</li> </ul>
Sophisticated Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good support from dominant coalition</li> <li>• PR function becoming strategic; combines traditional publicity efforts with two-way communication and emphasis on reputation management</li> <li>• Qualified staff or use of PR agencies in most local units</li> <li>• Some cooperation between headquarters PR and local</li> <li>• Local PR beginning to be subject to global guidelines</li> <li>• Proactive international PR valued but not often achieved</li> </ul>
World-Class Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dominant coalition sees PR as core international function and support it completely</li> <li>• PR protects reputation first, then supports marketing</li> <li>• Full-time PR officers in all major markets, often supplemented by PR agencies</li> <li>• PR training is prerequisite for hiring at headquarters and in local units; development and team-building is ongoing</li> <li>• PR officers function as global team, with frequent, purposeful interaction between headquarters and local units <i>and</i> among local units</li> <li>• Headquarters PR person is team leader for achieving PR goals both globally and locally</li> <li>• Information sharing is fostered, with ideas and solutions coming from any source on the global team</li> <li>• Global team cooperatively sets global PR guidelines, and every unit creates and carries out strategies based on those guidelines; budgeting available at headquarters and locally</li> <li>• Global PR team anticipates and is prepared to expedite, even across borders, any contingency that arises</li> </ul>

Seven of the companies fell into the sophisticated category, eight had emerging status, and five more had not left dormant state. Certainly, this supported the assertion made earlier that “many large multinational companies make international public relations management the victim of benign neglect” (Foster, 1999, p. 3).

Other findings also proved intriguing. First, public relations status had little to do with corporate size. One *Fortune* Global 500 firm that had been in dozens of national markets for years was entrenched in the dormant state. Also, the only U.S. firm with world-class status was also the only U.S. firm not among the Global 500. Second, the European corporations seemed far more advanced in their international public relations than American firms. This is probably because the European firms are inherently more attuned to the international environment and from their earliest stages the corporations must look beyond their own borders to increase their marketplace. Therefore, European public relations had a more holistic approach from the outset.

Third, the entities with more advanced international public relations—those with the most in-house resources—also were most effective in using public relations agencies.

### **Toward the Future**

The studies conducted from 1995 to 1998 disclosed considerable knowledge about the practice of international public relations. The variables held up well over three tests and proved to be a solid basis for effective practice in multinational organizations. In addition, the studies verified that development, political environments, culture and language, activism and the media affect public relations practices in the local units and also are causing a need for advanced programming and coordination on a global level.

However, all of these studies were early explorations into what at the time was a poorly framed world of international public relations. They were qualitative approaches with small sample sizes and mostly open-end questions. Therefore, although the studies identified worldwide patterns of thought among public relations experts, they should still be viewed with what some scholars call “systematic doubt” (Agar, 1980).

### **Update of the Delphi and World-Class Model**

In the decade since the original research, this author and others have fostered conversation (Pauly, 1991) about how to effectively organize and practice public relations in the multinational (Wakefield, 1999; Wakefield, 2000a, Jackson, 1999; Jackson, 2000, Sriramesh, 2003; Vercic, 2003; J. Grunig, 2006). However, building theory in such a broad and expanding domain as international public relations is a mammoth undertaking, and as this year began there still was tremendous room for additional research (Molleda & Laskin, 2005).

To continue this research track, this author has started replications of the earlier projects. The first task is to replicate the original Delphi research to determine whether its results are still applicable in a more globalized business climate, where the advent of the Internet, greater instability in the post-9/11 environment, increasing clout and sophistication globally connected activist networks, have perhaps necessitated changes in international public relations since the onset of this century. Later, with this new data in hand, there will be another examination of the validity of the *Model of World-Class Public Relations* based on today’s global context.

As mentioned earlier, the Delphi replication so far is in its early stages. Ten responses have been collected from eight countries—the United States, Canada, Ireland, Italy, Slovenia, Turkey, Chile, and Australia. At least 10 more respondents are sought, and the researchers are anticipating that these responses will come in no later than the end of August 2007. At that point, much more extensive investigation will be conducted to search for patterns, outliers, and comparisons or contrasts to the original studies.

Meanwhile, it is possible to pass on some early observations based on the responses to date.

1. There is some skepticism over the actual practice of two-way symmetrical communication in the international context.

The concept of two-way symmetrical communication, advocated by James Grunig (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), has long been seen as more ideal than practical despite attempts to defend the model (J. Grunig, 2006). Scholars have argued that it is not realistic to expect powerful multinational entities to communicate on equal terms with their publics (Holtzhausen, 2007). Ironically, however, today’s Internet environment demands that organizations be more transparent—more or less a “forced symmetry” in a world where entities can no longer control their messages but must enter conversation with their publics (Payne, 2007). Yet, the early

comments in this Delphi replication are reflecting the continued skepticism over two-way symmetrical communication, as follows:

- *“While the principle is sound ... the actual practice is limited internationally.”*
- *“I find two-way symmetrical public relations impossible in many South American, African, Eastern European, and Middle Eastern countries because of restrictions on performance and these differ for different reasons.”*
- *“This should be desirable if a company would like to prove its social responsibility; but I doubt that organizations are able to maintain such kind of relations due to the differences in the local environments.”*
- *“The less an organization is focused on meeting the needs of a specific clientele, the less they are susceptible to adopt the two-way model.”*

2. Increasingly, domestic and international public relations are seen as the same thing, even in the United States.

This represents a shift from the previous Delphi study, where most of the respondents from the United States saw a distinct difference between domestic public relations and international public relations. This likely was because most American respondents saw the need to understand and respond to the complexities of culture, language, political and economic differences, and other factors that usually were not encountered in the United States at that time. With more and more practitioners working in the international arena, and with the increasing cross-cultural publics even in the United States, these observations apparently have changed in the past decade. Some of the comments from Americans participating in the Delphi replication are:

- *“I see no difference nor a need to make one form an aspirational point of view.”*
- *“In my view, PR is PR, regardless of the ‘version’ of it, national or international.”*

3. Respondents still seem to think international PR follows mostly marketing goals

In the original study, there was great consensus that the tendency for public relations to support marketing efforts was greater in the international arena than in companies practicing only in the domestic arena. Again, while these artificial boundaries between domestic and international seem to be disappearing, the tendency for public relations to support marketing still seems great in the multinational organization. Some typical comments of the Delphi replication are:

- *“What we see all over the world at this point in time: performance tied to the marketing function corrected only by crisis situations that demonstrate to management the insufficiency of current one-way symmetrical performance.”*
- *“Public relations is narrowly defined and most likely to be in marketing.”*
- *“Looking to the examples of our national companies working in the international environment, they are mainly talking about product public relations and image making.”*

4. There seems to be some thought that qualifications for public relations around the world are not necessarily getting better.

As multinational entities increase in number and continue to spread farther around the world, there will be greater pressures on obtaining and developing qualified public relations practitioners in every nation. The question, of course, is what exactly is a qualified practitioner, and should those qualifications be constant throughout the world? In the original Delphi there was consensus that qualified practitioners were necessary, but not great agreement that it was possible to obtain them from one nation to the next. This is a question that will be explored

further in this replication. Meanwhile, early comments indicate that not much has changed in the past decade, as shown below:

- *“Perhaps our country [the United States] is going backwards.”*
- *“It is not sufficient to know public relations, but you must devote some time to learn the ways and methods of other disciplines of the organization to be able to develop the advisory capacity that will be holistic.”*
- *“In my opinion, you are never qualified enough. Besides having knowledge of communication, it is almost necessary to have some knowledge on management, financial management, human resources, understanding of culture, speaking foreign languages, and more and more... The environment should be developed enough to understand and accept these ‘qualifications’; otherwise management would just expect publicity as the only value offered by public relation people.”*
- *“The fact that there is an increase in numbers of educational institutions does not guarantee a good education.... The qualifications listed in the propositions are for true public relations practitioners. The qualifications should not, however, change to a great extent from one culture to another culture. This profession should have universals.”*

5. Activism definitely is increasing, even in countries that traditionally have faced this phenomenon. The growth in activism may require a shift in the international model from a specific variable to a generic variable, because increasingly both local and global responses are needed for activist publics.

A decade ago activists could incite change by enduring the bureaucratic pace of legislation, approaching media to expose abuses, or trying direct intervention like protests at headquarters (Rose, 1991). Activism often was contained in one place, and companies could hide local incidents from the rest of the world. With the Internet, this is not possible. Information goes global in hours as activists rally other groups to help apply pressure. Governments that previously could terrorize their citizens and hide human rights abuses are finding it more difficult as activists swarm in from around the world—literally and virtually—to expose the misdeeds.

The growing power and reach of activists begs a significant question. Where activism was once seen as a specific variable, has its global influence now turned it into a generic variable? Does activism demand attention from headquarters, which must carefully develop global strategies that include continual communication and feedback from the local units? From where does communication with these activist groups need to originate—headquarters or host countries or both? These questions will be explored in the Delphi replication, with early comments as follows:

- *“Activism is growing in all countries [with] creation of PR programs where none previously existed (China, Poland).”*
- *“I think the effects of activism are much more dramatic in countries other than the United States.”*
- *“Activism may or may not be a problem and in some cases—a problem created may be a healthy sign.”*
- *“Activists have yet to make full use of the Internet in their activities. Similarly organizational use has also been somewhat passive. There is a level of activism here which would not be dissimilar to that found in the home countries of our multinationals: i.e.. concern about the impact of the multinational on the local environment and economy.”*

6. The Internet, obviously, is playing an important new role in international public relations work. It needs to be added somewhere to the equation to update any theory related to public relations in the multinational entity.

At the outset of this research in the early 1990s, only the military and academics knew much about the Internet. Today it is difficult to imagine how the world got along without it. It has penetrated the developed world and reaches into even some of the most remote villages of Africa and the Pacific. It has facilitated great communication and marketing opportunities as well as unprecedented vulnerability for multinational entities. The entire world comes to the individual at the click of a mouse, and with that comes power to communicate directly with or against organizations anywhere in the world. With the Internet, borders lose meaning. And, as revolutionary and incredible as the Internet is, this new world information system is always at risk of viruses and security issues that could threaten multinationals as well as society (Cha, 2005).

It would be interesting to re-examine the international excellence studies in light of the fact that the Internet has entered the arena. Micklethwait & Wooldridge (2000) explained that the Internet has fused media, politics, economics, and other power centers to the point that it is impossible to change one of these areas without impacting the others. What influence does this new situation have on multinational organizations operating in countries which have lost the ability to control their people and information? Some of the early responses in the Delphi replication offer suggestions:

- *“Social media has a big influence on activism.”*
  - *“Internet can disseminate false information too. In that case you have to correct it through the same and also other communication medium as well. Internet facilitated the activists’ mission and that medium doubled the work of the public relations people. They have to monitor that environment as well.”*
  - *“The outlook has radically changed because people that before had no chance of meeting each other and make common cause, are now able to do so. The way organizations respond to activism has not changed because of Internet, but maybe they are becoming aware of the issue. Many times the organizations wait for this kind of thing to disappear by itself, not reacting for a long time.”*
  - *“The Internet plays a crucial role in activism. Certainly it has affected activism. Large organizations now devote sections of their web site responding to charges and issues. We know about the blogs that attack organizations and the counter blogs sites. Organizations need to respond to these sites.”*
  - *“ I think the Internet has the potential to be an organizing force, but I don’t know how much it has affected activism in the U.S.... I do think the Internet must be monitored just as any other media or information source must be tracked.”*
7. Although media are growing, crossing borders, and, in some cases, globalizing, they still need to be addressed locally.

What do the dramatic changes in media mean for those who practice public relations? Questions about the role of the media would no doubt generate completely different discussion because the Internet now exists as both another media conduit and a competitor (Chester & Larson, 2005). Today, most media sources can be accessed from anywhere in the world or multinationals can bypass them entirely in favor of more direct communication with their publics. What are the implications of the rapidly proliferating media conglomerates, which combine traditional media venues with the Internet and focus on profitability rather than on

providing information? These questions and others could use additional exploration. Meanwhile, early comments of the Delphi replication suggest that media influence may need to be reexamined while at the same time still maintaining local response:

- *“Media is simply another cultural and social (and sometimes political and economic) part of a culture. It is an important information source and is widely credited with setting agendas. So public relations would be foolish to ignore local media.*
- *“An international organization has to explain itself on many levels – international and local. It is important to develop a strong relationship with the local media.”*
- *“There is a secret, that I think is basic in public relations, and it is “to know who is in front of you”. One thing is the formal thing of having the list of relevant media people, with their phone numbers and email addresses, and another very different thing is to know them, to have some relationship, some referral from common friends, or from having studied in the same university. Some times you want to put something in the media, and they simply don’t give you space. But if you have some friend or some link is more much easier to get that space. This is one of the reasons why you must have local people.”*
- *“I agree that multinationals should use media relations to manifest a truthful picture of what the multinational is seeking to accomplish and the means by which it has chosen to do so.”*
- *“It is normal to try to establish relationships with local media and local publics if you would like to succeed. In the open systems, you have to communicate with various stakeholders.”*

### **The Conversation Continues**

As mentioned earlier, this Delphi replication is still in its early stages, with responses from about half of the desired number of participants. So far, many of the statements seem to echo opinions of the original Delphi study. This could suggest that while the Internet and other global forces have changed the means whereby public relations is practiced around the world, the fundamental principles behind the practice have not changed all that much. It also could suggest that the questions asked in the original Delphi and its replication are “boxing in” the answers to a degree that new and different opinions are not emerging. Either way, much more analysis is left to be completed—including a second round of declarative statements resulting from first-round responses—before final conclusions can be reached.

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**Managing the Metaphor:  
Dubai, Inc: Its Corporate Reputation and the News Media**

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While today's leaders in the United Arab Emirates may use more sophisticated public relations techniques, they have continued what was begun by their forbearers. The story of how today's leaders have succeeded in spreading the message of a user friendly economic environment offers great lessons for other such societies about managing the development metaphor.

Because of the hurly burly development in the United Arab Emirates, some of the facts in this paper will have changed in the brief months between its writing and its publication. New buildings will have risen. New initiatives will have begun. And the Emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai and the five outlying smaller Emirates will have created new businesses and their accompanying public-relations programs. Even as this time goes by the story's gist will remain the same.

As the 2002 Arab Human Development Report has suggested, that story is full of contradictions. It is a time in which the economic news coming from the region is written in superlatives. Yet, buried beneath the hyperbole is a grim reality—many Gulf countries face a daunting and uncertain future. Those that do not modernize their economies, reduce subsidies to their citizens, create real jobs, and get their ecological house in order will find the not-so-distant future especially bleak (Quinn, Walters, & Whiteoak, 2003).

Because Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have been victims of misspent windfalls and Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar are playing catch-up, the United Arab Emirates has become the economic leader in the Gulf Cooperation Council. During the last three and a half decades, the UAE was transformed from seven small, impoverished desert principalities of frond-topped huts to a modern state with towering skyscrapers. To his credit, much of this is due to the simple, clear priority agenda set by late President His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, who led the country from its formation in 1971 until his death in November 2004. Under his tutelage, the UAE developed a diversified economy with one of the world's highest mean standards of living. Many of the UAE's petrodollars have been used to build its infrastructure, broaden its economy, and build its reputation.

From those early days when fundamental choices were made, the United Arab Emirates has been transformed utterly. Fifty years ago, when the grandparents of today's college students were young adults, the county had no electrical grid, indoor plumbing, telephone system, public hospital, or modern school. As late as 1950, Dubai was a city of huts and unpaved streets. In 1970, literacy rates hovered just above 20%. Only a fraction of the mothers of today's college students graduated from high school, and that fraction are just slightly higher for their fathers. As recently as 1992, Dubai's Sheikh Zayed Road—now lined by glass-and-steel towers—was mostly desert as far as the eye could see from the lone skyscraper, the 39-story Dubai World Trade Center. Today, that skyscraper is dwarfed by its near neighbor, the 56-story Emirates Tower and the view from the top includes dozens of skyscrapers (Walters, Walters, & Quinn, 2005). Tomorrow, the world's tallest building, the 200-story Burj Dubai, will loom over all.

Modern high-speed highways now traverse a landscape that a generation ago had only rutted roads. Modern ports, including those that house container facilities and dry docks, dot the coastline. Dubai International Airport has estimated that more than 22 million passengers would pass through its concourses in 2006 and that 60 million would do so in 2010 (Dubai International Airport, October 11, 2005). Abu Dhabi's airport is currently undergoing a 25 billion dirham redevelopment and expects to handle 20 million passengers by 2010 (Airport-technology.com).

Along with spectacular developments, the United Arab Emirates (particularly Dubai) has carefully cultivated its reputation as a crossroads that is a visitor friendly, safe, modern, and reasonable Arabic/Islamic state. Some visitors are from neighboring Arab states who come for an Islamic-friendly vacation or for something different than their own country's monotonous, monotonous landscape. Others are snowbirds from Europe with deep pockets, seeking the warm sunshine, white-sand beaches, and second homes. Still others are "temporary workers" who come seeking employment in the Middle Eastern version of El Dorado.

#### Corporate reputation

Much like line from Al Capp's *Li'l Abner* "What's good for General Bullmoose is good for everybody," what is good for this economy is seen as good for the newly developing country (Walters, Kradagic, Walters, 2006). In the creating of this economy, the United Arab Emirates is striving to become the Singapore of the Middle East. To date, much of that story has been the story of the Emirate of Dubai. This is so for several reasons. Dubai was the first of the seven Emirates to create a modern airport, has developed an airline with a global reach, and has the country's largest circulation English-language newspaper, the Gulf News, tub thumping for its case.

When then crown prince, now ruler, of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum manned a booth at Comdex 2000 in Las Vegas designed to attract techies and their businesses to Dubai Internet City, one glib observer noted that the royal was trying to "pull a Bugsy Siegel in the middle of the Dubai desert" while building a technological city instead of casinos (Gartner, 2000). Much of this plan has now been pulled off.

Dubai has become a kaleidoscope of modernistic skyscrapers and master-planned communities as the vision of the master architect, Sheikh Mohammed, unfolds before his eyes. Dubai is cultivating itself as a luxury brand destination, and Dubai Holding, the government investment branch, has developed into the engine of this growth. In becoming this investment manager, the company has developed "an investment empire where the sun never sets" (7Days, 22 October 2006, pps. 16-17). Under the umbrella of Dubai Holding, that empire includes now includes Dubai Investment Group, Jumeriah Hotels, Istithmar, Emaar, Dubai International Capital, Dubai Ports International, Dubai Islamic Bank, Dubai Ports World, and Dubai Financial, among others. Other government entities include Emirates Airlines, one of the world's fastest growing and most profitable airlines, and the flagship of transportation and promotion in Dubai.

Some seasoned observers valued the brand name Dubai at \$24 billion in 2004. But they also suggested that the city and Emirate must move merely beyond leveraging its strategic location and newly built infrastructure to become something "more" than the vocabulary of big and bigger. That something more includes developing intangibles because many potential competitors exist in the surrounding Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Thus, the country must fortify its educational backbone, create a more humane climate in the labor market, establish a meritocracy, and develop better human resource management (Varughese, 2005). To date, the most visible thing Emirati authorities have done is ban the importation of child camel jockeys from India and Pakistan. Even so, the motive may have been less about humane treatment of

children and more about not being the punch line of a telling joke. Discussions about replacing the term “migrant workers” with “temporary workers” in a recent adverse Human Rights Watch report about labor conditions demonstrate that those controlling the country sometimes would rather distract than honestly tackle problems head on (Al Baik, 2006). Occasionally, they don’t even both to distract; ministries have been known to refuse to comment about a problem or toss reporters out of their offices.

