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Exploring the Strategic Use of New Media’s Impact on Change Management and Risk in Theory and Practice

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The Importance of Corporate Social Responsibility Communication in the Age of Social Media
Lina M. Gomez, University of Puerto Rico, and Ricardo Chalmeta, The Jaume I University, Spain

This paper focuses on analyzing how companies are using social media platforms for CSR communication. First, a content analysis was conducted to the Facebook and Twitter profiles of 50 companies. Second, based on the analysis of the messages, a conceptual framework for CSR communication through social media was developed.

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Kirk Hallahan, Colorado State University

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analyzes the current practices – including the role of online *articles directories* as conduits for the distribution of these articles and the operation of fee-based *article submission services*.

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*Marco V. Herrera*, Grupo Public International, Mexico, and *Rebeca I. Arévalo Martínez*, Anahuac University of North Mexico, Mexico

This presentation is about the most relevant results of the study of Leadership in Public Relations and Communication Management in Mexico, which brings a new perspective of the communication systems, skills and knowledge needed to understand the challenges of a globalized and multimedia society.

**Sampling Considerations for Social Media Research**

*Joe Bob Hester*, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

This research investigates sampling issues in social media research and provides practical recommendations for reducing errors. A comparison of Twitter data gathered from 3 sources using an identical search term reveals dramatic differences among sources, identifies the development of search phrases as a crucial component, and empirically demonstrates the effectiveness of random sampling.

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*J. Suzanne Horsley*, University of Alabama

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*Ann D. Jabro*, Robert Morris University

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*Angela Jeffrey*, Angela Jeffrey & Associates
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Erika K. Johnson, University of Missouri

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The Effect of Socially Mediated PR Crises on Planned Behavior: How TPB Can Help Both Corporations and Nonprofits
Arthur W. Page Center Benchmarking Award
Emily S. Kinsky, Kristina D. Drumheller, R. Nicholas Gerlich, Meagan E. Brock, West Texas A&M University, and Marc Sollosy, Marshall University

Through two online surveys conducted during the recent crises experienced by Lowe’s and by Susan G. Komen, this study gauges people’s thoughts about purchasing or donating toward the organization in crisis and discusses the use of online apologies. Results showed attitudes and social norms held the most sway.

Public Relations/Communication Department CCO Reporting: What Information Do CEOs Truly Need?
Fraser Likely, Likely Communication Strategies Ltd.

The extant literature provides limited empirical evidence on specific CEO PR/Communication information needs. This conceptual paper presents a model for the
reporting of requisite information supplied from the PR/C department/CCO to the CEO, by adapting Peter Drucker’s five dimensional Information Executives Truly Need framework. The identification of information possibilities in the construct of the model comes from a review of three relevant streams of PR/C research: roles; leadership and; measurement.

**The New Role of News Release: What Induced the Change in Linguistic Expression in the News Release?**
*Junichiro Miyabe* and *Hinako Suda*, Hokkaido University, Japan

It has become common practice for Japanese companies to publish news releases on their websites. Taking this as a long-term trend in communication environment, Japanese companies have been experiencing drastic change in PR environment after the 2011 Earthquake. With these changes, Japanese companies recognized the new role of news release. Has the role change of news release influenced its linguistic expression? The results of quantitative content analysis are presented at the conference.

**Updating pride: How 21st century gay pride organizations strategically use social media to manage relationships with key stakeholders**
*Dean E. Mundy*, Appalachian State University

This study investigates how LGBT Pride organizations in 10 major U.S. cities—Boston, Charlotte, Denver, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Miami, New York City, Philadelphia, Portland, and Washington D.C.—use social media to build and maintain quality relationships with their local communities. Their insights reveal how social media can help, and hinder, the success of such massive, public events.

**Co-creating Organizational Changes in Social Media—A Theoretical Framework**
*Koichi Yamamura International Strategic Communication Award*
*Chiara Valentini, Mona Agerholm Andersen*, and *Annette Agerdal-Hjermind*, Aarhus University

The purpose of this article is to propose a theoretical framework in which change is understood as a physiological, cyclical process of an organization and communication in social media is used to co-create solutions to changes and to develop innovations.

**The Role Of New Media in Reputation Management: What's the Price of Ignorance?**
*Ana Tkalac Verčič*, University of Zagreb, Croatia, and *Dejan Verčič*, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

This paper focuses on the assessment of students attitudes towards both existing media channels and new communication media, both in their "private" and "university" life. The main question is: What media preferences do students have regarding formal information about their university and are these media preferences the same as in their informal, social communication?

**Networked Micro-Diplomats: International Students As a Specific Case of Within-**
Border, Foreign Public Diplomacy
Kelly Vibber, Purdue University

This study looks at the role of within-boarder, foreign publics, specifically international students, as potential micro-diplomats and the communicative actions they use to embrace a role as either an adversary or advocate for their host country. Their role as a networked public and the implications of their megaphoning behaviors on the soft power of their host country is discussed.

The Delphi: An Underutilized Method of Scholarly and Practical Research for a Public Relations Field in Transition
Robert Wakefield, Brigham Young University, and Tom Watson, Bournemouth University

The paper is created through a literature review of similar articles on Delphi studies in other domains, notably health communications, followed by an examination of some studies conducted to advance issues in public relations. The authors explore the most appropriate situations for using a Delphi and list the benefits and disbenefits of different aspects or applications of the method.

How PR Faced the Challenge of the "Information Superhighway"
Tom Watson, Bournemouth University

Drawing on the archive of the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), this paper reviews 18 papers of contemporary discussion over a 20 year period from 1977 to 1996 and draws lessons about the adoption of innovative technology for today's practitioners and historical researchers.

IPRA’s Code of Athens – The first International Code of Public Relations Ethics
Tom Watson, Bournemouth University

In 1965, IPRA adopted an International Code of Ethics: the Code of Athens. It reflected the hopeful, post-WW2 ethical framework with its linkage to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Using the IPRA archive, the paper explores the Code’s evolution, implementation and modification. Within IPRA, there was continued debate whether it was an aspirational statement or a statement of standards. Anglo-American members considered that the Code, while laudable, was unenforceable.

Is That All There Is? A Literature Review and Potential Approach to Measuring Influence in Social Media
Institute of Public Relations Top Three Papers of Practical Significance Award
Sean Williams, Communication AMMO, Inc. and Kent State University

This research seeks to uncover a deeper understanding of how influence works online, and how we might measure influence beyond the outputs and outtakes. The research is based on the Social Impact Theory of Bibb Latané (1981), using interviews, focus groups, and
ethnographies.

**A Need for Power, Achievement, or Affiliation? Exploring the Influence of Personality, Attraction, and Perceived Career Fit in Public Relations Education**

*University of Miami School of Communication Top Student Paper Award*

Christopher Wilson, University of Florida

This study investigates personality traits and preconceptions that are likely to play a role in the attraction of undergraduates to study public relations using attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) framework. A survey of 307 undergraduate students indicates that this framework is a promising theoretical perspective from which to study questions of attraction to public relations education.

**Customer Relations in Social Media: Social Media Usage Motives, Expected Responses from Organizations and Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)**

*Institute of Public Relations Top Three Papers of Practical Significance Award*

Ming-Yi Wu, Gallup, Inc.

The main purposes of this study are to explore customers’ social media usage behaviors, expected responses from organizations, and electronic word of mouth (eWOM). The results of this study extend the knowledge about customer relationship management in social media.

**International Strategic Communication with Investors on the Web – A Global Benchmark Study of Financial Communications in the US, UK, France, Germany and Japan**

Ansgar Zerfass and Kristin Koehler, University of Leipzig, Germany

Despite the growing relevance of social media in all fields of corporate communications, little is known about the practice of strategic communication with investors and other financial stakeholders from an international perspective. The research presented here closes this gap. It analyses social media activities, dialogical approaches and the use of mobile media by the 150 leading corporations listed on the stock market in the United States (DJIA), United Kingdom (FTE), Germany (DAX), France (CAC), and Japan (NIKKEI).

**Social Media Newsrooms in Public Relations—Developing a Conceptual Framework and Researching Corporate Practices in the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany**

*Institute of Public Relations Top Three Papers of Practical Significance Award Jackson-Sharpe Award*

Ansgar Zerfass, University of Leipzig, Germany, and Dana Melanie Schramm, Seedmatch, Dresden, Germany

This paper critically reviews Social Media Newsrooms (SMNRs) as instruments for aggregating social media content provided by an organization and/or thematic content
about the organization and its key issues from several platforms in one place. It introduces SMNRs from a conceptual perspective, explores opportunities and challenges for strategic communication, and explains empirical manifestations and modes of usage by corporations in three major international markets.

**How is Diversity Portrayed in the Websites of Brazilian Corporations? An analytical study**  
*International ABERJE Award*  
**Helga S. Pereira**, Brigham Young University

This study aims to investigate how some of the largest and most successful Brazilian corporations define diversity and portray it to the publics that access their websites. Through the analysis of ten websites of the top Brazilian corporations, retrieved from the Forbes 2000 Biggest Public Companies list, this study aims to look into a few issues relative to diversity.

**Issue Management within the U.S. Navy: Toward a Revised Issue Lifecycle Model**  
*Red Raider Public Relations Research Award*  
**Rebeca Pop**, University of Oklahoma

The purpose of this paper is to revise Meng’s issue lifecycle model. Specifically, the author re-examined the issue lifecycle by following two approaches: (1) theoretical inferences based on public relations, public affairs, and updated issue management literature; and (2) quantitative content analysis containing the news stories of two issues that have recently affected the U.S. Navy: Spice (synthetic marijuana) and Sexual Assault.

**Examining the Relationship between Corporate Associations and Brand Loyalty: The Moderating Role of Product Involvement**  
*Peter Debreceny Corporate Communication Award*  
**Weiting Tao** and **Haishi Cui**, University of Florida

Through conducting an online survey among college students, this study examined the relationships between two streams of corporation associations (i.e., corporate ability associations and corporate social responsibility associations) and brand loyalty. Additionally, this study explored the moderating effect of product involvement on these relationships. Its results contribute to corporate communication scholarship and practice regarding corporate associations and customer-brand relationships.
Public Relations and Community: An Old Perspective in A New Forum

Amanda Agee
University of North Carolina

Abstract
With the growing popularity of social media in our daily lives, it is no surprise that corporations across the globe are altering their public relations campaigns to include more technologically savvy strategies to reach out to consumers (Diga & Kelleher, 2009; Halligan, 2010; Hung, Li, & Tse, 2011; Volmar, 2010).

The lines between the virtual and physical worlds are ceasing to exist (Brown, 2011), creating new opportunities for community building (Bruns, 2010). Traditional ideas of community that were bound by geographic proximity still exist; however, communities now can span globally, thanks to the Internet (Brown, 2011). To understand how traditional public relations tactics that have been used to create a sense of community can translate to online communities through social media, this thesis will examine traditional concepts of community that have been prevalent in consumer public relations. The thesis also will examine social media that are prevalent in today’s society and how these have introduced a new means to create a consumer community.

This study will focus on the social networking site Facebook. The study will examine how corporations are using social networking sites to advance their businesses, how prevalent the use of these sites is in consumers’ everyday lives, and it will explore how social networking sites have broadened the power of communities.
Study Background

This study emphasizes the importance of community building in public relations and uses Kruckeberg and Starck’s (1988) community building theory to demonstrate how a sense of community can be created through social media platforms.

Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) claim modern communication technology has destroyed the sense of community that had once been common. Leeper (2001) addresses this loss of the “communitarian spirit” (p. 94) and connects it with a “loss of trust in society” (p.94). He suggests that these losses may lead to a loss of shared meaning thus affecting cultural moral standards. Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) advocate that the main function of public relations practitioners should be to restore this sense of community, and they identify eight strategies that can restore and maintain communities. These eight strategies are the dimensions of the community building theory on which this research will focus.

With the evolution of social media, consumer communities now exist in a new online forum. These online consumer communities can easily facilitate dialogue and two-way communication between consumers and organizations (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001), resulting in a sense of community much like that which communication technology had destroyed many years ago (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988). This study examines these online consumer communities and how, albeit subconsciously, they utilize Kruckeberg and Starck’s (1988) eight strategies for community building. To clarify, the researcher will argue that a true community of consumers can be created via social media and is not suggesting that attempts to create consumer communities did not previously exist.

The literature review of this paper will provide a theoretical framework for this research. It will describe the concepts of community and relationship building as these relate to public relations, will examine how increased Internet access and use have influenced communication, will explore what the introduction of social media has meant to public relations, and will illustrate how social media are changing public relations strategies and tactics today. The study also will identify the gaps in research relating to public relations’ role in community building through social media (Diga & Kelleher, 2009) and will explain the need for a deeper understanding of how the eight strategies for community building advocated by Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) are being used to create consumer communities online today. The study uses a content analysis of consumer communities on Facebook to explore the use of these eight strategies that were identified by Kruckeberg and Starck (1988).

Significance of Study

Many scholars suggest that public relations should focus on relationship building as opposed to persuasion (Hallahan, 2008; Kent & Taylor, 1998; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Taylor et al., 2001; Volmar, 2010). This study tests this perspective of public relations as a relationship-centered practice by exploring whether some practitioners and their organizations are actually doing so. This research searches for evidence of community building online and considers whether online communities should be given the same value as are given traditional communities in terms of effectiveness and significance. The researcher considers whether the findings of this study add legitimacy to current research on social media practice (Eyrich, Padman, & Sweetser, 2008). To date, support of the use of social media in public relations has been mostly from practitioners in the form of trade publications, as opposed to scholarly research (i.e., articles on Mashable.com, a website where journalists post articles and infographics discussing the latest
trends in social media), although increasing scholarly attention is being paid to public relations’ use of the social media (Taylor & Kent, 2010).

Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) challenged future researchers by posing the question, “Can a sense of community be developed and maintained where it has never before existed?” (p. 117). This study explores whether it can. Potentially, this research will support the contention that online consumer communities do emulate a sense of community equal to or greater than those created in traditional geographically proximate communities. The study will explore whether a sense of community can be developed in a new forum where it has never before existed, using the same basic strategies for community building.

**Review of Literature**

This section discusses literature about public relations, community building, and social media that ground the study. Included is an argument why public relations’ main focus should be on building relationships in the form of communities and how this focus can be facilitated through the use of social media. After the discussion of current social media uses and trends, this chapter summarizes the role of social media in today’s corporate public relations practice.

**Public Relations and Community**

Much public relations research begins with the search for an appropriate definition of public relations. Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) researched definitions of public relations, finding most of them to be vague and lacking the depth necessary to justify that public relations is a significant practice that contributes more than just the use of persuasive communication. They sought the roots of why public relations exists today, concluding “a fundamental reason public relations practice exists today is because of a loss of community resulting from new means of communication and transportation” (p. 21). Thus, they advocated a definition of public relations as “the active attempt to restore and maintain a sense of community” (p.21).

Traditionally, communities were viewed as “geographic publics,” that is, groups of people brought together based on proximity in their geographic locations. Historically, this made sense because transportation and technology had not yet reduced time and space to the extent to which they have been eliminated at the present time. Today, it is possible for “social distances [to be] maintained in spite of geographical proximity” (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988, p. 46). With the evolution of mass society, individuals have separated themselves from one another and have become more private (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988). Herein lies the reason for the loss of community.

Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) and Starck & Kruckeberg (2001) were the first to introduce the argument that public relations could be the key to restoring a sense of community. The authors argued that the loss of a sense of community in mass society “provided impetus for the development of modern public relations” (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988, p. 43). They argued that public relations practitioners could seek to bring people and organizations together in an equally beneficial community relationship.

Mass society evolved from advances in technology in transportation, media, and production methods. Everything was seemingly getting bigger and better, but mass society also left individuals lost in an “increasingly impersonal” world (Kruckeberg and Starck, 1988, p.48). This mass society introduced a host of issues that did not exist prior to the loss of community. Individuals felt a sense of alienation from the rest of the world and longed for communal activity involving communication with others. Leeper (2001) points to the loss of community relating to
a loss of trust in others, and thus, a loss of shared meaning. He argued that this loss of community and shared meaning could negatively affect “cultural standards, moral standards, and political participation” (p.95). He also argued that there is an increased interest in communitarian thought due to the loss of a sense of community (Leeper, 2001).

The need for communication to bring people together could be addressed by public relations practitioners. The public relations practitioner has the unique ability to introduce two-way communication between the organization and members of its publics to determine these publics’ opinions about the organization and to reconcile differences and relationship problems, but also to initiate conversations to address the sense of isolation that many people feel in mass society. Leeper (2001) argued for the importance of a sense of community to prevent this sense of isolation that people increasingly feel and believed that “community is seen as necessary to the development of the individual” (p. 97). Two-way communication, as used here, involves the sending and receiving of messages from all parties involved in the communication. St. John III (1998) suggests that, by using channels of communication, practitioners can help individuals “make sense of the information flowing within a community and can help develop a healthier social structure” (p. 39). Kruckeberg (1998) said over a decade ago that, at that point, we were still referring to community in a national, if not local, sense, while, in the future, communication technology would allow communities to span globally. Kruckeberg (1998) said this globalism would forever change the way people communicate among one another.

Previously, some had believed that “media will never be able to create a community” (Mowlana, 1996, as stated in Kruckeberg, 1998, p. 5) because “a community is created when people act together.” Little did everyone know that future technology would enable people to act together through a community created by media. Kruckeberg (1998) stated, “through the Internet, corporations can perform much community-building… among virtually all other organizational stakeholders—enhancing a sense of community, not only with the organization as locus, but within the context of the geographic community” (p.6), showing that, contrary to prior belief, community building can and does exist because of media technology. While online communities cannot replace “real” communities involving in-person, face-to-face communication, they can lead to such activities and serve as a medium of communication for community members.

However, the public relations practitioner’s role in the creation of communities involving businesses and brands introduces many ethical considerations. For example, community members may have concerns about their privacy and an organization’s motives behind bringing members together. They may ponder whether such effort is strictly a business strategy or if the community relationships fostered by the organization are meant to be equally beneficial for community members as well as the businesses encouraging the formation of these communities (St. John III, 1998). Starck and Kruckeberg (2001) believe that “today’s corporations have their roots firmly embedded in the concept of public interest” (p. 54). These authors’ inference is based on their belief that, if a business is successful, it is indebted to society. While corporations ultimately exist to make money, this does not mean that they do not wish well upon their consumers. If consumers find joy in a corporation’s product or service, and a healthy community is created based on this product or service, this is ideal for both the consumers as well as for the corporation. Consumers will continue to create positive opinions about the corporation and will share these opinions with everyone they encounter, and, thus, the corporation will continue to succeed financially.
Social Media

Much uncertainty, both in academic and professional worlds, still surrounds what defines social media (Valentini & Kruckeberg, 2012; Vocke, 2010). Social media seemingly appeared overnight and continue to grow in their prevalence at a rapid pace, with no signs of slowing down (Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2010; Brown, 2011; MacMillan, 2012). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (p.61). One of the most critical aspects of social media to which this definition points is the idea that its content is created by its users. Social media platforms make it easy for users to create and share content with others. These sites have a strong focus on interaction among users on both individual and professional levels. Valentini and Kruckeberg (2012) suggest that, due to its interactive nature, the existence of social media is dependent on the participation of their users. By their nature, social media attract all kinds of people by providing them with a forum in which these people can easily gather and share information of all kinds in various forms (e.g., text, pictures, audio, video.) online (Chu & Kim, 2011; Valentini & Kruckeberg, 2012).

Social media can be categorized based on their function (how information is shared). Barnes and Mattson (2008) studied social media use of the Inc. 500, which is “a list of the fastest-growing private U.S. companies compiled annually by the Inc. magazine” (p.1). They found that the top six forms of social media included blogging, podcasting, online video, social networking, wikis, and message/bulletin boards (Barnes & Mattson, 2008). As technology has advanced, many sites have begun to make several of these functions available in a single site. This allows for classification based on the purpose of the media.

Valentini and Kruckeberg (2012) note that, when “classified according to their scope” (p. 7), social media fit into the following five groups: informational, professional, educational, entertainment, and personal. Users will access each form of social media to accomplish different goals. For instance, if a person is planning a trip and wants to find information on the best hotels or things to do in the area, they would use an informational social media site such as TripAdvisor, from which they can access reviews that users who have visited the same place have posted. However, if a person’s intent were to interact with friends overseas through conversation and picture sharing, it would be more appropriate to use a personal social media site such as Facebook.

A common theme running through social media tools is the power to connect individuals in a simple way. This connection is important because it relates to the sharing of information through social media that allow those who express their opinions to be heard by many. This can be both positive and negative for companies and their reputations, due to the fact that people can post anything online unedited and unverified, allowing for the potential spread of misinformation (Newsom, Turk, & Kruckeberg, 2010). Wade (2009) suggests that …

“… the days of using the web solely to benefit from online commerce and one-way promotion are over…. A new age where user-generated content, consumer sentiments and unedited dialogue define a brand’s reputation is changing the way all companies must operate” (p. 27).

Research shows that Internet and social media use is increasingly prevalent in everyday lives (“Fact sheet,” n.d.; Madden, 2010; Newsom et al., 2010; Valentini & Kruckeberg, 2012). Today, it is nearly impossible to go anywhere without seeing advertisements directing consumers to the website, Facebook, or Twitter page of various companies. For example, when you make a
purchase at a store, typically, the website address and details about the store’s social media presence appear on the receipt. Due to this increased prevalence of Internet and social media use, it comes as no surprise that organizations are increasingly becoming involved with this new information and communication technology as well.

The Inc. 500 study by Barnes and Mattson (2008) included a series of telephone interviews that found that 77% of the participating companies used a form of social media in 2008, a 20% increase from the year before, indicating that familiarity with social media is increasing in the corporate realm. Their study also showed that 44% of the companies interviewed claimed that “social media was ‘very important’ to their business and marketing strategy” (p. 76). With the interactive and relational capabilities that social media have to offer, this number is expected to increase (Barnes & Mattson, 2008).

Valentini and Kruckeberg (2012) suggest that social media can be used “to create channels of communication and information for establishing relationships among individuals and organizations” (p. 6). Hallahan (2008) reported that “one-third of all customer-to-business contacts are mediated through online technology” (p. 46), which illustrates that not just organizations are reaching out to consumers, but that consumers are reaching out to organizations as well. Ferriter (2011) rationalizes that “since society as a whole is actively using social media, it only makes sense to connect with my community through these means” (p. 87). One particularly popular way of doing so is through the use of social networking sites (Becker, 2012; Drell, 2011; Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2011; MacMillan, 2011b; MacMillan, 2012; Reid, 2011; Wasserman, 2011).

**Social Networking**

Valentini and Kruckeberg (2012) note, “social media and social network sites describe similar online environments and often refer to the same digital technologies and applications” (p. 6). For the purpose of this research, social networking is recognized as a form of social media that refers to the use of social networking sites designed to connect users and to allow them to interact and network together. Specifically, social networking sites are defined as:

“Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections as well as those made by others within the system” (Valentini & Kruckeberg, 2012, p. 6).

Popular social networking sites require users to create an account, typically free of charge, which allows them to create their own personal networks. Many of these sites now contain functions that encompass all of the other social media tools (e.g., picture and video sharing, bulletin boards, and chat functions), which make them incredibly popular. The top social networking sites include Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, and Twitter. Each of these sites has similar functions, but different focuses. For instance, LinkedIn is used to create a professional network, whereas Facebook has traditionally been used for personal networks. The prevalence of social networking sites in modern society is what makes them the social media tool on which this study will focus.

**Personal Use of Social Networking**

A 2008 U.S. consumer studies report showed that 90% of adults aged 18-24 use some form of social networking (Barnes & Barnes, 2009). Many in this age bracket have grown up with social networking and use it on a daily basis (Madden, 2010; Pardee, 2010). Pardee (2010)
identifies a new generation that encompasses those who fall into this age bracket (18-24) that he calls either “Gen Y” or “millenials” (those born from 1980-2000). He claims that they “live and die by social media” (para. 9). Contrary to popular belief (Briones et al., 2010), social networking is not just for younger generations. Madden (2010) suggests that it “bridges generational gaps” (p. 7). The fastest growing demographic is reportedly adults aged 40-60 (Buttell, 2010). Sioco (2009) notes that Facebook’s fastest growing demographic is “adults age 35 and older” (p. 6). A study from the Pew Research Center found that 47% of Internet users ages 50-64 use social networking sites (Madden, 2010). Hampton et al. (2012) found that half of the adults and three-quarters of teenagers in America use social networking sites, illustrating how much of an immersion already exists within American culture. According to Briones et al. (2010), “two-thirds of the world’s Internet population [has] visited a social networking or blogging site, and the time spent on these sites [is] growing at more than three times the rate of overall Internet growth” (p.37), illustrating that this phenomenon is taking place globally, not solely within the United States.

Individuals use social networking sites to keep up with their personal and professional lives. Hallahan (2008) identifies five key motives driving individual Internet use: (1) interpersonal utility, (2) the passing of time, (3) information seeking, (4) convenience, and (5) entertainment (p. 52). All of these motivations can be satisfied through social networking. Thanks to easy Internet access that is available in many parts of the world, individuals are constantly connected (Brown, 2011). Chu and Kim (2011) report that, due to “high levels of self-disclosure and social presence, social networking sites have recently outpaced e-mail as the most popular online activity, and have enabled consumers to connect with others by exchanging information, opinions and thoughts” (p. 48). This self-disclosure is seen in activity on sites such as Twitter and Facebook, where users commonly share status updates on what they are thinking and doing throughout the day.

The technology behind these websites is always growing and changing. Only a few years ago, less than half of the current capabilities of Facebook were available to its users. This technology will only continue to improve and will include more and more social media technologies, such as video conferencing (Barnes & Barnes, 2009). Thanks to social networking sites, staying connected and keeping up with different lines of communication have become incredibly easy. Hallahan (2008) argues that communication technology, which has previously been blamed for “[reducing] the quality of interpersonal relationships and social involvement” (p. 48), has the capability of reinstating and even improving these relationships. Relationships fostered on social networking sites are similar to those that take place in real life, but they exist in a realm in which “time and space are not relevant” (Valentini & Kruckeberg, 2012, p. 10). Chu and Kim (2011) support this focus on relationships by pointing out that “social relationship building and maintenance is the primary activity among SNS [social networking site] users” (p. 49). By constantly introducing new advances to social networking sites, staying in touch with members of personal and professional networks becomes even easier because one can connect via pictures, videos, websites, chat conversations, etc., by accessing one main hub, such as Facebook. Newsom, Turk, and Kruckeberg (2010) suggest that these “rapidly evolving communication technologies… have drastically changed both how people communicate and how they live” (p. 53).

Negative Aspects of Personal Use of Social Networking
Along with the many positive aspects associated with communicating via social networking sites come the negative traits. Irresponsible use of sites such as MySpace has cost individuals their jobs, friendships, and in extreme cases, their lives (Dretzin, 2008).

Privacy is one major concern. By accessing these sites, individuals are releasing information about themselves into cyberspace, sometimes without even realizing it. MacMillan (2012) introduces the idea of “frictionless sharing,” which is when social media applications automatically post information to the personal sites of their users. Frictionless sharing often shares the activity of a user to everyone within his or her networks. Reportedly, 61% of people feel annoyed by applications that post content automatically (MacMillan, 2012). However, despite this annoyance, users are utilizing these applications anyway, and thus frictionless sharing is expected to increase in prevalence (MacMillan, 2012). Social networking sites are constantly changing, including their privacy controls. Vocke (2010) suggests that this constant change prevents many from using social media in general, because it creates a lack of understanding among users. Many are afraid of what information they will project onto their networks. There is also a concern with the information unknowingly being shared publicly. Today, educators and employers are using social networking sites to check up on their students and employees/future employees. As Podger (2009) states, “you don’t want to post something regrettable” (p. 35). When utilizing social networking for personal use, it is necessary to remember that not only your “friends” are accessing these sites. Even with privacy settings, people can access personal sites and can ridicule those people based on information provided on these sites. It is imperative that users be careful about the content that they share and/or are connected to (e.g., an incriminating photo posted by a friend).

Organizational Use of Social Networking

According to Barnes and Mattson’s (2008) study, 57% of the Inc. 500 companies interviewed claimed that they were “very familiar” with social networking. The study equated familiarity with use, telling us that many new companies are jumping onto the bandwagon and are joining social networking sites to boost business, recognizing the “critical role of social media to a company’s future success in today’s online world” (Barnes & Mattson, 2008, p. 76). Many organizations are beginning to use social networking regularly to benefit both their employees and consumers. Wilson (2009) believes, “social networks are here to stay… so it is important for businesses to find a practical way to work with these sites and not against them” (p. 56). Because this technology is new and is constantly changing, professional use of social networking sites is still being perfected (Briones et al., 2010). However, MacMillan (2011a) indicates that companies that are integrating social media with their business strategies are doing it well and, thus, are reaping the benefits in the form of higher profits. He notes that “the imperative for business is clear, if you fall behind in creating these internal and external social networks it could well be a ‘critical mistake’” (MacMillan, 2011a, “Going forward- four key steps,” para. 1). Social media prove to be a cheap method for advertising services as well as to reach a large number of people for other purposes. Many smaller businesses are excelling because of their strategic use of social networking sites (Waters & Jamal, 2011). Large corporations recognize the value of social networking as well and are beginning to utilize social media to reach new audiences. Using social technologies gives an organization the unique ability to strengthen brands and consumer support of organizations (Waters & Jamal, 2011).

Social networking sites allow for companies to relate to their publics, including consumers, stakeholders, and employees, like never before. Through the creation of
relationships, companies gain the trust of their publics and potentially have a more positive image because of it (Briones et al., 2010). Companies utilizing social networking to create these relationships are “more likely to be market leaders” (MacMillan, 2011a, para. 3). In creating relationships with publics, life is brought to the companies—they seemingly possess human characteristics such as the ability to empathize or care (Wade, 2009). Bruns (2010) suggests that showing consumers the humane side of a company allows it to appear more personal, thus gaining the trust of its consumers.

Bruns (2010) boldly states that “conventional marketing models are out, and direct engagement with customers is in” (p. 309). Pardee (2009) mirrors this sentiment through the suggestion that, if organizations engage consumers and these consumers find value in the organization’s message, they will share an organization’s story for them. Avery et al. (2010) note that, “one unique advantage social media tools have…is their ability to engage countless numbers of constituents in two-way communication even when an organization has a limited funding structure” (p. 341). Social networking sites provide an atmosphere where consumers can voluntarily associate with brands and engage with organizations directly (Avery et al, 2010; Chu & Kim, 2011; “Hoping to find,” 2009; Valentini & Kruckeberg, 2012). Chu and Kim (2011) suggest that “voluntary exposure to brand information in SNSs [social networking sites] is important because consumers are seeking ways to interact with brands and other consumers” (p. 50). Organizations create social networking sites for their products and services in the attempt to attract consumers and to create a home for their interactions with the organization. Consumers are responsible for actively choosing with which organizations to interact by adding organizational pages to their networks. However, even if an organization creates a large network, its work is not complete.

For organizations to succeed in social networking, they need to strategically engage with the consumers who have chosen to be a part of their network (“Hoping to find,” 2009; Wasserman, 2011). An organization’s strategy should involve relationship building through dialogic and/or two-way communication. The basic principles for accomplishing this on the Internet, derived from the work of Taylor and Kent (1998), are as follows: “(a) include useful information on the site; (b) frequently update sites and generate new content to engage publics and encourage return visits; (c) make the sites easy to use and navigate; and (d) strive to keep publics on the site” (Briones et al, 2010, p. 38). Following these principles will create an environment where consumers can “enter into a dialogue with organizations” (Valentini & Kruckeberg, 2012, p. 10), but, as Valentini and Kruckeberg (2012) point out, it is critical for organizations to understand that this potential dialogue is dependent on consumers voluntarily joining in. Waters and Jamal (2011) suggest that social network users find satisfaction in the attempts of organizations to reach out to consumers through social networking sites to involve them in activities and to get their feedback. Thus, as long as practitioners understand the functions of social networking sites and use them appropriately, consumers should actively engage and create relationships with organizations (Briones et al., 2010).

**Negative Aspects of Organizational Use of Social Networking**

This new means to market products and services to publics presents new ethics challenges. It is important for corporations to provide honest information and to appear as transparent as possible (Bruns, 2010; MacMillan, 2011b; Pardee, 2009). Corporations are “eager to harness the power of social networks to find and distribute information,” but it is necessary for them “to do it in a way that fosters responsible use” (Podger, 2009, p. 33). Being transparent,
However, is not always easy because it makes the organization vulnerable to its publics. Companies cannot afford to make mistakes— at least not without paying for them. Projecting information via social media allows for more people than usual to have access to the company and what it is doing. In some cases, organizations may earn great praises for things they have done; in others, negative information may spread rapidly (Beaubien, 2010). Organizations must be prepared to quickly handle all kinds of situations, good and bad. People expect instant gratification. Consumers want answers right away. If a company messes up, it must be able to explain itself right away to save face.

Social networking pages are created as social environments in which consumers and organizations interact with one another. Organizations hope for positive interactions, but sometimes this is not the case. Consumers and fans can turn against the organization just as easily as they can support it. Nestle experienced this firsthand when consumers used its Facebook page, which was “originally intended as an open forum for fans to show their support” (Beaubien, 2010, p. 4), into a “critics’ billboard” (p. 4) on which angry consumers expressed their dissatisfaction with Nestle’s use of palm oil. A Nestle representative wrote back to some of these consumers with sarcastic comments that only fueled their anger, illustrating “the downside of operating such a public forum for consumer comments” (Beaubien, 2010, p. 4). Bruns (2010) notes the importance of “responding humbly to problems (or perceived problems) as they are raised in social media, there is no place for corporate pride” (p. 310). If the Nestle representative had responded differently to its angry consumers, this situation may not have been such a disaster.

In addition to the lack of control over how consumers react to an organization through social networking, social networking sites are criticized for the lack of control over page design that these social networking sites give organizations (Waters et al., 2010). Organizational websites have complete creative freedom, but social networking sites impose strict guidelines to create consistency across pages. Social networking sites are criticized for constraining an organization’s liberty by “forcing them to create an identity that fits predetermined categories from the social-networking site” (Waters et al., 2010, p. 164). Organizations accept these regulations because consumers and potential fans live on these sites. Consultants suggest that it is easier to create a community in an environment that is familiar to consumers as opposed to directing them to an external website to which they would not typically go (Waters et al., 2010). However, due to the setup of social networking sites such as Facebook, messages that are created by organizations that are intended to reach their fans may often be overlooked due to a newsfeed function that constantly updates visible information (Waters et al., 2010). Also, organizations must be sensitive to the culture of the respective social networking site that it chooses to utilize and must be careful not to over-post information (Drell, 2011), because these sites were originally created for personal use and many users are still adjusting to the presence of companies in this forum (Vorvoreanu, 2009; Waters et al, 2010).

Social media sites require a lot of time and effort to maintain. MacMillan (2012) notes that “users become more passive the longer they are on a social network, which means brands will need to find a way to keep their fan base active and engaged over time” (MacMillan, 2012, “The rate of shared content,” para.1). In other words, there is no one right way to interact with fans. Tactics and strategy constantly must change to keep consumers engaged, which requires much time and research. “Studies routinely publish results that indicate only modest attempts at interactivity and relationship building in the social-media sphere” (Waters et al., 2010, p. 164), typically due to the lack of staff and funding necessary to promote such efforts (Bortree &
The necessity for constant updating of information (Briones et al., 2010) is imperative to an organization’s successful use of social networking. Because consumers are increasingly connected or logged-in to social media at all times (Brown, 2011), it is necessary for organizations to mirror this behavior. Actively running a social media campaign can be exhausting. Consumers love that information on social networking sites is available in real-time, but that means these pages have to be updated outside the timeframe of normal business hours. While social networking sites are relatively cheap to utilize, they are time-intensive and require much labor. It can become difficult for companies to maintain these sites, and, often, companies simply cannot afford to keep their accounts up-to-date.

One final important item to note is that not all of an organization’s consumers use social networking (Ang, 2011). While many consumers may use social networking sites, there are still multiple consumers who choose not to. Or, who choose not to interact with organizations on their social networking platforms. Waters et al. (2010) propose that, “the lack of a demonstrated return on investment for social-media endeavors” (p. 163) relates to this lack of consumers utilizing social networking in the sense that social media leaves something to be desired. Likewise, Avery et al. (2010) point out that, since “not all populations engage in social media to equal extents… message selection must be segmented in conjunction with priority populations according to demographics, psychographics, lifestyle, and motivations” (p. 342). Ultimately, although social media and social networking are effective public relations tools, they currently are still too new to replace traditional tactics without leaving multiple consumers untargeted.

**Facebook**

With 845 million monthly active users and 483 million daily active users as of the end of December 2011 (“Fact sheet,” n.d.), Facebook has proven to be the most popular social networking site in the world (Wakiyama & Kagan, 2009). With 80% of its users outside the United States and Canada (“Fact sheet,” n.d.) and approximately 37% of the world’s Internet users utilizing the site (“Fact sheet,” n.d.; MMG, 2012), it is clear that Facebook has truly embraced globalism. The site is available in over 70 languages (“Fact sheet,” n.d.) to connect people worldwide. Ang (2011) noted, “if Facebook were to be a country, it will be the third largest, after China and India” (p. 31). Size is not the only positive aspect of Facebook. People are not just joining the site; they are actively using it as well. Ferriter (2010) noted that users spend 500 billion minutes per month on Facebook (p. 87). What started as an exclusive social networking site that was only available to students at select universities (Vorvoreanu, 2009) has grown to include any individual having Internet access as well as organizations of all kinds—non-profit (Briones et al., 2010), sports teams (Waters, Burke, Jackson, & Buning, 2010), health departments (Avery et al., 2010), and many more. Facebook is growing continually and changing rapidly. What started as a space strictly for personal use has evolved into, arguably, one of the most powerful marketing tools available today. Public relations professionals have adopted Facebook into numerous campaigns, working to help build the online communities of their clients (Becker, 2012; Drell, 2011; MacMillan, 2011b; Wasserman, 2011).

**How Facebook Works**

Facebook is set up as a large community where users request other users to be their “friends” and, thus, to become a part of their networks. For organizations, users become “fans” of an organization’s page to join their networks. Each user is given an individual page where that individual can create and share content in the form of status updates, photos, videos, notes, and
The list of features is constantly growing and changing. Users can interact with one another through several options. One popular way to communicate is by writing on a user’s “wall.” Each page has a “wall” that is essentially a bulletin board where people can leave messages publicly (Drell, 2011). Users can then comment on these posts—one way in which many conversations are started. There is also the option of sending a direct message, which is private and can only be viewed by those to whom it is addressed. Facebook also has an internal chat system, where users can exchange instant messages while logged onto the site.

Much of the shared content gives the user the option to “like” it. The “like” button typically lives directly underneath shared content. Users click the word “like,” which shows the person who posted the content that you appreciate, agree, like, etc., that person’s post. The person who “likes” the post is then publicly attached to the content, together with all the other users who chose to “like” it. Reid (2011) praises this “like” function for its measurability. For public relations, “like” gives practitioners a way to see how many users and/or “fans” viewed and appreciated the content. (Note: this does not account for all users and/or “fans” who viewed the content, only those who clicked “like.”) Aside from “liking” a post, a user can leave a comment or share the post, either on his or her own network, or directly with any of their “friends.” By measuring “likes,” comments, and shares, practitioners have an easy way to measure the success and to gauge the reach of their campaigns (Reid, 2011), which is one reason why public relations practitioners love Facebook. One main criticism of social media is the lack of proven return on investment (Waters et al., 2010). Facebook provides multiple ways to measure engagement, and public relations practitioners appreciate this (Reid, 2011).

Facebook brings information from all of the networks to which users connect themselves in the form of a “newsfeed” that appears on the home page of all users. When users within a network share content, their “friends” can view it on their individual newsfeeds. Facebook shows the user, not only what his or her “friends” have posted, but also what these friends “like.” Oftentimes, Facebook will suggest that the user “like” it too. A study by Hampton, Goulet, Marlow, and Rainie (2012) for the Pew Research Center discovered that, “at two degrees of separation (friends-of-friends), Facebook users… can on average reach 156,569 other Facebook users” (p. 5), which shows that all posted content has great potential for exposure. This same study found that the longer someone has been a Facebook user, the more that individual tends to use it; also, the more “friends” the user has, the more content that individual will share (Hampton et al., 2012). These facts suggest that the future growth of Facebook use would potentially increase the reach of each individual Facebook user.

Facebook Use in Public Relations

Public relations practitioners worldwide are increasingly leading social media efforts (Avery et al., 2010; Bruns, 2010; Waters et al., 2010; Vorvoreanu, 2009; Vocke, 2010), monitoring the Facebook pages of their client organizations and strategically factoring them into public relations campaigns. Today, the job is “to get the publics’ attention electronically because people are their own editors and publishers, finding information they want and increasingly accessing it on handheld devices” (Newsom et al., 2010, p. 60). Valentini and Kruckeberg (2012) suggest that social media “must be at the heart of public relations activities because social media can enhance organization-public relationships by increasing and improving community relations” (p. 11). Facebook is home to many online consumer communities, and the majority of the top brands have a Facebook presence. While they “do not keep statistics on the number of brands that have created pages on its platform…” Facebook boasts that it has run campaigns for
83 of the top 100 brands” (“Hoping to find,” 2009, para. 6), showing that organizations are actively using Facebook to reach consumers.

Public relations practitioners today consistently create campaigns that are strategically designed to reach out and engage with consumer communities on Facebook (Becker, 2012; Drell, 2011; MacMillan, 2011b; Wasserman, 2011). Sarah Hofstetter, senior vice president of emerging media and brand strategy at 360i, says that “putting your brand on Facebook—or any other online community—is an invitation for conversation” (Wasserman, 2011, “A lot of campaigns,” para. 3). She suggests that, to successfully use Facebook, practitioners should “focus on quality of engagement to foster a real relationship with the people who matter most, and invest your efforts in getting a continuing dialogue going between yourself and your consumers—and even better, connecting fans of your brand to each other” (Wasserman, 2011, “A lot of campaigns,” para. 3). The idea that quality relationships can be created and maintained on Facebook coincides with the idea that the main function of public relations is to create relationships.

**Future of Social Media in Organizations**

Research suggests that the future use of social media in organizations is bright (Barnes & Mattsson, 2008). Whether they want to or not, companies will eventually have to succumb to the call of this technologically savvy world and prepare for interactions of all kinds with their publics.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Community Building Theory**

Kruckeberg and Starck state in their 1988 book, *Public Relations and Community: A Reconstructed Theory*, that “public relations is better defined and practiced as the active attempt to restore and maintain a sense of community” (p. xi). Throughout the book, they examine the concept of community from the perspective of a public relations practitioner in a traditional sense—one dictated by physical proximity. With the growing prevalence of the Internet in people’s daily lives across the globe (Brown, 2011), physical proximity is no longer as important in the creation of a sense of community surrounding consumer products and brands. Today, we utilize technology, such as social media, to create communities that span borders and connect people globally. However, through this study, the researcher explores whether the basic principles of community building from a public relations perspective, as set forth by Kruckeberg and Starck (1988), are still relevant. The basic principles of community building referred to are the following eight main strategies, as determined by Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) in their case study, that public relations practitioners can use to help to restore and maintain a sense of community:

1.) Create consciousness of common interests
2.) Overcome alienation—encourage members to know one another
3.) Apply new communication technologies
4.) Encourage leisure-time activities
5.) Provide consummatory (self-fulfilling) communication
6.) Encourage fulfillment of social roles through charitable works
7.) Spur interest in community welfare, social order, and progress
8.) Help foster personal friendships
Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) found these eight strategies to be the key for public relations practitioners to maintain and restore a sense of community. Arguably, these same strategies could be used to encourage and create a community. Many of these strategies are interchangeable and can be used together to create a similar effect. Or, utilizing one strategy may naturally lead to another. A more in-depth look at each strategy will make this clear.

Strategy One: create consciousness of common interests. By making citizens aware of shared interests, these shared interests will help to bring them together. Consciousness of common interests may spark ideas for enjoyable activities that can be carried out together, that will encourage members to explore these shared interests, and that will help them to find an identity within the community. Sharing common interests will help citizens “maintain their individuality as well as their solidarity” (p. 112).

Strategy Two: overcome alienation. By encouraging members to know one another, they will feel more at ease within the community. By encouraging the development of “person-to-person relationships within the community” (p. 113), members will become attached to and identify with the community on a personal level. The comfort that they will find within the community will naturally encourage them to be active in this community and to partake in activities that are promoted by the other strategies as well.

Strategy Three: apply new communication technologies. In their case study of the Standard Oil of Indiana refinery in Sugar Creek, Missouri, Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) noted that “the efforts of the community relations personnel often were remarkably successful, and their insights into community relations problems were likewise remarkably accurate” (p. 114). These “efforts” were their distribution of “employee magazines, open houses, tours, speaking engagements” (p. 114), etc.—all that were acceptable forms of communication at the time. Reaching out to citizens of the community and offering them information will create a sense of community. The public relations practitioner plays a special role when dealing with new communication technology because the practitioner will need to make sure that community members have an understanding of how these technologies work. For example, if a communication campaign that is underway utilizes a new technology, the public relations practitioner needs to make sure it is user friendly so that the community members are encouraged to participate, instead of shying away from something new and unknown.

Strategy Four: encourage leisure-time activities. Since practitioners are going to be bringing community members together by making them aware of their shared interests, encouraging them to know one another, and helping to create friendships, it only makes sense that public relations practitioners should utilize these new developments through enjoyable activity. Companies can sponsor various activities and encourage members to participate, enhancing the effects of many other strategies of community building and the overall sense of community.

Strategy Five: provide consummatory (self-fulfilling) communication. This strategy simply relates to providing an outlet for communication to be had for communication’s own sake. Offering the opportunity for community members to openly partake in conversation will prove enjoyable for members and, once again, may end up overlapping other strategies, such as creating friendships and creating consciousness of common interests. Especially in communities that have been created by businesses and brands, the community members are likely to talk about the brand and/or product, itself. This will surely create a buzz around the product, which is a portion of what the public relations practitioner is seeking to create.
Strategy Six: encourage fulfillment of social roles through charitable works. “Practitioners can help individuals find security and protection through association with others” (p. 115). Engaging in charitable works within the community will help members become attached to the community. Through helping others, and seeing how many people are willing to participate in charity events, community members gain the sense that, if they needed help, their community would help them out as well, thus helping to create a feeling of security. This strategy overlaps with other strategies in the sense that it can be viewed as a leisure-time activity and it definitely brings community members together, encouraging them to know one another, thus eliminating alienation and helping to create friendships.

Strategy Seven: spur interest in community welfare, social order, and progress. Practitioners can enhance the sense of community by “[respecting] and [promoting] opportunities for members of the community to realize and appreciate their own culture” (p. 116). Perhaps through encouraging self-fulfilling communication, community members will begin talking about what makes them a community—things in which only members of the community would find interest and would understand. This realization of their culture may create a sense of pride and belonging within the community that can be expressed in communication, shared experiences, and/or shared beliefs.

Strategy Eight: help foster personal friendships. Basically, through the utilization of the previous seven strategies, personal friendships are bound to evolve. Individuals will grow attached to the community and its members through the realization of shared interests, through the encouragement to know one another, by experiencing new communication technologies together, and by participating in leisure-time activities, communicating for the sake of communication, participating in charitable works, and by sharing an interest in the welfare, social order, and progress of the community. The personal friendships that will be created will “help individuals to root themselves in the community, to grow with it, gaining in depth, significance, flavor, and absorbing the local tradition and spirit” (p. 116).

Each of these strategies was determined through Kruckeberg and Starck’s (1988) case study of a refinery community. However, the researcher cannot help but see the correlation between these seemingly old strategies and how perfectly they translate to modern technology. Scholars have been claiming that modern communication technology had destroyed the traditional sense of community, but the researcher will show that these old strategies of community building are just as relevant and practical today as they were back in 1988 and can be applied to consumer communities created via social media. Some say that we have become an individualistic society, leaving the need for community behind (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988), but the researcher disagrees. Especially with the introduction of social media and social networking sites, people are encouraged, once again, to unite and to partake in two-way communication, not only with individuals, but with companies as well (Vorvoreanu, 2009).

Past Research and Literature Gaps
The current research and available literature explore many avenues of the introduction of social media from a public relations perspective. Current research also explores the idea of consumer communities created online. Such research does not, however, take into consideration the idea of consumer community building via social media as performed by public relations practitioners utilizing traditional community-building efforts. There are numerous studies surrounding blogs and Twitter (e.g., Briones et al., 2010; Kelleher, 2009; Waters & Jamal, 2011), but more research is needed on other forms of social media (Eyrich et al., 2008), such as
Facebook. The researcher believes Facebook has the best platform to foster online communities because of its range of functions. Other sites, like Twitter, are more limited. Justin Levy, director of business development at New Marketing Labs, LLC, said, “Facebook is like a party, with time to socialize and relax, while Twitter’s fast pace is a distracting stream of information” (Volmar, 2010). Levy’s point supports the idea that Facebook is a good forum for community development because it allows for users to spend a good amount of time on the site, thus, allowing for the potential growth of relationships. Although there are studies (e.g., Briones et al., 2010) that examine the types of communication used in social media (one-way vs. two-way), no one has studied how companies are creating consumer communities on Facebook and whether or not these companies utilize traditional methods of community building. Are consumer communities today really that different from those of the past? Or are they just created in a new forum? Are the eight elements of community building as advocated by Kruckenberg and Starck (1988) being satisfied in social media campaigns today? These are questions that remain unanswered in the existing literature.

The majority of research about public relations and social media is from a practical perspective, recognizing social media as a tool used by practitioners to disseminate information directly to consumers that has the power to affect the reputation of the company and the power of the brand. Also, research exists that illustrates how organizations can easily gain feedback from consumers. Little research has examined whether social media is a tool that (when used by public relations practitioners) is capable of building, restoring, and maintaining consumer communities.

This study, focusing on the community-building efforts of public relations practitioners through their use of social media, will address skepticisms of social media practices and will add significantly to existing literature in several ways. First, by studying current social media practice, this research describes how social media are utilized by organizations and how this use correlates with the role of public relations practitioners in attempting to create a sense of community, as suggested by Kruckenberg and Starck (1988, 2004) and Starck & Kruckenberg (2001). This research will examine current efforts of public relations practitioners who employ social media in their campaigns to see if these campaigns are strategized from the perspective of public relations practice that fosters community by attempting to utilize the identified strategies to restore a sense of community, as determined by Kruckenberg and Starck (1988). This study has the potential to support the contention that consumer communities that are created online via social media programs can be created, restored, and/or maintained by using the same strategies Kruckenberg and Starck (1988) had recommended for traditional, geographically proximate consumer communities that have been reached using traditional channels of communication. This research may provide insights necessary to help practitioners harness the power of these social media tools by using them effectively. If it is supported that these eight strategies are relevant for community building via social media, a content analysis can help determine which of the eight strategies are used most frequently and generate the most response within the community. Knowing this can help practitioners determine the effectiveness of each strategy—which may point to some or all of them maintaining and/or lacking in relevancy. This knowledge can also help practitioners to uncover new trends in community building in this forum. Potentially, this study could provide impetus for more in-depth research leading to the update and potential decrease or expansion of these eight strategies, thus helping the efforts of public relations practitioners to appropriately adopt popular modern technology for public relations purposes. Therefore, the following research questions are proposed to guide the study:
**RQ1:** Are the eight strategies of community building for public relations practitioners as identified and advocated by Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) relevant in the online environment, specifically Facebook? How do companies use these strategies in the content they produce for their Facebook communities?

**RQ1a:** Which of the eight strategies of community building for public relations practitioners, as identified and advocated by Kruckeberg and Starck (1988), are used most frequently by companies on Facebook? Why might it/they be the most popular?

**RQ1b:** Which of the eight strategies of community building for public relations practitioners, as identified and advocated by Kruckeberg and Starck (1988), gets the most response from “fans” of company pages on Facebook?

**Methodology**

The methodology used in this research must provide a means to determine whether Kruckeberg and Starck’s (1988) eight strategies of community building are being used by organizations to create and maintain a sense of community on Facebook and, if so, how they are used in this forum. Evidence of the use of these eight strategies can be obtained through a content analysis of Facebook pages. In this analysis, the eight strategies must be separated into eight discrete categories. If, upon analysis, selected posts meet specific criteria relating to these categories, they will be coded accordingly. Once it is determined whether or not these eight strategies are indeed present in the Facebook community, the data can be further analyzed in search of themes relating to the prevalence of one category over the others, response rates relating to use of these categories, underutilization of categories, and similar topics.

Past research has not directly tested the eight strategies of community building advocated by Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) with a consumer community on Facebook. For the purpose of this research, a content analysis examining the Facebook communities of Coca-Cola, Jeep, and Run Disney will be used to determine whether or not practitioners in this forum utilize the aforementioned eight strategies. The researcher will focus solely on the status updates posted by the companies on their own Facebook pages. Moving forward, the term “post” will be used to refer to these individual status updates. Dissecting the messages in these posts will allow the researcher to determine whether the companies create posts that fall within the guidelines of these basic strategies of community building to create and maintain a sense of community for their “fans” on Facebook.

**Sample**

For the purpose of this study, theoretical construct sampling will be used. According to Davis, Gallardo, and Lachlan (2010), this sampling method allows for the selection of a sample that has “characteristics that represent theories on which the study is based” (p. 172). Thus, for this research study, it is necessary to choose a sample that illustrates strong communities. For this study, the sample consists of data posted by three organizations on their Facebook pages for the last business quarter of 2011 (October through December). The selected period of time was chosen for convenience and is not significant to the purpose of the study because it is expected that similar results would be found in any three-month time period. The researcher chose a three-month period of time to have a sufficient amount of posts to study. The selected organizations are Coca-Cola, Jeep, and Run Disney. The Facebook pages of these organizations were selected for the following three reasons.
First, all three companies have an active, well-developed presence in the form of consumer communities on Facebook. It is imperative that the sample for this study has a strong community to test the strategies of community building/restoration/maintenance.

Second, three companies of different sizes were intentionally chosen to see if the size of the company might affect these communities. While this is not specifically related to the research questions, the intention of the researcher was to seek out variety to show that the relevance of the eight strategies could be seen in the Facebook pages of all companies, not just specific types. Run Disney represents a small company with 148,370 “fans” that “like” it on Facebook. Jeep represents a medium sized company with 1,706,568 “fans.” Coca-Cola represents a large company with 36,308,785 people who “like” that company on Facebook. (These numbers were collected from Facebook on December 7, 2011, and may have increased or decreased since then.)

Third, these companies are completely unrelated. Unrelated companies were purposefully chosen because the researcher presumes all companies have the same basic goal of creating strong consumer communities, so the researcher was curious to see whether the same types of messages were being sent to the public despite product differences. The variety in the types of products each company produces was intended to support the presumed relevance of the eight strategies.

Coca-Cola. Of all the pages on Facebook, both personal and professional, Coca-Cola has been identified as one of the 15 most popular pages (“Hoping to find,” 2009). Its page was actually started by two fans of the brand in 2008. Due to the page’s success, Coca-Cola invited the Coke fans to its headquarters and offered them a job running the page with backing from Coca-Cola (“Hoping to find,” 2009). Coca-Cola is one of the world’s most recognized brands. It is no surprise that its Facebook page has millions of “fans.” This company’s well-established presence on Facebook and worldwide is why its page was chosen for this study.

Jeep. Jeep is a well-known American brand with a relatively large presence on Facebook. One main reason the researcher wanted to include the Jeep brand is because of its strong community in the real world (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005). Car brand communities tend to interact regularly, and the researcher was specifically interested in finding out if and how involvement in these activities is encouraged online.

Run Disney. Run Disney represents the smallest organization in this study. While it is a smaller organization, it is part of the behemoth company Disney, with which many people identify worldwide. Some suggest that one way to personalize these large companies on Facebook is through the creation of separate fan pages for each division, product, or service of the company (“Hoping to find,” 2009). The researcher was curious to see whether this was true of Run Disney’s page.

Data Extraction. It is important to note that these are public pages that anyone can access via the Internet through his or her free Facebook accounts. For the purpose of this study, the researcher collected data from each of the aforementioned pages from the same three-month period of time—October, November, and December 2011. On each Facebook page, the researcher selected the format that displays only content created by the brand for its individual Facebook page. This allowed the researcher to see all of the status updates that were created and posted by the company, itself. Each individual status update is viewed as a separate unit of analysis (Elo & Kyngas, 2007; Moretti et al., 2011; Schilling, 2006), also referred to as a coding unit (Budd, Thorp, & Donohew, 1967). All data collected is from the past; therefore, at no point does the researcher interact with individuals who have responded to the content put forth by the
brand. This study is a basic content analysis, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, that will focus on content presented to the public by the brands mentioned above. Therefore, IRB approval is not necessary because human subjects are in no way involved in this research. Any person can access this information at any given time.

Instrumentation and Procedures

Initially, the researcher performed a qualitative content analysis. This method is used to describe the content of a text (Davis et al., 2010) and allows the researcher to “interpret subjective data in a scientific manner” (Moretti et al., 2011, p. 420). Each Facebook page in the sample is an individual text. Each post (status update) on the page represents a separate unit of analysis. The researcher used a deductive approach because the whole study is based on an existing theory (Elo & Kyngas, 2007; Moretti et al., 2011; Schilling, 2006). Moretti et al. (2011) suggest using a deductive approach when “the purpose is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory” (p. 421), which is exactly what this study intends to do. In order to code the data according to which of the eight strategies of community building (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988) each individual post related to, the researcher introduced a new approach to coding created specifically for this study. Because this study takes a deductive approach, the categories used for the initial coding are predetermined based on the eight strategies. The researcher created a coding manual so that, individually, each of the eight strategies of community building defined by Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) represent a separate category. A ninth category, entitled “other,” is also included to account for posts that may not fall into one of the eight categories since, in this study, all data are relevant and will be accounted for in the analysis (Busch et al., 2005). While the categories are not mutually exclusive, they are exhaustive.

The main goal of this study is to use the data provided by each individual brand to determine whether the same basic goals of community building that had been determined by Kruckeberg and Starck in 1988 exist in public relations practice today in the social media site Facebook. For the purpose of this study, to address RQ1, if these strategies exist in this realm, it will equate to the strategies being relevant. It is important to note that initially the researcher coded for the existence of the eight strategies of community building. Then, to address RQ1a, the results were analyzed to discover the frequency of each strategy. To answer RQ1b, a spreadsheet noted the number of responses each individual post received.

Since RQ1 involves a search for implicit information, the researcher completed all coding by hand and kept the resulting data organized in an Excel spreadsheet. Each post was coded individually. A strict coding process was created to ensure consistency throughout the study (Busch et al., 2005). After the creation of a coding manual, each individual post was analyzed to determine which of the nine categories it related to. Each post could be coded as relating to one or more of the stated categories. Only one researcher coded all of the data, so intra-coder reliability was tested to ensure a reliable study. Intra-coder (also, intrarater) reliability involves coding the same data multiple times and comparing the results to make sure the coding is consistent due to a reliable understanding of what belongs in a category (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001; Schilling, 2006). The data from this study was coded two times. The first coding session took place on February 28, 2012 and the second coding session was completed six days later on March 5, 2012. The reliability was tested using Holsti’s method (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001) which involves multiplying the number of decisions where the coder was in agreement by two (4,598) and dividing it by the sum (5,112) of the number of coding decisions made in both
coding session one (2,556) and coding session two (2,556). This resulted in an 89.9% overall reliability, identifying the data as statistically reliable.

**Method of Analysis**

All of the coded data was organized in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. There is a column for each of the following: company, month, date of post, time of post, text of post, category (1-9), count (total number of categories each individual post related to), multiple categories (signifying if a post related to multiple categories or just one), number of “likes,” number of comments, number of shares, and total number of responses.

Once the qualitative coding process identified that the eight strategies of community building (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988) existed throughout the sample, thus addressing RQ1, the researcher then analyzed the data quantitatively. The data were analyzed to search for specific findings related to the other research questions. To address RQ1a and RQ1b, the researcher took note of how many of the posts related to the stated categories, into which categories the majority of posts fell, and how many posts fell into multiple categories. A pivot table of each company was created to show (1) the total amount of posts each company created for each category and (2) the total number of responses posts of each category received. The researcher was able to both show patterns and provide statistics based on these data by utilizing functions within Microsoft Excel. The patterns were identified and analyzed both statistically and thematically by the researcher in an effort to understand what can be determined from the data in relation to the research questions presented in the study.

Once the research questions were addressed, the researcher focused on the “other” category to search for themes among these posts for the purpose of future research on this topic. However, all posts fell into one or more of the categories relating to the eight strategies of community building. Therefore, the “other” category proved to be unnecessary. Thus, the researcher used the results, personal observations based on the analysis of textual elements of individual posts, and previous research to discover themes for analysis of the study. These themes are described in detail in the next chapter.

**Results and Discussion**

**Overview**

This research used content analysis to examine textual content on the Facebook pages of three organizations. This study sought to discover the eight strategies of community building for public relations practitioners, as identified and advocated by Kruckeberg and Starck (1988), exist and maintain their relevance in the realm of Facebook, and, if so, to take a critical look at how companies incorporate these strategies in the content they produce for their Facebook communities. The research concluded that these eight strategies do indeed exist on the Facebook pages of the studied sample. However, the research shows that while these strategies exist, they do not appear to be used deliberately. Further, the research shows that some of the strategies are used far more than are others. Certain strategies typically receive more responses, and the type of response often correlates with the strategy used. This section addresses the results of this research in a formal analysis. The purpose of this analysis was to draw as much information from the collected data as possible to show how organizations are using the eight strategies of community building (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988) to create and maintain a sense of community on Facebook.
Coca-Cola. Over the course of the selected business quarter (October-December 2011), Coca-Cola created 69 posts on its Facebook page. These 69 posts were analyzed and coded by the researcher, following the guidelines set forth in the coding manual. Because the researcher was the only coder, Holsti’s method (Austin & Pinkleson, 2001) was used to test intra-coder reliability. This involved multiplying the number of decisions where the coder was in agreement by two (1,114) and dividing it by the sum (1,242) of the number of coding decisions made. This resulted in 89.7% reliability between two coding sessions of Coca-Cola data. Therefore, the analyzed data were identified as statistically reliable. The following section will discuss the results specific to Coca-Cola.

Results. As the largest company studied, Coca-Cola showed the highest total number of comments, “Likes,” and shares from its community members, despite having the lowest number of posts within the given time period. Within three months, Coca-Cola received 631,724 total responses from its Facebook community members. The percentage of total posts falling into each category was calculated (with a sum greater than 100% since posts could fall into several categories) to address RQ1a. Of all of Coca-Cola’s posts, 49% fell into category #3 (apply new communication technologies), making it the most frequently used strategy of community building. It was followed by category #4 (encourages leisure-time activities), to which 36% of Coca-Cola’s posts related.

To address RQ1b, the researcher calculated both the total number and percentage (with a sum greater than 100%) of responses with respect to each category. Both Category #1 (create consciousness of common interests) and category #5 [provide consummatory (self-fulfilling) communication] showed 40% of the total responses. Category #5 had slightly more with 254,041 total responses, making it the category earning the greatest number of responses. It was closely followed by Category #1 that garnered 252,012 total responses. From the data, it was also determined that Category #5 received the greatest number of “likes” (215,375) and shares (6,461). Category #2 (overcome alienation—encourage members to know one another) got the greatest number of comments (41,430).

Overall, there were typically more “likes” than comments and more comments than shares. When Coca-Cola posted a Category #5 status [provide consummatory (self-fulfilling) communication], it received the highest percentage and number of total responses, “likes,” and shares.

Jeep. Over the course of the selected business quarter (October-December 2011), Jeep created 116 posts on its Facebook page, making it the company (within the sample) with the greatest amount of posts. These 116 posts were analyzed and coded by the researcher, following the guidelines set forth in the coding manual. Because the researcher was the only coder, Holsti’s method (Austin & Pinkleson, 2001) was used to test intra-coder reliability. This involved multiplying the number of decisions where the coder was in agreement by two (1,876) and dividing it by the sum (2,088) of the number of coding decisions made. This resulted in 89.8% reliability between two coding sessions of Jeep data. Therefore, the analyzed data were identified as statistically reliable. The following section will discuss the results specific to Jeep.

Results. With 116 posts, Jeep had the largest sample in this study, but received the second highest amount of responses. Within the quarter, Jeep received 194,171 total responses from its Facebook community members. Once again, the percentage of total posts falling into each category was calculated (with a sum greater than 100% because posts could fall into several categories) to address RQ1a. Of all of Jeep’s posts, 66% fell into Category #3 (apply new communication technologies), making it by far the most frequently used element of community building.
building. It was followed by Category #2 (overcome alienation—encourage members to know one another), which encompassed 41% of Jeep’s posts.

To address RQ1b, the researcher calculated both the total number and percentage (with a sum greater than 100%) of responses with respect to each category. Once again, Category #3 came out ahead. It showed the greatest percentage of total responses (49%) and the greatest number of total responses (94,250), followed by Category #2 with 45% and 87,266 total responses. From the data, it was also determined that Category #3 received the greatest number of “likes” (77,230) and shares (7,071). Once again, Category #2 (overcome alienation—encourage members to know one another) received the greatest number of comments (18,629).

As was also seen in Coca-Cola’s data, there were typically more “likes” than comments and more comments than shares. However, there appears to be a greater number of shares in comparison to the other companies. Jeep makes up 43.9% of the total shares in the sample, only 4.4% less than Coca-Cola, which has a significantly larger number of “fans.” Overall, posts from Category #3 dominate Jeep’s community. The greatest number of all sections (“likes,” shares, response number, and percentage) except comments relate to Category #3. Once again, posts from Category #2 had the most comments.

**Run Disney.** Over the course of the selected business quarter (October-December 2011), Run Disney created 99 posts on its Facebook page, making it the company (within the sample) with the second highest number of posts. These 99 posts were analyzed and coded by the researcher, following the guidelines set forth in the coding manual. Because the researcher was the only coder, Holsti’s method (Austin & Pinkleson, 2001) was used to test intra-coder reliability. This involved multiplying the number of decisions where the coder was in agreement by two (1,608) and dividing it by the sum (1,782) of the number of coding decisions made. This resulted in 90.2% reliability between two coding sessions of Run Disney data. Therefore, the analyzed data were identified as statistically reliable. The following section will discuss the results specific to Run Disney.

Results. Although Run Disney is the smallest company within the sample, with 99 posts, it created the second highest number of posts within the three-month period. Within the quarter, Run Disney received 48,834 total responses from its Facebook community members. Once again, the percentage of total posts falling into each category was calculated (with a sum greater than 100% because posts could fall into several categories) to address RQ1a. Of all of Run Disney’s posts, 47% fell into Category #2 (overcome alienation—encourage members to know one another), making it the most frequently used element of community building on Run Disney’s Facebook page. It was closely followed by Category #3 (apply new communication technologies), to which 45% of Run Disney’s posts related.

To address RQ1b, the researcher calculated both the total number and percentage (with a sum greater than 100%) of responses in each category. Posts from Category #1 (create consciousness of common interests) received the greatest percentage (55%) and number (25,699) of total responses. Category #2 received the second largest percentage (46%) and number (22,654) of total responses. The greatest number of “likes” (16,265), went to posts from Category #1, followed by category #4 (encourages leisure-time activities) with 10,676 “likes” reported. As seen in both Coca-Cola and Jeep, the greatest number of comments (11,617) was for posts from Category #2. The greatest number of shares (1,620) was from posts in Category #3, closely followed by posts from Category #4, which had 1,587 shares.

Just like the other companies, there were typically more “likes” than comments and more comments than shares. Run Disney most frequently created posts that related to Category #2 and
Category #3. Category #2 (overcome alienation—encourage members to know one another) received the most comments, and Category #3 (apply new communication technology) received the most shares. Comments and shares are the most time-consuming and interactive types of responses measured in this study, meaning for a “fan” to leave a comment or share a post requires more effort on their part. Run Disney’s tendency to create posts that prompted these interactions suggests that the company is actively seeking engagement beyond “likes.” The high percentage of Category #2 posts and their likelihood of receiving comments from “fans” suggest that Run Disney is actively seeking interaction within its community.

Discussion of Combined Results
From October through December 2011, Coca-Cola, Jeep, and Run Disney collectively created 284 posts on its Facebook pages that received a grand total of 874,729 responses from “fans.” These 284 posts comprised the sample that was analyzed and coded by the researcher, following the guidelines set forth in the coding manual. Intra-coder reliability was tested using Holsti’s method (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001), resulting in 89.9% overall reliability between two coding sessions. Therefore, the analyzed data were identified as statistically reliable. The following section will discuss the results relevant to the sample as a whole.

Thematic Analysis
Throughout all of the data, a theme showed that responses had the greatest number of “likes,” followed by comments and then shares. It is evident that “fans” are far more likely to “like” a post than they are to comment or share. Comments are typically the next most popular method of response, followed by sharing. Comments and sharing are the most time-intensive ways for “fans” to respond to posts created by companies. By “liking” posts, the “fans” show that they are listening. The extra effort involved in commenting and sharing could mean that the “fans” utilizing these functions are seeking community interaction. Therefore, if a company is looking to increase community participation and build its community, it should focus on creating posts that generate responses in the form of comments and shares.

The results showed that Category #2 posts generated the greatest number of comments across the board. Comments are arguably the response method that takes the most effort to create. They are interactive in nature and are often part of a larger conversation. Category #2 relates to overcoming a sense of alienation by encouraging members to know one another. The fact that Category #2 posts regularly attracted comments indicates that people are reaching out to others in these communities. They like sharing information about themselves and talking about their interests and experiences. This shows their willingness to participate in communities. Overall, it suggests that people are actively seeking communality.

All companies found Category #3 posts to be one of the top two categories posted. The frequency of Category #3 posts suggests that organizations are incorporating new communication technology in their posts. Posts were coded in Category #3 if they included links to blogs, external websites, videos, etc. The prevalence of hyperlinks in posts suggests organizational attempts to involve community (1) in more than just Facebook and (2) these organizations are using multiple forms of social media and/or communication technology. The use of new communication technology illustrates the attempt to expand the reach of the community beyond Facebook and to direct consumers to multiple forums where its media live, as suggested by Halligan (2010).

Jeep tends to include the most Category #3 posts (apply new communication technologies). For their “fans,” using Category #3 posts has proven to be effective in creating a
large amount of shares. In relation to its size, Jeep tended to get more shares than did the other Facebook pages in this study. Run Disney tended to get many comments, and it seemed to actively seek out conversations and opinions from its community members. Run Disney represented the community with the most dialogic potential in this study because of the conversations it prompted and the large number of comments it had received. Coca-Cola does not seem to be as strategic in its posting. It seemed to have such a wide range of information to send out that sometimes it hindered the apparent purpose of its messages. Coca-Cola might benefit from creating separate pages for each of the company’s different ventures.

In analyzing the text of each post, we can see that all of the companies actively thank their “fans” for interacting with them. This is one tactic for encouraging consumers to come back to their pages. It gives the pages human characteristics, personalizing the brand, and makes the consumer believe that the company is actually interacting with the individual. All of the companies frequently created such “thank you” posts. For example, at 8:00 p.m. October 4, 2011, Coca Cola posted, “Here’s a giant Coca-Cola Polar Bear hug for all our fans. Thanks to your votes, they won favorite ‘Icons’ in the 2011 Madison Avenue Advertising Walk of Fame!”

**Conclusion**

The focus of this study has been on the role of the public relations practitioner in creating and maintaining a sense of community online through the use of social media. This study attempted to discover (a) whether or not the eight strategies of traditional community building advocated by Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) are utilized in today’s on-line environment and (b), if utilized, how practitioners use social media to maintain a sense of community online. The results of this study add to the debate by both scholars and professionals over what is the role of public relations in relation to social media. Also, the study takes a critical look at how Facebook is being used strategically to create strong organization-public relationships and to maintain online consumer communities.

The research question for this study had asked whether the eight strategies of community building for public relations practitioners that had been set forth by Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) are relevant in the realm of Facebook. Further, how do companies incorporate these eight strategies in the content produced for their Facebook communities. Sub questions addressed which elements were used most frequently and which got the most response from “fans.” To answer these questions, the researcher performed a content analysis involving the posts created on three organizational Facebook pages that were chosen for their strong communal presence.

To gain an understanding of whether or not the eight strategies of community building were, in fact, being used in these Facebook communities, content analysis methodology was utilized to consider each post created by the individual organizations. The posts were categorized according to which element they represented and were measured statistically. Once it was determined that the elements were present, and thus relevant, the researcher then used thematic analysis to gain a better understanding of how these elements were being used through Facebook.

The results of this study have shown that there is reason to believe the eight strategies of community building that had been proposed by Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) are being utilized by public relations practitioners to create and maintain an online sense of community, even and especially in the new forum of Facebook. Their success, however, is dependent upon proper use. The themes discussed by the researcher suggest ways in which to increase the effectiveness of these elements in creating relationships with community members or “fans” and in strengthening the sense of community, for example by suggesting that companies that wish to increase
interaction between “fans” of their Facebook pages (thus, increasing participation in the community) should create posts that tend to generate comments, such as those from Category #2 (overcome alienation—encourage members to know one another) as opposed to “likes” or shares.

Limitations of study. This study revealed what three companies are doing to create online consumer communities through Facebook. It can be assumed that other companies are following suit, but research involving a much larger population of companies and a longer timeframe are necessary to determine whether these elements are increasingly prevalent. This study analyzed the Facebook pages of three companies during a three-month period. Analyzing posts from more organizations’ Facebook pages and over a greater time period may have produced different results.

It is also important to note that the posts were categorized based on the interpretation of the researcher and the researcher’s understanding of the eight strategies of community building. At no point were the content creators contacted to confirm that their intentions matched up with what the researcher inferred from the units of analysis.

Suggestions for future research. Future research relating to the role of public relations practitioners in creating and maintaining a sense of community through social media use should attempt to show that implementing these elements is what causes increased participation in online communities. Perhaps creating a strategic plan using the strategies of community building as guided by the suggestions presented in this research, implementing this plan via organizational Facebook pages over an extended time period, and then analyzing the community before and after implementation of this proposed plan could show whether or not putting all of this effort into social media is paying off. Future research should explore how these communities bring value to both the consumer community members as well as the organization.

Improving the study. The researcher recognizes the fact that the results of the content analysis could have been more precise if the coding categories were mutually exclusive. Instead of coding to see whether the posts related in any way to any of the categories, coding could have been carried out differently. The researcher could have placed a restriction on data coding, allowing each post to fall into only one category based on what the coder believed to be the main intention of the post. Doing so may have shown significantly different results, allowing for a greater understanding of which categories are used most frequently. This would reveal more about the intentions of the companies creating these online communities.

Overall, this study can be used as evidence that public relations practitioners are actively working to create a sense of community for brands through social media. It shows that many consumers are actively engaging with companies online and suggests that companies should consciously incorporate Kruckeberg and Starck’s (1988) eight strategies of community building to derive the most benefit from this engagement.
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Adding, Deleting, and/or Over: How Social Media Has Changed Crisis Communication Plans in School Systems

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to examine how public relations specialists within school systems are developing, implementing, and revising their communication crisis plans. Social media tools have added a new and unique dynamic in crisis situations. Because of these new tools and their heightened use within school systems, many communication crisis plans are being revisited in order to take into consideration social media and its ability to connect with target publics. Four research questions and two hypotheses were posed. Members from a state public relations association for schools were asked to participate in in-depth interviews regarding crisis management plans and modification due to social media tools. Ten phone interviews took place to gather detailed information on how public relations practitioners are developing their crisis communication plans in schools systems with particular focus placed on how social media has had an impact on their plans. Results indicated that while social media is being used, it has not replaced traditional tools. However, social media has added a new dynamic in engaging target audiences, as key stakeholders want information more quickly, especially in a crisis. Prioritized audiences and media are discussed, as well as examples of why crisis planning has become more complicated and necessary in light of ever-changing media landscape.
Crisis can occur in any location, including schools. Procedures must be taken before, during, and after the crisis to ensure the safety of the faculty, students, and any other party involved. Communication is key when working through a crisis. Public relations specialists must communicate not only with the faculty, staff, and students, but also with parents, community members, and media. A crisis management plan must be established in every school in preparation of a crisis.

**Crisis Communication in Organizations**

Image is crucial to an organization, but during a crisis, the image may be damaged. According to Benoit (1997), working through a crisis involves three steps. The first step is ‘Preparation of Crisis Contingency Plans.’ Planning for a crisis may reduce response time and even prevent missteps in an organization’s initial response. The second step is an ‘Analysis of the Crisis and the Accusations.’ When a crisis occurs, it is important to know what the nature of the crisis is. The last step is ‘Identification of the Relevant Audience.’ In order to persuade, a message must be tailored to the salient audience(s). If more than one target audience is identified, the organization must prioritize, making sure the most important audience is satisfied first (Benoit, 1997).

The lack of accurate, adequate, and timely information during a crisis can alter the trust people have in their own organization. The lack of precise information can determine organization members to be open to rumors. Rumors can lead to false information being released to the media. “Transparency, consisting in providing as complete, clear and precise information as possible, represents a critical feature of crisis communication, no matter the publics being addressed,” (David, 2011, p. 73).

Not only must the details of the crisis be communicated to all organizational members; the details must be released swiftly. A successful and effective crisis management plan relies greatly on quick and efficient communication. However, the reputation and actions of the senior public relations practitioner also weigh heavily on the outcome of a crisis. An effective crisis plan involves the senior public relations practitioner being in the boardroom helping create a strategy, not outside the boardroom waiting to be told what to do (Marra, 1998). In addition to websites and text messaging, blogs have become an important communication tool when an organization is dealing with a crisis.

**Crisis Management Planning in Schools**

Davis E. Baker, principal of Buckeye Valley High School, had to think quick on his feet when a deputy sheriff was shot and killed close to the school in the early morning of October 14, 2004. Baker described his crisis drill as “code red drill.” He answered all questions from the media and handed each interviewer a copy of the code red plan. He also granted each television station the opportunity to enter the building (that was on lock down) to interview students who were legal adults. The television crews helped Baker and other school officials ensure the community that everything was being done to ensure the safety of the students. Communication between the schools and local law enforcement was vital during the crisis (Baker, 2006). Crises are unpredictable, therefore, a plan needs to be established before a crisis hits.

According to Armistead (1996), “A large part of the success or failure is determined through communication” (p. 31). Armistead claims that two elements are important to salvage a school’s reputation. First, is the credibility the principal has established before the crisis. Parents will want to hear immediately if their child is safe. The principal’s response will only be
effective if he or she has already established credibility. Second, is the crisis communication plan. Communication can be difficult on a normal day and it is even more challenging during a crisis. Therefore, a communication plan is essential. A communication plan must recognize key audiences with whom the school needs to communicate. A vital element to a crisis plan is having a designated spokesperson for the school. This includes speaking with the media and sending letters home to parents (Armistead, 1996).

How well a school is prepared for a crisis dictates their behavior and response. Roberts (2010) outlines steps that must be taken before a crisis occurs to assure the crisis can be taken care of smoothly. These steps include identifying a chain of command, creating a crisis response team, training the team, and practice. Faculty members must be familiar with the school’s crisis plan. Communication between faculty, administration, and the response teams is key (Roberts, 2010).

During a crisis, school counselors are important communicators. The role of a school counselor changes significantly from a normal day to the day of a crisis. The regular test-taking day turns into one of psychological intervention. School counselors provide direct counseling to those directly involved with the crisis (Studer & Salter, 2010).

The involvement of parents, students, and the entire school community during a crisis is imperative. In order for everyone to truly understand safety measures, the topic of a crisis plan should be repeatedly explained and reinforced throughout the school year. School officials must balance the amount of information distributed to parents and community members. If too little information is revealed, they (parents and community members) may feel the school is not taking enough steps to ensure the safety of the students. If too much information is disclosed, they might believe officials are overreacting or that the school has serious issues (Brunner & Lewis, 2007). In addition to speaking with students, parents, and community members, schools have created other ways to communicate with their key publics.

School crises can happen anywhere, but preparation can minimize the likelihood of death or injury. Communication is vital during a crisis at a school. Steps to prepare for a crisis include knowing how many phone lines are in the school and where they are located. In case of an emergency, faculty and staff must know how to interrupt busy lines to make a phone call. Although personal cell phones may be used, they have been unreliable in the past. Therefore, landlines and two-way radios have become useful. When dealing with the media, school officials must know their legal rights. A school staff member should be assigned specifically to dealing with media personnel (Skiba & Peterson, 2003).

School crises occur not only in elementary and high schools, but also in higher education. An effective crisis communication plan is only possible with planning and proper use of all communication tools. Although not used as much as necessary, school websites are controlled mediums that can be used to directly communicate with the media, public, faculty, and students. By using the school’s website, the university can tell the public their side of the story, reduce uncertainty of the public, address several stakeholders, and work with the government. Several schools are starting to make use of their websites regardless of the crisis. Organizations are moving from one-way communication to two-way communication. The Internet allows members of the community to ask questions through online chat services (Madere, 2007).

Social Media in Crisis Situations

To inform multiple audiences of information regarding a crisis, school administrators must choose methods that deliver information quickly and efficiently. Social media is an
excellent tool to use. According to the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, “…education institutions need to be using social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to communicate important news to students, staff, family members, and the community members at large,” (Social Media and Crisis Response, 2012, p. 14). Before a crisis hits, school administrators must establish the goals for the social media platforms and designate who will post messages. Social media sites must be up and running before a crisis occurs in order for students, staff, and community members to become followers. Institutions must publicize the existence of the social media platforms (Social Media and Crisis Response, 2012).

According to Crowe (2011), social media is a, “tool to help coordinate, manage, and facilitate a safe and expected response during emergencies and disasters” (p. 409). Emergency management must utilize platforms that provide a way to communicate with various audiences. Platforms that are effective include Facebook and Twitter. These social networking sites are where communication and relationships are actively happening. However, emergency managers and governmental officials worry about the credibility of social networking sites. As a result, alternative systems such as Nixle have been developed. Over time, social media systems that are built to draw in people for specific purposes have paled in comparison with sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Crowe, 2011).

In addition to social networking, blogs are innovative ways to communicate with the public during a crisis. By using a blog, an organization member has the ability to be conversational. This technique can decrease the perceived level of a crisis. By using blogs, responsiveness and customer service are increased and therefore, relationships with the public are improved. An organization that is quick to respond to questions during and after a crisis does not appear to be shying away from discussion of the incident in question. This enhances the relationship between organization and public (Sweetser, 2007).

Social media has enabled school officials to communicate with parents in a way different than before. Notification systems on mobile devices are used to send text messages to parents during any type of crisis. In addition to text messaging, emails, and telephone calls are used. However, text messaging has become the most convenient communication method according to 45% of the population (Devoe, 2008).

**Current Study**

Crises can occur in any location, including schools. Procedures must be taken before, during, and after the crisis to ensure the safety of the faculty, students, and any other party involved. A crisis management plan must be established in every school in preparation of a crisis. The current study researched how schools in one Midwestern state prepare for crisis situations.

The following research questions and hypotheses are advanced:

RQ1: Who are the people responsible in the development of school crisis management plan?
RQ2: Are revisions made to the school crisis communication plan after the plans have been implemented once?
RQ3: Who are the most important audiences to communicate with during a school crisis?
RQ4: What are the primary social media tools incorporated in a school crisis communication plan?

H1: School communicators will utilize traditional media (radio, television, newspaper) more than social media (social networking, microblogging, online websites) during a crisis.

H2: School communicators annually practice the crisis communication plan in order to prepare for a crisis.
Method

Participants

Spring of 2012, the president-elect of a state school public relations association, was contacted requesting a list of active members. This organization is dedicated to listening and communicating with internal and external publics within the education discipline. Membership of school public relations association is open to any person who has part-time or full-time duties in the field of education or communication and public relations. After the list was obtained, a complete sample was taken. All members of the school public relations association were contacted via email. A total of 139 members were sent an email and asked if they would participate in an in-depth interview. Ten members agreed to participate in the study. Of these 10 participants, six were female and four were male. The 10 participants’ titles listed included: communications specialist, accredited public relations and communication director, director of marketing and development, communication and community relations coordinator, director of community and administrative services, communications director, communications coordinator, and director of communications.

The research for this study sought to obtain valuable perceptions and beliefs of school communicators through qualitative research methods. In-depth interviews were used for the study to achieve these goals. According to Frey, Botan, Friedman, and Creps (1992), in-depth interviews, “provide information about communication not accessible through other research methods,” (p. 285). Low costs and important information are two advantages to in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews may result in interesting and useful facts for many fields of study (Milena, Dainora & Alin, 2008).

Procedure

Members who agreed to the interview were asked a series of questions via the telephone. These questions included:

1. Can you tell me who helped develop the crisis management plan for your school?
2. Have you had to use your plan in the past?

If yes:
   • Would you mind telling me what was the situation in which you had to use the plan?
   • In your opinion, how well did your plan work in this situation?
   • Would you make any revisions to your plan after that situation?

If no:
   • Have you made any revisions to your plan in the past year?
3. Ohio House Bill 422 (HB 422) “safety drill” bill advises crisis plans should be practiced every three years. My question is, do you practice your crisis plan more than once a year? Why or why not?
4. In your opinion, who are the most important audiences to communicate with during a crisis? Why?
5. How do you (or would you) notify and interact with the media during a crisis?
   • What media do you interact with?
6. Have you included Social media as part of your crisis plan?

If yes:
   • What platforms will you use?
   • Do you have one person dedicated to handling social media in advance?

If no:
• Why don’t you use social media?
7. What do you use more during a crisis? Traditional media or social media?
8. Do you feel crisis planning has become more complicated or more necessary than in the past? Explain.

All in-depth interviews were recorded so they could be transcribed at a later date. Every participant was informed in advance that the conversation would be recorded.

Results and Discussion

Research Questions

A variety of answers were given when research question one, Why are the people responsible in the development of school crisis management plan, was asked. All but one participant stated that the administration was a key participant in the development of the crisis plan. Participant six was the only participant who did not express administration was directly involved in the creation of the crisis plan. Instead, the business manager, principals, and maintenance operators were the key participants.

Most participants looked at the crisis plan very much from a physical plant perspective. Some noted they ordered the National School Public Relations Association crisis management manual. One participant stated, “That has a lot of the procedures and forms that we might arise in a crisis, and have adapted many of those for our own use.”

Participants claimed there were a variety of key contributors to the crisis plan. Participant #8 stated administration, safety director, and communication coordinator all played a critical role in developing the crisis plan. Participants three, four, six, seven, and nine revealed the local police and fire departments were included in the crisis plan. Participant four had the most extensive list of key contributors including: the district and school administrators, police and fire departments, maintenance supervisor, business director, transportation director, and health service coordinator.

Research question two asked, Are revisions made to the school crisis communication plan after the plans have been implemented once? Four participants stated that yes; they would make corrections after the crisis plan was implemented. Participant one specifically expressed the need to perfect the communication chain of command during a crisis to ensure every participant is aware of the situation. Participants six, seven, and eight indicated the need to update a crisis plan as a routine after every crisis situation. Participant eight stated that after practice events, the crisis plan is revised.

Participant four was the only participant to state that the crisis plan did not need to be revised after their current crisis situation. However, the participant did express the crisis plan is revised every summer, regardless of if a crisis has occurred. Three participants had never experienced a crisis situation and were unable to answer the question.

The third research question asked, Who is the most important audience to communicate with during a school crisis? Six respondents answered parents, followed by three who answered students, two who answered staff, two who answered media, two who answered community, and two answered that it depends on the situation. Many explained how getting the right information to the right people was key. “If we allow the media to form their own story, they may not find the correct information,” stated Participant #1. Participant six gave a similar reason for declaring students and parents as their most important audiences. “If we don’t communicate with both about the same thing, the students will communicate with their families and it won’t be the right information.”
Those respondents who declared parents as the most important audience, explained why. Participant three stated, “Parents, because of the high degree of anxiety.” Participant seven also stated parents, “They’re the first people that are lining up and wanting to know what’s going on and in on the rumor mill. If we can get ahead of that and then the media helps us get ahead of the rumor mill, things keep going according to plan.”

Some respondents simply explained how those with the most vested interest and impact would be most important. Participant nine explained, “I think your parents are number one and your community is number two because they have the most vested interest in what is going on. They’re the closest to the school district, they have kids here, or they live around a school building.”

Although public relations coordinators supplied a variety of important audiences, it was encouraging that they were still prioritizing publics based on the situation. Many listed their most important audience members, but followed up with other key audiences that would also be worth reaching out to in a crisis situation. It was interesting that parent topped students and faculty, however after careful consideration, this makes sense from a public relations standpoint. Because the students and faculty are most likely the ones involved, parents would be the next largest target audience with the most invested interest of concern of their children.

The fourth research question posed, What are the primary social media tools incorporated in a school crisis communication plan? Participants stated that their social media tools included Facebook, Twitter, emails, websites, and automated calling or texting systems. Only one participant said social media would be added to the new crisis plan, but at the time of the interview had not yet been part of the crisis communication plan.

Through the in-depth interviews, it was found that a majority of the participants have social media established somewhere within their crisis communication plan. Two of the participants, however, stated that social networking is not vital to the crisis plan. Participant three specifically spoke about the downfalls of Twitter. “Twitter is not sufficiently reliable to serve as an emergency notification service and its footprint is still quite small. Under 10% of adults have accounts, and a lot of those are inactive.” Several governmental leaders and emergency managers also worry about the credibility of sites like Twitter that lack verifiable accounts (Crowe, 2011). According to Participant two, “Some of the information on there is a little stale,” when asked about social networking. These views are drastically different than those of the U.S. Department of Education. The Office of Safe and Drug-Free schools believe that social networking is a valuable platform to use during a crisis because it can be used in all four stages of a crisis plan (Social Media, 2012). Apart from social networking, social media is used quite often and for various occasions. Participant two stated that the school utilizes an emergency out call. Whenever the emergency out call is used, the superintendent gets on the phone and dials one number and the message goes to every parent, household, and teacher. This out call includes phone calls, emails, text messages, Facebook posts, and tweets. However, Participant three believes that the school’s website is the number one way to communicate directly to parents. Controlling a crisis in higher education calls for the use of the university’s website. Madere (2007) explains that websites are controlled mediums that can be used to directly communicate with the media, public, faculty, and students. The website offers the university to form two-way communication and reduce uncertainty of the public. DeVoe (2008), also argues that out of text messaging, emails, and telephone calls, text messaging has become the most convenient communication method according to 45% of the population.
Hypotheses

Hypothesis number one stated, School communicators will utilize traditional media (radio, television, newspaper) more than social media (social networking, microblogging, online websites) during a crisis. Hypothesis number one failed to predict that school communicators utilize traditional media more than social media. Results gathered from participants showed that four participants used traditional media more, three participants used social media more, and three participants stated that they used the two types equally.

Those who declared utilizing traditional media more didn’t deny using social media. Participant #5 commented, “I think in a crisis, it would probably be first traditional. I think most people, are still prone, in our area, to run on the radio, or television.” Participant #10 pointed out, “We’re starting to use some social media but still more traditional media.” Even though Participant #6 stated traditional still triumphed social media, they expressed, “I really would have to say that the technology, particularly in the last five years, has dramatically changed and improved our ability to communicate with people, whether it is in a crisis or on a day-to-day basis.”

Three participants indicated that they used social media more than traditional. Comments included, “For a crisis, we have made a shift towards the social media tools to deliver our message.” One participant stated, “I would say the website and email with automated calling as a close third.”

Some respondents argued that both traditional and social media were equally important in a crisis. Participant #9 stated, “Whatever I send out, whatever I would put on Facebook or Twitter or the website, I am typically sending out a release to the traditional media as well.”

It seems that the playing field is becoming more evenly dispersed in terms of a balanced amount of information permeating through all media channels. Because every school is different, some have channels that they tend to go to first, but throughout the interviews, it became evident that there is shift beginning. Five to ten years ago, traditional media still dominated in crisis situations. Now with the immediacy of information, many public relations practitioners are finding their needs changing in regard to getting accurate information out even quicker.

Hypothesis number two supported the prediction that school communicators annually practice the crisis communication plan in order to prepare for a crisis. Lock down and weather related drills, for example, fire drills and tornado drills, were practiced most frequently. One participant stated that they practice the crisis plan not only to be prepared but also because of the law. “We need to make sure we do this [practice] and keep in accordance to the law.” Another participated noted, “We do different aspects of it once a year.”

Every participant stressed that the crisis communication planned is reviewed and practiced every year. Armistead (1996) stressed the importance of practicing a crisis communication plan, as it can be difficult on a normal day, but it is even more challenging during a crisis. Participant three described the reasoning behind practicing the plan in terms of practicing for a sport. “If you didn’t practice this sport, you wouldn’t know how to play it. If you don’t practice your plan, you’re not going to know what to do in a crisis.” It was encouraging to hear that schools in this particular state were practicing their plans.

Limitations

A major limitation to this study is that all participants who contributed to this study held jobs at schools located in one state. Limiting the study even more, all participants were selected because they were all members of the state public relations association. Additionally, this study
was a volunteer sample. The participants volunteered their time to discuss their crisis communication plan free of charge.
References


Best Practices in Creating Content for Twitter:
A “How To” Template Based on a Qualitative
Content Analysis of Gold Standard Twitter Brands

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Abstract

This exploratory qualitative content analysis explores content categories and
subcategories used by top Twitter brands with the purpose of providing a comprehensive list of
types of content that public relations practitioners can use as a reference. The data collected has
practical application in answering what to write about to keep up with the need for constant, and
varied, Tweets necessitated by the medium.
While there are ample best practice lists for Twitter online, there is a lack of research-based exploration into current content categories across industries among top Twitter brands that public relations practitioners could use as a guide in creating tweets for their own organizations. Studies that have addressed content have tended to focus on a specific industry or organization or to look at content from a theoretical framework that lacks straightforward application to public relations professional practice. Additionally, studies mentioning types of content on Twitter tend to report broad or general categories such as “dialog” or “information” that have limited use in professional application. This study expands types of content by more nuanced groupings that provide depth and variety beyond broad or general categories.

This explorative qualitative analysis of the myriad of content types produced by nine “gold standard” (McCorkindale, 2011) top Twitter brands aimed to fill a gap in existent research by taking a more detailed approach in terms of “what” to write about on Twitter. Types of content were categorized for the purpose of presenting a guide (a menu, so-to-speak) for best practices content creation on Twitter. The findings, with examples in categories and subcategories, are a valuable tool that PR practitioners can use as a guide in producing the constant content supply necessary for building brands on Twitter.

From the author’s own experience as a PR consultant to organizations and as a college professor teaching public relations, the need for such a guide was highly evident. Organizations and students have struggled with developing a constant stream of tweets beyond those that are predominantly promotional in nature. In fact, this study came into being to help public relations students and organizations with Twitter content; i.e., learning what the options were to create dynamic, interesting, informative, and engaging material. Many students and many organizations, including a PR agency, are not well versed in the wide variety of content they could use to build relationships in addition to promoting products and services. Best practices from a public relations standpoint dictate that being overly promotional is not sufficient in using Twitter successfully. It is similar to the old saying in traditional news releases: It is not only how well one writes, it is also knowing what to write about that yields the most favorable outcome. This research on nine gold standard top Twitter brands tries to help answer that question for successful content on Twitter.

Literature Review

“Thanks to its snappy nature and its potential to reach users on the go, pretty much every business you can think of has a Twitter account. However, that doesn’t mean that all brands use it right […]” (Wasserman, 2012)

The popularity of Twitter, a micro blogging site where tweets (published “posts”) are limited to 140 characters, is substantial. There can be upwards of approximately 175 million tweets posted in a single day and as of 2012, Twitter was adding approximately 300,000 new visitors per day (Dunn, 2012). There is no wonder companies are trying to make a presence on this popular social media site; Twitter has 140 million active users as of 2012. Having the ability to produce a steady stream of interesting and engaging content is also mandatory for brand building on Twitter. A lot of content needs to be created; for example, the number of tweets per day from top nonprofits runs approximately five to 10 (Abrahams & Lasica, 2011).

Due most likely to the newness of Twitter, there is a lack of published scholarly research on creating content, or the “what,” to tweet about. Much of the scholarly research that addresses
content relates to a specific industry or company. For example, looking specifically at the nonprofit sector, Abrahams & Lasica (2011) analyzed eight organizations known for successfully using strategic approaches to Twitter. (As is often the case with these best practices lists, advice that is directly related to “what” content to publish is mixed in with timing, length, and other such recommendations.) Their findings for what type of content was used by top nonprofits included: retweet others; quote well-known and respected people; ask questions; and use human interest stories.

One scholastic study that specifically researched classifying Twitter content categories was done by Dann (2010). In that study, Dann built upon previous recommendations of content category types by supplementing prior findings with data drawn from his own personal Twitter. The resultant content categories were more theoretical than practical in nature, and were not purposed for organization-to-public(s) brand building. Five broad categories emerged: pass-along; status; news; phatic; and conversational, with multiple subcategories for each. Under the category of status, for example, he had eight subcategories of work, automated, activity, personal, temporary, location, mechanical, and physical. The subcategories that emerged under conversational were query, referral, action, and response. Perhaps due to using his personal Twitter (as opposed to a company or organizational Twitter) as the data source, his category of news contained only the following subcategories: headlines, sport, event, and weather.

Interesting types of “what” in content were implied in general terms from studies that mentioned content but did not investigate types of content in-and-of-itself. For instance, Fathi (2008) reported that companies could use Twitter to generate awareness; seek media opportunities; boost customer loyalty; launch viral campaigns; manage reputations; promote products; enhance events; recruit employees; and hear about breaking news. McCorkindale (2011) mentions different types of content that was present in the top Twitter brands she studied: response to inquiries about a problem; events; giveaways or contests; and dissemination of information. Her conclusion of why people tweet included: to provide status updates; post information; respond to inquiries; talk to other tweeters; participate in giveaways or contests; retweet existing content; discuss feelings about a topic; and, to a slight extent, recruit employees.

What might be lacking in scholastic research is not with online recommendations regarding best practices on Twitter; there is a plethora of such material online. However, advice on the “what” of content advice is frequently mentioned in a very broad, generalized manner or mixed in with advice on other factors more related to the “how” and “when” to Tweet as previously mentioned. For example, Wasserman (2012) points out that organizations are getting it wrong by tweeting too much on the wrong days, not asking for retweets, and not using hashtags enough. Even though specific types of content aren’t mentioned, Wasserman includes a comment that it is crucial for companies to know best practices for producing engaging content. Other best practices from Twitter itself include what, when and how to tweet (Twitter). On the “what” to tweet, Twitter recommends engaging other Twitter users in conversation using @replies and “combining exciting, useful content with an engaging, unique tone … and include links, pictures and videos” (Twitter, para. 2). Twitter also offers organizations marketing a brand the following content-specific advice: ask questions; respond to others; offer specials and deals; and share links relevant to one’s industry at large.

Weighing in on another content consideration, that of personal or corporate tweets, Brito (2009) advocates a 20/80 rule where 80 percent of tweets are conversational and personal and the remaining 20 percent are about the company for which he works. There does not seem to be a definitive answer to how much individual personality should be present compared to presenting
a strictly corporate Twitter brand from multiple, unidentified sources. The research for this paper looked at brands that do each of those; some organizations are not attached to a person, while others use a named person to represent the brand.

It would appear that perhaps the dialogical capacity of Twitter for engaging with publics has probably been studied the most from a public relations perspective. For example, Macnamara (2010) addresses the potential of Twitter in terms of the excellence theory for two-way symmetrical communication. Likewise, Rybalko and Seltzer (2010) analyzed Fortune 500 companies’ use of Twitter and found that those that were more dialogic in orientation resulted in keeping visitors to a greater degree than those that did not. The main point of two-way communication appears to come from the public relations perspective; it is perhaps where PR can most contribute to using Twitter for purposes other than direct marketing and promotion. Unfortunately, it has been found that organizations tend not to use this relationship-building feature as much as they should (McCorkindale, 2011). For this research study, dialogical communication shows as content such as asking questions, responding to individuals, giving thanks/acknowledgement to people, etc.

The research questions that emerged from the purpose of this study and a review of the literature were:

RQ1: What are the types of content published by the top Twitter brands analyzed?

RQ2: Do any overall themes emerge related to the types of content published by the top Twitter brands analyzed?

RQ3: Do the top Twitter brands analyzed publish from a named-individual basis or a corporate basis?

Method

This exploratory qualitative content analysis investigated a randomly chosen week of tweets (seven consecutive days) for each of nine gold standard top Twitter brands as identified by McCorkindale (2011). The brands analyzed were: 92Y Tribeca; Dunkin Donuts; Home Depot; Hoovers; Marvel; Portland Trailblazers; KodakCB (Jennifer Cisney); Ford Motor Company (Scott Monty); and Starbucks. These nine brands originally appeared in Mashable’s 40 best Twitter brands list (Van Grove, 2009); from the original list of 40, McCorkindale designated 11 of the original 40 as gold standard Twitter organizations based on “a balance of the number of tweets, amount of dialogue with publics, dissemination of information including pictures, links, and discussion of social responsibility” (p. 56). For this study, two of McCorkindale’s gold standard brands were excluded, Whole Foods and Comcast, because they engaged primarily in customer service. Since customer service most often deals with solving problems on an individual and specific basis, it was not deemed appropriate for a general content guide.

A random week/seven consecutive days out of the 56 weeks available for the time period of January 1, 2012 through January 31, 2013 was selected for each of the nine organizations. The first month of 2013 marked the end of the timeframe for this study as it was the most current month available at the time the analysis was conducted. At least a one-year period from which to sample the weeks was selected to allow for the myriad of possible time-of-year variations such as on/off season, major holidays, etc. A one-week period of seven consecutive days was used to
account for variations that could be present based on day of the week. All tweets originating from the organization during the week were included.

An ethnographic content analysis (ECA), with open and axial coding from grounded theory, was chosen to allow for analysis of relational meanings and nuances. It further provided for multiple category inclusions that were anticipated as being important in this study. Altheide (1987) describes ECA as reflexive with the investigator central to the interpretive meanings found in the text. The goal of using ECA was to allow for identifying taken-for-granted elements as well as to enable locating critical categories and subcategories that might emerge that structured protocols might miss.

Open coding from grounded theory was used in “identifying, naming, categorizing and describing phenomena found in the text” (Borgatti, 1996, Open Coding). Axial coding was used for investigating casual conditions such as subcategories that have a relationship to a general area (Babchuck, 1996).

In the open category stage, tweets were arranged in sections that were constantly compared until enough data showed an emergent pattern for broad, general categories. Once those were established, remaining tweets were added as subcategories, unless a new broad, general category happened to emerge. In the axial stage of coding, certain relationships that had developed across categories and between categories were noted. As long as any tweet from any of the organizations had new or different content than had appeared before, new categories or subcategories were added. By the end of the analysis, no new or different content was appearing so the categories were considered exhaustive for the data analyzed. At that point, three levels of content categories sufficiently covered all content types. The levels developed as: broad content areas, level one; more nuanced content types, hence subcategories, level two under the level one broad content areas; and then some level two subcategories contained further nuanced subcategories, level three. There was constant rearranging and reorganizing of content to make the most exhaustive, but easy-to-follow, template that would be useable by PR practitioners for emulating the various types of content used by the nine gold standard Twitter brands.

Results

In response to RQ1 of what types of content were being tweeted by the brands analyzed, three levels of category content emerged (see Table 1). The data fit best in a series of content category levels. The most broad level, level one, consisted of six content categories: product promotion; events; social responsibility; internal/employee; unrelated to company or product; and miscellaneous. (The broad category of customer service was not analyzed in this study and the broad category of crisis management did not appear in the data.) There were a total of 20 subcategories at the next level (level two) underneath the six broad categories in level one. Examples of level two subcategories under level one “product promotion” would be the following: ask questions; offer specials and contests; talk about product; talk about results/awards/accomplishments/give acknowledgement. Another example of level two subcategories under a different level one broad category, that of “internal/employee,” would be: give information about employees or post a position. All level one categories had at least two level two subcategories underneath (see Table 1).

Beyond levels one and two, a third level manifested itself in only two of the broad level one categories, those of product promotion and events. Sufficient content appeared in those two categories to necessitate fine-tuning the more specific types of content into a third level, level three. The descriptions of those level three subcategories can be seen in Table 1. No third level
was necessary for the other four broad level one categories: social responsibility; internal/employee; unrelated to company or product; and miscellaneous. Those four were saturated with only level one and level two.

The majority of level three content subcategories fell under the level two categories of 1) talking about product or 2) talking about event under level one categories of product promotion and events, respectively. Examples of level three subcategories under the level two category of talking about event would be: give info about the event; offer something interesting to do at event; give notice event is coming up/give reminders; report in real time what is going on at event; and comment on what you are doing relating to the event.

To make the content guide more applicable for PR professionals and students, specific tweet examples are given in the various content areas in Table 1.

In general and overall, the tone of the content across these nine organizations seemed to be business and/or marketing oriented. There was a lot of product info, specials/deals for products, acknowledgement/thanks, and calls-to-action. In general, the data that came forth demonstrated using Twitter more as a marketing tool than an educational or entertainment tool. What was lacking in the cumulative milieu were: talking to individuals, leveraging social responsibility, giving a glimpse inside an organization, giving advice, and publishing here-and-now Tweets.

Research question 2 asked if there might be any overall themes in the content published by the nine gold standard top Twitter brands studied. Six basic types of content themes were revealed that appear across content areas and can be used by PR practitioners in any level in any category or subcategory. These six types of content were: repeat, call-to-action, questions, results/outcome/thanks/acknowledgement, hash tags, and links, which are described further in Table 2.

Research question 3 asked if the gold standard Twitter brands studied published from an individual or corporate standpoint. Of the nine organizations, only two of them tweeted as named individuals representing the organization (Jennifer Cisney for KodakCB and Scott Monty for Ford Motor Company), suggesting that not aligning with any particular individual was the more popular choice among these organizations.

Limitations

Whenever selecting only a small number of accounts for qualitative analysis, it is a challenge to construct a truly exhaustive content list. This particular study of nine gold standard brands is useful in terms of a guide only. Various industries and organization types were not represented. In addition to the small sample of nine organizations, another limitation was the relatively small number of days investigated, one week of Tweets out of a 13-month period for each brand. For example, the fact that no crisis communication content appeared could be attributed to the fact that the odds are slim that a single randomly chosen week in a 13-month period for an organization would happen to coincide with an organizational crisis.

Likewise, the author could see where a category or subcategory might be obviously missing. In other words, off-the-top-of her head, the author could see some content types that did not appear under the level two subcategory of talking about an event. For example, missing were: retweet others talking about the event; give something to do at the event; offer a special for the event; and have a contest related to the event. These would be helpful to have on the content guide but they were not in the data and therefore excluded. Perhaps if there were more than only two event brands analyzed (Portland Trailblazers and 92 Tribecca) and more than a
one-week time period, those content types would have been seen. Future research exploring either longer time frames and/or additional organizations is recommended to further develop the “menu” so-to-speak of category content used by top Twitter brands.

**Conclusion**

It is interesting to note what the gold standard brands studied were doing and were not doing. What they were doing was posing broad questions in a way that stimulated curiosity or opinion response more than for two-way symmetrical communication. “Problem” questions often were presented that would allow the organization’s product or service to be the “solution,” hence asymmetrical communication from a public relations excellence model perspective. Due to the fast moving nature of Twitter, repeating subject matter with slightly different wording was popular. Many of the tweets were promotional in nature; i.e., asking/telling public(s) to attend a show, buy a product, check out a product, etc. There was a lot of content with product info, specials/deals, acknowledgement/thanks, and calls-to-action. Overall, the content came forth as more promotional than interesting/engaging, even though the latter has been what is recommended as the best way to use Twitter from a public relations perspective. One recommendation for future research would be to quantify the different content categories and subcategories to better represent the frequency of various content types beyond qualitative observation. It would also be helpful to conduct investigations into the ratio between promotional-type tweets and helpful/interesting-type tweets. Furthermore, future research could look at what area within an organization handles Twitter; is it marketing, public relations, advertising, or something else?

One of the main things done across industries was incorporating links in virtually all tweets. Twitter is known for driving traffic; in this study the proliferate use of links to other locations like a Facebook page, website, or blog supports this benefit of Twitter. It is possible that future research could address the relative use of links to outside sources and organizational sources from the viewpoint of providing helpful information or keeping within company-generated content that might tend to be more self-promotional than outside links.

What was not being done was a lot of talking to individuals, leveraging social responsibility, giving a glimpse inside a brand, giving helpful advice, and reporting on the here-and-now. The last one, a lack of reporting on the here-and-now, or giving instant updates as they occur in real time was surprising because one of Twitter’s main features is how well it functions for immediate delivery in real time. Often Twitter is used with a hash tag to collect comments as something happens, like a seminar. It could be that nothing was going on during the weeks covered; it did appear that the Portland Trailblazers probably used the immediate status tweet more than the others mainly due to the fact that basketball events provide perfect fodder for as-it-happens updates.

Even with limitations, the content guide produced in this study gives public relations students and professionals a reference to help stimulate a variety of ideas for Twitter content. From the nine gold standard top organizations’ Tweets, the guide provides six broad categories of content; 20 level two subcategories; and 19 level three subcategories of content for consideration.
Table 1

Twitter Content Categories and Subcategories, With Tweet Examples


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level One Broad Categories</th>
<th>Level Two Subcategories</th>
<th>Level Three Subcategories</th>
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</table>
| **Product Promotion**     | Ask questions           | Ask question-offer product solutions  
  Example from TR: Can’t get enough Fassbinder? Neither can we! Join us for 3 nights of double features next week (link) |
|                           | Ask polling-type questions  
  Example from DD: Which donut would you pick this Friday (and gives options) |
|                           | Offer specials and contests  
  Example from KD: There is still time to get your buy-one-get-one-free coupon for Breast Awareness pink photo cards |
|                           | Have a contest  
  Example from DD: Tweet us who you’d share a dozen donuts w/#DDozen for a chance 2 win a $100 mGift! |
|                           | Talk about product  
  Example from MV: See what’s new in Marvel AR this week: (link). What’s your favorite execution? |
|                           | Give info about product  
  Example from HV: A2: Interesting factoid: 93% of customers who use apps in stores have bought at a physical location the past wk.-WaveCollaps #ETCafe |
|                           | Comment on product/give personal evaluation  
  Example from FM: Great rear view on the new #Ford #Fiesta #ST (link) |
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<th>Level Three Subcategories</th>
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| **Product Promotion, continued** | Talk about product, continued | Respond to individual’s question/talk to an individual  
Example from TR: Happy birthday @KatinaCorrao! Looking forward to having you here for Sideshow Goshko next week! (link) |
| **Comment on “what you are doing” relating to product** |  | Comment on “what you are doing” relating to product  
Example from KD: Spent the morning at a session in our research labs learning about cool future development for Kiosks! |
| **Share info outside of organization that relates to product** |  | Share info outside of organization that relates to product  
Example from PT: Get your rookie of the month dame Lillard |
| **Share helpful advice about product** |  | Share helpful advice about product  
Example from HV: Top line mgmt. isn’t always the most important in #sales. Look to your core for strength, via @HarvardBiz (link) |
| **Give a “sneak peek”/preview or insider “scoop” about product** |  | Give a “sneak peek”/preview or insider “scoop” about product  
Example from MV: Preview EdMcGuinness pencils from #Nova #3 by Jeph Loeb and McGuiness; (link) #MarvelNOW |
| **Encourage or celebrate product use** |  | Encourage or celebrate product use  
Example from KD: High speed photos and explosion are always a good time (link) |
| **Retweet product compliments or what others are saying about product** |  | Retweet product compliments or what others are saying about product  
Example from SB: Tom wants you to know that he enjoyed his skinny mocha today. He also stuck to his new year’s resolution |
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<th>Level Three Subcategories</th>
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</table>
| **Product Promotion, continued** | **Talk about results/awards/accomplishments/give acknowledgement**  
*Example from FM:* Proud to have our @FordFocus Electric featured on the cover of @seth_leitman’s Build Your Own Electric Vehicle (link) | |
| **Events** | **Talk about the event**  
*Example from TR:* Big News! We have the Karate Kid booked! (link) | **Give info about the event**  
*Example from TR:* Big News! We have the Karate Kid booked! (link) |
| | | **Offer something special at event**  
*Example from KD:* Get access to the Kodak tent (link) |
| | | **Give notice event is coming up/give reminders**  
*Example from PT:* Have a safe and happy New Year! Don’t forget, the Blazers take on the @nyknicks New Year’s Day at 4:30 PM on CSNNW and 1190 KEX |
| | | **Report in real time what is going on at event**  
*Example from PT:* Wow, what a shot by my fellow rookie ace ... |
| | | **Comment on what you are doing relating to the event**  
*Example from TR:* Can’t wait! (link) MT @sene718: I’ll be rocking @92YTriBeCa along w/ @DenitiaOdigie @NittyScottMC & @denzilporter on 6/30 folks |
| | | **Give something to check out prior to the event**  
*Example from TR:* Check this out. She’ll be here April 7 (link) |
<table>
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<th>Level One Broad Categories</th>
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<th>Level Three Subcategories</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Events, continued</strong></td>
<td><strong>Talk about results/awards/accomplishments/give acknowledgement</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Example from PT: Congrats to players “smooth operator tonight” Dame Lillard (link); every time the TB needed a bucket, Nicolas Batum answered the call</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social Responsibility</strong></td>
<td><strong>Give info about what you are doing</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Example from SB: How can social media &amp; technology help create sustainable solutions for the planet’s future? (link)</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Encourage participation/involvement</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Example from SB: (Had a Tweet offering different things “you” could do with link)</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Give results/awards and acknowledgement or thanks</strong></td>
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<td>Example from HD: Congrats to Stiggy’s Dogs, the July winner of Aprons in Action! Which non-profit wins $25K this month? You decide: (link)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal/ Employees</strong></td>
<td><strong>Give information about employees</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Example from SB: Meet an employee who is passionate about our reserve coffee (link)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Post a position</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Example from PT: Newest job posted: Club Concierge Asst PT. Fun job working with guests on the club level during @pdxtrailblzers games! (link)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level One Broad Categories</td>
<td>Level Two Subcategories</td>
<td>Level Three Subcategories</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| **Unrelated to Company/Product** | Share info not related to company or product  
*Example from FM: 88% on Gen Yers want to be in an urban setting. Learn how city growth is changing (link) #FordTrends* | | |
| | Ask questions not related to company or product  
*Example from HD: Hey tweeps let’s play @MarsCuriosity! Can you identify this artifact on the orange planet? (link)* | | |
| | Talk to people directly (@) unrelated to company or product  
*Example from TR: @merylalper we’re super excited!* | | |
| | Have a contest unrelated to company or product  
*Example from DD: Holiday fashions make season better; stay tuned we have fun new contest coming up to celebrate the season* | | |
| **Miscellaneous** | Share information about some type of problem or situation related to company or product  
*Example from SB: (Mentioned that something was down with the computer systems)* | | |
| | Straight-forward drive traffic  
*Example from TR: Want to get the latest news on what is happening here? Sign up for eNews (link)* | | |
| | Investor relations: give financial information related to company or product  
*Example from FM: $FNA also reports record operating margine of 10.4% for full year #FordEarnings (link)* | | |
Table 2

*Cross Category Content Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Type of Content</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RPT</td>
<td>Repeat</td>
<td>Repeat basic information with slightly different wording for multiple tweets of same material. Excellent for giveaways/specials; event reminders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTA</td>
<td>Call-to-action</td>
<td>Give some type of a call-to-action by using terminology like “check out xxx,” “get your xxx,” “please retweet,” etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QES</td>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Pose questions frequently in tweets to encourage engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTA</td>
<td>Results/Awards Thanks/Acknowledgement</td>
<td>Give results or the outcome of things that have happened; for example, talk about who won a contest, link to winning poster design, give shout out to volunteers, mention awards, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTG</td>
<td>Hash tags</td>
<td>Include a hash tag or two in almost every tweet so the conversation can be easily categorized/located/referenced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LNK</td>
<td>Link</td>
<td>Virtually 100% of tweets should have a link that moves traffic to more information, graphics, photos, video, ordering page, outside advice, items of interest, etc. Popular destinations are the organization’s website, Facebook, blog, Instagram, YouTube, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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McCorkindale, T. (2011). Twitter me this, Twitter me that: a quantitative content analysis of the 40 best Twitter brands. *Journal of New Communications Research, 43*-60.


Exploring the Indications of Rising Social Media Usage in Turkish PR: A Survey of Turkish Internet Users

Bilgen Basal
Istanbul Bilgi University

Abstract

PR activities conducted in Social Media include the usage of online tools and methods for managing and improving of a brand, a company, a project or any online platform. The importance of social media in Turkey has increased considerably in recent years, which in turn has led to a mounting interest in the phenomenon and its overall impact on the Turkish society. The open and free communication form offered is very appealing to the young Turkish population. Moreover, people increasingly access their social networks from mobile phones. Thus PR practitioners are forced to consider and to use social media.

Through a non-probability quota sampling survey method, this paper explores the reasons of why Turkish PR professionals need to allocate a respectable amount of their communication budget to social media along with traditional media. In this study PR practitioners may highly utilize the answers of these kinds of valuable questions; what types of online tools do the Internet users mostly prefer? How do they perceive the importance of social media usage in PR profession? How can PR professionals benefit from social media in terms of brand and consumer communication? Why do they need to allocate a part of their communication budgets to interactive social media?

In this survey it has been employed 716 questionnaires with 51% male and 49% female well educated respondents having 27 years of age mean (standard deviation is +/- 6.7). Social media tools like social networks, blogs, forums, search engines like ask.com, video sharing, photo sharing, slide sharing, game applications and virtual worlds have been researched in this study.

It has been found that the product demonstrations in internet highly affect the consumer’s choice of purchase. Other inference to be issued from this survey is the respectable amount of users who have bought a brand or a service have indicated ‘liked’ option in the social media. One of the most important objectives of social media PR activities is to attract the Internet users to visit the corporate websites. In this survey, more than one-third of respondents visit the corporate websites and one-fourth of them write comments about their products and services.

It can be concluded that Social Media gives the advantages to PR professionals for reaching a fragmented but yet the accurate consumer target groups with an interactive and measurable consumer responses having the lower cost of customer acquisition.
Introduction

The social networking landscape continues to evolve in Turkey. If we consider the hospitality and the sociability nature of Turkish people it is perhaps no surprise to expect more average digital communication time spent than other European countries. All virtual characters are very welcome to their lives. This high level of engagement means that there is room for many companies to succeed in the market. (Fosk, 2012) According to ComScore November 2012 digital measurements analysis, Turkey is the 5th highly engaged social networking market in the world after Argentina, Brazil, Russia and Thailand. ‘Top 10 Global Markets by Average Social Networking Hours per Visitor report’ reveals that an average Turkish social networking visitor spent 8.6 hours as opposed to 5.2 hours European average. (Sit, 2012)

According to 2012 Webrazzi Analitic Facebook Infographic data, the current number of Turkish Facebook users is 31 million and grabs the 7th position in world ranking. The same data shows that the contribution rate of Internet promotions to sales is much higher than the traditional media ratios. This ratio is 33.2% in Internet, 10.1% in newspapers, 8.96% in television and 4.68% in radio. (Eyidilli, 2013)

The widespread use of social media has fundamentally changed how people communicate and share information. This has made an impact in virtually every industry as companies seek to create strategies to engage on the social web. Public Relations is certainly no exception as it tries to communicate with, and hears from consumers, as well as using social channels to share information with key audiences. A direct two-way communication with consumers is a tremendous opportunity for businesses to gain real-time feedback on messaging coming from the company. The live interaction allows for ongoing refinement and improvement to make a deeper connection with the target audience. According to Dave Folkens, the speed of information sharing is faster than ever before and PR professionals have access to a wealth of content that can be shared with consumers seeking solutions to a problem. Creating a simple keyword based search on Twitter can connect companies with people at exactly the right time to serve as a helpful resource. By engaging proactively, PR teams can create new opportunities to create a favorable brand impression that can lead to the beginning of a social media relationship and a potential business relationship. (Folkens, 2011)

There are a number of ways that the field of PR must continue to adapt, as the social media tools of today will change tomorrow. Rather than focus on the channels, focus on the expectations of the audiences and how to serve as a valued resource for them. PR activities conducted in Social Media include the usage of online tools and methods for managing and improving of a brand, a company, a project or any online platform. The importance of social media in Turkey has increased considerably in recent years, which in turn has led to a mounting interest in the phenomenon and its overall impact on the Turkish society. The open and free communication form offered is very appealing to the young Turkish population. Moreover, people increasingly access their social networks from mobile phones. Thus PR practitioners are forced to consider and to use social media.

Through a non-probability quota sampling survey method, this paper explores the reasons of why Turkish PR professionals need to allocate a respectable amount of their budget to social media along with traditional media. In this study PR practitioners may highly utilize the answers of these kinds of valuable questions; what types of online tools do the Internet users mostly prefer? How do they perceive the importance of social media usage in PR profession? How can PR professionals benefit from social media in terms of brand and consumer communication? Why do they need to allocate a part of their communication budget to interactive social media?
In this survey it has been employed 716 questionnaires with 51% male and 49% female well educated respondents having 27 years of age mean (standard deviation is +/- 6.7). Social media tools like social networks, blogs, forums, search engines like ask.com, video sharing, photo sharing, slide sharing, game applications and virtual worlds have been researched in this study. In the appendix you will find the survey questionnaire.

**Literature Review**

**Social Media and Public Relations**

Social media has become a powerful communication tool for public relations agencies whose aim is to get the right message, to the right people, at the right time. Social media allows companies to get their message across immediately but it also allows their customers to react and comment on their product or services in a very public domain. People are heavily influenced by what they read online. (Malcolm, 2013)

Social media has dramatically changed the way information is shared between individuals, groups and organizations. As a result, public relations professionals must master these communication platforms not only to advise their clients, but also to build trust and maintain relationships with key stakeholders. (Markus & Robey, 1998) Social media has become the new arena for PR. And the characteristics of social media, which continue to evolve as users shape it, are changing the way we are doing PR. Expect the PR landscape to shift and change quickly. If you don’t keep up, you’ll get lost. Social media is changing the way we connect with journalists, as well as our prospects and customers. It’s placing new demands on companies and PR professionals; demands that require new skills and expertise. In some ways, PR is getting easier because of social media. (Verlee, 2012)

PR people are well equipped for social because they know how to tell a story. They know how to create dialogue and they think beyond campaigns to relationships. All of which is essential for effective engagement on social media. (Lewis, 2012) Social media lets us reach people more directly, through Twitter and Facebook and an ever-growing array of new platforms. It used to be B2B and B2C but now it’s B2P, with P being people. Social media cuts across channels and is all about engaging with individuals, holding conversations not relying on press releases and launches. (Ferrier, 2012)

**Turkish Online Media Statistics**

According to ‘Internet and Facebook Usage in Europe’ report of Internet World Stats in October 2012, there were 36,455,000 Internet users in Turkey that represents 45.7% of the whole population in mid-year 2012. Turkish Internet users have the third highest engagement in Europe with 23.1 million unique visitors spending an average of 32.7 hours online and 3,706 pages per month is ranked as the highest consumption amongst all countries reported. (Comscore, 2011) Email marketing tips data from Turkey suggest that people skim through more pages than in any other European country. While, Turkey leads in page impressions per visit having the most page views per visit (3.7), British spends most online hours.

Turkish people are highly engaged in social media. Social networking site Facebook is not only among the leading web destinations in Turkey, but it also ranked as the most popular destination for online video with 17 million viewers in February 2011. Turkey is Facebook country No.6 with 32.438.200 Facebook users in world ranking which makes Turkey number 1 in Europe according to SocialBakers Facebook statistics by country in 2012. Turkey is Frienfeed country No.1 and the No.8 country for Twitter with 4 million users according to 2011 ComScore Media Metrix. Mike Read draws attention to another important fact that is PR professionals has to take into account not just pages of fans, but also friends of fans in social media. Friends of fans who saw the issues shared in this area increases the power of marketing further. Online video engagement showed significant differences by age
and gender. Males between the ages of 15-24 viewed 200 videos each, accounting for an average of 20.8 hours of online video viewing during the month, while females in this age group viewed just 12 hours and watched 122.5 videos on average. Online video appealed least to females over 55 years of age, who only spent 8.4 hours watching 91.1 videos per viewer during the month.

**E-commerce Penetration**

Turkey is a big domestic market with many young users who love to spend time in online. Facebook, Twitter, Friendfeed are heavily used web destinations. The rate of e-commerce penetration is 25% over all Internet users. Sina Afra indicates that 6-9 million users in e-commerce leave a great potential for the future if you compare 60% penetration rate in some European countries like Germany or UK. The significant amount of online money spent, the large credit card penetration (the second biggest credit card penetration rate around 60% in comparison with 50% European average) and very well developed logistics network provide a great infrastructure for the further development of e-commerce. According to Internet World Stats 2012 report, Turkey has 36.4 million Internet users. This makes Turkey the 5th biggest Internet population in Europe (after Russia Germany, UK and France) and number 15 in the world. Turkish e-commerce had a volume of $16.3 billion in 2010 according to the Internet Card Center. The growth from 2006 to 2010 was 325% and the first half-year of 2011 generated a volume of $10.6 billion. European E-commerce Online Payment 2012 Report declares that Eastern Europe is an emerging market including Turkey. The growth potential for e-commerce is high despite the relatively smaller size of the e-commerce turnover and lower consumer spending.

**Methodology**

Through a non-probability quota sampling survey method, this paper explores the reasons of why Turkish PR professionals need to allocate a respectable amount of their budget to social media along with traditional media. In this study PR practitioners may highly utilize the answers of these kinds of valuable questions; which types of online tools do the Internet users mostly prefer? How do they perceive the importance of social media usage in PR profession? How can PR professionals benefit from social media in terms of brand and consumer communication? Why do they need to allocate a part of their communication budget to interactive social media?

**The Survey Questionnaire**

It has both closed-ended and open-ended 40 questions. Some open-ended questions require numerical values as in average online time spent and age questions. Other open-ended questions require qualitative answers as in ‘Why do brands prefer to allocate a portion of their communication budgets to reach their target groups in addition to traditional media?’ question. The survey questionnaire consists of four different parts.

The first part of the questionnaire measures the degree of social media engagement in four different social media tools; blogs, facebook network, corporate websites and online forums by asking ten different questions.

For blogs; the degree of blog engagement is analyzed by asking ‘Do respondents visit blogs and read the writings or do they both visit and also make comments?’ and ‘What are the frequently visited blog names?’ questions.

For Facebook network; the degree of Facebook engagement is analyzed by asking ‘Do respondents indicate their likes for any specific products or services or do they both indicate their likes and also make comments’ question. The research question of ‘How effective is ‘like’ indication on buying decision?’ is analyzed by asking ‘Did the respondents buy a
product or a service for which they have indicated their ‘likes’ and consider buying it again?’
question.

For corporate websites; the degree of corporate website engagement is analyzed by asking ‘Do respondents visit any corporate websites?, ‘Do they make any comments for them?’ and ‘What are the frequently visited corporate website names?’ questions.

For online forums; the degree of online forums engagement is analyzed by asking questions like ‘Do respondents engage chatting in online forums?’ and ‘What are the mostly engaged online forum names?’

The second part of the questionnaire measures the perception of the importance of PR communication activities in social media. It is analyzed by asking three different questions;

Q1. Which of the following sentence correctly summarizes the importance of social media in Public Relations?
   1. It enables media to meet with internet. Medyanın internet ile buluşmasını sağlamıştır.
   2. It causes Public Relations mediums to shift completely to internet.
   3. Social media which enables the 100 % interactive communication to take part in Public Relations, provides an easy and a fast target group determination.
   4. It enables Public Relations agencies to promote themselves in social media.

Q2. Which of the following has been provided by social media to brand and consumer relations?
   1. It provides consumers to forward the opinions directly to the brands.
   2. It provides brands to listen consumer opinions in all social media platforms.
   3. It provides the measurement of brand and consumer communication clearly.
   4. All of the above

Q3. Why do brands prefer to allocate a portion of their communication budgets to reach their target groups in addition to traditional media?

The third part of the questionnaire measures the respondents’ social media practices by asking 18 different questions. The first one is about the mostly shared content in social media. The later 3 questions are based on numerical data related with the daily average number of hours spent in Internet, the daily average number of photos and videos viewed. 15 questions are based on a 1–5 Likert scale allowed the respondent to indicate the extent. Social media tools which have been researched in this study are: Social networks, virtual worlds, slides sharing, video sharing, photo sharing, music and audio files sharing, search engines, game applications. Other questions measures the practices about online shopping, reading e books, listening online music, making online product comments, visiting own brand’s website and the effectiveness of product promotions on purchase decision.

The fourth part of the questionnaire is about the socio-demographic profile of the respondents. Respondent’s age, gender, level of education and profession.

Types of Analysis Used

All the responses are entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) research software and the results are analyzed with both univariate and bivariate types of analysis. Univariate analysis used in this survey are Frequency and Descriptive analysis. Bivariate analysis are Cross Tabulations, Compare means (One-Way-ANOVA), Correlations (Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient) and Linear Regression analysis. Besides, Recoding into Different Variables analysis is made to categorize the age of the respondents into young people (17-25 years), young adults (26-45 years), adults (36-45) and mature (46 +years) age classes.

To test the reliability of scaled questions Alpha Coefficient measurment is used. Reliability indicates how consistently an indicator measures a concept. The Alpha score can range between 0 and 1, with higher numbers indicating higher reliability. As a rule, an Alpha score of 0,70 or higher on an index of four or more indicators indicates good reliability.
In this survey, Cronbach’s Alpha is 0.811, which indicates a good scale reliability.

Significance levels are measured to test the relationships between all the variables analyzed in this survey. Only statistically significant (values lower than 0.005 significance level) relationships are taken into consideration. Significance tests rely on significance levels, estimates of probabilities that indicate the degree to which chance is a likely explanation for observed patterns. A low significance level shows that simple random chance is unlikely explain the pattern indicating that there is a relationship between the variables.

**Sample**

In this survey, it has been conducted 716 face-to-face interviews basing on non-probability quota sampling survey method for gender and age categories. This method defines samples based on the known proportions within the population and nonrandom sampling is completed in each group. After deciding on the sample size to be drawn, a ‘quota’ for each category is identified. (Reinard, 1997) The main reason why researchers choose quota samples is that it allows the researchers to sample a subgroup that is of great interest to the study. If a study aims to investigate a trait or a characteristic of a certain subgroup, this type of sampling is the ideal technique. Quota sampling also allows the researchers to observe relationships between subgroups. (Castillo, 2009)

The quota of this survey is based on both genders as 50% shares for each sexes and age groups. The quota is 90% for 17-35 age category including young people and young adults. More than half of this quota belongs to young people. The quota for adults and mature people is 10%. Table 1, shows the data of 716 respondents’ age categories having 27 years of age mean with +- 6,7 standard deviation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Categories</th>
<th>Respondent Frequency</th>
<th>Respondent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17-25 years</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35 years</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45 years</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>9,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46+ years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>716</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Why Do We Need to Make Survey with Young Population?**

Although, only 54 percent of the global online population is under 34, Turkish Internet audience profile skews young: nearly 40% of the Internet audience is under the age of 24, and nearly 70 percent are under the age of 34. For example, in UK only 39% of all Internet users are younger than 34 years. (Afra 2011) Young males are typically the earliest adopters in emerging Internet markets and digital platforms. The strong presence of these early adopters in Turkey is that the young online audience profile including 71% of 15-34-age category with 58% males implies that there is still a room for further advancement. Demographic composition shows that Turkey’s online development is incomplete. (Flanagan, 2009)

Education: The respondents are both young and well educated in this survey. 65% of the respondents are either graduated from a university or still receiving the university education. 5% of them have a postgraduate degree and 24% of them are graduated from a high school.

Profession: 50% of the respondents are students, 10 % of them are self-employed, 8,5% are employees, 8% are managers, 5,5% are housewives, 4% are officers and 4% are employers.
Findings

RQ1. How online PR activities are perceived by social media users in terms of consumer and media relations?

This research question is analyzed in 3 different parts:

The Importance of Social Media Concept in PR

Table.2 shows the survey responses about the perception of the importance of social media concept in Public Relations. Almost half of the respondents with 7 non-response frequencies believe that social media, which enables 100% interactive communication to take part in Public Relations, provides an easy and a fast target group determination. Almost one fourth of the respondents indicate that social media causes Public Relations mediums to shift completely to Internet. 17.8% declares that social media enables media to meet with Internet and 13.5% believe that it enables Public Relations agencies to promote themselves in social media.

Table.2 Which of the following sentence correctly summarizes the importance of social media concept in Public Relations?

| Social media, which enables 100% interactive communication to take part in Public Relations provides an easy and a fast target group determination. | 319 | 45.0 |
| It causes Public Relations mediums to shift completely to Internet. | 168 | 23.7 |
| It enables media to meet with Internet | 126 | 17.8 |
| It enables Public Relations agencies to promote themselves in social media. | 96 | 13.5 |
| Total | 709 | 100 |

Contributions of Social Media to Brand and Consumer Relations?

Table 3 shows that 36.4% of the respondents with 2 non-response frequencies believe that social media provides consumers to forward their opinions directly to the brands, provides brands to listen consumer opinions in all social media platforms and provides a clear measurement of brand and consumer communication.

Table.3 Which of the following has been provided by social media to brand and consumer relations?

| It provides consumers to forward the opinions directly to the brands. | 145 | 20.3 |
| It provides brands to listen consumer opinions in all social media platforms. | 161 | 22.5 |
| It provides a clear measurement of brand and consumer communication. | 148 | 20.7 |
| All of the above | 260 | 36.4 |
| Total | 714 | 100 |

Allocation of Communication Budgets to Social Media with Traditional Media.
In communication budget question, there are 319 valid responses out of 716 respondents. Answers can be grouped into 4 different categories; advantages gained in target group communication, benefits brought into communication mix, comparison with traditional media, and advantages of social media itself.

*Advantages in target group communication:* to reach more people, to reach different types of people, to communicate with target group effectively, to reach young people, because it is easier to reach target group,

*Advantages brought into communication mix:* To provide integrated communication, because it has to be included into communication mix, to increase awareness, to establish a bond with consumers

*Comparison with traditional media:* Because it is cheaper than traditional media, because it is interactive, because it provides a faster communication, to make communication entertaining, because there is a necessity to adapt to the technology,

*Advantages of social media itself:* Because it is a contemporary communication method, because it gives the opportunity to have viral spread, because it is an universal media, because it has become a part of social life, because all the brands are in social media, because there is a tendency to spent more time in social media

A large share of respondents agrees on the advantages of social media in communicating with target group.

Table 4 Why brands do prefer to allocate a portion of their communication budgets to social media in order to reach their target groups in addition to traditional media?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantage</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Respondent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To reach more people</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>7,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because there is a tendency to spent more time in social media</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To reach different types of people</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it is cheaper than traditional media</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To communicate with target group effectively</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it is a contemporary communication method</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To reach young people</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it provides a faster communication</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it is interactive</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it has become a part of social life</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To establish a bond with consumers</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it is easier to reach target group</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because all the brands are in social media</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it gives the opportunity to have viral spread</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To increase awareness</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make communication entertaining</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide integrated communication</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it has to be included into communication mix</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because there is a necessity to adapt to the technology</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it is an universal media</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>44,4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RQ2. What is the degree of engagement in social web destinations in Turkey? Among 716 respondents, 65.6% of them loves to engage (either completely agrees or agrees on engagement) in social media. Almost one fifth of them; 18.8% respondents do not like engagement in social media.