Corporate reputation programs in the UAE are crafted in different ways for different audiences because of the inherent differences between Arabic and English. For the most part, Arabic is a lyrical, almost musical language that deals with a vision in a holistic way. It is the sum of the parts that matters. For its part, English is a more direct bottom-line language that gets to the point, in which the individual parts are essential. This difference seems grounded in inherent differences in where language comes from and how it is processed in the brain. In Western languages, reading and writing go from left to right, and exercise the brain’s left hemisphere, the alphabetic mind. Arabic reads right to left and exercises the right brain, the “thousand pictures side” (Pink, pps. 18-19).

Thus, while the Burj Dubai (the world’s tallest building) might be sold to an Arabic audience as the most “prestigious square kilometer on earth” offering breathing views, it is sold to English language audiences as cost per square foot or as convenient to shopping. This linguistic perspective is in sync with the 2006 Economist Intelligence Unit survey in which 145 senior executives said that cultural and linguist adaptation were critical for success here (GMR online, News Analysis). Academic study also supports this opinion, suggesting that inherent cultural differences in message construction between Arabic and English mean that repetition versus simplicity, imagery versus accuracy, exaggeration versus understanding, words versus action, and vagueness versus specificity must be understood to communicate effectively (Zaharna, 1995).

### **Business and the news media**

Studies of the relationship between business and the news media are relatively new and largely unscientific with respect to the UAE. Walters, Bhatti, Fakhreddine, Gulovsen, and Hassall’s (2006) pioneering, 1115-respondent systematic study of news and news values has examined the relationship of the media to its various target audiences in the United Arab Emirates. These audiences, which reflect the nature of this divided society, include Nationals, Expat Arabs, Indians, Other Asians (Pakistanis), and Native English Speakers. Among other things the study found was that 1) respondents turned to media that used their native language and supported their native culture, 2) news was ranked as important based on its culturally proximity, meaning that the closer a story was to a respondent’s cultural or linguistic background, the more important that respondent deemed the story, 3) Indians, other Asians, and Native English Speakers tended to get their information from newspapers, 4) Al Jazeera was the overwhelming source of news and business information for Nationals and Expat Arabs alike, and 5) Native English Speakers turned Westward towards home for news, as they also did for business information, which they found largely on the Internet.

Both Native English Speakers and English-as-a-Second Language residents turn first to newspapers for cultural, linguistic, and practical reasons. Pragmatically speaking, the wide usage of English as the language of commerce translates into English-language media enterprises such as the Gulf News and Khaleej Times; these cater to disparate bands of English-readers from the subcontinent as well as from the British Isles, Australia, the United States, and Canada.

In the United Arab Emirates, neither Nationals nor Expat Arabs are much interested in business news. In a recent survey of media usage habits only about 14% of Nationals and 16% of Expat Arabs judged regional business news as extremely important, only 14% of Nationals and 18% of Expat Arabs viewed International business as Extremely Important, and only 19% of Nationals and 15% of Expat Arabs viewed the stock market as Extremely Important. Of National English Speakers only about 22% viewed Regional business news as Extremely Important, 37% viewed International business as Extremely Important, and 24% viewed the stock market as extremely important. The top information sources for business news for Nationals were Al Jazeera and UAE TV; for Expat Arabs it was Al Jazeera or Arabic Language dailies, and for Native English Speakers it was English-language daily newspapers and the Internet (Walters, Bhatti, Fakhreddine, Gulovesn, & Hassall, 2006).

Although government monopoly Internet Service Provider Etisalat official figures suggest a techno-savvy, broadly-wired, Internet-informed society, the reality in 2006 was different. In a comprehensive survey of actual media usage, about 63% of Nationals reported having access to Internet at home, but only about 16% of National respondents reported using the Internet on a daily basis. This percentage is much less than that of college-age Emiratis, of whom 90% plus use the Net daily (Walters, Quinn, & Walters, 2005). It is also much less than the about 60% of Native English speakers who use the Internet daily, many turning to the Net for news from home and to manage their finances long distance (Walters, Bhatti, Fakhreddine, Gulovesn, & Hassall, 2006)

UAE governments in their various incarnations own, license, or otherwise permit all media and, thus, have the final say about what is read, seen, or heard. Because of their large-scale presence, temporary workers are carefully catered to by media. The free-to-air media mix includes radio stations such as Radio 4; Ajman broadcasting in Hindi, HUM FM that broadcasts in Hindi/Urdu, Al Khaleejiya that has news/talk/music in Hindi; al Quran broadcasting religious programming; and City 101.6, broadcasting Arabic pop (RadioStationWorld, 2006). Pay-to-play television packages feature stations from across the Arabic-speaking world. Packages appeal to several languages groups from India, the Philippines, and the United States and Western Europe. Packages are available from about 58 dirhams to upwards of 500 dirhams monthly.

The landscape has exploded so quickly that Arab Advisors, a Jordan based media consultancy group, has estimated that the total number of free to air satellite (FTA) channels broadcasting on Arab sat and Nile sat had reached 263 by October of 2006. This meant, according to their figures, that the number of FTA channels on these services had jumped by 163 between January 2004 and October 2006 (Arab Advisors, 2006; see also, [www.arabadvisors.com](http://www.arabadvisors.com)).

Complicating an interpretation of the communication climate is a “new” generation of Nationals represented by the age group 20-29. They have become the “bulge” in the python for the United Arab Emirates. They are the leading edge of a groundbreaking generation of highly trained citizens, many of whom have been educated in an English-speaking environment. Having been exposed to new consumer ideas and brands via advertising and programming, these young people are among the first to harvest the many benefits of a marketplace economy. What appears clear is that this group is more media savvy, more media oriented, and more brand aware than either their parents or grandparents.

Media usage patterns of population groups in the United Arab Emirates have implications for local governmental policy makers, advertisers, and interested observers. Above all else, the patterns reflect a media-related “cultural distance,” particularly with sources of news. (See

Hofstede, 2004.) Anecdotal evidence suggests that story frame, source credibility, and “brand name” (a surrogate for positive reputation attributes in this context) are essential. This same anecdotal evidence suggests that UAE audiences are exceptionally adroit about differentiating between and among information sources, picking up subtle body language and other non-verbal clues. (Gladwell, 2005). They are able to differentiate the who, what and where of the news presenters, even those who may be fluent in Arabic.

The data also speak to the difficulty of coordinating any standardized communications campaign. Although the glocal strategy seems the best option for social, political and commercial purposes in the UAE, the data suggest that policy makers and interested observers must take the long-term view about strategy and tactics and about what information types best achieve their ends.

### **Corporate Reputation in the United Arab Emirates**

The corporate reputation landscape in the United Arab Emirates reflects the country’s segregated economic, political, and linguistic landscape. Because of a more welcoming economic and social environment than to their GCC neighbors, the United Arab Emirates, particularly Dubai, has become home to dozens of transnational corporations such as Microsoft, Siemens, and Reuter are among the hundreds of companies calling Dubai Media City or Dubai Internet City home. (For a complete list, see <http://www.dubaimediacity.com/> or <http://www.dubaiinternetcity.com/>.) These companies have corporate images, brand identities, and reputations upon which Dubai has capitalized in developing the Emirate’s public face.

Reputation building efforts of national companies move outward from a center tent pole. As Emirati-based corporations build and manage reputations, they proceed from Emirate, to nation, to Gulf, to region, and then to continents of concern. Leading the pack in the United Arab Emirates has been the Emirate of Dubai, which has capitalized on a systematic public relations program. This process means that a company such as government-run Emirates Airlines labored to build its reputation in the Emirate of Dubai first, then the entire United Arab Emirates, then Gulf Cooperation Council countries, then the 22 members of the Arabic League, and then to locations where the airline opens new routes. Whenever Emirates Airlines opens a new route, it spends much time, energy, and effort developing its reputation among the populations who live where these flights land, emphasizing comfort, luxury, safety and ease. With 80 worldwide destinations in scattered places, such as New York, Paris, Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong, Lahore, and Sydney, the airline now proudly serves as the stalking horse of the Dubai brand name.

Whatever else can be said, hyperbole and superlatives have become a way of life in the country. Ventures are regularly described not in terms of excellence but in P.T. Barnum’s vocabulary of the “biggest,” “tallest,” or “newest.” The only thing missing from the process is a sign saying this way to the egress, which is unlikely to appear until visitors’ pockets have been drained of cash.

The term “world-class” has been bandied about so often that it has lost meaning. Master-planned communities sprout up everywhere the royals will allow. During 2004 and 2005, the rapid-fire announcements of Dubailand, Health City, the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), Burj Dubai, and Falcon City waxed lyrical in local newspapers. Today, these have been joined by the world’s longest hotel strip, a 31-hotel, USD \$27 billion, 10-km project on super highway E311, labeled Bawadi, a Bedu word meaning roughly “place where you live in the desert.”

Local media (which the several governments either directly influence or control) have used hyperbole about of these developments that borrow liberally from the iconography of other lands. Then Dubai Crown Prince General, now ruler, Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum, was said to have topped “his previous visionary initiatives” with the 18.5 billion dirham Dubailand theme park, “the Middle East answer to Disneyland.” To be built on two-billion square feet of land, Dubailand has been projected to attract 15 million more people a year to the area (AME Info).

Falcon City of Wonders at Dubailand, which will replicate the “wonders of the world,” was described as an ambitious 5.5 billion dirham project. “Shaped like a falcon, the city features structures based on ancient and modern wonders of the world,” including the Pyramids, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Eiffel Tower, the Taj Mahal, the Great Wall of China, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, and the Lighthouse at Alexandria, in which you can live, shop, and play. Dubai, of course, will do them better. “These structures,” according to reports, “will be larger than the originals” (Jacob, 2005). The 6.7 billion dirham Healthcare City has been called “world’s first health care free zone” and includes internationally known brand health care providers such as Harvard Medical School and the Mayo Clinic (Dubai Healthcare City). Such initiatives, the leaders say, help make Dubai a leading hub in the new global economy.

Topping this off a building designed to rival the Colossus of Rhodes. According to the Gulf News, “passengers flying into Dubai’s planned Jebli Ali airport should not be alarmed when greeted by the imposing figure of a 140-metre tall human figure. The structure will be ... a 35-story designed to resemble a man dressed in traditional Gulf Arab dress... (Ditcham, 10 January 2007).

Articles in the business section of the Gulf News and the Khaleej Times speak about the hub metaphor as if working from the same talking-points memo. The Khaleej Times (2006) quoted Tim Clark, president of Emirates Airlines, who was not shy in saying, “Dubai is the centre of new wealth in the world. We are the crossroads for the emerging economies of West Africa and East Africa, for the embrace of capitalism in Russia and Eastern Europe, for India, for North East and South East Asia, and for China” (Khaleej Times, 2006). The Gulf News, in describing Dubai as the destination of choice in the Gulf, has said that Dubai has successfully separated politics from business and has become a center of opportunity in which dreams can come true (Kalaf, 2006). And the Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing is busily putting Dubai on the world stage by participating in 28 overseas travel exhibitions, thus creating better awareness of Dubai as a destination (Staff Reporter, 2006).

Governments regularly cultivate reporters. Not to be out done by the ruler of Dubai, President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nayhan recently sponsored 50 member of the UAE Journalists’ Association on a Hadj trip to Saudi Arabia. “The grant,” according to the Gulf News, was “part of Sheikh Khalifa’s ongoing material and moral support to journalists based on his appreciation of the role of the significance they play for the UAE” (Charity, 29 November 2006). Or maybe this was because he did not want to be outdone by Sheikh Mohammed of Dubai who donated 5 million dirhams to the UAE Journalists Association. These funds were to be used to help the association meet its social and humanitarian commitments, which included paying back loans granted to 60 members (WAM, 2006).

### **News Values**

Newsworthiness in the United Arab Emirates is the product of the society’s form, which is pyramidal in shape and sharply divided by culture, language, and income. Because most non-Emirati populations have not yet been (nor will they ever be) assimilated, they exist on virtual

islands in the stream of information that flows around the Arabian Peninsula, adapting to the workplace, but living segregated lives. Many share Islam in common with UAE nationals, and may watch or hear the same Imam preaching on Friday, but most migrants do not share much else with their reluctant hosts. Many transport artifacts of their culture with them (Appadurai, 1991).

Separateness includes school, as well, because government-run K-12 schools are almost exclusively for Nationals; so, too, are national universities. Non-Emiratis must bring their educational systems with them, leave their children back home, or send them home. Exclusion is instrumental in generating real boundaries because children often serve as agents of acculturation, bringing home from school not just backpacks, but norms, history, and traditions of their adopted country (Ewen, 1992). This inculcation of values does not happen in the United Arab Emirates, except in the way that consumers transport common lifestyle symbols and corporate reputation inherent in brand names from the marketplace to home.

The consequence of the multifaceted Emirati “separateness” is that expatriate communities often exist in physically distinct neighborhoods or in walled, inwardly turned enclaves within neighborhoods. Though a pidginized English has become the “lingua Anglo” of public interaction and of business, each group has retained its own distinct language, culture, and identity for use in the home and for interacting with friends.

Because the United Arab Emirates remains a separated society in which people maintain their particular cultural identity, newsworthiness is directly related to that cultural identity. When looking at issues of the day, different cultural groups rank issues in starkly different orders. Nationals and Expat Arabs are concerned with different things and they look at different media as well.

### **Organizational newsworthiness**

A great pride and terrific boosterism fill the United Arab Emirates today, as the new vision of society is being terra formed in the Arabian Desert. As a product of this pride and because media frequently view their role as cheerleader, media are full of positive stories about business development. When asked why the newspaper does not typically include negative coverage, the editor of the Dubai-based Gulf News responded that the paper did not want to embarrass a business owner or force that business to close its doors. Words such as bigger, better, more, and higher are sprinkled upon business pages of all newspapers, emphasizing the positive. After the first page, business sections are mostly filled with stories with a byline, sans name, but with the appellation “By a Staff Reporter.” This is a euphemism for a story that has been printed verbatim from a press release. This euphemism is meaningful because from the moment of creation all ministry and government releases are, by legal definition, newsworthy. The law requires that all ministry and government releases be printed or broadcast or otherwise used, and reporters rarely edit these materials in any way. And, many of the “public enterprises” are actually government-run entities in disguise as Emiratis are masters of the shell game.

Cultural imperatives mean that the front pages of Arabic and English language newspapers usually features a 4-color photograph of a Sheikh above the fold. (Except for war casualties, there are usually no women on that front page.) The caption always identifies the most important Sheikh using his full title, wherever he appears in the picture. The mere structure of the name suggests power. Not only does the mention of a Sheikha or Sheikh imply authority, but a knowledgeable reader understands that bin (son of) or bint (daughter of) also conveys something of consequence. Someone reading the caption which includes the name “His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum” understands that this is the very

youngish son of the current ruler of Dubai who is, in turn, the son of Sheikh Rashid, one of the country's founders.

A caption rarely identifies people from left, right, or center; it identifies the most important person no matter where he is. The assumption is that the reader knows who the principal person is. Sheikh Mohammed is typically identified as High Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai. Sheikh Khalifa is typically identified as His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan President of the UAE and Ruler of Abu Dhabi. If you are unfortunate enough to be standing next to the most important Royal, the likelihood is that you will remain unidentified, even if you are the president of a major corporation or any other VIP. One story on Bill Clinton speech was accompanied by a picture not of the ex president, but of a rapt male Royal sitting in a velvet-covered chair at the front of the audience.

A typical caption front page caption reads: "President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan yesterday received a message from Iranian President Mahmoud Abhadinejad dealing with bilateral relations and issues of mutual concern. The message was handed to Sheikh Nahyan by Sadiq Mahsouli, adviser to the Iranian President (Khalifa receives Ahmadinejad message, 2006)

Because the ruling family and their extended kinfolk often mix politics with business, their pictures and stories not only appear on the front page or at the top of the newscast, but in the business news as well. Besides capitalizing on attention-getting power of the ruling families, business news is filled with stories of the impending opening of mega projects, celebrity attendance at meetings, another Memorandum of Understanding, and the most recent top brand to come to the country. Mega projects are described as bigger than or taller than or the largest on planet earth, business stories wax prosaic about Celebes such as Bill Clinton, Richard Branson, and Cherrie Blair, and assorted well-known economic gurus such as Tom Peters and Edward de Bono and are breathless when the latest LV product is announced or the newest BMW 7 series is unveiled. Whether it is luring an ex-president with a six-figure honorarium, a professional golfer with a seven-figure appearance fee, or using a helipad for a tennis match, Emiratis know how to turn the spotlight on themselves.

Today a couple of women have become feature players in the news. One is Princess Haya bint Al-Hussein, the young, pretty wife of Sheikh Mohammed of Dubai, who maintains her own website listing her achievements. (See <http://www.princesshaya.net/>). The second is Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi the niece of the ruler of Sharjah, who is the Minister for Economy and Planning of the United Arab Emirates.

## Method

This study used data derived from key word searches in both the Gulf News, the local English language newspaper of record, and Google. Because of the general absence of published public opinion about business, these figures have been used as gross measures of public's awareness, corporate attributes, and public perception of that attribute. Key words included Dubai and the following key words power outage, water shortage, Dubai expensive, apartment rental, property prices increase, and traffic congestion.

Dubai Shopping festival, the wildly popular annual event, held each spring, has continued growing since its inception. Mean visitors per day has grown from about 40,000 to about 100,000 and total spending has increased as well. It has grown from about 1340 dirhams in 1996 to about 2002 per person to in 2005. Despite these rosy figures, spending, adjusted for inflation

actually declined during the period from 2001 to 2006 as inflation has escalated from 5% to upwards of 14% per annum. (See Table 1, below.)

Table 1  
Dubai Shopping Festival

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Visitors	2.55	2.68	2.92	3.1	3.3
Days	31	31	32	32	32
Visitors per day	0.08	0.09	0.09	0.10	0.10
Dirhams per person	1.76	1.72	1.75	1.87	2.02

Source: Gulf News, 23 November 2006, page.

Even as visitors continued arriving in record numbers, Emirate Airlines customer satisfaction has slipped. From a ranking of 1st in the airline of the year category in 2001, Emirates slipped to number 2 in 2004 and then to number 3 in 2005. And, though the airport reports double digit growth of transit passengers, the growth in the number of visitors actually staying in Dubai's hotels has dropped as well. (See Table 2 below.)

Table 2  
Growth in number of visitors staying in hotels in Dubai

2001	5.88%
2002	31.94%
2003	4.84%
2004	8.43%
2005	12.96%
2006	3.28%

Source: Gulf News, 12 January 2007, page 32.

Along with this decline in the growth of visitors to hotels has come a slow down in the rate of appreciation in property values. The annual appreciation rate declined precipitously during the period from 2002 to 2006. Damac, a leading government property developer, listed the following figures.

Table 3  
Property appreciation DAMAC

Year	Rate of annual appreciation	Sold out/Not sold out
2002	46.5	Sold out
2003	45.0	Sold out
2004	36.7	25% units remaining
2005	19.0	25% units remaining
2006	13.6	More than 25% remaining

Source: Gulf News, 12 November 2007, page 43.

While property appreciation figures and hotel growth rates look robust at first glance, the data suggest that bits and pieces of the Dubai brand name are suffering with the exploding growth. As the number of stories about problems such as power outages, water shortages, Dubai becoming an expensive place to live, apartment rental prices jumping, property prices increasing,

and traffic congestion becoming worse, the appreciation of property values has slowed drastically. Indeed, Pearson Correlations for news story counts of property appreciation and water shortages, Dubai becoming expensive, apartment rental prices jumping, property prices increasing, and traffic congestion are all negative, highly correlated, and significant at  $p. \leq .02$ . With respect to news story counts in the *Gulf News* (Dubai's English language newspaper of record) and power outages, water shortages, Dubai becoming an expensive place to live, apartment rental prices jumping, property prices increasing, and traffic congestion becoming worse Dubai becoming expensive, property problems, and traffic congestion were negative, highly correlated, and significant at  $p. \leq .02$ . And, although traffic has grown at the Dubai International Airport, not only has that rate of growth slowed down, but problems with customer service reflected in the lowering of Emirates Airlines overall ranking with Skytrax are highly correlated with the numbers of passengers coming through the airport and venturing into the city. This correlation is highly correlated, negative, and significant at  $p. \leq .05$ .