Table 5 I love to engage in social media like Facebook and twitter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Respondent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completely Disagree</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely Agree</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>716</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the survey, 4 different social web destinations are questioned in terms of engagement; blogs, facebook, corporate websites and online forums.

*Blogs:* 40% of the respondents only visit and read blogs, 20% them both visit and make comments in blogs. 30% of them did not visit any blog so far and 10% of them do not have any idea about blogs. Blogs about football, sports, news, travel, fashion, women clubs, photograph, food and personal web diaries are mostly visited ones.

*Facebook:* While 34.5% of the respondents are indicating only their ‘likes’ about a product or a service in Facebook, 21% of them both indicate their ‘likes’ and make comments about this specific product or service. This makes more than half of the respondents are actively engaged in Facebook. Other 32% of the respondents are only present in Facebook without having any ‘like’ indication or comments. 13% of the respondents are not engaged in it and don’t have any idea about it. Mostly ‘like’ indicated product categories are; clothing, shoes, accessories, online tickets, sports items, food recipe sites, online restaurants, personal development seminars, music groups, music videos, technology products, telecommunication operators and some brand names are markafoni, limango, biletix, yemeksepeti and turkcell.

*Corporate Websites:* While 37% of the respondents declare that they visit corporate websites, 42% of them do not visit any corporate websites. 24% of the respondents make comments for the product or service for the websites that they have visited. Mostly visited corporate website categories; Telecommunication, clothing, fashion, banking, sport clubs and products, newspapers, automotive, TV channels and airlines.

*Online Forums:* While 28% of the respondents engage chatting in online forums, 59% of them do not engage chatting and 13% of them do not have any idea about forums. Mynet, forums on facebook, tweeter and you tube, sims forum, women forums, news forums and forums about cars, newspapers and news are mostly preferred forums.

The One-Way ANOVA analysis shows that engagement in social media is correlated with daily online average time spent having 0.000 significance level. This produces a one-way analysis of variance for a quantitative dependent variable (social media engagement) by a single independent variable (daily online average time spent). A low significance level indicates that simple random chance is unlikely to explain a pattern and it means that there is a relationship between the variables. Respondents who spent 5.64 hours on average per day are completely agree on social media engagement, respondents who spent 3.97 hours on average per day are agree on social media engagement whereas respondents who spent 2.91 hours on average per day are completely disagree on social media engagement.

RQ3. Which contents are the mostly engaged by Turkish online audience?
Tom Malcolm indicates that the rise of social media has also an effect on media organizations, which are now in search of unique and engaging content, which will drive traffic to their websites. This in turn has transformed the role of PR. To feed the media’s growing appetite for engaging content, successful PR campaigns are now increasingly reliant on their ability to create engaging content that people want to share and talk about online. This has also forced PR agencies to work alongside and focus a lot more like creative and ad agencies. Companies are quickly learning that visual media is one of the most effective ways to share their stories. A brand’s story is best framed online with photos & videos. In a study of the top 10 brands on Facebook, photos and videos drive the most engagement and users liked photos twice as often as text updates. They shared videos 12 times more than photo and text posts combined. And increasingly, that shareable content is originating from brands. (Buck, 2012) Comscore Video Metrix April 2011 report indicates that Turkey is the second biggest video online market in Europe after Germany and the number one video property is Facebook.com. According to Paperandink PR advices, it is important to remember that your content should not only interest people but inspire them to take action – whether it’s engaging with you via a blog, buying a product or enlisting your services. In order to create content, which engages successfully with people, you must decide what your goal is. In other words, what action do you want them to take? Once you have decided what affect you want your content to have on people (for example a charity might want people to donate after watching a short video) and then you can start to monitor what type of content works best.

As indicated in Table 6, 37% of the survey respondents share mostly photographs, 32% share text, and 22% share video and 5% share audio files.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6</th>
<th>What kinds of content do you share mostly in social media?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Respondent Frequency</strong></td>
<td><strong>Respondent %</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photograph</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio files</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>711</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ4. Do Social Media Engagement Affect Buying Intention?

**Buying Intention of Respondents**

30% of the respondents have bought a product or a service for which they have indicated their ‘likes’ in Facebook and 36% of them stated that they didn’t buy any product or a service for which they have indicated their ‘likes’, but they would consider buying it. It wouldn’t be wrong to say that 66% of the respondents have a positive intention for buying decision related with ‘like’ indication in Facebook. Here, awareness is created with ‘like’ indications in social media. Finally, 14% of them stated that they have decided on that type of purchase decision but wouldn’t consider buying it anymore and 18% of the respondents declared that they didn’t make any buying decision of this type. Non-response frequency rate is 2%

**Buying Intention Index**

Assuming that the online audience who has a positive buying intention would visit his brand’s Internet site, would be affected by online product promotions and would make online purchases, an index has been developed. This index calculates the averages of those three variables mentioned above and it is called as ‘Buying Intention Index’. Later, Index has been
analyzed with social media engagement (‘I love to engage in social media like Facebook and twitter.’ question), social media online music, audio files, video and photo consumption variables. Here, Pearson’s correlation coefficient analysis is used to measure the strength of the linear relationship between two variables.

**Buying Intention Index and Social Media Engagement:** Pearson’s correlation coefficient indicates that Buying Intention Index and social media engagement are correlated. It indicates that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between these two variables at 0.452-correlation rate. The closer to correlation is to -1 and +1, the stronger the relationship between two variables. Therefore, there is a moderate positive relationship between social media engagement and buying intention, indicating that more socially engaged people tend to have more buying intention of a product or a service for which is promoted in social media. This relationship is unlikely to be due to chance with 0.000 significance level. Again, a low significance level indicates that simple random chance is unlikely to explain a pattern and it means that there is an apparent relationship between the variables.

R-Square statistic in linear Regression analysis indicates the degree of variation in dependent variable (buying intention index) with independent variable (social media engagement). R-Square of 0.204 indicates that 20% of the variation in buying intention index can be explained by variations in social media engagement. The remaining 80% can be explained by other factors. The relationship is statistically significant at 0.000 in our analysis. We can be confident of an actual statistical association between buying intention index and social media engagement.

**Buying Intention Index and Social Media Online Music And Audio Files Consumption:**
Buying intention index and social media online music and audio files consumption (‘I like to share music and audio files in social media’ statement) are correlated at 0.352 with 0.000 significance level. It indicates that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between these two variables at 0.352-correlation rate. There is a positive relationship between social media music and audio files consumption and buying intention, indicating that people who share more online music and audio files tend to have more buying intention of a product or a service for which is promoted in social media. Here, the relationship is not so strong. However, there is still a considerable relationship between these two variables.

**Buying Intention Index and social media online video consumption:**
Buying intention index and social media online video consumption (I like to share video in social media’ statement) are correlated at 0.346 with 0,000 significance level.

**Buying Intention Index and social media online photo consumption:**
Buying intention index and social media online photo consumption (I like to share photo in social media’ with picassa, flickr, etc question) are correlated at 0.340 with 0,000 significance level.

There is a positive relationship between social media online video and photo consumption and buying intention, indicating that people who share more online video and photo tend to have more buying intention of a product or a service for which is promoted in social media.

It wouldn’t be wrong to say that corporate awareness increases with social media engagement in the light of all these analyzed data.

RQ5. Do Education Affect Social Media Engagement?
Education and Social Media Engagement (‘I Love To Engage In Social Media Like Facebook and Twitter’ statement) variables are two categorical variables. For this reason, in order to find all the possible combinations of the values, Cross Tabulations analysis has been applied in this study. When the cells of this grid are filled with the frequency of occurrence of the intersecting values, the association between two variables becomes apparent. The data in Table 7 shows us there is a statistically significant (at 0.000 significant level) relationship between education and social media engagement. There is a tendency to increase in social media engagement scale as level of education increases. While 30.0% of post graduates completely agree on social media engagement only 6.7% of elementary school graduates completely agree on engagement. 0.000 significance level indicates that simple random chance is unlikely to explain a pattern and it means that there is an apparent relationship between the variables.

Table.7 Cross Tabulation Analysis Result Between (‘I Love To Engage In Social Media Like Facebook And Twitter’ and Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Completely Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Completely Agree</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>38.0%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduate</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ6. Do Average Online Time Spent Affect Online Purchase Decision?
As it is seen in Table 8, the One-Way ANOVA analysis shows that purchase decision is related with daily online average time spent with 0.000 significance level. It means that there is a statistically significant relationship between these two variables. Respondents who spent daily 5.76 hours in Internet completely agree that online product promotions are effective on their purchase decision. It indicates that their buying decision is heavily affected by online product promotions. Respondents who spent daily 4.06 hours in Internet agree on purchase decision variable. It means that their purchase decision is somehow affected by online product promotions. On the other hand, respondents who have spent daily 2.54 hours in Internet completely disagree on purchase decision variable indicating that their decision is not affected by online product promotions at all. As a result, 51% of the respondents who spent more online times declare that their purchase decision is affected by online product promotions whereas 28% of them do not agree on this decision.

Table.8 The One-Way ANOVA Result Between ‘Online Product Promotions Affect My Purchase Decision’ and ‘Average Online Time Spent (AOTS)’ Variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AOTS Mean</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completely Disagree</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely Agree</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>711</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Limitations
In this survey, it has been conducted 716 face-to-face interviews basing on non-probability quota sampling survey method for gender and age categories. This method defines samples based on the known proportions within the population and nonrandom sampling is completed in each group. The quota of this survey is based on both genders as 50% shares for each sexes and age groups. The quota for age groups is 90% for 17-35-age category including young people and young adults and 10% for adults and mature people. More than half of the respondents with 56% share belong to young people in 17-25-age category. The respondents’ age mean is 27 years, which is quite young. Although Turkish Internet audience profile skews young, if one would like to observe social media motives and behaviors of adults and mature, this quota has to be changed.

The respondents are both young and also well educated in this survey. 65% of the respondents are either graduated from a university or still receiving the university education. 5% of them have a postgraduate degree and 24% of them are graduated from a high school. Again, if one would like to observe social media motives and behaviors of more high school graduates, this quota has to be changed.

If a study aims to investigate a trait or a characteristic of a certain subgroup, this type of sampling is the ideal technique, which is the case in this research. Quota sampling also allows the researchers to observe relationships between subgroups. (Castillo, 2009) But also it carries the disadvantages of all non-probability samplings. For example, if random sampling is not employed, it is no longer theoretically possible to evaluate the sampling error in terms of probability.

Directions for Future Research

In the near future, it would be possible to conduct a survey with more professional people rather than students (in this survey 50% of the respondents are students) and more adult and mature people to explore the reasons of why Turkish PR professionals need to allocate a respectable amount of their budget to social media along with traditional media and social media usage habits.

Conclusion

Social media has become a powerful communication tool for public relations agencies whose aim is to get the right message, to the right people, at the right time. As Denise Sutmann offered, PR is what you get others to say about you. Social media allows companies to get their message across immediately but it also allows their customers to react and comment on their product or services in a very public domain. People are heavily influenced by what they read online. (Malcolm, 2013) Social media has dramatically changed the way information is shared between individuals, groups and organizations. As a result, public relations professionals must master these communication platforms not only to advise their clients, but also to build trust and maintain relationships with key stakeholders. (Markus & Robey, 1998) In maintaining this relationship it is extremely important to understand the public and their expectations. For this reason, one of the most important findings in this study measures the perception of the importance of PR communication activities in social media. Almost half of the respondents believe that social media, which enables 100% interactive communication to take part in Public Relations, provides an easy and a fast target group determination. 36,4% of the respondents believe that social media provides consumers to forward their opinions directly to the brands, provides brands to listen consumer opinions in all social media platforms and provides a clear measurement of brand and consumer communication. A large share of respondents agrees on the advantages of social media in target group communication. The advantages provided by social media are to reach more people, to reach different types of people, to communicate with target group effectively, to
reach young people and to reach target group easier. The other shares of the responses belong to the advantages brought into communication mix, advantages of social media itself and superior features in comparison with traditional media like its interactivity, viral spread and universality.

The other important observation in this study is about the degree of engagement in social web destinations in Turkey. These findings give valuable clues to PR professionals to provide high social engagement to their contents. According to Paperandink PR advices, it is important to remember that your content should not only interest people but inspire them to take action – whether it’s engaging with you via a blog, buying a product or enlisting your services. 65.6% of the respondents loves to engage in social media whereas 87% engage in Facebook. More than half of the respondents are actively engaged in Facebook meaning that either they indicate their ‘likes’ about a product or service or they make comments about this specific product or service for which they have indicated their likes. In this study, 66% of the respondents have a positive intention for buying decision related with ‘like’ indication in Facebook. Here, awareness is created with ‘like’ indications in social media. Mostly ‘like’ indicated product categories are; clothing, shoes, accessories, online tickets, sports items, food recipe sites, online restaurants, personal development seminars, music groups, music videos, technology products, telecommunication operators. While 37% of the respondents declare that they visit corporate websites, 24% of the respondents make comments for the product or service for the websites that they have visited. Mostly visited corporate website categories; Telecommunication, clothing, fashion, banking, sport clubs and products, newspapers, automotive, TV channels and airlines. 40% of the respondents only visit and read blogs, 20% them both visit and make comments in blogs. Blogs about football, sports, news, travel, fashion, women clubs, photograph, food and personal web diaries are mostly visited ones. 28% of the respondents engage chatting in online forums; Mynet, forums on facebook, tweeter and yotube, sims forum, women forums, news forums and forums about cars, newspapers and news are mostly preferred forums. Finally, engagement in social media is statistically correlated with daily online average time.

Tom Malcolm indicates that the rise of social media has also an effect on media organizations, which are now in search of unique and engaging content, which will drive traffic to their websites. Finding about the mostly engaged content by Turkish online audience in this study include photo, video, text and audio files. 37% of the survey respondents share mostly photographs, 32% share text, and 22% share video and 5% share audio files. We have to keep in mind that shareable content is originating from brands (Buck, 2012).

In this survey, there is a moderate positive relationship between social media engagement and buying intention, indicating that more socially engaged people tend to have more buying intention of a product or a service for which is promoted in social media. There is a positive relationship between social media music and audio files consumption and buying intention, indicating that people who share more online music and audio files tend to have more buying intention of a product or a service for which is promoted in social media. There is also a positive relationship between social media online video and photo consumption and buying intention, indicating that people who share more online video and photo tend to have more buying intention of a product or a service for which is promoted in social media. It wouldn’t be wrong to say that corporate awareness increases with social media engagement in the light of all these analyzed data.

Final observations in the social media usage in Turkey survey includes education and average online time spent. There is a tendency to increase in social media engagement scale as level of education increases. While 30.0% of post graduates completely agree on social media engagement only 6.7% of elementary school graduates completely agree on
engagement. Other observation is related with average online time spent. 51% of the respondents who spent more online times declare that their purchase decision is affected by online product promotions whereas 28% of them do not agree on this decision.

The rise of social media has also had an effect on media organizations which are now in search of unique and engaging content which will drive traffic to their websites. This in turn has transformed the role of PR. To feed the media’s growing appetite for engaging content, successful PR campaigns are now increasingly reliant on their ability to create engaging content that people want to share and talk about online. This has also forced PR agencies to work alongside and focus a lot more like creative and ad agencies. Social media is not only forcing PR agencies to become much more integrated. A thread on a consumer forum can quickly become headline news and as such PR professionals need to have an understanding of how a brand’s reputation online and offline are intrinsically linked. Because of this shift, only those who understand the new digital world will be able to communicate effectively. A continually evolving Turkish networking landscape and incomplete online development forces us to make more research regarding the expectations of the audiences and how to serve as a valued resource for them.
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Social Media PP Activities Questionnaire

I am ....................... and a student at İstanbul Bilgi University. We are conducting a research about Social Media and PR. You are one of the appropriate people for this research. Can we please continue to survey with you?

Q 1. Do you spend some time in internet?
   1. Yes, I spend some time. Please continue to questionnaire.
   2. No, I don’t spend any time. Please terminate the questionnaire.

Q 2. Do you visit ‘blogs’ which are kinds of diaries about hobbies, travels, fashion, etc. and make comments about products and services?
   1. Yes, I only visit and read the writings.
   2. Yes, I visit and also make comments.
   3. No, I didn’t visit any blog so far.
   4. I don’t have any idea.

Q 3. If your answer is ‘Yes’, can you please tell me the name of blog that you have visited frequently?

Q 4. Do you indicate your likes or make comments for any specific products or services in Facebook social network?
   1. Yes, I only indicate my likes.
   2. Yes, I indicate my likes and also make comments.
   3. No I don’t indicate my likes,
   4. I have never been in Facebook.
   5. I don’t have any idea.

Q 5. If your answer is ‘Yes’, can you please tell me the name of the product or service that you indicate your likes mostly?

Q 6. Did you buy a product or a service for which you have indicated your like, or would you consider buying it?
   1. Yes, I bought it and I would consider buying it.
   2. Yes, I bought it, but I wouldn’t consider buying it anymore.
   3. No, I didn’t buy it, but I would consider buying it.
   4. No, I didn’t buy it, and I wouldn’t consider buying it.

Q 7. Do you visit corporate websites?
   1. Yes, I visit.
   2. No, I don’t visit.
   3. I don’t have any idea.

Q 8. If your answer is ‘Yes’, can you please tell me the name of the corporate website that you visit mostly?

Q 9. Do you make comments about the corporate websites that you have visited?
   1. Yes, I comment.
   2. No, I don’t comment.
   3. I don’t have any idea.

Q 10. Do you engage chatting in online forums?
   1. Yes, I engage.
   2. No, I don’t engage.
   3. I don’t have any idea.
Q 11 If your answer is ‘Yes’, can you please tell me the name of online forum that you have engaged mostly?

Q 12. What kinds of content do you share mostly in social media? Please tick only one of them.

1. Video
2. Text
3. Photo
4. Audio file
5. Other. Specify

Q 13. Which of the following sentence correctly summarizes the importance of social media concept in Public Relations?

5. It enables media to meet with internet. Medyanın internet ile buluşmasını sağlamıştır.
6. It causes Public Relations mediums to shift completely to internet.
7. Social media which enables the 100 % interactive communication to take part in Public Relations, provides an easy and a fast target group determination.
8. It enables Public Relations agencies to promote themselves in social media.

Q 14. Which of the following has been provided by social media to brand and consumer relations?

5. It provides consumers to forward the opinions directly to the brands. Tüketicilerin markalara görüşlerini doğrudan iletebilmesini sağlamıştır.
6. It provides brands to listen consumer opinions in all social media platforms. Markaların tüketicilerin görüşlerini tüm sosyal medya platformlarında dinleyebilmesini sağlamıştır.
7. It provides the measurement of brand and consumer communication clearly. Marka ve tüketici iletişiminin daha net ölçülmesini sağlamıştır.
8. All of the above

Q 15. Why do brands prefer to allocate a portion of their communication budgets to social media in order to reach their target groups in addition to traditional media?

Q 16. How many videos do you watch in internet on an average day. Can you please tell me the number of daily video you have watched on internet? Bir günde, internette izlediğiniz video sayısını öğrenebilir misiniz? (For non-watchers write ‘0’)

Q 17. How many hours do you spend in internet on an average day? Can you tell me the number of hours spent in internet. İnternette, bir günde kaç saat geçirdiğinizı öğrenebilir midiniz?

Q 18. How many photos/pictures do you see-view in social media on an average day. Bir günde sosyal paylaşım sattelerinde gördüğünüz fotoğraf/resim sayısını öğrenebilir midiniz?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q19. I like to listen music from internet.</th>
<th>Definitely I don’t agree</th>
<th>I don’t agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>I agree</th>
<th>Definitely I agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q20. I love to engage in social media like Facebook and twitter.</th>
<th>Definitely I don’t agree</th>
<th>I don’t agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>I agree</th>
<th>Definitely I agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q21. I like to visit my brand’s internet site.</th>
<th>Definitely I don’t agree</th>
<th>I don’t agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>I agree</th>
<th>Definitely I agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q22. Online product promotions affect my</th>
<th>Definitely I don’t agree</th>
<th>I don’t agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>I agree</th>
<th>Definitely I agree</th>
</tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Q</td>
<td>Question</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>I like to make online shopping</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>I like to read e-books</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>I like to share music and audio files in social media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>I like to share photo in social media with picassa, flickr, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>I like to use online presentations sites like slideshare</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>I like to share video in social media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Skype haberleşme yazılımını kullanırım</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>I like to make online product comments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>I like to use search engines like <a href="http://www.ask.com">www.ask.com</a>.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>I like to play online games</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>I like to participate in virtual world like 2nd life, simsonline</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Q 34.** Can you please tell me your age? .............................................

**Q 35.** Can you please tell me the level of education?


**Q 36.** Can you please tell me your profession?

1. Self employed ..specify ................................
2. Manager (manages 0-29 people )
3. Manager (manages 30+ people)
4. Worker
5. Unemployed
6. Retired
7. Employer (0-29 employees)
8. Employer (30+ işçii employees)
9. Public servant
10. Civil servant
11. Student
12. Housewife
13. Other ..specify .....................................

**Q 37.** Respondent’s gender: 1. Female  2. Male

**Q 38.** Respondent’s name and surname :

**Q 39.** Respondent’s telephone no. or email adress:

**Q 40.** Interviewer’s name and surname:
Auto Recall Crisis, Framing, and Ethical Response: A Content Analysis of Toyota’s Failures

Shannon A. Bowen
Yue Zheng
University of South Carolina

Abstract

This study employs a content analysis to examine news coverage concerning the Toyota crisis from January 16, 2009, through November 21, 2012, in the following media: The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today, and the news releases listed on the Toyota official website. We examine how the media frame Toyota’s crises and responses, and whether the news coverage varies between mass media and Toyota’s releases. The findings shed light on the crisis communication in terms of response strategy selection. In tracking the ethics of the Toyota crisis in the years since its inception, combined with a content analysis conducted in this paper, the authors attempt to integrate crisis management with that of ethics in public relations. Ethics should be foremost in the minds of those who consider an organization’s reputation and a board factor of success.
Introduction

An unintentionally accelerated Lexus sedan killed four people including an off-duty California highway patrol officer at an estimated 120 mph on August 28, 2009, near San Diego. This is just one example of failures that began a series of Toyota recalls: 3.8 million vehicles including models like Camry and Avalon, followed by Prius on Sep. 30, 2008. Then, a recall of another 4 million vehicles was issued on Nov. 26, 2009 (Vlasic & Bunkley, 2009; Woodyard, 2009). In 2010, Toyota generated an even longer recall list: 2.4 million sedans and trucks (Carty & Healey, 2010), 436,000 Prius hybrids (Tabuchi & Bunkley, 2010), 600,000 Sienna minivans (Whoriskey, 2010), 14,900 Lexus sedans (Woodyard, 2010), 50,000 Sequoia SUVs (Carty, 2010), 17,000 hybrid sedans (Jensen, 2010b), 373,000 Avalons (Jensen, 2010a), and 1.13 million Corolla and Matrix hatchbacks (Bunkley, 2010a).

The U.S. government criticized those recalls, saying that the recalls should have been scheduled at least one year earlier and levied a total of $48.8 million in penalties (Bunkley, 2010c). The copious recalls, as well as Congressional hearings, triggered a huge financial loss and damaged Toyota’s reputation, and they can thus be viewed as crises for the Toyota corporation (Bunkley, 2010b).

Strategic communicators routinely monitor crisis coverage and work with organizations to modifying the news frames of crises via providing appropriate responses (Coombs, 1995; Prue, Lackey, Swenarski, & Gantt, 2003). However, when discussing how media frame a crisis, previous studies only pay attention to the news coverage of mass media (An & Gower, 2009; Miller & Littlefield, 2010), which leaves the organizations’ original responses unknown and whether mass media interpreted statements the way they were intended. Although a few studies do compare the news coverage between mass media and social media, they only explore the news frames and neglect the role played by response strategies (Liu, 2009, 2010; Liu & Kim, 2011). This research is designed to fill those gaps in the body of knowledge and to combine crisis management research with an ethical analysis.

Conceptual Foundations

Crises cause untold expense for organizations, as well as varying ramifications for consumers. In the Toyota case, more than 55 people died as a result of vehicle failures, with many others injured and large financial consequences as a result. How the media tell the story of these dramatic events impacts both the crisis itself, organizational response, and the resulting reputation of the organization. We examined the literature related to how the media frame those reports and crisis response strategies.

Media Frame

Framing theory explains how the media focus on certain components of a story. Entman explained that the media extract key attributes of news content and present them in a variety of frames, helping to reduce the complexity of issues by “selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text,” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). The mass media determine which frames to include and which to exclude and organize them in a certain order (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). As the simplified version of reality, news frames guide audiences to recognize, locate, label, perceive, evaluate, attribute, and make decisions on human actions and events (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gitlin, 2003; Guttmann, 2000; Hoffman-Goetz, 1999; Iyengar, 1987; Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002; Kim, Shanahan, & Boo-Hun, 2012; Moore, 1989; Scheufele, 1999; Wallack, Woodruff, Dorfman, &
Diaz, 1999). The effect of news frame is considerable, since most people rely on mass media to obtain and interpret messages due to their low self-confidence, limited ability, and insufficient prior knowledge (Glik, 2007; Kelley, 1967).

Several news frames are so highly visible in mass media that they have been chosen to define or explain complex or ambiguous situations including business (An & Gower, 2009), politically or economically relevant events (Constantinescu & Tedesco, 2007; Han, 2007; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000), and social problems (Iyengar, 1991). Generic frames are presented in the following order of predominance of frame types in news coverage: attribution of responsibility, economic, conflict, human interest, and morality (An & Gower, 2009).

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) define those generic frames as:

- **Responsibility** frame presents an issue or problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for its cause or solution to either the government or to individual or group.
- **Economic** frame reports an event, problem, or issue in terms of the consequence it will have economically on an individual, group, institution, region or country.
- **Conflict** frame emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions, as a means of capturing audience interest.
- **Human interest** frame brings a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem.
- **Morality** frame puts the event, problem, or issue in the context of religious tenets or moral prescriptions. (p. 95)

Besides the generic frames that focus on the news content and themes, three dimensions of operationalizing frame could also well explore the news frame’s attributes: time, space, and tone frame (Bichard, 2006; Liu, 2010).

**Organization Frame**

However, mass media are criticized for being biased in deciding which news frame to be more salient than others. For example, mass media was found to over emphasize the individual responsibility but obscure governmental responsibility when discussing poverty, terrorism, and epidemics (Brown, Zavestoski, McCormick, Mandelbaum, & Luebke, 2001; Iyengar, 1996; Kim & Willis, 2007), which facilitates incumbent officials to escape the duty of social issues (Iyengar, 1996). It is hard to infer whether mass media would also bias an organization’s responsibility as well as responses when reporting a business crisis. On the other hand, organizations’ webpages provide a platform where business can independently speak for their own and provide the original and un-garbled information. Particularly, many organizations routinely post the links of their news releases on the “fan pages” of many social media, like Facebook and Twitter, which enable those news releases to reach and influence a bigger size of population.

**Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)**

In the face of a crisis that is framed as negative, uncertain, or unexpected in mass media, most people are actively engaged in figuring out which particular parts of the stable environment relate to the event (Kelley, 1967). This process is called attribution of responsibility that occurs spontaneously and prominently in people’s daily perceptions of social issues (Weiner, 1985a, 1985b). The high level of perceived responsibility would generate the undesired emotions and negative evaluations of organization and harm organization’s reputation, especially when the organization is shown to be at fault, irresponsible to concerns, or purposefully did not to rectify problems (Choi & Lin, 2009; Coombs, 1998; Glik, 2007).
The reputation harm, however, could – ideally – be diminished by different kinds of communication strategies. Picking a strategy appropriately and ethically is so important that it has an impact on the duration and magnitude of the crisis. The selection of an inappropriate strategy is even worse than no response at all (Bradford & Garrett, 1995; Liu, Austin, & Jin, 2011).

Situational crisis communication theory suggests a series of mass-mediated communication strategies by which crisis communicators expect the stakeholders’ evaluations of the organization via the way mass media frame the crisis and attempt to elicit the stakeholders’ positive evaluations via providing the appropriate responses on the media coverage (Coombs, 2007). The first step of reputation repair is to determine the crisis type via accessing the level of framed crisis responsibility in mass media: victim cluster by which the organization is viewed as the victim of the crisis and attributed the weakest level of crisis responsibility, accidental cluster by which the organization is considered to unintentionally or uncontrollably trigger the crisis and attributed the minimal level of crisis responsibility, and the preventable cluster by which the organization is believed to purposely trigger the crisis and attributed the strongest level of crisis responsibility (Coombs, 2007). By identifying the crisis type, crisis communicators could determine the level of crisis responsibility stakeholders attribute to the organization and expect the level of reputation damage. Nevertheless, mass media are known to exaggerate the seriousness of the events (Seale, 2003) as well as the individual responsibilities for social issues (Iyengar, 1996).

It is generally believed that the higher level of crisis responsibility, the more accommodative response strategy to be selected; whereas the lower responsibility, the more defensive strategy (Coombs, 1998). SCCT locates the response strategies continuum managing from defensive to accommodative: Deny (attack the accuser, denial, scapegoat, or suffering), diminish (excuse, deny volition, or justification), rebuild (compensation, apology, repentance, or rectification), and reinforce (bolstering, transcendence, or ingratiation). In order to track the efficiency of response strategies and figure out if those strategies were correctly reported in mass media, this study compares the identified response strategies between mass media and Toyota news releases.

Ethics of Crisis Response

Public relations has been conceptualized as both a public evil (Stauber & Rampton, 1995) and a public good (Bowen, 2010; Taylor, 2010). In reality, the ethics of the field varies dramatically from case to case, issue to issue, and depends largely on the ethical knowledge of the Chief Communication Officer (CCO) (Neill & Drumright, 2012). Bowen (2008) found that many CCOs act as ethical consciences in their organizations, yet some are not permitted the access to top decision makers to act as an ethical conscience (Bowen, 2009) or they do not have the training to act as an ethics advisor (Bowen et al., 2006). For public relations to act as an ethical conscience, the function must have a seat within senior management to contribute to strategic planning and organizational decision-making. In that manner, they represent the interests of both the organization and of the publics upon whom doing business has consequences (Grunig & Repper, 1992). Additionally, from the perspective of moral philosophy, consequences are an inextricable part of doing business and mean that an organization is required to engage in ethical deliberation. Not to do so would be in an act of selfishness or prudential self-interest, unworthy of consideration in moral philosophy as a form of ethics (Kant, 1785/1964).
Although varying levels of responsibility for the strategic communicator are present, the fact remains that a crisis of the severe nature faced by Toyota invariably involves an ethical responsibility to consumers and other publics. Any time lives are at stake, fatalities are a potential or real consequence, and trust is at risk, an organization should conduct rigorous and methodical ethical analyses (Sims, 1991). In that manner, the strategic communication functions and the CCO acts not only as an organizational conscience, but also in the public (Goodpaster, 2007).

Moral philosophy holds that there are two different levels of responsibility (De George, 2010). The first is a moral responsibility shared by all people, which involves a duty to tell the truth and to prevent harm to others. People can bear moral responsibility without doing anything to cause an action, but simply by existing (for example, a bystander may have a moral responsibility to offer assistance to a stranger having a heart attack). The second form, causal responsibility, is a higher level of moral responsibility, meaning that the moral agent actually causes an action through their decision (harm due to failure to act, in this case). By causing an action, one accepts more of the responsibility burden for the consequences of that action than would a bystander or uninvolved person. Causal responsibility is the most direct form of moral responsibility, in which one is directly implicated in the consequences of one’s choices.

Moral deliberation about the ethical course of action can take one form, or a combination of several forms, ranging from consequence-based utilitarian reasoning to a principle-driven deontology approach. Utilitarianism asks the decision maker to predict the potential consequences of an action and determine what is ethical based on the outcomes. Utilitarian approaches seek to maximize the greatest good for the greatest number of people, while minimizing harm or negative consequences (Mill, 1861/1957). Simply stated, that which serves the public interest or has more positive than negative consequences is the ethical action, according to this philosophy.

By contrast, deontology does not seek to assess the potential outcomes of an action, but determines ethics based on moral principle and a duty to uphold that moral principle (Kant, 1785/1964). The means deontology uses to assess principle are by asking if an action can be universalized (meaning it hold a quality of reversibility and generic applicability), if it maintains the dignity and respect of all involved, and if it based on a good will or pure intention (Kant, 1785/1964). If all of those conditions are met, the action is deemed ethical.

Ethics is connected to trust between publics in an organization. A breach of ethics causes an organization to lose the trust of publics, destroying a long-term relationships, brand loyalty, and resulting in a tarnished organizational reputation. In tracking the ethics of the Toyota crisis in the years since its inception, combined with a content analysis conducted in this paper, the authors attempt to integrate crisis management with that of ethics in public relations. Ethics should be foremost in the minds of those who consider an organization’s reputation and a board factor of success.

Along with the concerns of news framing and effective crisis response, an organization must also respond in an ethical manner to potential or real crises. Therefore, we designed the following research questions based upon our review of this literature:

**RQ 1:** Are there differences in how often print media leaders (*The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today*) and Toyota official new releases (posted on their website) use generic frames when covering crises?
RQ 2: Are there differences in how often print media leaders (The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today) and Toyota official new releases (posted on their website) use operationalizing frames when covering crises?

RQ 3: Are there differences in how mass media and Toyota news releases frame the crisis type?

RQ 4: Are there differences in how mass media and Toyota news releases report the Toyota response strategies?

RQ 5: Does the tone of news stories in mass media related to the used response strategies of apology, deny volition, and repentance strategy?

RQ 6: Are there ethical missteps in this case by Toyota officials, as was alleged, that can be seen upon a review of the coverage?

Method

This study employs a content analysis to examine news coverage concerning the Toyota crisis from January 16, 2009, through November 21, 2012, in the following media: The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today, and the news releases listed on the Toyota official website. This study also analyzes the ethical issues within their responsibility to respond accurately to safety concerns of consumer and regulatory publics.

To retrieve the news stories from mass media, we selected The New York Times, The Washington Post, and USA Today for their national circulation and modest geographical emphasis. Those media outlets have thus been employed quite often in content analysis researches (An & Gower, 2009; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Kim & Willis, 2007). Focusing on the recalls that occurred in 2009 through 2012, this study searched LexisNexis database with the keyword, “Toyota recall,” appearing in the whole news story and retrieved 356 stories in those three media outlets. This study then excluded abstracts, duplicates, and unrelated items and eventually got 343 (66.9% of the total news stories) news articles in mass media including 141 (41.12% of the entire news articles in mass media) from The New York Times, 91 (26.53%) from The Washington Post, and 111 (32.36%) from USA Today, respectively.

To retrieve the news stories from Toyota news release, we searched the Toyota homepage-www.toyota.com- with the keyword, “recall,” by its own searching engine and retrieved 186 news stories. After excluding the stories considering the recalls happened off U.S., 170 (33.1% of the total news stories) news articles from Toyota news release were identified. We also run the frequency of Toyota news articles being shared by social media ($M = 8.14$, $SD = 38.45$), being “liked” by Facebook ($M = 13.05$, $SD = 85.74$), and being twittered ($M = .04$, $SD = 2.50$).

This study identified a total number of 513 news stories and examined the entire text of each news article as the unit of analysis.

Two graduate students were recruited as coders, who were first trained and then coded a randomly selected subsample (7.8%) of the data to get an inter-coder reliability of .70 (Scott’s $p$) for crisis type; .72 for operationalizing frame, .72 for responsibility frame, .85 for human interest frame; .85 for conflict frame; 0.90 for morality frame, .71 for economic frame, and .72 for response strategies.
Coding The Visibility of Generic News Frames

This study developed 18 questions that had to be answered as yes (1) or no (2) (Table 1) and adopted a deductive approach to frame establishment introduced and supported by previous studies (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) to detect the visibility of generic news frames embedded on the news coverage of Toyota crises. Each question was designed to measure one of five pre-identified news frames: attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict, morality, and economic frame. To verify whether those 18 questions could cluster into 5 distinguishable frames, we employed a principal component analysis with varimax rotation and yielded a factor solution that explained 69.95% of the variance of the framing questions (Table 1). We then excluded the question with factor loading lower than .05, a threshold used by prior researchers (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000), which is “Does the story suggest that an individual or group of people in society is responsibility for the problem?”

Cronbach’s alpha was used to check the internal consistencies for the questions whose factor loadings are higher than .50 within each factor. Alpha values were .62 for the attribution of responsibility frame (four questions); .89 for the human interest frame (four questions); .84 for the conflict frame (four questions); .90 for the morality frame (two questions); and .94 for the economic frame (three questions).

For each generic frame, a scale was formed by summing the scores of its own questions and averaging the summed score by the number of measuring questions (see Semetoko & Valkenburg, 2000). The values of each scale thus ranged from .00 (frame not present) to 1.00 (frame fully present), and different scores show different visibility strength of each frame.

Coding The Visibility of Operationalizing Frames

This study adopted Bichard’s (2006) frameworks and developed three dimensions (past, present, and future) of time frame and five dimensions (individual, community, state, national, and international) of space frame. Each dimension was measured by a question that should be answered as yes (1) or no (0). For example, “does the story mention a past event?” and “does the story focus on issues relevant to nation?”

Tone frame was coded with a five-item scale (1=negative, 2=slightly negative, 3=neutral, 4=slightly positive, and 5=positive).

Coding Crisis Types And Response Strategies

This research identified the crisis types and the response strategies via answering the questions (1=yes and 0=no) according to their operationalized definitions (Appendix I).

Data Analysis

Chi square and t tests were employed to answer research questions.

Results

Research question 1 asks about the possible difference between newspaper and Toyota news release in the use of generic news frames. As shown in Table 2, t-tests for independence reveal that Toyota news releases use attribution of responsibility frame significantly more often than newspapers ($t = -6.07, p < .01$); whereas newspapers present human interest frame ($t = 6.07, p < .01$) and conflict frame ($t = 10.51, p < .01$) significantly more often than Toyota news.
There is no significant difference between newspapers and Toyota news releases in the use of morality and economic frame.

Research question 2 asks about the possible difference between newspaper and Toyota news release in the use of operationalizing frames. Chi square tests for independence reveal that mass media employ past frame significantly more often than Toyota news release ($\chi^2(1, N=513) = 124.59, p<.01$); whereas Toyota news release employ present frame ($\chi^2(1, N=513) = 6.99, p < .01$) as well as future frame ($\chi^2(1, N=513) = 60.241, p < .01$) significantly more often than mass media. When it comes to the space frame, mass media employ individual frame ($\chi^2(1, N=513) = 34.234, p < .01$), community frame ($\chi^2(1, N=513) = 5.055, p < .05$), and international frame ($\chi^2(1, N=513) = 29.041, p<.01$) significantly more often than Toyota news release. There is no significant difference between mass media and Toyota to use state frame and national frame. When it comes to tone frame, chi square test reveals that mass media’s tone is significantly more positive than Toyota news release ($\chi^2(4, N=513) = 113.07, p < .01$).

Research question 3 tries to detect the possible difference between newspaper and Toyota news release in framing the crisis type. As shown in Table 3, there is no significant difference between newspapers and Toyota website in framing the Toyota crises as victim clusters. However, Toyota news releases frame the crises as accidental clusters significantly more often than newspapers ($\chi^2(1, N=513) = 5.675, p<.05$) and they frame the crises as preventable clusters significantly less often than newspapers ($\chi^2(1, N=513) = 55.005, p< .01$).

Research question 4 asks about the response strategies used on the media coverage. As shown in Table 4, there is no significant difference between newspapers and Toyota news releases to use the strategies of attack the accuser, scapegoat, excuse, deny volition, apology, and repentance. Newspapers use such strategies significantly more often than Toyota news releases as denial ($\chi^2(1, N=513) = 10.48, p < .01$) and compensation ($\chi^2(1, N=513) = 16.81, p < .01$), whereas Toyota news releases use the following strategies significantly more often than newspapers: suffering ($\chi^2(1, N=513) = 6.74, p < .01$), justification ($\chi^2(1, N=513) = 14.01, p < .01$), rectification ($\chi^2(1, N=513) = 72.44, p < .01$), bolstering ($\chi^2(1, N=513) = 15.20, p < .01$), transcendence ($\chi^2(1, N=513) = 23.12, p < .01$), and ingratiation ($\chi^2(1, N=513) = 30.86, p < .01$).

Research question 5 attempts to explore the relationship between the tone of newspaper reports and strategies used in newspaper. Chi square tests reveal that there is no significant association of the news tone and the used strategy of apology and deny volition. No news stories in newspapers use the repentance strategy.

We also detect that mass media are more likely than Toyota to quote government sources ($t=10.357, p<.01$), institute sources ($t=5.684, p<.01$), and industry sources ($t=9.342, p<.01$). Reliance on multiple sources by the news media is expected as a good reporting practice, so it is not an unexpected finding.

Finally, this study gleaned information from the news reports and Toyota newsroom related to ethics. Research question 6 asked if there were ethical missteps by Toyota officials that can be seen upon a review of the coverage? . The US government, in its capacity as regulator, levied fines against Toyota totaling almost $49 million and more than $16 million by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for its disregard of safety protocols. News reports criticized Toyota for not responding sooner to the crisis, indicating that complaints of problems with sudden acceleration, brake loss, and other issues, were reported by consumers and dealers and well known inside Toyota. News reports discussed that Toyota knew as early as 2004 of the problems resulting in the recalls beginning in 2009.
A post hoc ethical analysis of the situation finds an ethical problem in Toyota’s actions of initially attempting to defer blame and shift responsibility for the vehicle problems to others (drivers, suppliers, and so on). Moral responsibility involves a duty to tell the truth and to prevent harm to others. They were morally responsible for the faulty vehicles even if the supplier sent bad components because the consumer purchased a Toyota based on the reputation of the brand and a belief in quality. They did not accept the moral responsibility that was properly Toyota’s – instead, executives reacted by denying problems and by not working to quickly correct the problems.

Causal level is a higher level of moral responsibility, meaning that the moral agent (Toyota executives in this case) actually cause an action through their decision (harm due to failure to act, in this case). In this case, Toyota appears to be causally responsible for the many death, accidents, and financial losses resulting from the recalled parts after they knew a problem exited and failed to act (Maynard, 2010). Knowing of the problem and failing to act is a larger ethical transgression than in the uncertain beginning stages of the problem.

Toyota moved from simple moral responsibility to a more serious causal responsibility between 2004 and 2009 when claims mounted. Instead of proactively problem solving, Toyota did nothing but make efforts to hide the problem (CNN, 2010). To be causally responsible for the many accidents and lives lost in this case is a most severe moral failing. This failure to act shows that CEO Toyoda and other executives at Toyota did not engage in ethical analysis, and the resulting unethical actions const the company dearly in both finances and (more importantly) reputation.

Our data showed that ethically, Toyota came out better than may be expected in the media coverage examined for this research. There was no significant difference in the Moral Frame variable between the mass media and Toyota newsroom. However, our analysis does show that Toyota did not receive favorable coverage in other areas. The mass media were less likely than Toyota to report rectification strategies ($X^2 = 72.437, p < .01$), bolstering based on prior good works ($X^2 = 15.203, p < .01$), or transcendence for the future ($X^2 = 23.118, p < .01$) strategies conveyed by Toyota. Those messages not conveying may be due to the lack of ethical authenticity conveyed by Toyota to the news media.

**Discussion**

Employing a quantitative analysis of 513 news stories, this study explored the manner in which mass media reports ($n = 343$) and Toyota news releases ($n = 170$) framed the Toyota recall crisis from 2009 to 2012. The contribution of this study is four-fold: firstly, this study examined the difference between mass media and business news releases in framing a business crisis; secondly, this study identified the difference between mass media and business news releases in presenting business statements and responses; thirdly, this study demonstrated the business’ ethical issues in responding the crises; and finally, this study provides a range of practical implications in terms of selecting appropriate crisis response strategies.

Taking a closer look at the generic news frames, this study detects the dissimilar approaches by which mass media and Toyota newsroom frame the crises. Specifically, Toyota website is more likely than newspapers to use responsibility frame, whereas newspapers are more likely than Toyota site to use human interest frame and conflict frame. That is because most Toyota news articles endeavor to explain why the product harms happen and how to address those problems, that is, causal responsibility and treatment responsibility (Iyengar, 1991). And most Toyota news releases are written in an asymmetrical manner, only expressing their
opinions and rarely citing or making comments on the opinions of governments, media, or institutes. Compared to Toyota news releases, mass media tend to present, compare, discuss, and conclude diverse opinions from various sources within a single news article. Mass media also prefer human examples or victim experiences representing specific ideas.

The difference is also detected between mass media and Toyota newsroom in the use of operationalizing frames. Mass media are more likely than Toyota newsroom to mention past events; whereas Toyota is more likely than mass media to mention present and future events. That is because most Toyota news aims to describe the current recalls and emphasize their abilities to prevent future reoccurrences. Besides the current and future events, most news articles in mass media have a tendency to mention the business history, especially the past events that generated negative outcomes. When it comes to the space frame, mass media are more likely to mention the issues relevant to an individual, community and international, since mass media prefer to report individual victims, highlighting Toyota’s communication weakness between U.S. offices and Japanese headquarters, and discussing the crises impacts on international relationships. But Toyota news releases only pay attention to the product recalls and fail to deeply analyze the causes and consequences of the crises. When it comes to the tone frame, it is not surprising that mass media’s tone is more negative than Toyota news releases.

By identifying the communication strategies, this study detects that although Toyota employs a range of response strategies in their official statements during the entire crises, those strategies are not completely reported by mass media. Especially for the accommodative strategies, like rectification, bolstering, transcendence, and ingratiation, they are reported less frequently in mass media than in Toyota’s original statements. The strategies of apology, deny volition, and repentance used in mass media have little impact on the media tone.

This study also explored how media frame the crisis type for Toyota product recalls. Toyota would like to frame their recalls as accidental events, but mass media tend to frame them as preventable events by pointing out that Toyota intentionally delayed the recalls. The ethical responsibility to respond accurately to safety concerns of consumer and regulatory publics was not upheld by Toyota officials. Evidence showed that they were slow to accept the responsibility for faulty products, and initially tried to defer blame to others, such as suppliers and vehicle owners. Therefore, Toyota transgressed ethical standards at the highest level of responsibility: a causal responsibility and actively causing continued problems by denial and failing to address them. Much is left to be desired in their accountability for the problems, and many lives were lost as a result of their unwillingness to accept moral responsibility and agency for the issues and create an appropriate response.

How Toyota engaged in either of the forms of ethical analysis discussed in the conceptualization, lives may have been saved and the severity of the crisis may have been mitigated. They are using consequentialist, utilitarian reasoning we can conclude that Toyota did not act in the public interest. To protect the greatest good for the greatest number of people and minimize harms, Toyota executives, including CEO Toyoda, would have needed to act rapidly at the first sign of a pattern of complaints indicating a faulty part. An immediate recall would have been acting in the public interest by maximizing the number of people helped by the decision and minimizing the number of people harmed by it. Utilitarian philosophy would conclude that a speedy recall at the first sign of trouble was the ethical action for Toyota. That action would have also worked to maintain the organization’s credibility and reputation for quality, and increased its trust among publics.
We can conduct a deontological analysis of Toyota’s actions and also conclude that they handled the crisis in an unethical manner. By denying problems and covering up potential lawsuits, Toyota did not respect or offer dignity to the publics who purchased its vehicles. They took away the moral agency of those consumers to make an informed decision by not providing relevant facts and accurate information. Further, Toyota did not maintain its duty to uphold moral principle and do the right thing for everyone involved – it only do the right thing for itself and for its profitability. By acting based on prudential self-interest, deontology concludes that there is no moral worth in the decision, meaning that it is unethical. Finally, a deontological analysis shows that Toyota did not act with good will or a pure moral intention toward the people who purchased its vehicles, its dealers, or others on the road who may have been harmed by a faulty Toyota. Again, Toyota prioritized its own self-interest above the good will that it has a moral obligation to convey to other human beings. By not acting immediately to uphold moral duty to principle, to maintain the dignity and respect for publics it should have, and to act out of good will, Toyota handled this crisis in an unethical manner.

Practical Implications

This study demonstrates that Toyota failed to utilize their homepage to deal with their crises. Their news coverage is only focused on the dysfunctional products, like what part of the car is damaged and when they are going to start repairing. On the other hand, mass media tend to dig the internal causes, like the weakness of management and communication among various Toyota offices, and to highlight their negative impacts, like the loss of trust and damaged reputation. According to those media coverage, Toyota does not respond those criticism and suspicion aggressively. Even if they argued that some media reports are biased, their arguments are rarely cited by mass media. Toyota’s accommodative responses are also hardly reported by mass media and their online news are also hardly shared by social media.

This study also finds that the use of strategies of apology and deny volition would not influence the media tone, which also implies that Toyota needs more efforts to rebuild their reputation. Once credibility and trust are lost among key publics through unethical actions, it is exceptionally difficult to regain. Crises do not have to negatively impact reputation if they are handled in an ethical manner. Unfortunately, Toyota did not use any form of ethical framework to analyze their decisions, and the result is diminished credibility and reputation.

Practically, the researchers hope that other organizations can learn from these failures. Toyota should have acted as soon as issues management identified any potential problem with the vehicles, rather than engaging in denial, defensive, or blaming strategies. In conclusion, we recommend that a utilitarian or deontological ethical analysis be used to analyze the ethics of the situation as soon as issues management identifies any of emerging or potential problem. To do so could not only builds the organizations trust among publics, it could also enhance its reputation as an organization seeking quality, reliability, and accepting moral responsibility.

Limitations

This study only retrieved 170 news articles from Toyota news releases. This number is far less than the articles (343 news stories) retrieved from mass media sources. The difference in the news amount of each story type could influence the statistics results. Rebuild this study using what we believe are valid and reliable instruments tested by other researchers. We are indebted to them for their research efforts, but our instrument is only as reliable and valid as those originally created. Finally, we have a limited sample of prestige press news outlets. If we were to
include many other sources and online media, results may have been extremely different. Our ethical analysis is based on a qualitative analysis of those news reports. We recommend continued study in both quantitative and qualitative formats to increase our understanding of this landmark crisis within the automobile industry and how organizations can ethically respond to similar situations.
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Carty, S. S., & Healey, J. R. (2010, January 22). Toyota recalls millions more; Another accelerator issue hits carmaker USA Today, p. 1B.


Woodyard, C. (2009, September 30). Sliding floor mats lead to Toyota's biggest recall; 3.8 million vehicles affected after possible link to deaths., *USA Today*, p. 1B.

Woodyard, C. (2010, May 20). Luxury Lexus LS next for recall; Quality issues continue as Toyota brand has steering problem *USA Today*, p. 3B.
Table 1. Varimax rotated factor solution for the 18 framing items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framing questions</th>
<th>Framing factors</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>Human interest</td>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Attr. of resp.</td>
<td>Morality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution of responsibility frame</td>
<td>Does the story suggest that some level of Toyota has the ability to alleviate the problem?</td>
<td>-.038</td>
<td>-.220</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td><strong>.684</strong></td>
<td>-.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the story suggest that some level of Toyota is responsible for the problem?</td>
<td>-.076</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td>.188</td>
<td><strong>.591</strong></td>
<td>.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the story suggest solutions to the problem?</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>-.075</td>
<td>-.018</td>
<td><strong>.799</strong></td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the story suggest that an individual or group of people in society is responsibility for the problem?</td>
<td>.524</td>
<td>.174</td>
<td>-.113</td>
<td>-.068</td>
<td>-.123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action?</td>
<td>-.032</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td><strong>.607</strong></td>
<td>.100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human interest frame</td>
<td>Does the story provide a human example or human face on the issue?</td>
<td>.201</td>
<td><strong>.905</strong></td>
<td>-.044</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the story employ adjective or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion?</td>
<td>.183</td>
<td><strong>.648</strong></td>
<td>-.063</td>
<td>-.082</td>
<td>-.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue?</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td><strong>.880</strong></td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the story go into the private or personal lives of the actors?</td>
<td>.188</td>
<td><strong>.888</strong></td>
<td>-.082</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict frame</td>
<td>Does the story reflect disagreement between parties-individuals-groups-countries?</td>
<td><strong>.917</strong></td>
<td>.196</td>
<td>-.064</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.904</td>
<td>0.208</td>
<td>-0.044</td>
<td>0.036</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Does the party-individual-group-country reproach another?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>.902</th>
<th>0.127</th>
<th>0.008</th>
<th>-0.039</th>
<th>0.103</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>.539</th>
<th>-0.021</th>
<th>0.291</th>
<th>-0.149</th>
<th>0.145</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the story refer to winners and losers?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Moral frame**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>-0.024</th>
<th>-0.026</th>
<th>-0.068</th>
<th>0.122</th>
<th>0.886</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the story contain any moral message?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0.179</th>
<th>0.096</th>
<th>-0.019</th>
<th>0.031</th>
<th>0.871</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Economic frame**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0.012</th>
<th>-0.047</th>
<th>0.960</th>
<th>0.057</th>
<th>0.001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>-0.041</th>
<th>-0.081</th>
<th>0.914</th>
<th>0.102</th>
<th>-0.070</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>-0.015</th>
<th>-0.029</th>
<th>0.948</th>
<th>0.065</th>
<th>-0.038</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Independent samples t-test for the use of generic news frames

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generic news frames</th>
<th>Newspaper Mean (SD) (n = 343)</th>
<th>Toyota news release Mean (SD) (n=170)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attribution of responsibility</td>
<td>.81 (.26)</td>
<td>.92 (.16)</td>
<td>-6.07</td>
<td>495.34</td>
<td>p &lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human interest</td>
<td>.32 (.39)</td>
<td>.14 (.26)</td>
<td>6.07</td>
<td>468.87</td>
<td>p &lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>.52 (.41)</td>
<td>.17 (.32)</td>
<td>10.51</td>
<td>414.03</td>
<td>p &lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality</td>
<td>.17 (.36)</td>
<td>.15 (.25)</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>448.94</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>.42(.46)</td>
<td>.43(.48)</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>324.80</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis type</td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>Toyota news release</td>
<td>$X^2$</td>
<td>$df$</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim clusters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>38 (11.1%)</td>
<td>22 (12.9%)</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>305 (88.9%)</td>
<td>148 (87.1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidental clusters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>236 (68.8%)</td>
<td>134 (78.8%)</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$p &lt; .05$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>107 (31.2%)</td>
<td>36 (21.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventable clusters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>106 (30.9%)</td>
<td>4 (2.4%)</td>
<td>60.24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$p &lt; .01$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>237 (69.1%)</td>
<td>166 (97.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response strategies</td>
<td>Newspaper (n = 343)</td>
<td>Toyota news release (n = 170)</td>
<td>$X^2$</td>
<td>df</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attack the accuser</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6 (1.7%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>337 (98.3%)</td>
<td>170 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>36 (10.5%)</td>
<td>4 (2.4%)</td>
<td>10.48</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$p &lt; .01$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>307 (89.5%)</td>
<td>166 (97.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scapegoat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>33 (9.6%)</td>
<td>21 (12.4%)</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>310 (90.4%)</td>
<td>149 (87.6%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffering</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>17 (5.0%)</td>
<td>19 (11.2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>326 (95.0%)</td>
<td>151 (88.8%)</td>
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<td>Excuse</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>58 (16.9%)</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>139 (81.8%)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deny volition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>28 (8.2%)</td>
<td>8 (4.7%)</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>315 (91.8%)</td>
<td>162 (95.3%)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 (13.1%)</td>
<td>45 (26.5%)</td>
<td>14.01</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$p &lt; .01$</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>298 (86.9%)</td>
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<td>Compensation</td>
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<tr>
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<td>n.s.</td>
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<td>55 (16.0%)</td>
<td>54 (31.8%)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 (11.7%)</td>
<td>14 (8.2%)</td>
<td>1.42</td>
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<td>n.s.</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>303 (88.3%)</td>
<td>156 (91.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Repentance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (0.6%)</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>343 (100%)</td>
<td>169 (99.4%)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Chi-square tests for the response strategies
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bolstering</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>170 (49.6%)</td>
<td>173 (50.4%)</td>
<td>72.44</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>( p &lt; .01 )</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>150 (88.2%)</td>
<td>20 (11.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transcendence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>39 (11.4%)</td>
<td>304 (88.6%)</td>
<td>15.20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>( p &lt; .01 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>42 (24.7%)</td>
<td>128 (75.3%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ingratiation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8 (2.3%)</td>
<td>335 (97.7%)</td>
<td>30.86</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>( p &lt; .01 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>26 (15.3%)</td>
<td>144 (84.7%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix I. Crisis types and response strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Theoretical definition/Label</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crisis type: Victim clusters</td>
<td>Does the story suggest the crisis cause as natural disaster, rumors, workplace violence, or product tampering?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis type: Accidental clusters</td>
<td>Does the story suggest the crisis cause as challenges, mega-damage, technical error accidents and technical error recalls?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis type: Preventable clusters</td>
<td>Does the story suggests the crisis causes as human breakdown accidents, human breakdown product recalls, organizational misdeed with no injuries, organizational misdeed, management misconduct and organizational misdeeds with injuries?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attack the accuser</td>
<td>Does Toyota confront the person or group saying there is a crisis, claiming no crisis exists?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Does Toyota asset there is no crisis?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scapegoat</td>
<td>Does Toyota blame some person or group outside of the organization for turning this into a crisis?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffering</td>
<td>Does Toyota claims organization is the unfair victim?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>Does Toyota minimize responsibility by denying intent to do harm?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deny volition</td>
<td>Does Toyota minimize responsibility by claiming inability to control?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>Does Toyota minimize the perceived damage caused by the crisis?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>Does Toyota offer money, compensation, or other gifts to victims?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apology</td>
<td>Does Toyota indicate the organization take full responsibility for the crisis?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repentance</td>
<td>Does Toyota ask for forgiveness?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rectification</td>
<td>Does Toyota say they are taking action to prevent future recurrence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolstering</td>
<td>Does Toyota tell stakeholders about past good works of the organization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcendence</td>
<td>Does Toyota place crisis in a larger, more desirable context?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingratiation</td>
<td>Does Toyota praise stakeholders or thank for their help?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Starbucks, Reputation Management, and Authenticity:  
_A Case Study of Starbucks’ United Kingdom Tax Crisis & “#SpreadTheCheer” Campaign_

Shannon A. Bowen  
Diana C. Sisson  
University of South Carolina

**Abstract**  
Using an informal qualitative analysis, we explored whether Starbucks’ corporate ethics insulated its reputation from negative media coverage about tax evasion and social media outcry in its “#spreadthecheer” campaign. Framed by the literature on authenticity, situational crisis communications theory, public relations ethics, and reputation management, our findings illustrate a complex interplay of reputational variables.
Purpose

Organizations build reputations through a complex interplay of many variables and interactions, including -- and perhaps most importantly -- organizational philosophy or values and their enactment through ethics. The best organizations align reputation management strategies with organizational ethics, which can be seen in the mission and vision statements as representations of core values.

During times of crisis, an organizational strategy, be that proactive, interactive, or reactive, determines how it will be perceived by its publics. In some cases, a strong reputation may sustain the organization from the impact of a crisis or mitigate the negative effects of a crisis to varying degrees -- a concept that we refer to here as an insulated reputation. The purpose of this case study is to explore Starbucks’s tax crisis in the United Kingdom and repercussions through the hijacking of their Twitter feed in the holiday-themed “#spreadthecheer” campaign. We seek to understand the damage to Starbucks reputation caused by the crisis, or mitigated by its insulated reputation. We ask, to what extent were the themes that emerged in Starbucks’ response to the UK tax crisis consistent with an authentic reputation and an ethical organizational culture?

Literature Review

According to Coombs’ (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) organizational crisis posed numerous variables and response strategies that can alter reputational outcomes. A crisis is a period of instability or uncertainty in which the outcome will impact an organization in an extremely negative or extremely positive manner (Fink, 1986). The reputation of the organization is at stake during a crisis, but the outcome of a crisis is largely dependent on the organization, including how prepared, proactive, and responsive it is. Scholars who researched this area noticed that the reputation of an organization appears to be “insulated” from a crisis if it has already established authentic relationships with strategic publics that are based on trust. For the purpose of this paper, we will refer to this insulation as an “insulated reputation,” but some scholars refer to this as a halo effect or a suspension of belief among publics with established relationships (Coombs, 2000; Leuthesser, Kohli, & Harich, 1995).

Coombs (2006) posited that reputations are worth protecting in a crisis, even if they are comprised of intangible components. The importance of a corporate reputation is related to the nature of reputations, which are comprised of how members of the public perceive an organization. Citing Fombrun, Coombs wrote that corporate reputations have substantial economic significance, particularly when it pertains to “financial performance, sales, recruitment success, and government influence” (Coombs, 2006, p. 246). To maintain and guard a corporate reputation from negative repercussions during a crisis, Coombs and Holliday (2002) argued that organizations must choose appropriate crisis response strategies.

To examine reputation further, the concept of authenticity should also be studied as a component of reputation. Authenticity is a hallmark of good relationships between organizations and publics. Authenticity is based on a core of truth; that is, ethical values that the organization ascribes to and promotes within its culture and its decisions (Bowen, et al., 2006). Bowen (2010) researched the nature of public relations itself and described authentic ethics as the core of the organization -- where it holds values and then enacts those values through organizational decision making. Without enacting strong organizational values it is difficult or impossible to build credibility and trusting relationships with publics.

Trust and credibility among publics are enhanced when organizations act with moral rectitude and reflexiveness, in such a manner that authentic relationships are maintained (Bowen
Gallicano, 2013). It facilitates building trust and credibility when the public relations manager acts as a counsel to the dominant coalition, advising the CEO and top management on ethics. In that role, he or she can enhance the ethical rectitude of the organization, and helps maintain long-term relationships between the organization and publics based on credibility and consistency (Bowen, 2008).

Corporations that value trust and credibility project these traits through their corporate reputation (Fombrun & van Riel, 1997). Corporate reputations are “a collective representation of a firm’s past actions and results that describes the firm’s ability to deliver on multiple outcomes” (Fombrun & van Riel, 1997, p. 10). Whether a corporation is in the coffee or oil industry, corporations’ reputations are shaped by the industry that it conducts business, as well as its human resources, social responsibility, finance, or product quality practices (Fombrun & van Riel, 1997).

Several external indicators reflected a corporation’s reputation. Profit, risk, as well as market value of an organization had the greatest impact on corporate reputations as they are external indicators of a corporation’s ability to sustain its reputation (van Riel, 1997). An organization’s visibility in the media and shareholder involvement also seemed to be significant indicators. Van Riel postulated that “dividend pay-out ratio, social concern, size, and the extent of advertising” were additional factors and external indicators of a corporation’s reputation (van Riel, 1997, p. 298). Interestingly, when there was limited information or knowledge about a corporation based on its advertising, an individual’s evaluation of the product was lower (Gertsen, van Riel, & Berens, 2006, p. 438).

Van Riel and van den Bosch (1997) proposed a preliminary integrative model for determining organizational responses to strategic issues through an examination of organizational processes and previous organizational responses to strategic issues. Under this initial framework, van Riel and van den Bosch collated a list of propositions grounded in pre-existing literature focusing on corporate responses to strategic issues. Negative reactions to a corporation’s response to a strategic issue were based on certain characteristics of the corporation’s response. By citing Brockner et al. (1990), van Riel and van den Bosch (1997) posited that when a crisis is unusual, avoidable, or there is no clear or fair decision-making for victims of a crisis, the likelihood that external stakeholders will react negatively increases.

Regardless of the actuality of the situation, corporate reputations are largely based on perception (Dukerich & Carter, 2000). Assessments of an organization’s reputation come from the media, special interest groups, and community leaders. Corporate reputations constrain corporations’ responses as to what is an appropriate and effective response to reputational cues, particularly during instances where a corporation is trying to repair its reputation (Dukerich & Carter, 2000).

Reputations can buffer organizations from negative stakeholder reactions during times of crisis (Fombrun & Rindova, 2000). Using a case study analysis of the 1995 Royal Dutch/Shell crisis, Fombrun and Rindova (2000) argued that reputations are formed through a three-step process that takes into account the environment, the transmission of signal cues, and the aggregation that results in a reputational halo (Fombrun & Rindova, 2000, p. 80). Although reputations can be built through this process, a corporation’s actions are important components to maintaining a positive reputation among key stakeholders (Fombrun & Rindova, 2000). Even the organizations that take great care to maintain transparency in the interests of positive reputation should pay attention to ethical values, so that authenticity is maintained.
Authenticity Based on Ethical Values

Authentic reputation should be driven by a core of ethical values (Page, 2007). Ethics is central to organizational decision making that leads to a reputation for authenticity. Authenticity is built over time, and is comprised of transparency, genuineness, and a desire to be an ethical organization. Scholars who study organizational ethics assert that the management of an organization must be guided by ethical values matching the mission of the organization (Sims, 1991; Sims & Brinkman, 2003).

Using deontological moral philosophy, one can look deeper into the link between authenticity and reputation. Kant (1948) based his philosophy of ethics on the study of duty under the moral law based on the equal obligation of all rational decision makers. Organizations are therefore obligated to behave ethically, just the same as individuals are obligated. In that sense, managers must be guided by rationality and an obligation to do the right thing. Using rationality as a guide to ethical decision-making is intended to eliminate bias, capriciousness, greed, or other concerns that taint decisions or keep them from being made based on moral duty.

A second tenant of Kant’s (1793/1974) philosophy obligates the decision-maker to act with dignity and respect toward others, in essence communicating honestly and providing the needed information to make rational decisions. Publics may not agree with the organization but they can understand actions in which they were considered, treated with respect, and offered the dignity due to publics. Decisions that are made based on maintaining the dignity and respect of publics around the organization tends to be more enduring over time (Borowski, 1998). Additionally, respecting the values and views of publics can help the organization and incorporate new and diverse perspectives into it strategic management, ultimately helping to align the organization’s interests with those of its environment (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002).

Authenticity based on duty alone and dignity and respect still is not strong enough to provide a complete core of ethics for an organization. Perhaps the most important basis of authenticity is good intention, also known as good will or the pure moral will. Kant (1785/1993) elucidated that concept as the highest goal of ethics, arguing that good will alone was the only virtue that could not be corrupted. Basing an organization’s actions on goodwill before other concerns, such as prudential self-interest or finances alone, ensure that the decisions it makes are not myopic.

Kantian deontology requires that all three of these tenants be maintained: duty, dignity/respect, and good intention (Kant, 1785/1993). In so doing, authentic relationships with publics can be built and maintained, credibility is enhanced, the organization becomes consistent and reliable and publics ultimately learn to trust the organization. When an organization makes decisions that are seen as consistently ethical, or at least made with good intention, relationships can flourish.

Case Overview: Starbucks Background

As a case study, Starbucks provides both an excellent reputation and a crisis in which it was criticized publicly for alleged ethical wrongdoing. Starbucks is arguably the most successful coffee franchise in history. Founded in 1971 as a small coffee shop in Pike’s Peak Market in Seattle, Washington, Starbucks Coffee Company has grown into a corporation with about 18,000 stores in 60 countries (Starbucks Corporation, 2012b). Starbucks has positioned itself as an ethical corporation particularly through its business operations, which include its “responsible purchasing practices, supporting farmer loans and forest conservation programs” (Starbucks Corporation, 2012b).
Starbucks stated that its mission is “to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time” (Starbucks Corporation, 2012b). With this mission, Starbucks has placed importance on “building a great, enduring company that strikes a balance between profitability and a social conscience” (Starbucks Corporation, 2012b). Starbucks operates in 60 countries ranging from Argentina to Wales. It is a publicly traded company with a net worth of over $11.7 billion (Starbucks Corporation, 2011, p. 22). It is structured with a Board of Directors whose President and the current CEO of Starbucks is Howard Schultz. The public relations function is headed by James Olson. As of May 2012, Starbucks employs a workforce of 140,000 employees across about 18,000 stores, and sells retail products in those stores as well as made-to-order beverages based on coffee or tea (Starbucks Corporation, 2012a).

Starbucks’ corporate culture, as discussed in Michelli’s *The Starbucks Experience*, is focused on five key principles: “make it your own, everything matters, surprise and delight, embrace resistance, and leave your mark” (Michelli, 2007, p. 16). Former employees describe the coffee company as human-focused, built on a culture of respect for employees and its corporate partners (Michelli, 2007, p. 11). In other crises, Michelli notes that Starbucks operates under the philosophy of “when you are wrong, admit it, fix the problem, and stay the course in areas where you are making a positive difference” (Michelli, 2007, p. 144).

**The Tax Crisis**

Debate over multinational companies arose when a report released by the United Kingdom Parliament’s Public Accounts Committee criticizing multinational companies like Starbucks, Google, and Amazon for not paying or paying minimal taxes after earning significant profits in the United Kingdom for the past three years. Research conducted by Reuters shows that “Starbucks has reported no profit, and paid no income tax, on sales of 1.2 billion pounds in the UK” (Bergin, 2012a). More so, based on transcripts of investor relations phone calls from the past 12 years, Starbucks has reported losses, while telling investors that its UK operations were profitable (Bergin, 2012a). Public outrage was immense. Newly appointed Group of Eight (G-8) president, British Prime Minister David Cameron vowed to crack down on tax evaders. Breaking from the other companies listed in the Public Accounts Committee’s report, Starbucks vowed to reallocate funds to pay “extra tax of 10 million pounds a year for two years – more than needed by law…[and] said that it had always complied with UK tax law and the decision was part of a ‘process of enhancing trust with customers’” (Bergin, 2012b).

As part of a Christmas public relations campaign that occurred during the company’s tax troubles, Starbucks sponsored an ice skating rink outside of the London Museum with a large screen to display tweets live. The purpose of the campaign was to encourage Starbucks fans and customers—both ice skating and online—to share holiday cheer through the use of the hashtag, #spreadthecheer. Given Starbucks’ prominence in British newspapers for tax payments, disgruntled United Kingdom taxpayers took to tweeting about Starbucks tax practices with vulgar and profane language, which families with children at the ice rink could see on the screen set up next to the ice rink. Starbucks apologized for the “malfunction in their filtration system” (Stuchin, 2012).

Based on a review of media articles, Starbucks UK’s tax crisis can be classified as a smoldering crisis, which has been prolonged based on the current media agenda focusing on the British government’s fiscal austerity measures. This crisis may be the tipping point for Starbucks UK’s reputation given the amount of public outrage its tax practices elicited. Earlier in the month, Starbucks UK revealed that it was cutting employee benefits, which includes “maternity...
leave, paid lunch breaks and sick leave” (Cimaglia, 2012). Initial reports from Reuters begin in October 2012 (Bergin, 2012a) and the crisis lasted until late January, 2013.

Based on a review of the literature on reputation and crisis, and the above case history, the following research questions will be addressed:

RQ 1: To what extent were the themes that emerged in Starbucks’ response to the UK tax crisis consistent with an authentic reputation?

RQ 2: To what extent were the themes that emerged regarding Starbucks’ corporate response indicative of an ethical corporate culture?

**Method**

Using an informal qualitative analysis of news articles, Starbucks’ annual reports, #spreadthecheer Tweets, and David Michelli’s *The Starbucks Experience*, data collection helped to inform the discussion of authenticity and whether it helped to insulate Starbucks’ reputation during its crisis in the United Kingdom. Insights extrapolated from these data were analyzed through a framework moral philosophy. Data for analysis were grouped together by theme, using the constructs that constitute an authentically ethical organization: credibility, transparency, good intentions, and trust, as they are used to create authentic and consistent relationships between organizations and publics.

News articles for this study were collected from Google and Google News searches using the search terms “starbucks uktax,” “starbucks spread the cheer,” “#spreadthecheer,” “starbucks uk tax bill,” and “starbucks spread cheer.” The five search terms were chosen for their relevance to the case being studied. Additionally, these search terms were chosen because they produced over 1,000 search results. Using systematic random sampling with a skip interval of 22 and a starting point of 4, 44 articles were selected from a search population of 1,308,290 news articles. The starting point of 4 was chosen based on a random number generator. When one cycle of the article population was complete, another random number was generated as a starting point using the same data set, and the process was repeated at least five times.

Systematic random sampling was selected to route the algorithm used for Google News’ search engine optimization. News articles selected using this sampling methodology resulted in some “404 – Article not found” messages; thus, these articles were rejected from the inclusion into this study. News articles selected with this sampling methodology that were not relevant to the subject of this study were also rejected from inclusion. News articles hidden behind pay walls were additionally rejected from inclusion. With the use of several search terms, there was some duplication of articles selected, but duplicate news articles were not included in the data. Omnibus articles needed to discuss Starbucks in one-third of the article to be included.

Tweets pertaining to the “#spreadthecheer” campaign were selected by a Twitter search using the hashtag, #spreadthecheer. Given that data collection occurred several months following the peak of the crisis and Twitter does not archive Tweets for extended periods of time, limited Tweets were available for analysis. While this was limiting to a degree, some news articles that were collected provided screenshots or pictures of Tweets from the time period in questions, which provided context.

Starbucks annual reports from 2009-2011 were collected for analysis. Annual reports were analyzed to ascertain the organization’s depiction of its corporate culture, as well as its organizational statements regarding the organization’s tax practices. Starbucks’ annual reports were evaluated for their institutional response, and Michelli’s *The Starbucks Experience* was evaluated as a third-person account of the organization’s corporate culture.
Findings

A review of the documents regarding Starbucks’ UK tax crisis and “#spreadthecheer” campaign hijacking revealed several themes surrounding authenticity. Apology, genuineness, honesty, organizational response, public response, transparency, good intentions, and trust are core themes in this case study.

Apology and Trust

In both its United Kingdom tax crisis and in its “#spreadthecheer” campaign hijacking, Starbucks UK displayed authenticity by apologizing and accepting responsibility. Offering an apology was an attempt at regaining credibility, to show authenticity, and regain trust among key publics. Apologizing in both situations shows a pattern of authentic behavior. Additionally, Starbucks has taken supplemental efforts to bolster its reputation like running a promotional campaign. Kris Engskov, Starbucks UK’s managing director, noted that it would take time to restore lost trust with its customers. Engskov was quoted in a blog post as saying that, “We know we are not perfect. But we have listened over the past few months and…hope that over time, you will give us an opportunity to build on your trust and custom” (Shields, 2013). Additionally, immediately following the hijacking of Starbucks’ “#spreadthecheer” campaign, the company acknowledged and apologized for a malfunction in the filtration system, which allowed profane tweets about Starbucks tax practices to be seen at a family-friendly event. An apology and acknowledgement of fault in both contexts show an attempt to restore customer trust in Starbucks.

Genuineness

Having been placed on pedestals for their exemplar business practices, companies that have a strong ethical reputation face the strongest criticism. Thus, media attention tends to focus more on crisis involving companies embroiled in ethical dilemmas. Media coverage of the Starbucks UK tax crisis and “#spreadthecheer” campaign hijacking received significant media coverage online. In these articles, Starbucks shows genuineness by offering to pay the taxes that they owed and more for two years, even if the company does not turn a profit. Part of Starbucks’ organizational response is due to its corporate culture and potential negative economic impact. The coffee company acknowledges in its annual reports from 2009-2011 that, “consumer demand for our products and our brand equity could diminish significantly if we fail to preserve the quality of our products, are perceived to act in an unethical or socially irresponsible manner or fail to deliver a consistently positive consumer experience in each of our markets” (Starbucks Corporation, 2010).

Honesty

Some individuals question whether Starbucks UK was only being honest because its tax practices were subjected to scrutiny. A large portion of the public outrage found in the media articles questions Starbucks corporate values and whether it succumbed to public pressure and looming customer boycotts. One individual stated in The Guardian, “the company's ‘here's £20m over two years’ solution struck me as the worst possible gesture, admitting the misdeed while at the same time remaking the world as a place where PR is more important than taxation” (Williams, 2013). While these questions are valid, there is something to be said for being truthful in a tough situation. Starbucks provided a truthful account of their business dealings and tax negotiations with the United Kingdom’s government in their testimony before Parliament. According to a blog post on the National Review Online, Starbucks UK “admitted that its British business had made large payments for coffee to a profitable Starbucks subsidiary in Switzerland
and large royalty payments to another profitable subsidiary in the Netherlands for use of the brand and intellectual property” (Stuttaford, 2013).

Clearly, Starbucks UK knows that it has a public relations crisis on its hands. Hiring an outside agency, WPP, in addition to the efforts of its internal staff, is an indication of conflict occurring within the organization. Or perhaps, this is an instance where the internal staff recommended the external agency to validate a position that they recommended. Deeper understanding of the organizational culture inside Starbucks UK and understanding management’s decision-making process is not possible due to lack of access to internal documents, but would be a valuable future extension of this case study to provide a more complete view of the strategy inside the organization.

Interestingly, Starbucks UK’s organizational response regarding its tax practices differed slightly prior to the crisis than when it actually occurred. Michelle Gass, Starbucks’ European president, was quoted saying that “the company had ‘never avoided paying taxes’” (Rushe, 2013). At the tipping point of the crisis when an organization response was imperative, Starbucks UK managing director Kris Engskov candidly stated, “Today, I am announcing changes which will result in Starbucks paying higher corporation tax in the UK - above what is currently required by law... we believe we could pay or prepay somewhere in the range of £10m in each of the next two years in addition to the variety of taxes we already pay” (kidsleepy, 2012).

Backlash from Starbucks UK’s tax crisis was immense. Public response from customers and politicians was largely unfavorable towards the coffee company. Prime Minister David Cameron was quoted on tax evasion by multinational companies at the World Economic Forum saying that, “Companies need to wake up and smell the coffee, because the customers who buy from them have had enough” (Rushe, 2013). UK Uncut, an activist group, called for protests against Starbucks UK’s tax practices, while others voiced their opinions by hijacking the company’s “#spreadthecheer” holiday campaign. Some of the anti-Starbucks tweets posted on the video screen include: “Hey #Starbucks, PAY YOUR F—ING TAX #spreadthecheer,” or “#spreadthecheer Tax Dodging MoFo’s,” or “I like buying coffee that tastes nice from a shop that pays its tax. So I avoid @starbucks #spreadthecheer” (Dalton, 2012).

While public response was largely unfavorable, there have been some advocates for Starbucks UK. One such person was Sir Martin Sorrell, who heads the advertising agency contracted by Starbucks. Sorrell’s commentary counters overwhelming public sentiment. In an interview with the BBC, Sorrell stated that, “Starbucks did not do anything underhand at all...Let’s be quite clear, they did negotiate with HRMC [HM Revenue & Customs] and agreed a royalty and it was perfectly transparent” (Bowers, 2013). While Sir Martin Sorrell has a vested interest in his comments, third-party credibility was used to bolster Starbucks UK’s reputation and to validate its actions as transparent, lawful, and consistent with the expectations of its stakeholders. Additionally, some individuals have pointed out that each individual Starbucks store is a franchise, who are like “small businesses that are paying cooperation tax—assuming they make profit” (Zientek, 2013).

Transparency

Given their “secret” negotiations with the government regarding their tax rate, some individuals question Starbucks UK’s commitment to transparent business practices. One blogger noted that, “many in the UK would disagree with the transparency point as SB along with a number of the other multi-nationals have been avoiding paying corporation tax in Britain”
(Hunter, 2012). Tom Bergin, a reporter at Reuters, found that Starbucks UK told investors that the company was generating a profit, while it was incurring significant losses. Bergin postulated that Starbucks UK was able to do this because “the UK unit made payments to a Dutch one for which the company had secured a very low tax rate…After its low tax payments were exposed, the company promised to pay extra tax of 10 million pounds a year for two years – more than needed by law” (Bergin, 2012b). Some individuals saw the Starbucks UK tax crisis as another event that degraded trust in business and thus, by extension in Starbucks. One article noted that, “there is a widening gap between the trust people have in business and the trust people have in the leaders of those institutions to tell the truth” (Baker, 2013).

In an attempt to allay public furor, be transparent and garner the holiday spirit, Starbucks UK launched an initiative with a Twitter component—its “#spreadthecheer” campaign. The decision regarding the timing of this campaign is questionable. Several media articles lambast Starbucks for being naïve in thinking that the hashtag component of the “#spreadthecheer” campaign would not draw negative public response. One blogger asserted that, “it seems that the marketing folks at Starbucks UK have taken that media sword and committed Hari Kari for a recent Christmas-themed Twitter campaign” (Dalton, 2012). Another blogger noted that,

“For starters, Starbucks shouldn’t have assumed that everyone on Twitter would use #SpreadTheCheer as intended. Freely promoting #SpreadTheCheer tweets in a live display left Starbucks extremely vulnerable -- that sort of public forum can lend itself to many types of attacks and criticisms. Not vetting the tweets or promoting the right sort of #SpreadTheCheer messages brought more attention to the situation than it may have otherwise received, particularly given Starbucks’ position as a globally recognized brand” (Lawton, 2012).

**Good Intention**

Intention, or the morally good will, is the most stringent text in Kantian moral philosophy. It is also difficult to determine in a case study from an external vantage point, relying primarily on media reports. So the researchers cannot determine whether Starbucks intended to evade taxes or used an established tactic of negotiating a favorable tax rate in return for job creation. Their intention at the outset of the crisis is unknowable to all but those inside the organization. Starbucks responded to the tax criticism by increasing the amount paid and also paying for what many claimed were taxes owed, so we can conclude that their response to critique was made with good intention.

Media coverage of the “#spreadthecheer” campaign hijacking depicts Starbucks UK as having good intentions with its Twitter campaign. Articles tend to refer to the “#spreadthecheer” campaign as well-intended, but naïve given the media climate surrounding its corporate tax practices in the United Kingdom. One blogger noted that, “Starbucks should have recognized that many seemingly harmless hashtags can be taken out of its original context and used by consumers in unintended ways” (Lawton, 2012).

**Discussion**

Authentic corporate cultures should align with corporate business practices in order to reduce the potential for crises to occur. Authenticity, as it pertains to Starbucks, is acting “the same on the inside as one appears to be outside an organization” (Bowen, 2010, p. 579). Starbucks appeared to have its ethical rectitude in line with the duty and obligation that is owed rational decision makers – at least when pressed and criticized for the tax payments it had made.
Further, Starbucks treated publics with dignity and respect because it reacted to the tax crisis with rectitude. Intention is difficult to ascertain, but one can see that in this case Starbucks acted with good will post-crisis. The intention that was displayed by paying back taxes showed good will. The authenticity of Starbucks’s reputation in the UK has been criticized by some publics, but appeared to remain positive to the majority of publics.

Authenticity and transparency play an integral part in the development and management of an insulated reputation. An insulated reputation occurs when external image cues, which are generated by corporate identity and actions, and reputational assessments, which are communicated by stakeholders, meet (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). A good authentic corporate culture results in an insulated reputation, which negates the negative impact of crises. Organizations such as Starbucks with insulated reputations that have been developed and cultivated have enough brand equity to sustain their positions in their respective markets.

Dukerich and Carter (2000) argued that “corporate reputations are based on perceptions, and it is those perceptions that drive reputational assessments, regardless of the reality of the situation” (Dukerich & Carter, 2000, p. 98-99). More so, Dukerich et al. argued that the “magnification of negative reputation cues may also arise if the organization has historically had a poor reputation” (Dukerich & Carter, 2000, p. 106). Given the economic crisis and news agenda of the media in the United Kingdom as well as the reduction of benefits for its employees, negative reputation cues were magnified in Starbucks UK’s tax crisis. The public outrage surrounding Starbucks UK’s tax practices was amplified.

In the United Kingdom tax crisis, Starbucks UK benefits from the insulated reputation of the global Starbucks brand. While this reliance on the reputation of the global Starbucks reputation is present, Starbucks UK did not practice proactive crisis management amid the allegations of tax evasion and dishonesty in the mainstream media and in social media. Instead, Starbucks UK reacted to the crisis by explaining its tax arrangements with the British government, and then, offered to pay extra taxes for two year regardless if the company made a profit. Perceptions of a lack of honesty, transparency, and authenticity occurred as a result of Starbucks UK’s reactive crisis management strategies. Based on the data collected in this case study, it is clear that there was a perceived lack of transparency noted by the media regarding Starbucks UK. Dukerich et al. argued that, “the media play a large part in the dissemination of reputations” (Dukerich & Carter, 2000, p. 99). Perceptions of a lack of honesty could have been avoided by clear disclosure of Starbucks UK’s tax practices. Honesty must be the basis of organizational values, and transparency helps to avoid issues growing into crises even when good intention is present. We argue that it is possible that ethical core values and a strong organizational approach to ethics help to insulate its reputation among publics during a crisis.
Deeper understanding of the organizational culture inside Starbucks UK and understanding management’s decision making process was not possible due to lack of access to internal documents, but would be a valuable future extension of this case study to provide a more complete view of the strategy inside the organization. Another area of further research, as it pertains to this case study, is whether Starbucks acted ethically and authentically in their communications with its stakeholders, particularly in their communication in relation to their profitability in the United Kingdom.
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reputation-recovery-with-monday-promotion/4005265.article


Abstract

Using a content analysis of editorials, columns, letters, opinion pieces and articles (N = 241), this study identified publicity tactics used by PETA and covered by the media, and calculated its media reputation during two of its most notable campaigns. The study also discusses connections between literature on publicity tactics, press agentry and activism and their relevance to data obtained from the content analysis. Findings from the study are used to make the argument that PETA’s use of press agentry and publicity is calculated and successful at stirring up controversy and news coverage, all of which are appropriate in the context of activism.
Introduction

(PETA) is a tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that has exponentially expanded its operations, redefined the limits of activism and established itself “in the public mind as the animal rights group par excellence” (Phelps, 2007, p. 237). It is common to read headlines of the various publicity tactics PETA uses to propagate its vision of protecting the rights of helpless animals and promoting the mass-adoption of the vegan lifestyle. The public’s responses to these occurrences range from controversy and outrage to further discussion and support of animal rights that, this paper argues, are all calculated outcomes of PETA’s overall strategy.

Coombs and Holladay (2012a) suggested that scholars examining activist groups should move past the traditional focus on determining the appropriate organizational responses to their attacks, to reconceptualizing their activities as important contributions to public relations theory in their own right. This study responds to their call by empirically examining PETA’s use of press agentry and publicity tactics as strategic and efficient means of achieving its sole purpose, which is to challenge its opponents in its efforts to improve the treatment of animals. This study discusses connections between literature on publicity tactics, press agentry and activism, identifies the various publicity tactics used by PETA and analyzes the media reputation it developed using these tactics during two of its most controversial campaigns.

Public Relations Models and Activism

Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) four models of public relations – publicity and press agentry, both of which are based on one-way communication, two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric – have served as a notable foundation within much public relations research, and have formed part of the basis that helped public relations develop as an academic discipline. Other foci and perspectives have also developed through the creation of competing viewpoints that have been derived from discussing the limitations of the models.

One limitation, identified by Dozier and Lauzen (2000), is that research on the four models of public relations have influenced researchers to conceptualize activist groups as merely obstacles or nuisances to the operations of deep-pocketed organizations. The authors discussed how the majority of research on activism has been predicated on the invalid notion that the two-way symmetrical model accurately represents the ways in which activist groups desire to communicate with their opponents. They challenged this notion by arguing that the conflicting nature of these interactions is often based on irreconcilable differences, which they defined as “situations in which the very existence of an organization and its behavior are unacceptable to an activist public” (p. 12).

Other researchers have presented arguments to explain why activist organizations resort to using asymmetrical tactics such as the publicity stunt. For example, Leichty (1997) argued that activist groups often use confrontational and aggressive strategies with their opponents because of what he labeled as an “antagonistic interdependence” they have with their opponents. Activist groups are reliant on the establishment of confrontational relationships, especially those that take place in the media or another public forum, because those confrontations allow them to spread their messages and retaliate against their opponents in the most public way possible. Asymmetrical tactics like the publicity stunt serve as successful means that allow an activist group to be heard and claim its place on the media agenda.

Coombs and Holladay (2012b) claimed that the overall strategy of an activist group often begins with the use of asymmetrical activities to command the attention of its opponent, which
are then followed by the use of symmetrical communication activities. Their argument demonstrates the underlying need for activist groups to find ways to break through the clutter of the entertainment-focused news agenda and the hundreds of other groups fighting for donations and people to support their causes. The use of both asymmetrical and symmetrical tactics serves varying purposes for activist groups, depending on their targets.

Aldory and Sha (2007) argued that activist groups serve the dual roles of acting as a public for their targets and an organization for their constituents. They enact the public role by attempting to influence or challenge target organizations, while the organizational role involves creating advantageous relationships with their own stakeholders or members. Researchers have reasoned that asymmetrical communication activities are more effective when attempting to challenge targeted opponents (Coombs & Holladay, 2012b) and symmetrical activities are more appropriate when communicating with the general public (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002). In this same vein, Jiang and Ni (2009) argued that activist groups successfully define themselves according to the strategies they use to communicate with internal and external stakeholders.

Some activist groups, like PETA, have successfully defined themselves as radical as a result of pushing the boundaries of how they exert pressure on opponents. The use of aggressive tactics such as “vitriolic rhetoric, disruptive image events, actions that provoke violent backlashes, unreasonable demands, pressure against targets’ accomplices, harassment, and sabotage (Derville, 2005, p. 529)” easily define such radicalism. Derville argued that the use of these tactics provide activist groups with a sense of fulfillment that cannot be obtained using collaborative tactics.

Press Agentry and Activist Publicity Tactics

Grunig and Hunt (1984) argued that the press agentry model of public relations involves the dissemination of messages that are one-way in nature, which implies that the organization does not obtain or consider feedback from its target. Often labeled as a form of craft PR, press agentry is also viewed as asymmetrical, meaning its purposes are imbalanced or focused more on changing its targets with no intention of changing the organization itself (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). Its underlying premise, no publicity is bad publicity, means that practitioners using the model attempt to obtain media exposure for their organizations using any means necessary, often ignoring ethical principles and the integrity of the media (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002).

The works of early press agents and their focus on manipulating unsuspecting targets have arguably tainted the history of public relations and resulted in numerous criticisms of the press agentry model. For almost 100 years press agents have been given unfavorable labels by scholars including “one-sided propaganda specialist[s]” that merely serve the purpose of “draw[ing] attention to something” (Bivins, 1989, p. 66), the “instrument[s] of infection” for propaganda and “the poor relation of the journalist” (Brown, 1921, p. 610). Journalists have also branded press agents as “spacegrabbers” with an incessant desire to solicit free publicity and undermine the integrity of the journalism profession (Lucarelli, 1993, p. 883).

An unremitting desire to obtain publicity was the most detested characteristic of the press agent by journalists. According to DeLorme and Fedler (2003), this aspiration resulted in the development of one of the press agent’s most popular tactics, the publicity “stunt,” which they defined as “sensational creations that attracted columns of free publicity” (p. 105). These researchers discussed how the use of such publicity tactics rapidly increased because of their evident effectiveness, regardless of the negative way in which journalists viewed them. DeLorme and Fedler (2008) later argued “publicity stunts should be used selectively and with caution.
[because] they can be risky not only for the image of individual clients and practitioners but also for the credibility of the industry as a whole” (p. 10).

**Organizational Reputation**

If an activist group is defined by its use of communication, it can be argued that its use of communication is directly related to its reputation. Using the strategy that any publicity is good publicity, PETA has established itself as being a successful activist organization despite the amount of controversy it stirs with its arguably manipulative publicity tactics. Gotisi and Wilson (2001) defined organizational reputation as an “overall evaluation of a company over time [that is based on] direct experiences with the company, any other form of communication and symbolism that provides information about the firm's actions and/or a comparison with the actions of other leading rivals” (p. 29).

Lange, Lee and Dai (2011) claimed that for some organizations, “reputation can consist of simply being well known” (p. 150). Other researchers have reasoned that familiarity with an organization is a central component of organizational reputation (Greyser, 1999), which is similar to a dimension of reputation Rindova, Williamson, Petkova, and Sever (2005) labeled as perceived quality. The media play an important role in this aspect of reputation because they are capable of serving as a catalyst to increase the notoriety of an organization.

**Media Reputation**

The role the media play in stakeholder evaluations of an organization’s reputation has been well documented in extant research. Using literature on organizational reputation and agenda setting theory, Deephouse (2000) developed the concept of media reputation, which he defined as the overall evaluation of [an organization] presented in the media” (p.1099) He argued that media reputation is based on the assumption that constituents who are disconnected from an organization often rely on evaluative indicators in the media. The amount of publicity an organization receives in terms of media coverage is directly connected to the amount of notoriety it receives within the general public (Carroll & McCombs, 2003).

**Research Questions**

According to the review of literature, press agentry entails the use of publicity tactics that have been deemed as inappropriate when used by organizations to respond to the concerns of consumers. Their one-way nature, use of manipulation and effort to obtain publicity using any means necessary makes these tactics unacceptable for organizational use in any context.

This study makes the argument that these defining characteristics make the use of press agentry quite suitable in the context of activism in which radical activist groups openly disclose the use of strategies and tactics that are intended to manipulate and challenge opponents. This context provides an appropriate situation within which press agentry and the use of publicity tactics can be used appropriately and effectively. These fundamental characteristics are conducive to the overall goals of an activist group, which are to challenge its opponents, obtain publicity in the media and spark controversy that engenders further discussion of its cause.

Taking the activist context into consideration, this study seeks to first identify the various publicity tactics PETA uses to challenge its opponents by answering the following research question:

RQ1: What are examples of publicity tactics used by PETA and covered by the media?
This study also seeks to discover if a key reason behind PETA’s use of publicity tactics that fit within the realm of press agentry is to allow it to advance itself as a major player in the discussion of animal rights, an outcome that many more traditional public relations tactics such as press conferences, media releases, or the use of well-known spokespersons, are incapable of achieving. Taking this into consideration, the study’s authors ask these additional research questions:

RQ2: Does PETA’s use of traditional public relations tactics receive publicity in the media?
RQ3: Which PETA tactics are the most effective at obtaining publicity in the media?

According to Deephouse (2000), the evaluative attribute of media reputation is measured by assessing the favorability of coverage, or circumstances when the organization is praised for its actions or presented in a positive light to the public. Wry, Deephouse and Carter (2006) measured evaluative media coverage by conducting a content analysis and assessing the tone of articles, then using these data to calculate a variable based on the equation: Favorability = (# Positive codes - # Negative codes) / # Total codes (p. 234). The current study will use similar methods and procedures to answer the following research questions:

RQ4: What is the evaluative media reputation score of PETA during its anti-dairy campaign?
RQ5: What is the evaluative media reputation score of PETA during its anti-fishing campaign?

**Methodology**

This study used a quantitative content analysis to first identify the various publicity tactics used by PETA during its anti-dairy and anti-fishing campaigns. The sample was composed of articles published between 1999 and 2009 that were retrieved from the LexisNexis database using the search terms “PETA” and both “anti-dairy” and “milk” or “PETA” and “anti-fishing.” Seventy-one English-language publications from the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Scotland and Great Britain were found that contained articles relating to these two campaigns.

A sample of 140 articles was randomly chosen from the first 250 articles that topped the search list arranged by relevance for the anti-dairy campaign. Two of those articles were ultimately dropped because they were irrelevant to the topic, leaving a final sample of 138 articles that were analyzed for the anti-dairy campaign. The same method was used for the anti-fishing campaign, with the first 250 articles arranged by relevance that topped the LexisNexis search list also being the starting point. For this campaign 103 articles were ultimately analyzed because many of the articles sampled just mentioned the anti-fishing campaign, and really focused on other PETA campaigns.

**Coder Training and Inter-Coder Reliability**

During the first training session, the two coders reviewed the initial coding sheet, discussed the manner in which favorability would be interpreted in the study, and coded a random sample of 25 items selected from the larger sample. The initial coding allowed the coders to identify discrepancies and make minor changes to improve the coding sheet and procedure. To test for inter-coder reliability, both researchers coded the same 48 randomly
selected articles from both campaigns, which resulted in a final inter-coder reliability that ranged from .81 to 1.0 using Krippendorf’s alpha (Hayes & Krippendorf, 2007).

Coding Procedure

The coders read the full text of each item and identified the name of the newspaper or magazine in which it was published, date of publication, and type of tactic that was described in each article. The coders also rated each item according to its favorability or tone. Using a framework similar to that designed for examining the evaluative media reputation of an organization, (Deephouse, 2000; Pollock & Rindova, 2003; Wry, Deephouse, & McNamara, 2006), the coders rated each item according to whether it was positive, negative or neutral toward PETA.

Items that received a positive rating discussed or praised the work of PETA either without mentioning or by only briefly mentioning its opponents’ viewpoints, and articles rated as negative briefly mentioned PETA’s actions or viewpoints while using the majority of the words in the article to express the criticisms of its opponents toward PETA. The articles that were coded as neutral reached a balance in the words used to equally describe or report the viewpoints and actions of both PETA and its opponent.

Results

The first research question was focused on identifying the specific publicity tactics used by PETA. The content analysis revealed that the articles reviewed contained eight sensational publicity tactics related to the press agentry model of public relations. Their perceived effectiveness was determined by the fact that they were mentioned in each article. Table 1 provides specific descriptions of each tactic and the manner in which it was used by PETA to confront its opponents.

Results from the second research question revealed that PETA received significantly less publicity for its use of six traditional public relations tactics, which are listed in detail in Table 2. Traditional tactics included in the results were those that were actually mentioned in the article.

The third research question sought to identify the specific tactics, both sensational and traditional, that were most effective for PETA in terms of helping it achieve its objective of obtaining publicity about its cause. Data revealed that sensational print and billboard advertisements were discussed in 57% of the total articles (N = 136), using illogical arguments in 43% (N = 102), protesting the event of an opponent in 33% (N = 78), writing letters to the editor in 26% (N = 63), using celebrity activists in 19% (N = 46), using scientific evidence in 11% (N = 26), throwing substances in 5% (N = 11), and using naked women in 2% (N = 4) of the articles examined in the study.

The fourth and fifth research questions focused on identifying the evaluative media reputation scores for PETA during its anti-dairy and anti-fishing campaigns. Coding revealed 17 positive articles, 65 negative articles, and 56 neutral articles for the anti-dairy campaign (N=138), whereas coding for the anti-fishing campaign resulted in 24 positive articles, 56 negative articles, and 23 neutral articles (N=103). Data obtained from the analysis were used to identify that PETA’s overall evaluative media reputation score during its anti-dairy campaign was -0.35. Its overall evaluative media reputation score during its anti-fishing campaign was -0.31.

Discussion
This study is based on the premise that the work of activist groups provides important contributions to public relations theory and practice. A content analysis was used to examine PETA’s ingenious use of publicity tactics and to identify how those tactics influence its reputation in the media. Findings from the study demonstrate that publicity tactics are crucial elements of PETA’s overall strategy as it sparks controversy, gains public and media attention and keeps its agenda in the public forum.

Researchers that move past the negative labels placed on press agentry and publicity have an opportunity to evaluate their true efficiency and ability to assist activist organizations in their survival. Table 1 contains several publicity “stunts” that can be described as calculated strategies with measurable outcomes, and might better be termed publicity tactics, as the authors have done here. The manipulation and persuasion that are inherent in these publicity tactics are synonymous with the defining characteristics of activism. The true nature of an activist group is to challenge, influence, or change the ways in which its opponent operates, all of which are well served by the use of manipulative strategies.

**Calculated Publicity Tactics**

Two frequent publicity tactics PETA uses against its opponents are graphic and sensational posters, cards and billboards and making unreasonable demands on its opponents. Bold (2001), a writer for PR Week, discussed how PETA sponsored a campaign that used a sensational poster of a dog impaled with a fishhook and the caption, “If you wouldn’t do this to a dog, why do it to a fish?” (p. 9). This tactic initially attracted publicity from the media, and Bold argued that the success of the tactic was evident as additional media coverage was sparked by a report of a journalist who asked a PETA representative “if she planned on contacting the Scouts Association in Britain to drop its angling badge?” (p. 9). The outrageousness of this possible demand resulted in more calls and coverage from other reporters and media outlets. In this situation, reporters were drawn to the PETA representative because they wanted to further publicize her intentions of making an unreasonable demand on a larger organization if that was indeed the case. A PETA representative claimed that traffic to its website increased by 475% as a result of the publicity received from the campaign (Bold, 2001).

In its anti-dairy campaign, PETA used the tactics of sensational print ads and making illogical arguments as its members visited local elementary schools dressed as cows to hand out “Milk Suckers” trading cards. These cards vilified milk-related fictional characters such as “Windy Wanda and Pimply Patty” (Bailey, 2001, p. 13A). The cards attempted to make the invalid argument that milk consumption causes acne and flatulence. The school’s officials were quoted in the article as expressing their outrage with the lack of morality involved with promoting invalid arguments and propagandizing young children. Media outlets covered the entire event and included multiple quotes from critics, students and PETA members.

An example of an unreasonable demand by PETA is when one of its members contacts the CEO of a corporation to give the ultimatum that the organization immediately stop its production or operations. Even though PETA’s members realize that their opponent is not going to give in to its irrational demands, they can predict with reasonable accuracy that the organization’s management will use the media to discuss this situation in the public forum. This publicity tactic is considered effective because of its ability to spark controversy and promote PETA’s message in the media.

This finding is related to Dozier and Lauzen’s (2000) notion of irreconcilable differences. PETA gives its opponents ultimatums to stop certain actions or change specific policies that
would ultimately threaten their existence and ability to operate. The reasoning behind this tactic is that the absurdity of these requests is viewed as newsworthy by the media and their readership. Many of PETA’s opponents retaliate by using the media to express their discontent with PETA’s request, thereby creating more publicity for PETA.

For example, McKerron (2001) described how PETA initiated a multi-million dollar campaign to make the unreasonable demand that angling, the most popular participant sport in Great Britain, be outlawed. Networks like CNN refused to run several of PETA’s commercials in this campaign “on the grounds that it attacked a legitimate pastime and was too extreme” (p. 5). Having its commercials censored by the media was persuasive because it made those commercials more desirable to various facets of the public, and they sought them out in other media.

Two of PETA’s more sensational tactics are to protest events and throw substances either on or around its targets. In its anti-fishing campaign, several PETA members gathered to protest a popular fishing event by throwing rocks in the areas near the fishermen to scare away fish (Mueller, 1996). Mueller’s article quoted Tracy Reiman, PETA member and coordinator for the anti-fishing campaign, who stated that PETA’s members “won’t go so far as ramming fishing boats or cutting lines,” however, [they] may participate in other actions, like rock-throwing [to scare away fish] and riding around in a boat where people are fishing” (Mueller, 1996, p. B3). PETA has also become well known for flour bombing, or throwing full bags of open flour on movie stars wearing fur on the red carpet (Garib, 2000).

Findings of this study reveal that PETA uses dysphemism, which involves changing or describing the word or phrase associated with the actions of their opponent into something that is repulsive and unpleasing. For example, a PETA spokesperson was quoted as giving fishermen the negative and rather repulsive label of “lip rippers” in her interview with a reporter (Thompson, 2001). The “lip ripper” label was quickly picked up in the media and used in the headlines of multiple media outlets. The characteristics of press agentry clearly involve its use of persuasion. PETA’s use of dysphemism is opposite to the euphemisms used by various corporations to shape the ways in which their consumers view their products and services. Typical euphemisms are words intended to make a less attractive action seem more politically correct, however, PETA’s main objective is to make their opponent look as repulsive as possible.

One of PETA’s most well known tactics is its use of naked or scantily clad celebrities promoting the vegan lifestyle in its advertisements and commercials. Akerman (2009) described the overall success of these campaigns by pointing out that “few ploys are guaranteed to gain as much attention as naked young women…” (p. 20). He argued that PETA took advantage of “a clutch of high-profile representatives from among the usual coven of semi-celebrities hoping to lift their magazine profiles from thoughtless banality to at least the level of fingernail clinic intellectualism to spearhead the push against mulesing of merino sheep” (p. 20).

Although using naked women is a tactic that was not directly related to the anti-dairy and anti-fishing campaigns, it was still mentioned in many of the articles. Articles that discussed this tactic used it in unrelated examples to explain the methods used by PETA and to provide readers with examples of past events that helped PETA increase its notoriety among its opponents and the general public.

*Traditional Public Relations Tactics*

The findings of this study also indicate that PETA received a moderate level of publicity from its use of more traditional public relations tactics such as writing op-ed pieces or letters to
the editor, sponsoring fundraisers or membership drives, disseminating press releases to promote scientific evidence against the actions of their opponent and using Web pages and media kits. These tactics were specifically mentioned by the articles examined in the study in statements that indicated PETA used these particular tactics in its campaigns. These less sensational and more traditional public relations tactics are directed toward its internal stakeholders and prospective members. This finding coincides with extant research that argued activist organizations use less confrontational tactics while serving this one of its dual roles, which is to establish collaborative relationships needed for its survival (Aldory & Sha, 2007; Jiang & Ni, 2009).

Writing op-ed pieces and letters to the editor was identified as a significant component of PETA’s overall strategy. Many of the letters and op-ed pieces identified in the study were used to respond to the criticism PETA received about some of its publicity tactics. For example, one story publicized how Dawn Carr, a spokesperson for PETA, wrote a letter to the editor to explain the reasoning behind one of its protests. This tactic was used to counter any negative publicity in a reasonable and logical manner by allowing Carr to provide explanations for the actions of PETA’s members. This finding corresponds with Coombs and Holladay’s (2012b) argument that activist groups often use aggressive and asymmetrical tactics to command the attention of their opponents. After this has been achieved, members from the activist group are given a chance to respond with more symmetrical tactics.

Mueller’s (1993) article provided an example of how PETA attempted to provide arguably valid scientific evidence conducted by unnamed scientists revealing that fish feel pain just like their human counterparts. According to Mueller, a PETA representative addressed these research findings by arguing, “Fish feel pain, hence catching a fish can be ‘likened to a human having his hand impaled and being jerked off the ground by a hook caught through his flesh’” (p. C3). While the validity of this finding, the rigor of the study, and anonymity of the scientists were called into question by the author, this tactic still represented PETA’s attempt to attack its opponents with a more logical and less sensational tactic.

The use of celebrity activists is another tactic classified by the authors as being both traditional and sensational. Findings from the content analysis revealed that celebrity involvement with PETA’s campaigns varies in terms of how far the celebrity will go to represent the organization. An example of very sensational celebrity involvement is when Heather Mills McCartney went to the office of pop star Jennifer Lopez with a graphic video of animals being skinned alive for their furs (Jagasia, 2005). This resulted in a “chaotic scrum” in which McCartney was subdued and threatened by Lopez’s guards (p. 13). An example of one of PETA’s milder and more traditional forms of celebrity involvement is when PETA used the media to publicly announce its affiliation with actress Kim Basinger and the fact that she is “an ardent anti-fur activist and vegetarian” (Oldenburg, 1993, p. 2D).

**Appropriate Context for Successful Use of Press Agentry and Publicity**

The use of press agentry and publicity in the early 20th century was considered to be unethical and inappropriate. This paper argues that this perceived inappropriateness was a result of these tactics being used in the incorrect context. Early pioneers of public relations like Edward Bernays and Ivy Lee were aware of the negative ramifications of using press agentry with the general public and made valiant efforts to hinder its use by practitioners. What was missing from their, and later assessments, was identifying the ability of press agentry to serve as an extremely beneficial and effective tool for activists. This myopic view can be attributed to the corporate-centric view of public relations that existed during most of the 20th century.
The authors of this study believe that PETA’s use of questionable tactics is based on a deontological ethical perspective. PETA’s members appear to operate under the assumption that an organization can use potentially unethical means to achieve a more acceptable end of stopping animal abuse and death. In this context, the use of press agentry, which is often a manipulative tactic that pushes the limits of being ethical, is more accepted by society when used by activist groups because it is *for a good cause* or socially desirable end. This argument is backed with evidence that PETA is now labeled as the “largest and best-funded animal rights group,” with hundreds of employees and a multi-million dollar annual budget (Strauss, 2007, p. 3D). This modern example of press agentry differs from the traditional uses in the early 20th century where it served primarily as a means to achieve an end of corporate profit and self-interests.

The nature of the publicity stunt matches the needs of a radical activist organization like PETA. The ability of publicity stunts to attract attention from the media is best suited to PETA’s nonprofit status and need to spend the majority of its donations on serving its cause of protecting the rights of animals. Publicity stunts and tactics associated with press agentry also vary in terms of their levels of sensationalism, something that PETA uses to ensure that its messages are visible to the public and to attract the attention of its opponents.

For example, findings of the study demonstrate that PETA’s media reputation during the anti-dairy campaign was -0.35, and -0.31 during the anti-fishing campaign. Since a -1 evaluative media reputation score indicates a very negative media reputation and 1 indicates an extremely positive reputation, PETA’s two scores during its campaigns can be translated as being unfavorable enough to spark controversy, yet still maintaining enough favorability to demonstrate PETA’s effectiveness.

Articles that were coded as being written in a neutral tone were those that presented both PETA and its opponents’ points of view in an equal manner. When challenging the status quo, any activist group must find an effective middle group where its message can be compared to that of its opponents’. In this situation, neutral coverage is as much a desired outcome as positive coverage. One specific aspect of press agentry is that it is one-way dissemination of the organization’s message. Even using a publicity tactic that results in negative coverage still achieves this objective of having the organization’s point of view disseminated to the public for its consumption and evaluation.

Articles that were coded as having a negative tone also, probably inadvertently from the publication’s standpoint, served the purpose of sparking controversy, another way for PETA to get its message out. Findings from the study revealed opponents that wrote Op-ed pieces and letters to the editor in response to PETA’s publicity tactics unintentionally kept PETA’s name and agenda in the public spotlight. As opponents continued to write articles and provide the organization with more publicity, PETA’s members countered these responses by providing more letters to the editor, thereby creating even more publicity and dialogue about the issue of animal rights.

Other nonprofit activist groups also use persuasion and press agentry to obtain support for their causes. Activist groups work to stop transgressions that are considered unacceptable to most people within a western society, such as human rights issues, unlawful child labor practices, human trafficking and protecting the environment. Animal abuse has been a common occurrence in American history for so long that its absurdity has been masked, and cruelty ignored. Radical animal rights groups like PETA choose to uncover the absurdity of abusing animals by using arguably absurd tactics.
As the implicit nature of an activist group is to challenge the status quo, one has to reconsider the various constructs of organizational reputation and their applicability to activist organizations. More importantly, future research must determine whether a favorable reputation is required for a radical activist group to be successful. A more realistic view of activist group reputations may be that any radical activist group’s most effective strategy is to challenge those that oppose its viewpoints, thereby making their true success dependent on their ability to use communication, provoke their opponents and incite the public to listen to its message. An activist group’s success is also based on its ability to successfully use persuasion and manipulative publicity tactics like those associated with the press agentry model of public relations.

**Implications**

This study examined PETA as a radical activist organization that is extremely capable of using effective public relations tactics, whether or not they are accepted by the mainstream, against its opponents. The findings provide further evidence of the futility involved with attempting to respond to radical activist groups with symmetrical and collaborative tactics. Fishermen and dairy farmers around the world can hire public relations professionals to help them respond to PETA’s attacks, yet the ultimate conclusion of these interactions will most likely be labeled as an irreconcilable difference, a situation pointed out by Dozier and Lauzen (2000) more than a decade ago.

Organizations and practitioners alike must recognize the public’s tolerance for activist groups that effectively use communication, and brand themselves as challengers of the status quo and underdogs that are confronting the corporate world. For many members of PETA’s audience within the general public, its tactics are viewed in a positive light because they are intended to achieve an overall end that is viewed by that audience as desirable to society as a whole. The appropriate responses by those organizations viewed by PETA as its opponents to PETA’s tactics remain impenetrable, especially in circumstances that are deemed as irreconcilable and detrimental to the very existence of an organization. The researchers suggest, however, that sticking to scientific facts or economic realities and not mentioning the tactics PETA is using against an organization, will be the best way to discourage overwrought media coverage of whatever publicity tactic is being used by the activists. Another response that may be effective is for the organization to publicly indicate its willingness to talk with PETA officials to come up with collaborative solutions. To the public, this may result in views that the organization is willing to compromise and listen to PETA.

This study provided examples of press agentry and publicity tactics used by PETA as effective tactics that allow it to remain in the forefront as a successful activist group. Future research should continue to examine the effectiveness of publicity tactics by radical activist groups in terms of how they are perceived by current members of the organization and other members of the general public. Additional content analyses of media coverage of other activist groups would broaden the scope of understanding about the success of such publicity tactics. Case studies of successful organizational responses to such activities by activist groups would help practitioners on the corporate side to better rebut the tactics used against them.

**Conclusion**

Publicity tactics fit within the press agentry model of public relations, which suffers from a bad reputation because of its unsavory past. While its foundational premise, no publicity is bad publicity, has some ethical faults, it makes a great deal of sense when applied to the context of
activism. Activist organizations must ensure their visibility in a public forum that is inundated with numerous other social causes and activist groups competing for attention and donations. Any form of publicity, regardless of potentially negative or unfavorable coverage, is better than being silent among the masses.

PETA’s use of press agentry and publicity tactics are well described in Strauss’s (2007) report on a documentary that labeled PETA’s tactics as being “subtle to extreme -- demonstrations by naked women, campaigns comparing animal slaughter with the human toll of the Holocaust, anti-dairy tirades urging college students to quaff beer -- outraging other advocacy groups ranging from the Anti-Defamation League to Mothers Against Drunk Drivers” (p. 3D). However achieved, one of PETA’s opponents made clear its power in the last line of that article: the director of the documentary “tried to get comments from meatpackers, drug companies and other PETA targets. No one wanted to go against them” (p. 3D).
References


Strauss, G. (2007, November 19). HBO unleashes an ‘Animal ‘ tale; Documentary chases the truth of the woman behind PETA. USA Today, pg. 3D.
Table 1 *Description of PETA publicity tactics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tactic</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shocking advertisements</td>
<td>The use of print, electronic or billboard advertisements that contain horrific, embarrassing or heinous depictions of the brand of an opponent or its spokesperson, usually related to murdering or harming animals. <em>(e.g. Colonel Sanders from KFC holding a decapitated chicken in one hand and the severed head in the other).</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Protesting opponents’ events</td>
<td>Involves sending groups of activists to protest an event related to their opponent. Members often dress in costumes and attempt to hinder or obstruct the action being protested <em>(e.g. PETA members attending an angling event dressed as fish)</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Celebrity activists</td>
<td>The use of well-known celebrities to spread the organization’s agenda among their fans and the general public. <em>(e.g. Heather McCartney, wife of Paul McCartney, getting in a physical altercation with Jennifer Lopez's security guards while protesting outside her office).</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Naked people, most often women</td>
<td>Involves the use of naked women, sometimes celebrities, in provocative photo shoots in print and online format. Also involves naked public protesters that are typically arrested for public nudity <em>(e.g. the “I’d rather go naked than wear fur” campaign)</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Throwing substances</td>
<td>Throwing various projectiles on or around individual opponents. <em>(e.g. Flour-bombing fur-clad models at fashion shows or throwing rocks in water around fishermen to scare away the fish so they will not get caught)</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unreasonable public demands</td>
<td>Asking opponent to stop a specific action that is pertinent to its survival. Related to Dozier and Lauzen’s (2000) concept of irreconcilable differences. <em>(e.g. Asking a dairy farm to stop its production of milk immediately or calling for a worldwide boycott).</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysphemism</td>
<td>Members of the organization labeling or designating the activity in question in a way that is repulsive or offensive. <em>(e.g. Fishermen vs. lip rippers)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Threatening senseless legal action</td>
<td>Threatening to take the opponent to court for a transgression that is not actually illegal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tactic</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>---------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letters to the editor</td>
<td>Member of organization writes editor of the newspaper or media outlet to respond to negative comments or coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op-ed written by staff</td>
<td>Management in organization writes Op-ed piece addressing negative publicity or comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity spokespersons</td>
<td>The use of well-known celebrities to spread the organization’s agenda among their fans and the general public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization-sponsored event</td>
<td>Sponsoring an event on behalf of the organization. (eg. fundraising event or membership drive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenting scientific evidence</td>
<td>Promoting scientific evidence that supports argument against various transgressions against animals (eg. attempting to persuade media to publish articles about studies that suggest fish feel pain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web page or media kits</td>
<td>Distributing information about organizational mission, campaigns, and views via the Internet or media kits</td>
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New Media, New Challenges: Towards a Theory of Transactional Diversity for Public Relations

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Abstract

New media’s influence upon diversity, access, and public communication has been a subject of focused concern since a series of reports in the 1990s documented a “digital divide” – a growing chasm between the those with access to new media technologies and those without (NTIA, 1996). These studies, released through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, chronicled expanding disparities of computer access among populations of color, when compared against the white population majority. These contrasts coincided with the economic and income differences documented from comparisons of communities of color on the whole, with those of white communities. And although similar disadvantages were noted between rural and urban populations, the discourse of the "digital divide" came to symbolize a growing chasm between technology "haves" and "have nots" -- and this difference often turned on race.

The rhetoric of new media has been, in its fundamental form, a discourse about choice. This paper examines some touchstones of new media development, how race has informed our thinking about the location of new media in society, and what the implications may be for public relations conceptualizations about publics, identity, and technology.
**Introduction**

New media’s influence upon diversity, access, and public communication has been a subject of focused concern since a series of reports in the 1990s documented a “digital divide” – a growing chasm between the those with access to new media technologies and those without (NTIA, 1996). These studies, released through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, chronicled expanding disparities of computer access among populations of color, when compared against the white population majority. These contrasts coincided with the economic and income differences documented from comparisons of communities of color on the whole, with those of white communities. And although similar disadvantages were noted between rural and urban populations, the discourse of the "digital divide" came to symbolize a growing chasm between technology "haves" and "have nots" -- and this difference often turned on race.

The rhetoric of new media has been, in its fundamental form, a discourse about choices. These choices can reflect our understandings of power, and of communication as process (Silverstone, p.11). This paper examines some touchstones of new media development, how race has informed our thinking about the location of new media in society, and what the implications may be for public relations conceptualizations about publics, identity and technology.

**New Media: Definitions and Implications**

New media can be defined in many ways (Morley & Robins, 1995). We wrap those forms of media that were “technologically new in the late 1990s” under this definition, even though they have become quite familiar to users in this age (Coleman, 1999, p. 61), encouraging attention to the social, instead of the technical, characteristics displayed.

Web 2.0 technologies opened up the Internet for a variety of new applications, which have collectively made it possible for publics to move from passive consumers of media to producers of their own media, and commentators on the media of others (Antony and Thomas, p. 1285). One characteristic that sets them apart from legacy media is their capacity for interactivity. Simultaneously, new media channels have the potential to diversify message production and dissemination. New media, even before the Internet became ubiquitous, offered choice in its early stages through the use of video tape recorders and expanding choices offered in cable channels (Webster 1986). These baby steps gave viewers more control over when and where they could view video content, engaging audiences of color in new ways. Wilson and Gutierrez described this as the demassification of the media and predicted that audiences of color would thrive in niche-oriented channels and programming (1985). By the time the Pew Research Center examined Internet usage in its April 2012 report on "Digital Differences" (Zickuhr & Smith), an enormous change was evident along racial lines. For instance, African-Americans sent and received an average of 70 text messages a day; Hispanics, 49 a day, with Anglos, sending 31, a day. (p. 5). These figures reflected an enormous change from the two government-sponsored studies (Irving, 1995; McConnaughey, 1997), which identified a geography of technology disparities between rural and urban communities. At that time, researchers began to document an uneven access to the technological resources needed to participate in this new media world. Most notably, the 1996 report, Falling The Net, sounded dire warnings about potential impacts upon educational opportunity, professional competitiveness, and social cohesion if marked differences in access to new media persisted between communities of color and whites.
Race, Identity and the Web

The new media emerging in the late-20th century and into contemporary times seems to offer users the opportunity, through user names and avatars, the chance to be faceless. And, this virtual anonymity offered the potential to be raceless as well. But as these assumptions were challenged, some of these early-identified challenges still persisted into the 21st century. But the most significant outcome of the proliferation of new media was the seismic shift to social communication. Manovich characterizes this as an evolutionary change affecting all forms of media—whether legacy or new—as “cultural communication” (2012, p.19). If we accept this premise, then we can no longer afford to think of communication as devoid of social meaning and nuance. These social identities travel with us and become the lenses through which we navigate, interpret and respond to situations in mediated contexts (Carstarphen & Lambiase, 1999; Wolf, 1999).

New media, even before the Internet became ubiquitous, offered choice in its early stages through the use of video tape recorders and expanding choices offered in cable channels (Webster 1986). These baby steps gave viewers more control over when and where they could view video content, engaging audiences of color in new ways. Wilson and Gutierrez described this as the demassification of the media and predicted that audiences of color would thrive in niche-oriented channels and programming (1985). By the time the Pew Research Center examined Internet usage in its April 2012 report on "Digital Differences" (Zickuhr & Smith), an enormous change was evident along racial lines, and that the game-changer has been in the proliferation of mobile media (p.2).

As technologies have shifted and expanded to include new channels and emerging platforms, more recent reports in 2011 and 2012 have delivered a more complex, layered picture of how communities of color use new media. While some technological disparities persist, other surprising opportunities have appeared, suggesting that racially defined groups have adopted new media techniques successfully, even dominating certain types of usages.

A long-time analyst of race, media and social contexts, Teun van Dijk (2010) considers race as one of many “social categories” fundamental to personal identity construction. The connections between language and identity are intractable, and as he notes, people use language to signal connections to community or to represent themselves in social contexts (135).

But another implication involves the challenge of operationalizing communication for the social constructs of race that are shifting and evolving, while individuals and groups adhere to these gradations. One approach that reconciles this seeming contradiction identifies race as a social construction that, as a social category, operates with the force of social reality (Bonilla-Silva 2010). That is to say, individuals can easily live their lives in an array of specific moments as if race has no meaning until social conditions arise to build a "raced" experience. This experience draws meaning from shared identities that form a socially recognized category, or cultural space. And, operating within such a space that now has a categorical structure, individuals experience a social reality that is palpable and meaningful to them. Maintaining such social realities are communication codes, channels and messages whose levels of authenticity turn upon how well they adhere to the conventions of the cultural space.

Public Relations Frameworks: Identity and Communication

In a slow evolution of published literature, scholars have established touchstones for examining race within public relations contexts. While race can be discredited as a biological or genetically determined human condition, its place as a socially constructed idea has gained
credibility and salience in public relations’ literature (Pompper, 2005; Sha, 2006; Sha & Ford, 2007; Tindall, 2009; Toth, 2009; Waymer, 2011). The mutability of the racial identity is a concept that articulates the realities of multiethnic, multiraced societies, both domestically and globally (Carstarphen, 2008; Sha, 2008; Sriramesh, 2007). Certainly, among the implications for public relations are that our notions of who are publics are and how they are motivated must shift. On the whole, the ways in which racial identity exists as a salient factor in public relations surfaces in two broad ways in research: one, as an explicit value, and two, as an implicit, or unquestioned, assurance. In these explicit examinations, scholars have taken on the challenges of locating race within public relations practice, and within public relations scholarship. These conceptual arguments plant stakes in uncharted domains, seeking to build the rationale for inclusion.

But by far the larger spaces where race within public relations frameworks have been considered have been implicit, in the sense that the dominant models and theories for the field would automatically carry the influence for racial publics. In these contexts, some scholars who have examined the intersection of public relations and race, have done so largely in terms of underscoring the applicability of using public relations as a tool for interracial communication in the face of conflicts (Coombs & Schmidt 2000, Taylor 2001). Race could be viewed as subtext in a number of conceptual approaches calling upon the importance of building relationships (Ledingham & Brunig, 1998, 2000), engaging in dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002) or framing good practice through the ethical framework of communitarianism (Leeper, 1986). These analyses and many more too numerous to review here offer variations to the dominant construct of excellence and the primacy of symmetrical relationships. Over an extensive career of scholarly production, Grunig has argued that symmetrical, or balanced, relationships remain central to strategic management in public relations, while recognizing that these must be cultivated, especially in circumstances where collaboration may not come easily (Grunig 2006). Also, Botan & Taylor (2006) have offered a cocreational perspective that promotes an idea of shared meaning-making between organizations and their publics, tracing this theme as a shared value through many previous conceptual approaches about public relations.

Between the contentions that race has value, and the assumption that good public relations practice trumps this value, lies a critical gap in how to operationalize and connect these streams of explicit and implicit conversations. In other words, the tradition in public relations theory development of obscuring, or ignoring, the possible role of race as a specifically defined criterion in public relations emanates from a fundamentally naive worldview. These views assert a genuine conviction that sound theoretical perspectives and well-executed practices will automatically--and implicitly--forge positive relations among diverse communities and disperse strategic messages evenly. But, multiple examples illustrate an alternative view; that is, that racial identity can be a critical factor in mobilizing actions.

The presidential elections of 2008 and 2012 illustrate this, starting with the challenges journalists faced in their attempts to determine how race was to be treated as a factor in their coverage (Carstarphen, 2009). When the results of the 2012 presidential election were widely reported, voters of color supported President Obama's re-election in sizeable majorities, proving to be, collectively, a determining factor in the outcome (VOA, 2012). But this support was more than skin-deep. In the 2008 election, the Obama campaign developed communication channels on its official website by ethnicity and gender that laid for foundations for its 2011 "Operation Vote" initiative (Wallsten, 2012). From the onset, this strategic communication outreach to specific communities using social media data and “microtargeting models” (Issenberg 2012) that
included racial groups--African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans--but also women, lesbian and gay voters, and religious groups. As time progressed, new campaign groups were formed, such as Native Americans, Puerto Ricans and Arab Americans (Tewfik 2012), reflecting the fluidity of social constructions. Communication channels that sustained links between the Obama campaign and these niche voters were creative and distinctive to each group. These included such linkages as ethnic media, barbershops, small businesses, and cultural parades, which helped amplify the campaign's key messages (Lee, 2011). According to a PRWeb post-election analysis, social media’s influence on the 2012 election, President Obama had a demonstrably higher social media engagement than his rival, Republican nominee Mitt Romney: 3 times more followers on Facebook and more than 20 times more followers on Twitter (Adams 2012). Will new media now become a reliable predictor of election outcomes, consumer behaviors or social movements?

The rough-and-tumble environment of political messaging emphasize what public relations does best, providing the structure in which competing ideas can be exchanged. Negotiating these differences is an inherently rhetorical process, one that should place public relations at the core of political discourse when defined, as Michael Kochin does, an exchange designed to “mobilize” or “discourage” public action (2011, p.55).

In 2012, transacting diversity moved voters from the fringes of political action to the center of it.

**Public Relations and Rhetoric: Towards a Transactional Approach**

On its website, The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) defines public relations as a “strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.” Managing risk and change are inherent parts of this role. Yet, except when studied through the lens of conflict or neglect, racial identity and its relationship to how publics respond to messages remains little explored.

Public Relations has been defined as a profession of the modern (mostly 20th century) age (Ewen, 1996). However, an expanding body of literature has grown, placing the modern practice of public relations within the boundaries of centuries-old rhetorical traditions (Hallahan, 1998; Botan, 1999; Heath & Toth, 2010). Classically defined as the attempt to persuade by using all available means (Cooper, 1960), rhetorical theory and practice has been interpreted within many professional contexts. The rhetorical aim of persuasion seems to be a natural complement to the public relations’ professional goal of influencing publics and facilitating relationship-building between organizations and people. Yet, to envision rhetoric as persuasion only confines it to a narrow application of what Jeffrey Murray describes as a broader role of rhetoric as "purposeful communication." (pp.334-35, 2004)

As he notes, persuasion-driven discourse can result in coercive and non-ethical outcomes, as in propaganda and inherently untruthful propositions that often accompany, for example, dictatorial political governments. To counter these conceptual limitations, Murray proposes a rhetorical perspective that involves both an attitude of supplication and disruption, and a practice of asymmetry and reciprocity. These inherently contradictory positions that Murray (2009) describes result from the engagement of the "Other" in the dynamic and sometimes fractious exchange of mutual communication. This tension, he contends is ever-present in rhetorical exchanges, highlighting any dialogic exchange as inherently asymmetrical. And, it is in this context that we can position the influence of race in public relations, and operation alike what Heath calls the "wrangle in the marketplace (2009)"

Strategic guidance demonstrating ways in which public relations practice can engage racial publics still lacks an operational theory that can help facilitate building ongoing
relationships through effective communication with these groups. A central challenge is how to map the fluidity of social identity with the best practices of the dynamics of strategic public relations practice, which relies upon interpreting and responding to changing data. As new media practices dynamically impact public relations, the need to understand potential racial influences increases, rather than dissipates.

Demographic data show us that we are in the midst of a new social and cultural reality. According to the 2010 census, there are close to 309 million people living in the U.S., and 50.5 million claimed Hispanic origin. This census also gave respondents an unprecedented range of ways--57 possible designations--to describe their race. More than these striking results, are the implications these events have for communication and public relations professionals. New media pathways have amplified the ways in which messages are sent and received, expanding the diversity of voices. Such changes have enormous implications for every aspect of communication as a process and product. The ubiquity of new media channels both expand opportunities for communicators, as well as offer them new challenges. One area of challenge is to understand how new media affect communication with racially diverse publics, and the management issues involved. So the culture of new media is essentially social.

I propose a Transactional theory of diversity that supplants both explicit and implicit public relations theories because it addresses contexts of power, identity and privilege that complicate the transmission of information across racial contexts. A Transactional Theory of Diversity builds upon the rhetorical “exchange” that is at the heart of both the challenge and the opportunity of successful engagement with racial publics.

As a process, transactional diversity includes three broad stages: engagement, action-interaction, and transaction (Carstarphen, 2013). First, engaging with diverse publics must include a recognition of socially constructed categories as salient communities. So, this first stage would include research protocols designed to reach niche communities and the development of culturally relevant contacts. Next, interactions are formed based upon authentic interpretations of the cultural codes of the new community. These lead to actions evolving from these new exchange relationships, and with strategic activities, accompanied by supporting messages. Finally, in the third phase, transaction, a true exchange can take place even though, in terms of power relationships, it may not symmetrical, dialogic nor co-equal. Instead it is transactional, based upon a reciprocity of values and supported by strategic communication messages. In the end, successful diversity engagement does not depend upon a realignment of power relations, nor an oblivious view concerning power that ignores its effect.

In other words, a transactional view does not minimize power inequalities created through social circumstance, but holds that, even within these contexts, organizations and diversity publics— including racially defined communities—can only find mutually beneficial relationships through a fundamental and explicit recognition of the value each brings to the other. This includes both recognition of the power and stakes involved in such exchanges, as well as an acknowledgement of the real value raced publics provide. One of the manifestations of power is in its ability to convene a dialogue, to set an agenda and to invite participation. In the end, the ultimate currency of these exchanges is respect.

**Conclusion: Enacting Diversity Through Transactional Public Relations**

Within these contexts, public relations’ strategists who manage messages across increasingly diverse publics must rethink basic assumptions about what they do, the way they do it, as well as the people who are on the receiving end of their messages. New media tools have
invoked a different participatory presence in the process of making meaning. And this process is inherently rhetorical.

New media tools have opened up an evolving age of communication, one that is marked by interactivity and user agency. Publics will use these tools to establish and connect with communities that interest them in ways unmatched by traditional media. For racial publics, movement in and out of these communities is made more facile by new media. And, at the same time, organizations are recognizing that such interactive tools can create more welcoming environments in which to communicate with these publics. Although race will not always be relevant, nor strategic, in all forms of public communication, transactional diversity may provide a path by which eclectic communities can be identified and engaged. Certainly, more research will be needed to draw the lines more clearly between the ways in which new media exists as both cause and effect for public behavior and action. But in this profoundly rhetorical space of dynamic communication, public relations research must incorporate race and identity into these investigations. The people and the times demand it.
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Governance Of CSR Communication – An International Benchmark Study on Organizational Structures Enabling and Restricting Corporate Social Responsibility Communication

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Abstract
Organizations, especially corporations, are under an increasing demand of being responsible to the society by various stakeholders as a global trend. Consequently, corporations have adapted to this demand by different means and actions discussed under the broad umbrellas of corporate social responsibility (CSR). This implies strategic decisions linked to core processes of value creation (sourcing, production, marketing, distribution, services) as well as CSR communication aimed at identifying needs and concerns of stakeholders, agreeing on acceptable standards, and reporting about ongoing initiatives. However, communication professionals are often challenged to act within the limits of normative demands for an open discussion about CSR issues and organizational structures that do not support or even restrict such approaches. While various strands of research on CSR communication have investigated the practice of communicating about responsible activities and conducting stakeholder dialogues, the organizational frameworks which – according to structuration theory – enable or restrict those efforts (Giddens, 1984) have largely been neglected until now. The benchmark study presented in this paper closes this research gap by examining how corporations in two major international markets govern CSR communication function and why they do it in a certain way. By surveying 138 CSR professionals in Germany, the largest European market, and China, the largest Asian economy, the research explores CSR communication governance in terms of organizational frameworks consisting of formal and informal rules, allocated resources, strategies, activity orientation, and organizational status that guide CSR communication in the corporations in the two countries. It also identifies “years of CSR communication experience” as the factor predicting the establishment of such governance in German and “ownership” and “CSR approach” in China.
**Introduction**

Organizations, especially corporations, are under an increasing demand by various stakeholders of being responsible to the society as a global trend. From a public relations perspective, various studies have been done in emphasizing the importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication (e.g. Ihlen, Bartlett, & May, 2011; Bartlett & Devin, 2011; Golob & Podnar, 2011). In particular, methods and tools in communicating CSR, for example, using corporate image advertising (Pomering, 2011), the internet and social media (Capriotti, 2011), and via non-financial reports (Crawford & Williams, 2011) have been in discussed. Reports on CSR development and practices also have been discussed from China (Tang & Li, 2009; Wang & Chaudhri, 2009), Spain (Prado-Lorenzo, Gallego-Alvarez, Garcia-Sanchez, & Rodrigueq-Dominquez, 2008), Finland (Panapanaan, Linnanen, Karvonen, & Phan, 2003), and several Asian countries (Chapple & Moon, 2005). As corporations in different countries have showed various levels and practices of CSR, the study done by Chapple and Moon (2005) showed that corporations in Asia usually involved more in community and less on employee relations in the CSR practices. Oftentimes, CSR practices and communication are determined by corporate policy and resources. The Excellence Study (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002) has outlined the organizational factors that affect public relations practices. However, to date, the factors arising from organizational structure and policy (referred as CSR communication governance hereafeter) that affect the performance of CSR communication have not been explored yet. In addition, even though CSR communication has become a global phenomenon, no study has been done in explaining why companies in different countries have done CSR communication in certain ways and perspectives.

This study addressed the issues of CSR communication governance in two major economies in the world: Germany and China. Germany has been a country that emphasizes greatly environmental issues and CSR. China is a new market economy that has attracts many multinational corporations to enter to expand their markets. Thus, by discovering on how CSR communication governance in these two locations differs, insights for advancing CSR communication can be revealed.