### Discussion

As the bad news has spread, the economic engine and reputation of Dubai seem poised to be slowing down. While the newspaper business pages remain chock full of happy talk, the changing times terms are clearly reflected in real estate advertisements in the newspaper. Where once developers would have required large down payments and cash, master developer Dubai Properties is now offering a development called Skycourts ([www.skycourts.ae](http://www.skycourts.ae)) for a pledge of 5%. (Gulf News, 1 December 2006, p. 56.) Other Emirates are now capitalizing on the mess that Dubai is making. Ras Al Khaimah is advertising Yasmin Village as "an oasis where your life, your family, and your investment can really flourish" while pointing to Dubai as "an over-developed property market..." (Gulf News, 9 November 2006, p. 47.)

The finger pointing to Dubai as a overdeveloped and over hyped market seems all the more valid because Dubai jumped from 73<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> and Abu Dhabi from 64<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> on Mercer's list of the World's Most Expensive Cities ([infoplease.com](http://infoplease.com)). Whether and how Dubai and the UAE recover is a serious question. The answer to this question will determine whether the city and country make a hard or soft landing when the bills come due.

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**Public Relations as Social Activism:  
Ida B. Wells-Barnett and America's First Anti-Lynching Campaign**

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On the morning of March 9, 1892, Ida B. Wells learned three of her closest friends had been murdered. Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Lee Stewart were owners of Memphis, Tennessee's popular black grocery store and had been jailed after an alleged altercation with a competing white grocer. In the middle of the night, a mob broke into the jail and dragged the men to a field on the edge of town where they were "shot to pieces."<sup>1</sup>

Wells, a local newspaper editor who was the godmother of one of Mosses' small children, was devastated but also outraged that such a thing could happen. Before the incident, she had despised lynching<sup>2</sup> but had accepted the idea that, as horrifying as it was, it was the punishment for rape and other crimes that incited such brutality. However, with this lynching - murder of men whom she knew to be leading citizens – Wells began to suspect that mob violence was not an unconstrained punishment for crimes but an act of terror carried out against black people in order to maintain power and control. She reasoned that lynching was designed to stop the progress of African

Americans in their efforts to participate more fully in social, political, and economic activities.<sup>3</sup>

**“This is what opened my eyes to what lynching really was. An excuse to get rid of Negroes who were acquiring wealth and property and thus keep the race terrorized and ‘keep the nigger down,’ ” Wells wrote.<sup>4</sup>**

Indeed, the murder of Wells's three friends changed the course of her life forever. The then 30-year-old newspaper publisher resolved to fight discrimination, and launched an anti-lynching crusade at a time when few others dared. Within one year of the incident, she would emerge as the leading anti-lynching activist renowned throughout the United States and the United Kingdom. Making her mark as a prolific writer, public speaker, civil rights activist, club leader and businesswoman, Wells became one of the most accomplished women in African American history, and indeed, American history. Although she received many accolades, her most notable achievement is her successful anti-lynching campaign, which began in the late 1800s. The campaign is historical in that it reveals social activism at a time of civil unrest and highlights a woman's role in spearheading the activism of Black women, the activism of a nation and eventually, the world.

In a career that span almost forty years, Wells used all of the communication tools at her disposal in what today would be considered a well thought out campaign strategy. Before beginning her crusade, she researched and investigated lynchings, collecting facts to counter inaccuracies of the mainstream press. Next, she personalized and humanized issues of lynching and mob violence by way of a writing campaign which included newspaper editorials, news articles, and pamphlets. Later, she initiated a public speaking platform highlighted by national and international engagements and rallies. Wells went on to form women's clubs and activist organizations to fight the complex system of power and domination that defined lynching. Though she faced enormous personal risks and unpopular stances throughout her campaign, Wells refused to let the deaths of her friends be in vain as she fought to win justice and equal rights for herself and others until her death in 1931.

### **Growing up in the South**

Wells was born on July 16, 1862, three years before the Civil War concluded, ending slavery. She grew up in Holly Springs, Mississippi, during the Radical Reconstruction era. The first born of James Wells, a carpenter, and Elizabeth Warrenton Wells, she saw her hard working parents gain status and respect in the community. They were politically active as her father became known locally as a “race” man, a term given to African American men and women who were involved in the leadership of their communities through the securing of civil rights and the betterment of political, economic, and social conditions.<sup>5</sup> Wells’s father was also a businessman, a Mason, and a member of the Board of Trustees at Shaw University, which eventually became Rust College. She and her siblings were educated in the Freeman Bureau schools. Her mother even attended school with the children until she learned to read the Bible.<sup>6</sup>

In her autobiography, Wells wrote about her parents: “My earliest recollections are of reading the newspaper to my father and an admiring group of his friends.” She had great respect for her mother: “She was not forty when she died, but she had borne eight children and brought us up with a strict discipline that many mothers who have had educational advantages have not exceeded.”<sup>7</sup>

While Wells was just a teenager, her parents and nine-month-old brother died in a yellow fever epidemic.<sup>8</sup> She refused to let Holly Springs neighbors separate her five remaining siblings by having them live with different people.

**“I said that it would make my father and mother turn over in their graves to know their children had been scattered like that and that we owned the house and if the Masons would help me find work, I would take care of them”<sup>9</sup>**

Wells’s independent streak, sense of obligation, and unwavering courage, displayed at such a young age, made her stand out in the black community. Those qualities would later bring her national attention during her career. At age 16, Wells assumed responsibility for her family by leaving school, making herself look older, passing the teaching examination, and obtaining a teaching position outside of town. While she worked, a family friend cared for her siblings.<sup>10</sup>

Several years after the death of her parents, Wells’s aunt invited her to move to Memphis, Tennessee, for a more upwardly mobile life. While she moved two of her sisters with her, two brothers were placed in an apprentice program and another sister, who was crippled, went to live with another relative.<sup>11</sup> When Wells arrived in Memphis, she secured a teaching job and began a writing career. Yet, it was also in Memphis, that she tasted her first injustice at the hands of Jim Crow laws.<sup>12</sup>

### **Suing the railroad**

During her early years in Memphis, Wells became a part of the black elite as she taught school and took classes at Fisk University. In addition, she joined a lyceum, attended plays and lectures, and traveled frequently to teachers’ conventions. It was on one of these trips, in May 1884, that she confronted prejudicial laws for the first time.

Taking a train from Memphis to Woodstock, Tennessee, Wells was approached by a conductor who said he could not take her ticket because she was sitting in the ladies car and needed to move to the smoker car. Wells refused, pointing out that she had bought a first-class ticket. She was forcibly removed from the train but not before biting the hand of the conductor who had to enlist the help of the baggage man to throw her off the coach. As she tumbled onto the platform, white passengers stood and cheered. When she returned to Memphis, the outraged Wells filed a lawsuit for \$500 in damages against the Chesapeake, Ohio, and Southwestern

Railroad. She won the lawsuit in the Memphis Court system.<sup>13</sup> It was the first time an African American had challenged the nullification of the Civil Rights Act.<sup>14</sup>

Viewing the outcome as a victory not just for herself but for the black community, Wells was asked to write about her experience in the religious weekly *Living Way*, a black Baptist publication. If blacks were willing to stand up for their rights, Wells pointed out, then those rights would prevail under the law. A local white newspaper, the *Daily Appeal*, also wrote an article about the lawsuit. On Dec. 25, 1884, the newspaper's headline read "A DARKY DAMSEL OBTAINS A VERDICT FOR DAMAGES AGAINST THE CHESAPEAKE & OHIO RAILROAD."<sup>15</sup> It was one of many articles the newspaper would write about Wells, who would become one of city's most outspoken residents.

Despite her initial victory, within weeks, Wells's high hopes were dashed. The railroad appealed the decision before the state Supreme Court, who overturned the ruling, stating that the smoking car was designated as "first-class for blacks." Crushed, Wells wrote in her diary:

**"I have firmly believed all along that the law was on our side and would, when we appeal it, give us justice. I feel shorn of that belief and utterly discouraged, and just now if it were possible would gather my race in my arms and fly far away with them."**<sup>16</sup>

Wells may have lost her lawsuit to the railroad, but the disappointment eventually propelled her career into the field of journalism. After the disillusionment, she was again asked to write about her ordeal in the *Living Way*. With the success of the article, she was invited to write a regular column, which she signed with the pen name "Iola." Her articles covered community news as well as national issues and were so well-read that they were picked up by other Black newspapers throughout the country.

As a young adult, Wells had already encountered more obstacles than most her age. She had lost her parents, been uprooted from her community, faced the challenges of raising a family, and confronted discrimination. Growing up quickly gave her a mature perspective - one she shared in the classroom with her students and in her syndicated newspaper column. As one of the few women editorial writers - black or white - at that time, she was in a pivotal position to convey knowledge and experiences in a way few others could.

### **Becoming a nationally known writer**

In the 1880s, almost 200 Black newspapers were published every week. The top papers carried Wells's column, including the *Detroit Plaindealer*, the *New York Age* and the *Indianapolis Freeman*. Her writings included a boldness and candor that caught the attention of many, including editors of the *Washington Bee* who described her as a "remarkable and talented schoolmarm, about four and a half feet high, tolerably well proportioned and of ready address."<sup>17</sup> With a favorable writing career in place, Wells decided to try her hand at entrepreneurship.

She became a co-owner of Memphis' black newspaper, *Free Speech*, in 1889. Holding down two jobs, she secured an income at the newspaper almost equal to her teaching pay. This was an important milestone because her editorials against the Memphis school board would eventually lead to her being fired from her teaching post.<sup>18</sup> But even when she became a full time writer with a decent salary, Wells still needed more money to pay her bills and assist with the expenses for her siblings. She worked to increase circulation of the *Free Speech*, traveling from Arkansas to Mississippi to Tennessee to drum up support. Within a year of her firing from the school system, subscriptions increased from 1,500 to 3,500 and her salary reached her teaching income. But Wells's career, and indeed her life, were about to be altered.

On one of her many trips to boost newspaper circulation in Natchez, Mississippi, she was handed a newspaper that detailed the murder of three friends.

### **Heeding a call to action**

Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Lee Stewart were owners and operators of the People's Grocery Store, which was popular among the city's black community. Blacks readily supported the business, which led to the white owner of the grocery across the street becoming resentful over a perceived loss of business, particularly as the grocers competed for customers. Disbelief turned to outrage when Wells learned a mob of white men had committed the triple murder. She knew her friends, upstanding members of the community, had committed no crime – especially the crime of rape that many claimed justified lynching. Yet, in Memphis, a leading city in the South where other lynchings had occurred, her friends had been lynched with just as much brutal force as other lynch mobs victims. Wells vowed justice and began a major writing campaign.

It was reported in the black press that Mosses' dying words to the Memphis black community was "Tell my people to go West. There is no justice for them here."<sup>19</sup> In scathing editorials, Wells urged African Americans financially capable of it to leave a city that offered no protection of their rights of citizenship and to go west to Kansas and Oklahoma. Those who could not leave were told to boycott city streetcars and railroads. Wells's barrage of editorials used calls such as "On to Oklahoma," and led to a black exodus that had a crippling effect on the city's infrastructure, causing 6,000 blacks to move west and out of Memphis.<sup>20</sup> Wells wrote in an editorial:

**"The city of Memphis has demonstrated that neither character nor standing avails the Negro if he dares to protect himself against the white man or become his rival. There is nothing we can do about the lynching now, as we are outnumbered and without arms. The white mob could help itself to ammunition without pay, but the order was rigidly enforced against selling of guns to Negroes. There is therefore only one thing left that we can do; save our money and leave a town which will neither protect our lives and property, nor give us a fair trial in the courts, but takes us out and murders us in cold blood when accused by white persons."**<sup>21</sup>

Wells continually called on the city to bring the murderers of the store owners to justice. Even so, she personally carried a gun and advised her readers that a "Winchester rifle should have a place of honor in every black home, and it should be used for that protection which the law refuses to give."<sup>22</sup>

With the deaths of her friends, Wells became an editor-turned-investigative journalist. She began collecting data on other lynchings. She surmised that if her friends were not guilty, perhaps others who had been lynched were innocence also. For months, she poured over newspaper accounts and interviewed eye witnesses. In total, she examined the circumstances of 728 lynching that had taken place over 10 years.<sup>23</sup> The result was a report that showed only 30 percent of the murdered Blacks were even accused of rape, and very few were found guilty of it. She discovered that the majority were killed for crimes like "incendiarism," "race prejudice," "quarreling with whites," and "making threats." She found not only men but women and even children were lynched.<sup>24</sup>

After her findings, Wells wrote an editorial that questioned the "threadbare lie" that most black men were lynched for raping white women. On May 21, 1892, she wrote the following in an editorial:

**“Eight Negroes lynched since last issue of the Free Speech. One at Little Rock, Ark, last Saturday morning where the citizens broke (?) into the penitentiary and got their man; three near Anniston, Ala., one near New Orleans and three at Clarksville, Ga., the last three for killing a white man, and five on the same old racket – the new alarm about raping white women. The same programme of hanging, then shooting bullets into the lifeless bodies was carried out to the letter. Nobody in this section believes the old threadbare lie that Negro men assault white women. If Southern white men are not careful they will over-reach themselves and public sentiment will have a reaction; a conclusion will then be reached which will be very damning to the moral reputation of their women.”<sup>25</sup>**

Clearly, Wells was one of the bravest journalists of her time. Few other editors – black or white – would have written an editorial with such candor during an era of extreme violence. Suggesting that “rape” was used to cover up consensual relations between black men and white women who were attracted to them, Wells postulated that the truth might be more obvious than some whites were willing to acknowledge and called on her audience to do their own reasoning by paying attention to facts.<sup>26</sup>

At this point in her career, Wells’s writings were not only appearing in black newspapers but in a few white newspapers as well. Additionally, she was being called upon to speak in venues in the North. When the above editorial hit newsstands, she was, by invitation, attending the African Methodist Episcopal Church Convention in Philadelphia. As it turns out, her trip was a blessing. White leaders in Memphis decided to send Wells a message after reading the editorial. Angry mobs destroyed her newspaper office and printing press and her partner, J.L. Fleming, barely escaped with his life. Moreover, the mob threatened her with lynching should she ever return to Memphis. The incident received national press coverage, appearing in newspapers such as the *New York Sun*. Because of her tenacity, Wells at first thought about returning to Memphis to “save what took years to build.” But friends and family members urged for her to stay in the North. She became a writer in exile.

### **Launching a national crusade**

Once she experienced the horrors of lynching first hand, Wells was determined to launch a national campaign to end the violence. In order to do this, she understood that increasing public awareness and being persistent in calling for action were necessary to attain her goal. She was well aware that one of the key steps in any successful campaign is to tell the facts. "When the Christian world knows the alarming growth and extent of outlawry in our land, some means will be found to stop it," she wrote.<sup>27</sup> Wells sought to recast lynching in the public eye so that it was no longer viewed as an acceptable, though unpleasant response to reprehensible acts, but as a national crime against all human beings. After the destruction of her business, Wells settled in New York and began writing for T. Thomas Fortune’s *New York Age*, the leading black newspaper at the time. Seizing the moment, Fortune immediately published the results of Wells’s investigations, and her anti-lynching message was thrust into the national spotlight.

On June 5, 1892, the *Age* carried her seven-column article on its cover. It was heralded as the “first inside story of Negro lynching,” and included names, dates, places, and circumstances of hundreds of lynchings for alleged rape. Readership of the article was overwhelming and ten thousand copies were printed. Ironically, one thousand copies were sold in Memphis.<sup>28</sup> Wells continued to write two weekly columns for the paper under the heading “Iola’s Southern Field.”

She became a businesswoman in New York as well, purchasing a one-fourth interest in the *Age* in exchange for her *Free Speech* subscription list.

Though she wasn't the first person to speak out against lynching, Wells was, by far, one of America's most outspoken agitators against the violence. Once in America's largest city, she found herself sharing the stage with some of the most famous champions of justice, including abolitionist Frederick Douglas and suffragist Susan B. Anthony. In some ways, both leaders became mentors for Wells as she struggled to bring attention to lynching atrocities.

With her national campaign slowly unfolding, Wells's next strategy was to publish the findings of her investigative work in booklet form. However, she did not have the money to fund the project. Where could she find a captive audience ready to support her anti-lynching message and genuinely embrace her into their community? The group that could directly identify with Wells's plight was black women, many of whom had also faced discrimination, even as free women in the North. The women knew the constant challenges of gaining respect and defending themselves to the public. Once they read accounts of Wells's exile in local newspapers, black women of the North became her center for raising funds and social organizing.

On October 5, 1892, women from the upper echelons of black society sponsored a speaking event to pay homage to Wells's stance against lynching. The gala was held in New York's City's Lyric Hall. Among the group of 250 black women who attended were Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin of Boston, a suffragist, activist and wife of a prominent legislator and judge; Sarah Garner, the first Black principal of an integrated school in New York and widow of the famous abolitionist Henry Highland Garner; and Victoria Earle Matthews of New York, sponsor of the event whose White Rose Working Girls Home was a predecessor of the Urban League.<sup>29</sup> After a rousing speech by Wells, the group gave her a standing ovation and \$500, which was used to publish her first pamphlet titled "Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases."

### **Spreading messages through pamphlets**

"Southern Horrors" was published in 1892, the year 161 blacks were lynched in the United States.<sup>30</sup> The pamphlet became the official guide for arguments against lynching and the information was immediately used by other anti-lynching protesters. In addition to providing numerous statistics on lynching, Wells gave insight into the South as a "white man's country" in which free speech and fair treatment were denied to blacks. She instructed readers to "note the wording" of newspaper reports of lynchings and if the press was dormant on key issues, people were urged to demand answers. "Has it a motive? Wells asked. "We owe it to ourselves to find out."<sup>31</sup> In other words, Wells encouraged her audience to become critical thinkers rather than passive readers of the news.

Wells continued to publish other significant works in booklet form.<sup>32</sup> In 1895, she published "A Red Record," her most comprehensive argument against lynching. In the pamphlet, she includes tabulated data on lynching that she had been collecting over the years. Wells asserted that over a thousand black men, women and children had been lynched and included the brutal details of those who had been burned alive, tortured beyond recognition, hanged for stealing hogs and lynched over a quarrel.

Also, in the pamphlet, Wells continued to argue against the explanation of lynching as punishment for rape by documenting consensual and sometimes illicit sexual contacts between white women and black men as well as the role of white women in inciting mobs. She documented several cases of white women quietly bearing Black babies, pointing out that one such woman tried to protect her lover by denying that she was white. Moreover, Wells gave an

account of a lynch victim who had tried to escape the advances of his boss's daughter, even to the point of quitting his job.<sup>33</sup> Lastly, she emphasized that black women were the victims of sexual assault and lynching by white individuals and mobs.<sup>34</sup>

Wells published her final pamphlet, "Mob Rule in New Orleans," in 1900, which focused on the story of Robert Charles and his fight to death with a New Orleans Mob and included more lynching facts.

Even with her publications, Wells was not satisfied with the progression of the anti-lynching movement. With no hope of free speech for those in the South, she became increasingly bothered by the combination of support without real momentum among African American audiences in the North. Additionally, she was frustrated with the double standard talk of white Christian groups.<sup>35</sup> Wells realized that her campaign needed an international stage. With the assistance of her friend and mentor, Frederick Douglass, Wells embarked on two speaking tours of Great Britain in the early 1890s.

**Editor's Note:** To read more of this article see "Ida B. Wells-Barnett and America's First Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1892-1900" by Frances Ward-Johnson in the book *Rousing the Conscience of a Nation: Women, Public Relations and Progressive-Era Reform* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007).

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Newspaper reports also noted that McDowell's eyes were gouged out.