**Conceptualization**

**CSR and CSR Communication**

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) or sustainability has been increasingly addressed by the business sector over the years. As Hahn and Scheeermesser (2006) argued, it is commonly agreed now that corporations should contribute to the long-term development of the society and environment because they not only represent “the productive resources of the economy” (cited from Bansal, 2002, p. 124) but also create societal and environmental issues by their production. CSR, in general, reflects “the economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic expectations placed on organizations by the society at a given point of time” (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2000, p. 35). Carroll (1999) acknowledged that the concept of CSR, in the academia, while having an extensive and long history, still has no agreed definition of CSR (Fisher, 2004; Ihlen, Bartlett & May, 2011; Yang & Rivers, 2009). For example, Carroll (1979, 1991) and Carroll and Shabana (2010) considered the ethical behavior of a corporation has to meet its economic responsibilities that towards its stakeholders, such as shareholders, customers, employees, and so on. Yang and Rivers (2009) extended this stakeholder perspective and defined CSR as “a firm’s strategic approach and initiatives toward its stakeholders” for various purposes (p. 156). Other scholars asserted that CSR is a contested and dynamic concept and should go beyond complying with the law (Bartlett & Devin, 2011; Ihlen, Bartlett, & May, 2011; McWilliams, Siegel, & Wright, 2006).
Bartlett and Devin (2011) further pinpointed three conceptualizations that each of the definition constructs or the rhetoric of CSR can be categorized into. First, the normative approach of CSR proposed by Carroll (1979) posits the responsibilities of corporations should include the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations from the society. From the normative approach point of view, organizations in the society operate as a reflection to the norms and expectations from the society. Followed by the rationale, L’Etang (1994) argued that organizations have obligations to the society and CSR endeavors should be judged by their benefits brought to the society. As a result, previous research suggested that CSR practices can be driven by ethical and normative motives of corporate decision makers (Hahn & Scheerermesser, 2006; Wulfson, 2001) or by institutional pressures on corporations to be viewed as desirable by the social system of norms (Bansal & Roth, 2000; Driscoll & Crombie, 2001; Prakash, 2001). The second conceptualization views CSR as a means for organizations to respond to the competitions in the market. Porter and Kramer (2006), for example, followed this approach by arguing that CSR should be developed as a company’s strategic capacity. In a similar vein, Bartlett and Devin (2011) viewed the CSR activity as a strategic resource that allows organizations to gain legitimacy in the society while other scholars argued a linkage between CSR activities to sustainable competitive advantages (Litz, 1996; Oliver, 1997) or shareholder value (Figge & Hahn, 2002). The third conceptualization contends that CSR practices are a negotiated outcome between an organization and its stakeholders. In this approach, CSR communication is defined as a negotiated effort. Consequently, communication of CSR practices is not merely a one-way activity for organizations to inform stakeholders about their CSR practices by disseminating relevant information. Rather, it should be a two-way interaction for organizations to incorporate stakeholder input into the process of their CSR practices via constantly communicating with the stakeholders where appropriate or feasible (Bartlett & Devin, 2011; O’Riordan & Fairbrass, 2008).

As suggested by the management literature, different approaches to CSR serve as diverse stages of an organizational learning process (Zadek, 2004; Schneider, 2012). For CSR communication, these stages are of particular significance as organizations ideally find their expression in the communication processes reflecting their approaches of CSR. For example, if a company has come to the point where it perceives CSR-related conflicts as an ongoing process within which outcomes are negotiated cooperatively, communication professionals involved need to have specific competencies, such as openness to dialogue and conflict resolution skills, to deal with such situation (Weiβ, 2002; Weiβ, 2007). At the operating level, this argumentative approach – in contrast to an informative or persuasive one – manifests the company itself being open-minded in the situation as well as in the willingness to gain useful inputs via communication (Zerfass, 2008). As a result, CSR and CSR communication should be strategically aligned with one another.

Most CSR communication studies concentrate on communication about CSR, for example, by investigating reporting activities of corporations (e.g. Capriotti & Moreno, 2009; Gebauer & Glähe, 2011; Nielsen & Thomsen, 2007). Another focus lies on the analysis of long term effects like reputation building or sales promotion (e.g. Fombrun, 1996; Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007; Brønn & Vrioni, 2001; Brønn, 2011). Related communication processes and the general framework needed for those were mostly neglected (such as linking corporate strategy and communication activities, which was identified as an important factor for credible CSR communication by Schmitt and Roettger, 2011) and can be identified as a research gap (May, 2011). The so that the interdependency of agency and structure.

In conclusion, corporations may define CSR differently due to their CSR approach and motives behind the practice. Strategic CSR communication refers to chosen communication activities aligning with not only the overall goal of the CSR practice defined
by an organization but also organizational resources needed for implementing the activities (Golob & Podnar, 2011; Verhoeven et al., 2011). Strategic CSR communication can be used by the corporations to (1) reflect or advocate the expectations from the society as seen by the corporation, (2) help gaining strategic resources for corporations, and (3) facilitate two-way dialogue with corporate stakeholders in defining the areas of CSR practice. The challenge for communication professionals is to strategically link between corporate CSR approach and CSR communication activities (Waddock & Googins, 2011).

**CSR Practices and CSR Communication in China and Europe**

There are extensive studies done on the topic of CSR and CSR communication in various countries which form different strands of research (e.g. Chapple & Moon, 2005; Prado-Lorenzo, Gallego-Alvarez, Garcia-Sanchez & Rodriguez-Dominquez; Tang & Li, 2009; Verma, 2011; Wang & Chaudhri, 2009).

Chapple and Moon (2005) investigated the CSR development in seven Asian countries1 by analyzing the CSR reports of total 50 companies in the countries available on their corporate websites. They confirmed that companies in these countries had different variations on the penetration of CSR activities (how active they are in CSR). However, none of the companies had extensive CSR reporting (communication). The results also suggested different degrees of involvements in the three waves of CSR by companies in these nations: community involvement, socially responsible production process, and employee relations. As community involvement was more in focus, employee relations received less attention. The research also concluded that the international exposure of the companies in these countries has a positive relationship with their levels of CSR adoption. However, this study did not confirm that international companies have influenced the profile of CSR practices in their host countries in Asia.

In China, Wang and Chaudhri (2009) and Tang and Li (2009) investigated the content of CSR communication and engagement. Different from Chapple and Moon’s (2005) study, Tang and Li’s (2009) study confirmed that multinational corporations in China were more engaged in discussing their CSR activities with multiple stakeholders via their corporate websites than the local companies, although the level of communication content regarding to various CSR activities (e.g., philanthropy, employee relations and shareholder and supplier discussions) of these two types of corporations did not differ significantly. Interestingly, multinational corporations were more likely to form formal company policies so as to institutionalize their CSR commitment in China. This finding indicated that multinational corporations move beyond charity activities by internalizing their CSR practices into their business practices. When examining the influence of industry on the reported CSR activities as suggested by Cottrill (1990), Tang and Li (2009) found that consumer-focused companies in China usually performed CSR as ad hoc, or strategic philanthropy; however, B to B companies were more likely to show CSR as an expression of ethical business conduct. They interpreted the practice as driven by the corporate motives to gain profitability and business success by being viewed favorably by the consumers. The studied consumer-based companies believed that by engaging in public philanthropy or charity events, more visibility on corporate good will could be seen by the public which in turn leads to their purchases and profitability.

Wang and Chaudhri (2009) examined the CSR communication and engagement activities of Chinese companies by two rounds of surveys. The results revealed that the survey participants preferred to use corporate websites and company publications, (e.g.,

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1 The seven countries included: India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Korea, Singapore, and Thailand.
newsletters and brochures) for communicating their CSR activities. The participants also reported differences in terms of using local and national media. More interestingly, the results showed that the top two motivations for corporations in engaging CSR are “improving corporate image/reputation” and “building corporate culture,” whilst “adhering to government policy/advice,” “responding to competition,” and “purely making contribution to social development” are the least important motivations. Even though CSR communication was considered important in the survey and had the value of communicating the companies’ goodwill, not many participants extensively promoted companies’ CSR efforts via communication. For the areas of contributing to CSR, what companies deemed to be areas of importance was incongruent with what they focused on doing. “Environmental protection, energy conservation, disaster relief, occupational health and safety, and consumer rights” were considered the top areas of importance for CSR activities. However, most of the Chinese companies seemed to solely focus on disaster relief efforts.

In Europe, several studies were done in analyzing the CSR practices. Prado-Lorenzo, Gallego-Alvarez, Garcia-Sanchez, and Rodriguez-Dominiquez (2008) compared Spanish companies’ CSR practices with corporate financial performances. They found that an increasing number of companies supported the activities in reducing environmental impact and creating comfortable workplaces. Research also revealed that the CSR practices in these Spanish companies showed a positive influence on the sales growth of the companies but not in the area of productivity of market value. Recently such effects are seen critically as credibility risks need to be taken into stronger consideration when analyzing the outcome of CSR and CSR communication practices (Eisenegger & Schranz, 2011).

In Finland, Panapanaan, Linnanen, Karvonen and Phan (2003) conducted interviews and document analysis in exploring corporations’ views on CSR, including its elements, how they practiced CSR, what the policies should be in different practices, and what the conceptual framework should be for guiding CSR. For Finnish corporations, their interview findings revealed that 1) all of the interviewed corporations considered CSR should be in compliance with strict Finnish laws and regulations; 2) most of the interviewed corporations considered CSR is integral to all the company operations and should be integrated with company’s environmental responsibility; and 3) the majority of the companies considered CSR is a global phenomenon. In addition, in exploring the factors that drove companies’ CSR practices, globalization has challenged companies to be socially responsible and behave ethically in the areas such as child labor, human rights violations, bribery, etc. Furthermore, important stakeholders, such regulatory bodies, employees, industrial federations, made it necessary for corporations to be more aware of the influence of their behaviors on the society. Companies’ long-term engagement in sustainability development in the environmental and social issues also urged corporations to focus CSR practices. The main areas for Finnish companies’ CSR practices included issues related to employees, community, suppliers and customers. Thus, drawing from the interviews and document analysis, Panapanaan et al. (2003), from the factors and the main areas of practices, developed the framework for the management of CSR for Finnish companies that had the essential activities of organization and structure, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and communicating and reporting.

Hahn and Scheermesser (2006) conducted an online survey among German companies on the state of corporate sustainability practices. They were investigating the meaning and relevance of sustainable development for companies, the reason(s) why companies committed themselves to sustainable development, and the management tools used to implement sustainable development in the German companies. The findings showed that more than 80% of the participating companies deemed corporate sustainability highly relevant for the company, and more than half of the companies considered sustainable
development to be an integral part of their corporate governance system. In addition, most German companies used ecological procurement guidelines, environmental reporting, and benchmarking as their environmental and social management tools. In terms of motivations in performing corporate sustainability, companies expressed normative motivations, such as being socially and ecologically responsible, to be the dominating reasons for CSR engagement. However, at the same time, image and reputation that were benefited by corporate sustainability as the strategic resources for companies were also considered important for corporate motivations to engage in sustainability.

**CSR Communication Governance**

As suggested by the public relations literature, various strands of research on CSR or CSR communication have focused on investigating the practice of CSR activities and communication that inform or facilitate the activities with the target stakeholders and the organizational factors that contribute to the practice (e.g., motives of CSR practices, top management's perception of CSR, types of CSR practices, or strategy and tactics of CSR activities and communication). However, the literature pinpoints the largely neglected area of CSR research on the organizational frameworks which enable or restrict efforts of CSR or CSR communication as suggested Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory. Departing from historical views, the premise of structuration theory posits that the two elements of a society—agency and structure—must not be considered as being independent of each other, but rather as both jointly influencing or determining social behavior. As defined by Giddens, “agency” refers to human action or action of groups while “structure” signifies a duality of rules and resources which agents draw upon on one hand, and the outcome of the resulting social practices on the other. Giddens’ theory also permits the analysis and interpretation of social practices and their development across space and time.

The theory has been applied to multiple disciplines (e.g. economics, politics, and social sciences) to examine the concept of governance with various foci. In social sciences, governance is a broadly-understood concept that can embrace a wide range of phenomena. As defined by Zerfass et al. (2012), governance “includes all institutional structures and processes used to handle interdependencies between various, mostly collective, actors” (p. 7). Social scientists have studied governance as “an umbrella term refers to the logic of action and the causal relations between structures, interests and interactions” (Zerfass et al., 2012, p. 8). To apply the concept of governance to an organizational level, corporate governance in this study refers to a corporation’s overall framework that guides and regulates corporate behaviors towards stakeholders as a mechanism to manage the potential risks or uncertainties caused by the behaviors (Van Kersbergen & van Waarden, 2004; Zerfass et al., 2012). The underlying importance of corporate governance as a significant research focus is the fact that the framework directly prescribes the performance of each corporate function, including CSR and CSR communication, by confining the behaviors of individual actors in the corporation. Since the purpose of this research is to examine CSR communication, the resulting organizational framework shall be called **CSR communication governance** which refers to the formal or informal structure which guides or regulates the actions of the staff members of a corporation to communicate about the corporation’s CSR-related issues and information with stakeholders. Further, the structure includes four aspects: (1) regulatory framework, (2) organizational status, (3) resources, and (4) practice orientation as suggested by the literature. The regulatory framework, informal or formal, means guidelines, policies, or managerial tools (e.g., GRI and AA1000) for specific CSR communication practices. Organizational status refers to a managerial structure that regulates the role and hierarchical structure of CSR communication in the corporation’s organization as well as the integration of CSR communication to other functions (e.g. horizontal power: Zerfass et al., 2011; Salancik &
Resources on CSR communication include the number of positions, the budget amount, and training. Practice orientation of CSR communication reflects the communication approach used by the corporation and the foci of communication activities.

The literature review suggests the following research questions and hypotheses:

RQ1: What is the governance (i.e., regulatory framework, organizational status, resources, and practices) of CSR communication in the Chinese and German corporations?

RQ2: What levels of knowledge and understanding of CSR communication do corporate communication specialists claim to have in China and Germany?

RQ3: How do the four organizational factors (i.e., ownership, industry, CSR approach, and CSR communication experience) affect CSR communication governance in China and in Germany?

H1: The four factors affect the regulatory framework for CSR communication in both countries.

H2: The four factors affect the resources for CSR communication in both countries.

H3: The four factors affect the practice orientation of CSR communication in both countries.

H4: The four factors affect the organizational status of CSR communication in both countries.

Methods

Procedures and Participants

An online survey was conducted in China and Germany separately with corporate communication specialists responsible for CSR. In Germany, the data was collected in cooperation with the working group, CSR Communication of the German Public Relations Association (Deutsche Public Relations Gesellschaft, DPRG) and supported by the PR consultancy messagepool specialized in sustainability communication. Between June and July, three survey invites were sent out by e-mail. They generated 149 responses; the final sample size after data cleaning comprised 103 replies from communication specialists working in corporations active within the field of CSR communication.

To collect data in China, the largest public relations association in China and a Chinese online medium active in the field of CSR were approached to assist in recruiting participants by sending survey invitations to members in their databases. The two supporting organizations sent out three rounds of survey invites from July to October, 2012, and generated 161 responses in total. Among them, only 35 were from corporate communication specialists whose companies actively practice CSR communication. As a result, the sample size of the valid China data was 35.

The surveyed corporations in both countries came from a wide range of industries (see Table 1) and the more than 50% of them in both countries were large corporations with more than 1,000 employees (see Table 2). The Chinese participants were significantly younger than the German participants with the average age of 29.34 and 41.58 respectively (t = 6.73, df = 122.84, p = .00) and had fewer years of experience in CSR communication (MCH = 4.10, MGE = 6.15; t = 1.89, df = 129, p = .02). 54.3% of the participants in China were female (n = 19) and 42.9% were male (n = 15) while in Germany, female participants accounted for 54.4% (n = 55) and male for 43.7% (n = 46) of the data. The majority of the Chinese participants and held a bachelor degree in media and communication science while most German participants had a master’s of the same major. 54.3% of the participants in China (n = 19) were not at the management level whereas 57.3% of the German participants (n = 59) were managers either at the functional level or the departmental/unit level.
Table 1. Industry of Surveyed Corporations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry sector</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary production</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automobile</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and pharmaceutical</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textile</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and logistics</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial services and assurances</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunication</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Size of the Surveyed Corporations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of employees</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 50</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 to 250</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>251 to 1,000</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,001 to 10,000</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10,000</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measurements

As guided by the research framework, the questionnaire was first developed in English, translated into German and Chinese for data collection, and back-translated for internal reliability. The questionnaire consisted of five parts. The first part asked about the current situation of CSR and CSR communication in participants’ corporations, including its definition, perceived importance, strategy, and resources. The second part explored the nature, organizational status, target stakeholders, management and practical tools, and practitioners’ knowledge of CSR communication activities. The third part centered on the regulatory framework, formal and informal, of CSR communication. The last two parts asked about the organizational characters and individual characters respectively. A pre-test was held with 18 corporation communication specialists in Germany and give in China.

Results

Definitions, Relevance, Activities, and Main Tools of CSR Communication Used by Corporations

As Table 3 shows, 80% of the corporations in China used the terms “CSR” and “CSR communication” to define a corporation’s ethical behavior as to be responsible to the society where it operates, while 38.8% of German corporations adapted to the terms “sustainability” and “sustainability communication” that define the ethical corporate behavior as not only doing no harm to the society but also to maintain and further the society. Thus, the concept of sustainability demands corporations to behave in a proactive manner. In addition, 23.3% of the German corporations chose the terms “corporate responsibility” and “CR
communication.” This choice of terminology implies the corporations’ commitment to being responsible to the society and the environment. Some corporations in both China and Germany indicated the usage of other terms. Terms like “holistic corporate responsibility,” “PR,” and “quality and dialogue promotion” were provided by the German corporations while Chinese participants did not provide any.

Table 3. Terms Used by Corporations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Responsibility / CR Communication</td>
<td>8.6 %</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Citizenship / CC Communication</td>
<td>2.9 %</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Social Responsibility / CSR Communication</td>
<td>80.0 %</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability / Sustainability Communication</td>
<td>2.9 %</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility Communication</td>
<td>0.0 %</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Communication</td>
<td>0.0 %</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>5.7 %</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both of the Chinese and German corporations claimed to focus their daily CSR communication work mostly on producing CSR communication materials and maintaining personal contacts with stakeholders via multiple communication channels (see Table 4). It is interesting to note that the German corporations focused least on organizing stakeholder events for CSR communication. Corporations in both countries identified a similar list of target stakeholders for their CSR communication, including consumers, employees, suppliers, and media in an order of importance (see Table 5). As expected, the Chinese corporations ranked the government as the second important audience. The Chinese government, at all levels, greatly influences the development of corporations in China due to the country’s political system (Chen, 2006). Since China’s former president Hu declared the country’s priority to establish a “Harmonious Society” in 2009, the Chinese government has strongly promoted CSR as the expectation on corporations doing business in the country. As a result, corporations in China actively disseminate their CSR information to the government as a means to gain support from the government or to build business-government relationship that further contributes to organizational effectiveness. In addition, corporations in China and Germany evaluated the importance of investors and NGOs differently as their CSR communication audiences. This is because that after twenty years of economic reforms, many local corporations in China have been privatized or are in the process of privatization. Also, due to the prevailing political system, the civil society in China is undeveloped and NGOs there are generally immature and weak in power.

Regarding CSR communication tools, the Chinese corporations mainly used social media (e.g., corporate Sina Weibo accounts, mobile Wechat accounts, Renren accounts, Douban, or customized apps), followed by media relations tools (e.g., press releases) and corporate websites (see Table 6). The German corporations most used corporate websites, followed by their media relations tools and annual reports on sustainability or CSR. Unlike their counterparts in China, the German corporations seldom use social media or events to communicate about their CSR information with target stakeholders.
Table 4. Main CSR Communication Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Production of communication materials</td>
<td>85.3%</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal contact with stakeholders</td>
<td>82.9%</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal consultation on CSR communication measures</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>49.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic planning of CSR communication</td>
<td>74.3%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending third-party events</td>
<td>74.3%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and rating CSR related matters</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of CSR communication</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing stakeholder events</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Percentage figures represent the responses of “4 = often” and “5 = very often”

Table 5. Strategic Stakeholders for CSR Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumers</td>
<td>4.54 (1.09)</td>
<td>4.65 (.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees</td>
<td>4.31 (1.05)</td>
<td>4.49 (.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>4.31 (1.02)</td>
<td>4.38 (.86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suppliers</td>
<td>4.23 (1.31)</td>
<td>4.27 (.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs and civil organizations</td>
<td>3.86 (1.57)</td>
<td>3.82 (1.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governments</td>
<td>4.41 (1.10)</td>
<td>3.60 (1.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inventors</td>
<td>4.23 (1.11)</td>
<td>3.58 (1.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local community</td>
<td>3.86 (1.42)</td>
<td>3.42 (1.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unions</td>
<td>3.69 (1.60)</td>
<td>2.83 (1.34)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. 1 = not important at all and 5 = most important

Table 6. CSR Communication Tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate website</td>
<td>4.20 (1.18)</td>
<td>4.67 (.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media relations tools (e.g., press releases)</td>
<td>4.31 (1.13)</td>
<td>4.26 (.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual reports (e.g., sustainability/CSR reports)</td>
<td>4.09 (1.38)</td>
<td>4.15 (1.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal communication (e.g., intranet, bulletin board)</td>
<td>4.09 (1.04)</td>
<td>4.09 (1.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships and collaborations (e.g., with NGOs)</td>
<td>3.83 (1.27)</td>
<td>3.85 (1.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events (e.g., stakeholder dialogues, round tables)</td>
<td>4.14 (1.14)</td>
<td>3.60 (1.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>3.46 (1.46)</td>
<td>3.59 (1.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate publications (e.g., brochures, newsletters)</td>
<td>3.97 (1.14)</td>
<td>3.58 (1.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsors and donations</td>
<td>3.86 (1.14)</td>
<td>3.30 (1.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Weibo)</td>
<td>4.46 (1.15)</td>
<td>2.85 (1.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing instruments (e.g., ad campaigns, raffles)</td>
<td>3.89 (1.37)</td>
<td>2.56 (1.25)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. 1 = not important at all and 5 = most important

**CSR Communication Governance in Corporations**

Regulatory framework for CSR communication. The results reveal a lack of formal regulatory framework of CSR communication in both Chinese and German corporations (see Table 7). Corporations in China and Germany did the best in clearly defining their CSR communication goals. However, they seldom construct policies and guidelines on CSR communication, lack communication strategies or dialogue standards for discussing with stakeholders on CSR-related issues, and rarely use methodologies and evaluations for
managing CSR communication. It is noteworthy that 62.1% of the German corporations claimed to implement standardized guidelines for CSR communication while only 25.7% of the Chinese corporations did. Interestingly, 51.4% of the corporations in China reported to have codes of conducts to guide CSR communication behaviors of their employees whereas only 31.1% of the German corporations claimed so.

Table 7. CSR Communication Governance in Corporations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CSR Communication Governance</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standardized or own guidelines for CSR communication</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearly defined goals</td>
<td>62.9%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication strategies to act target-oriented</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and rating methods for related issues</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria for prioritizing issues and stakeholders</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditing of CSR communication</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Codes of conducts for CSR communication professionals</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized or own guidelines for direct interaction with stakeholders</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Performance indicators for CSR communication</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Orientation of CSR communication practices. When examining the orientation of CSR communication practices used by corporations as suggested by Pirsch et al. (2007), the participants in both countries perceived their CSR communication as more strategic and internalized\(^2\) than as instrumental in nature (MCH = 6.94 and MGE = 7.70). However, in terms of the practice, the participants in both countries reported an explicit style\(^3\) of their CSR communication (MCH = 3.06 and MGE = 2.20) where the corporations actively talked about their CSR engagement. The participants in China described their CSR communication practices as persuasive and informative in purpose whereas their counterparts in Germany reported an informative purpose of the practice (see Table 8).

Table 8. Orientation of CSR Communication Practices by Purpose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>China M (SD)</th>
<th>Germany M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informative: To inform CSR strategies and activities</td>
<td>4.09 (1.07)</td>
<td>4.27 (.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasive: To persuade the target that the company is being socially responsible</td>
<td>4.24 (.92)</td>
<td>3.52 (1.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogic: To gain useful inputs via communication</td>
<td>3.50 (1.31)</td>
<td>3.35 (1.02)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. 1 = never and 5 = always

Organizational status of CSR communication. The data showed that the corporations in China and Germany rate the importance of CSR communication at the average score of 3.93 and 4.45 on a 5-point scale respectively. The result on German corporations is similar to what Hahn and Scheermesser (2006) found even though more than 60% of their surveyed corporations were SMEs with fewer than 500 employees. More than half of the surveyed corporations in China (n = 51.4%) structured their CSR communication at the top management or one level below, while around 69% of the corporations in Germany had the

\(^2\) The participants were asked to rate the nature of CSR communication by using a 10-point scale where 1 = strongly instrumental, 5 = neutral, and 10 = strongly strategic/internalized.

\(^3\) The participants were asked to rate the style of CSR communication by sing a 10-point scale where 1 = strongly explicit, 5 = neutral, and 10 = strongly implicit.
same structure. As for the role of CSR communication professionals, 62.9% of the participants in China and 80.6% in Germany said they were taken seriously by the senior management. 51.4% of the participants in China and 62.1% of them in Germany were invited to their corporations’ strategic planning meetings by the management. Furthermore, over 60% of the participants both countries agreed or strongly agreed that CSR communication generates assets for their corporations, foresees CSR-related conflicts critical to the corporations and plays an important role in the corporation’s overall performance but the function was not widely used by other departments in the corporations (see Table 9). The data also suggested that while 77% of the participants in China evaluated the function as irreplaceable in their corporations only 51.5% of the participants in Germany believed so.

Table 9. Overall Position of CSR Communication in Corporations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positions</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generating financial and intangible assets</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreseeing CSR-related conflicts</td>
<td>62.9%</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing an important role in the overall corporate performance</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is irreplaceable</td>
<td>77.1%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating activities of other departments</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
<td>49.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Percentages represent the responses of “4 = agree” and “5 = strongly agree”

Organizational resources on CSR Communication. The participants in China reported an average 2.49 CSR communication positions in their corporations with an average annual spending of 446,566 U.S. Dollars on the function while the reported position number in Germany was 1.71 with the annual spending of 58,280 U. S. Dollars. As the Table 10 shows, few participants in both countries received some CSR communication training.

Table 10. CSR Communication Training in Corporations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Production of communication content</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic planning</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal development on CSR communication measures</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder event organization</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules and conventions of CSR communication</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and prioritizing CSR-related issues, stakeholders, values, etc.</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods/tools for CSR communication</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of CSR communication outcomes</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CSR Communication Knowledge in Corporations

The participants in both China and Germany rated their knowledge about various areas of CSR communication above average (see Table 11). In general, the German participants reported a higher level of CSR-communication knowledge than their Chinese counterparts, especially in the fields of ethics, reporting guidelines, and communication rules and conventions. However, the Chinese participants claimed to know more about organizing events targeting stakeholders than the German participants.

After comparing the results of CSR communication governance, the data above suggested that some of the self-reported knowledge level about CSR communication may be over-stated. For instance, the Chinese participants rated their knowledge about “monitoring CSR-related issues” at 3 on a 5-point scale while only 34.3% of the corporations had implemented a monitoring mechanism for the purpose. The German participants reported
an average level of knowledge about CSR communication evaluation at 3.2 while only 23.3% of corporations in Germany used key performance indicators to evaluate their CSR communication outcomes. When looking at both the Chinese and German corporations, their evaluated level of knowledge about stakeholder event organization was 3.71 and 3.50 respectively. However, fewer than 30% of the Chinese or German corporations had guidelines for stakeholder interactions and only about 47% to 49% of the corporations in these two countries had clear criteria for choosing the target stakeholders for a CSR issue. Similarly, the reported knowledge about strategic planning was rated at 3.37 by the Chinese and 3.77 by the German. However, only 40% of the Chinese corporations and 56.3% of the German ones claimed to have strategies for their CSR communication practices. These results are consistent with the tendency found in the study of Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) that communication specialists in the Austrian and the European corporations over-evaluated their knowledge about social media practice. This may be because that both CSR communication and social media communication have become part of the common practice for communication specialists and thus, they believe they know how to do it (by doing it).

Table 11. Knowledge about CSR Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge about CSR Communication</th>
<th>China M (SD)</th>
<th>Germany M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethical principles of CSR Communication/ Business ethics</td>
<td>3.17** (1.29)</td>
<td>3.90** (.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting guidelines and standards</td>
<td>2.86*** (1.26)</td>
<td>3.66*** (1.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National and international key players and initiatives in CSR</td>
<td>3.09 (1.31)</td>
<td>3.50 (1.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best and worst cases of CSR Communication</td>
<td>3.09 (1.29)</td>
<td>3.33 (1.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific tools for CSR communication management</td>
<td>2.83 (1.27)</td>
<td>3.18 (1.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal regulations related to CSR communication</td>
<td>3.17 (1.29)</td>
<td>3.20 (1.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production of CSR communication content</td>
<td>3.69 (1.47)</td>
<td>4.21 (.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic planning of CSR communication</td>
<td>3.37 (1.26)</td>
<td>3.77 (1.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal consulting on CSR communication</td>
<td>2.94 (1.35)</td>
<td>3.62 (1.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of stakeholder events</td>
<td>3.71 (1.52)</td>
<td>3.50 (1.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules and conventions of CSR communication</td>
<td>3.00* (1.28)</td>
<td>3.61* (1.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and rating of CSR related stakeholders, issues, values, etc.</td>
<td>3.00 (1.51)</td>
<td>3.35 (1.17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation of CSR communication

2.27 (1.44) 3.20 (1.22)

Note. 1= very weak and 5 = very strong

*** p <0.001, ** p < .01, * p < .05

**Organizational Factors Affecting CSR Communication Governance**

SEM tests and path analyses were performed to assess the hypotheses by using Mplus 6.12. As suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999), a model is viable when it meets the joint criteria: CFI ≥ .96 and SRMR ≤ .10, or RMSEA ≤ .06 and SRMR ≤ .10. Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the recommended models that best fit the China data and the Germany data respectively. The retained models indicate that listed corporations (β = 1.20, p < .05) in China are more likely to establish the regulatory framework for CSR communication than the non-listed corporations do. Corporations that take a proactive and strategic approach of CSR (β = .12, p < .05) tend to view CSR communication as a necessary means to develop and implement CSR strategies by communicating with the stakeholders in a dialogic manner. In addition, CSR communication in such corporations with a proactive/strategic CSR approach (β = .08, p < .05) usually has an important status by being part of the overall strategic planning process and directly supervised by the dominant coalition because it contributes to organizational effectiveness by managing the conflicts between the corporation and the society as a whole.

The Germany data only identified one model indicating the effects of the four factors on one of the CSR communication resources, namely the number of CSR communication positions. As Model 4 shows, listed corporations in Germany (β = 1.32, p < .000) with CSR communication experience (β = .07, p < .01) tend to have more positions for CSR communication. Similar to the results in China, ownership (β = .09, p < .001) contributed to the establishment of the regulatory framework for CSR communication in German companies. In addition, the length of CSR communication experience (β = 1.07, p < .001) also positively led to the regulatory framework. The retained models also suggested that CSR communication experience significantly contributes to strategic practices of CSR communication (β = .03, p < .01) and its perceived importance (β = .03, p < .001) in the German corporations.

**Country as a Moderator**

The multiple group model fits the data well (χ² = .013, p = .91; RMSEA = 0, CFI = 1, SRMR = .002). R-square was .266 for the China group and .224 for the Germany group, respectively. The effects of CSR communication experience, CSR approach, and industry on regulatory framework were different between China and Germany. However, the effects of approach and industry were not significant in both countries. The effect of CSR communication experience was not significant in China (β = .257, p =.37) but significant in Germany (β = .340, p = .00). It means that country serves as a moderator on the effect between CSR communication experience and regulatory framework. That is, the effect of CSR communication experience on regulatory framework was stronger in Germany than in China.
Model 1.

Ownership  
CSR comm. experience  
CSR approach  
Regulatory framework

RMSEA = 0  
SRMR = 0  
CFI = 1  
TLI = 1

Model 2.

Ownership  
CSR comm. experience  
Industry: sensitive  
Industry: consumer-based  
CSR approach  
CSR comm. practice

RMSEA = 0  
SRMR = .031  
CFI = 1  
TLI = 1

*p < .05

Model 3.

CSR approach  
Industry: sensitive  
Industry: consumer-based  
Organizational status

RMSEA = 0  
SRMR = .031  
CFI = 1  
TLI = 1

*p < .05

Model 4.

Ownership  
CSR comm. experience  
CSR approach  
Industry: sensitive  
Industry: consumer-based  
Number of CSR positions

RMSEA = 0  
SRMR = 0  
CFI = 1  
TLI = 1

*p < .05

Model 5.

Ownership  
CSR comm. experience  
CSR approach  
Industry: sensitive  
Industry: consumer-based  
Regulatory framework

RMSEA = 0  
SRMR = 0  
CFI = 1  
TLI = 1

***p < .001
Discussion

The results of analysis offer information about the current CSR communication governance in the corporations in China and Germany and insights on factors influencing the governance. As a general pattern, there is discrepancy between the high importance of CSR communication and the establishment of CSR communication governance that leads to strategic CSR communication as shown in Hahn and Scheermesser (2006) study on German corporations. However, the gap gets closer as suggested by the results. It might be because listed large corporations in both countries, the major type of corporation in the samples, are now required to employ certain management tools for their annual reports.

Operating in the largest developed economy of Europe, corporations in Germany overall have a longer history in practicing CSR as well as CSR communication than those in China, one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. As the results reveal, the long-term development of CSR in Germany leads corporations there to arrive at a more advanced concept (i.e., sustainability) that defines the role of a corporation in the society (or in the environment) and its ethical behavior toward the society (or in the environment) and to provide better education on corporate ethics and reporting standards and rules of CSR communication to their staff responsible for the function than those in China. However, the development in CSR in Germany has not significantly contributed to advanced CSR communication governance in German corporations, such as the development of policy, strategy, analysis and evaluation methodology and tools, and training. It may be because of two reasons. First, corporations globally, including in Germany, started to pay much attention to CSR and its communication in recent years due to the increasing demand from the public and the rising impact of corporate reputation on its revenue as a new market trend (i.e., reputation economy; Brown, 2012). The development of function is relatively immature comparing to that of other corporate functions, such as marketing or lobbying. As a result, corporations have not fully established their governance on CSR communication. Second, unlike marketing communication, CSR communication does not directly contribute to the corporation’s bottom-line and it is rarely-regulated and flexible in terms of practice similar to social communication. Therefore, corporations might not believe such governance on CSR communication is needed. However, the German data reveal that corporate years of experience in CSR communication serve as a salient factor that distinguishes corporations with better governance on CSR communication from others in Germany.

In China, the results clearly show that CSR and CSR communication are a new but highly emphasized function by corporations due to the Chinese government’s demand. The government has been facing various societal issues resulting from its rapid economic
development of the country since its first economic reform in 1978. It is the government’s
top priority to maintain the society’s stability and thus, it needs corporations—the major
beneficiaries of the development—to help resolve the issues before they escalate to crises by
giving back to the society. Consequently, corporations have quickly adopted the concept of
CSR, allocated a certain amount of budget for the function, and learned the practice and
know-hows of CSR communication in a short period of time. This might explain the little
discrepancy between corporate governance on CSR communication in Germany and in China.
The rapid adaption of CSR practices by corporations in China also explains why the
ownership and CSR approach, not years of experience, of the corporations in China are the
salient factors predicting their CSR communication governance. With sufficient training,
corporations in China might have the opportunity to have a more advanced development of
CSR and CSR communication than those in Germany under the expectation of the
government.

Limitations and Future Research

The major limitation of this study lies in the small sample size of the participants in
China. The second round of survey is already in process and further analyses will be run to
test the results reported here as the next phase of the project. This study attempts to tackle a
new research dimension in CSR and more research is needed to verify the theoretical and
practical discussion presented herein. For example, as the study relied on self-reported data,
future research using content analysis to examine the CSR reports or publications can provide
valuable data to validate its results. In addition, future research is needed to get a clearer
picture of the development of general trends of CSR communication governance in a country
and the impact of the governance on different aspect of CSR communication performance.
For example, future research can explore the relationship between CSR communication
governance and CSR communication strategies in detail. Other studies can further examine
the factor of corporation ownership by including other types as stake-owned, joint-venture,
and private than listed and non-listed. One more area worth investigating is the governance
of CSR communication by using social media. As a rapidly increasing number of people in
China are adapting to the use of Internet and social media, new media become a must-use
channel for corporation communication for various purposes. Since Chinese “netizens”
have formed unique practices (e.g., human flesh search and microblogging) and cultures that
might provide opportunities and challenges for CSR communication in China, it will be
insightful to discover how corporations would govern the function in this area.
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Understanding Publics’ Engagement with Nonprofit Organizations through Facebook: A Typology of Messages and Motivations behind Public-initiated Conversations

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Abstract
This study explores how publics initiate conversations with an organization and their publics through its social media. Through an analysis of publics’ postings on two nonprofit organizations—Salvation Army and Goodwill, the study provides a typology of messages used by publics to engage organizations in Social Media.
Introduction

Recognizing the potential of social media for establishing connections with their desired publics, many organizations have eagerly adopted social media as part of their communication efforts. Government agencies, private companies and nonprofit organizations alike are utilizing social media to engage key publics. In fact, many studies have explored how organizations communicate through social media (e.g., Barns & Andonian, 2011; Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Waters & Jamal, 2011). Yet, most studies focus solely on messages posted by the organizations, without exploring how publics communicate with them. In other words, they focus on one-way communication, without understanding the feedback that the organizations receive.

Therefore, the purpose of the study is to investigate how publics initiate communication with nonprofit organizations, through one of the most popular social media platforms: Facebook. A qualitative content analysis using constant comparison method is employed to explore the types of messages that publics post in the Facebook pages of two of the top nonprofit organizations: Goodwill Charities and The Salvation Army. An analysis of three months of conversations (November 2012-January 2013) initiated by these organizations’ publics revealed the types of messages that publics employ in initiating conversations with nonprofits through social media, which also provided insights as to their motivations for engaging the organization.

Literature Review

Social Media and Strategic Communication

Social media is defined as a tool of “activities, practices, and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media” (Safko & Brake, 2009, p. 3). Since its introduction, social media has constantly evolved and developed new features (Perdue, 2012). There are various types of social media with distinctive functions, such as social network sites (SNSs), microblogging, wikipedia, online forums, and content communities. As a social phenomenon, social media has been widely adopted by many individuals and influences their lives in many (Pew Research Center, 2012). Four in every five Internet users in the United States uses social media (Nielsen, 2011). Also, as of September 2012, there were close to one billion Facebook accounts worldwide with over 184 million accounts in North America alone (Internet World Stats, 2012).

With its interactivity features, social media also changed the nature of communication between an organization and its publics. Today, publics expect that organizations will have a presence in social media. A consumer study found that 85% of publics expect proactive engagement with organizations on social media (Cone Business in Social Media Research, 2008). Also, Wegner (2012) found that social media makes an impact on consumers’ shopping behavior. According to a Nielsen report (2012), about 47% of social media users are involved in social care, in which they voice their opinions about a product or service through organizational social media channels. The report also showed that one third of the respondents prefer social care to a traditional way of contacting an organization (i.e., by phone). Additionally, Nielsen (2012) reported that 65% of social media users get information about a brand, product, or service via social media; and half of respondents write positive or negative comments about brands and services.

Recognizing the potential effect of social media, most organizations use social media as a communication channel with their publics. The adoption of social media by Fortune 500 surged in 2012 (Barnes, Lescault, & Andonian, 2012). Bosari (2012) found that an estimated 94% of
Businesses have social media presence and that businesses acknowledge the crucial role of social media in organizational management.

Social media offers various advantages for organizations to communicate with their publics. Subsidizing traditional media, social media helps organizations build brand or corporate awareness (Gunelius, 2011). Moreover, social media allows organizations to engage timely and directly with various publics, bypassing traditional media (Sedereviciute & Valentini, 2011). Put another way, with social media’s potential for fostering dialogic communication, organizations can easily interact with their publics and build relationships with them (Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2011; Kent & Taylor, 1998). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) argued that for organizations engaging publics through social media is more efficient than doing so through traditional media channels. Indeed, social media has brought a paradigm shift in the business environment because it provides an organization with opportunities to both attract publics and engage with them, which ultimately leads to high retention rate and increases revenue (Anjum, More, & Ghouri, 2012). However, the use of social media by organizations is heavily focused on brand promotion rather than customer service (Sakakeeny, 2012).

Nonprofits’ Use of Social Media

Both for-profit and non-profit organizations are actively adopting social media for their communicating with their key publics. A recent survey showed that 93.3% of responding nonprofit organizations have a presence on social media sites (Nonprofit Social Network Report, 2012). Barns and Andomian (2011) found that nonprofit organizations are more proactive in using social media than corporations. Their study results showed that higher educational institutions and charities used three types of social media —blogging, Facebook, and Twitter— more than corporations do. Given the fact that in the nonprofit sector there is high competition for public support and resources, nonprofit organizations welcome a cost-effective channel like social media to engage with their publics (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). According to the Nonprofit Social Network Report (2012), the average cost for nonprofits to recruit new Facebook friends or Twitter followers is $3.47 and $2.12, respectively, while the average value of the new supporters from Facebook to the organization is between $161 and $214. The report also found that over 80% of nonprofit organizations view the use of social media as valuable to organization. Undeniably, being social for nonprofit organizations is not optional but indispensable for successful relationships with publics (Fine, 2011).

However, despite their desire to be social, many nonprofit organizations are reluctant to increase social presence due to the lack of know-how or resources. Nonprofit Social Network Report (2012) found that nonprofit organizations emphasized the needs of social media strategy for successful use of social media. It showed that 60% of nonprofit organizations reported an absence of social media strategies is the factor to hinder nonprofits from being social present. Currently, a simple online presence is the most frequently used strategy among nonprofit organizations, followed by emailing the organizational list and promoting events (Nonprofit Social Network Report, 2012). Both practical and academic research has found that nonprofit organizations make limited use of social media. Rather than fully utilizing the two-way features that social media offers, many nonprofit organizations use social media as a subsidy to traditional media, and as a means to distribute information (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012; Waters et al., 2009, Waters & Jamal, 2011).

Public Engagement in Social Media
Many scholars have proposed typologies to describe social media users’ behavior and their engagement in new media, including social media. Within interactive media circumstances, Ko, Cho, and Roberts (2005) suggested two different types of interaction: human-message interaction and human-human interaction. Whereas human-message interaction denotes publics’ voluntary expose to organizational messages (i.e., clicking hyperlinks, keyword search, subscribing organizational messages), human-human interaction refers to public’s activities to involve conversations with organizations, by providing feedback or comments, participating online discussion, and suggesting new ideas, services or products. Focusing on social media, Li and Bernoff (2008) categorized social media users into six groups based on the levels of message consumption and creation: inactives, spectators, joiners, collectors, critics and creators. Given that social media users often play in multiple roles, Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit (2011) proposed a continuum to describe consumers’ online brand-related activities (COBRAs), which range from consuming (low level of use) to contributing (medium) to creating (high). Muntinga et al. argued that consuming refers to any behavior involved in viewing video, following a brand’s social media sites, reading comments that an organization or other publics created about a brand on social media. Contributing denotes a moderate level of interactions between social media user and contents on a brand or organization, by rating products or services, commenting on social media sites, and engaging in conversations on brands. As an ultimate level of user-content interactions, creating activities involve in publishing a weblog related a brand, uploading brand-related visuals and audios on social media, and writing brand reviews. Applying Muntinga et al.’s types of social media activities to Chinese publics, Men and Tsai’s (2013) study found that Chinese publics are passive when engaging with corporate social media by consuming messages, rather than contributing or creating contents.

Adopting Stakeholder Salience Model (SSM) and Social Network Analysis (SNA), Sedereviciute and Valentini (2011) proposed a framework to prioritize stakeholders in social media. They viewed publics’ connectivity and content sharing as important factors in prioritizing publics. A public’s connectivity is highly related to their potential influence or power over other publics, whereas content sharing denotes the publics’ concern, which brings urgency and legitimacy. Based on the two dimensions of connectivity and content, they argued that stakeholders can be categorized in four groups: unconcerned lurkers (low connectivity and low content sharing), unconcerned influencers (high connectivity and low content sharing), concerned lurkers (low connectivity and high content sharing), and concerned influencers (high connectivity and high content sharing).

Focusing on the antecedents of social media engagement, Men and Tsai (2013) found that the numbers of following pages, media dependency, parasocial interaction, and community identification are positively associated with the levels of public engagement, both in terms of consumption and contribution.

Motivations engaging organizations via social media
Since the advent of social media, scholars have been concerned with explaining what motivates publics to use these platforms. Uses and gratifications theory (U&G) has proven to be good framework to explain publics’ use of social media. Unlike traditional media research which focuses on the effect of media on passive users, U&G is based on the assumption that media users are active and selective in using and consuming media to fulfill their needs (Katz, 1959; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). In other words, U&G explains why and how people use certain media.
In applying U&G as the framework to understand publics’ use of new media and social media, some scholars explored media users’ motivations, such as entertainment, integration or social interaction, personal identity, and information. The first motivator is “entertainment” that involves relaxation, enjoyment, escapism, and emotional relief (Muntinga et al., 2011; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; Shao, 2009). Second, “integration and social interaction” refers to media users’ sense of belonging, connection with others, and emotional support (Boyd, 2008; Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008; Kaye, 2007). Third, “personal identity” motivator is rooted in the self of individuals, including self-expression, impression/identity management, and self-enhancement (Boyd, 2008; Nov, 2007; Papacharissi, 2007). Fourth and last, the “information” motivation is related to the need for information, advice, and opinion to reduce potential risks (Kaye, 2007; Park et al., 2009; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2003).

Recently, some scholars have expanded social media motivations by adding two more motivators of remuneration and empowerment. Whereas “remuneration” pertains to rewards, benefits, or economic incentives (Muntinga et al., 2011; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2003), “empowerment” refers to publics’ power or influence on organization or other publics (Muntinga et al., 2011; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2003).

Based on their engagement levels, different motivators play important roles in influencing public engagement in social media. Ko et al. (2005) found that consumers with high levels of information, convenience, and social interaction motivations are likely to engage in human-message interaction, while those having high convenience and social interaction motivations have tendency to engage in human-human interaction. In addition, Muntinga et al. (2011) found that information, entertainment, and remuneration are driving forces for public consumption of brand-related contents, the lowest level of engagement, whereas both contributing to and creating contents are driven by personal identity, integration/social interaction, and entertainment. Along these same lines, a recent study found that information and entertainment are the main reasons why Chinese users use corporate social media sites (Men & Tsai, 2013).

Even though previous studies addressed publics’ motivation to engage with organizational social media, they have focused heavily on motivations—explained through U&G models—and very little on what they are communicating to the organizations about. In other words, it has not been studied how publics initiate conversations with organizations on social venues. Therefore, in an effort to contribute to addressing this research gap, the current study explores the contents produced by publics on the organizational Facebook site. These people are called “concerned” publics who “gain urgency and consequently become highly salient within the overall stakeholder map” (Sedereviciute & Valentini, 2011, p. 231).

**Method**

The study purposively chose two nonprofit organizations that share similar missions: Goodwill Industries International, Inc. and The Salvation Army, which are ranked 4th and 6th, respectively, in the Top Nonprofit Times 100 in 2011, which lists 100 largest non-educational nonprofit organizations in the United States. Both organizations are community service organizations that provide similar involvement programs, which include receiving donations, working with volunteers and fundraising through thrift shops. However, The Salvation Army is a religious organization, while Goodwill is not.

The data was collected from the official Facebook site of these organizations. Facebook was selected because it is the most popular social media site (Social Media Today, 2012) and
because 86 of the 100 Top Nonprofits have a Facebook account. From the official Facebook pages for each organizations (https://www.facebook.com/GoodwillIntl; https://www.facebook.com/SalvationArmyUSA), the researchers selected the option of “post by others” to reveal the conversations started by publics, and collected all the data available from November 2012 to January 2013. This resulted in a total of 838 posts for The Salvation Army and 73 posts for Goodwill. All the comments available were included in the sample. Besides the number of comments by publics, the researchers also counted the number of comments by other publics including the organization, the number of likes by other publics including the organization, whether the organization responded to the comments, and whether the public who originally wrote the posted liked or commented to the organizational responses.

The data was analyzed using constant comparison method, which is widely used approach for analyzing texts. The constant comparative method “combines systematic data collection, coding, and analysis with theoretical sampling in order to generate theory that is integrated, close to the data, and expressed in a form clear enough for further testing” (Conrad, Neumann, Haworth, & Scott, 1993, p. 280). The unit of analysis was one line of text in the comment. Two coders analyzed the comments separately and then combined the list of themes they had identified.

Findings

This study focused on the comments made by publics on the organization’s Facebook page. Table 1 summarizes the frequencies of comments and likes by both the public and the organization. The frequency analysis demonstrated that although Goodwill did not respond to the comments posted by their friends, The Salvation Army actively engaged with Facebook friends, both by posting replies to their comments \( N = 171 \), and by linking their comments \( N = 114 \). Findings also show that the publics were engaging each other by responding to the comments posted. They liked the posts by other publics (Salvation Army: \( N = 578 \), Goodwill \( N = 0 \)), liked posts by the organization (Salvation Army: \( N = 37 \); Goodwill: \( N = 0 \)), and received responses from other publics to the comments they posted (Salvation Army \( N = 559 \), \( N = 4 \)).

The constant comparison analysis of the comments posted by the publics of these organizations revealed a list of 23 themes, which were reviewed and collapsed into a typology of messages posted by publics on these social media sites. These themes were grouped in the following seven categories or types of public comments: inquiries, requests, experience, grievance, advocacy, advisory and self-promotion.

The first type of comment, inquiries, refers to posts requesting information or clarification from the organization. These may include requests for clarification on policies or secondhand information that they received about the organization. For example:

“I LOVE Goodwill. Your store on Broadway in Chula Vista, CA is clear, organized and has very friendly employees. Every time I go there I find stuff for my entire family and I feel like most of the prices are great deals. Do you have a time frame on when the San Diego Home Ave location going to be reopened after renovations?” (Goodwill Facebook, December, 2012)

The second type of message, requests, refers to people using the organization’s Facebook page to ask for help for themselves or for someone else in need. For example, one person posted the following message in Goodwill’s page:
I have a young couple who is in dire need of a twin bed for their 3-year old daughter. Can anyone here help?

*Experience* messages refer to narratives in which a Facebook friend would share their first or second-hand experience with the organization. For example, this message was posted on the Salvation Army’s page:

When my kids were little we started a tradition during the holidays and throughout the year. Every time we see the Salvation Army kettles we donate at every single one. It might be $1, $5, $10. My kids are now getting older and we are still carrying on the tradition. It’s a great way to teach your kids to help those in need. Hope they do the same when they have kids of their own. (November 28, 2012)

Another user posted:

2nd year ringing the bell. We had a lot of fun. You may get a little cold on the outside but you leave with you heart feeling full and war. (Salvation Army Facebook page, December, 2012)

The fourth type of message, *grievance* refers to directing accusations or complaints against their organization and its practices. The grievance message types can be further classified with two sub-categories of complaint and attack. A complaint is when publics share dissatisfactory experiences with a nonprofit organization. For example, one Facebook follower posted on these organizations’ Facebook pages:

You get more and more expensive and I never actually see anything that you’re money is going to. I’d rather donate to smaller in-town thrift stores. At least they can keep their prices low, and some of them actually donate to good causes. (Goodwill Facebook, November, 2012)

On the other hand, an attack involves verbal assault of organization, and/or its mission. This often implies accusing the organization of wrongdoing. One Facebook user posted:

When the Sal Army stops discriminating against gays I’ll return to contributing to this organization. Sadly, most bell-ringers I’ve spoke with don’t even seem to know that this is a group that condones HATE. (Salvation Army Facebook, December, 2012)

On the other hand, *advocacy* messages defended the organization and its mission, often in response to attacks from other Facebook users. For example, in response to the grievance message above, one user commented:

The Salvation Army does not discriminate, nor does it condone hate. You are sadly mistaken, you have poor information, and perhaps taken things out of context. Jesus loves you, and so does the Salvation Army, please, you do not know what you are talking about. (Salvation Army Facebook, December, 2012).

*Advisory* messages refer to those in which the public share ideas as to how the organization could improve on their service or mission. These ideas are shared in a positive and helpful tone, rather than a critique. This example of advisory messages was found in the Salvation Army Facebook page:

You should organize your pants by size like Goodwill does. It’s difficult to shop by color like you have it now. (Salvation Army Facebook, November 2012)
The last message type, *self-promotion*, refers to messages in which the users share their own news or events on the organization’s social media site. Usually these will have little or nothing to do with the organization itself, because the purpose is to communicate with the other people on the organization’s platform. For example, one user posted this message in the Salvation Army Facebook page:

In 2013, we change the world. In 1 minute, find out how you can spread some love! For every scarf sold, the Full Circle Project by AEON Attire gives one brand new scarf to someone in desperate need of warmth. (Salvation Army Facebook, January, 2013)

**Discussion**

Highlighting the value of social media, which offers organizations opportunities to engage with their publics, scholars have sought to understand social media engagement from the perspective of the organization. Yet, despite the fact that either side can initiate this engagement, existing research focuses heavily on how organizations use social media, rather than observing the other side of engagement loop: their publics. Whereas it is quite clear why organizations use social media—i.e. to share updated information of organizations to publics or to build and maintain relationships with them—research has neglected what motivates publics to engage with organizations via organizational social media venues. In an effort to address this research gap, the present study explored message initiated by publics on organizational Facebook.

By employing the constant comparison method, the study explored posts initiated by publics on two nonprofit organizations’ Facebook. Based on the qualitative analysis of Facebook postings on the Goodwill International and Salvation Army Facebook pages, the study found seven different types of message strategies that publics initiate conversation with organizations: inquiries, requests, experience, grievance, advocacy, advisory, and self-promotion. More specifically looking at each category of message strategies, publics use social media to fulfill their needs for information—*inquiries*. This type of messages is either requesting information about an organization or asking clarification of information they have. Beyond requesting information, the second message strategy, *requests*, is to ask organizations to help them or others in need, to receive organizational services. Whereas both inquiries and requests strategies seek organizational resources—either information or service, the third message strategy, *experience*, is publics’ voluntarily sharing of their personal experience with organizations.

By comparing the types of messages identified in this study to the motivations based on U&G theory explored in previous research, some logical connections can be made (Table 2). In the case of inquiries, the motivation is logically information seeking; and in the case of experience, the motivation would be Social interaction or integration. However, the authors could not link requests to any existing motivation explained by the theory. A loose connection could be made between the remuneration motivation, which pertains to rewards benefits or economic incentives (Mutinga et al., 2011). However, the people who posted on these organizations’ Facebook were not looking for rewards or economic incentives, but rather for assistance. It could be concluded that in the case of non-profit organizations, U&G theory as it pertains to social media, might need to add another motivator type, which could explain these types of requests.

The findings of this study also showed that publics use organizational Facebook to threaten or endorse organizational legitimacy. Findings show some who were dissatisfied with organizations complained or even attacked the organizations publicly (*grievance* messages). On
contrary, there are some publics who endorse or defend the organizational practices and their mission (advocacy). They were often in response to attacks from other Facebook users who accuse the organization. In addition, publics share ideas about how organizations could improve on their services (advisory). The motivation behind these types of strategies is considered as empowerment, in which publics make impact or influence over the organizations and other publics. These three types of messages fit logically, with the U&G empowerment motivation, which explains the use of social media to exert power or, more fitting in this case, influence over other publics.

Lastly, the study found that some publics share their own news or events on organizational Facebook even though the news or events were not directly related to organizational mission or practice (self-promotion). This message type is related to the personal identity motivator of U&G theory. This type of message strategy is likely used to leverage an organization’s public venue and its networks for self-promotion.

The study’s findings revealed the dynamic motives of publics in engaging with organizations via social media channels, especially Facebook. Whereas nonprofit organizations do not utilize the virtue of social media as a two-way communication channel but limit its function as a information subsidy (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Lovejoy et al., 2012; Waters et al., 2009, Waters & Jamal, 2012), publics of nonprofit organizations use social media for multiple purposes, ranging from self-promotion to seeking organizational resources or to influencing organizational practices and other publics’ opinion.

By offering this typology of message strategies initiated by publics, the present study provides nonprofit organizations with an opportunity to learn the various motivations of publics who share their concerns or requests with organizations. Sedereviciute and Valentini (2011) asserted the importance of understanding the messages or content shared by publics via social media with following reasons:

When content shared by certain social media members is perceived by other social media members as relevant and significant for their concerns, they acquire legitimacy. Hence, the relevance of issues discussed and shared grants legitimacy to those individuals that post those contents (p. 231).

Thus, it is timely and crucial for public relations scholars to understand message strategies and publics’ motivations behind the messages in order to better implement social media practice. By learning the content types shared by publics and addressing publics’ motivations, organizations can provide sufficient information with their publics and engage with them.

There are some limitations of this study that should be acknowledged. First, as an exploratory study, the study used the purposive samples to propose typologies of publics’ message strategies. Given that there are various types of nonprofit organizations who serve different missions to advance society, the findings from these two community service nonprofit organizations may not be applicable to the other types of nonprofit organizations. Also, due to the distinctive nature of the nonprofit sector, the message typologies proposed in this study may not reflect the way publics from for-profit organizations or from government organizations use organizational Facebook. Thus, future studies should replicate in different settings of organizations.

Second, while most social media share common grounds of two-way interaction, the unique characteristics of Facebook should not be ignored. In other words, publics may have
different message strategies when engaging with organizations via other types of social media, such as Twitter or YouTube.

Also, given the exploratory nature of the study, more systematic and quantitative approaches should be considered for future study, to address the most common message strategies used by publics and to which extent organizations continue the dialogic loops initiated by publics.
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Mapping known and undiscovered stakeholders from social media. *International Journal of Strategic Communication, 5*(4), 221-239.


Table 1. Interaction on the organization’s Facebook pages from public-initiated conversations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nov. '12-Jan. '13</th>
<th>Posting by publics</th>
<th>Likes by the organization</th>
<th>Organizational responses to publics’ posts</th>
<th>Organizational responses both liked &amp; commented</th>
<th>Likes by publics on publics’ comments</th>
<th>Likes by publics to organization’s responses</th>
<th>Postings by publics to which others responded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salvation Army</td>
<td>824 (12.84%)</td>
<td>114 (19.26%)</td>
<td>171 (65.09%)</td>
<td>578 (4.84%)</td>
<td>43 (4.17%)</td>
<td>37 (62.95%)</td>
<td>559 (62.95%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodwill</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24 (68%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 (11.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message type</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Example</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Inquiries:</strong></td>
<td>Information-seeking</td>
<td>“I LOVE Goodwill [...] Do you have a time frame on when the San Diego Home Ave location going to be reopened after renovations?” (Goodwill Facebook, December, 2012).</td>
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<td>“I have a young couple who is in dire need of a twin bed for their 3-year old daughter. Can anyone here help.” (Goodwill Facebook, November, 2012).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Experience:</strong></td>
<td>Social interaction/integration</td>
<td>“When my kids were little we started a tradition during the holidays and throughout the year. My kids are now getting older and we are still carrying on the tradition. It’s a great way to teach your kids to help those in need. Hope they do the same when they have kids of their own.” (Salvation Army Facebook, November 28, 2012).</td>
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| **Grievance:**       | Empowerment                   | **Complaint:** “You get more and more expensive and I never actually see anything that you’re money is going to. I’d rather donate to smaller in-town thrift stores. At least they can keep their prices low, and some of them actually donate to good causes” (Goodwill Facebook Page, November, 2012).
**Attack:** “When the Sal Army stops discriminating against gays I’ll return to contributing to this organization. Sadly, most bell-ringers I’ve spoke with don’t even seem to know that this is a group that condones HATE” (Salvation Army Facebook December, 2012). |
| **Advocacy:**        | Empowerment                   | “The Salvation Army does not discriminate, nor does it condone hate. You are sadly mistaken, you have poor information, and perhaps taken things out of context. Jesus loves you, and so does the Salvation Army” (Salvation Army Facebook December, 2012). |
|                      |                               | “You should organize your pants by size like Goodwill does. It’s difficult to shop by color like you have it now.” (Salvation Army Facebook, November 2012) |
| **Advisory:**        | Empowerment                   | “In 2013, we change the world. In 1 minute, find out how you can spread some love! For every scarf sold, the Full Circle Project by AEON Attire gives one brand new scarf to someone in desperate need of warmth.” (Salvation Army Facebook, January 2013) |

1 Adapted from Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory
2 Remuneration pertains to rewards benefits or economic incentives (Mutinga et al., 2011). This motivator does not completely explain this message type, yet there is not current U&G motivation that does.
How International Media Outlets Interpret and Utilize U.S Election Poll Results

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Abstract
The purpose of this study is to examine how the 2012 U.S. presidential polling results compare to similar polls conducted by media outlets in other countries. It is widely known that the election coverage is closely monitored throughout the world considering the wide political reach the U.S. president has. This fact is true in Korean and Japan, where both countries have close political, military, and economic ties with the United States. Since there is also concurrent local presidential elections in these countries, it is possible to determine how different countries: analyze similar polling data, tie U.S political issues into their own domestic ones, support or attack a specific candidate, and lastly, how certain overarching patterns in coverage develop among various media outlets. Due to the scope of this research, this study was accomplished by employing a quantitative content analysis method of the news coverage in the above-mentioned countries.

Research like this is important because it sheds light on the importance of polls in the media. By using data gathered through polls, journalists can shape their stories. However, this data is not always used the same way. Often, editors and producers do not let the data guide the stories and only use the data when it broadens the scope of the story or supports their conclusion. This research will help to demonstrate how different media outlets can use the same data and at the same time maintain a different message.
Introduction

This study seeks to examine how international media outlets covered the 2012 U.S. presidential election. By utilizing a content analysis approach, it is possible to determine how different countries: analyze similar polling data, tie U.S. political issues into their own domestic ones, support or attack a specific candidate, and develop specific overarching goals in their coverage.

The year 2012 saw widespread political elections with almost all of the world powers holding some form of political election including: Russia, France, the United States, China, Japan and Korea. According to the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, a Washington, D.C. based nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting fair elections around the world, 29 nations held presidential elections in 2012 with about 50 countries preparing for parliamentary polls. Although it would be possible to conduct this research on anyone of these above-mentioned countries, coverage of the U.S. presidential election was used due to the popularity worldwide and the ease of access to usable data.

To further narrow the focus of the research, data gathering was narrowed to only Japanese and Korean media outlets. Both of these countries are seen as important allies to the U.S. and as such have a large amount of coverage related to the elections. Using a content analysis approach it was possible to determine overarching approaches to reporting that demonstrate underlying biases within media outlets whether intentional or not.

Method

Research like this is important because it sheds light on the importance of polls in the media. By using data gathered through polls, journalists can gain a greater understanding on public opinion and other important trends. However, this data is not always used the same way. Often, editors and producers do not let the data guide the stories and in fact, only use the data when it broadens the scope of the story or supports their conclusion. This research will help to demonstrate how different media outlets can use the same data and at the same time maintain a different message. This research will seek to answer three central research questions about tendencies in the medias reporting which are:

How different countries analyze similar polling data, tie U.S. political issues into their own domestic ones
Whether specific outlets support or attack a specific candidate
How local national events affect their coverage of a specific candidate

In order to make the task of data management more manageable, it was decided to focus on media coverage in Japan and Korea considering both countries had very large elections and also have very active media companies. Despite the large amount of media outlets to choose from it was important to narrow it down to 4 main papers, the Hankyoreh and the Chosun Ilbo of Korea, and the Asahi Shim bun and the Yomiuri Shim bun of Japan. Both the Chosun Ilbo and the Yomuri Shim bun where recognized as conservative leaning papers, while the Hankyoreh and the Asahi Shim bun were noted as adopting a more liberal stance. From September 1- October 30th, election data was gathered from these sources.

A quantitative and Qualitative content analysis approach was taken to obtain the sources used in this research. Each specific company’s database was used to find the necessary articles and include: The Asahi Shim bun’s Kikuzo II Visual for Libraries database, the Yomiuri Shim bun’s Yomidasu Rekishikan database, the Chosun Ilbo’s DB Chosun database, and the Hankyoreh’s MEDIAGAON database from the Korea Press Foundation. Using these databases,
key terms used in the search are: “U.S. presidential election”, “Barack Obama”, and “Mitt Romney”. After finding the articles, keyword analysis of headlines, abstracts, and the full texts were the primary means of analysis.

Both news articles and editorials were analyzed and coded depending on these factors including: overall tone relating to both candidates (positive or negative), and simple total of how many times each candidate’s name was mentioned in each paper. The polling data used was open coded.

Findings and Discussion

By gathering data from a multitude of sources, specific trends become readily apparent. Media outlets often vary their coverage of the same event despite having access to the same data. This strongly supports the conclusion that there are outlying influences that cause this variation. Unlike many outlets within the U.S., these papers do not readily identify themselves with a particular political party. By quickly looking at the data, it is possible to see that these outlets have underlying biases.

With the completion of the data collection immediate trends become apparent within the data. First, there is an obvious disparity between the numbers of available articles related to the election. Data shows that during the data collection period both Japanese papers, the Asahi Shimbun and the Yomiuri Shimbun, had only written 59 and 58 articles related to the election respectively. During the same period, both Korean outlets had written significantly more articles. The Chosun Ilbo published 107 articles while the Hankyoreh published 98.

Although the number of articles alone does not demonstrate any clear bias, it is important to consider why there is such a contrast. Current economic and other domestic issues have been important news in Japan. Since the recent political focus has been on addressing these issues, there is reason to believe that this would directly correlate to decrease coverage of international politics. This is in direct contrast to South Korea where recent trade agreements with the United States as well as the constant threat of military action with North Korea have kept the South’s media focused on U.S. politics.

With a clear understanding of the disparity between the amounts of articles published, it is important to look at how much coverage each candidate received as well as how they were portrayed. Barack Obama was mentioned 389 times between 59 articles published by the Asahi Shimbun. This was almost identical to the 370 times he was mentioned in the Yomiuri Shimbun’s 58 articles. However, when looking at this same data for Mitt Romney, disparities are easily evident. Mitt Romney is mentioned only 224 times by the Asahi Shimbun and 320 times by the Yomiuri Shimbun.

Regarding the coverage in Korean papers, Barack Obama was mentioned a surprising 737 times within the 107 articles published by the Chosun Ilbo. Within the 98 articles published by the Hankyoreh, Barack Obama was mentioned 492 times, significantly less than the Chosun Ilbo. In the same number of articles Mitt Romney’s name arose 1202 times in the Chosun Ilbo and 441 times in the Hankyoreh.

Aside from the great difference between coverage of the candidates in the Chosun Ilbo, the coverage is fairly balanced. Even though there are some slight differences, the total number of times a candidate is mentioned is not enough of an indicator in determining biases in media support. To determine this, the data was coded to determine of the article showed positive or negative support for a particular candidate.

Within the already mentioned articles from the Asahi Shimbun, Barack Obama was
mentioned positively 36 times compared to only 5 times for Mitt Romney. Negative coverage was greater for Mitt Romney with 24 compared to only 8 for Barack Obama. However, when analyzing the *Yomiuri Shimbun*’s papers, the Obama receives 24 negative articles while Mitt Romney received 21 positive and 22 negative.

Findings from the Korean papers mirror those found in the Japanese counterparts. Barack Obama is mentioned favorably 72 times and negatively only 21 times in the *Hankyoreh*. Mitt Romney received only 19 positive mentions and 51 negative. This contrasts with findings from the *Chosun Ilbo*, which gave Barack Obama 50 positive articles but also 43 negative. Mitt Romney received an almost equal 35 positive and 32 negative.

The findings from both countries are surprising considering the political leanings of the papers. The *Asahi Shimbun* and the *Hankyoreh* and often-considered liberal leaning papers and the gathered data supports that label. Barack Obama received a far greater amount of positive attention compared to Mitt Romney. However, when looking at the *Yomiuri Shimbun* and the *Chosun Ilbo*, both considered to be conservative leaning, it is expected that one would find similar results. However, the support between the candidates was much more even. Although the *Yomiuri Shimbun* did publish more negative articles for Barack Obama, their coverage of Mitt Romney was equally divided and showed no significant outward support. The *Chosun Ilbo*’s support was the most balanced among all of the papers with almost an equal amount of positive and negative articles.

These findings are surprising considering how often the media is accused of offering a liberal bias. Although there were some inconsistencies among the conservative papers, they offered a less biased approach to reporting when compared to those, which are viewed as more liberal.

Another area of analysis relates to the use of polling data and how it is used in conjunction with other data methods. Often times, this polling data is heavily relied upon because of the objective support it lends to reporting. News organizations look to polls to get a better understanding of the political climate and to offer validity to their claims. However, there are problems that arose related to the use of polling data among these four papers. Although each company referenced well-established polls such as Gallup, real clear politics, and pew research, there were instances where papers gave supposed polling information without providing any reference to where it was taken from. When looking at the polling data referenced by each paper, it appears as if the papers are letting the data drive their reporting. For instance, the *Hankyoreh*, which showed strong support for Barack Obama, referenced 9 polls that showed Mitt Romney ahead in the ratings while referencing 11 polls showing Barack Obama in the lead. This is in direct contrast with the earlier findings that showed that this paper had written 72 positively framed articles for Barack Obama and 51 negatively for Mitt Romney. Other papers showed similar results in this regard.

Although the papers did a commendable job utilizing this objective polling data, it was found that the companies were able to use this trust of polling data to inject opinion into their articles. Among every company it was found that they made mention of polling data without referencing which poll it came from and other identifying information. When this occurred, the unnamed polling data supported earlier findings related to the amount of positive and negative articles for a specific candidate. In the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, Barack Obama received 24 negative articles while the unreferenced polling data suggested that Mitt Romney was ahead in the election. The *Hankyoreh* showed similar practices by stating 7 times that unnamed polling data suggested a Barack Obama reelection.
This finding is troubling for the fact that possible opinions are being passed off as objective data and leading to the possibility of inaccurate reporting.

Besides these major attributes, smaller trends in reporting were also discovered. Among the Korean papers, more focused was placed on hard data such as polls and other statistics while in Japan focus was placed on the opinion of various topic specialists. Despite these differences in data gathering techniques, similarities were noted in newspaper reports. There were four major TV debates and Americans were polled heavily before and after each. Before the 7th of October Barack Obama held a clear lead in the majority of popularity polls. However, from the 7 through the 21st of October when Mitt Romney performed well in his debate, Mitt Romney took the lead in many of the polls. After the final debate on the 21 of October, it was shown that Barack Obama retook the lead in the polls. Despite the change in leader at the polls, Barack Obama remained the favorite to win in both the Korean and Japanese media. Even though both countries reported the fact that Mitt Romney took the lead during the middle of October, many of the papers still reported that Barack Obama would win the election. They supported this with polls of their own or expert opinion.

**Conclusion**

These findings clearly show that although polling data may point to a certain conclusion various factors still drive a story. One major cause for this difference is presumed to be due to the power of the media's audience. Because most people only want news that has some impact on their lives, journalists often frame stories in ways that appeals to current domestic issues. By trying to shape their stories, they inject subjective data into the narrative, which causes differences to develop. This is easy to accomplish even in the face of statistical polling data. Almost any type of data can be discredited if emotion becomes involved. One way to accomplish this is to make readers question whether the data is true. This was done in both Japanese and Korean newspapers when journalists stated that many voters felt that Barack Obama would still be the leader even though polling data showed Mitt Romney was the current leader. If a certain political ideal appears popular, there is a higher chance undecided voters will want to follow popular opinion. Although it could be said that the polling data itself might be inaccurate, it should be the job of the media to state the statistical limitations of the polls and let the reader decide instead of offering less accurate evidence to try and persuade readers.

Overall, this research supports the belief that even though many newspapers rely on polling data to develop their stories and create and idea of objectivity, they often rely on various techniques to try and shape public opinion whether this is done purposefully or not is hard to tell.
References


Minority Recruiting: The Effects of Diversity in News Coverage of the Military on the Recruitment of Minorities

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Abstract

This study examined the effects of portrayals of diversity and minorities in leadership positions in military news reporting on minorities’ attraction to the military as an organization. Subjects (N=86) participated in a dual online experiment and survey that exposed them to mock military news stories. Exposure to news stories with minority leaders was found to be related with greater levels of organizational attractiveness among minorities. The study also explored the role that family experience and family support have on organizational attractiveness to the military. Both family experience and family support were found to be positively related to organizational attractiveness.
While the racial demographics of the U.S. have continued to change over the past several decades, levels of diversity within the military have not changed to represent the diversity present in the population as a whole. In addition, the leadership of our nation’s military has remained overwhelmingly White and male, despite the growing numbers of minorities and women in uniform. For example, 12.6% of respondents to the U.S. Census identified themselves as Black or African American alone (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). If the military were envisioned as a reflection of the society from which its service members are drawn, then similar numbers of African Americans would be expected in the military. The facts of the matter, however, are much different.

For fiscal year (FY) 2009, African Americans were overrepresented in the active-duty enlisted force at 18.5% and underrepresented in the active-duty officer corps at 8.7% (U.S. Department of Defense, 2009). While African Americans are overrepresented in the Army enlisted force at 21.4% and comparably represented in the Army officer corps at 12.8%, much more stark levels of underrepresentation manifest themselves in the other services (U.S. Department of Defense, 2009). The Marine Corps fared the worst: Only 10.8% of enlisted Marines and 5.2% of officers are Black (U.S. Department of Defense, 2009).

The Military Leadership Diversity Commission (2011) report underscored the snowball effect that a downturn in the recruitment of women and minorities has on military leadership in the future. The result will be a military with varying representations of women and different minority groups, still led almost exclusively by White male generals and admirals. Harris (2009) further discussed why African American officers fail to advance, and why the advancement of minorities is of great concern to military leaders. Weick (1979) presented Buckley’s notion of requisite variety as “the variety within a system must be at least as great as the environmental variety against which it is attempting to regulate itself” when explaining that “organizations have to be preoccupied with keeping sufficient diversity inside the organization to sense accurately the variety present in ecological changes outside it” (p. 188). Simply put, any organization that hopes to exist in balance with its environment must maintain the level of diversity found within its environment.

Studies such as the one conducted by Lievens, Van Hoye, and Schreurs (2005) demonstrate how organizational image among potential applicants affects their decision regarding whether or not to join the military. Publics develop images of an organization from a number of different sources. Films, video games, acquaintances, and other sources also help shape an outsider’s perception of the military, but the one source of information with which individuals are inundated on a daily basis is the news media. Gutiérrez and Wilson (1995) found that “the media’s coverage and portrayal of minorities have an effect on members of both minority and majority groups” (p. 56). While several studies have examined the effects of recruitment advertisements on the image of an organization held by minority applicants, few studies have specifically looked at the effects of news reports on an organization and the organizational image of potential applicants. The uncontrolled nature of publicity leaves many factors out of the hands of the professional communicator but it is critical to identify where and how different modes of mediated communication can be synced in order to portray a unified, consistent organizational image.

Knowing how their organizations may be perceived is a fundamental skill for a military public affairs officer or any public relations practitioner. Military public affairs officers are charged with relationship-building and organizational image management, but with only limited control over content and placement. Still, Broom (2009) pointed to public relations sources as
one of the most important sources of information in the news media. Understanding how minorities perceive the military due to the effects of military news coverage, recruitment advertisements, official websites, and other channels, is essential to properly communicating the military’s desire to be a heterogeneous, inclusive force.

This study explored the link between portrayals of minority service members in news coverage of the military and how would-be recruits perceive the military as a potential organization of employment. The study analyzed the racial diversity of service members in military news stories and what effect the level of diversity has on the military’s organizational attractiveness to minorities. The study also explored whether or not the news story portrayed minorities in supervisory roles, and how that affects minorities’ attraction to the military as an organization.

**Literature Review**

*Minorities, Diversity, and Organizational Attractiveness*

A key part of public relations as a management function is projecting the right image of the organization. This does not insinuate projecting a false image, but communicating to various publics the genuine values and goals of an organization. In the case of the U.S. military, this goal is a diverse force with representation throughout its ranks, reflective of the population from which it draws its members. The military services have communicated this goal by increasing the diversity of service members portrayed in its recruitment advertisements.

This study borrowed Ghawuk and Triandis’ (1996) definition of *diversity* as the “difference in ethnicity, race, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, veteran status, age, national origin, and cultural and personal perspectives” (p.85). A homogeneous group implies that all of the individuals within the group are of the same race (White, Black, Asian, etc.). Heterogeneity within a group implies that its members come from two or more racial backgrounds.

*Organizational attractiveness* is associated with organizational image. According to Tom (1971), organizational image is the way in which an individual perceives an organization. This perception could refer to a number of different factors, such as whether the organization is perceived as being environmentally conscious, or a good neighbor and member of the community. Botero, McKenna, Morgan, Zartman, and Fabel (2009) defined organizational attractiveness as “how organizations get potential applicants to view the organization as a positive place to work” (p. 4). They discussed different approaches for viewing organizational attractiveness—from the organization’s perspective, or from the potential employee’s perspective. The former is concerned with the actions the organization takes (through human resources, recruitment, etc.) to attract potential applicants. This study is concerned with the latter approach to organizational attractiveness—that of the potential employee’s perspective. Botero et al. (2009) listed several key objectives for potential recruits: “Having a positive affective attitude towards the organization, viewing the organization as a desirable entity, and exerting effort to work for the organization” (p. 4). This last key objective highlights that organizational attractiveness is more than a person’s perception of an organization. Attraction to an organization also leads to a behavioral change—seeking to join the organization. Perception is only half the battle; one can argue that getting potential applicants to perceive your organization as a good place to work is useless if no one actually applies for employment. Organizational attractiveness goes beyond merely getting a potential recruit to perceive the organization as a desirable place to work; the ultimate goal is to get the potential recruit to seek to join the organization. What
factors make a potential employee view the organization as a desirable place to work, and lead that person to seek employment with that organization? Therefore, this study defined organizational attractiveness as a person’s perception of an organization as a desirable organization to join, and his or her efforts to join that organization.

The U.S. Department of Defense’s Joint Advertising Market Research & Studies (JAMRS) program examines factors affecting recruitment in the military. The JAMRS program measures the likelihood of potential recruits joining the military in terms of propensity, which it defined in its 2004 report as potential recruits who identify that they will definitely or probably join the military. The program found that propensity to join the military was related to self-efficacy, or how well an individual felt they could conform to a military lifestyle, and to attitudes toward the military. A third factor, subjective norms, or pressure to join the military from family members, was found to be an indicator of attitudes toward the military. The present study sought to explore potential recruit’s desire to join the military using an organizational attractiveness model as it relates to racial diversity.

Using Schneider’s (1987) Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) model, Perkins, Thomas, and Taylor (2000) explored the effect of diversity in recruitment advertisements on minority job applicants using an Attraction-Image-Compatibility scale. The Attraction subscale measured applicants’ attraction to a fictitious organization, and included items such as “I would like this company to recruit on campus” (p. 253). The Image subscale measures the organizational image as perceived by the applicants, and included items such as “This company appears to care about its employees” (p. 253). The Compatibility subscale measured how well applicants perceived they would fit in with the organization, and included items such as “I would have no problem adjusting to this organization” (p. 253). Perkins et al. (2000) found that the more racial diversity was portrayed in a recruitment advertisement, the more positive the image of that organization was among Blacks, the more compatible with the organization Blacks perceived themselves to be, and the more Blacks were attracted to the organization. The study also found that the racial diversity of the advertisement did not seem to have an effect on White subjects. Villamil (2007) conducted a similar study in which he found that minorities favored diversity management more than Whites did. Because higher levels of racial diversity and diversity management have been found to be aspects of organizational characteristics that are important to minorities, the following hypothesis is presented:

H1: Minorities exposed to military news coverage with a higher level of racial diversity will perceive the military as a more attractive organization than minorities exposed to military news coverage with a lower level of racial diversity.

The Leadership Factor

Developing a positive, racially diverse image of the military is the first step in developing diversity among senior military leaders. The U.S. military seeks to diversify its officer corps by countering the perception that senior leadership is reserved for White males only. This perception comes not just from reality, as previously stated, but also from portrayals in the news media and elsewhere. There is a gap in current research regarding how leadership roles portrayed in media affect organizational attractiveness, whether for the military or civilian sector. Woodman (2001) examined the portrayal (or rather, the marginalization) of African American soldiers in Vietnam War films. Unfortunately, very little content analysis has been done on portrayals of minorities in military news reports.
A supervisory role is one where the person filling that role is leading or managing others. Avery (2003) made a further distinction between “first-line” or immediate supervisors, and “higher level executive positions” or senior leadership (p. 677). In the military, a supervisor may be anyone of the same or higher rank to whom a member is accountable. While this includes many mid-level and senior enlisted personnel and warrant officers, this study used the term to signify commissioned officers.

Avery (2003) examined the effects of portrayals of African Americans in higher and lower status positions in recruitment advertisements, finding that “[B]lack viewers were more attracted to organizations depicting Blacks in both higher and lower status positions than to those wherein Black representation was limited to the entry level” (p. 676). The presence of Black managers in Avery’s (2003) study did not have an effect on White subjects—this is similar to the lack of effect of diversity on Whites that Perkins et al. (2000) experienced. However, Avery (2003) found that some Whites reacted more favorably to recruitment advertisements where Blacks were only shown in subordinate, entry-level positions. This supported Gutiérrez and Wilson’s (1995) idea that both minorities and members of the majority are affected in some way by the media. Therefore, the following hypothesis is presented:

H2: Minorities exposed to military news coverage in which minorities are portrayed in supervisory roles will perceive the military as a more attractive organization than minorities exposed to military news coverage in which minorities are not portrayed in supervisory roles.

The Role of Family Experience

The concept of family, in the context of this study, consisted of parents, siblings, and extended members, such as first cousins, uncles, and aunts. Hill (1998) reinforced this concept when he defined African American families as a “constellations of households” that included blood or marriage relations (p. 18). More specifically, African American families were seen as a network of immediate and extended relatives who may live together or in different households but provide the needs and functions of a related unit. In addition, Billingsley and Caldwell (1991) and Roberts (1980) considered individuals and groups associated with such institutions as the church and schools as extended family members, because they, along with the immediate family, are three critical institutions integral to the viability of the African American community.

The concept of experience is defined as knowledge or familiarity gained through involvement or observation. Familiarity is often equated with an entity having knowledge of another entity through direct or indirect experience (Bromley, 2000). Moreover, Bromley (1993) posited that an individual could gain knowledge of an organization via secondhand experience. Grunig and Hung (2002) advanced that notion, developing the term reputational relationships to describe an organizational-public relationship (OPR) based on secondhand experience. Schmitz & Boyer (1996) found “the presence of veterans under age 65”—those most likely to be parents of potential military recruits—“to be perhaps the single most important factor for explaining enlist behavior” within a population, indicating that secondhand experience from veterans may affect an individual’s decision to join the military (p. 5). Still, research indicating a relationship between an individual knowing more veterans and his or her organizational attractiveness to the military is lacking. In addition, research from Grunig and Hung (2002) concluded that a public’s experience was positively correlated with the quality of OPR, even if that relationship is reputational (secondhand). Therefore, this study proposes to examine the following hypothesis:
H3: Positive family experience with an organization is positively related to attraction to that organization.

The Role of Family Support

Scholars have found that family support influences behavior. The JAMRS program (2004) found that pressure to join the military from family members was an indicator of more positive attitudes toward the military, which increased propensity to join. Bandura (1991) pointed out that children are exposed to standards and behavior patterns from various sources—family members, siblings, peers and other adults. Maton, Hrabowski, and Greif (1998) indicated a positive relationship between parental involvement and African American males doing well, staying focused, and overcoming challenges. This supportive relationship also had an impact on the relationship between minorities and an organization.

When pursuing minorities to join higher education institutions or other organizations, education scholars (Cabrera, Nora & Terenzini, 1999; Stewart, Russell & Wright, 1997; and Thomas & Thurber, 1999) have argued that it is important for colleges, universities, and professional institutions to get families and communities involved in the recruitment process, because they are extremely important in the recruitment, transition, and retention process. Schneller (2008) observed this when he interviewed some African American and Hispanic students at the Naval Academy as part of the Navy review of racial policies. A significant majority of the students told Schneller that their families, friends, and peers often tried to dissuade them from entering officer programs. Schneller was also told that school counselors, too, were uninformed about officer program requirements, benefits offered by the Navy, and scholarships. The JAMRS program (2004) found that Blacks perceived lower levels of family support for joining the military than Whites or Hispanics, and also less influence from fathers and more influence from church or religious group members. The study also noted that sometimes there can be a gap between parental attitudes regarding military service and children’s perceptions of their parents’ attitudes, which it attributed to the low frequency at which parents discuss military service with their children. Still, they concluded that perceptions of those attitudes “do significantly affect military enlistment, independent of parents’ true attitudes” (p. 32). These findings underscore two important considerations regarding family support among minorities: Support from non-parent family members may be of increasing importance for some minority individuals, and a potential applicant’s perception of parental attitudes is a better indicator of organizational attractiveness than parents’ actual attitudes toward military service.

One of the most challenging aspects of this study is the fact that very few researchers have focused on the interactions of race, ethnicity, and gender with career patterns (Smith, 1980). In fact, Witherspoon and Speight (2009) found no far-reaching model used to study minority career development. Therefore, this study reviewed literature from the field of education, which has embarked on an effort to recruit more African American males to become teachers. Analysis of the literature in the recruitment process found an initial review of theories on occupational choice and career development, but those theories used studies with White, middle-class men as the sample, which did not address how race, ethnicity, and culture influenced decisions to pursue teaching or other career choices in general (Education Alliance at Brown University, 2004).

Since there is little research analyzing recruitment and retention of minorities for careers as military officers, this study focused on some of the literature involving recruiting and retaining minorities into the educational field. In particular, Bandura (1991) contended that
support from immediate or extended family members can have a direct influence on the
decisions of young people. Therefore, this study presents the following hypothesis:

H4: The level of support to join an organization an individual perceives from family
members is positively related to an individual’s attraction to that organization.

Methods

Participants

The respondents in this study were undergraduate students (N = 86) enrolled at San Diego
State University. Of the respondents, 23% were freshmen (n = 20), 11% were sophomores (n =
9), 33% were juniors (n = 28), and 34% were seniors (n = 29). The respondents ranged from 18
to 25 (M=20.5, SD = 1.68). In addition, 31% of respondents were male (n=27) and 69% were
female (n = 59). Among the respondents, 11% identified themselves as American Indian or
Alaskan Native (n = 9), 43% as Asian (n = 37), 17% as Black or African American (n = 15), 8%
as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (n = 7), and 21% as White Hispanic (n = 18).
Participants were recruited using a nonprobability sampling strategy, and offered a chance to win
Aztec Shops gift cards as an incentive to participate. Participants were given a link to an online
website on which the study was being conducted.

Experimental Design

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested using experimental design. The experiment used a 2x2
posttest-only independent group factorial design to test two levels for the diversity variable
(low/high diversity) and two levels for the leadership variable (minority/White leader). These
four groups were subjected to various treatments. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of
these groups upon visiting the study website. Each treatment used the same story text.
Differentiation between the treatments was accomplished by altering the associated photographs
and captions with the story to depict different levels of racial diversity of the characters, and to
depict either a minority or White character as the supervisor. The low racial diversity treatments
contained photographs showing more White characters than minority characters, while the high
racial diversity photographs showed more minority characters than White characters. The
minority supervisor treatments contained a photograph identifying a Black character as the
supervisor, while the White supervisor treatments contained a photograph identifying a White
character as the supervisor. Because the characters depicted in the photographs were wearing
military uniforms and gear that covered most of their bodies, a character was only considered
identifiable if some area of his skin (face or hands) can clearly be seen. All of the photographs in
the treatment were actual images captured by military and civilian journalists in Afghanistan and
published by civilian or military news agencies.

Survey Design

Hypotheses 3 and 4 were tested via the cross-sectional survey method. The family
experience independent variable and family support independent variable were evaluated by
asking the respondent questions regarding their family’s experiences with, interaction with, and
attitudes toward the military. The questionnaire used a series of Likert-type questions to
determine the participant’s level of family experience with the military as an organization, their
level of family support to join the military, and to what extent the participant agreed with
statements regarding leadership and advancement opportunities and racial diversity in the
military. Questions regarding a subject’s family’s experience with the military were used to
generate the Family Experience index, and questions regarding a subject’s family’s support for joining the military were used to generate the Family Support index.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Experience and Support Indices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How many people do you know (family members, friends, or acquaintances) who currently serve or have served in the U.S. military? (Options given from 0-20, then “More than 20”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>Frequency of which the respondent speaks with service members about their military experience.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>Whether service member or respondent initiates military-related conversations.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>The service members I know enjoyed their experience of being in the military. (5-point &quot;Strongly Disagree&quot; to &quot;Strongly Agree&quot; scale) (Note 1)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <strong>I would consider working for an organization even if no one I knew ever worked for that organization. (5-point &quot;Strongly Disagree&quot; to &quot;Strongly Agree&quot; scale)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Family Support (All items measured on a 5-point "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" scale) |
| 1. In general, my family would support me joining the military. |
| 2. In general, my family has a positive opinion of the military. |
| 3. *I would not go to work for an organization even if my family, in general, did not think highly of the organization.* |
| 4. In general, my family believes military service is honorable. |
| 5. A family member has encouraged me to join the military. |

Note 1: Items with two asterisks were not included in the final Family Experience index. Note 2: After testing for reliability, the italicized item with one asterisk was removed from the Family Support index. Cronbach’s alpha for the adjusted Family Support index was .81.

Questions regarding a subject’s feelings toward the military as a place of potential employment were used to generate indices for organizational attractiveness. The organizational attractiveness indices, detailed below, were derived from the Attraction-Image-Compatibility (AIC) scale used by Perkins et al. (2000). Items were been modified or added as necessary so the indices and questions apply to the current study. The Leadership index was created specifically for this study to measure whether a respondent felt that the military would provide the opportunity to serve in a supervisory or leadership position over others. In terms of the perceptual and behavioral characteristics of organizational attractiveness, the Compatibility index measures the behavioral aspect of organizational attractiveness by more closely addressing whether the respondent would join or would feel comfortable serving in the military, whereas the Attraction, Image, and Leadership indices more closely address how the respondent perceives the military as an organization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Attractiveness Indices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(All items measured on a 5-point &quot;Strongly Disagree&quot; to &quot;Strongly Agree&quot; scale)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>I would request additional information regarding military service opportunities.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. I would like the military to recruit on campus.
3. *I would speak to a recruiter about the possibility of joining the military.
4. I think the military is an attractive organization.
5. I would recommend military service to a friend.
6. I like the military.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Compatibility</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The military appears to care about its service members.</td>
<td>1. I would feel at home serving in the military.</td>
<td>1. The military can provide me with an opportunity to lead others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The military has a favorable image.</td>
<td>2. I would very much like to join the military.</td>
<td>2. The military can provide me with opportunities for advancement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>The military would be a good organization to work for.</em></td>
<td>3. This organization will likely meet my desires and needs.</td>
<td>3. <em>There are people just like me in the military.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note 1: After factor analysis, the italicized items with an asterisk were removed from the indices to which they belonged.*

The 90% decision rule (alpha = .10) was used in one-tailed tests of statistical significance because the sample size was less than 100.

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the 17 items of the organizational attractiveness indices. Four distinct factors emerged. Factor 1, which corresponds to the Compatibility index of the organizational attractiveness scale, accounted for 48.58% of the total variance (eigenvalue = 8.26). Factor 2, which corresponds to the Attraction index of the organizational attractiveness scale, accounted for 10.73% of the total variance (eigenvalue = 1.82). Factor 3, which corresponds to the Leadership index of the organizational attractiveness scale, accounted for 7.05% of the total variance (eigenvalue = 1.20). Factor 4, which corresponds to the Image index of the organizational attractiveness scale, accounted for 6.10% of the total variance (eigenvalue = 1.04). Five items were dropped because they loaded on more than one factor or did not load on any factor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Loadings for Organizational Attractiveness Indices</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
<th>Factor 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would have no problems adjusting to the military.</td>
<td>.822</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would very much like to join the military.</td>
<td>.793</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The military would likely meet my desires and needs.</td>
<td>.756</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would feel at home serving in the military.</td>
<td>.745</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think the military is an attractive organization.</td>
<td></td>
<td>.804</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend military service to a friend.</td>
<td></td>
<td>.774</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like the military.</td>
<td></td>
<td>.716</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like the military to recruit on campus.</td>
<td></td>
<td>.671</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The military can provide me with an opportunity for advancement.

The military can provide me with an opportunity to lead others.

The military appears to care about its service members.

The military has a favorable image.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eigenvalue</th>
<th>Variance Explained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.26</td>
<td>48.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>10.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>7.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>6.10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After factor analysis, reliability checks were performed on the remaining items for the organizational attractiveness indices. Cronbach’s alpha for the adjusted Compatibility, Attraction, Leadership, and Image indices were .89, .87, .89, and .69, respectively. Means and standard deviation for the adjusted Compatibility index were, Attraction, Leadership, and Image indices were 1.84 and .88, 2.65 and .98, 3.45 and 1.21, and 3.14 and .89, respectively.

**Results**

H1 predicted that minorities exposed to military news coverage with a high level of racial diversity would perceive the military as a more attractive organization than minorities exposed to military news coverage with a low level of racial diversity. To confirm whether or not the manipulation was successful, a one-way ANOVA test was run to compare the differences in perceived diversity between those exposed to the low diversity news stories and those exposed to the high diversity news stories. The difference between the two was found to be statistically insignificant: $F(1, 84) = .81, p = .37, \eta^2 = .01$. The manipulation was not successful, so H1 was not tested.

H2 predicted that minorities exposed to military news coverage in which minorities were portrayed in supervisory roles would perceive the military as a more attractive organization than minorities exposed to military news coverage in which minorities were not portrayed in supervisory roles. To confirm whether or not the manipulation was successful, a one-way ANOVA test was performed to compare the differences in perceived minority leadership between the groups exposed to news stories with a minority leader and groups exposed to news stories with a White leader. The differences between the two groups was statistically significant: $F(1, 84) = 27.88, p < .01, \eta^2 = .25$.

A one-way ANOVA test was performed to test the relationship between minority leadership and organizational attractiveness. A statistically significant relationship was found between being exposed to a news story with a minority leader and the Compatibility index: $F(1, 83) = 4.42, p = .04, \eta^2 = .05$. A statistically significant relationship was also found between being exposed to a news story with a minority leader and the Attraction index: $F(1, 82) = 3.50, p = .07, \eta^2 = .04$. Thus, the second hypothesis was partially confirmed.

H3 predicted that having positive family experience with an organization is positively related to attraction to that organization. Positive family experience predicted attraction towards the military among minority individuals, with $\beta = .42, t = 4.18, p < .01$. Positive family experience also explained a significant proportion of variance in attraction to the military, with $R^2 = .17, F(1, 82) = 17.46, p < .01$. Positive family experience predicted minority individuals seeing themselves in leadership roles in the military, with $\beta = .29, t = 2.72, p < .01$. Positive family experience also explained a significant proportion of variance in the Leadership index, with $R^2 = .07, F(1, 84) = 7.41, p < .01$. Further, positive family experience predicted a positive
image of the military among minority individuals, with \( \beta = .23, t = 2.14, p = .04 \). Positive family experience also explained a significant proportion of variance in minority individuals having a positive image of the military, \( R^2 = .40, F(1, 84) = 4.58, p = .04 \). Our third hypothesis was partially confirmed.

H4 predicted that the level of support to join an organization an individual perceives from family members is positively related to an individual’s attraction to that organization. For minority individuals, family support towards joining the military predicted minority individuals feeling that they would be compatible with the military, with \( \beta = .43, t = 4.32, p < .01 \). Family support also explained a significant proportion of variance in minority individuals feeling compatible with the military, \( R^2 = .17, F(1, 83) = 18.62, p < .01 \). Family support predicted minority individuals feeling attraction towards joining the military, with \( \beta = .56, t = 6.16, p < .01 \). Family support also explained a significant portion of the variance in attraction, with \( R^2 = .31, F(1, 82) = 37.97, p < .01 \). For the minority individuals in this survey, family support also predicted perceiving leadership opportunities in the military, with \( \beta = .41, t = 4.12, p < .01 \). Family support also explained a significant portion of the variance in leadership, with \( R^2 = .16, F(1, 84) = 16.93, p < .01 \). Finally, family support predicted minority individuals having a positive image of the military, with \( \beta = .53, t = 5.65, p < .01 \). Family support also explained a significant portion of the variance in having a positive image, with \( R^2 = .27, F(1, 84) = 31.92, p < .01 \). Thus, the fourth hypothesis was confirmed.

Discussion

Testing H1 proved difficult because the treatments did not invoke the desired perception of diversity among the respondents. Previous research on organizational demography, recruiting advertisements, and racial balance found that the demographic composition of a group can affect the perception of racial diversity within the group, indicating that the concept of racial diversity is more contextual and subjective (Avery, Hernandez, & Hebl, 2004; Davis, Strube, & Cheng, 1995; Pfeffer, 1985). Further research is needed to determine how race and racial diversity can be conveyed in mediated communication.

For H2, a significant relationship was detected between exposure to a minority leader and a higher reading on the Compatibility and Attraction indices, partially confirming the hypothesis. The other indices (Image and Leadership) did not yield significant results. H2, therefore, concludes that exposing minority individuals to military news reports in which the leader is a minority leads to the subject feeling more compatible with and attracted to the military, which is consistent with previously mentioned findings regarding the impact of media on members of racial minority and majority groups (Gutiérrez & Wilson, 1995; Avery, 2003). That exposure to a minority leader was related to higher readings on the Compatibility index, which more closely captures the behavioral aspect of organizational attractiveness, suggests that exposure to a minority leader may have more of an effect on minorities’ actual enlistment behavior than on just improving minorities’ organizational image of the military. Further research should be conducted to determine if this effect exists. One practical implication for the findings in H2 is that military public affairs practitioners should be aware of the effects of portrayals of minorities in leadership roles in military-related news reports. The paradox to the previous statement, however, is that “[t]he U.S. military is too white [sic] and too male at the top and needs to change recruiting and promotion policies” (Jelinek, 2011). Efforts must continue to develop a continuing stream of successful, demographically diverse leaders who can be appropriately portrayed in public affairs efforts. Additional research should be conducted to consider whether representing actual
minority service members as lead subjects in news reports is more or less effective in increasing levels on the Compatibility index than actors representing minorities in recruiting advertisements.

For H3, findings detected significant relationships between knowing more service members and higher readings on the Attraction, Image, and Leadership indices. Therefore, H3 was partially confirmed. These findings further Schmitz & Boyer’s (1996) research that indicated the presence of parent-age veterans in a population as the most accurate indicator of enlistment behavior, by showing that the more service members an individual knows, the more attracted to the military the individual will be. It should be noted that a statistically significant relationship was not found between knowing more service members and higher readings on the Compatibility index. Because the Compatibility index is a better indicator of the behavioral aspect of organizational attractiveness, the lack of a relationship between Compatibility and knowing more service members could mean that knowing more service members improves minorities’ image of the military, but does less to influence their behavior to join. The relationship between family experience and the Attraction index was stronger than the relationship between exposure to a minority leader in news coverage and the Attraction index.

This finding and the additional statistically significant relationships found between family experience and the Image and Leadership indices indicates that the secondhand experience potential applicants get through interpersonal relationships with service members has more effect on organizational attractiveness than mediated communication. This suggests that the military should continue developing more innovative ways to involve its service members and veterans in the recruitment of potential minority applicants. More research in this area is strongly recommended, since current research is limited. Because this study did not examine the race or military leadership roles of the service members that the respondents knew, further research should also seek to determine if those circumstances moderate the effects of family experience.

For H4, a statistically significant relationship was found between family support to join the military and all four organizational attractiveness indices. Therefore, H4 was fully confirmed. These findings support research by the JAMRS program (2004). This supportive relationship also had an impact on the relationship between minorities and an organization. In addition, these findings support previous research that indicated that a supportive relationship between minority parents and children positively affects the perception of an organization. (Stewart et al., 1997; Maton et al., 1998; Cabrera et al., 1999; Thomas & Thurber, 1999). At a practical level, these findings indicate military organizations should consider efforts that focus on attracting family members in recruiting efforts.

**Limitations**

Though the use of a nonprobability sampling strategy limits the generalizability of the study’s findings to a larger population, it was necessary to recruit a sufficient number of subjects. In addition, a less stringent decision rule (alpha = .10 instead of alpha = .05) was applied to the study results due to the small sample size, increasing the likelihood of a Type I error. Further research should attempt to use a probability sampling strategy to recruit a larger sample.

Another limitation to the study was that H1 (the relationship between exposure to high versus low levels of racial diversity and organizational attractiveness) could not be fully tested because the manipulation failed. Why the manipulation did not work is unclear but possible explanations to consider could be found in a flawed experimental design or treatments, the fact
that all of the characters in the treatments were males while the majority of respondents were females, or the respondents’ perception of diversity. Clearly, further research is needed.

The composition of the Image and Leadership indices led to issues once a factor analysis was conducted and only two items each were included on these indices. While Cronbach’s alpha for the Leadership index remained strong (.89), the reliability of the Image index suffered (.69). This may have led to the inability to find a statistically significant relationship between exposure to a minority leader and higher readings on these indices. Organizational Image and Leadership indices should be developed to be more robust in future research.

Finally, a more comprehensive Family Experience index must be developed. Initially, the Family Experience index was intended to account for the number of service members a subject knew, as well as other factors such as how often the subject spoke to service members about the military, and whether or not those service members communicated good impressions of military life. Because of it was difficult to develop an index to account for all factors involved, family experience was measured simply by the number of service members the subject reported knowing. This may have led to the inability to find a statistically significant relationship between family experience and compatibility.

Implications for Further Research

Overall, more research should focus on the interactions of race, ethnicity, and gender with career patterns, specifically as it relates to military organizations. These findings support previous research indicating a supportive relationship between minority parents and children positively impacts the perception of an organization (Stewart et al., 1997; Maton et al., 1998; Cabrera et al., 1999; Thomas & Thurber, 1999). At a practical level, these findings indicate military organizations should consider efforts that focus on attracting family members in recruiting efforts. In addition, military organizations should consider increasing efforts to use current and retired minority military members in efforts to recruit and retain minorities in the military. These efforts could include incentives for the current and retired minority military members to participate. Further research should seek to determine which specific factors of interaction with service members and veterans have the most effect on organizational attractiveness. The ways that race and racial diversity can be conveyed in mediated communication should also be examined further.

Diversity management within an organization has become a focus area. Military organizations need to develop systematic efforts for recruit and retain qualified minorities. The results of this study have theoretical and practical applications that can help organizations develop streamlined and cost-effective diversity initiatives to recruit, train, and retain the best and brightest individuals.
References


Comparing the Efficacy of New Media Communication in Nonprofit, For-profit, Government and Educational Organizations

Matthew Costanzo
Suzanne FitzGerald
Joseph Basso
Rowan University

Abstract

With social media usage rapidly increasing across all demographics, organizations must learn to use these channels effectively to communicate with consumers today. This study examines the ways in which nonprofit, for-profit, government and educational organizations use new media channels to send messages and engage consumers.
The importance of new media—social media—continues to increase. Research shows that messages displayed through static media, such as print, fail to resonate with audiences as efficiently as messages displayed via dynamic channels. Modern communication reflects the thesis of famed communication researcher Marshall McLuhan who stated that the medium is the message. McLuhan proposed that the medium “medium itself shaped and controlled the scale and form of human association and action (McLuhan, 1964). Today, organizations must do more than simply send out a message and hope the receiver reads it and reacts. Rather, today’s communication engages receivers in conversation and encourages readership through participation and acknowledgement.

The global society has reached the age of constant communication. Publics demand continuous updates and immediate satisfaction. Responding versus responding late, or not responding at all, could represent the difference between a successful or failed message.

Websites such as Facebook and Twitter (often referred to as microblogging websites) encourage conversation between the organization and its audience. Blogging platforms such as Wordpress and Blogger allow organizations to craft content and accept (or reject) feedback in the form of comments on blog posts.

Since consumers can gain access to these channels easily, content can no longer be created to speak to a mass audience, but rather to individuals. Social media allows for a narrowing of communication and a break in the barrier between organizations and consumers. The two-way process of social media allows both sender and receiver the opportunity to engage in communication freely and without time restrictions. Of course, this creates a management imperative for organizations as they must now redefine their communication strategy to incorporate social media.

Depending on the audience, organizations will approach message sending and storytelling in different ways. A nonprofit organization may use a social media strategy that entices people to donate to a cause; whereas, a for-profit organization may continuously highlight a new product. However, despite the industry, there are certain functions an effective social media strategy should maintain. In a paper titled "Information, Community, and Action: How Nonprofit Organizations Use Social Media," Kristen Lovejoy and Gregory Saxton state "there are three key functions of microblogging updates—‘information,’ ‘community,’ and ‘action’," (para 1).

If the audience recognizes a direct benefit, it will continue to visit a page. Presenting audiences with unique benefits will keep them engaged and active in an organization’s social media community.

Statement of Problem

Approaches to social media marketing can be categorized by industry, with distinctions often found among the various industries.

Many organizations now see social media as a less expensive, more effective alternative to traditional modes of communication with key audiences. However, as more organizations move toward the use of social media as a primary tool in the communication strategy, many of these organizations, from all business sectors, struggle with understanding how to effectively use social media.

A Social Society as Component of Organizational Communication Strategy
From inside the classroom or workplace and into our homes, social media continues to become an important aspect of everyday life. Modern society developed and largely thrived because of continued dialogue among members of society. Historically, message exchange took place as families sat around radios in the early 1900s to the widespread use of television fifty years later. Today, communication continues to pave the way for cultural and societal changes.

According to Erik Qualman in his book Socialnomics, social media is "one-to-one and one-to-many discourse in a public setting," (2010). It provides both a singular and group option for discourse creates new opportunities for individuals and organizations alike. Audiences expect to receive information instantly, and without even asking for it. Audiences also expect the information to be current and constant. No longer do consumers need to cut through miles of red tape for an answer to a pressing question about an organization or product. Modern organizations, to be successful, must present valuable information in a two-way communication process that both engages and persuades audiences.

Qualman coins an adaptation of James Carville’s historic “it’s the economy, stupid,” when he says “it’s a people-driven economy, stupid” (Qualman, 2010). People's opinions, habits and outlooks evolve over time. At one point in time, organizations had almost complete control over their publics. Each organization chose what it wanted to say, how it wanted to say it, where it wanted to say it and how frequently it wanted to say it. Prior to the social media revolution, what happened behind closed doors might have never made it to the news. Social media platforms added transparency to organizations, while also providing a personality and human element. Organizations have taken on personal qualities and know engage in conversations with individuals rather than disseminating messages via mass media.

Social media has changed the way organizations communicate with their publics. Social media platforms demand new considerations for frequency, tone and content in general. Each platform, as well as each industry, has its own individual demands.

Organizational survival and success depends on building relationships with key publics. By forging a positive and meaningful relationship with a consumer, an organization fosters relationships and eventually develops ambassadors who can share their positive experience with others. Word of mouth (WOM) -- or as it is referred to when using online communication, E-WOM -- is the concept that anything your organization does causes a reaction; positive or negative. In today's society, providing a consumer with a positive experience might lead to several positive online reviews and digital referrals. However, WOM can be a double-edge sword. Just as quickly as positive information can spread to key publics, negative responses can spread just as easily and cause damage to reputation. According to Lon Safko in his book The Social Media Bible: Tactics, Tools and Strategies for Business Success, "The statistic that 'an angry customer will tell up to 20 other people about a bad experience...,' that's face-to-face. With the use of social media like blogs, Twitter and Facebook, those 20 people can quickly become 20,000 or even 200,000," (2010).

Today's Social Media Users

Safko (2009) surveyed 1,000 professionals with degrees and annual incomes averaging $100,000. Sixty-six and four-tenths percent of the participants surveyed stated they could not define what social media is; yet, 99.1 percent stated they knew that social media either currently has or would have an effect on their lives and their businesses. If those surveyed were asked the first question again today, three years after the first time they answered, they might answer differently. With new media, there is a learning curve. It takes time for a majority of a culture's
generations to adapt to something new. If individuals do not completely understand what it is and how to use it, it is difficult for organizations to figure out how to use the channels to market to their publics effectively.

Publics can find out what is going on in the world by accessing a variety of media. Whether they use social media to broadcast their latest blog post or share a cat picture with a group of friends, publics can be constantly connected. According to the 2012 Social Media Report created by Nielsen, 47 percent of social media users engage in what Nielsen defines as "social care." Social care is customer service via social media. One in three social media users prefer social care to contacting an organization by phone. These users primarily use the organization's Facebook and Twitter pages or official blog to communicate directly to the organization.

Also in the 2012 report, Nielsen recorded that 70 percent of social media users read about other people's experiences, 65 percent use social media to learn more about brands/products/services, 53 percent compliment brands and 50 percent express concerns or complaints.

**Social Media Effectiveness: Measuring ROI**

Measuring the effectiveness of social media pages and campaigns differs from how the return on investment (ROI) is measured for traditional media campaigns run through channels such as print and television. Campaigns are usually measured by reach, frequency and overall profit versus how much the organization spent on creating and running the campaign.

With social media, it is difficult to distinguish whether or not reaching out to the consumer using social media influenced their future purchasing decisions and therefore gained the organization a tangible profit. The social media revolution caused metrics like ROI to be overshadowed or adapted. While the success or failure of a campaign still comes down to creating a profit for the organization, the term profit takes on a new meaning.

ROI invites us to translate all 2.0 communication into money. However while costs are fairly clear, the profit arising from each activity is more elusive. Many tend to simplify the return, reducing it to only items which can be quickly quantified in money and calculating profit solely on the basis of direct sales made from links posted on social networks. While this return is interesting for a company whose activity is 100 percent linked to on-line commerce, it is completely inadequate for any other institution, and especially for a company or institution that does not sell anything online. (Romero, 2011).

Romero includes a list of factors to generate a ROI figure for social media communication in her publication *ROI. Measuring the social media return on investment in a library*.

- The consumption by previous users can be compared with that of current arrivals on the network.
- Comparisons can be made between the behavior of a user prior to following us on social media and after doing so.
- The extent to which the success of our new developments, events etc. has improved after being communicated in social networks can be measured.
• The influence of brand perception on users’ consumption and that extent to which the new media have changed this perception can be measured.
• The cost of resolving incidents using social media can be compared to the cost of resolving them over the counter. Of relevance in this case is the reduction in staff costs that can translate into better and higher quality customer services.

Web 2.0 communication is based on depth of engagement (Souza, 2012). Depth of engagement depends on the number of people reached, how frequently they are reached and how those people react to the engagement. While traffic and impressions are important, personal and public action is paramount. A social media page could have thousands of followers but feature no fan engagement, whereas; a page with hundreds of followers could develop a meaningful and frequent rapport with its followers and therefore be more effective.

Social Media Marketing: Blogs/Twitter/Facebook
Social networking sites are seen as "relationship-building" tools (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, Lucas 2008). In many cases, organizations do not need to pay for the use of social media. While some organizations might opt to purchase advanced features or advertising space on social media, no purchase is required to actually use it. Since social media is still new to many organizations, each organization --large or small-- has the opportunity to start on the same level.

Organizations that have the marketing budget to support a public relations team or outsource its new media communication to a company specializing in that area of marketing will have an advantage and are likely to adapt to social media more quickly than others (Curtis, Edwards, Fraser, Gudelsky, Holmquist, Thornton, Sweetser, 2009). However, as determined by the web 2.0 ROI factors, putting more money into a campaign than competitors might not always bring more success.

Hypotheses
H1: It is expected that for-profit organizations use social media most effectively overall compared to organizations in the nonprofit, education and government industries.

• For-profit corporations rely on word of mouth communication to gain new and retain current consumers. Since word of mouth communication now exists on the internet (E-WOM), consumers now use social media to communicate their experiences with a product or company. A company’s success or failure depends on brand management. Corporations invest time and money into ensuring its image maintains a positive reputation (Kwok and Yu, 2012).

H2: It is expected that government organizations use blogs most effectively compared to organizations in the nonprofit, for-profit and education industries.

• "Blogs can socially construct an agenda or interpretive frame that acts as a focal point for mainstream media, shaping and constraining the larger political debate" (Drezny and Farrell, 2004)
• Media and consumers alike read blogs to gain further information about an issue or topic. Enabling the ability to comment on blogs opens up two-way communication
between the consumer of the information and the organization to create a better understanding. (Drezny and Farrell, 2004)

H3: It is expected that for-profit and nonprofit organizations use Facebook most effectively compared to organizations in the government and education industries.

- "Organizations more focused on acquiring funds through external sources are more likely to adopt and utilize technologies, such as Facebook and Twitter, that enable them to reach and interact with a broader set of potential donors" (Nah and Saxton, 2012)
- Facebook allows for consumers to use "share" and "like" features. For-profit organizations encourage the use of these features to its consumers to help promote the company. Digital word of mouth through Facebook represents the primary way many companies grow and retain market share (Kwok and Yu, 2012).

H4: It is expected that educational organizations use Twitter most effectively compared to organizations in the nonprofit, for-profit and government industries.

- Education organizations, like for-profit organizations, rely on engagement and two-way communication. In higher education, consumers (potential and current students), use social media for news and information. Education organizations have an obligation to create social media pages for their consumers. "Students will make a judgment about the university if it is not current and responsive online. When their post doesn't get answered, they are not interested anymore" (Pidaparthhy, 2011).

**Procedure**

To determine how organizations in different industry sectors use social media, the authors conducted a Delphi study of sixteen experts. Researchers selected four organizations from each industry sector: nonprofit, for-profit, government and education. Organizations were selected purposefully, and their selection required them to have a Facebook, Twitter and blog.

The Delphi method as systematic, interactive forecasting relies on a panel of independent experts. The carefully selected experts answer questionnaires in two rounds. After each round, a facilitator provides an anonymous summary of the experts’ forecasts from the previous round as well as the reasons they provided for their judgments. Then, panelists refine their answers and the group converges toward consensus through a second set of ranked responses.

The Delphi study collected responses from nine experts in round one, and an additional five experts in round two. Each expert selected plays a significant role in his/her organization's social media strategy. The questions asked in the Delphi study were based on each participant's opinion of how social media is used within his/her industry and which industry sector uses social media most effectively overall.

The authors emailed the questions for the Delphi study to participants and collected the email responses. The authors then sent the responses back to each participant to refine and rank in the second round of the study. The data from this round was collected by email and compared to the first round results.

*Delphi Round 1*
Question Set

1. Which organizational sector do you think makes the overall best use of social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, blogs)?
2. Please rank order the factors you deem most effective in evaluating the best use of social media from 1-5, 1 being the most effective, 5 being the least effective:
   - Appropriateness for target audience (#1)
   - Ease of use (#2)
   - Effectiveness of the channel itself (#3)
   - Credibility of the channel (#4)
   - Personal/organizational familiarity with the channel (#5)
3. Which social media tool does your organizational sector use most effectively (Facebook, Twitter, blogs)?

Delphi Round 2

Question Set

Question 1:
Respondents were asked to rank which responses from round one question one they agreed with on a scale of 1-9, one meaning agreed with most, nine meaning agreed with least.

Question 2:
Respondents were given the answers to question three from round one and asked to state whether they agreed or disagreed with the responses from the sector they work for only.

Results: Round One

For the question, which organization sector makes the best use of social media, 86% of experts polled believe for profits make the best use of social media. Most cite that for-profits have the resources to get the most from social media. Many note that having a larger staff enables for-profits to maintain a stronger Facebook, Twitter and blog presence. One respondent notes that media tactics work best in tandem with others so without traditional media backing the social media, it’s hard to get noticed. One respondent suggests that any organizational sector can benefit greatly from using social media because it allows people to engage directly with audiences. The authors’ first hypothesis was supported by round one results.

Respondents who selected nonprofits (14%) as making the best use of media, noted that they do not have large marketing budgets social media is a cost-effective option. One respondent suggests that nonprofits connect with people on an emotional level and can help them engage with those affected or interested in their mission as well as connect volunteers.

For question two, when respondents ranked the factors most effective in evaluating the best use of social media, 77% of respondents selected "appropriateness for target audience" as the best measure of social media effectiveness. Interestingly all respondents of for-profit companies rated the five criteria as follows:

- appropriateness for target audience
- effectiveness of channel itself
- credibility of the channel
- ease of use
personal/organizational familiarity with the channel.

Two-thirds of the respondents in the nonprofit sector rated the criteria as the for-profits did. Government respondents selected "appropriateness for target audience" as the most effective factor. Educational respondents found "personal/organizational familiarity with the channel" to be the least effective factor.

For question three which probed the social media tool used most effectively by organizational sector, the For-profit experts list Facebook, Twitter and blogs, thus supporting the third hypothesis. The government respondents suggest Facebook and Twitter, not blogs, as the literature indicates, not supporting the second hypothesis. Nonprofit respondents indicate that they use Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn most effectively. Educational experts also list Facebook, not Twitter as the literature suggests, not supporting the fourth hypothesis.

Results: Round Two

The authors calculated an overall ranking by organizational sector by computing a mean score for each round two response. Respondents from the for-profit sector clearly ranked for-profit organizations as using social media most effectively. Respondents from the government sector supported the notion that for-profit organizations use social media most effectively. Although round one results indicate that the nonprofit sector believes for-profit organizations make the best use of social media, round two nonprofit respondents showed a disconnect with round one responses indicating that nonprofit rather than for-profit makes the best use of social media. Overall, H1 was supported. Respondents from the educational sector indicated that both for-profit organizations use social media most effectively.

One educational respondent stated "I would say large for-profits probably best use social media. They are more likely to have the funding and the staff to implement various strategies."

For round two, respondents from each sector reviewed the comments made in round one by only experts in their organizational sector. They were asked to agree or disagree with the comments referring to which social media tool their organizational sector uses most effectively. Respondents used Facebook, Twitter, and blogs as their response sets.

All government respondents agreed with the comment that indicates government entities make the best use of Facebook. The government respondents disagreed with the experts noting that Twitter is most effective. These results do not support the hypothesis that government organizations make the best use of blogs as secondary research suggests.

Educational respondents agreed with the comment regarding the use of all three as effective in educational settings. One respondent noted that the organization started with Facebook to reach parents, students, alums, local businesses, donors and trustees. Twitter is used for announcements and the blog is shared via Facebook and Twitter. Educational respondents also agreed that while they continue to master all three social media tools, educational organizations make the best use of Facebook. These results do not support the hypothesis that educational organizations make the best use of Twitter as research suggests.

Two-thirds of for-profit organizations agree that for-profit organizations make the best use of blogs. These same respondents said they agree with the following ranking for best use of social media tools: Facebook, Twitter, e-newsletters. These results are somewhat contradictory—agreeing that blogs are first and then subsequently agreeing that Facebook is first as the literature suggests.
All nonprofit respondents disagreed with the statement that LinkedIn is more important than other social media. Eighty percent of nonprofit respondents disagreed with the statement that nonprofits make the best use of Twitter. All nonprofit respondents agree with the following ranking: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube which supports the hypothesis that for-profits and nonprofits make the best use of Facebook.

Conclusions

The first hypothesis that the for-profit sector would make the best use of social media was supported by the Delphi study. The second hypothesis that the government sector makes the best use of blogs was not supported as the literature indicated it would be. The third hypothesis that the for-profit and nonprofits sector make the best use of Facebook was supported by the Delphi study. The fourth hypothesis that the educational sector would make the best use of Twitter was partially supported in that some respondents selected blogs and others Twitter as the most effective social media tool.

Finally, an interesting general finding is that all four organizational sectors believe that appropriateness for target audience is more important than the effectiveness or credibility of the channel itself.

Future Research

The authors recommend expanding this study by using a survey format to gain additional responses. Also, the authors suggest conducting a series of in-depth interviews with social media managers from different branches of the government, school districts nationwide as well as several nonprofits and for-profit entities. The additional quantitative and qualitative techniques will help future researchers to confirm or disconfirm the results of the Delphi study from this study. It would also prove interesting to replicate the Delphi study in five years to determine changes in social media use by organizational type.
References


“Adios NetQwiks”: How Customers Used Social Media to Voice Their Complaints and Question Netflix’s Reputation and Authenticity

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Abstract

This study examines the reaction of Netflix customers following two announcements from the company: (1) a change in pricing structure, and (2) the decision to split the company in two. Comments posted by customers on Netflix’s Facebook page were explored using both qualitative and quantitative content analysis to understand how they evaluated the company following the communication of these changes. Findings show that customers not only expressed negative feelings about the company’s reputational attributes, but also questioned Netflix’s authenticity and the competence of its leaders.
Introduction

Corporate decisions, actions, and communication are persistently scrutinized by the public and affect how an organization is perceived in the public arena. In other words, corporate reputations evolve over time as publics evaluate an organization and its offerings, actions, and behavior (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). Corporate communication comprising of clear, consistent, and periodic information sharing with key publics help organizations develop and maintain a favorable reputation (Gray & Balmer, 1998). On the other hand, lack of communication may fuel suspicion and distrust among key publics about an organization and its motives.

So was the case of Netflix. In the third financial quarter of 2011, Netflix, a company that had experienced years of continued growth, reported losses in the billions of dollars (Woo & Sherr, 2011). These losses came as a result of two changes communicated through the company’s blog. The first, was the announcement in July of a price change of 60% for customers who used both the company’s streaming video and DVD by mail services (Becker, 2011). The second, was the decision in September of the same year to divide both services into two separate companies: Netflix, which would keep the streaming video services; and a new company to be named Qwikster, which would deliver the DVD via mail (Hastings, 2011a). Although the decision to divide the company was revoked less then a month later (Hastings, 2011b), the discontent that these announcements caused not only resulted in large financial losses, but also in hundreds of thousands of Netflix customers closing their accounts (Edwards, 2011).

Although this is surely not the only case in which a company’s decisions causes customer dissatisfaction and financial losses, what makes the Netflix case special, is that customers expressed their anger publically via social media. They took to the Netflix Facebook page to post tens of thousands of comments in response to both announcements. These comments provide an opportunity to analyze how customers evaluated the company in the context of these organizational changes.

Therefore, this study explores the comments made by customers on Netflix’s Facebook page, following both the July 12, and September 18, 2011 announcements. From the respective of corporate reputation, the comments were analyzed to determine which reputational attributes were discussed in customer’s comments, and the tone (positive, negative or neutral) of these comments. Additionally, a qualitative content analysis of the comments was also conducted, to identify additional themes salient in these discussions, providing a better-rounded understanding of the issues and attributes of import to the customers, as well as insights as to how these resulted in losses for the company.

Findings show, that not only did the customers actively discuss many reputation attributes, but also that in the majority of the cases, their evaluation of these attributes was negative. Additionally, the qualitative analysis revealed that customers questioned the company’s authenticity, i.e. the perception that stakeholders have of an organization as a result of their experience with the organization, its offerings, and communication (Molleda, 2010a, 2010b). Lastly, the findings of this study highlighted the damage that Netflix did to its relationship with its customers, as well as the potential danger of mismanaging communication in the social media era.

Literature Review

The Netflix Case

In July 12, 2011, a post on the Netflix blog [http://blog.netflix.com] informed customers of “two significant changes” (Becker, 2011, para.1). These changes were that the company was
launching DVD-only plans, and that the streaming video (which had been combined with DVD-by-mail plans), would now be charged separately. For customers who had been receiving both the DVD and streaming video services, these changes implied a 60 percent price increase, from $9.99 a month to $15.98 a month (Cohan, 2012). Their customers took to social media to express their outrage about the increased price. The day of the announcement, Netflix received approximately 10,000 posts on their Facebook page, many of them accusing the company of being greedy, expressing unhappiness about the streaming services, or announcing that they would be cancelling their Netflix account (Suarez, 2011).

As a response to their public’s complaints, on September 18, 2011 Netflix CEO Reed Hastings used the company’s blog to apologize for the “insensitive” announcement regarding the change in pricing (Hastings, 2011a). However, along with the apology, Hastings informed that the company was going to be divided in two: a DVD delivery system, which would be now named Qwikster, and the DVD streaming service, retaining the name Netflix. The pricing change would still be in effect. Again, there was immediate customer response to this message; many expressing outrage and cancelling their accounts (Phillips, 2009).

These messages, and changes, resulted not only in customer dissatisfaction, but also in financial losses for the company. Starting with the July announcement and continuing after their announcement in September, Netflix suffered significant losses in customers and market value. During the third quarter of 2011 the company lost approximately 800,000 subscribers, and over 10 billion dollars in market value (Woo & Sherr, 2011).

For public relations practitioners, the case became an example of what not to do. Hasting’s apology was valued to be ill timed and half-hearted (Trivitt, 2011). Phillips (2011), analyzed the reasons why Hastings’ apology failed, arguing that it had come two late, it didn’t give the customers anything; its wording was tepid; it didn’t give the customers an easy way to contact the company; it combined the apology with another unpopular change; and, it offered no explanation for the fee increase, something that had also been missing from the original July announcement. The main takeaway seemed to be that one wrong move could cause the same customers who were loyal to the company, to turn against it. Wortham and Selter (2011) put it this way:

“The lesson seems to be that all those customers who appreciate low prices, innovative products and lightning-fast customer service can swiftly turn when they feel slighted — perhaps because they know how responsive such companies have been in the past.” (para. 5).

Apparently because of the negative reaction to this change, Hastings soon announced that the company would not be divided after all (Hastings, 2011b). In a blog post dated October 11, he wrote: “It is clear that for many of our members two websites would make things more difficult, so we are going to keep Netflix as one place to go for streaming and DVDs” (para. 1). However, it seems that much of the damage had already been done, and the two preceding communication mishaps had had a significant impact on the company.

Because customers communicated about these changes through social media, their posts provide an opportunity to analyze how they evaluated the company following these two announcements. Therefore, this study explores the comments made by customers on Netflix’s Facebook page, following both the July 12, and September 18, 2011 announcements.

*Corporate Reputation*
Reputation is a valuable asset for organizations and is often managed by public relations practitioners (Hutton, Goodman, Alexander, & Genest, 2001; Carroll, 2004; Schreiber, 2008). According to Wartick (1992), reputation is defined as “the aggregation of a single stakeholder’s perception of how well organizational responses are meeting the demands and expectations of many corporate stakeholders” (p.34). Reputation is a function of stakeholders’ interaction and direct experience with an organization, its products and services, and “any other form of communication and symbolism that provides information about the firm’s actions and/or a comparison with the actions of other leading rivals (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001, p. 25). Bromley (2001) explained that reputation is stakeholders’ “overt expression of a collective image,” of an organization. In other words, reputation is the way in which external stakeholders perceive and conceive an organization and the attributes that they assign to it.

These definitions ascribe communication and thereby, public relations a key role in reputation management. Balmer and Greyser (2006) explained that organizational reputation, “what we are seen to be,” is an outcome of organizational communication, “what we say we are,” organizational constituencies, “whom we seek to serve,” and organizational covenant, “what is promised and expected” (p. 735).

Reputation has been extensively examined in the business and public relations literature where it has been defined as opinions of market participants about an organization’s strategic positioning (Weigelt & Camerer, 1988), salient characteristics that stakeholders associate with a firm (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990), the value that publics ascribe to an organization (Fombrun, 1996), media coverage and tone (Deephouse, 2000), and people’s collective belief about an organization’s identity and personality (Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2006).

There have also been several attempts to measure reputation as perceived by organizational stakeholders (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Black, Carnes, & Richardson, 2000; Carroll, 2004). One such measurement that is extensively used by scholars and practitioners is Reputation Quotient™, a proprietary service used by Harris Interactive (2009). The instrument is used to compile an annual ranking of the most visible companies in the United States and their reputation, as well as to offer its clients insights into their reputation branding goals and designing messages and strategies. Since Gradberg and Fombrun’s (2002) initial evaluation, this index has been validated through scholarly research as an accurate measure of stakeholder’s evaluations of organizations (Carroll & McCombs, 2003; Carroll, 2004; Kiousis, Popescu, & Mitrook, 2007).

The Reputation Quotient™ evaluates corporate reputation based on 20 sub-attributes items, which compose six organizational dimensions: emotional appeal, products and services, social responsibility, vision and leadership, workplace environment, and financial performance (Harris Interactive, 2007). These dimensions, or reputational attributes, are measured on a seven-point scale, which provides the composite evaluation of the company’s reputation. Similarly, Doorley and Garcia (2006) suggested nine reputation criteria, six of which are similar to the Reputation Quotient™, and three are unique: communicativeness (transparency), governance, and integrity (responsibility, reliability, credibility, trustworthiness). Because the focus of this study is to analyze the effect of public relations efforts and media coverage on organizational reputation, we use the six attributes of reputation used in the Reputation Quotient™. From this perspective, the study will address the following research questions:

RQ1: Which reputational attributes are salient in customer’s comments?

RQ2: What is the tone (positive, negative or neutral) of the discussion of these reputational attributes?
Additionally identify other issues or attributes related to the company, which may be salient in these discussions and provide a better-rounded understanding of customers evaluation of Netflix, the following research question will also be addressed:

RQ3: Which themes are salient in the customer’s discussion of Netflix’s changes?

**Methods**

This study explored customers’ messages through both a quantitative content analysis and a qualitative thematic analysis. For the quantitative analysis, this study benchmarked Kiousis, Popescu and Mitrook’s (2007) adaptation of The Reputation QuotientSM as dimensions and attributes of reputation found in the customer’s Facebook comments. These attributes were also coded for tone (positive, negative and neutral). The following dimensions, and related attributes were explored:

*Products and services.* The comments coded under this dimension included (1) mentions of the quality of the goods and services provided, (2) the innovation of the products and/or services, (3) the value for the money provided by these goods or services, and (4) the company’s standing behind its products and/or services.

*Vision and leadership.* Comments coded included (1) mentions of the company’s market opportunities, (2) its leadership, and (3) its vision for the future.

*Emotional appeal.* Comments categorized under this dimension included mentions of (1) feeling good (or bad) about the company, (2) its evoking feelings of admiration and respect (or the opposite), and (3) its inspiring trust (or distrust).

*Social responsibility.* Related comments included mentions of (1) the company being environmentally responsible (or not), (2) being responsible in the community (or not) and (3) supporting good causes (or not).

*Workplace environment.* The comments under this dimension included mentions of (1) the company rewarding employees fairly (or not), (2) being a good (or bad) place to work, and (3) having good (or bad) employees.

*Financial performance.* The comment was coded for mentions of (1) the company’s performance vs. competitors (positive or negative) (2) its record of profitability (positive or negative), (3) it being a good (or bad) investment, and (4) its prospects of growth (or lack thereof).

From a total of 40,000 comments posted following both announcements a manageable sub-sample of 433 comments responding the announced price change in July, and 165 comments posted following the announced company split in September were analyzed. The comments analyzed were selected randomly. The average length of comments was 50 words with longest comments being 440 words and the shortest being 4 words. Intercoder reliability between coders was assessed using a 25% sample of the comments (n = 150). Overall score was Holsti = 0.96; and Cohen K = 0.74; for valence, Holsti = 0.97 and Cohen K = 0.65. These values represented good agreement between coders beyond chance (Fleiss, 1981).

**Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics using frequency counts were used for the purpose of data analysis. Chi-square statistics were calculated to determine the change in the discussion of the attributes between July and September 2011.

Following the quantitative analysis of the reputational attributes qualitative analysis of the sample using constant comparison was employed to identify the themes salient in the comments.
Themes were analyzed employing the constant comparison method, which “involves searching for similarities and differences by making systematic comparisons across units of data” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 91). The following section details the findings of both the quantitative and the qualitative analyses.

Findings

Quantitative Finding

The first research question asked which reputational attributes were salient in customer’s comments. An analysis of the reputation dimensions salient in the comments for both months showed that most referred to the company’s products and services (n = 410), followed by financial performance (n = 233), emotional appeal (n = 137) vision and leadership (n= 128), and social responsibility  (n = 5). Under products and services, most comments were about the service’s value for money (n = 244), followed by quality of products and services (n = 156). Under vision and leadership, most comments were about the quality of leadership (n = 99). Under emotional appeal, most comments were about the general feelings of the readers regarding the decision and the company (n = 88). Lastly, under financial performance most comments compared Netflix with other competitions (n = 160).

The discussion of certain reputation attributes (such as quality of goods and services, innovation, value for money, leadership, vision, feelings about the organization, and trust in the organization significantly) increased significantly after the September message was posted on the Netflix blog  (Table 1).

The second research question asked about the tone (positive, negative or neutral) of the discussion of the reputational attributes. Findings show that negative-toned messages significantly surpassed the positively or neutrally toned messages for both months (Table 2). The reputation attributes which were most frequently mentioned in a negative tone were quality of goods and services, leadership, standing behind their products, vision, inspiring trust, and growth prospects.

Findings of the Qualitative Analysis

Lastly, the third research question asked which themes were salient in the customer’s discussion of Netflix’s changes. A qualitative analysis of the comments posted by Netflix customers provided additional details about how they evaluated the company following the July and September announcements. These themes did not appear isolated in a customer’s post. Instead, usually a comment would present several of these themes. The following seven themes were identified as salient in the comments:

Remembrance. In messages under this theme, customers would refer to the previous (often better) image that they held of the company. For example, one customer posted:

7.95 streaming + 11.99 for 2 discs at a time + 3$ extra for blu ray = FAIL. Remember when you used to be cool Netflix? (Message posted on Netflix Facebook, July, 2011)

These messages were also salient in the comments posted in September. For example, one customer commented:

I go back to your first days in a tiny building on N. Santa Cruz Avenue in Los Gatos. I

1 Customer comments were transcribed literally, using the exact same wording and spelling present in the original comment. Therefore, it is possible that these comments contain misspelled words or grammatical mistakes.
scratched my head and thought what a crazy idea, DVD's by mail. You were an innovator and you proved me wrong, even though you came close to bankruptcy in the process. Netflix grew into a company that truly was an industry leader and offered the best interface and service. [...] Flash forward several years to 2011. Competition has caught up with you and in many cases surpassed you. You've added streaming which put you back in an innovation leader category temporarily, but now it appears that you are losing streaming content (Starz) and we have other sources for recent release (i.e. HBO Go). All the while, you've been raising prices, changing strategies, and this summer you completely "screwed the pooch". Raising prices and complicating the user experience while losing good content spells disaster to me. I canceled my DVD subscription this morning. I will continue my streaming subscription only so long as you have desireable content. I am sure that over the next 12 months I will also be canceling my streaming service as soon as I finish my analysis of the many alternatives to Netflix... (Message posted on Netflix Facebook, September, 2011)

Questioning leadership. This theme encompassed the comments in which customers challenged or questioned the leadership of the company, and /or more specifically, the leadership of the Netflix CEO. Often it included questioning the soundness of the leadership's decision, like in the following comments:

"I have been a Netflix subscriber for many years and have been mostly happy with your service. I even defended your recent increase in price to other people-prices go up, right. When I received your email this morning, I genuinely thought it might be a joke. Honestly, the thought went through my head "It's September so this can't be an April Fool's joke". The name Qwikster is silly, but I could live with this. The idea of separating services seems like a huge mistake to me. Part of what I liked about Netflix was having everything together. A few minutes ago I downgraded my service to streaming only. Once I find another company with more streaming content, I will leave Netflix all together. Thank you for your years of good service-I'm sorry that several bad decisions in a row have changed my mind about your company." (Message posted on Netflix Facebook, September, 2011)

"I get the need to raise capital and improve your streaming service. DVDs, like laser discs, Beta, 8 track, cassette, etc, will soon go the way of the dinosaur, and you need to keep our competitive edge. But two very high percentage price increases over the last couple of years, with no grandfathering option for long time customers? Where's the love? Adios NetQwiks." (Message posted on Netflix Facebook, July, 2011)

Disenchantment with the company. Another salient theme included expressions of the customers feeling disappointed in the company, and its offerings. Many comments referred to the problems they had with the services, while others accused the company or its leaders of betraying their trust or undervaluing their loyalty, like in this example:

Add me to the list of discontents! I have paid loyally for years and as a matter of fact, my wife and I were about to go search for a movie to watch online because we don't have the time to watch the 2.5 hour dvd that we have sitting on our table from you. Excellent job at alienation. We just started experimenting with Redbox. Honestly, Netflix...We're close to being addicted. Sorry that you don't have better business sense. (Message posted on
Conciliatory proposal. Many customers also posted suggestions for the company, or proposed a way for Netflix to repair its relationship with their customers by taking on certain changes or measures. These were grouped under the conciliatory proposal theme. The following is an example of this type of comment.