<sup>2</sup> According to some accounts, the term "lynching" was taken from the name of Colonel Charles Lynch, a Virginia landowner who was known for holding illegal trials of local lawbreakers in his front yard during the 1790s, according to some reports. Upon conviction of the accused, Lynch would whip the suspects while they were tied to a tree in front of his house. Over time, this practice became known as simply "lynching." The practice included vigilante mobs hangings, shootings, and burnings. Sometimes, victims' body parts were mutilated before or after their murder.

<sup>3</sup> Historians have noted that, during the late 1800s and early 1900s, 187,000 Blacks in the South owned their own farms, several of them more than a thousand acres in size. Additionally, many owned businesses, including restaurants, grocery stores, blacksmith shops, and contracting companies.

<sup>4</sup> Paula Giddings, "To Sell My Life as Dearly as Possible: Ida B. Wells and the First Antilynching Campaign" in *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 23.

<sup>5</sup> Jacqueline Jones Royster, Ed., *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1997) 14.

<sup>6</sup> Mildred I. Thompson, *Ida B. Wells: An Exploratory Study of an American Black Woman: 1893-1930* (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1990), 13.

<sup>7</sup> Patricia A. Schechter, *Ida B. Wells and American Reform: 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 12.

<sup>8</sup> Yellow fever is an acute viral disease that first appeared in Boston in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Wells's parents died during the summer of 1878, the year the epidemic was most widespread throughout the United States.

<sup>9</sup> Schechter, *Ida B. Wells and American Reform*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Royster, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings*, 15.

<sup>11</sup> Eventually, Wells's two sisters lived with her aunt who eventually moved to Visalia, California (near San Francisco). Still, Wells sent money to assist with her family members.

<sup>12</sup> Jim Crow laws were state and local laws enacted in the Southern and Border States of the United States that required separate facilities, including public schools, for blacks and whites.

<sup>13</sup> Karenna Gore Schiff, *Lighting the Way: Nine Women Who Changed Modern America* (New York: Miramax Books, 2005), 2.

<sup>14</sup> During the Reconstruction period of 1865-1876, federal law provided civil rights protection in the South for African-Americans who had formerly been slaves. When Reconstruction ended around 1877, each Southern state passed the Jim Crow laws to separate the races.

<sup>15</sup> Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 23.

<sup>16</sup> Miriam Decosta-Willis, Ed., *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells: An Intimate Portrait of the Activist as a Young Woman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 141.

<sup>17</sup> Dorothy Sterling, *Black Foremothers: Three Lives* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1988), 74.

<sup>18</sup> Royster, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings*, 17.

<sup>19</sup> Thompson, *Ida B. Wells: An Exploratory Study*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> Sterling, *Black Foremothers*, 80.

<sup>21</sup> Linda O. McMurry, *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 136.

<sup>22</sup> Schechter, *Ida B. Wells and American Reform*, 84.

<sup>23</sup> Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 28.

<sup>24</sup> Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 28.

<sup>25</sup> McMurry, *To Keep the Waters Troubled*, 146.

<sup>26</sup> Anne P. Rice, *Witnessing Lynching: American Writers Respond* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 47.

<sup>27</sup> Royster, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings*, 27.

<sup>28</sup> The *New York Age* article under the name "Exiled" eventually became the core of her pamphlet, "Southern Horrors," and her basic anti-lynching address.

<sup>29</sup> Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 30.

<sup>30</sup> Royster, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings*, 34.

<sup>31</sup> Schechter, *Ida B. Wells and American Reform*, 86.

<sup>32</sup> Most of Wells's pamphlets were privately funded by herself or club women's groups. One such venture was the publication titled "The Reason Why the Colored American is not in the World's Columbian Exposition." The pamphlet, written by Wells, Frederick Douglass, and other black male leaders, was in response to blacks' exclusion from most of the exhibits at the Chicago world's fair in 1893. Under Wells's leadership, black club women funded the project, distributing more than 20,000 copies in English and more copies in other languages.

<sup>33</sup> Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 29.

<sup>34</sup> Wells asserted that the term rapist more aptly applied to white men than to black men. She said race mixing between white men and black women was indisputable and reasoned that "mulattoes" existed in large part because white men were free to assault Black women without fear of retaliation.

<sup>35</sup> Newspapers widely reported on Wells's dispute with abolitionist and social reformer, Frances Willard, who was national president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Wells was accused of being too radical by some blacks and whites after she concluded to the press that Willard was "no better or worse than the great bulk of white Americans on the Negro question." Willard denounced Wells's comments about her and other white women. The controversy received so much attention that Wells wrote a chapter in the "Red Record" to dispute inaccuracies about her statements.

**Examining Organizational Crisis Communications Research:  
Extending the Work of Seeger, Selnow, and Ulmer**

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In their seminal 1998 work, Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer organized what they termed a “dynamic and growing body of communication and organizational literature dealing with crisis.” Their analysis identified specific research areas within the literature, methodologies that were employed in this research, and themes that were prevalent in crisis communications research through 1996. However, nothing has been done to update their analysis since, leaving a ten-year period of research that has not been compiled and analyzed. This paper seeks to extend and expand on the work done by Seeger et al. (1998) and provide an up-to-date review of more recent research being done in crisis communications.

An analysis of the literature suggests that much of the research in crisis communications continues to fall into the six classifications defined by Seeger et al. (1998), however, many researchers have greatly expanded the contributions within these classifications and moved into unique and new directions that cannot be classified into the original categories set forth by them. These new areas include the application of a number of evolving crisis communication and applied theories in an attempt to predict various aspects of crisis situations, the fusion of relational management concepts of public relations and symbolic approaches to crisis responses, the role of prior reputation in successfully dealing with a crisis, and inoculation as a proactive strategy of crisis response.

The review also suggests there has been significant movement from qualitative methods such as case studies to quantitative based research focused on testing models and theories using well-constructed experimental designs. Many of these quantitative research projects seek to test Benoit’s image restoration strategies while others test nascent crisis communication theories.

Finally, our study suggests that while many of the same themes outlined by Seeger et al. (1998) remain prevalent, there is expanded researcher interest in a broader variety of themes, including the examination of dysfunctional systems and their relation to crisis and a greater focus on theory development and application. Implications for the growth of crisis communications research and areas for future research are discussed.

Crises and crisis communications have become important issues in the study of public relations. Because crises and the communication processes used during a crisis situation can have an enormous impact on an organization, these issues have been examined by a large number of researchers.

Seeger et al. (1998) conducted a literature review of crisis communications research in order to "organize a dynamic and growing body of communication and organizational literature dealing with crisis . . ." (Seeger et al., 1998, 231) The researchers analyzed the literature and identified specific research areas within the literature, methodologies that were employed in this research, and themes that are prevalent in crisis communications research. The researchers concluded their literature review with suggestions for future research in the area of crisis communications. The remaining portion of this introduction provides a very brief summary of Seeger et al.'s (1998) analysis in order to provide a starting point for our update and expansion of this seminal work.

### **Findings**

While their seminal 1998 work identified specific research areas within the literature, methodologies that were employed in this research, and themes that were prevalent in crisis communications research through 1996, nothing has been done to update their analysis since, leaving a ten-year period of research that has not been compiled and analyzed. This paper seeks to extend and expand on the work done by Seeger et al. (1998) and provide an up-to-date review of more recent research being done in crisis communications.

An analysis of the literature suggests that much of the research in crisis communications continues to fall into the six classifications defined by Seeger et al. (1998), with the exception of their first category, "Type of Crisis." Researchers have expanded the contributions within the other five classifications and moved in unique and new directions that cannot be classified into the original categories set forth by Seeger et al (1988). These new areas include the application of a number of evolving crisis communication and applied theories in an attempt to predict various aspects of crisis situations, the fusion of relational management concepts of public relations and symbolic approaches to crisis responses, the role of prior reputation in successfully dealing with a crisis, and inoculation as a proactive strategy of crisis response.

The review also suggests there has been significant movement from qualitative methods such as case studies to quantitative based research focused on testing models and theories using well-constructed experimental designs. Many of these quantitative research projects seek to test Benoit's image restoration strategies while others test nascent crisis communication theories.

Finally, our study suggests that while many of the same themes outlined by Seeger et al. (1998) remain prevalent, there is expanded researcher interest in a broader variety of themes, including the examination of dysfunctional systems and their relation to crisis and a greater focus on theory development and application.

This review inevitably leads to implications for the growth of crisis communications research and areas for future research.

### **Types of Crisis**

We were unable to identify research focused on identifying and categorizing types of crises that was produced from 1996-present. Initially, we identified this as a problem area, however, upon further analysis, we identified this lack of research as a key element in the progression of research into crisis communication.

The absence of "types of crises" research in the current literature suggests that research in the area of crisis communications is evolving in complexity and depth. In any area of study, the first step is to define the elements that are in need of examination. The same is true for crisis communications research. Thus, the initial research in this area was focused on defining types of crises in order to examine them more closely. Once these areas have been identified, the research can move forward towards theory development and application.

### **Communication and Crisis Development**

Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer (1998) explained that, "the relationship between communication and crisis development is grounded in a view of organizational communication as epistemic." (Seeger et al., 1998, 237) According to Seeger et al., this body of research examined the dynamic and interactive events that may through cause and effect linkages result in a crisis. Their study focused on the work of Fink (1986), Turner (1976) and Weick (1988).

Our review found six studies into the relationship between communication and crisis development conducted since Seeger et al (1998).

González-Herrero and Pratt (1996) presented an integrated four-step symmetrical model for crisis-communications management including issues management, planning-prevention, crisis, and post-crisis stages. Their model does not presume that the situation involves all steps. If communications are used in an effective manner, situations can be handled without reaching the crisis and post-crisis stages. Their model recognizes the epistemic nature of crisis communications and calls for the development of a contingency plan during the planning-prevention phase to present the opportunity for the organization to influence the course of the issue. At the crisis stage, they limit the organization's response to reacting to events as they occur. During the post-crisis stage, the researchers emphasize the monitoring function that allows for crisis evaluation and organizational action to prevent future occurrences.

Heath and Abel (1996) examined communication and crisis development by focusing on the role of information in risk communication, suggesting that the ability for people to understand and evaluate the risks they encounter through the presence of potentially threatening organizations is key to avoiding crises. However, Heath and Abel found that this awareness is not generated solely through outreach programs designed to educate the community members. Sufficiency of information is what helps form a positive attitude about the organization. Communications, distribution of information and the development of a strong communications infrastructure can be used as a risk management tool aimed at reducing the potential for a crisis situation.

Hauser (1999) developed a theory of publics and public spheres as they relate to communications and crisis management, explaining that publics are more complex than is often believed and have a much greater voice than is often allowed. Hauser suggested that publics naturally debate and develop a shared understanding about the issues that are important to them and that organizations have the opportunity to shape these understandings by using openness, attentiveness and responsiveness. Employing these communication tactics allows an organization to have an active role in the development and prevention of crisis situations.

Greer and Moreland (2003) also examined the use of communication and the development of crisis, focusing on online communication following the September 11 terrorist attacks and how this communication allowed American Airlines and United Airlines to communicate effectively with audiences to control the development of the crisis situation. They found that online communication tools, such as Web sites, allowed the airlines to carry out Sturges' (1994) three crisis response phases in an effective, efficient manner and helped the airlines to respond quickly to the attacks and to continuously provide their audiences with information crucial to the crisis situation. The researchers concluded that the use of online communication can have a large impact on the development of a crisis and can provide the organization with a great tool to accomplish the goals of successful crisis communications.

Arpan and Roskos-Ewoldsen (2005) investigated a strategy they called "stealing thunder," a proactive approach to the disclosure of crisis information. The researchers found that stealing thunder, or breaking the news of the crisis before it becomes public, resulted in higher credibility ratings among respondents and had a positive effect on how the organization and the crisis are evaluated. They also found that higher credibility ratings attributed to the organization's message resulted in a greater acceptance rate of that message. The researchers suggest that stealing thunder could be used as an effective communication tool for avoiding a crisis or minimizing the damage caused to an organization's reputation during a crisis.

Hale, Dulek and Hale (2005) modified the linear crisis response communication model into their own spiral crisis response communication, noting the inadequacy of the former model fails deal with the complexities in crisis communication. The four steps to this spiral model are: observation; integration; choice; and dissemination. Information gathering (observation) is a critical step in a crisis, yet information changes throughout the crisis and there is the need to fill information gaps. Assigned meaning (integration) is dynamic, changing as new observations are made throughout the crisis response process; accuracy and understanding are continually improved as new information joins existing knowledge. Spiral choice, the third step, involves a fluid process, in which existing information is analyzed within the context of the situation presenting a decision from among potential action alternatives; decision makers must then immediately return to the observation mode to gather information about the response to the decision. The last step, spiral dissemination, is ongoing, with the goal of mitigating direct damage and terminating cascading effects. The researchers suggest the dissemination phase results in the beginning of a new response cycle, in which observation begins in the midst of the choice and information dissemination stages.

### **Crisis and Group Decision-making**

As Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer (1998) found, a small body of research continues to focus on communication and its role in maintaining decisional vigilance during a crisis. Although a larger body of research exists exploring group decision-making and groupthink, only a few of these sources apply the concepts to crisis situations.

Lee, Jares and Heath (1999) examined the group decision-making process that takes place during an organizational crisis, focusing on the encroachment and cooperative relationships between public relations and legal counselors in this decision making process. They found that although a level of legal encroachment exists in the decision making dynamic, public relations officers seem to have a greater influence on management and communication decisions during a time of crisis than the legal counselors on the crisis team. The researchers also found that the public relations officers and legal counselors in their study seemed to have a high level of cooperation in their working relationship in the crisis decision-making process. While a crisis team is typically comprised of members from varying fields, the researchers found the group decision-making process in organizational crisis lends itself to the opinions of the public relations officer.

Lintonen (2004) approached decision-making from another perspective, exploring the boundaries that values and goals, previous institutional commitments and practices, and policy lessons can put on the decision making process during a crisis situation. The researcher organized the theory into three perspectives; problem framing, the exertion of power and the justifications of decision-making. Lintonen found that when the problem is framed as a crisis, there are perceived threats to major values, time pressures and a high degree of uncertainty. However, the researcher explained that the assessment of these threats is subject to constraints

stemming from conflicting goals, values and norms of the decision-making group. Lintonen (2004) also explained that decision-making calls for an exertion of power. Noting that decision-making is centralized in crisis, Lintonen observed that the center of power is shifted upward, creating a small group of executive office holders who are challenged with making decisions during the crisis situation. Lintonen explained that these groups are often affected by "groupthink" and that the presence of groupthink often leads to the decision-maker's justifications for the decisions they make during a crisis situation.

Dimitroff, Schmidt and Bond (2005) examined how groupthink led to conflict in NASA. They examined five elements of Janis' (1971) groupthink concept in relation to the Challenger and Columbia tragedies and found that all five elements existed in NASA in both cases. In particular, they found that when cost and time pressures were introduced, management failed to understand the tradeoffs associated with lower quality and that this high level of groupthink within the culture of NASA prevented sound decision-making and caused decision-makers to reject information that did not match preconceived ideas.

### **Public Relations and Crisis Management**

Seeger et al. (1998) found that a body of organizational crisis research focused on informing practice. We found an extensive body of research of this type has been produced in the years following their study. Much of this recent research is drawn from the areas of practitioner experience, examination of case studies and the growing area of crisis simulation literature.

#### *Crisis Simulations*

Preston and Cottam (1997) examined the practice of simulating US foreign policy crises in educating and training future policy makers. They found that crisis policy simulations can: increase student awareness; enhance empathy for challenges facing actual policy makers; and provide illustration of theoretical concepts. They also noted some difficulties associated with crisis simulations, primarily getting "phenomena" to appear in the simulation, such as in-group identification, time pressure and cohesive groups; getting participants to adopt the roles of policy actors and play them realistically; and difficulty in the creation of realistic time pressures, role conflicts and pay-offs. However, the researchers concluded that although difficulties in creating simulations exist, ". . . the use of simulations clearly provide remarkable opportunities to model a wide range of political environments for their users." (Preston and Cottam, 1997, 230)

Kleiboer (1997) found that simulations perform five functions: 1.) they can be used for research purposes to help theorists define and grasp the underlying mechanisms of crisis behavior; 2.) they can serve as a teaching and training instrument and offer a close approximation of the stresses and flow associated with the events of a real-world crisis; they help crisis management planning by revealing weaknesses in existing plans, gaps in resource planning, improving coordination, achieving higher levels of individual performance, raising public faith in the crisis plan and management, and assuring the effective implementation of crisis plans; they can be employed to design decisional support systems; and they can be used as tools for selecting members of the crisis management team with the critical competencies necessary for effective crisis management. Kleiboer also observed that simulations: 1.) Provide reluctant clients with a detailed experience that demonstrates the importance of taking crisis management seriously; 2.) provide systematic feedback to planners that will assist in the formulation of strong crisis management plans; and 3.) will become increasingly popular as their costs diminish and political awareness of risks and vulnerabilities continues to increase.

Hermann (1997) focused on the multiple pay-offs of crisis simulations, noting six areas in particular: training, preparation, rehearsal and assessment of people for their roles; demonstrating

that process matters; allowing policymakers to learn from experience; allowing them the opportunity to fail; permitting assessment of performances and evaluation; and adding to the generation of knowledge regarding crisis management.

Yusko and Goldstein (1997) focused on the use of crisis simulations in the selection and development of crisis leaders, finding that crisis simulations provided organizations with an extremely effective means of selecting and training leaders to effectively handle crisis situations. They noted that the purpose of crisis situations is to create stimuli that gives the participants the perception of a crisis, allows the participants to react and behave freely and suggested that simulations containing seven elements they identified could aid organizations in the selection of qualified, knowledgeable crisis managers prepared to handle crisis situations if and when they arise.

Borodzicz and van Haperen (2002) examined individual and group learning in crisis simulations, finding that simulations might concentrate on the learning outcomes of the simulation designers rather than the simulation participants. They opined that observers of crisis simulations tend to learn more from the simulations and differently than the actual participants and that a steep learning curve is achieved when participants are offered the opportunity to be involved in the simulation both as a participant and as an observer, allowing for higher cognitive levels among the group and individual learning of the participants.

Smith (2004) explored how organizations can prepare for crisis events by training crisis management teams (CMTs) using real-time, simulated crises, focusing on the role of crisis simulations in improving the skills of CMTs. Smith found that several desired outcomes exist for crisis simulations: The simulation should focus on providing managers with the ability to cope with the demands associated with unpredictable events; opportunities should be generated for learning from failure; the simulation should help the organization audit its key vulnerabilities; and the simulation plan should help the organization to refine its contingency plans and also to challenge core assumptions.

Boin, Bos and Overdijk (2004) argued that crisis simulations should be a crucial feature in an organization's preparatory effort to deal with crisis situations, exploring different types of simulations in order to explain how these simulations can help managers cope with disasters and crisis situations. Boin et al. explained that three models are used for crisis simulations: Standard simulation; simulations for institutional crises; and simulations for future crises. They explained that simulations help organizations safely experiment with procedures and strategies while simultaneously testing improvements to these strategies.

#### *Case Studies and Practitioner Experience*

Nearly a dozen of the organizational crisis studies developed since Seeger et al. continue to derive from case studies of crisis situations or practitioner experience. Many of these studies attempt to develop or test communications models or response strategies.

Sellnow and Brand (2001) explored model and anti-model arguments and the role they play in crisis communication, finding that ". . . the value of model and anti-model arguments that propose industry-wide corrective action is based on their capacity to enable an organization to frame the debate surrounding a crisis." (Seeger and Brand, 2001, 290) The researchers suggest that model and anti-model responses could be an effective response strategy for organizations involved in social responsibility crises.

Williams and Olaniran (2002) examined the role of communication strategies in racial crises, finding that organizations that were marginally involved in crisis incidents involving race might benefit from the public attention. They also found that crisis response strategies, such as

apology, denial and attacking the accuser, could be used in a racial crisis, even though these response strategies were once viewed as inappropriate and unavailable to communicators.

Benoit and Czerwinski (1997) examined image restoration strategies used by organizations during a crisis, exploring specific response strategies and the impact these strategies have on restoring image and legitimacy. They concluded that the theory of image restoration discourse could provide useful insights into message designs following a crisis. The researchers noted that companies that are at fault are more persuasive and can restore image and legitimacy when they accept blame and apologize. Also, the researchers noted that taking corrective action could be a very important element in restoring image and legitimacy.

Cowden and Sellnow (2002) also examined image restoration strategies in an analysis of the image restoration strategy known as issues advertising, finding evidence that organizations could include issues advertising as one channel of communication within their crisis response plans. Their analysis suggested that issues advertising can perform a vital function by providing the organization's perspective during a crisis.

In a related study, Ho and Hallahan (2004) examined the corporate advertising and strategy motives incorporated into crisis communications following an earthquake in Taiwan, examining gestures, themes, message points and imagery, and strategy motives of corporate advertising that appeared in two major newspapers. They noted that crisis situations such as the earthquake are triggering events that create a sense of uncertainty among the society, causing people to become dependent upon others to restore normalcy in their lives. Ho and Hallahan found that organizational communications became highly communal. Ho and Hallahan (2004) concluded that corporate advertising provides a tool for organizations to maintain ongoing relationships with key audiences. However, to be effective, the researchers suggested that the advertisements must reflect the cultures and values of a society.

Kozacik (2003) used experience within the public relations field and experience handling crisis situations to inform practice among practitioners who are faced with creating crisis response strategies. Kozacik developed 13 basic rules that would help organizations maintain their corporate reputation during times of crisis.

Fearn-Banks (2001) also put forth a set of guidelines or "best practices" that are derived from crisis communication theory and the practices that were employed by organizations that effectively handled a crisis situation, based on the second stage of crisis, the preparation/prevention phase. Identifying nine guidelines, Fearn-Banks concluded that organizations testifying to using these practices reported suffering less financial, emotional, and/or perceptual damage during their crises.

Schoenberg (2005) went beyond creating a set of rules or identifying best practices for crisis situations and presented a crisis leadership model that involved a combination of four external factors; (a) information gathering; (b) external conscience; (c) preparation; and (d) experience. Schoenberg noted that the proposed model had two purposes; it would assist future researchers and help organizations lead better in times of crisis. Schoenberg suggested that organizations take a close look at the model in order to evaluate their own definition of crisis leaders and the appropriate roles of communicators in times of crisis.

Brown (2003) also drew on experience gained as a practitioner from a crisis situation to develop crisis communications lessons that could be adapted by practitioners. Brown offered five key lessons public relations managers must follow in times of crisis; (a) anticipate criticism; (b) step back and take time to think; (c) change the way that you think about media relations; (d) keep internal communications needs in view; and (e) focus on people. Brown concluded that

“...while it is important to follow the time-tested principles of crisis communications, you will undoubtedly need to adapt them to your particular situation.” (Brown, 2003, 34)

Rosenthal (2003) applied new insights in the study of crisis communications to the September 11 attacks, paying special attention to the role of public officials and public agencies in the midst of crisis, and noting many elements of crises that arose that day which are increasingly becoming part of every crisis situation. Rosenthal found that the notion of a self-contained crisis is outdated and outlined three trends that demonstrated its end. Rosenthal concluded that if media define a situation as a crisis, the situation would indeed be a crisis in its consequences. The researcher concluded that this new structure of crises places new responsibilities on professionals and public administrators.

Taylor and Perry (2005) examined the use of the Internet as a tool for organizations to communicate with publics during times of crisis, incorporating Diffusion of Innovations into their research. They illustrated diffusion by highlighting innovative tactics that were used in Internet responses during the crisis studied. They identified two categories of Internet crisis tactics; traditional and innovative media tactics. Taylor and Perry found that innovative media tactics could be classified into five types and suggested that the new tactics allow for increased interactivity, public dialogue and give greater access to audiences and publics. However, the researchers found that the adoption Internet use in crisis communications is not growing at the expected rate. They also found that organizations that did incorporate the Internet into their crisis response tended to rely primarily on traditional tactics.

#### **Rhetorical Approaches to Crisis**

Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer (1998) found that a large portion of research involved rhetorical approaches to organizational crisis, noting that this research emphasized understanding the communication strategies open to the organization in the aftermath of a crisis. In most cases, the research drew on the rhetorical genre of apologia. Our review identifies research that incorporates a rhetorical approach to crisis communications and expands the study of apologia and rhetorical approach strategies.

Coombs and Holladay (1996) tested the symbolic approach to crisis communications, focusing on the match between crisis type and crisis response strategies identified by Benson (1988). They discovered that transgressions were perceived as having greater intentionality than accidents and both accidents and transgressions were viewed as very similar in terms of external control. Coombs and Holladay also found that matching the crisis response suggested by the symbolic approach to the crisis situation resulted in a more positive organizational image than the no response or the mismatched response strategy. The researchers also discovered a connection between performance history and organizational image. Organizations with a poor performance history were perceived more negatively than organizations demonstrating a positive performance history.

Building on his earlier work with Holladay, Coombs (1998) constructed an analytic framework for crisis responses. Coombs identified seven crisis communications strategies available to organizations: (a) attack the accuser; (b) denial; (c) excuse; (d) justification; (e) ingratiation; (f) corrective action; and (g) full apology. Coombs placed these strategies on a continuum, ranging from defensive responses (attack the accuser) to accommodative responses (full apology) and suggested that crises move further toward the high end of the continuum as perceptions of personal control strengthen. Coombs further suggested that many factors might affect a crisis' placement on the continuum, including past performance and crisis history and

noted that defensive strategies are best in low responsibility cases, whereas accommodative strategies are used best in high responsibility cases.

Continuing his efforts to understand crisis response strategies, Coombs (1999) explored the effects of information and compassion in crisis responses. Coombs found that there appears to be little to no social downside to expressing compassion during an accident crisis. However, Coombs did not find support for the amount of instructing information and organizational reputation, honoring the account, or intentions for potential supportive behavior. The researcher also found that compassion was related to perceptions of organizational control and that greater specificity of instructing information led to stronger perceptions of personal control. Thus, the more detailed the information stakeholders received, the more it was believed the organization could have prevented the crisis.

Ihlen (2002) found that Coombs' (1999) typology proved useful in the examination of crisis response strategies, but suggested that organizations are not free to mix and match response strategies. The researcher found that when using Coombs' typology, managers must refrain from; (a) mixing opposing strategies of attack or denial on one hand, and excuse and justification on the other; and (b) mixing an apology with strategies other than corrective action and ingratiation. Ihlen also noted that pressure exerted by the media was directly related to changes in organizational response strategies.

Englehardt, Sallot, and Springston (2004) examined the crash of ValuJet flight 592 in a test of the accident decisional flow chart developed by Coombs (1995), noting the seven defense categories on the accommodative-defensive continuum suggested by Coombs (1998) to analyze the response strategies used by ValuJet. Englehardt et al. found that ValuJet used the mortification strategy, as suggested by Coombs (1998), in most of its corporate messages. The researchers found, however, that Coombs' (1998) model does not allow for "corporate statements that express concern and sympathy without placing blame on the company." (Englehardt et al., 2004, 150) The researchers argue that neither Coombs' (1995) strategies nor Coombs' (1998) continuum provided the response strategy that expresses sympathy while avoiding blame. Englehardt et al. suggested that a category titled "compassion without blame" might be useful in the continuum to offer another option for crisis response.

Huang, Lin, and Su (2004) also focused on testing the crisis communicative strategies (CCSs) formed by Coombs (1998), examining the CCSs in a context outside of Western culture to determine if the model has any cultural implications. Also, Huang et al. attempted to develop a model integrating the measures, categories, and continuum of CCS. The researchers found that the CCS framework depicts Chinese crisis communications style, specifically the responses of concession, justification, excuse, and denial. However, the researchers noted that a new categorization "diversion" emerged from their analysis, describing diversion as a strategy that includes showing regard (but not apologizing), differentiating, and creating a new issue. Huang et al. also found that the CCSs could be placed on a two-continuum matrix, based on defense-accommodation and specification-ambiguity. The researchers noted that the continuum allows for the flexibility needed for managers to switch positions while using the response strategy of accommodation-defense to balance empathy for the public and argumentation. The specification-ambiguity matrix allows managers to avoid simultaneously adopting CCSs placed on contrasting ends of the continuum, in order to prevent inconsistency and contradiction.

Haruta and Hallahan (2003) also examined cultural issues in crisis communications, studying the contrasts of organizational responses following plane crashes in Japan and the United States. Haruta and Hallahan focused on discovering cultural differences that affected

communications practices used by the airlines in both countries and found significant cultural issues in the airlines' crisis communication. Haruta and Hallahan argue that Hofstede's (1980) five dimensions of culture could be used as a tool to analyze cross-cultural differences that exist in crisis communications planning.

In an effort to build on the rhetorical stance of apologia, Seeger and Ulmer (2002) examined post-crisis discourse of two organizational crises, attempting to describe an alternative to apologia as the primary rhetorical stance following an organizational crisis. They found that the ability of both organizations to successfully respond to the crises was based in their pre-crisis relationships with stakeholders and concluded that positive discourse focusing on rebuilding and renewal offers an alternative approach to apologia in post-crisis discourse. The researchers noted that optimistic discourse might provide organizations with the opportunity to frame the crisis in ways that lead to renewal.

### **Legitimacy and Organizational Crisis**

Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer (1998) found that a portion of the research on crisis communications focused on organizational legitimacy, examining the strategies available to organizations in their efforts to maintain and regain legitimacy during and following a crisis. Two studies since then have focused on legitimacy exclusively. We would note, however, that much of the literature placed in previous classifications in our study (i.e. rhetorical approaches) also strongly relate to legitimacy and organizational crisis. In many cases, the crisis response strategies we've noted to this point in our review have an end goal of restoring or maintaining organizational legitimacy. These sources would fit well into this classification, however, they will not be referenced again. It is also important to note that research based solely on organizational legitimacy and its relationship to public relations (i.e. Everett 2001; Metzler 2001; Pratt 2001; Moffitt 1994, 2001; and Zyglidopoulos 2003) will not be referenced due to the lack of relationship this literature has to crisis situations.

Massey (2001) extended the study of response strategies for organizations in crisis as they relate to the management of organizational legitimacy, finding that consistent crisis-response strategies are more effective than inconsistent strategies for legitimacy management. Massey also found that generalist organizations are perceived as more legitimate than specialist organizations and that both generalist and specialist organizations that produce consistent crisis response strategies are perceived as being more legitimate than those who present inconsistent strategies. Massey concluded that a relationship existed between an organization's niche and perceptions of legitimacy and that organizations who wish to maintain legitimacy must engage in successful crisis management.

Boyd (2000) examined the differences between institutional legitimacy and Brummer's (1991) actional legitimacy. Boyd suggested that actional legitimation is a productive new area for public relations studies, allowing for "the study of more day-to-day public relations activities in which publics have a more immediate impact on corporate policy" and concluded that this area of study should explore how organizations can establish specific policies that are "useful and responsible with no crisis necessary." (Boyd, 2000, 341, 352)

### **New Directions in Research**

The following portion of our review identifies literature that has moved in unique and new directions following Seeger et al.'s initial review of the literature. This research cannot be classified into the original categories set forth by Seeger et al. (1998).

### *Theory and Crisis Communications*

Three of the studies in our review focused on the use of theory in the development of crisis communications research. These studies examined and tested various crisis communications theories as well as applying theories from other disciplines to crisis communications.

Fishman (1999) examined the three leading theoretical approaches to understanding crisis communications in an attempt to develop a blended methodological approach to understanding a complex crisis event. Fishman focused on Fink's (1986) natural history approach, Benoit's (1995) image restoration theory, and Birkland's (1997) focusing events perspective in his analysis of the events of the Valujet accident. Fishman noted that a blending of these theories proved more beneficial in the analysis of a crisis situation than using a single theoretical approach. Fishman concluded that crisis communication theories, which are relatively recent creations, have remained insular and isolated and argues that attempts are needed at mixing and matching concepts and constructs from different approaches in order to lead to more sophisticated and useful crisis communications models. Fishman noted Reichers and Schneider (1990) three distinct stages constructs pass through. According to Fishman, crisis communication theory is in the midst of the second stage of development, one that involves synthesizing and testing the parameters of the construct.

Coombs and Schmidt (2000) also noted the importance of advancing crisis communications theory by making and testing predictions based on theory. Coombs and Schmidt set out to test the five strategies of image restoration in order to determine if image restoration is, in fact, a theory. They found that there was no real difference in the effectiveness of any of the five image restoration strategies on a set of three social-oriented strategies and argued that the same social benefits could be achieved from using mortification, bolstering, or corrective action as an image restoration strategy. Coombs and Schmidt determined that image restoration research is built around single cases studies, in which qualitative research was used to determine the strategies used in these single cases. They concluded that when image restoration strategies were tested using a quantitative method, results regarding the effectiveness of the strategies were inconsistent with previous research and argued that a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative methods would provide of more value to theories and constructs in crisis communications.

Sellnow, Seeger, and Ulmer (2002) examined chaos theory by applying the theory to an analysis of crisis communication during a natural disaster. Their application of chaos theory to crisis communications exposed the tension between the fundamental absence of predictability in complex, non-linear systems and the continued tendencies of crisis managers to assume that traditional methods for prediction are accurate. They also found that chaos theory illustrated the phenomenon of the cosmology episode in which those affected by the crisis lose the fundamental ability to make sense of their altered world. Sellnow et al. explained that chaos theory suggests that systems often demonstrate self-organization following a crisis, which leads to the creation of new relationships, structures, and understandings and can set the stage for both recovery and renewal. They concluded chaos theory in its construction is well suited for the examination of crises involving complex, non-linear systems.

Christen (2004) used organizational theory in an analysis of the public relations strategies used during the restructuring and downsizing of AT&T. Christen used two perspectives of organizational theory in the analysis: symbolic management, organizational legitimacy, and procedural justice (cultural metaphor); and strategy contingencies and resource dependency

(political metaphor). Christen concluded that cultural and political aspects played a key role in the AT&T crisis. Christen suggested that organizational theory offers a frame for analyzing crisis that provides an expanded understanding for the reasons for a crisis and a basis for explaining the success or failure of management's crisis efforts.

#### *Dysfunctional Systems and Crisis*

We found four studies in our review that examined the element of dysfunctional systems and their relation to crisis. The main tenet behind this line of research is that an organization's culture and everyday practice produce crisis. That is, organizations contain systems that are functionally prone to creating crisis situations.

Kersten (2005) argued that understanding, preventing, and managing crises calls for a perspective that questions our implicit assumptions of rationality and makes us aware of psychodynamic disorders in organizations. Kersten noted three models of dysfunctional organizations that play a role in the production of crisis: Cohen and Cohen's (2005) suggestion that organizations suffer from psychotic or neurotic tendencies; Schaeff's (1987) view that addiction is the primary dysfunction present at the individual, organizational, and societal levels; and Kets de Vries (1991) view that an organization becomes dysfunctional because its structure and culture reflects its CEO's neurosis. Kersten concluded that this psychodynamic approach has four implications for crisis management: (a) it questions the assumption of a singular rationality; (b) it aids in the detection of the "sick" organization and demonstrates how crisis can become a natural outcome of dysfunction; (c) it allows researchers to analyze crisis responses in a different light; and (d) it allows for recognition that change is difficult and that an attachment to dysfunction may be present at many levels within the organization. According to Kersten, using this perspective helps us understand more fully the nature of organizational crisis and to intervene at a deeper level of organizational functioning, addressing the causes of crisis and restoring healthy operations. It is not until we succeed in this restoration that Kersten concludes we can successfully implement the existing practical counsel of crisis managers.

In another application of the psychodynamic view, Kersten and Sidky (2005) argued that the military prisoner abuse scandal in Abu Ghraib should not be examined as a case of poor crisis management, but as evidence of a systematic neurosis at the highest levels of government. Their examination into a form of organizational dysfunction known as dramatic neurosis, suggesting that: (a) the Bush narrative depended on an "us versus them" theme; (b) the governmental officials controlled the management of information and decision-making processes; and (c) the narrative contained a sense of "the rules don't apply to us." According to Kersten and Sidky, these themes and the neurosis of officials in promoting these themes led to the rationalization of abuse in the Abu Ghraib case. The researchers concluded that the psychodynamic view could alert managers to deep-seated problems and contradictions within the organization.

Kaufmann (2005) focused on the flaws that existed in the organizational culture of NASA that led to the Columbia disaster. Kaufmann concluded that three lessons can be derived from the organizational dysfunction at NASA: (a) if a crisis warrants an investigation, it should be conducted independently; (b) the organization should refrain from speculating about the cause of an accident; and (c) as an organization develops its crisis plan, it should examine its organizational climate to identify potential problems that may lead to crisis.

#### *Other Areas of Research*

Ten additional studies examined an eclectic collection of interest areas. Heath, Seshadri, and Lee (1998) examined the elements of dread, trust, involvement, uncertainty,

openness/accessibility, knowledge, and support in relation to proximity of chemical companies. They found that proximity had little effect on most of the variables that were tested in the research. Heath et al. concluded that the chemical industry has paid a great amount of attention to the high proximity areas and that this attention should be given to the low proximity areas as well.

Coombs and Holladay (2001) chose to construct a model of crisis situations using a fusion of the relational management and symbolic approaches. The model contains five variables: (a) personal control; (b) crisis responsibility; (c) organizational reputation; (d) potential supportive behavior; and (e) performance history, which was broken down into crisis history and relationship history. They concluded that: the results did not support the bolstering response strategy (Benoit 1995); a situation where a strong crisis responsibility is paired with a predisposition for negative reputation should make it more difficult to protect the organization's reputation; and there is a relationship between the core variables that needs to be examined more closely in future research.

Lyon and Cameron (2004) also explored the element of prior reputation of an organization and its relation to immediate responses to a crisis, examining the elements of attitude, behavioral intentions, and source credibility assessments in participant's perceptions of organizations. They found that reputation and response style both affected attitudes toward the companies and that respondents were more likely to purchase and invest in an organization with an apologetic response as opposed to a defensive response. The researchers found that reputation is a powerful force behind judgments about a company and may lead to unfounded judgments about other attributes associated with the organization. Lyon and Cameron concluded that the study demonstrates significant long- and short-term effects of reputation, and that organizations have a continual need for reputational management.

McConnell and Stark (2002) examined the foot-and-mouth crisis in Britain, noting that managing a crisis is not just finding the best technical solution and implementing it, but placing emphasis on the politics involved in crisis management as well. They suggested that four politically based factors affected the crisis and ultimately led to the intensification of cattle slaughtering policy during the crisis. They concluded that political factors such as public opinion and powerful interest groups are often intensified during a crisis and dictate the responses that are used.

Venette, Sellnow, and Lang (2003) explored the process used by organizations in crisis to manage and influence public narratives that are taking place regarding the event, focusing on the division of organizational messages into primary and secondary narratives as the organization seeks to reconstruct the crisis for its stakeholders. They concluded that organizations "miss an opportunity to reconstruct the crisis favorably" (Venette et al., 2003, 232) if they complete their crisis response during the primary narrative. Venette et al. also contended that crisis responses are a series of narratives between the organization and the media. The researchers argued that much of the research in crisis management involves planning designed for immediate explanation of an event and that this research does not account for the potential of the organization to restructure the event via metanarration. The researchers concluded that metanarration provides a means for understanding and interpreting the crisis at all stages.