I would like to give you an opportunity to give us better reasons for such drastic increases, like you aren't making a profit (which is important) or can't afford increasing movie licensing fees to stay competitive for what's offered. (Message posted on Netflix Facebook, July, 2011)

Defensive position. This theme included messages in which the customer takes a defensive stance about what he/she feels is an attempt by the company to take advantage of them or trick them. For example:

In fact I'm quite insulted you would try to spin this as a "good" thing for the customer, claiming it's for our benefit... There is NO benefit to the customer. I get two bills, no connection between my two services, two websites... (Message posted on Netflix Facebook, September, 2011)

None of your customer base is ignorant enough to believe that Netflix is splitting their company because it was unfeasable for you to continue as you were. What you did is supply a great product for a reasonable price, and because of this you gained a large customer base. Once you realized that you have cornered the movie rental market, and your customers had nowhere else to go, then you decided to DOUBLE the price and split the company. The only reason this is happening is because you don't have any decent competitors and you know you can GET AWAY with screwing your customers. (Message posted on Netflix Facebook, September, 2011)

Advocate. Yet, despite the complaints against the company, some customers’ comments expressed their support for Netflix. In some cases, this included responding to existing customer posts and defending the company against the attacks or accusations by other customers. For example, this customer celebrated the decision to charge for the services separately:

Good work. Streaming-only customers shouldn’t have to bear the cost burden of the DVD customers. When I stream a movie, there’s barely any additional cost for the company, whereas with DVD’s they have to pay a package to shop it twice, pay someone to handle and stock it, etc… Recorded, physical media is on its way out, there is no stopping it. (Message posted on Netflix Facebook, July, 2011)

Calls to activism. These messages include calls for customers to take some action against Netflix, such as cancelling the services, or otherwise boycotting the company. For example:

I suggest that all the people who are unhappy with the changes and the ‘apology’ boycott the company by putting their accounts on hold. Three months should be enough time for the company to feel the pain and issue a real apology, put things back to Norman and give everyone a free month of service. If not, this procedure can be repeated. We, as a customer base, have a voice and we should act. I don’t believe Reed Hastings cares about WORDS spoken here, but he will care when customer base reaction will affect the
bottom line. $$$ talks. I already put mine on hold. (Message posted on Netflix Facebook, July, 2011)

**Discussion**

The Netflix case evidences that customers are no longer passive recipients of corporate communication messages, and that they also have a hand in shaping these messages. Customers can also produce their own competing messages about the organization. In fact, today more than ever, corporate decisions, actions, and communication are being scrutinized. A simple message can affect how an organization is perceived in the public arena. In other words, the way in which they communicate is one of the factors used by the public to evaluate an organization’s offerings, actions, and behavior, which in turn affect the company’s reputation (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001).

The quantitative analysis of the messages posted by Netflix customers following their July and September 2011 communication of changes in pricing and organizational structure, show that many of the company’s reputation attributes (Harris Interactive, 2007) were being discussed in these comments. In fact, customer’s response to these planned changes included making evaluations about the company’s reputational features including leadership, value for money and quality of goods and services. Sadly for the company, in many cases they found these reputational attributes lacking, as shown by the proportion of negative vs. positive tone in these messages.

However, the quantitative analysis also showed that in this case, customers did not evaluate the company based on every reputational attribute. Some attributes, like those referring to employees and social responsibility, were mainly absent from the discussion. Therefore, even though the Reputation QuotientSM scale suggests that the combined opinion that consumers hold of a company in each of these traits and dimensions make up its reputation, it is important to note that given a certain situation or context, some might take primacy over others when consumers form opinion about a company. In this case, quality of goods and services, leadership, vision, inspiring trust and admiration, and performance vs. competitors, were the reputational attributes most discussed.

Additionally, the quantitative analysis showed that the discussion on several of these attributes increased following the September announcement (compared to July), and that the proportion of negatively-framed messages also increased, pointing to a cumulative effect of both messages and changes on customer’s opinion of the company.

Yet, the discussions were not only centered on Netflix’s reputational attributes. The qualitative analysis provided more insight as to how the company was discussed and evaluated in customer comments. Seven salient themes were identified as being frequently occurring in the texts. All of the themes identified were closely related to customer’s reaction to the messages from Netflix. Five of these themes had negative tone, especially those expressing disenchantment, distrust (i.e. adopting a defensive position before the company), and calling for customers to take actions against the company. The other two themes, were mostly positive or neutral, and although less occurring than the negative messages, they showed that throughout this situation Netflix retained the loyalty and admiration of at least part of its customers, precisely because of how please they were with the company’s goods and services.

Additionally, themes referred specifically to the image that the customers had of the company not being aligned with its current behavior. In comments making remembrance claims about Netflix, customers would write about the previous image and experience with the company as something that made them expect a different behavior from the company. Likewise, when the
customers expressed disenchantment with the company, they referred to being loyal customers, specifically because of certain benefits or services that they would receive from the company, that are not the same, or not provided anymore.

These claims can be seen as questioning the company’s authenticity. Much like reputation, authenticity is a perception that stakeholders have of an organization as a result of their experience with the organization, its offerings, and communication (Molleda, 2010a, 2010b). Authentic organizations are the ones that stay true to their values, mission, purpose, and value proposition and show consistency with these core values in their actions and behavior (Molleda, 2010).

Molleda (2010) argued that authenticity is the subjective evaluation of an organization’s offerings, actions, behavior, and communication by its stakeholders. In this sense, Molleda and Jain (2013) described authenticity as an outcome of an on-going negotiation of meaning between the organization and its publics.

More specifically, Gilmore and Pine (2007) and Molleda (2010b) break down the construct of authenticity into different dimensions, which are: natural authenticity, i.e. communicating the nature of the commodities or product promoted; original authenticity, which includes providing accurate representations of the original product or services offered; exceptional authenticity, communicating the quality of the goods or services offered; referential authenticity, communicating the pleasure or fun that could be had with the organization’s goods or services; and influential authenticity, which is related to communication of the company’s social responsibility.

The qualitative analysis highlighted many instances in which the customers called into question the original authenticity of the company. More specifically, messages under the “remembrance” theme seemed to collectively argue that the company wasn’t who they said they were anymore. Closely related, the “disenchantment” theme encompassed messages, which related a loss in referential authenticity, which in this case was accompanied by a deeper sense of being betrayed by the company. In essence, customer’s comments suggest that the company did not meet stay true to what they understood to be the organization’s values, and purpose, and therefore were not authentic.

Seen together the findings of the quantitative and qualitative study show a damaged relationship between Netflix and its customers. Hon and Grunig (1999) detailed four components of organizational-public relationship: Control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, and commitment. The first refers to the degree to which the parties in the relationship can influence each other. The second, to the confidence that one party has in the other’s willingness to be open in the relationship. The third, to the extent to which each party has favorable feelings of the relationship. And lastly, commitment refers to the extent to which both parties feel that the relationship is worth investing time and an energy to maintain. Through both the qualitative and quantitative findings of this study, it is evident that customers felt that their trust in the organization, and satisfaction with their relationship with Netflix had suffered, which in turn impacted their desire to stay committed to the organization. This last point is evidenced not only in the fact that many of the comments referred to canceling services and ending the relationship with Netflix (as well as encouraging others to do the same), but also in the fact that hundreds of thousands of users ultimately cancelled their accounts.

In sum, to the overarching question of this study, related to how customers evaluated the company following their July and September 2011 announcements, the following conclusions can be drawn is that they (1) communicated negatively about the company’s reputational
attributes; (2) questioned the company’s authenticity; and as a result (3) devalued their relationship with the organization. As such, this analysis contributes to our understanding of how customers express their discontent with a company—even one as highly regarded as Netflix was at the time—and what aspects of the company they highlight in their evaluation.

**Practical Implications**

This study provides useful insights for public relations managers. The first, is the need to understand the power of social media, and the impact that it can have on organizational reputation. Although the impact of traditional media is already acknowledged, less is known about social media. Yet, this case suggests, what existing research has pointed to: that customers can influence one-another’s opinion about a company, and actively engage in public discussions about its core attributes. Likewise, this case suggests that depending on the context, publics may pay more or less attention to specific reputational attributes—in this case, they focused heavily on the quality of goods and services, value for money, and leadership, among others. This implies that public relations managers should learn to identify which aspects of the organization’s reputation is most important in a given context, so that they can be proactive in managing communication, and, ideally offset the negative impact that customer complaints might have on the company’s reputation.

Likewise, the link to authenticity identified through the qualitative analysis of the messages, suggest that when faced with a situation such as this—which threatens not only the organization’s financial standing, but also its relationship with customers—it is important to have a good grasp of what customer’s believe to be the core values and purpose of the organization; and to ensure that before, during, and after the situation, they communicate in a manner that is consistent with this idea. Doing so could help the company remain authentic in the eyes of their customers, and safeguard their relationships with publics.

Lastly, the damage done to the organizational-public relationships, as evidenced in the poor evaluations of trust, satisfaction and commitment in the customer’s messages, suggest that following situations like this one, public relations managers should focus on rebuilding relationships with customers. Making this a priority could help the company overcome the challenges presented by the situation, and convert customers into advocates and allies for future situations.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Although this study contributed to public relations understanding social media evaluations of companies, specifically in terms of its reputation and authenticity, there are some limitations that must be acknowledge and which point to potential avenues for future research. The first limitation is that although tens of thousands of comments were posted on the Netflix Facebook site, only a sub sample of these was analyzed in the study. Although the authors selected the sample for representativeness, it is possible that a larger sample (specially for the qualitative analysis) could provide additional insights into this case.

Also, future studies could explore for possible connections between the comments posted by customers and the treatment that traditional media gave to the company in this situation. This could serve not only to understand the relationship between the two, but also to better measure the impact that these comments can have on the organization’s reputation.
References


Table 1. Change in proportion of reputational attributes mentioned in Netflix’s customer comments

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reputation Dimensions</th>
<th>Reputation Attributes</th>
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<th>September</th>
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<td>Quality of goods and services</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
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<td>Value for money</td>
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<td>Market opportunities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>27.297**</td>
</tr>
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<td>Leadership</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<td>Environmental responsibility</td>
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<td>0</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Being responsible in the community</td>
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<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.130</td>
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* p = >0.05  **p = >0.01
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<th>September</th>
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<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Market opportunities</td>
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Corporate Social Responsibility Re-Examined: Measuring the Influence of “Corporate Social Advocacy” Communication on Consumer Purchase Intention

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Abstract

This pioneering research examines the relationship between consumer purchase intention and a newly conceptualized dimension of corporate social responsibility: corporate social advocacy (CSA). CSA refers to recent public stances taken by organizations regarding social-political issues. This pseudo-experimental research presented participants with one of two potential organizational statements reflecting either an anti- or pro-stance toward gay marriage. Participants then responded to theory of planned behavior items (attitude toward the behavior, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms) aimed at the dependent purchase intention variable. This approach in combination with additional measures of CSA provided strong support for a predictive relationship between CSA and consumer purchase intention. Implications for the public relations profession are discussed.
Founding Father of modern public relations, Arthur W. Page said, “All business in a democratic country begins with public permission and exists by public approval” (Griswold, 1967, p. 13). Organizations have historically sought to be transparent only to the extent which is minimally expected by the public; however, the rise of social media has necessitated what has been termed “forced transparency” (DiStaso & Messner, 2010) on behalf of organizations. Consumers today are increasingly aware of where their products come from and the social, political, and ethical issues that surround their everyday purchases. More than ever, consumer expectations of corporate social responsibility (CSR) are important considerations that precede their intent to purchase an organization’s product or service.

Perhaps, then, consumers’ expectations of transparency as a component of CSR have grown beyond ethical practices surrounding human rights in manufacturing and financial donations to consumer causes to include organizational stances on controversial social-political issues. For example, megabrands Starbucks, Amazon, and Microsoft have recently taken public stances in support of gay marriage rights. Whereas, Chick-fil-A has publicly taken the opposite stance regarding gay marriage (Arnold, 2012). Likewise, the reputations of Papa John’s, Applebee’s, and Denny’s have been impacted by executive remarks in opposition to the Affordable Care Act (i.e., Obamacare) (Popken, 2012). And, the National Rifle Association has recently made public a list of more than 100 organizations and celebrities that support gun control, including Levi Strauss & Co., Hallmark Cards, and Ben & Jerry’s among several others (Allen, 2013). These public declarations regarding social-political issues have largely been avoided by organizations for fear of isolating publics who, in turn, may boycott their products or services. As an emerging phenomenon, then, little research has been done to this extent.

Thus, this study expands on previous research by the study’s authors (Dodd, 2010; Dodd & Supa, 2011) regarding CSR and consumer purchase intention with a focus on the practical implications of taking public stances on social-political issues. The authors use the term corporate social advocacy (CSA) to describe this emerging phenomenon, contextualized as an unexplored dimension of CSR.

Using Ajzen’s (1985, 1991) theory of planned behavior as the theoretical underpinning for consumer purchase intention, this research proposes to examine how CSA has an impact on the organizational bottom line. The proposed research further seeks to examine consumer expectations of CSA, and discuss the changing role of the corporate public relations practitioner with regard to this emerging phenomenon.

**Literature Review**

At its core, corporate social responsibility is concerned with responsibilities for an organization that extend beyond financial performance. While much research has been conducted in the area of organizational involvement in CSR activities, very little to date has focused on organizational stances on social issues, what the authors of this study have termed corporate social advocacy (CSA). It may be that CSA is the next logical step for organizations, as CSR activities are becoming increasingly integral, particularly as consumers become more educated both about the products and services they use, and the organizations that provide them.

**Corporate Social Responsibility**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is broadly defined as the organization “incurring responsibilities to society beyond profit maximization” (Pava & Krausz, 1995, p. 1). Or, more specifically, CSR consists of “voluntary initiatives taken by companies over and above their
legal or social obligations that integrate societal and environmental concerns into their business operations and interactions with their stakeholders” (Hopkins, 2007 in Brower & Mahajan, 2012). More recently, the term has been used interchangeably with “corporate social performance” (CSP), despite the fact that CSP is operationalized as an outcome measure of CSR. In other words, “CSP is an outcome measure of the visible aspects of the implementation of policies and programs intended to reach the overarching goal of CSR” (Brower & Mahajan, 2012). Further, the literature has differentiated CSP from corporate financial performance (CFP) most often for the purposes of demonstrating the predictive relationship between the two.

Although it has been reasoned that the core of CSR is concerned with responsibilities beyond profit maximization, the relationship between an organization’s involvement in socially responsible activities and its effects on financial performance have been a topic of research for some 35 years (Margolis, Elfenbein, & Walsh, 2009). This relationship has received such enduring attention as companies that “do good” are expected to “do well” (Simpson & Kohers, 2002); however, evidence to this extent has been controversial at best.

McGuire et al. (1988) explains that there are three major perspectives from which the relationship between CSR and financial performance is viewed: “One view is that firms face a trade-off between social responsibility and their financial performance. Those holding this view propose that firms incur costs from socially responsible actions that put them at an economic disadvantage compared to other, less responsible firms” (p. 854).

Alternatively, many believe that the costs of CSR are offset by benefits to include financial profitability. Much research has supported this perspective, demonstrating a positive relationship between CSR and financial performance (Margolis, Elfenbein, & Walsh, 2009; Pava & Krausz, 1995; and Roman, Hayibor, & Agle, 1999). For example, Margolis, Elfenbein, and Walsh (2009) performed the most comprehensive meta-analysis to-date of 214 studies linking CSR to financial performance, concluding that the overall effect is positive, but small.

Likewise, much research has found no relationship between CSR and financial performance. For example, in an industry-specific study of 82 firms, Bowman and Haire (1975) were unable to conclusively demonstrate that organizations categorized higher than others in regards to CSR produced a higher mean return on equity than those organizations categorized at a mid-level for CSR activities. More recently, in a review of 62 empirical studies, Griffin and Mahon (1997) failed to conclude that there was a relationship between CSR and financial performance.

Researchers have posited that the discrepancies in the financial outcomes of CSR activities are a result of theoretical shortcomings (Schuler & Cording, 2006) and model misspecification (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). Overall then, managers and communicators have been left with little in regards to guidance or empirical support as to the potential profitability of pursuing CSR programs or campaigns.

Despite all this, organizations have continued to engage in CSR activities. One area that has seen an increase recently is in consumer-choice CSR (Robinson, Irmak & Jayachandran, 2012). Robinson et al. (2012) showed that when consumers had a choice in supporting a specific cause based on their purchase, they were more likely to make that purchase. Popular consumer-driven choice campaigns such as the Product (RED) campaign or the Subaru “Share the Love” campaign may in fact cause consumers who have a choice among product providers to choose the provider which either coincides with their pre-established beliefs, or a provider which allows them to choose the target beneficiary.
Margolis, Elfenbein, and Walsh (2009) sorted CSR studies into nine separate categories, of which five represent specific dimensions of CSR and four represent different approaches to study. These categories include: “(1) corporate policies; (2) disclosure; (3) environmental performance; (4) philanthropic donations; (5) revealed misdeeds; (6) self-reported social performance; (7) observers’ perceptions; (8) third-party audits; and (9) screened mutual funds” (pp. 9-11). Based on the researchers’ operationalization of the categories, none would encompass CSA as conceptualized in this research, despite the fact that broad definitions of CSR encompass such societal issues. As such, the current study attempts to fill a void left by the current literature.

**Purchase Intention via Planned Behavior**

Purchase intention is rooted in psychological and behavioral studies using the theories of reasoned action and planned behavior. Armitage and Christian (2004) explain that the theory of reasoned action holds that “behavior is solely dependent on personal agency (i.e., the formation of an intention), and that control over behavior (e.g. personal resources or environmental determinants of behavior) is relatively unimportant” (p. 6). In other words, the theory of reasoned action was designed to deal with relatively simple behaviors in which the prediction of behavior required only the formation of an intention. Sheppard et al. (1988) found that the theory of reasoned action possesses adequate predictive validity in consumer behavior.

Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) state, “Behavioral intentions are regarded as a summary of the motivation required to perform a particular behavior, reflecting an individual’s course of action, as well as an index of how hard people are愿意 to try and perform the behavior. The idea that behavioral intentions mediate the attitude-behavior relationship represents a significant move away from the traditional view of attitudes: rather than attitudes being related directly to behavior, attitudes serve to direct behavior to the extent that they influence intentions” (in Armitage & Christian, 2004, pp. 4-5).

The theory of reasoned action was later revised to include those behaviors that may not be under an individual’s complete volitional control. In other words, the theory of planned behavior includes the construct of perceived behavioral control such that in order to form an intention to perform a behavior, an individual must perceive that performing the behavior is within their control (Ajzen, 2005).

The theory of planned behavior is “based on the assumption that human beings usually behave in a sensible manner; that they take account of available information and implicitly or explicitly consider the implications of their actions [...] the theory postulates that a person’s intention to perform (or not to perform) a behavior is the most important immediate determinant of that action. According to the theory of planned behavior, intentions (and behaviors) are a function of three basic determinants, one personal in nature, one reflecting social influence, and a third dealing with issues of control” (Ajzen, 2005, p. 117). And, “Generally speaking, people intend to perform a behavior when they evaluate it positively, when they experience social pressure to perform it, and when they believe that they have the means and opportunities to do so” (Ajzen, 2005, p. 118).

Meta-analytic research across some 25 years has demonstrated support for the theory of planned behavior such that the three variables predicted intentions aimed at: physical exercise (Courneya, 1995); hunting (Hrubes et al., 2001); dropping out of school (Davis et al., 2002); engaging in leisure activities (Ajzen & Driver, 1992); buying stock (East, 1993); contributing to scholarship funds (Ajzen et al., 2004); donating blood (Giles & Cairns, 1995); attending class (Ajzen & Madden, 1986); and using cannabis (Conner & McMillan, 1999) among hundreds of
others. Therefore, the theory of planned behavior works well in identifying and understanding the relationship between corporate social advocacy and consumer purchase intentions for this study.

Corporate Social Advocacy

Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) analyzed consumer behavior in what they termed the beginnings of the “consumer movement.” They state:
The mounting interest in consumer behavior can be attributed in part to the desire of business firms to obtain a competitive advantage by basing their marketing decisions on information about the factors that determine the consumers’ preferences among products. At the same time, consumers have organized to express their dissatisfaction and demand political action to ensure, among other things higher standards of quality and safety, lower prices, and better service. The consumer movement further underscores the need to gain a better understanding of the factors that determine the behavior of individuals who consume the products of our economy (p. 149).

Perhaps, these words have never been truer than they are today, more than 30 years later. Recent public declarations on social-political issues on behalf of mega companies such as Amazon, Chick-fil-A, Ford, Microsoft, and Starbucks, among others have been largely unprecedented both in practice and scholarship. For example, Starbucks, Amazon, and Microsoft have recently taken public stances in support of gay marriage rights. Whereas, Chick-fil-A has publicly taken the opposite stance regarding gay marriage (Arnold, 2012). Likewise, the reputations of Papa John’s, Applebee’s, and Denny’s have been impacted by executive remarks in opposition to the Affordable Care Act (i.e., Obamacare) (Popken, 2012). And, the National Rifle Association has recently made public a list of more than 100 organizations and celebrities that support gun control, including Levi Strauss & Co., Hallmark Cards, and Ben & Jerry’s among several others (Allen, 2013). These public declarations regarding social-politic issues have largely been avoided by organizations for fear of isolating publics who, in turn, may boycott their products or services. As an emerging phenomenon, then, little research has been done to this extent. The authors of this study term such activities corporate social advocacy in order to differentiate what may be considered a new dimension of CSR and unprecedented area for exploration.

Arguably, organizational involvement in corporate social advocacy may be conceptually attributed to a few things: (1) the evolution of CSR as an accepted and expected practice for organizations that allows for participation in activities absent a normatively demonstrated ROI; (2) the passing of legislation that allows for a higher degree of financial corporate involvement in political systems (see Supreme Court’s ruling on Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, 2010); and (3) the evolution of social media to include “forced transparency” (DiStaso & Messner, 2010) to the extent that organizations may proactively align themselves with appropriate social-political issues in order that they not be deemed obsolete.

However, no research to-date has examined consumer expectations of corporate social advocacy, nor the effect of such activities on consumer attitudes toward (and behaviors as a result of) such stances. Therefore, this study attempts to fill in that gap in the current understanding of corporate practices.
Research Questions

Therefore, the question remains, what expectations do consumers have of organizations regarding social-political issues? And, how does this impact their purchase intentions toward the organization (and, thus, organizational financial objectives)?

RQ1: What are consumer attitudes regarding corporate social responsibility and organizational stances on social-political issues?

RQ2: What is the relationship between organizational stances on social-political issues and consumer purchase intention?

Methodology

This study employed a pseudo-experimental survey design. The online survey was administered via Qualtrics survey software. The survey link was distributed to undergraduate communication classes at two northeastern universities: one private, one public. Snowball sampling was used to increase the number of respondents. Students were given extra credit in their enrolled course for having three additional people respond to the survey. The data collection period lasted two weeks (November 14 - 28, 2012).

Respondents were first asked questions regarding general beliefs about corporate social responsibility, purchasing from socially responsible organizations, and past behaviors. Respondents were then prompted to respond with their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale to the 17-item Attitude Toward Same Sex Marriage Scale as developed by Pearl and Galupo (2007). Survey respondents were then randomly exposed to one of two potential prompts regarding two corporations and their advocacy efforts with regard to gay marriage. The corporations used for this study were Starbucks and Chick-fil-A, two prominent organizations both in regard to news salience and also for their penetration into college-aged markets. The prompts featured an accurate, though primarily paraphrased (in order to decrease differences across conditions) statement from the CEO of each organization. The statement described the organization’s viewpoint on gay marriage legislation and noted support for a relevant third-party organization “which helps raise awareness about issues in the communities where we live and work.” Both third-party organizations do receive support from Chick-fil-A and Starbucks, respectively: Marriage & Family Foundation; and, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Pride Alliance Partner Network.

Respondents were then prompted to respond with their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale to 15 items—that differed only in regard to the organization (Chick-fil-A or Starbucks) that preceded the items—regarding: (1) attitudes toward purchasing from the organization; (2) subjective norms surrounding purchasing from the organization; and (3) perceived behavioral control of purchasing from the organization. According to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 1985, 1991), the combination of these items comprises intention to perform a behavior (i.e., purchase from the organization in this case).

Finally, respondents were asked to self-identify demographic information to include: age, gender, marital status, children, education, race/ethnicity, income, and political affiliation. Comprehensive demographic information was collected as previous research has indicated the possibility of segmenting and targeting audiences with CSR communication based on such variables (see Dodd & Supa, 2011). Responses were entered into SPSS for Windows, and analyzed based on the theory of planned behavior model presented by Azjen (1985, 1991).

Data Collection and Screening
Ultimately, the survey received 793 responses (to include clicks on the survey link where no items were answered), from which 274 cases were excluded due to missing data for a resultant n=519 (completion rate = 65%). For the two random conditions, participants were nearly evenly split: Starbucks, n=255 and Chick-fil-A, n=264. No responses were included where more than 10% of the data were missing.

**Participant Demographics**

Of the 519 participants, the majority was typical college-aged: 18-25 years old (n=452, 87.1%). Nineteen participants indicated that they were between the ages 26-35 (3.7%), 12 were between the ages 36-45 (2.3%), 27 were between the ages of 46-55 (5.2%), and 9 were 56 or older (1.7%). Likewise, the majority of participants were female (n=360, 69.4%) as opposed to male (n=158, 30.4%). Participants further indicated the following racial backgrounds: Asian (n=59, 11.4%), Black (n=13, 2.5%), Hispanic (n=33, 6.4%), White (n=392, 75.5%), and other (n=20, 3.9%). And, the following political affiliations were reported by participants: Democratic (n=213, 41%), Republican (n=65, 12.5%), Independent (n=63, 12.1%), other (n=7, 1.3%), and “Don’t identify with a political party” (n=171, 32.9%).

It was reasoned that past behavior may also serve as a relevant variable for understanding the relationship between organizational stances on social-political issues and consumer purchase intention. Thus, behavior was assessed for the past 12 months, generally in regards to drinking coffee (𝑥̅=3.62, SD=1.46) and eating fast food (𝑥̅=2.80, SD=1.05), and specifically, in regards to purchasing Chick-fil-A (𝑥̅=1.44, SD=0.88) and Starbucks (𝑥̅=3.12, SD=1.34). These items preceded the Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Marriage Scale and identification of organizations; that is, placement in the pseudo-experimental conditions (CEO statements) in order that participants responses were not biased by other survey questions. Overall, participants generally indicated that they drank coffee “often” and ate fast food “sometimes.” Likewise, participants specifically indicated that they purchased Chick-fil-A “never” and Starbucks “often.”

Likewise, three additional items were included to be used as manipulation checks for the general believability of the constructed CEO statements, past reputation of the organizations, and previous knowledge of the organizational stance on the issue. These items included the following: “This statement is an accurate depiction of [the organization’s] values” (𝑥̅=3.61, SD=0.80); “I was previously aware of [the organization’s] stance on this issue” (𝑥̅=2.90, SD=1.37); and, “This stance matches [the organization’s] reputation” (𝑥̅=3.49, SD=0.88). Further, a single item was included to assess the salience of the issue of gay marriage for the sample: “The issue of gay marriage is important to me” (𝑥̅=3.97, SD=1.06). Overall, participants generally indicated agreement that the CEO statement was an accurate depiction and matched the reputation of the organization. However, participants indicated low agreement to having had previous knowledge of these organizational stances on the issue of gay marriage. Additionally, participants generally agreed that the issue of gay marriage was important to them.

**Results**

This research sought to explore consumer expectations regarding organizational stances on social-political issues, particularly the issue of gay marriage as used in this pioneering research. Specifically, the relationship between organizational stances on social-political issues, termed corporate social advocacy, and consumer purchase intention was the focus of this research.
First, the Cronbach’s alpha reliability for the Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Marriage Scale (Pearl and Galupo, 2007) was assessed and found to be good: (alpha = .958). The scale would not have been improved with the deletion of any item. Next, the theory of planned behavior suggests the following constructs as indicative of intention to perform a behavior: (1) attitude toward the behavior, (2) perceived behavioral control; and (3) subjective norms. Items comprising each construct were run as scales finding good reliabilities for attitude toward behavior (alpha = .788) and subjective norm (alpha = .809). However, the Cronbach’s alpha reliability for the perceived behavioral control construct was lower than desired (alpha = .626) and would have been improved to an acceptable level (alpha = .712) with the deletion of the item “If I wanted to avoid purchasing from [the organization], I am confident that I could.” Thus, this item was removed from the scale, resulting in acceptable alpha reliability levels for all measures used in this research.

Likewise, the outcome variable, purchase intention, was calculated using the combination of two items: “I plan to purchase from [organization]” and “I will go out of my way to purchase from [organization].” The combination of these items resulted in a Cronbach’s alpha reliability of .750, which is considered good.

The first research question sought to understand general consumer attitudes regarding corporate social responsibility and organizational stances on social-political issues. Table 1 displays the means and standard deviations, indicating extent of agreement to six items regarding CSR and organizational stances on social-political issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I purchase products from social responsible companies.</td>
<td>3.47 (.831)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I purchase products from companies that share my beliefs.</td>
<td>3.28 (.871)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that companies should focus on making a profit for shareholders.</td>
<td>3.38 (.890)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider companies’ ethical behavior in my everyday purchases.</td>
<td>3.03 (1.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am willing to pay more for a product that supports a cause I believe in.</td>
<td>3.66 (.979)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that companies should take stances on social-political issues.</td>
<td>2.93 (1.11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, then, participants indicated that they generally purchase products from organizations they consider to be socially responsible and those that share their beliefs, taking the ethical behavior of the organization into consideration for everyday purchases. In fact, the strongest agreement by participants was indicated in response to the item regarding paying higher prices for products that support causes the consumer believes in.

At the same time, however, participants indicated strong agreement to the item suggesting that companies should focus on making a profit for shareholders, a concept that often runs counter to notions of CSR (both ideologically and practically). Further, participants indicated neutrality toward the item regarding CSA; that is, participants did not indicate either strong agreement or disagreement that companies should take stances on social-political issues.

The second research question sought to identify the relationship between organizational stances on social-political issues and consumer purchase intention using the theory of planned behavior. Participants responded to these items directly following the pseudo-experimental condition (CEO statement regarding gay marriage).

Items comprising the following measures were included: (1) attitudes toward purchasing from the organization; (2) subjective norms surrounding purchasing from the organization; and
(3) perceived behavioral control of purchasing from the organization. According to the theory of planned behavior, the combination of these items predicts intention to perform a behavior (i.e., purchase from the organization in this case). Additionally, in order to explore a potential predictive relationship between CSA and purchase intention, the following variables were also included: mean score on the Attitudes toward Same Sex Marriage measure and pseudo-experimental condition (Chick-fil-A or Starbucks) as this is expected to have a relationship with purchase intention based on attitudes toward gay marriage. Table 2 displays the results of a simple linear regression. These measures were regressed on the behavioral outcome (purchase intention) measure.

Table 2: Theory of Planned Behavior and Corporate Social Advocacy Regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Summary</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.791</td>
<td>.625</td>
<td>.621</td>
<td>.655</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANOVA</th>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>340.019</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>68.004</td>
<td>158.590</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>203.682</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>.429</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>543.701</td>
<td>480</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coefficients</th>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>-1.018</td>
<td>.350</td>
<td></td>
<td>-2.914</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Control</td>
<td>.204</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>4.253</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Norm</td>
<td>.348</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>.194</td>
<td>4.640</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward Behavior</td>
<td>.679</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.593</td>
<td>14.381</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward Same Sex Marriage</td>
<td>-.118</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>-.088</td>
<td>-3.049</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Condition</td>
<td>.150</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>2.007</td>
<td>.045</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the mean theory of planned behavior measures in combination with scores on the Attitude Toward Same Sex Marriage measure and the organizational condition category were regressed on the purchase intention item, the linear combination of items on purchase intention was significant $F(5, 475) = 158.59, p<.000$. The sample multiple correlation coefficient (R) was .79, which indicates that approximately 63% of the variance in purchase intention can be accounted for by the aforementioned theory of planned behavior and CSA constructs as answered to in response to the social-political issue of gay marriage (an issue demonstrated to be
salient to participants in this research). Each mean theory of planned behavior measure was a significant contributor \( (p < .000) \) to purchase intention with attitude toward behavior, subjective norm, and perceived control contributing in higher amounts, respectively. Further, attitudes toward the issue of gay marriage and the organizational condition (indicative of opposing stances on gay marriage) were also significant predictors of purchase intention \( (p < .05) \).

Thus, RQ2 may be answered affirmatively such that a strong significant relationship has been demonstrated between attitude toward the behavior, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms (the theory of planned behavior) and social-political specific variables with purchase intention based on the results of this pseudo-experimental approach focused on corporate social advocacy surrounding the issue of gay marriage.

**Discussion**

This research has explored the issue of consumer purchase intention via the theory of planned behavior as applied via a pseudo-experimental approach using the issue of gay marriage to forward an understanding of corporate social advocacy (CSA) as a potential dimension of corporate social responsibility (CSR). The first research question found that participants generally purchase products from organizations they consider to be socially responsible and those that share their beliefs, taking the ethical behavior of the organization into consideration for everyday purchases. In fact, participants strongly agreed that they would pay higher prices for products that support causes they believe in. At the same time, however, participants indicated strong agreement to the item suggesting that companies should focus on making a profit for shareholders, a concept that often runs counter to notions of CSR (both ideologically and practically). Further, participants indicated neutrality toward the item regarding CSA; that is, participants did not indicate strong agreement or disagreement that companies should take stances on social-political issues.

These descriptive results to the first research question may be explained (at least in part) by past research that has found that participants may “fake good” (i.e., indicate greater salience in CSR efforts for their purchases) or a lack of general understanding of issues surrounding CSR and CSA (i.e., the theoretical trade-off between CSR/CSA and profit-making activities). Indeed, it is for these reasons that understanding CSR in relation to bottom-line objectives has been so difficult to demonstrate. Future, perhaps experimental, research as to the extent to which participants consider CSR and CSA in actuality would prove beneficial. Also, it may be reasoned that consumers view making profits for stockholders, employees, and, thus, communities as a socially responsible act in and of itself, which could potentially explain some of the ambiguity between CSR and financial outcomes. Such an approach could be further explored via qualitative methods.

The second research question examined directly the predictive relationship between the theory of planned behavior and consumer purchase intention when participants were placed into one of two potential conditions that presented them with an organizational stance on the issue of gay marriage, an issue that demonstrated salience among participants in this research. It was reasonably concluded that when confronted with an issue of CSA, purchase intention is impacted via attitudes toward the behavior, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms, respectively.

This conclusion follows logically from consumer indications that they generally purchase products from organizations they consider to be socially responsible and those that share their beliefs, taking the ethical behavior of the organization into consideration for everyday purchases.
In other words, it may further be concluded that the concept of CSA fits well within research exploring CSR activities on behalf of organizations.

It was interesting to find that when variables were placed into the model, a negative beta coefficient resulted from the Attitudes Toward Same Sex Marriage measure. Importantly, this may indicate that the stronger the agreement with the issue of gay marriage (i.e., pro-gay marriage), the lesser the likelihood of indicating purchase intention. Perhaps, this may be explained in that pseudo-experimental conditions were nearly evenly split between Chick-fil-A, an organization taking an anti-gay marriage stance and Starbucks, an organization taking a pro-gay marriage stance; however, participants were not evenly split as to opinions on this issue. The overall mean on the Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Marriage Scale was 4.20 (SD = .79) on a 5-point scale. Further, when scale data was reduced to categorical-level data (mean scores from 0-3 indicate an anti-gay marriage position, and mean scores from 3.01-5 indicate a pro-gay marriage stance), a simple frequency count demonstrate that only 60 participants fell within the anti-gay marriage category (11.6%) as opposed to 439 (84.6%) who were categorized as pro-gay marriage based on mean scores on the Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Marriage Scale. In other words, many participants were responding to theory of planned behavior constructs as related to an organization that did not share their personal beliefs on the issue of gay marriage, such that we would expect purchase intention to be low in these cases (based on CSA). It is for that reason that the organizational condition was included due to its assumed relationship with attitudes toward gay marriage. Further, a crosstabs comparison of the categorical attitude toward gay marriage variable with the categorical organizational condition in which participants were randomly placed (Chick-fil-A as anti-gay marriage and Starbucks as pro-gay marriage) revealed that of those participants responding to the Chick-fil-A condition, 87% did not have beliefs that matched the organizations’ stance toward same-sex marriage. On the other hand, of those participants responding to the Starbucks condition, only 12% had beliefs that did not match the organizations’ stance toward gay marriage.

**Future Research**

Future research, then, may be directed at using a national, representative probability sample using multiple social-political issues in order to gather a greater diversity both demographically and in regards to opposing viewpoints. Further, with a larger sample, researchers should seek to include a control group where participants respond absent a social-political issue. This control group allows for a more experimental approach that adds strength to the predictability of CSA for purchase intention. Moreover, with a representative sample, advanced statistical analyses could be performed via structural equation modeling. The results of the current research provide strong support for such approaches. Future research should also further efforts aimed at scale building and dimensionality of measures and concepts addressed in the current research.

**Practical Implications**

Strategic communicators and public relations professionals have long been identified as those most capable of handling organizational CSR initiatives. Likewise, the proactive communication of organizational position statements and (often) reactive crisis communication that result from unintended or perceived organizational positions have been deemed public relations areas of expertise. Thus, the combination of these two concepts into corporate social
advocacy is a logical extension of the public relations professional’s responsibilities, and a worthy area for the current research.

This research has demonstrated that perhaps unsurprisingly, organizational stances on social-political issues impact consumer purchase intentions. Sharing many of the features of CSR in regards to the potential organizational trade-off between financial profitability and CSR and CSA activities, CSA seems to also fit well within the literature surrounding CSR. This is despite the fact that no prior research has examined or operationalized CSA to this extent; that is, as a strategic function capable of being effectively executed in regards to bottom-line objectives and researched to this extent. With a greater understanding of CSA, communicators and public relations professionals may now apply this model specifically to representative organizational publics in order to strategically implement the communication and promotion of organizational stances on social-political issues, knowing that financial objectives will be impacted.

Ultimately, CSA has been demonstrated to be a significant contributor for consumers’ purchase intention; suggesting a more tangible benefit, perhaps, even than CSR research has led us to believe. Therefore, organizations may look to adopt CSA on certain issues that resonate with publics. Practical implications regarding transparent communication and contributions to political actions committees (see also, Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, 2010) may also be considered, then, to this extent.
References


Explicating the Concept of Interactivity in the Context of Public Relations Theory

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Abstract

Purpose: This study analyzes the extant literature, explicates the concept of interactivity, and offers implications for the theory and practice of public relations. Specific to public relations, this study defines true interactivity as exchanging multiple dependent messages between two parties (face-to-face or mediated), where both parties have interchangeable roles and respond with mutually agreed-upon immediacy to achieve shared meaning in order to influence strategic decisions in organizations and publics. Utilizing Chaffee’s (1991) framework of concept explication, we examine six elements of interactivity: 1) face-to-face and mediated communication, 2) two communicating parties with interchangeable roles, 3) exchange of multiple dependent messages, 4) agreed-upon immediacy, 5) shared meaning, and 6) the ability to influence strategic decisions in organizations and among publics.

Findings: This paper offers a pragmatic solution to problems inherent with shifting levels of analysis from interpersonal dyadic interactions to higher-order interactions among organizations, emerging publics, and niche leaders. Therefore, we distinguish true interactivity from faux and quasi interactivity. After distinguishing three conceptualizations of interactivity, we suggest several implications for theory and practice. Specifically, we argue that true interactivity is not possible when a small public relations staff must engage interactively with large publics. Demands for interactivity with public relations practitioners include (1) the publics’ desire for 24/7 personal service, (2) the demand for new content development, (3) increased pressure from practitioners’ organizations to increase public engagement (Bucy & Gregson, 2001; Putnam, 2000), and (4) greater public access to organizations via online and mediated platforms. Although quasi interactivity allows public relations practitioners to “automate” some lower-level interactions, this cannot substitute for true interactivity when building mutually beneficial, reciprocal relationships (Broom & Sha, 2012). The push for interactivity increases job opportunities for public relations practitioners while diminishing the effectiveness of traditional, one-way communication practices. Using interactivity in a conceptually appropriate and strategically sophisticated manner, we discuss the role of social media and word of mouth practices in achieving public relations objectives.
Introduction

The term *interactivity* has become something of a “god term” in the practice of public relations and a key concept in developing theories of digital and social media. As explicated by Weaver (1953), a “god term” is any word or phrase specific to a particular time that is vague in its actual meaning (denotation) but powerful in its connotations. Words like “freedom” and “progress” are difficult to define but carry powerful positive connotations. In public relations, such also is the case with interactivity. The purpose of our paper is to explicate the concept of interactivity and unwrap the aura surrounding this “god term” as it relates to the theory and practice of public relations. Proper explication, as suggested by Chaffee (1991), greatly contributes to the applicability and longevity of a concept because the theoretical underpinnings remain relevant over time. As a strictly conceptual piece, this study does not report original data. The authors review the relevant literature to nail down the meaning of the concept and spell out useful theoretical and practical implications of the interactivity frenzy.

Trade media suggest interactivity is critical to business success and an important indicator of best practices. Public relations practitioners view the digital age as an opportunity to be more interactive with key publics through enhanced online engagement (“Looking to the future,” 2000). Trade publications such as IABC’s *Communications World*, PRSA’s *Public Relations Tactics*, and *PR Week* focus on how to make online tools more “interactive” through the use of press release optimization and distribution, the creation of an online web presence to build credibility, and automated monitoring of press coverage to enhance interactivity. Tailored messaging, paid placements, and customer preferences provide seemingly unlimited opportunities to participate in a dialogue with constituents (“As the Internet grows,” 2007). Other practitioners argued that face-to-face communication is most appropriate when dealing with internal publics (“Restating the case,” 2008).

Few doubt the importance and value of interactivity in public relations, yet the meaning of interactivity remains maddeningly vague. In the trade press, the term is rarely defined. When defined, such definitions provide little coherency or specificity. A review of online public relations publications showed that interactivity is often confused (and used interchangeably) with other terms like engagement, participation, interactive communication, interactive PR, social interaction, social marketing, interactive communication, and social media. In some cases, interactivity is defined by consumer preferences (“As the Internet grows,” 2007), the integration of multimedia advertising components (“Creating PSAs,” 2007), or search engine optimization and website features (“Online news optimization,” 2006).

The extant literature on interactivity, as described in public relations trade publications, provides no precise meaning of the concept. Instead, practitioners invoke the god term of “interactivity” without considering the theoretical underpinnings detailed in this paper. Practitioners utilize technology so that their organizations and publics will perceive the practice as more “interactive” by automating typically human jobs to computer functions. Indeed, some simple clerical tasks of the public relations department (e.g., archiving past news releases for digital downloading) are good candidates for automation. The scramble to have a social media “presence,” however, reflects practitioner insecurity and a desire to keep the status quo regarding the latest technologies. Paradoxically, automating some public relations functions to enhance “interactivity” may have precisely the opposite effect.

**Competing Conceptualizations of Interactivity as Process, Perception, or Features**

The debate over the meaning and explication of the concept also occurs in the scholarly
literature (Bucy, 2004; Kiousis, 2002). The inconsistent use of interactivity to describe both human-to-computer exchanges and human-to-human interactions has created considerable confusion about the meaning of the concept. Some scholars (Bucy, 2004; Newhagen, Cordes, & Levy, 1995) have argued that no clear conceptualization of the term has evolved. Scholars have generated a plethora of operational uses, applications, and situation-specific meanings of interactivity. A review of the existing literature indicates that a clear conceptual and empirical definition is warranted, particularly for public relations.

Scholars have conceptualized interactivity as (1) a process, as (2) a system feature, as (3) a perception or (4) some combination of all three constructs (Bucy, 2004; McMillan, 2002). Thus, academics have generated conflicting claims about interactivity (Bucy, 2004; Kiousis, 2002).

**Interactivity-as-Process**

Analyzing interactivity as a process puts the emphasis on human interaction, the reciprocity of conversations, and the impact of this human interaction online (Stromer-Galley, 2004). The process approach focuses on human-to-human—rather than human-to-computer—interaction and the exchange of information between two communicating parties (Bucy, 2004; Heeter, 2000; McMillan & Hwang, 2002; Pavlik, 1998) where the roles of sender and receiver are interchangeable. Interactivity as a process highlights the messages exchanged between communicating parties, whether mediated or not (Stromer-Galley, 2004). Pavlik (1998) declared, “the essence of interactivity is the exchange” (p. 63). The process of information exchange creates a dialogue that transforms one-way communication into an interaction. Interactivity as a process is often considered the “gold standard” of interactivity.

**Interactivity-as-System Features**

When interactivity is conceptualized as a system feature, researchers examine the types of communication tools that individuals use to interact with computer and Internet systems, the functionality of the site, and the actual tools themselves (Stromer-Galley, 2004). These scholars argue that interactivity is a characteristic of the communication channel, with some online communication tools viewed as more interactive than others. System features may provide the technological tools for interactivity to occur across great distances. Arguably, however, system features such as chat rooms and forums on the Internet are simply enabling tools. System features can facilitate interactions, but system features are neither necessary nor sufficient for interactivity to occur.

Studies of new technology tend to favor a functional, human-to-system view of interactivity due to the relative ease of quantification. The goal is to optimize public relations staff capabilities and resources by using technology to replace human-to-human interactions whenever possible. For example, interactivity as a system feature is achieved by providing archived press releases or press kits online as a pragmatic solution to common inquiries from interested publics.

**Interactivity-as-Perception**

When viewed as perception, interactivity is conceptualized as users’ feelings of engagement during message exchanges. Burgoon, Bonito, Bengtsson, Ramirez, Dunbar, and Miczo (2000) conceptualized interactivity as the qualitative experiences associated with exchanges that make such exchanges “feel” interactive. They defined interaction involvement as
the degree to which users (1) “feel” engaged, (2) create a sense of relational connection and understanding (mutuality), and (3) perceive that parties of the exchange have a rich, detailed impression of the other’s identity (individuation) (Burgoon et. al, 2000). Bucy (2004) suggested analyzing interactivity in terms of user experiences rather than focusing on the ever-changing hardware technologies that make such experiences possible. In short, if a recipient of messages perceives those messages as “interactive,” then interactivity has occurred.

Although interactivity-as-perception is particularly compelling, the ultimate goal of interactivity in public relations is to move past the perception of the experience to the achievement of mutual understanding between organizations and its publics. Interaction-as-perception should not be confused with the special use of perception as described in the coorientation model. Interaction-as-perception focuses on the experience of the end user (e.g., publics), consistent with Lasswell’s one-way model of mass communication (Bineham, 1988) but hardly consistent with the notion of two-way communication between two parties constructing shared meaning. As argued below, this explication of interactivity-as-perception is not theoretically useful to public relations.

**Interactivity and Public Relations Theory**

The extant literature on public relations theory emphasizes the importance for two-way communication as core to best practices in public relations. Specifically, the Excellence Study (Dozier, L. A. Grunig, & J. E. Grunig, 1995; Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; J. E. Grunig, L. A. Grunig, & Dozier, 2006) demonstrated that the most important determinant of excellence in public relations and communication management is the core knowledge of the staff in the public relations department or unit. That knowledge core consists of the expertise to execute two-way communication to pursue symmetrical and asymmetrical goals. The core competency that contributes most heavily to best practices is the expertise to engage in two-way communication.

*The Excellence Theory and Two-Way Communication*

In the Excellence Study (Dozier, L. A. Grunig, & J. E. Grunig, 1995; Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, Dozier, 2002; J. E. Grunig, L. A. Grunig, & Dozier, 2006), two-way communication was operationalized according to state-of-the-art practices at the time of the survey (1990-91). As originally conceptualized by Grunig and Hunt (1984), two-way models of public relations practices depended on gathering information from publics using various forms of formal and informal research. Indeed, the Excellence Study showed that departments practicing the two-way models were significantly more likely to use formal research techniques, such as conducting regular, routine research activities, conducting specific research to answer specific questions, and using formal approaches to gather information for use in strategic decision making (Dozier, L. A. Grunig, & J. E. Grunig, 1995). Excellent organizations also used informal approaches to information gathering, using contacts with knowledgeable people outside the organization, and exercising professional judgment based on experience.

The Excellence Study was conducted before the digital and social media revolution; however, the core theory remains unchanged. In order to engage in excellent public relations, the public relations department serves as the eyes and ears of the organization, as well as its mouthpiece. In excellent organizations, information is exchanged between dominant coalitions in organizations and key publics on whom organizational survival and growth depends. The public
The relations department provides the mechanism for this exchange. Properly explicated, the concept of interactivity describes this critical process of exchange between organizations and publics.

**The Coorientation Model, Shared Meaning, and Understanding**

Broom’s (2006) application of the coorientation model to public relations provides another way of appreciating the significance of interactivity in public relations theory. The coorientation model highlights public relations problems that occur when perceptions of agreement (or disagreement) and actual agreement (or disagreement) differ for both dominant coalitions and publics. False consensus occurs when the dominant coalition thinks that a particular public perceives an issue in the same manner as does the dominant coalition when, in fact, there is disagreement. Pluralistic ignorance occurs when the dominant coalition thinks that a particular public perceives an issue in a different manner than the dominant coalition when, in fact, there is no disagreement.

Dominant coalitions make strategic decisions based on perceptions or representations (see White & Dozier, 1992) of what’s going on with publics. When those representations are incorrect, management makes costly and wholly unnecessary errors in organizational decision-making. By the same token, members of a particular public may make similar errors in representations of the dominant coalition. If properly explicated, interactivity describes the process whereby organizations and publics increase the accuracy of their perceptions of the other party. This does not resolve all conflicts between organizations and publics; it does resolve conflicts based on misunderstandings of the other party.

**Situational Theory of Publics**

Grunig’s (1997) situational theory segments publics based on three key constructs: problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement. Grunig (1997) argued that these constructs determine an individual’s future communication behavior (information seeking and information processing). Based on the interaction of these constructs, groups of people can be categorized as latent, aware, active, or activist publics. Once a problem is recognized, the degree of involvement that people feel towards an issue or problem pushes from latent to active publics (Grunig, 1997; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Perceptions of constraints generally retard the transition of publics from aware to active to activist levels of engagement.

The concepts of involvement and the advancement of publics from latent to activist status are particularly relevant to the explication of interactivity. Publics move from latent to aware status as members of that public begin to recognize a problem or issue that affects them and the practitioner’s organization. Practitioners are more successful at establishing shared meaning and understanding during the early stages of a public’s evolution toward activism. As the focal problem or issue pushes the public toward a more activist stance, positions become entrenched on both sides. At the same time, communication is more difficult between practitioners and publics when the public has low levels of problem recognition and involvement. Such emerging publics are simply not interested in communicating about a problem they don’t fully recognize and which they feel does not fully involve them.

However, publics are not monolithic. Some members of a latent public recognize the problem or issue before others do. A higher level of initial involvement, in part, may drive this recognition. Thus, the strategic public relations practitioner seeks to engage interactively with these individuals to establish shared meaning and understanding (in the coorientation sense). This, in turn, can have powerful multiplier effects as these “early recognizers” of the
problem/issue communicate through their own enhanced channels of interpersonal and especially mediated communication (e.g., social media) with other members of that same public.

**Defining and Explicating Interactivity**

In explicating interactivity in the context of public relations theory, we distinguish true interactivity from quasi interactivity and faux interactivity. Table 1 lists the attributes and provides examples of each. *Quasi interactivity* is defined as the use of sophisticated authoring systems (i.e., artificial intelligence) to simulate aspects of human-to-human interactions, including the ability to fashion message exchanges that are dependent on prior messages sent by humans (see Turing Test section below). *Faux interactivity* is defined as the use of primitive information storage and retrieval systems for disseminating existing documents and files from PR departments to interested publics.

We define **true interactivity** as the process of exchanging multiple dependent messages between two parties through face-to-face or mediated communication channels, where both parties have interchangeable roles and respond with mutually agreed-upon immediacy to achieve shared meaning in order to influence strategic decisions in an organization and its publics. This definition is composed of six key elements: 1) face-to-face and mediated communication, 2) two communicating parties with interchangeable roles, 3) exchange of multiple dependent messages, 4) agreed-upon immediacy, 5) shared meaning, and 6) the ability to influence strategic decisions in an organization and its publics. By defining each component of interactivity, a clear explication of the concept emerges. To avoid conceptual confusion, we argue that other uses of interactivity ought to be labeled quasi interactivity or faux interactivity.

**Extension of Face-to-face Interactivity to Include Mediated Communication**

Prior to the Internet boom and the emergence of social media, scholars such as Bretz (1983), Goffman (1967), and Rafaeli (1988) argued that interactivity involved largely interpersonal exchanges, wherein two or more individuals engage in active face-to-face dialogue (Konijn, Utz, Tanis, & Barnes, 2008; Sundar, 2008). Alternatively, mass media offered one-way information transmission from a sender to many receivers without interchangeable roles (Bretz, 1983).

The emergence of user-friendly digital technology at the millennium caused a shift in how scholars defined interactivity. Bucy (2004) argued that interactivity is at the core of new media technology. The shift from *mass* to *mediated* communication as a descriptor of the discipline reflected the emerging importance of interactivity as central to the intellectual domain. *Mediated communication* is the process through which a message is transmitted to another party through channels that do not involve face-to-face channels (Pavlik & McIntosh, 2004). Today, technology permits interactions to occur without both parties sharing the same physical space (Jackel, 1995). Mediated communication often occurs through digital technology, such as emails, phone calls, and video conferencing.

Thus, a comprehensive explication of interactivity includes both face-to-face and mediated communication. Technology enables people to interact over great distances and asynchronously; nevertheless, interactivity remains an inherently human activity. Consistent with McLuhan (1964), digital and social media are extensions of the human nervous system. Digital and social media change the ways in which people can interact with others. But in the end, interactivity is a mechanism for the achievement of shared meaning between people.

The prominence of digital and social media has been a boon to the public relations
function in organizations. Theoretically, the interactivity provided by digital and especially social media creates a powerful tool for two-way communication between organizations and publics, as well as a useful mechanism for increasing the accuracy of public perceptions of organizations—and organizational perceptions of publics—regarding issues important to both.

**Interaction Between Two Communicating Parties With Interchangeable Roles**

For interactivity to occur, there must be at least two communicating parties in the exchange. To be theoretically relevant to public relations, interactivity must describe a process whereby the people in the public relations department can serve as the eyes and ears of the organization. To do so, practitioners must be able to negotiate with publics, as suggested by the two-way symmetrical model, as well as persuade, as suggested by the two-way asymmetrical model. Neither of these activities can be automated.

Further, in order for interactivity to occur, communication roles between the organization and particular publics need to be interchangeable and reversible (Sundar, Kalyanaraman, & Brown, 2003). Although practitioners may view themselves and their organization as wielding more power, the interchange of roles and dependent messages requires organizations and publics to be both senders and receivers of information (Kelleher, 2007). Essentially, each party must have equal footing and the ability to engage in a two-way dialogue; otherwise, the process is not interactive.

System features that allow websites to respond to a limited range of human prompts may indeed increase user satisfaction with the system. But the responsiveness of a website is an extremely low level of interaction with an organization. An explication of interactivity as merely bells and whistles on a website makes the concept essentially useless from a theoretical perspective.

Computers can provide programmed responses to inquiries. Using sophisticated branching instructions, based on verbal responses (e.g., over the phone) or typed responses (e.g., using a computer or smartphone keys), software can achieve limited success when generating messages that are responsive to previous messages from humans. We label this *quasi interactivity* (see Table 1). Rafaeli (1988) used the same term to define reactive responses to messages. However, these systems are unable to decipher any deeper meaning or understanding from the message exchange.

Automated downloading of static documents and file, such as those provided on organizational websites, are defined as *faux interactivity* since there is no capacity for shared meaning on the part of the non-human party to the exchange (see Table 1). The system has no capacity to fashion conditional responses based on prior messages from humans to the system. Examples of *faux interactivity* or automated responses include (1) computer-generated emails when one sends an email query to a company and (2) an out-of-office message response from personal email accounts. So-called interactive media systems can react to a user’s actions by displaying selected search results, sending emails, or displaying new levels on a video game, but those reactions are not in themselves interactive (Quiring & Schweiger, 2008).

**The Turing Test**

The Turing Test, developed by Turing (1950), proposed a method for determining whether machines have the capacity to imitate human behavior so precisely that interacting with a computer would be indistinguishable from interacting with a human. In Turing’s model (1950), the ability of a machine to fashion meaningful, dependent or contingent responses through a
series of interactions provided the acid test for artificial intelligence. Turing proposed that computers could simulate original human thinking and operationalized human intelligence and thinking as the ability to generate messages in response to inquiries that simulated human responses (1950).

Even in a sophisticated human-to-computer exchange, the computer can only respond to human-generated messages through programmed decisions or choice trees. Such systems cannot construct or share meaning, reflecting the limitations of current authoring systems and machines (Shannon & McCarthy, 1956). As such, machines lack the emotions and the ability to meaningfully interact—two irreplaceable elements of the human component of interactivity (Oppy & Dowe, 2011).

The increasing sophistication of artificial intelligence (AI) and authoring systems makes faux interactivity and quasi interactivity valuable tools for public relations practitioners (see Table 1). By automating some of the routine clerical functions of the public relations department, practitioners are freed to devote more time to higher levels of interactions with publics. However, the haphazard equating of true interactivity with quasi interactivity and especially faux interactivity creates misperceptions when practitioners try to discuss interactivity. Public relations practitioners build an unsteady structure for the practice when we, as professional communicators, are unable to properly use the core terminology of the practice.

**Exchange of Dependent Messages**

A critical component of true interactivity is the exchange of dependent messages. A dependent message is an exchanged unit of information that is influenced by the content and nature of the previous message(s) received (Bretz, 1983). Scholars (Bretz, 1983; Rafaeli, 1998) argued that for an interaction to be truly interactive, the exchange must contain at least three messages, where the content of each message is contingent on the content of the prior message or messages. (Bretz, 1983). According to Bretz (1983), the original sender must receive a message back from the receiver and then react to the specific content of that message for the exchange to be truly interactive. The third dependent message in the sequence transforms an information exchange into true interactivity.

Although quasi interactivity (e.g., through authoring systems) is able to achieve modest success in generating messages dependent on prior messages from humans, this technological innovation remains in its infancy. Regarding public relations theory, development of a clear understanding of publics requires the exchange of multiple messages to increase understanding and shared meaning. Indeed, the exchange of multiple dependent messages is the process whereby shared meaning is established. In coorientational terms, the exchange of multiple dependent messages leads to shared meaning and understanding. According to the Excellence Theory, the exchange of multiple dependent messages is one operationalization of two-way communication, a core competency for excellence in public relations.

This requirement of dependent messages eliminates automated messages and exchanges, such as instant chat pop-ups (e.g. faux interactivity), as forms of true interactivity. Dependent messaging also eliminates human-to-computer exchanges (e.g. quasi interactivity), since computers are not capable of generating or sharing meaning, as discussed in the Turing Test section above and the Shared Meaning section below. Furthermore, according to the Excellence Theory (Dozier, L. A. Grunig, & J. E. Grunig, 1995; Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, Dozier, 2002; J. E. Grunig, L. A. Grunig, & Dozier, 2006), such an advanced authoring system would have to participate in the decision-making processes of the dominant coalition, acting as
an advocate of the public interest in management decision-making while also serving as an advocate of organizational interests in communications with publics. At present, no computer authoring system can do that.

Distinguishing other forms of quasi and faux interactivity is critical as it relates to human-computer interaction. From a theoretical perspective, so-called “interactive” advertising campaigns that possess multi-media components like games and selective video clips gut the concept of interactivity. This type of engagement might be viewed more appropriately as “increased personalization” and “choice over consumption,” but not interactivity.

**Shared Meaning**

Shared meaning is the ability to achieve a mutual understanding between two humans, the culmination of the exchange of dependent messages described above. Through dialogue—the exchange of dependent or contingent messages—each party constructs meaning through a back-and-forth process most similar to interpersonal communication. Each interaction helps to provide better clarity about what the other party means. The focus of shared meaning is to establish understanding, a necessary but not sufficient condition for agreement.

Shared meaning is critical to the application of interactivity in public relations theory. Regarding the coorientation model, interactivity describes the process whereby dominant coalitions develop a better understanding of publics, and publics develop a better understanding of the organization’s position, even if the public does not agree with it. Consistent with the Excellence Theory (J. E. Grunig, L. A. Grunig, & Dozier, 2006), interactivity allows the public relations department to become the discerning eyes and ears of the organization as well as a more eloquent spokesperson—through shared meaning.

**Responsiveness**

Responsiveness is a key attribute of interactivity; both communicating parties must mutually agree on the speed of response. Anticipated response time varies with differing forms of mediated communication. When interactions are not instantaneous, time lags require both parties (1) to communicate their expectations of response time, (2) to share similar expectations, and (3) to respond to the other parties’ expectations if they are different to achieve responsive interactivity (Ha & James, 1998; McMillan & Hwang, 2002). Responses must be prompt when response expectations call for quick turn-around; responses may be slower if expectations permit slower turn-around for any given communication channel (Yun, 2007).

The limitations of each communication medium regulate the speed of interactivity (Rogers & Allbritton, 1995; Yun, 2007; Sundar & Wagner, 2002). This, in turn, affects the rate of interactivity expectations for various communication modes (Yun, 2007). Mediated interactions often introduce a time lag in information exchanges. For example, two communicating parties may share the expectation that a mailed letter arriving in a week is sufficiently responsive. These same two parties may have the similar expectation that an email returned two days later is unresponsive. However, these time lags can be resolved through mutual agreement without damaging the conceptualization of interactivity. In face-to-face communication, lag time is not an issue, since communication is perceived as instantaneous (Yun, 2007).

Although many scholars specify a maximum time lag as a condition of interactivity, such specifications are too rigid and arbitrary; time lags are specific to each communication channel (e.g. face-to-face, mail, phone, email, or instant chat) and the expectations of the parties
involved. Parties involved in the interaction can subjectively determine their expectations of what constitutes a timely response.

**The Problem With Shifting the Level of Analysis**

At the micro (individual) level of analysis, true interactivity occurs between two people (a dyad) that exchange information. The sender becomes the receiver as dependent messages are exchanged; shared meaning is established through an iterative process. The essential elements for interactivity to occur are two people and a means of two-way communication between them (see one-to-one interaction in Figure 1). Although the model of one-to-one interaction can be used to represent interactivity between organizations and publics, the simplicity of the model masks a critical distinction between the micro-level and meso-level of analysis.

In the rush to engage all publics in two-way, interactive communication, few practitioners seem to appreciate the challenges of scalability. With regard to digital applications such as Web design, *scalability* is the ability of the system to expand its performance satisfactorily as the number of users or the demands on the system increase. More generically, *scalability* refers to the capacity of a business or organization to perform satisfactorily as the size of the organization (e.g., number of employees, gross sales, number of markets, number of publics, etc.) increases. True interactivity, whether face-to-face or through mediated communication, does not “scale” well when the level of analysis shifts from the micro-level (one-to-one interactions) to the meso-level of analysis (organization/public interactions).

The imperative to have a “presence” in social media has increased demand on resources and added significant expenses to public relations campaigns and projects (Bucy, 2004). No organization has the resources to engage in true interactivity with all members of large publics. The solution is to engage strategically and selectively with niche members in the focal public.

**A Pragmatic Alternative: One-to-niche Interactivity**

A more practical approach to communicating with key publics is to engage opinion leaders as a manageable niche of communicators in a larger public, described as the “one-to-niche group” approach (Phillips, 2008). As illustrated in the middle section of Figure 1, the “one-to-niche group” model allows for an organization to participate in interactive communication with a more manageable number of opinion leaders in a larger public. These opinion leaders, in turn, act as liaisons and interact with other members of the same public. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) analyzed opinion leaders and their impact on voting and purchase behavior. They determined that opinions leaders influenced the decision making of others by how opinion leaders processed and re-presented information to others. “Information received directly from personal influence channels is regarded as generally more persuasive than information received from mass media” (Evans & Fill, 2000, p. 378). Thus, niche opinion leaders may have higher credibility among other members of that same public, when compared to practitioners working for an organization. The two-step model of communication illustrates this phenomenon as information flows from sender to opinion leader to opinion receiver, as illustrated as one-to-niche interaction in Figure 1.

The two-step model of communication does not provide an adequate explanation for how communication flows via social media through complex communication networks. The n-step model from communication network analysis more accurately depicts the complex process whereby information is communicated from node to node in a spider web of communication linkages between and within communication cliques (see n-step interactivity in Figure 1). Rather
than classify all members of a publics as “leaders” or “followers,” communication network analysis suggests that network centrality—the number of communication links or paths that go through a particular node (communicator)—provides a more variable description of the relative influence of some communication nodes (“leaders”) on others (“followers”).

**One-to-niche Interactivity With Emerging Publics**

Using Grunig’s (1997) situational theory of publics, communicators in such niches are connected to larger publics to which they belong. Niche members can be conceptualized, in the initial stages of public formation, as “early recognizers” of the problem or issue involving the organization and the focal public. Compared to other members of an emerging public, niche members are likely to have higher levels of involvement with the organization and issues important to that organization. This motivates niche members to interact with the organization’s public relations practitioners (see Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Regarding operationalization, these niche members can be identified by their (1) early problem recognition relative to other members of the public, (2) early involvement with the problem or issue relative to other members of the public, (3) higher source credibility or opinion leadership than other members of the public, and (4) greater network centrality than other members of the public.

For public relations, the one-to-niche model offers a more efficient and pragmatic means to communicate with key publics. Niche members have the capability to supercharge public relations efforts, by constructing shared meaning through the exchange of multiple dependent messages with organizational practitioners. Niche members can then engage in two-way, interactive communication with other members of their public through social networking and other online communication capabilities.

**Implications for Interactivity**

The implications for the concept of interactivity in the PR field are vast and far-reaching. The concept is changing the PR landscape, and traditional communication models as practitioners engage social media to increase the reach of messages and leverage opinion leaders as described in one-to-niche interactivity. Scholarly social media research is increasing (Rafaeli, 1988; Schultz, 2000; Khang, Ki, & Ye, 2012) making it even more necessary for this “god-term” to be clearly defined, implications measured, and consequences understood.

One-to-niche interactivity permits practitioners to establish shared meaning and understanding with key members of existing or emerging publics. However, when niche opinion leaders pass information on to other members of a public through social media or word of mouth, the authenticity and fidelity of the original message is skewed significantly through distortion and compression. As such, social media and word of mouth (WOM) provide something of a conundrum for public relations practitioners. On the one hand, PR practitioners struggle to control the content of messages about their organizations and issues important to their organizations. Yet, practitioners feel compelled to heavily utilize social media and word-of-mouth practices to fulfill public relations objectives and better engage publics (Smith, 2010). As such, today’s public relations practitioners have quickly embraced social media as a resource that dominant coalitions seem to value, creating an exaggerated need for so-called “interactive” communication.

Social media provides practitioners with the ability to build relationships and share meaning with segmented publics that may have been previously ignored (Khang, Ki, & Ye, 2012). Organizations have increased pressure from publics to keep content fresh, engaging, and
timely (Deuze, 2003). The publics’ desire for media consumption complicates the traditional public relations model and puts extreme pressure on public relations departments to constantly refresh content even if there is little to report. The vicious cycle is self-perpetuating, as constant communication creates more noise in an already-cluttered marketplace.

The challenge for public relations practitioners lies in the ability to distinguish when publics require true interactivity, and when quasi and faux interactivity will suffice. As described in the “The Problem with Shifting Units of Analysis” section, one-to-niche interactivity is ideal since it permits practitioners to establish shared meaning and understanding with key members of existing or emerging publics. However, in some circumstances, true interactivity may not be possible or even desired by the organization, public relations practitioners, or publics (Bucy, 2004; Rafaeli, 1988). “When it comes to interactivity, more is not necessarily better” (Bucy, 2004, p. 377). In some cases, quasi interactivity and faux interactivity are appropriate mechanisms of message exchange.