Tyler (2005) also used a narrative approach by applying a postmodern approach to crisis communications, focusing on postmodernism as an approach that examines the competing narratives that take place between the organization, its stakeholders, and the media during the crisis situation. According to Tyler, these competing narratives erupt in a crisis and counter the

dominant narrative that the organizational elite has been maintaining. Tyler concluded that applying the postmodern view to crisis communications encourages a multi-voiced response using the narratives of many groups, even those narratives that are not dominant and suggested that managers using this approach would listen to the diverse voices, rather than work to suppress them, in order to develop self-awareness for the organization necessary to stop the evolution of a crisis situation.

Wan and Pfau (2004) examined the response strategy of inoculation and its use as a proactive approach to crisis communications. Wan and Pfau argue that much of the research in crisis communications focuses on saving image and lessening the damage after a crisis. Their exploration of inoculation and the benefits it presents as a proactive strategy focused on preventing the crisis from developing in the first place. While their analysis found inoculation treatments were no better than traditional supportive treatments used by organizations, the researchers argued that a proactive approach to crisis communications may not be the only option, and that pointing out the vulnerabilities of the organization and refuting these vulnerabilities may be a productive approach to preventing a crisis. Wan and Pfau argued that another proactive approach known as bolstering might build too much confidence in audience members and reduce the public's tolerance for mistakes.

Martin and Boynton (2005) conducted a comparison of the crisis communications used by NASA following the Challenger and Columbia disasters, applying concepts from stakeholder theory to determine the differences in the two disasters. They found that more of the five criteria for successful crisis communications were found following the Columbia disaster than the Challenger disaster. Martin and Boynton concluded that organizations should: (a) understand crisis communications affects media portrayal of an organization; (b) learn from the past and make sure what is learned, sticks; (c) speak, and speak often; and (d) understand the media are not out to get the organization.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

An analysis of the literature suggests that much of the research in crisis communications still falls into five of the six classifications defined by Seeger et al. (1998). However, many researchers have expanded on research conducted in these areas and ventured into unexplored areas of study. The expansion and growth in the areas defined by Seeger et al. and the exploration into new areas of research demonstrates that research in crisis communications is moving in a positive direction.

We found that the methodologies present in Seeger et al.' (1998) literature review are still highly prevalent in the work since. However, our review contains a larger proportion of quantitative research, something that Seeger et al. suggested would add credibility to the study of crisis communications. Our review demonstrates a movement from qualitative methods such as case studies, to quantitative based research focused on testing models and theories using well-constructed experimental designs.

The themes found by Seeger et al. (1998) are also prevalent throughout our review. However, examining crisis from the dysfunctional organizational structure perspective emerged as a popular area of recent crisis communications research. Also, the amount of research focused on theory development and application has increased. Seeger et al. found that much of the research focused on case studies and single crisis events. Our review reveals a focus on theory development and application, as well as a movement to conduct research that can be applied to the broader spectrum of crisis communications.

Seeger et al. (1998) concluded their literature review with suggestions for future research. Our review reveals that crisis communications researchers have paid attention to the suggestions of Seeger et al. and attempted to conduct research in these areas.

Our review was conducted in order to provide researchers with a view of the state of crisis communications research. We also conducted our review to demonstrate areas of research still needing examination in order to build on crisis communications theory.

Researchers have not examined corporations that are “crisis prone” or “crisis proof” in order to determine if there are fundamental differences in the organizational structure of these organizations that may cause or prevent crises. Research into the organizational structure that creates or prevents crisis could be very beneficial.

Another area of research that is often ignored is crisis communications from the audience perspective. Research from the perspective of the audience is needed in order to determine how the audience perceives crisis messages. Although a few researchers have examined partial aspects of this focus, it is still a widely unexplored area of crisis research.

Research in crisis communications needs to bring theories from other disciplines to bear in order to expand on crisis communication theories. The body of knowledge in crisis communications could benefit greatly from the application of social theories such as conflict theory, or from psychology in the area of rumor.

While crisis theories, models and application of theories from other disciplines must continue, researchers need to begin testing these theories and models. In order for theories and models to be valuable, they must be able to be applied to many situations and be replicated. Crisis communications researchers need to begin testing these theories and models in order to support, modify, or disprove them.

Finally, crisis communications research could benefit from the development of a specific crisis development model. While the basic building blocks of crisis stages have been developed, scant research has been devoted to developing a specific time line for these stages or to determining which specific events will occur within this time line. Identifying and understanding what will happen within a crisis situation with this level of specificity will help practitioners anticipate, plan for and react to crises with greater accuracy and efficiency.

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## **Technology's Impact on Communication Theory: Rethinking Traditional Communication Models**

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In our previous research (Wright & Hinson, 2006) examining the impact new technologies are having on public relations, we found the phenomenon of blogging – and in particular employee blogging – has brought dramatic changes to many aspects of organizational communication. We have claimed the rise of the web blogosphere has significantly empowered employees and has provided a dynamic new medium many are using to communicate with a variety of internal and external audiences.

Results of our research have found employee blogging is a common occurrence and that employees who blog are writing both positive and negative things about their organizations. Although we've discovered that most public relations practitioners believe it is ethical for organizations to monitor information their employees have written on blogs, and that most agree it is ethical to discipline employees who write negative statements, only a limited amount of this research is being conducted.

Although a few academic articles are beginning to appear in the literature, we continue to find the greatest interest in blogs is reflected in the trade press and some of the world's largest public relations firms. These industry-related interests have led to the publication of several reports and white papers investigating the phenomenon of employee blogging, the credibility of blog messages, and how companies are reacting to this new form of consumer generated communication. However, as we reported one year ago, there does not appear to have been any research examining ethical concerns associated with employee blogging. There also is little, if anything, in the literature discussing the impact the emergence of blogs and other aspects of the new technologies are having on the science that is the communication process.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This paper explores several critical ethical and organizational issues about weblogs and employee communications through a web-based, study of public relations practitioners. Some of the questions in this 2007 survey were asked when we surveyed public relations practitioners on a similar topic late in 2005. This permits us to compare current thinking against the earlier benchmarks. The paper also examines the impact of blogs and other new technologies on the scientific process of communication.

The following research questions form the basis of this research:

- Are employee blogs saying positive or negative things about the organizations their authors work for?
- Is it ethical for employees to write and post on a web blog negative statements about the organizations they work for?
- Is it ethical for representatives of organizations to monitor information their employees have written on weblogs?

- Is it ethical for an organization to discipline an employee who writes negative statements about the organization on a weblog?
- Is it ethical for an organization to conduct research or measurement studies that focus on information their employees are writing on weblogs?

## BLOGGING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Many aspects of technology currently are challenging how public relations is being practiced. As Robert J. Key (2005) explains, “Public relations in the digital age requires understanding how your key constituents are gathering and sharing information and then influencing them at key points. Doing so requires strategies that embrace the digital age” (p. 19).

The term “blogs” is an abbreviation of “weblogs” that Edelman and Intellispek (2005) say are “easily published, personal web sites that serve as sources of commentary, opinion and uncensored, unfiltered sources of information on a variety of topics.” (p. 4). According to Robert J. Key (2005), many weblogs began sporadically as vanity publishing because “anyone with an opinion about anything could create, in a matter of minutes, his or her own web site for publishing news, opinion, commentary and links to other sites” (p. 18). It is believed there were 34 million blogs in existence at the end of 2005 (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2005).

Dave Winer (2005), who runs the Scripting News weblog, one of the first and currently the longest-running blog on the internet, and also is a fellow at Harvard Law School’s Berkman Center for Internet & Society, says the phenomenon of employee blogging “is nothing less than revolutionary.” Winer (2003) also points out that “Weblogs are unique in that only a weblog gives you a publication where your ideas can stand alone without interference. It gives the public writer a kind of relaxation not available in other forms.”

The potential impact of blogs on public relations and corporate communications is phenomenal. Steve Crescenzo, writing in *The Ragan Report* (October 24, 2005) says employee blogs have “massive, almost unlimited potential to share knowledge, foster dialogue, market goods and services, and open up two-way channels of communication” (p. 1). A recent study commissioned by Edelman Public Relations and Intellispek (2005) claims, “The rise of the blogosphere has the potential to empower employees in ways not unlike the rise of labor unions in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries” (p. 3). The 2005 *PR Week/Burson-Marsteller CEO Survey* reports that “59 percent of CEOs rate blogs as a good, very good, or excellent corporate communications tool for internal audiences” (p. 1).

In spite of the huge potential for blogs in both business and public relations, Anderson (2005) and *Wired Magazine* claim only 20 Fortune 500 companies currently are committed to blogging.

### WHY DO EMPLOYEES BLOG?

Fredrik Wackå (2005), who manages the Guide to Corporate Blogging ([www.corporateblogging.info](http://www.corporateblogging.info)) claims there are several reasons why employees are blogging. These include:

- Becoming an Expert: Positioning the employee as a thought leader.
- Testing Ideas: The conversational and informal nature of blogs, and the ability to encourage audience feedback, makes blogging a good way to toss out ideas and see if they generate interest.
- Personalizing Relationships: Employees can use blogs to personalize relationships with other employees and members of other strategic publics (customers, stockholders, etc.).

According to a Backbone Media (2005) survey the top five reasons why employees have created web blogs are to publish content and ideas (52%), build communities (47%), promote thought leadership (44%), get information to customers (36%) and get feedback from customers (23%). Steve Hirschfeld's (2006) research on behalf of the Employment Law Alliance claims millions of American workers blog – as much as five percent of the work force.

#### ARE EMPLOYEE BLOGS GOOD OR BAD?

There are conflicting viewpoints regarding whether employee blogs are good or bad. According to a 2004 *BusinessWeek* article, companies such as Microsoft, Dell and Sun have encouraged their employees to blog citing benefits such as these:

- “In a world of fragmented media, employees’ online diaries can be a seductive way to lure customers into conversations.”
- “They’re sticky – readers check back several times a day. And posts get linked to other sites amplifying their impact.”
- “They’re efficient. Employees can post questions about their work and get instant, mass feedback.”
- “They’re free. Blogs can serve as a global focus group, letting employees know exactly what customers want.”
- “Done well, they can humanize faceless behemoths. The Evil Empire of Redmond can instead become the home of ‘The Scobleizer,’ Microsoft’s most famous blogger.”

Michelle Conlin and Andrew Park (2004) point out that many corporate executives encourage employees to blog so they can create personal relationships with other employees and customers. David Weinberger (2002), the co-author of *The Cluetrain Manifesto: The End of Business as Usual* says employee blogs establish connections “through real human beings speaking like real human beings, which is something companies have forgotten how to do.”

Although some companies encourage their employees to blog, others do not. Anderson and Mayfield (2005) claim some of the companies currently encouraging blogging include Dell, Hewlett-Packard, Honeywell International, IBM, Microsoft, Sun Microsystems, Viacom and Xerox. Anderson, the editor of *Wired Magazine*, and Mayfield, the author of *Socialtext*, are collaborating on a project that will create an index of business blogging. The Ragan Report (February 20, 2006) claims some companies have large numbers of webloggers and says IBM has “more than 15,000 registered employee bloggers” (p. 6).

Even though some organizations encourage employee blogging, many organizations do not because they fear employees might misuse employee blogs and either communicate negative information about the company or exchange confidential information.

According to the *Ragan Report* (November 14, 2005) although employee blogs currently are a big phenomenon, many who work in employee communications do not like the idea of their employees blogging because the company is not able to control their messages. Communication consultant Allan Jenkins (2005) believes many public relations people fear employee blogs because they “are reluctant to let go of the communication reins.” Jenkins says “90% of this [concern is attributable to] loss of message control.” Conlin and Park (2004) claim many companies are willing to give up this message control because they now realize employee bloggers can develop meaningful relationships with customers. However, Dan Gillmor (2004) believes companies inevitably will try to co-opt blogs.

## ETHICS AND EMPLOYEE BLOGS

Research on ethics began with Socrates (c. 470-399 BC) in ancient Greece. He said virtue could be identified and practiced. Plato (c. 428-384 BC), Socrates' disciple, advocated moral conduct even when it might run counter to societal norms. Aristotle (384-322 BC), a student of Plato, theorized that moral virtue often required tough choices.

The central core of the study of ethics focuses on what is *good* and what is *bad* while the main focus in the study of law is on what is *right* and what is *wrong*. Although laws can be bad, something ethically good always should be right. Societies make and change laws, but ethical principles, theoretically at least, remain constant over time.

Classical ethical theory views ethical obligation in two different ways. Teleological ethics underscores the consequences of an act or decision while deontological ethics emphasized the nature of an act or a decision. As ethical theory and research developed in the traditional areas of scholarship – philosophy, the classics, and so forth – moral rules came to represent the fuel that powered the ethical system. These rules became guideposts for resolving ethical dilemmas and posed moral duties in individuals. In fulfilling moral duties people took into account all parties, including themselves, who may be touched by ethical decisions.

For more than two decades one of this paper's authors has advocated the importance of individuals and individual actions and opinions in public relations ethics (Wright, 1982, 1985, 1989 & 1996), and few aspects of public relations ethics focus more upon the individual than those surrounding employee blogs. Authors of weblogs have unlimited control over their content and as such can choose how ethical they want to be as they communicate via the web.

Ethics deals with questions of moral behavior and is similar to a set of principles or a code of moral conduct (Fink, 1998). Ethics scholar Richard Johannesen (1983) claims ethical situations are multifaceted and it is inevitable that conflicts among competing values will emerge in this process.

The study of ethics in contemporary public relations research and practice usually reflects some interpretation or judging of value systems and is representative of much contemporary research. As pointed out by Wilcox, Ault and Agee (1986), "a person determines what is right or wrong, fair or unfair, just or unjust. It is expressed through moral behavior in specific situations" (p. 108).

Many early studies in public relations ethics focused on the basic human need to function in honest and ethical ways. Most of these articles also combined ethics and professionalism and some also focused accreditation and licensing. Writings of Appley (1948), Bateman (1957), Bernays (1979), and Harlow (1951, 1969) justify this claim.

Contemporary ethics study in public relations is fairly young and as such reflects considerable interpretation. When it comes to the bottom line, the final arbiter in separating right from wrong or good from evil in public relations is the decision maker, all of which places a considerable amount of responsibility upon the many authors of employee weblogs.

## CORPORATE BLOGGING POLICIES

Even though millions of workers currently are blogging, Hirschfield's (2006) recent study conducted on behalf of the Employment Law Alliance found that only 15% of US companies have specific policies addressing work-related blogging. Findings claim the majority of US workers believe employees who post embarrassing information about their organizations should be dismissed. This study found:

- “59% of employees believe employers should be allowed to discipline or terminate workers who post confidential or proprietary information concerning the employer.”
- “55% think employers should be allowed to discipline or terminate employees who post damaging, embarrassing, negative information about the employer.”
- “23% support fellow workers being free to post criticism or satire about employers, co-workers, supervisors, customers, or clients without fear of discipline.”

The Ragan Report (article by Sarah McAdams, February 20, 2006) advises companies to “address blogging head-on with a written policy” and cites IBM for setting a good example with its document that “demonstrates the best way to balance open communication and legal protection” (p.6). This article quotes Ed Brill, IBM’s manager of competitive projects as saying that most IBM employees who blog do so to share information with each other. A full copy of IBM’s blogging guidelines is available on Brill’s blog ([www.edbrill.com](http://www.edbrill.com)).

### METHOD

A sample of public relations practitioners from various parts of the world took part in this research. Invitations to participate in the study were extended via e-mail messages to random samples collected from organizations such as the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the Arthur W. Page Society, the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) and the International Public Relations Association (IPRA); and from donor, task-force and commission membership lists of the Institute for Public Relations. The study’s measuring instrument contained 18 questions.

Respondents came from many different parts of the world and represented a good cross-section of a wide variety of segments of the public relations industry. More (32%) worked with corporations than any other area but small consultancies (29%) and public relations firms (19%) also were well represented. The education field accounted for eight percent of the respondents while six percent came from the not-for-profit area, four percent worked in government positions and three percent were research providers.

There was a fairly even split between male (53%) and female (47%) respondents. Given the study’s large international emphasis most (63%) were IPRA members while 22% belonged to PRSA, 14% to IABC, five percent were members of the Page Society and 24% belonged to a national public relations society in a country other than the United States. Of the respondents, 44% were based in the United States and 56% were based in a foreign country.

Usable responses were received from 294 subjects. Data were analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science) program.

### RESULTS

As anticipated, results show there is a significant increase between 2005 and 2007 in the number of public relations practitioners who are aware of situations where employees of their organization (or a client’s organization) have openly communicated on web blogs. Table 1 shows 45 percent were aware of this taking place in 2005 compared with 65 percent in 2007.

**Table 1**

**Responses to the question: *Are you aware of any situations where employees of your organization (or a client's organization) have openly communicated on world wide weblogs?***

	2005	2007	Difference
Yes	45%	65%	+20%
No	35%	25%	-10%
Uncertain/ Don't Know	20%	10%	-10%

Table 2 shows evidence suggesting employees who blog are writing more positive things about their organizations today than was the case late in 2005. Our 2005 results found employee blogs contained more positive than negative things about employee organizations. The 2007 study not only reflects this finding but also suggests the pendulum is shifting in an even more positive direction. As the table shows, t-tests between mean scores comparing 2005 and 2005 results are statistically significant.

**Table 2**

**Responses to the question: *If you are aware of any such employee blog activity do you know if the employees had positive or negative things to say about the organization?***

	2005	2007	Difference
Very Positive	1%	22%	+21%
Somewhat Positive	16%	8%	-8%
Both Positive and Negative but Mainly Positive	30%	33%	+3%
Neither Negative nor Positive	18%	17%	-1%
Both Negative and Positive but Mainly Negative	22%	11%	-11%
Somewhat Negative	4%	3%	-1%
Very Negative	8%	6%	-2%
Mean Score	4.1	4.8	

**Mean Differences**

	N	Mean	SD	t	DF	p
2005 Responses	292	4.08	.64	3.01	37	.003
2007 Responses	158	4.82	.78			

Table 3 displays results of the question asking whether or not it is ethical for employees to write and post on a blog negative statements about the organizations they work for.

**Table 3**

**Responses to the question: *Do you agree or disagree that it is ethical for employees to write and post on a weblog negative statements about the organizations they work for?***

	2005	2007
Strongly Agree	29%	7%
Agree	20%	22%
Uncertain	18%	22%
Disagree	33%	34%
Strongly Disagree	1%	15%
Mean Score	3.4	2.7

	Mean Differences					
	N	Mean	SD	t	DF	p
2005 Responses	290	3.42	.62	3.14	39	.001
2007Responses	157	2.68	.83			

Results indicate a fairly significant change of opinion in this area. The 2005 study found close to one half (49%) saying doing this was ethical while about one-third (34%) disagreed and 18% answered “uncertain.” The 2007 results show agreement dropping all the way to 29 percent with disagreement rising to 49 percent. T-tests between the means of these two groups are significant.

Results displayed in Table 4 indicate a similar shift of opinion in terms of the question asking if it is ethical for organizations to monitor what their employees are writing on their blogs.

**Table 4**  
**Responses to the question: *Do you agree or disagree that it is ethical for representatives or organizations to monitor information their employees have written on world wide weblogs?***

	2005	2007
Strongly Agree	32%	0%
Agree	47%	10%
Uncertain	11%	13%
Disagree	10%	61%
Strongly Disagree	0%	16%
Mean Score	4.0	3.0

	Mean Differences					
	N	Mean	SD	t	DF	p
2005 Responses	289	3.97	.58	2.78	35	.001
2007Responses	156	2.99	.79			

The 2005 study found most (79%) agreed with this practice and few (10%) disagreed, however the 2007 results find only ten percent agreement and considerable (77%) disagreement. We intend to explore reasons behind the large discrepancy in this particular finding through additional research.

As Table 5 shows, a majority of the 2005 respondents (59%) said it was ethical for an organization to discipline employees who write negative statements about the organization on a blog. Only 19% disagreed and 21% were uncertain. The 2007 results show less agreement with this practice as only 27 percent agree while 42 percent disagree.

**Table 5**

**Responses to the question: *Do you agree or disagree that it is ethical for an organization to discipline an employee who writes negative statements about the organization on a world wide weblog?***

	2005	2007
Strongly Agree	21%	5%
Agree	38%	22%
Uncertain	21%	31%
Disagree	19%	31%
Strongly Disagree	0%	11%
Mean Score	3.6	2.8

#### Mean Differences

	N	Mean	SD	t	DF	p
2005 Responses	287	3.61	.65	2.76	34	.005
2007 Responses	156	2.82	.83			

Since research is such an integral part of the corporate public relations process, both the 2005 and 2007 studies asked three questions specifically related to measurement and employee blogs. The first of these sought opinions as to whether or not it was ethical for an organization to conduct research that focused on information employees were writing on blogs. Results in Table 6 show that a very large majority (89% in 2005 and 73% in 2007) believe it is ethical to take such measures while only a small number of respondents (4% in 2005 and 11% in 2007) say it would be unethical.

**Table 6**

**Responses to the question: *Do you agree or disagree that it is ethical for an organization to conduct research about or monitor information that focuses on information their employees are writing on blogs?***

	2005	2007
Strongly Agree	29%	19%
Agree	60%	54%
Uncertain	7%	17%
Disagree	4%	9%
Strongly Disagree	0%	1%
Mean Score	4.1	3.8

#### Mean Differences

	N	Mean	SD	t	DF	p
2005 Responses	287	4.08	.72	3.27	38	.032
2007 Responses	156	3.77	.78			

However, as shown by results displayed in Table 7 indicate, in spite of those results, only a very small number of organizations appear to have commissioned or conducted such research or measurement.

**Table 7**

**Responses to the question: *To the best of your knowledge, has your organization ever commissioned or conducted a research or measurement study that focused on information employees communicated on www blogs?***

	2005	2007	Difference
Yes	3%	11%	+8%
No	77%	62%	-15%
Uncertain/ Don't Know	20%	27%	+7%

The 2005 study found fewer than half (46%) of the organizations who have not measured what their employees are writing on blogs believed their companies ever will commission or conduct research to study what is happening in this area. Results in 2007 found fewer than one-quarter of the respondents (21%) thought this ever would happen. Table 8 displays these findings.

**Table 8**

**Responses to the question: *If you answered "NO" to the previous question, do you agree or disagree that your organization ever would commission or conduct a research or measurement study focused on information employees were writing on www blogs?***

	2005	2007
Strongly Agree	4%	4%
Agree	42%	17%
Uncertain	40%	56%
Disagree	11%	22%
Strongly Disagree	3%	0%
Mean Score	3.3	3.0

#### Mean Differences

	N	Mean	SD	t	DF	p
2005 Responses	284	3.28	.68	2.48	34	.041
2007 Responses	152	3.03	.86			

#### ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

Table 9 reports on a results to several additional questions asked in the 2007 study. Findings suggest the emergence of blogs is changing how people communicate. More than half (53%) say blogs have changed how their companies handle external communications while another fairly solid number (40%) suggest this also is the case with internal communications. Although there is some ambivalence in terms of whether or not organizations should let their employees blog during regular working hours, more than one-third (38%) agree this should happen. At the same time, nearly two-thirds (63%) think employees should ask their organizations for permission to communicate on blogs before doing so during the regular work day.

**Table 9**  
**Other Findings**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Uncertain</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>
The emergence of blogs has changed the way your company (or a client's company) handles external communications.	11%	42%	24%	16%	6%	3.4
The emergence of blogs has changed the way your company (or a client's company) handles internal communications.	6%	34%	27%	26%	6%	3.1
Organizations should permit their employees to communicate on blogs during regular working hours.	7%	31%	31%	21%	10%	3.1
Employees should ask their organizations for permission to communicate on blogs before doing so during regular working hours.	18%	45%	12%	20%	5%	3.5

Subjects also were asked if their organization had a formal policy on employee blogging. Most (59%) did not have one, 18 percent had written policies and ten percent had unwritten ones (12% were uncertain). Respondents from organizations with employee blogging policies were asked if their employees were openly permitted to communicate on blogs (59% were), if employees could communicate on blogs during regular working hours (35% could), if employees could communicate on blogs during the work day but had to request specific permission to do so (21% could), and if employees had freedom to post negative statements about their organization on blogs (24% had such permission).

#### SUMMARY

Results of this international survey of public relations practitioners found nearly half (45%) of those who responded are aware of situations where employees of their company (or of a client's organization) have openly communicated on weblogs. Although employees who blog are writing both positive and negative things about their organizations, it appears that the positive outweighs the negative. Nearly half of the study's respondents (49%) think it's ethical for employees to write negative things about the organizations they work for on a weblog.

A large percentage (79%) of the public relations practitioners who responded to this survey believe it is ethical for organizations to monitor information their employees have written on weblogs, and 59% say it is ethical to discipline employees who write negative statements.

The greatest agreement on any of the study's questions resulted from the question asking if it is ethical for an organization to conduct research or measurement studies that focus on information their employees are blogging. A huge majority (89%) said this was permissible and only four percent disagreed. However, in spite of this only three percent of the respondents said their companies had ever commissioned or conducted such research. Nearly half (46%) of those from organizations not currently measuring employee blogging believe their companies will do so eventually.

Respondents were less likely to criticize, and more likely to disagree with disciplinary action, in cases where labor union represented employees, acting on behalf of the union, write negative statements about the organization they work for on a blog.

Tests comparing various demographic groups found the greatest amount of statistically significant differences between American and foreign respondents. Less significance was found

when comparing responses based upon gender or the segment of the public relations industry respondents were employed in.

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**Profile of Public Relations Practice in Ghana: Practitioners' Roles, Most Important Skills for Practitioners, Relationship to Marketing, and Gender Equality**

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This paper describes the practices of public relations in Ghana, a culture which has not been adequately studied before. Through the use of a questionnaire instrument, the researchers have surveyed 64 public relations practitioners in Ghana. The results indicate that: (1) most public relations practitioners in Ghana are performing management roles in their organizations; (2) the most important skill for Ghanaian public relations practitioners is interpersonal communication; (3) public relations and marketing are overlapping functions; and (4) most participants perceive that male and female practitioners are treated equally in their organizations. The results of this study will extend the knowledge about international public relations practices in African cultures.

In the last decade, much has been written about international public relations. Some regions, such as Asia and Europe, are well researched by scholars. However, some other regions, such as Africa and Latin America, have not been adequately studied by researchers (Taylor, 2001). In order to extend the knowledge about international public relations in African cultures, this study aims to explore the practice of public relations in a Western African country, Ghana.

Steyn (2005) did a database search of African Theses and Dissertations (a project of the Association of African Universities). Only one master's thesis (Gyan, 1991) in public relations was found. Gyan (1991) discussed public relations practice in Ghana and argued that public relations has received little attention in Ghana. Public relations practitioners also played insignificant roles in their organizations. Gyan's (1991) thesis provided some preliminary information about public relations practice in Ghana. However, her study was conducted 16 years ago. Ghana has gone through dramatic political, societal, and economical changes after Gyan's (1991) study was conducted. Previous international public relations studies (e.g., Holtzhausen, 2005; Rensburg, 2003; Wu, Taylor, & Chen, 2001) suggested that political and societal changes in a culture can change the way in which public relations is practiced. Therefore, it is meaningful to conduct an updated study about public relations practices in Ghana in order to catch up with the changes.

Specifically, this study aims to explore Ghanaian public relations practitioners' roles, most important skills for Ghanaian public relations practitioners, the relationship between public relations and marketing, and gender equality in the public relations field in Ghana.

### **Geo-Political Context**

The Republic of Ghana is located in West Africa and covers a surface area of 238,540 square kilometers. It was formerly a British colony in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and known as the Gold Coast, famous for centuries for gold exports. Other European countries, such as Denmark, and Holland also had economical influences on Ghana for centuries. It became independent on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1957, the first African country south of the Sahara, to have gained freedom from colonial rule. Ghana attained republican status on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1960. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana, who led the country to independence, was recognized as a visionary leader who expressed the need for African countries to unite and was one of the founding fathers of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), now known as the African Union (AU).

Ghana currently has a population of about 20 million. Ghana is a multi-cultural nation with many ethnic groups, including Akan, Mole-Dagbani, Ewe, and Ga. These ethnic groups have their own local languages. However, English is the official language of the country. Approximately 64.5 percent of Ghana's population is literate.

Ghana has experienced stable democratic government under the 1992 Constitution which was introduced after a period of military rule. The current President of Ghana, President Kufuor, was elected Chairman of the African Union (AU) in January 2007 for a one-year term.

An economic reform program was initiated in the early 1980s and supported by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and many developed countries. This program enabled Ghana to begin to restore its economic fortunes during a period when many African countries experienced economic difficulties. More recently, Ghana has been the beneficiary of debt forgiveness from the developed world and has seen continued economic growth, registering real GDP growth of 5.8 percent in 2005.

With its record of political stability as well as consistent and relatively successful economic performance, Ghana has been considered both as an oasis of peace amidst conflicts in the West African region – in countries such as Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia - and a model of economic progress in Africa.

Ghana is an active participant in international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN). The Ghanaian military has participated in peacekeeping operations of the United Nations in many countries including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Lebanon and Bosnia. Ghana has extensive trading relationships with other countries. For examples, Ghana is a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and has a very good trading relationship with ECOWAS members. Ghana also exports its agricultural products to Europe and the United States, and imports some products from Asia, Europe, and the United States. The main exports of the country are gold and cocoa. Because of its extensive trading relationships with foreign countries, it is important to explore public relations practice in Ghana.

### **Literature Review**

#### *Public Relations in Ghana*

As yet, no article published in mainstream U.S. journals has discussed public relations practice in Ghana. However, Steyn's (2005) database search showed that Gyan (1991) has discussed public relations practice in Ghana in her master's thesis. She conducted in-depth interviews and surveyed 51 participants (including management and public relations practitioners) in Accra, Ghana. The results of her study suggested that public relations was not considered as a profession in Ghana. Even public relations practitioners themselves had cognitive dissonance about their professional roles in the society at that point of time. In

addition, public relations practitioners' positions on the organizational chart were very low. Nevertheless, the good news is that both management and practitioners viewed public relations as a management function in their organizations.

#### *Public Relations Practitioners' Roles*

In order to have public relations in Ghana to fulfill its potential as an important organizational function, an understanding about Ghanaian public relations practitioners' roles in their organizations is necessary. Broom (1982) categorized public relations practitioners' roles. According to Broom (1982), there are four basic roles performed by public relations practitioners, including (1) the expert prescriber, (2) communication facilitator, (3) problem-solving process facilitator, and (4) communication technician. Public relations practitioners who practice the *expert prescriber* role are the expert who identifies problems and provides solutions to management. The role of *communication facilitator* is the boundary-spanning role for the organization which indicates that public relations practitioners act as the liaison between the organization and its publics. Practitioners who play the *problem-solving process facilitator* role are members of the management team. Public relations practitioners are problem solvers for the organization and participate in planning and programming process. The first three roles (expert prescriber, communication facilitator, and problem-solving process facilitator) are considered as management roles. The *communication technician* role is a non-management role. Public relations practitioners who perform the communication technician role produce written materials such as news releases, pitch letters, and brochures for public relations activities.

Dozier (1992) reviewed roles research in public relations and argued that "practitioner roles are conceptually and empirically related to participation in management decision-making" (p. 341). White and Dozier (1992) also argued that "excellent public relations requires that the top practitioner in an organization participate in management decision-making" (p. 91). These previous literature (e.g., Dozier, 1992; White & Dozier, 1992) suggested that there is a link between public relations roles and decision-making in organizations. The rationale for the advancement of technicians to managers is that public relations managers theoretically can have more influence in the strategic planning and decision-making processes in their organizations.

The roles research has become a closely examined area both in the United States (e.g., Broom & Smith, 1979; Broom, 1982) and in the international context (e.g., Wu & Taylor, 2003). Wu and Taylor (2003) argued that roles research also focuses on the skills and competencies required by practitioners to move from the ranks of public relations technician to a management position. Based on previous roles research, two research questions are proposed:

RQ1: What roles do Ghanaian practitioners perform in their organizations? Do the Ghanaian public relations practitioners have decision-making power in their organizations?

RQ2: What are the most important skills for Ghanaian public relations practitioners?

#### *Relationship between Public Relations and Marketing*

In addition to the roles public relations practitioners play in their organizations and most important skills for them, previous international public relations researchers (e.g., Van Der Merwe & Venter, 2006; Wu & Taylor, 2003) are also interested in studying the relationship between public relations and marketing in a specific culture. For example, Wu and Taylor (2003) attempted to discuss the roles Taiwanese public relations practitioners perform in their organizations and the levels of professionalism. One respondent of their study provided a forecast of future status of public relations in Taiwan and mentioned that "...Future, The public segmentation age is coming. Direct marketing is a trend" (Wu & Taylor, 2003, p. 480). Wu and Taylor (2003) then argued that public relations is viewed as a marketing tool in several Asian

countries, such as Taiwan and Japan. In the United States, public relations and marketing are viewed as distinct corporate functions. However, the result of Wu and Taylor's (2003) Taiwanese study showed that public relations and marketing are viewed as complementary organizational functions.

Van Der Merwe and Venter's (2006) study about public relations/marketing relationship in South African also demonstrated that public relations practitioners in South Africa do not have a clear understanding about the distinction about public relations and marketing. Both management and public relations practitioners in their study indicated that training in marketing is necessary for public relations practitioners in South Africa.

Previous international public relations studies (e.g., Van Der Merwe & Venter, 2006; Wu & Taylor, 2003) suggested that public relations and marketing are closely linked to each other in some countries, such as Taiwan and South Africa. This current study attempts to investigate such relationship in Ghana. Another research question is proposed.

RQ3: What are the relationships between public relations and marketing in Ghana?

#### *Gender Equality*

Another contemporary issue related to public relations practitioners' roles research is female practitioners' roles. Researchers are also interested in the gender equality issue in the public relations field. For instance, Newsom (1996) discussed the role of women in the Indian public relations field. She found that female public relations practitioners in India can receive equal pay as male practitioners do with comparable jobs although the Indian society is still paternalistic. The growth of public relations firms and corporations in India has provided many job opportunities for female practitioners. "The Public Relations Society of India (PRSI) had a president when it began its foundation, an important impetus for research and education" (Newsom, 1996, p. 111). The private sector in India is willing to hire women practitioners. However, the Indian government seems not willing to hire female practitioners. Therefore, there is room for promoting gender equality in the Indian public relations field.

Wu (2006) recently conducted a study to explore the gender equality issue in the Taiwanese public relations field. She surveyed 104 participants and found that male and female Taiwanese public relations practitioners are treated equally in terms of pay and promotional channel because of the enactment of the Gender Equality in the Workplace Law in Taiwan. However, male participants in her study still had higher masculine cultural values than female participants did. The results implied that the traditional Chinese patriarchal cultural value still exist in the Taiwanese society. Although the concept of gender equality is promoted by mass media and protected by the Gender Equality in the Workplace Law nowadays, it takes more time to change traditional cultural values which affect gendered roles in the Taiwanese public relations field and the Taiwanese society.

These previous studies (e.g., Newsom, 1996; Wu, 2006) have provided insights about gendered roles in the public relations field in the international context. However, no study has explored gendered roles and the gender equality issue in Ghana. Thus, this current study would like to explore the gender equality issue in a new cultural setting. The final research question which guides this study is proposed:

RQ4: Do male and female practitioners perceive that they are treated equally in their organizations?

## **Research Methods**

### *Data Collection*

An English questionnaire was distributed to participants during winter 2005 and spring 2006. The questionnaire was distributed to 120 organizations in Ghana. The purposive sampling method was used. In order to get both in-house and agency PR practitioners' views, the questionnaire was distributed to both organizations and PR agencies. One hundred questionnaires were distributed to top 100 organizations (Association of Ghana Industry Rating) have been selected to represent companies with in-house PR setups. In addition, 20 questionnaires were distributed to 20 public relations agencies. In each organization, one public relations practitioner served as the representative of the organization/agency and filled out the questionnaire.

Similar to previous international public relations studies (e.g., Wu, Taylor, & Chen, 2001; Wu & Taylor, 2003), well-connected public relations practitioners served as key informants and helped the researchers with data collection. After the questionnaires were mailed to participants, one of the key informants personally visited the organizations which received the questionnaires through mails and collected the completed questionnaires in sealed envelopes.

With close follow-up interpersonal communication, the total number of questionnaires collected was 64 (53% response rate). Compared to previous international public relations research, the response rate in this study seems to be desirable. For example, Wu and Taylor's (2003) Taiwanese public relations study reported a 44% response rate. Kent, Taylor, and Turcilo's (2006) public relations study in Bosnia reported a 38% response rate.

### *Demographic Information of Participants*

The data is based on responses from 64 participants. Forty-one (64%) participants are male. Twenty three (36%) participants are female. Fourteen (22%) participants work for local PR agencies. Five (8%) participants work for international PR agencies. Thirty-two (50%) participants work for for-profit organizations. Eleven (17%) participants work for non-profit organizations. Two (3%) participants work for government offices. The average age of participants is about 32 years old ( $M=31.8$ ). The average years working in the public relations field is about four years ( $M=3.7$ ). Respondents' titles include communication manager/executive, marketing manager/executive, and public relations manager/executive. Two (3%) participants have a junior college degree. Forty (63%) participants have a four-year college degree. Twenty (31%) participants have a master's degree. One (2%) participant has a Ph.D. degree. One (2%) participant does not answer the question about educational level. Thirty-six (56%) participants' educational background is communication. Twenty-six (41%) participants' educational background is in management. Two (3%) participants did not answer the question about educational background. The majority of the participants have a college degree or above and have educational backgrounds either in communication or management.

## **Results and Discussion**

### *Practitioners' Roles*

The first research question of this study asks what roles Ghanaian public relations practitioners perform in their organizations. Previous literature (e.g., Dozier, 1992) suggested that public relations practitioners who perform managerial roles in their organizations have decision-making power. On the contrary, public relations practitioners who perform the technician roles do not have decision-making power in their organizations. A close-ended question is asked:

Do public relations practitioners have decision-making power in your organization?

- a. Yes. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. No. \_\_\_\_\_

Fifty-four (84.4%) participants answered “yes”. Ten (15.6%) participants answered “no”. It seems the majority of the participants in this study have decision-making power and perform the managerial roles in their organizations. This result is very different from the results of Gyan’s (1991) study. The results of her study suggested that public relations practitioners’ positions were very low on the organizational chart. However, they are now performing managerial roles and have decision-making power in their organizations. Comparing the results with Gyan’s (1991) study which was conducted 16 years ago, we can see the improvement of the professional status of PR in Ghana.

#### *Most Important Skills*

The second research question asks what the most important skills are for Ghanaian public relations practitioners. A multiple-choice question is asked:

What are the most important skills for public relations practitioners in Ghana?

- A. Writing \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Interpersonal communication \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Speaking different languages \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Other \_\_\_\_\_ (Please specify.)

Eight (12.5%) participants chose “writing”. Forty-nine (76.6%) participants chose “interpersonal communication”. Seven (10.9%) participants chose “speaking different languages”. It is obvious that interpersonal communication skill is the most important skill for public relations practitioners in Ghana. The result of this study is different from the result of Napoli, Taylor, and Powers’ (1999) study. The results of their study suggested that writing is the most important activity for public relations practitioners in the United States. The different results between these two studies suggest that the most important skill for PR practitioners may vary from culture to culture.

#### *Relationship to Marketing*

The third research question asks what the relationships between public relations and marketing are in Ghana. A multiple-choice question is asked:

What are the relationship between PR and marketing in Ghana?

- A. PR and marketing are independent functions.
- B. PR and marketing are overlapping functions.
- C. Marketing is a subset of PR.
- D. PR is a subset of marketing.
- E. PR and marketing are the same function.

Eight (12.5%) participants chose “PR and marketing are independent functions”. Twenty three (35.9%) participants chose “PR and marketing are overlapping functions.” Fourteen (21.9%) participants chose “PR is a subset of marketing.” Six (9.4%) participants chose “PR and marketing are the same function”. One (1.6%) participant did not answer this question. It seems that the majority of participants perceive public relations and marketing as interdependent

functions. Only 12.5 % of the participants perceive PR and marketing as independent functions in Ghana. The result is very similar to previous international public relations studies (Van Der Merwe, & Venter, 2006; Wu & Taylor, 2003).

#### *Gender Equality*

The last research question of this study asks whether male and female practitioners perceive that they are treated equally in their organizations. A close-ended question is asked in the questionnaire:

Are male and female public relations practitioners being treated equally in the public relations field in Ghana?

- a. Yes. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. No. \_\_\_\_\_ (Please explain why.)

Forty six (71.9%) of the participants chose “yes”. Eighteen (28.1%) of the participants chose “no”. It seems that the majority of participants of this study perceived that male and female public relations practitioners are treated equally in their organizations. However, there are rooms for improvement. The qualitative results of this question showed somewhat different views among participants. Three participants thought male practitioners can work longer everyday. Thus, they are paid better. However, three other participants thought female practitioners are paid/treated better because women socialize better.

The majority of the participants of this study are male (N=41, 64.1%). Female (N=23, 35.9%) only count for about one-third of the sample. The gender distribution of this study is very different from most of the public relations studies which were conducted in the United States (e.g., Sha & Toth, 2005) and Taiwan (2006). Public relations is regarded as a feminized profession in the United States and Taiwan (Wu, 2006). However, it is not a feminized profession in Ghana.

#### **Conclusion**

By collecting empirical data in Ghana, this exploratory study has provided updated information about public relations practices in a culture which has not been adequately studied before. The significance of this study is that it discusses various contemporary research issues, including the roles that Ghanaian public relations practitioners perform, the most important skills for public relations practitioners, the relationship between public relations and marketing, and the gender equality issue in the Ghanaian public relations field. Because of its broad research scope, this study has built a profile of public relations in Ghana and extended the knowledge about public relations in African cultures. However, this study has limitations. The major limitation of this study is that all of the organizations surveyed in this study are located in the capital city of Ghana because all major Ghanaian organizations are located in Accra. Future studies may discover what roles Ghanaian public relations practitioners perform in smaller organization outside the capital city of Ghana and compare the results of with this current study.

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**And All That is Old is New Again:  
Embracing Fragmentation of the Field**

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For decades academics and professionals have debated the question of whether public relations is indeed a “profession.” From the practitioner point of view, the question of “should there be an accreditation exam for practitioners to ‘prove’ their knowledge of the field?” has been of importance in various organizations. Going beyond that are the questions of “should academic or professional bodies accredit schools or departments that teach the field?” and “should practitioners be licensed?”

Those teaching and doing research in public relations have asked, “what is our body of knowledge?” and “is it acceptable to include research and scholarship from the social sciences and rhetoric in this body of knowledge?”

To us, a more fundamental question would be: “Is there, in truth, a core of knowledge and theory that comprises a discipline called public relations?” and even: “Is public relations even a viable concept for research?” In this paper we discuss both of these final two questions.

We base our questions on a recent study we conducted of public relations articles published in the academic journals *Public Relations Review*, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Journalism & Mass Communications Quarterly*, *Journal of Communication*, *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, *Management Communication Quarterly* and *Journal of Communication Management*. The original purpose of the study was to determine what theories are being used, and what topics scholars publishing public relations-focused work are studying, in the new millennium.

What we found instead of a focusing of knowledge was a fragmentation, both theoretically and topically, that calls into question the very existence of a unified field with the name “public relations.” Can we, in truth, be a field when our theories and interests so seldom overlap? How can we build theory in public relations when there is no focus to our research? Kuhn, in his often quoted 1970 book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, tells us that “members of a mature scientific community work from a single paradigm or from a closely related set,” (p. 162) whereas in immature sciences every other researcher, writer and scholar has his or her own theory, and there are not the common theories and worldviews of a mature scientific community.

#### **Maturation of the Field?**

The question of whether public relations has become a mature theoretical science is an interesting one. The attempt to answer it began as early as the mid-1970s and continues to today. In the first issue of *Public Relations Review* in 1975 public relations was described as a profession that was coming of age and in need of a place to publish its research and findings (1975. p. 3). In a paper presented to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication in 1984, Ferguson proposed a focus on public relationships as the “first paradigm” of public relations. She wrote, “by focusing our concerns as a community of scholars on public relationships, we should be able to create a niche or domain for our research efforts”

(p. 24). Thus, although questioning where the field was in terms of scholarship, she was optimistic that public relations theory could develop if we only applied ourselves.

Six years later, in the first book that attempted to define what public relations theories were, Botan and Hazleton, in their introduction, called public relations a “rapidly emerging social science discipline” (1989, p. 12) that was *starting* to differentiate itself from other social sciences with its own body of theoretical knowledge, and thus starting to mature as a discipline.

In 1990 and again in 1992, Peter K. Hamilton “argued that the most critical issue facing the field of public relations is the link between theory and practice” (1992, p. 123). He further contended that what was most needed at that time was a theory that would predict “how people will communicate and when these communications will be most effective” (p. 123-4). Pasadeos and Renfro indicated that their findings in the early 1990s showed “the last 15 years represent the real beginnings of the consolidation of public relations research into a discrete discipline” (1992, p. 183) and that public relations could, at that point in time, be considered a field that is finally coming together as a scholarly discipline.

With the 2001 publication of Robert Heath’s *Handbook of Public Relations* came an increased optimism that we could define public relations, that there was enough developed theory to finally define a discipline. Heath, in his introduction, reflected Kuhn when he noted that even the casual reader could sense a revolution in thought about public relations. In a 2003 content analysis of public relations articles Sallot, Lyon, Acosta-Alzura & Jones stated that although no dominant paradigms appear to have emerged, scholarship and theory building in public relations is well on its way.

We would argue that notwithstanding the optimism, and sometimes confusion, of our colleagues over the years, our research, presented below, shows that after four decades of scholarly research it is still not the case that public relations has enough of a central focus in its research and theory building to be within striking distance of being called a mature science. While we would like to believe that public relations is moving toward that goal, the evidence in the journals analyzed for our study does not support that optimistic view.

### **Public Relations Research**

Analysis of the literature of public relations has become well-tilled ground over the last 25 years; from bibliometric studies focused on citations (Pasadeos & Renfro, 1992; Pasadeos, Renfro & Hanily, 1999) to analyses and compendiums of theory building (Botan & Hazleton, 1989; Botan & Hazleton, 2006; Botan & Taylor, 2004; Heath, 2001; Sallot, Lyon, Acosta-Alzura & Jones, 2003), public relations scholars are increasingly concerned with the research in, and theories of the field.

**Bibliometric Studies.** A 15-year citation study (1975-1989) was conducted by Pasadeos and Renfro (1992) of all public relations journals of the period, as well as of what was then called *Journalism Quarterly*. At that time they found that although many articles were citing works from other social sciences, an increasing number of public relations authors were citing each other. The authors concluded that public relations was developing a large and relevant literature base, and that the discipline “is coalescing around its own body of knowledge” (p. 167). During that period of time the largest number of articles used quantitative methods (43.8%), what the authors called “commentary” comprised the second largest number (30.1%) and the number of historical pieces declined over the 15 years analyzed.

Pasadeos, Renfro, and Hanily (1999) conducted a follow-up citation analysis of the most influential individual authors and pieces of work based on frequency of citations. The journals

they used for this research were *Public Relations Review*, *Public Relations Research Annual*, *Journal of Public Relations Research* and *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. This study covered the period 1990-1995, and this time discussed not only authors and affiliations but also topics of the work cited. They found six categories of most cited research, one being theory development. The authors concluded that the field of public relations could benefit from more topical diversity and less of an introspective focus.

**Books and Overview Articles.** Books related to the research and theory development in the field of public relations (Botan & Hazleton, 1989; Botan & Hazleton, 2006; Heath, 2001) have attempted to bring together in one place theoretical perspectives relevant to public relations research and practice. These works review and summarize, as well as propose directions in which to take public relations theory construction.

Several recent articles (Vasquez & Taylor, 2000; Botan & Taylor, 2004) have also discussed and analyzed public relations research and theory-building. Both articles appeared in non-public relations-oriented venues (*Communication Yearbook* and *Journal of Communication* respectively) and sought to explain and expand on public relations research for a general audience of communication scholars.

**Articles related to the current study.** In 1984 Mary Ann Ferguson, in a conference paper presented to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, analyzed the first nine years of the sole academic public relations journal of the time, *Public Relations Review*. In that paper, Ferguson identified three classes (or constructs) of research into which public relations scholarship fell. She found that most authors wrote about public relations (1) introspectively, where the focus is on the public relations function itself, or the education of future public relations practitioners, (2) as a practice or application, where the articles are meant to solve practical problems practitioners face, and (3) in terms of theory-development.

John Pavlik, in his book *Public Relations: What Research Tells Us* (1987), cites an unpublished study he conducted that analyzed a census of articles in *Journalism Quarterly*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Public Relations Review*, *Public Relations Research and Education*, *Public Relations Journal* and *Public Relations Quarterly* to find “PR research issues” (p. 17). Pavlik found that “only a fraction” of the public relations articles in these publications during the years 1975 to 1985 were basic research, or “research designed to build theory – not to answer specific practical problems” (p. 17). He also used the three classes developed by Ferguson in his book (called “themes” by Pavlik): introspective, applied (practice) and basic (theory-building) research.

Lynne Sallot, Lisa Lyon, Carolina Acosta-Alzura and Karyn Jones (2003), published the most recent analysis of public relations articles. Using the Ferguson (1984) study as the starting point, the authors analyzed the abstracts and some articles in *Public Relations Review*, *Public Relations Research Annual* and *Journal of Public Relations Research* from their inceptions through 2000.

Using the classifications developed by Ferguson, the four researchers and a graduate student coded articles as introspective, practice or theory development, and then further categorized them into subcategories of topics, first using Ferguson’s coding scheme and then letting new topic categories emerge. Although citations were not studied, the authors of the articles and their academic institutions were also coded.

### **The Current Study**

The data collection method consisted of a descriptive analysis of the contents of scholarly articles related to public relations theory and practice from academic journals published during the timeframe (2001-2005) selected for the research.

Graduate students served as the coders in the analysis of the journal articles. The coding sheet was constructed by the researchers based on their adaptation of the coding process developed by Sallot et al. (2003). The students were trained in two pre-coding sessions using 10 articles selected from two journals included in the actual study. Coders were directed to read an entire article and, following the lead of Ferguson (1984) and Sallot et al. (2003), to code it as either practice (relating to the practical aspects of public relations practice), introspective (about the public relations profession) or theory-oriented (directed to advancing or building the intellectual underpinnings of public relations).

A total of 325 public relations-related scholarly articles, taken from the seven major journals selected for this research, comprised the population of articles in this study. These articles ranged from case studies to experiments, from essays to historical overviews, from surveys to literature reviews.

Overall, only 47 articles (15%) were placed in the practice category (relating to the practical aspects of public relations), while 206 of the articles (63%) were categorized as being primarily introspective (focusing on public relations as a profession). The remaining 72 articles (22%) were categorized as belonging to the theory-oriented category (advancing or building the intellectual underpinnings of public relations).

Then, the primary topic of each article was identified. Those topics were diverse and were divided among the three categories listed above. It is important to note that we forced the articles into the topics that Sallot et al. developed. So, for example, if the article was about blogging it went into new communication technologies, and if it was about dialog on the Internet it also went into new communication technologies. The table below demonstrates the wide range of topics under these categories.

<i>Practice (15%)</i>	<i>Introspective (63%)</i>	<i>Theory-Oriented (22%)</i>
Ethics in Practice	Ethics	Ethics
Applied Research Issues	Scholarly Research	Academic vs. Applied Research
Image/Reputation/Impression Management in Practice	Image/Reputation/Impression Management	-----
Crisis Communication	-----	Crisis Response
Organizational Communication	-----	Organizational Communication
Social Issues/Issues Management	-----	Social Issues and Issues Management
-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----
-----	<b>International Public Relations (22%)</b>	International Public Relations
-----	The Profession	<b>Public Relationships (23%)</b>
Integrated Marketing Communication	Women and Minorities	Women's studies/Feminist school/Gender/Diversity/Minority theories
Implementing PR campaigns and programs	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----
Management in PR	-----	-----
<b>New Communication Technologies (45%)</b>	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----
Legal Issues	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----
-----	Education	-----
-----	History	-----
-----	-----	Public Opinion/Persuasion
-----	-----	Fundraising
-----	-----	Critical/Cultural Studies
-----	-----	Social Responsibility
-----	-----	Rhetorical Underpinnings
-----	-----	-----
Other	-----	Other
-----	Other	-----

Within the **practice** category, “new communication technologies” was the most researched category comprising 44.7% (21) of the practice articles. Within **introspective** the most frequent topics by far were “the profession” (41, 20.1%) and “international public relations” (44, 21.6%). These two topics account for almost half of the total number of introspective articles. “Public relationships” was the most frequently researched topic within the **theory-oriented** category with 16 articles (22.9%). As can be seen in the table above, although these topics were the most frequently researched, there were 34 topics covered within the three categories (325 articles) in the five-year period of the study.

### Reflections from the Field

After reviewing these findings it struck us how fragmented the academic research was during the five years covered by our study. To discover whether this was true with the practice of public relations as well, we looked at the professional organization of public relations practitioners, PRSA. The Public Relations Society of America’s 19 Professional Interest Sections are each designed to focus on issues, trends and research of a specialized practice area (see Table below). With forums to contribute expertise and resources to increase professional effectiveness, Sections offer niche networks and programming that are precisely relevant to professionals who work in one industry or who focus on a specific public relations discipline.

In addition, these sections hold separate conferences and functions, once again fragmenting the field. Because all Sections charge an additional \$60 to join, the number of individuals in the various interest areas may, in fact, be greater than membership shows, which would result in an incomplete view of the actual number of practitioners who are focused on these niche areas.

PRSA Interest Sections	
Association / Nonprofit	Food and Beverage
Corporate	Health Academy
Corporate Social Responsibility	Independent Practitioners Alliance
Counselors Academy	International
Counselors to Higher Education (CHE)	Military and Public Safety
Educators Academy	Multicultural Communications
Employee Communications	Public Affairs and Government Technology
Entertainment and Sports	Travel and Tourism
Environmental	
Financial Communications	

The Web site of the Institute for Public Relations is not immune to this fragmentation either. It has posted interdisciplinary annotated bibliographies of anthropology, psychology and sociology indicating that even practitioners see the need to go beyond the PR field to find relevant research and theory. It is amazing that the field has not changed since 1980 when Van Slyke wrote that scholars frequently “pirate” concepts and theories from the social sciences, and use them to address “one particular practical problem at a time” (p. 7).

Even in the textbooks that are used by public relations educators to train the practitioners of tomorrow, the authors talk about public relations “specializations,” and include such areas as fundraising (including development or donor relations), media relations and lobbying, that are not included above.

Perhaps even more confusing to the neophyte investigating this splintered field we call public relations, is that none of these divisions within the practice are new. Twenty years ago

PRSA appointed a Special Committee on Terminology that determined there was at that time no umbrella term that successfully clarified the field. As Cropp and Pincus write about the discipline they call “an ever-stretching field” (2001, p. 193), “confusion has worsened, exacerbated by terminology that confuses and further splinters the field” (p. 202).

### **Implications for theory and research**

Returning to the initial questions posed in this paper, the first one was “is there, in truth, a core of knowledge and theory that comprises a discipline called public relations?” To address that question we return to the findings of our study and its predecessors.

Originally, Ferguson (1984) found only four percent of the articles she analyzed could be classified as theory-oriented. Fifteen years later, the Sallot et al. (2003) study reported a dramatic increase to approximately 20%. Those authors characterized this as an indication that public relations research had “made tremendous progress in our scholarship toward building theory, thank you, and we’re getting better all the time” (2003, p. 50).

The results of the current study indicate that this progress has, in effect, plateaued. In the last five years, the proportion of theory-oriented articles has not changed. This is not what the researchers would have expected, based on the optimistic statements of previous researchers, and the continued growth of public relations within the academy.

It is significant that the introspective and practice constructs combined (80% of articles) continue to greatly outweigh the theory-oriented articles. This may be an indication that the most recent published scholarship is still focused on establishing the field and what practitioners are actually doing, rather than building or developing theories of public relations.

Findings in this subset of the research tend to reinforce that while a majority of the practice and introspective articles focus on what public relations is (the profession), how it is being practiced around the world (international public relations) and the newest methods for accomplishing all this (new communication technologies), the remaining articles cover 35 additional topics within these two constructs (with the “other” category composed of a majority of that number).

It may be that public relations scholarship is stuck in a rut. Overall, research is still focusing on specific topics related more to what the field is, rather than on investigating topics that might lead to advancing the field through building and developing theory.

Perhaps the greatest surprise in the categorization of the research articles analyzed in this study is the sheer number of different topics within all categories during the five-year time period. We found we have too many topics to say we have a core of knowledge and theory. In fact there were more than 80 different theories used within the three constructs of introspective, practice and theory-oriented.

Although we may be starting to coalesce around relationship management as a focus, Ferguson had suggested this as a potential paradigm in 1984, and we have still not fully developed the paradigm more than 20 years later.

In addition, we continue to work from theories that come from other disciplines, but that we have reworked and reworded. More critically, we found a lack of a few core theories that we could use to investigate various public relations topics – dominant theoretical perspectives that we can use to look at a wide variety of topics. Instead what we found was a wide variety of topics and an almost equal number of theoretical approaches to studying them.

We expected the opposite, many articles written on a small number of topics. What we found instead was that public relations research is a mile wide and an inch deep, at least as

published in the academic journals. What's even more disheartening is that we shouldn't be writing this. It was written about in 1980 and we're still saying the same thing.

The public relations field would benefit from studying a few theoretical perspectives in a variety of settings in order to strengthen the core theories of the discipline, rather than developing a different theory for every situation. But, maybe we're expecting too much. Maybe it takes hundreds of years to develop a discipline. Edward Bernays only started a body of knowledge in the 1920s, which puts the field less than 100 years into its development.

The second question posed in this research: "is public relations even a viable concept for research?" is perhaps more fundamental. The answer may be that the question itself is inappropriate because there is no such thing as public relations. Have we been linking things together that don't really go together in order to do public relations research? Maybe the study of crisis communication and risk communication and corporate social responsibility and stakeholder relations and media relations and other areas isn't a study of public relations at all, but are disciplines in themselves and should be treated as such. Maybe our findings are symptomatic not of a failure to come together but rather of the need to break apart. Scholars have been saying for years that we need to come together and develop a research paradigm, or a few theories we all can agree upon, but maybe that isn't the case.

If all of these different areas were disciplines in their own rights, they'd each be much stronger. Each specialty could develop targeted theories and paradigms instead of contributing to an overarching concept that lacks the cohesiveness to weave all these different ideas into a single discipline – what we now call public relations.

## **Conclusion**

Perhaps we're trying too hard to be a social science discipline, and we're not. Public relations is also a profession, and we need to embrace that.

Why are we so insecure? By trying to make public relations a unified discipline, scholars are failing practitioners because we're not focusing on what they need to do their jobs. And by saying that we're not talking about providing them with technical information, but rather with training on how to use the theories, the research and the knowledge base that already exist. This could include incorporating research and theories from other disciplines, as well as from public relations scholarship, in ways that will help them service their organizations and clients better.



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