Public relations practitioners are working longer hours to provide immediate, personalized service to a more active, participatory audience called “prosumers” (Hermes, 2009). Prosumers communicate with organizations on a variety of digital platforms with the desire to be heard. Social media provides publics the vehicle to communicate with organizations, resulting in a greater accessibility and level of sociality engagement (Bucy & Gregson, 2001). As such, PR departments must vigilantly monitor social media for comments that affect the organization and manage crises quickly (Khang, Ki, & Ye, 2012).

Consequently, the push for interactivity has created more job opportunities for the public relations practitioners (Khang, Ki, & Ye, 2012). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employment of public relations specialists is expected to grow 23 percent from 2010 to 2020, faster than the average for all occupations” due to the growth of social media in this high-information age. Despite the push to be more interactive, the prominence of social media and online platforms can be daunting for an organization due to increased demands on time, resources, and staff.

Conclusion

While considerable excitement surrounds interactivity in public relations practice, neither practitioners nor academics have been able to agree upon a clear, concise definition of this “god term.” As explicated in this paper, true interactivity is defined as the process of exchanging multiple dependent messages between two parties through face-to-face or mediated communication channels, where both parties have interchangeable roles and respond with mutually agreed-upon immediacy to achieve shared meaning in order to influence strategic decisions in an organization and its publics. Interactivity can be properly applied to both the theory and practice of public relations by dissecting the term into its six key elements and differentiating true interactivity from other forms of message exchange: quasi and faux interactivity.

With the growth and accessibility of Internet, dominant coalitions and key publics expect PR practitioners to use online communication tools like websites, forums, and social media to engage in true interactivity. The problem arises with scalability: true one-to-one interactivity does not scale readily with increases in the size of publics. The challenge for practicing public relations professionals is managing communication as they attempt to offer a more interactive approach to the practice, whenever appropriate. Interactivity, at its core, requires two parties to engage in an open dialogue. In the near future, at least, machines will not replace the human
function (Rafaeli, 1988). As the Excellence Study (J. E. Grunig, L. A. Grunig, & Dozier, 2006) illustrated, excellent public relations departments act as the eyes and ears of an organization. Properly managed interactivity with niche leaders supports excellence. Haphazard and non-strategic use of interactivity will force less-than-excellent organizations to falter.
References
Minds and Machines, 11, 3–27.


Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.


One-to-one interactivity:

One-to-niche interactivity:

n-step interactivity:

Figure 1. Visual representation of one-to-one, one-to-niche, and n-step interactivity
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Interactivity</th>
<th>True Interactivity</th>
<th>Quasi Interactivity</th>
<th>Faux Interactivity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-Face Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediated Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two Communicating Parties with Interchangeable Roles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exchange of Multiple Dependent Messages</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agreed-upon Immediacy</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Shared Meaning</td>
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<td>Influence Strategic Decisions</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Face-to-face or mediated communication between people</td>
<td>Information Exchange and Retrieval (Human Computer Interaction)</td>
<td>Automation Out of Office responses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New Media: Reshaping Future Communicators’ Self-Perceived Role in Crisis

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Abstract

This study utilized Q methodology to evaluate the priority future public relations practitioners (students) place on a company’s response to new media in a crisis situation compared to more traditional response strategies. The findings indicate that, while social media may be important in the future of crisis communications, students still place more value on traditional response strategies, varying their responses based on formal public relations training and the desire to build mutually-beneficial relationships with stakeholders.
Technology is rapidly changing the practice of public relations and, while some of us are racing to incorporate new media into our ongoing practices, today’s public relations students will join the profession as social-media savvy practitioners. How will this change the role of public relations practitioners, specifically crisis communicators in the future? Will lightning fast technology encourage us to put the need for immediate response ahead of other crisis communications considerations (such as accuracy and the depth or complexity of information)? Are the future practitioners putting all their focus on technology and ignoring the tried and true “rules” of crisis communications?

This study utilized Q methodology to evaluate the priority future public relations practitioners (students) place on a company’s response to new media in a crisis situation compared to the priority they place on the more traditional response strategies such as selecting the appropriate spokesperson, ensuring that the information is accurate, presenting the information in a transparent and complete manner.

**Traditional Crisis Response Strategies**

Crisis communications scholars have focused quite a bit of research on organizational crisis response strategies – which strategies are available and at what point or in what situations these strategies should be used to ensure the best possible reaction from stakeholders. Benoit (1997) outlined a set of response strategies in his image restoration theory which include denial, evading responsibility, reducing the offense, corrective action, and mortification (p. 177). These have been modified and adapted by Coombs (2006), in the development of situational crisis communication theory, into three categories of responses designed to best protect the reputation of the company based on the situational factors outlined in the theory (type, severity, crisis history, and relationship history) as they relate to attribution or the amount of crisis responsibility the stakeholders place on the organization. Coombs’ (2007) response strategies include denial strategies (deny, attack accuser, scapegoat), diminish strategies (excuse, justification) and deal strategies (concern, regret, compassion, ingratiating, and apology) (p. 254).

In each of these theories, there is an assumption that the practitioner must first analyze the situation and understand the level of blame being attributed to the organization before determining which response strategy to use.

**Popular Wisdom**

While these specific response strategies are important, there are other “rules” of crisis response that we have learned over the years – respond quickly, be transparent, get ahead of the news. These rules are based in research, but applied by practitioners on a daily basis and preached by crisis communications “experts” in the industry. You will find these rules throughout the multitude of workshops, books, training classes, and consultant services available to assist communication practitioners in the handling of crises situations.

For example, we are all told that crisis communicators must respond quickly in a crisis (Act Fast, 2013; Canty, 2011; McNeilly, 2012). This was noted early in the study of crisis as Hermann (1963) identified one of the characteristics of a crisis as a situation that demanded the fast response of the organization. One consultant describes this as “common sense at lightning speed” saying, “you cannot afford to dither and equivocate when a media tidal wave threatens to swamp your reputation” (Act Fast, 2012, p. 1) and Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2011) talk about the “short window” available for companies to respond (p. 7).
Role of Social Media in Crisis

Traditional response strategies do not take the medium or method of disseminating the information into account. In other words, they don’t dictate whether an apology should be done through traditional communication channels (e.g. press release, interviews) or via new media (e.g. blogs, social networking sites). Of course, we know that “new media” is changing the way in which every aspect of public relations is practiced and this includes crisis communications so the medium should probably be taken into consideration.

Several studies have looked at the role “new media” play in crisis communications (Taylor & Perry, 2007; Jin & Liu, 2010) and found that, while new media offers opportunities for organizations to communicate with its stakeholders, it also offers opportunities for stakeholders to communicate their own information in real-time. For example, Procopio and Procopio (2007) noted people sometimes turn to the Internet in a crisis, especially in a crisis where other forms of communication are disrupted. Specifically, they seek local information online (local television station or newspaper sites) on sites that are geographically relevant to them, a finding also noted by Sutton, Palen and Shklovski (2008) in the case of the California wild fires.

In addition, Procopio and Procopio (2007) found that people tended to reach out to social connections (both close and distant relationships) via social networks during a crisis in order to “reduce uncertainty” by gaining information on the status of friends, family, and personal property as well as sharing their own status with others. Likewise, Sutton, Palen and Shklovski (2008) point out the new dimension stakeholder involvement brings to the practice of crisis communications saying, “Social media supports ‘backchannel’ communications, allowing for wide-scale interaction that can be collectively resourceful, self-policing, and generative of information that is otherwise hard to obtain” (p. 1).

More recently, Schultz, Utz, & Goritz (2011) examined the impact of “new media” on crisis response strategies to see if people are more receptive to organizational responses if they are presented through different mediums. Their results suggest that the medium may mean more than the message in crisis communications, specifically as it applies to social media. For example, when looking at reputation, secondary crisis communication, and reactions, they found a main effect for medium (Twitter vs. blog vs. newspaper) while the message only had a significant effect with secondary crisis communication (p. 25).

This medium-focused concept, harkening back to McLuhan’s (1964) “the medium is the message” (p. 7) is key to the recent development of the social mediated crisis communication model (SMCC) in which the manner by which crisis information is distributed among publics and the organization is outlined and three different types of public are identified as content producers or consumers: “(1) influential social media creators, who create crisis information for others to consume; (2) social media followers who consume the influential social media creators’ crisis information; and (3) social media inactives, who may consume influential social media creators’ crisis information indirectly through word-of-mouth communication with social media creators and/or social media followers” (Austin, Liu, & Jin, 2012, p. 192).

While many of these studies have shown that social media is being used by audiences in crisis situations, there is also evidence that the role of traditional media is still important. In a look at how audiences seek out information during a crisis, Austin, Liu & Jin (2012) found that people use social media during a crisis for keeping in touch with family or friend and for gathering “insider information,” while they use traditional media for “educational purposes” (p.
How do practitioners pull the new and traditional media together for the best results and what priority will future practitioners place on the medium of social media? The research questions posed for this study are as follows:

**R1:** Do public relations students place a higher value on response statements that specify the medium over the more traditional response strategies (the medium over the message)?

**R2:** Do public relations students place a higher value on response statements that focus on social media over other crisis communication response options?

**Method**

This study utilized Q methodology, a small group method used in the “systematic study of subjectivity” (Brown, 1993, p. 93). Using this methodology, the researcher offers participants a subset (Q sample) of opinion-based statements (the concourse) and asks each participant to rank-order the items, based on their individual opinion, into a “Q-sort,” a researcher-determined scale that runs along a continuum from “most” favorable to “most” unfavorable or some variation thereof. Each of the individual sorts is then correlated and factor analyzed to determine which individuals’ subjective opinions are similar to those of another participant. Participants with similar opinion patterns, as defined by their Q sort, load together to form a group for the purpose of analysis called a “factor.” Researchers then interpret each of the factors by examining the specific statements or pattern of statements that distinguish them from each other as well as those that are shared between or among the factors (Brown, 1993).

In this study, the Q sample was comprised of a 34 statements of opinion that included three categories: traditional wisdom (customary do’s and don’ts considered practical by crisis communicators), response strategies (variations of the strategies outlined by image restoration and situational crisis communication theory), and various mediums (a list of methods/mediums by which information could be distributed) (Appendix A). Prior to providing the Q sample to participants, the statements were re-ordered randomly to avoid having participants intentionally sort them as they originally appeared on the list.

A convenience, non-probability sample of participants \( N = 49 \) was recruited from a large Northeastern university. All of the participants were enrolled in an undergraduate, public-relations course for upper-level public relations majors. Seventy-eight percent of the participants were female and the average age was 21.31 years with an age range of 17 to 55.

Participants were asked to sort the 34 items to the following condition of instruction: “Please sort the attached statements from “Highest Priority” (+4) to “Lowest Priority” (-4) when dealing with a crisis situation. Participants were then asked to transcribe their Q sort onto a score sheet (Appendix B), where they were asked to comment on their individual rationale for determining which items to sort in the top two (+3 and +4) columns as well as the bottom two (-4 and -3) columns. In addition, they were asked questions about their gender, age, class rank, major, public relations area of interest and involvement in the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA).

The 49 Q sorts were input into PQMethod, a software program designed specifically for Q methodology data input and analysis. The data were correlated and factor analyzed using centroid extraction with varimax rotation (Schmolck, 2002). The Q sort values for each
statement were produced and factor arrays were used to compare and interpret the factors (Table 1).

**Results and Discussion**

Two factors, representing 58 percent of the variance, emerged from the 49 Q sorts with 26 participants significantly loaded onto Factor A and 6 participants significantly loaded onto Factor B. Sixteen of the participants were confounded (loaded onto two factors) while one of the participants did not load onto either factor. Factors A and B were correlated \( r = .57 \), but the observed differences in the two factors illustrate distinct differences in the perceptions of the respective participants and were considered worthy of discussion.

**Consensus Items**

Factors A and B had a total of four consensus items, items that scored the same across both factors. One of the consensus item (“Lie if Necessary to Protect the Organization”) fell at bottom (-4) of the sort for both factors, of both sorts. Both factors also scored “Provide Updated Information on a Regular Basis” very high (+3). The complete list of consensus items included (scores in parentheses for Factor A and B, respectively):

- “Send Email to Employees” (2, 2)
- “Provide Updated Information on a Regular Basis” (3, 3)
- “Lie if Necessary to Protect the Organization” (-4, -4)
- “Respond Quickly to Comments and Questions” (0, 0)

These consensus items were considered as general similarities between factors and are consistent with the analysis of the individual factors, as well.

**Factor A: Promoters**

An analysis of Factor A indicates a “Promoter” focus as the highest ranked statements focus on taking responsibility for the crisis and being transparent and forthcoming with information in a public manner, responses often taught in formal and information crisis communications training. The top nine statements for this factor indicate that information should be disseminated to the masses by including the following: “Make a Statement to the Media,” “Hold Press Conference,” and “Post a Statement on Company Website.” The possibility of withholding information, “Take Your Time – ‘No Comment’ until all Information is Available” ranks very low with this factor. This attention to public disclosure is demonstrated in their Q sorts (scores in parentheses for Factors A and B, respectively):

- “Be Transparent and Honest with Information” (4, 1)
- “Take Responsibility for the Crisis” (4, 2)
- “Make a Statement to the Media” (3, 1)
- “Hold a Press Conference” (2, 1)
- “Post Statement on Company Website” (2, 0)

In explaining her decisions on what to prioritize first, one of the Promoters said, “Addressing the media makes it so your public has access to information.” Another stated, “It is important to get your company out in the media to be available for response, doing so in an honest and transparent manner.
Factor B: Protectors

An analysis of Factor B indicates a “Protector” focus as individuals appear to value protecting the organization and taking action over disseminating information to the public. Rather, their highest priority allows for the company to have “no comment” on the crisis until all information is available in an effort to minimize the risk to the organization. Their responses indicate an interest in addressing specific audiences (victims and employees) before making public statements. Three of their top five priorities include “Minimize the Reputational Risk to the Organization,” “Make Amends to the Victims of the Crisis,” and “Take action to Prevent Future Crisis.” Their highest ranking statements involving dissemination of public information is just above the mid-point of the scale at (+1) and include, “Issue a Traditional Press Release,” Make a Statement to the Media,” and “Hold Press Conference.” These protectors want to take care of business first and then talk about it. This attention to protecting the organization first is demonstrated in their Q sorts (scores in parentheses for Factors A and B, respectively):

- “Take Your Time – ‘No Comment’ until all Information is Available” (-3, 4)
- “Minimize the Reputational Risk to the Organization” (1, 4)
- “Make Amends to the Victims” (1, 3)
- “Take Action to Prevent Future Crises” (2, 3)
- “Have Meeting with Employees” (0, 2)

One of the protectors explained his response by stating, “My first priorities are going to be minimizing reputational risk by getting things squared away with employees before the world at large.” While another said, “Make sure preventative measures have taken place to prevent another crisis from happening. The public will know steps were taken in the right direction.”

Differences in Individuals by Factor

Ninety-six percent of the Promoters were public relations majors, compared to only 50 percent of the Protectors. Similarly, more than half (54%) of the Promoters were members of the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) as opposed to only 17 percent of the Protectors. (Figure 1)

These demographic differences indicate that the Promoters have had more formal public relations training and would be more familiar with Grunig’s (1992) theory of excellence and the importance today’s public relations practitioners place on two-way symmetrical communication, transparency, and relationships with stakeholders. One of the Promoters highlighted this training saying, “It is important to provide 2-way communication which will keep your stakeholders informed.” While both groups appear to value the traditional response strategies found in the literature (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007), the Promoters focus more on external communication, based on the popular “speak first, speak often and speak truth” sentiment, while the Protectors are focused more on internal corrective actions (fix the problem, make amends).

Social Media/Medium as Message

The statements that focused primarily on the medium scored low with both Promoters and Protectors. In other words, while both groups place a high priority on what needed to be done, the items related to specific mediums were much lower on their priority list. The Promoters did tend to rank the social media items a little higher than their Protector counterparts and even have two items related to social media ranked above the midpoint: “Post Company
Statement on Twitter” (+1) and “Post Company Statement on Facebook” (+1) which is consistent with their focus on getting information out, but it was more important for them to “Provide Information on a Regular Basis” (+3) than to prioritize the forums by which the information would be delivered.

In total, the statements that included specific references to social media were not a high priority with either group as demonstrated in their Q sorts (scores in parentheses for Factors A and B, respectively):

- “Post Company Statement on Twitter” (1, 0)
- “Post Company Statement on Facebook” (1, -1)
- “Provide Information on CEO’s Blog” (0, -3)
- “Post YouTube Video with Company Spokesperson Making Statement” (-1, -3)
- “Send Text Message Alerts to Stakeholders” (-1, -2)
- “Respond to Stakeholder Comments on Facebook” (-1, -2)
- “Respond to Stakeholder Comments on Twitter” (-1, -2)

These results would indicate the following answer to the research questions posed earlier:

**R1:** Do public relations students place a higher value on response statements that specify the medium over the more traditional response strategies (the medium over the message)? No, the public relations students in this study did not place a higher value on response statements that specify the medium over the message.

**R2:** Do public relations students place a higher value on response statements that focus on social media over other crisis communication response options? No, despite the overwhelming impact social media is having on society, the public relations students in this study (both the Promoters and Protectors) actually placed a higher value on more traditional mediums (“Hold Press Conference” and “Make a Statement to the Media”) than on social media.

In conclusion, the public relations students who participated in this study do differ in what their priorities would be when responding to a crisis, but the differences lie in either getting information out to everyone as fast as possible or being more protective of information and the organization. They did not, as we wrongly assumed, prioritize social media platforms above the tried and true response strategies and rules. In other words, the medium lost out to the message in this case. It will be interesting to see if this changes as we become more and more reliant on new technology.
References


Table 1. Factor Arrays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stmt #</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Factor A</th>
<th>Factor B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Punish the Person(s) Responsible for the Crisis</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Post Statement on Company Website</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Post YouTube Video with Company Spokesperson</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Deny Responsibility for Crisis</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Send Email to Employees</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Provide Updated Information on a Regular Basis</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Provide Information on CEOs Blog</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Make Amends to the Victims of the Crisis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Take Your Time - &quot;No Comment&quot; Until You Have All Information</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Don't Edit/Delete User Comments on Social Media</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Respond Accurately to Comments and Questions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Take Action to Prevent Future Crises</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Apologize to Stakeholders for the Crisis</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Create/Run Ad in Traditional Media Outlet</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Lie if Necessary to Protect the Organization</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Send Hard Copy Letters to Stakeholders</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Send a Blast Email to Stakeholders</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Post Company Statement on Twitter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Take Responsibility for the Crisis</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Issue Traditional Media Release</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Be Transparent and Honest with Information</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Have a Meeting with Employees</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Minimize the Reputational Risk to the Organization</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Make a Statement to the Media</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Schedule Media Interviews</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Send Text Message Alerts to Stakeholders</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Respond to Stakeholder Comments on Facebook</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Respond to Stakeholder Comments on Twitter</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Hold Press Conference</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Create and Run an Advertisement Online</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Shift the Blame to Someone Else for the Crisis</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Post Company Statement on Facebook</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Respond Quickly to Comments and Questions</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Provide Opportunity for User Feedback</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1.
APPENDIX A

Q Sample Statements

Traditional Wisdom
1. Respond Quickly to Comments and Questions
2. Respond Accurately to Comments and Questions
3. Provide Updated Information on a Regular Basis
4. Don’t Edit User Comments on Social Media (All Feedback is Important and Should be Visible)
5. Provide Opportunity for User Feedback
6. Be Transparent and Honest with Information
7. Take Your Time – “No Comment” Until all Information is Available
8. Lie if Necessary to Protect the Organization

Response Strategies
9. Deny Responsibility for Crisis
10. Shift the Blame to Someone Else for the Crisis
11. Minimize the Reputational Risk to the Organization
12. Take Responsibility for the Crisis
13. Apologize to Stakeholders for the Crisis
14. Punish the Person(s) Responsible for the Crisis
15. Make Amends to the Victims of the Crisis
16. Take Action to Prevent Future Crises

Distribute Messages/Information via Various Mediums
17. Post Company Statement on Facebook
18. Post Company Statement on Twitter
19. Provide Information on CEO’s Blog
20. Post YouTube Video with Company Spokesperson Making Statement
21. Respond to Stakeholder Comments on Facebook
22. Respond to Stakeholder Comments on Twitter
23. Send Email to Employees
24. Have a Meeting with Employees
25. Post Statement on Company Website
26. Issue Traditional Press Release
27. Hold Press Conference
28. Make a Statement to the Media
29. Schedule Media Interviews
30. Create and Run an Advertisement Online
31. Create and Run and Advertisement in a Traditional Media (Newspaper/TV/Radio)
32. Send a Blast Email to Customer Stakeholders
33. Send Hard Copy Letters to Stakeholders
34. Send Text Message Alerts to Stakeholders
APPENDIX B

SCORE SHEET FOR FUTURE CRISIS COMMUNICATORS’ STUDY

Please sort the attached statements from “Highest Priority” (+4) to “Lowest Priority” (-4) when dealing with a crisis situation. Then, write the number in the chart below to reflect your finished Q sort.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOWEST PRIORITY</th>
<th>HIGHEST PRIORITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-4</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-3</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-1</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments on companies in columns +3 and +4

Comments on companies in columns -3 and -4

Please answer the following:

How old were you on your last birthday?

What is your gender?

Are you a (circle one): Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

What is your major?

What area of public relations most interests you?

Are you a member of PRSSA (circle one)? Yes No

Have you taken a course in crisis communications (circle one)? Yes No
The Importance of Corporate Social Responsibility Communication in the Age of Social Media

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Ricardo Chalmeta
The Jaume I University

Abstract
The practice of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) places opportunities for companies to re-think how everyday management decisions could affect society and environment. Today, companies use different avenues to communicate CSR practices. For instance, social media is currently one of the most important and powerful communication channels, providing great opportunities to interact with stakeholders and maintain permanent relationships. This paper focuses on analyzing how companies are using social media platforms for CSR communication. First, a content analysis was conducted to the Facebook and Twitter profiles of 50 companies. A total of 2412 posts on Facebook and 12543 tweets on Twitter were encountered. Second, based on the analysis of the messages, a conceptual framework for CSR communication through social media was developed. Three main features were established as important resources for CSR communication on social media profiles: presentation, content, and interactivity. Findings pointed out that social media sites (in spite of its interactive characteristic), were used as another one-way communication channel for communicating CSR, failing to promote feedback and stakeholder participation and engagement.
Introduction

Prior studies (Esrock & Leichty, 1998; Maignan & Ralston, Snider, Hill, & Martin, 2003; Capriotti & Moreno, 2007; Golob & Bartlett, 2007; Birth, Illia, Lurati, & Zamparini, 2008; Tang & Li, 2009) have shown that companies have failed to use websites as interactive and engagement communications tools for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication. Perhaps the reason behind this was due to the lack of a trained staff to create more interactive sites. However, the advent of social media has taken away any excuse. Social media sites are free to use and have built-in interactivity, differing dramatically from websites. Moreover, it can be said that social media has altered how companies perform business and communicate with others (Bilic, 2010), presenting opportunities and challenges.

Social media are web-based media and mobile technologies for social interaction and communication; it can include social networking sites (Facebook, Google +), micro-blogs (Twitter, Tumblr), and video sharing sites (YouTube, Vimeo), among others. Social media has a powerful advantage in letting users to contribute and share information and ideas, in different ways that was never achieved before with traditional media. In addition, it is an excellent mechanism for engaging customers and stakeholders in dialogues (Fieseler, Fleck, & Meckel, 2010; Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). Although social media platforms are a valuable resource for CSR communication and stakeholder involvement (Fieseler et al., 2010; Schneider, Stieglitz, & Lattemann, 2007), companies are not yet aware of the importance of social media for CSR communication (Lundquist, 2010).

This paper focuses on analyzing how companies are using social media platforms (i.e. Facebook and Twitter) for CSR communication. First, a content analysis was conducted during two consecutive months to the Facebook and Twitter profiles of 50 companies from the Fortune Magazine. A total of 2412 posts on Facebook and 12543 tweets on Twitter were encountered. Messages were analyzed to discover: what type of CSR core subjects were communicated, how frequently they were posted, and the level of interactivity presented between companies and stakeholders. Second, based on the analysis of the messages, a conceptual framework for CSR communication through social media was developed. Three main features were established as important resources for CSR communication on social media profiles: presentation, content, and interactivity. Presentation refers to the different tools and basic information that supports the company’s CSR presence on social media. Content includes messages related to CSR and other topics that reinforce the communication of CSR practices. Lastly, interactivity refers to the type of CSR communication (one way, two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric) and the frequency of CSR messages and feedback. This novel investigation presents a starting-point of further studies about the importance of social media for fostering CSR communication. This study is also intended to help scholars and practitioners concerned with the theory and practice of CSR communication, to realize the role of social media in the communication and engagement of CSR efforts.

This paper continues with a literature review on corporate social responsibility and social media. Subsequently, the methodology, the results, and the discussion are shown. The last section outlines the main conclusions and future work on the area.

Background

Corporate Social Responsibility and Communication

Corporate Social Responsibility can be defined as a responsible management of corporate impacts. In other words, companies are aware that they can generate impacts (positive or
negative) on the economy, society, and environment due to daily operations, and they must work to minimize negative impacts.

Different groups of stakeholders (customers, academia, investors, NGO’s, companies, employees, etc.) are increasing awareness in this subject and they are claiming to corporations to enhance CSR actions that can benefit society and the environment (Du et al., 2010; Schneider et al., 2007). For instance, customers will be loyal to a company’s brand and ambassadors, if companies behave as good corporate citizens (Du et al., 2010). That is why it is fundamental that companies must detect any corporate operation that could impact the economy, the society, and the environment, and of course stakeholders. Today, CSR practices suggest that companies should detect key stakeholders and incorporate their needs and expectations to the corporation’s strategic goals and decision-making processes (Hartman, Subin, & Dhanda, 2007).

CSR practices have existed for several decades or even centuries ago as a dynamic and interchanging movement (Visser, 2010). But the modern era of CSR started in the 1950s with Howard R. Bowen and his definition of Social Responsibility (SR) about how SR could guide business in the future (Carroll, 1999). Later, the CSR concept was improved in the 60s with the birth of the environmental movement (Visser, 2010). Now, CSR is conceived as an answer to the effects of globalization. It is expected that capitalism should play a social role, and the owners of companies are not the only ones that can obtain benefits (Outtes-Wanderley, Lucian, Farache, & De Sousa Filho, 2008).

CSR practices must be communicated to the society and stakeholders in order to nurture corporate image and ameliorate reputation (Schneider et al., 2007). Communicating CSR also improves relationships with stakeholders and attracts better skilled employees (Castelo Branco & Lima Rodrigues, 2006). In fact, creative communication (presence of striking, relevant, and understandable content) is essential for a CSR communication plan (Dawkins, 2004). However, the communication of CSR practices are not a merely transmission of information (i.e. objectives, intentions, activities), it goes beyond that because is it based in a continuous process of exploration, construction, negotiation, and modification among different actors (Christensen & Cheney, 2011).

Today, enterprises use online resources, such as corporate websites or social media channels, to communicate CSR to specific groups of stakeholders, instead of using traditional communication channels like newspapers, TV, radio, bulletin boards, etc, for general stakeholders (Isenmann, 2006). According to a survey made by Fleishman-Hillard (2007), the Internet has become the leading source for CSR information for the majority of Americans. Seventy-three percent of Americans have used Internet search engines; and almost 50% have used corporate websites for social responsibility news or information. However in spite of all these facts, CSR still is presented as the missing link in the practice of CSR online communication of companies (Dawkins, 2004).

The Age of Social Media

Social media can be defined as a series of online tools that encourage social interaction and participation (Sweetser, 2010). It can include social networking sites (Facebook, Google +, LinkedIn), micro-blogs (Twitter, Tumblr), and video sharing sites (YouTube, Vimeo), social bookmarking (Delicious, Digg), virtual worlds (Second Life), among others. However, social media is not new; some of the first applications on the Internet have been framed around communication and sharing (Boyd, 2009). The era of social media probably started 20 years ago when Open Diary was established, a social networking site for online diary writers (Boyd, 2009).
Boyd and Ellison (2007) state that social networking sites attract millions of daily users and allow them to construct a public/semipublic profile and create and view a list of connections. Social networking sites enable users to share ideas, activities, events, and interests within their individual networks. The first recognizable social networking site appeared in 1997 with Six Degrees, and it combined the features of creating profiles and listing friends (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Today, Facebook is the most important and used social networking site, where users can create a personal profile, add friends, and post messages on friends’ walls, and other pages within Facebook, among other features. As December 2012 Facebook had more than a billion monthly active users¹.

Social media platforms can promote learning, exchange of ideas, interactivity, collaborative knowledge, and engagement. Through social media, companies and stakeholders can learn from each other, being beneficial for both parties. Creating a strong social media platform can engage and empower stakeholders to communicate and share ideas with the company (Manchester, 2010).

Using social media for communication presents great benefits for companies such as inexpensive collaboration, real-time communication, public relations, and online archiving. (Schneider et al, 2007). In addition, social media also presents higher levels of efficiency compared to traditional communication channels, improving productivity and quick performance (Mangold & Faulds, 2010). Social media also has excellent advantages for organizations such as low cost of implementation, credibility, image reputation, etc. As a result of all these advantages and benefits, social media have generated interactive and dynamics systems of organization action and public action (Saxton and Waters, forthcoming). For companies, social media cannot be conceived as a marketing channel, in fact, it is a very powerful business philosophy. When social media is embraced and applied within business, “has the ability to reboot a jaded company mentality and prepare it to compete, prosper and be profitable for the next generation of customers” (Social Media Sustainability Index, 2012, p.5).

Today, the role of organizations in online communication is less inclusive; companies do not have the ultimate power to control the information available in the cyberspace. In the past, they were able to control it through press releases and with the help of a public relations manager (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Cohen, 2010). Those days are gone, now through social media sites, the public has an active voice and they require more information about corporate products and services. Social media seems to be a more trustworthy channel regarding information about products and services, than traditional ways of corporate communications (Foux, 2006).

CSR in the Age of Social Media

The importance and growth of social media has placed tremendous communication challenges for all companies (Social Media Sustainability Index, 2010). Social media platforms have a great potential for creating and maintaining dialogues with stakeholders, in contrast with static corporate websites (Fieseler et al., 2010). Thus, social media plays a key role in how companies communicate and report CSR and behave as good corporate citizens. It provides great opportunities for organizations to interact with stakeholders and maintain authentic and permanent relations with them, achieving a competitive advantage (Bilic, 2010; Fieseler et al., 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2010; Schneider et al., 2007).

Organizations can be proactive at the moment of using social media in order to engage stakeholders to be their CSR advocates and spread CSR messages (Du et al., 2010). That is why

¹ http://newsroom.fb.com/Key-Facts
the power of “online consumer word-of-mouth” has been increased recently due to the popularity of social media. Stakeholders feel more engaged with products/companies, promoting open communication and building a sense of community (Mangold & Faulds, 2010).

However, little research is found about CSR through social media. CSR and social media research have shown that stakeholder involvement through blogs is a valuable resource for CSR communication (Fieseler et al., 2010), although social media sites are not widely used by NGOs to communicate CSR (Schneider et al., 2007).

McCorkindale (2010) examined Facebook member and fan pages of 50 Fortune companies of 2009 in order to determine how organizations use Facebook for disseminating information (including social responsibility) engagement, and relationship maintenance. It was found that only 12 companies had some sort of reference to social responsibility.

A survey of 250 people working in CSR and sustainability was performed by Communications Consultancy Lundquist in 2010. It indicated that social media is becoming a fundamental space for discussing and sharing information, but companies are not yet aware of their importance for CSR communication. Reaching similar conclusions, a report developed by Custom Communication (2010), analyzed 287 North American and European companies by industry sector (from the Dow Jones Sustainability Index) to see if they are communicating sustainability messages through social media. It demonstrated that only 22.5% of the organizations communicate sustainability and CSR messages on their social media sites. In 2011, they developed the same study, finding that at least 250 major companies around the world are engaged in communicating sustainability through social media regarding different topics (improved energy efficiency, lowering emissions, policing their supply chains, pioneering ethical sourcing and promoting equitable working environments) However, the report fails to expose how frequent these corporations communicate sustainability issues and if they promote one way or two-way sustainability communication.

That said, with few academic studies to date on CSR communication through social media, little is known about this phenomenon, particularly how companies are using social media platforms (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) for CSR communication and interaction with stakeholders.

**Methodology**

The growth in popularity of CSR studies presents opportunities to investigate different panoramas in the CSR realm. This paper analyzes one fundamental CSR scenario where online resources such as social media can improve CSR communication.

This study carried out a content analysis (Babbie, 1992) of Facebook and Twitter official profiles of the 50 most admired companies from the Fortune list of 2010.² The Fortune 500 companies have long been considered “as leaders” in the use of information technology and their home pages have been extensively researched (Sang, Taewon, & Lee, 2006). Fortune 500 companies also play a highly influential role in the business world; therefore it is important to know how well they employ social media channels for the future of the business (Ganin Bardes & Mattson, 2010).

Official corporate profiles on both Facebook and Twitter were analyzed between December 1, 2010 and January 31, 2011. Official corporate Facebook profiles were examined to find CSR information within the wall (company and users’ posts), on discussion and poll applications, on photos, videos, and company info. In addition, official corporate Twitter

accounts were analyzed to discover tweets (messages) related to CSR. All posts and tweets published during this period were taken into account for coding and analysis. A total of 2412 posts on Facebook and 12543 tweets on Twitter were encountered. Messages were analyzed to discover: what type of CSR core subjects were communicated, how frequently they were posted, and the level of interactivity presented between companies and stakeholders.

In order to find active accounts, company’ websites were searched; most of the companies (74%) had a prominent link to their Facebook/Twitter account on the corporate homepage. To find the remaining accounts, a search was conducted on Google and the Facebook/Twitter engine. Some companies had more than one Facebook or Twitter official profile (for example the official corporate profile, the news profile, the careers profile, or a specific product profile). If official corporate profiles were not found, news profiles were taken into account for analysis. If there were corporate profiles from different countries, USA profiles were chosen. Few companies had also CSR/Sustainability profiles on Twitter and/or Facebook and they were analyzed as well.

Prior to coding, a list of keywords associated with CSR was created (e.g. corporate social responsibility, corporate responsibility, social responsibility, sustainability, corporate sustainability, corporate citizenship, citizenship, environment, responsibility, society…) These keywords were used in order to find explicit content regarding CSR on conversations, posts, videos, or any relevant material or information on Facebook and Twitter official corporate profiles. In addition, definitions of CSR were also employed for detecting implicit content of CSR in posts (for Facebook) and tweets (for Twitter).

Post and tweets were manually examined to determine the frequency usage of these platforms and the presence of companies’ feedback. If CSR posts and tweets were found, they were classified using the standards of the Global Reporting Initiative\(^3\) (Economic, Environment, Labor practices, Human Rights, Society, and Product Responsibility). The Global Reporting Initiative (network-based nongovernmental organization) through G3 or Sustainability Reporting Guidelines presents the different principles and indicators that organizations require to use in order to measure and report economic, environmental, and social operations. These guidelines are suitable for all organizations of any size, location, or sector.

The authors cross-validated each subjective assessment and solved all discrepancies until 100% agreement was reached. For the statistical analysis, the variables were quantified by an assigned number: 1 if there is information regarding to the variable or 0 if there is not information regarding to the variable. In cases where a message appeared to serve two or more variables, codes were assigned according to what was considered the message’s best purpose.

On the other hand, based on the analysis of the messages, a conceptual framework for CSR communication through social media was developed. Three main features were established as important resources for CSR communication on social media profiles: presentation, content, and interactivity. Presentation refers to the different tools and basic information that supports the company’s CSR presence on social media. Content includes messages related to CSR and other topics that reinforce the communication of CSR practices. Lastly, interactivity refers to the type of CSR communication (one way, two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric) and the frequency of CSR messages and feedback.

The analysis of the data was twofold. First, a quantitative content analysis was employed to determine the frequency usage of Facebook and Twitter for CSR communication and the presence of companies’ feedback. Second, a qualitative inductive analysis for grounded theory

\(^3\) http://www.globalreporting.org/reportingframework/g3guidelines/
building (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to identify categories or features that are emergent in companies’ employment of social media for CSR communication.

Findings

Forty-three companies had an active Twitter account of which eight had a devoted CSR-related profile. On the other hand, 39 corporations presented a Facebook account while only two had a CSR-oriented account. Although few companies presented social media profiles exclusively for promoting CSR, the majority of the companies used their general social media profiles in Facebook and Twitter to post regarding CSR. However, there was a general trend in the analyzed data that, in spite of using interactive platforms, companies were not employing these platforms to promote an interactive CSR communication process.

Only 30 companies out of 43 posted CSR messages on Twitter, while 22 companies out of 39 did the same on Facebook. More often than not, the main purpose of using social media channels by the analyzed companies was for the marketing of products and services. For Facebook, an average of only 2 CSR posts was sent each month out of 32 posted in the same period regarding other topics. Companies were not sending posts and tweets regarding CSR on a daily basis as shown in Table 1. When hosting social media sites, it is important to tweet or post at least once a day; companies should understand that creating a presence in social media requires time and attention for maintaining different social media profiles (Sweetser, 2010).

Table 1. Average number of CSR posts and tweets during December 2010 and January 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average number of Posts/tweets- December 2010</th>
<th>Facebook CSR posts</th>
<th>CSR tweets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Posts/tweets- January 2011</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days posting/tweeting December 2010</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days posting/tweeting January 2011</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lack of commitment and non-periodic actualizations were observed when organizations communicated CSR messages through both Twitter and Facebook. Results indicated that it was enough for companies to tweet and post 5 or 4 days per month about CSR. However, communication of CSR practices requires a deeper and ongoing commitment; organizations cannot communicate only a couple of times, and then disappear for the rest of the month. Companies should understand that creating a presence in social media requires time, hard work, and attention for maintaining the social presence.

On the other hand, companies sent messages from the wide range of CSR core subjects. Posts and tweets were coded according to the G3 guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative (Economic, Environment, Labor practices, Human Rights, Society, and Product Responsibility). Society and environment were the most important and common CSR core subjects presented in
both posts and tweets. On average 62% of the companies disclosed messages regarding society on Twitter and 40% on Facebook as shown on Table 2. On the other hand, 42% of the companies sent tweets about environment while 20% posted environmental messages on Facebook. The least common topics disclosed were Human Rights and Labor Practices. CSR is usually associated with social initiatives due to its title name, thereby it was expected that companies tweeted and posted more about society than other topics. Society is one of the basic areas of the CSR practice, and organizations commonly encourage social initiatives when they are promoting CSR for the first time (Cohen, 2010). Therefore, companies were communicating through social media platforms only a small percentage about what truly CSR involves. In sum, results indicated that the dissemination and communication of different CSR core subjects through social media channels are still confined in an embryonic stage. With the tremendous advantages that social media has for CSR communication, organizations should take advantage of the enormous opportunities that social media can bring to the company to foster the whole CSR scenario, and not only a few CSR areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CSR topics addressed</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December 2010</td>
<td>January 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Practices</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>43.6%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product Responsibility</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The foundations of social media and Web 2.0 platforms rely on the principles of collaboration, sharing, and participation. Results showed that in spite of companies using interactive platforms, dialogue and community-building represent the least-used strategies for CSR communication. In other words, social media platforms were not used at full capacity for engaging stakeholders in CSR conversations. Only 12 companies provided feedback about CSR on Twitter and six companies on Facebook. On average, organizations were replying about CSR two days during a month on Twitter, and one day on Facebook as presented in Table 3. These results pointed out that social media platforms were employed primarily as another media channel, missing the opportunities for participation, engagement, and communication.
Table 3. Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days for feedback</th>
<th>Facebook CSR-related replies</th>
<th>Twitter CSR-related replies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 2010</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2011</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, based on the analysis of the messages, a conceptual framework for CSR communication through social media was developed. Three main features were established as important resources for CSR communication on social media profiles: presentation, content, and interactivity.

Presentation refers to the different tools and basic information that supports the company’s CSR presence on social media (e.g. photo, videos, links or other resources). Photos, videos and links are important for the reinforcement of the company’s message on social media (Waters et al., 2010; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). Content includes messages related to CSR and other topics that reinforce the communication of CSR practices. Content features can include different topics of the ample spectrum of CSR such as 6 core areas of the Global Reporting Initiative (e.g. environment, society, human rights, etc.). Other complementary topics such as communication or annual reports, recognitions, special chats and discussions are important features to disclose in social media profiles (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). In addition, posts must be informative, interesting, simples, and respectful (Sweetser, 2010), so they can generate conversations for building engaging communities regarding CSR topics and issues. Lastly, interactivity refers to the type of CSR communication (one way, two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric) and the frequency of CSR messages, feedback, and the creation of partnerships or opportunities for networking (through liking on Facebook or following on Twitter other organizations or causes that are related to the company’s purpose). Interactivity features also include interactive information (that includes support material such as videos, photos, and links) that users can share with their friends or colleagues. Another important aspect regarding interactivity is that companies should send frequently messages and promote constant feedback (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010).

Table 4 presents the three features (presentation, content, and interactivity) with the different resources for each category:
### Table 4. Framework for CSR communication features on Facebook and Twitter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Resources employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presentation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Photos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information regarding CSR (mission, vision, goals)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hyperlink to the company website or CSR/Sustainability online section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hyperlink to other social media channels (e.g. Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post and tweets regarding economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post and tweets regarding society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post and tweets regarding environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post and tweets regarding labor practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post and tweets regarding human rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post and tweets regarding product responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post and tweets regarding CSR/Sustainability annual reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post and tweets for promoting special chats and discussions about CSR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post and tweets regarding CSR recognitions and honors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retweet or repost relevant CSR information (news from other organizations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interactivity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presence of CSR interactive messages (with videos, photos, hyperlinks for users to share with others)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effective frequency of CSR interactive messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presence of CSR feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effective frequency of feedback regarding CSR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Like or follow other interests, artists, organizations, causes, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The conceptual model proposed in this study provides a helpful framework that organizations can use at the moment of developing or evaluating a functional social media profiles regarding CSR/Sustainability areas, or for communicating CSR in general profiles. Although each social media platform will be different, each single one of them of the features detected should be always employed in order to assure an efficient CSR interactive communication process. This study is also intended to help scholars and practitioners concerned with the theory and practice of CSR communication, to realize the role of social media in the communication and engagement of CSR efforts. Scholars and practitioners will have to continue to develop new conceptual and practical tools to understand responsible and sustainable practices in an age dominated by social media and active stakeholders.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

A pattern of one-way communication of CSR was observed within the Facebook and Twitter profiles. This could be due to the lack of engagement and participation of the companies at the moment of posting and tweeting regarding CSR practices. It is important that companies should inform to stakeholders about CSR initiatives and practices; but this is not sufficient, the key is to create and promote two-way asymmetric and symmetric communication processes where companies can involve and engage stakeholders in the CSR process. In fact, the
competition for attention on social media requires now intelligent and empathic messages that promotes public action and response (Capozzi and Zipfèl, 2012)

This can lead to fruitful dialogues that reflect stakeholder and multi-stakeholder satisfaction and organization expectations. One way of promoting stakeholder involvement is to have a real and genuine presence in social media platforms. According to the Nielsen study (2011), 53% of active adult internet users follow a brand on social media. Therefore, there is a potential niche in social media platforms to engage audiences or stakeholders about the importance of CSR.

This lack of commitment in promoting an effective CSR communication process comes along with a poor desire to have genuine dialogues with stakeholders about corporate social and environmental responsibility, ethics, and corporate governance, among others issues. Facebook and Twitter are places to build relationships with stakeholders and have personal and meaningful dialogues with them (Sweetser, 2010). Moreover, consumers treated as allies could serve as powerful advocates of CSR messages (Du et al., 2010). Practitioners and scholars concerned with the process of communicating CSR practices have a potential role in spreading and engaging the necessity of using social media platforms for fostering CSR communication. However, many public relations practitioners are “using social media in the same ways they used the old—as a means of dumping messages on the general population rather than as a strategic means of interacting with publics and bringing information from the environment into organisational decision-making” (Grunig, 2009, p.1).

Results indicated that the dissemination and communication of different types of CSR initiatives through social media channels are still confined in an embryonic stage. More commitment, concern, and attention are needed in order to say that a company has a real CSR presence in social media channels. With the tremendous advantages that social media has for CSR communication, organizations should believe in the enormous opportunities that Web 2.0 technologies can bring to the company to foster the whole CSR scenario, and not only a few CSR areas.

Findings also pointed out that one thing is having a Facebook or Twitter account, and another completely different thing is how well a social media presence is planned, managed, and monitored. Perhaps one of the reasons for this lack of commitment in CSR communication is the management of the social media corporate profiles. Is it perhaps in the hands of customer service representatives? Do they have sufficient knowledge about corporate communication and more importantly about CSR? Having a presence in the social media world requires planning, training, and monitoring, it is more than just opening a Facebook or Twitter account and leaving it in the hands of interns or secretaries. Public relations practitioners possess the “know-how” in handling and employing social media tools for a two-way symmetrical model of public relations practice (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010).

In the near future, more companies will create and maintain social media profiles exclusively to promote CSR, or profiles for specific projects or initiatives about CSR. In the past, organizations were worried to create and develop a functional CSR webpage (Esrock and Leichty, 1998; Capriotti & Moreno, 2007; Chaudhri & Wang, 2007). Nowadays, the shift is to plug in social media sites for CSR communication and be creative. For example, the inclusion of CSR or Sustainability apps for tablets or smartphones could create opportunities to show a true commitment about CSR to engage new audiences, as General Electric did with the annual report of the Ecomagination initiative or Fuji Xerox (in Australia) with its Sustainability Report.

This work provides both empirical and theoretical contributions to the literature.
Empirically, it represents a much-needed investigation into the social media use for CSR communication among companies. Theoretically, the conceptual framework of CSR communication through social media provides a helpful model for understanding the importance of employment of key features on social media for reaching effective CSR communication.

Although this study presents some limitations, these weaknesses suggest avenues for further research. One of the biggest limitations is that all the most admired companies from the Fortune list of 2010 were not taken into account for analysis, nor all the different Facebook and Twitter accounts of the 50 companies, such as those related to careers, specific products, or news. It is also important to analyze a larger sample of companies exploring all types of Facebook and Twitter accounts from the companies and during a longer period of time or different time periods during the year. In addition, there are limitations in the conceptual framework presented in this study. The different features were generated from insights of the use of Facebook and Twitter by the analyzed companies, so this framework remains to be empirically tested. However, it serves an important guideline in order to investigate effective CSR online communication features across new and existing social media platforms.

Additionally to future studies addressing the above limitations, further studies can focus on drawing comparisons between different types of organizations (nonprofit, for-profit and government sectors) at the moment of communicating CSR through social media. It could also be interesting to analyze other social media platforms including LinkedIn or Google + to see if CSR practices are also presented in other scenarios.

In sum, the power of social media cannot be underestimated, “specific genres of social media may come and go, but these underlying properties are here to stay” (Boyd, 2009). As somebody would say on Twitter: @companies, #CSR2.0communication will be highly required as stakeholders become connected and demand responsible reporting of business operations.
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Online Article Marketing – Professional and Ethical Challenges to Public Relations

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Colorado State University

Abstract
This paper examines articles marketing as an automated technique used for the placement of feature stories in e-newsletters, websites and blogs by digital marketers to drive traffic to websites and enhance search engine optimization. The process is reviewed, along with the roles of key players: articles directories sites, articles writing services, article editing/spinning software providers, and articles submission and software services. Recent efforts by Google to ferret out abuses by unscrupulous promoters and current best practices are also outlined. The paper argues that articles marketing deserves careful scrutiny by public relations practitioners and scholars because of the resulting denigration of the quality of public information online, ethical abuses, and encroachment on the traditional publicity function. Articles marketing also is a form of content marketing, which is posing new challenges to public relations as a form of integrated marketing communication.
Public relations research in recent years has devoted considerable attention to applications of new media to the field, particularly the role of websites, blogs and social media (Hallahan, 2010a). Yet various aspects of other Web 1.0 technologies and techniques have been largely ignored. Examples include the use of third-party websites and search engines to advance an organization’s goals.

One activity that merits particular attention is the dubious practice known as articles marketing – a 21st century adaption of a technique that has been used in public relations for more than a century: the placement of articles in magazines and newspapers as a mean to promote products, services, personalities and causes.

Dating back to the 18th century, the earliest examples of obtaining such publicity exposure involved the circulation of letters and printed tracts on various topics to newspaper editors, who eagerly sought information from any source to fill their pages and reprinted them with or without the permission or encouragement of the source (Cutlip, 1994, 1995; Lamme & Russell, 2010). News releases containing announcements later became standard publicity tools, while the idea of offering specially written “exclusive” or “special” articles to magazines and newspapers emerged as an accepted technique in the early 20th century.

The rise of source-provided articles accompanied the decline of the partisan press and the rise of mass-circulation publications. Meanwhile, readers sought advice to solve everyday problems in their lives and found information about products and services both informative and entertaining. Special interest magazines and general-circulation women’s magazines were among the first to rely heavily on such articles. In addition to first-hand accounts and opinion pieces, print media beginning in the late 19th century were replete with profiles of inventors and famous people, seasonal features, how-to-stories, tips and advice, and related “service material.” As newspapers expanded their editorial formats to include more “soft news,” sources became an important source of feature material on topics such as food, fashion, travel, automobiles, books, personal finance, entertainment, and today, technology.

With the advent of the Internet, it was not surprising that publicists sought placements in the same way in websites and in the blogs of quality news outlets. Yet, a wide range of secondary venues also emerged, including entrepreneurial news sites and blogs as well as so-called content farms that aimed to fulfill the needs of information-thirsty web users (Jarboe, 2012).

Today, obtaining exposure using article marketing techniques is a form of content marketing where the strategy is to attract attention based upon the informational, educational or entertainment value of the information provided, not the appeal of the product or service being promoted. Other examples of content marketing include educational and entertainment videos on YouTube. Articles act as a freeium – something of value given away at no charge with the hope of eventually paying for itself when the user becomes a paying client or customer (Anderson, 2009).

**Automating Articles Placement**

Similar to the automation of advertising placements by ad networks such as Google, Yahoo! and Microsoft, digital entrepreneurs have perfected ways to turn the placement of articles on websites into a high-volume activity through automation – an activity that went virtually unchecked until 2011.

Online article marketing is an apt term to describe how articles have been used for marketing purposes in today’s digital world. Originally, online articles were conceived of primarily as thinly veiled puffery where links to client web pages could be subtly featured. Although many
clients were as much concerned about communicating important information about their products or services, many digital marketing specialists seized upon the utilitarian function that articles could play in driving traffic to client websites.

For digital marketers (and clients who embraced this approach), the primary purpose of an article became the generation of leads. Visitors could read an article, and then follow an embedded hyperlink to find out more about a solution to the problem or topic of concern to them addressed in the article. Inevitably, this involved ordering a product or service online or retaining the expert services of an article’s author.

A secondary, but still important, goal was to generate a large volume of inbound web links to the client’s website. Articles marketing thus became an accepted tool in search engine optimization (SEO), a set of techniques designed to increase the prominence of a website on the search engine results pages (SERPs) of Google, Yahoo!, Bing and other search engines whenever someone typed a term or phrase (keyword) into the search engine’s search box. The existence of a large number of links from diverse sites that themselves were deemed of high quality improved the chances that Google’s spider software would find a client’s pages and rate them favorably. Multiple inbound links suggested that page was relevant and valuable to users. The number of links to a website, along with a variety of other factors (site structure, HTML tagging and prominence of keywords) were used in complex algorithms used by search engines to determine listing prominence.

During the first decade of the 21st century, a virtual cottage industry emerged around articles marketing. Players included article directories sites, article writing services, article editing and spinning software producers, and article submission software and services.

The trend was fueled, in part, by the rise of entrepreneurial blogs, e-newsletters, e-zines, and industry websites supported by online text and display advertising. Under pay-per-click models popularized by Google, sites made money only when users clicked on text or display ads. Because click-through rates were low, a large number of users were required in order for sites to generate sufficient revenue to offset operating costs. Publishers found articles rich in keywords provided a free and convenient way to generate traffic from search engines as well as providing fresh editorial content to online visitors.

**Article Directories Sites**

Online articles directories vary in terms of their purpose and operation. But the articles directories important in articles marketing are those involved in *article syndication*, i.e. the exchange of articles between would-be promoters and publishers (blogs and websites). Scores of websites, sometimes referred to as *article banks*, serve as exchanges where authors can post articles and publishers can download and then repost them.

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1 Today, nearly a 1,000 articles directory sites operate on the web. An updated list of the Top 50 Articles Directories by Traffic and PageRank is maintained by Virtual Real Estate Toolbar (2013), a website data compiler. Among all articles directories, the two most trafficked sites are ehow.com and Squidoo.com. eHow was created as a community of online users who wanted to document their know-how on various topics and share their knowledge with others. eHow differs from most article directories because its aim is not to facilitate SEO and it actually blocks search engine spiders from following links by including a “do not follow” tag on its pages. Squidoo.com is an authoring platform intended to provide a venue where people can create web pages devoted to a single topic (thus appearing like articles). Squidoo is supported by advertising and allows successful pages to earn royalties for the writer or for a designated charity.
Although some sites charge for every posting, others accept articles for free or charge authors only after exceeding a specified number of submissions. These sites generate revenue primarily from contextually targeted text and display ads that appear whenever topic-related articles are displayed. Articles directories actively encourage online publishers to download and repost articles. Terms of use typically state that articles must be used as-is, without editing, and must include a resource box at the end of article that contains the author’s affiliation and a hyperlink to the author’s website or blog. Thus, the resource box serves much like a promotional advertisement. Publishers can keep apprised of new articles by receiving RSS feeds or e-mail alerts. Article directories with good PageRanks from Google can receive a lot of site visitors and are often considered authority sites.

The largest article syndication site (and the third largest directory site overall) is EzineArticles.com (2013a), which was founded in 1999 and consistently ranks among the top 500 of all websites in traffic, with 120,000 sites linking in, according to Alexa.com (2013). As of 1Q 2013, the site lists 475,000 contributors and claimed to add tens of thousands of new articles every month. The site serves millions of unique visitors monthly and submits RSS feeds and mail alerts to 100,000 publishers. EzineArticles.com says each article is reviewed twice by human editors. Free membership allows authors to submit their first 10 articles free, after which they are assessed a modest fee. However, authors whose material consistently meets the site’s quality standards can ascend to the site’s Platinum membership level, and may submit unlimited articles and receive expedited article processing (E-ZineArticles.Com, 2013b).

**Article Writing Services**

Recognizing that many clients and marketers lack the journalistic skills necessary to high quality articles, and might not have the time or inclination, a variety of article writing services now operate to create custom articles at reasonable rates. Clients only need to provide basic content parameters (topic, length, deadline and keywords). Most services provide a first draft and will make a first set of revisions, if needed, at no charge. Writing services charge either by the article or by the word and offer discounts to volume customers. As works for hire, the finished product becomes the intellectual property of the client. Arrangements for obtaining the services of authors are handled entirely online, with a minimum of direct contact between the author and client. Several content writing marketplaces or article outsourcing platforms (such as Elance.com and odesk.com) serve as exchanges to match up clients and writers, who can advertise fixed rates or can negotiate prices based on the scope of a particular assignment.

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2 A variation on article directory sites devoted to syndication are article blog networks, which republish and cross-promote articles from one another to build traffic and higher page rankings and to increase advertising revenue among network members—a form of black hat search engine optimization.

3 Alternatively clients can obtain private label right articles, which are pre-written articles where most or all of the intellectual property rights are available for sale. Clients or their agents can then edit or customize the piece by adding pertinent client-specific information or quotes. PLR articles are generally cheaper than custom articles but are sold multiple times. Thus clients can run the risk of offering an article of boilerplate material that might appear as if it might have taken from others even though the rights were legally purchased. Private label right article providers sometimes sell individual articles but more frequently provide access to a database of generic articles on fee basis. Experts suggest that PLR articles only be used as source material for originally written articles.
Article Editing/Spinning Software.

Article marketing involves maximizing exposure for a client by placing as many different versions of the same basic article on as many directory and publisher sites as possible. In each case, the articles can be exclusive (unique to a particular site and substantially revised to vary the content) or exactly the same article. This is no different than traditional publicity efforts where, for example, a publicist distributes the same article widely on a non-exclusive basis or might restrict distribution to only non-competing publications. In the latter case, a slug on story might read “Special to….,” or “Special to You in Your Area,” or “Special to You in Your Industry” thus suggesting only limited exclusivity. Many publication editors in the analog print world found this arrangement perfectly acceptable because the same article might appear in multiple publications, but their readers had little chance of seeing the same content.

In today’s digital, search-based world, efforts to restrict distribution by geography or industry aren’t practical because search engines enable users to search for keywords or exact phrase matches. Thus interested users can quickly detect when exactly the same article is posted on multiple venues. Search engine spiders (the software agents that crawl the web to catalog content) also can quickly identify duplicate postings. Instead of authors developing unique article content for every venue, many authors whose primary interest is search engine optimization have resorted to automated software that allows them to produce a seemingly unlimited number of versions of the same article, thus ensuring that a large percentage of words are different from the original article.

Article spinning involves altering headlines, substituting keywords, verbs and phrases, reordering paragraphs, and modifying the author information. Article spinning requires spintax (also known as spin syntax) text file or database of 4-6 sets of alternate text for key sentences and paragraphs and several dozen synonyms for keywords from a thesaurus that can be embedded into an article to create variations that do not substantively alter the article’s main ideas. Thus a word such as municipality might be substituted with terms such as city, local government or jurisdiction. The aim is to create distinct variations of a basic article that do not substantially alter meanings but that will go undetected by users and search engines. (Google and other search engines impose penalties when they find direct duplications, including omission of duplicates from SERP lists, rating the website as being of poor quality, and tagging the article or websites as engaging in trickery.)

Although website owners can pay writers to “spin” articles manually by rewriting all or part of the content, more than a dozen downloadable software packages or web-based applications are openly promoted as tools to facilitate such wordsmithing chicanery. Although spinning software is used to concoct articles that pass as original content, the results often fall far short in terms of readability, coherence and grammar—problems that only can be fixed by manual editing.
Article Submission Software and Services

Finally, marketers can rely on article directory submission software and services that automate the distribution and submission of articles to article directories—a function often included in more sophisticated (and expensive) article spinning software packages. Dealing with each of the numerous article directories can be a time-consuming process, so similar to website submission services used to gain listings on search engines, article submission services coordinate the various details for clients for a fee. Tasks include author registration, the actual submission of each article, and responding to e-mail confirmations and queries received from the directories (which can take up to a week to review submissions). At least six different site scripts are used by article directories; using proper formatting required by each directory site can expedite acceptance (The ultimate…., 2013). Submission services also are equipped to respond to anti-spam filters (such as CAPTCHA challenges) and can automate the scheduling of distribution so articles can be blasted out at one time or “dripped” over a staggered period.

Articles Marketing Today

As suggested by extensive list of online services devoted to various aspects of articles marketing (Fig. 1), articles marketing is thriving today despite efforts by Google, the world’s largest search engine, to throttle in egregious abuses during the last decade. Articles can continue to enhance the reputation of authors (and the organizations, products and services they represent) and, if properly used, can help client organizations in their search engine optimization efforts.

Figure 1. Key Players in Article Marketing

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<th>Article Directories</th>
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<th>PLR (Private Label Right)</th>
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<td>Jiffy Articles</td>
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**Panda and Penguin Algorithms**

In February 2011, a major event occurred that altered early article marketing strategies was Google’s release of a new algorithm for how it assessed rankings for low-quality websites (Hefferman, 2011). Google described the problem as “sites which are low-value to users, copy content from other websites or sites that are just not very useful.” Google explained, “At the same time it will provide better rankings for high-quality sites—sites with original content and information such as research, in-depth reports, thoughtful analysis and so on” (Singhal & Cutts, 2011).

Although Google never stated its intent, press reports stated that that move was directed toward content farms of all kinds, including Demand Media’s (2013) ehow.com site and Yahoo’s Associated Content site (2012), which now operates as Yahoo Voices (Jarboe, 2012; Sullivan, 2011). However, the change also purged the search engine of duplicate content (which had not

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4 Google officially termed his update “Panda” and has issued a variety of updates. At the time, this was also labeled by outsiders as the “Farmer update” in reference to its supposed attack on content farms.

The company has had no regular system for naming algorithm changes and various references to these changes can be cited.

5 Most of the press attention at the time focused on content farms (versus article directories) and included attacks by traditional media on certain publishers of web-based “news” services that hired poorly qualified and poorly paid writers to produce large volumes of content on short deadlines. These sites often featured keywords in headlines tagged to current events and chose editorial topics based on what was trending in on search engine searches—all in an effort to divert traffic from other news sites to expose users to advertising. Content farms were criticized as dealing in clickbait and exploiting their workers. However, others have defended use of contributions of unpaid writers by organizations such as Bleacher Report, Huffington Post and Buzz Feed as creating opportunities for writers to break into
been de-indexed previously; Google, 2012/2007; Lasnik, 2006). Panda also excluded content copied from an owner’s sites by scraper sites, which acquired (scraped) content using legitimate means (such as RSS feeds with obtaining permission to republish excerpts) or illegitimate means (such as the automated appropriation of text, images, multimedia or whole web pages). Google reported that its pretests indicated the changes would impact 11.8% of queries – a dramatic change that Google’s engineers described merely as “pretty big algorithmic improvement” (Singhal & Cutts, 2011).

Fourteen months later, in April 2012, Google took another step toward rewarding high-quality sites when it unveiled its new Penguin algorithm, which had an immediate impact on about 3.1% of search results in the United States (and was projected to affect 5% of searches in other languages when fully rolled out). Penguin specifically targeted black hat webspam where shortcuts or loopholes are used to attain PageRanks higher than otherwise deserved and was intended to decrease rankings for sites that violated Google’s existing quality guidelines (Cutts, 2012). Among specific questionable practices that Penguin sought to correct were low quality links, over-optimized (over-used and over-exact) anchor texts, and excessive use of keywords (including keyword stuffing, or the insertion of needless, irrelevant or hidden keywords) that artificially increased the ostensible relevance of pages and did not enhance the experience of users. Penguin also placed a premium on web pages having links from a broad range of relevant sources – including blogs, social networking sites, and forums – thus not just articles directories.

Impact on Articles Marketing

The short-term impact of these advances in filtering techniques was to reduce the attractiveness of articles marketing for certain marginal players and those that were unable or unwilling to invest in producing high quality content. The unthinking strategy of submitting keyword targeted articles to multiple directories is no longer as effective for SEO purposes as it was previously. For example, the website WebsiteMarketingReview.com (2013) suggests “The key to effective article marketing today is producing quality and informative content and getting this content published where it will be read by targeted audiences.”

One SEO software and consulting firm, SEOMoz.org, goes so far as to argue that article marketing was mostly a scam and advises clients to avoid most old article marketing tactics because they are a waste of time (Wheeler, 2011). Moreover the consultant argues:

How about you try something, anything real? Real and useful. If you think that you can manipulate the search engines or that search engine optimization, that the practice of improving your rankings and gaining traffic is going to be done through this kind of stuff, you're living a decade ago man. This is not going to work. One of the worst parts about this is that when you do this, the impression you create on users, on visitors who do find you, even if you manage to win. … [L]et's imagine that you got your content up to number one using article spinning and article robots and article marketing. Good for you. Imagine what's going to happen when I come to your site, I visit, and I am, like, "God, this is totally junky." Then I see a bunch of nofollow comment spam that you've left on the Web, and I see the articles of low quality that you've submitted everywhere. What am I going to think about your brand? How is your conversion rate possibly going to match up to the high rankings that you've achieved? If it doesn't, why are you even bothering?

journalism and to broaden the number of voices heard in the media (Content Farm, 2013; Ingram, 2012; Martinez, 2011).
Isn't it so much easier to get 100 visitors and convert 10 of them than to get 10,000 visitors and convert 1 out of 1,000? It always is (Wheeler, 2011).

Other SEO consultants continue to embrace article marketing but take more sophisticated approaches. Brick Marketing, for example, specializes in link building (versus site content SEO strategies) and contends article marketing can still form the backbone of long-term SEO campaigns:

As a strictly white hat SEO firm, Brick Marketing believes in the power of online article marketing but does not practice article spinning. We will not take one of your articles and submit it to a dozen different low-quality article submission sites just to get another link. We believe that article marketing should be about brand building and establishing your site as an industry authority for potential clients. We will research the best possible distribution sites for your content, including niche industry sites, while following all search engine guidelines (Brick Marketing, 2013).

Peter Nisbet, who describes himself as an experienced ghostwriter, similarly believes that article marketing will continue to thrive. He contends that Google’s intention was not to target article writing nor article marketing services, but to nip the plethora of badly written information being used produced prior to 2011. He summarizes the culprits as: articles spun from a master article, bad rewrites of PLR articles, poor article writing offering little benefit to the reader, articles offering little information and designed only to get clicks to sales pages, very short articles with fewer than 400 words, articles with significant spelling errors, articles written with very poor grammar, and software-generated articles taken from scraped web content (Nisbet, 2011). Nisbet contends that article writing is now actually a more potent marketing tool than ever before. He explains that the article directories responded to Google’s actions by tightening up their editorial guidelines, reviewing their conditions of use, imposing higher minimum word counts, and more closely inspecting the quality of content and grammar. He argues it might actually be easier to use articles to achieve high Google results rankings because the vast majority of substandard articles and web pages have been removed from search engine results pages (Nisbet, 2011).

In a similar vein, Yaron Galai of Outbrain.com contends that the effect is to purge “any notion of fooling anyone out of the equation.” He termed such trickery “the Old SEO” and wrote in an AdAge Digital guest column:

With New SEO, the pendulum is finally swinging back to favoring humans over crawlers. The New SEO rules point directly back to what was valued in the traditional print-dominated days -- content will not be a mechanism to convert clicks but a tool to boost awareness, increase overall engagement and offer opportunities to connect with a quality audience. And the "customer" that content is tailored for will no longer be SEO bots (the software apps that work the web automatically), as the New SEO favors the true end-user: the reader (Galai, 2012).

**Current Best Practices**

Despite pressures from Google to eradicate abuses, there is no reason to expect the demise of article marketing. In light of the considerable infrastructure that has been created to support this cottage industry, and the considerable opportunity that still exists to promote
organizations through articles, attraction-based marketing schemes will continue to be used extensively. However, there are might be some consolidation in the field as marginal players drop out. Similarly, survivors will ingeniously and artfully adapt to the changing environment. Indeed, articles marketing continues to be promoted through workshops and short courses (Fore, 2012); trade books (Fox, 2010; O’Donnell, 2011); articles and web posts (Griffin, 2013; Gruber, 2013) and dozens of videos and tutorials on YouTube.

A review of advice from various experts suggests that online articles used for marketing purposes in the future must:

- Provide valuable, quality information in an interesting way that engages the reader.
- Avoid blatant commercialism (let the website’s landing page do the selling)
- Be longer – a minimum of 500-700 words and as high as 800-1,200 words (versus the less than 400 words that were previously acceptable).
- Focus on all original content, with a minimum of spinning (and certainly without the mechanistic spinning that prompted the swift response by Google).
- Focus on a limited number of targeted keywords that are relevant to both the article and website to which they are linked, not to extraneous or secondary topics.
- Avoid duplication of content entirely, eliminating suspicion or easy confirmation of plagiarism.
- Feature a keyword density of only 1-2% (versus the 3-5% previously recommended). Critical locations for placing keywords continue to be in the title and the first and last paragraph, with other references only within about every 200 words. (Only 1% is recommended in the author guidelines of EzineArticles.com, 2013b.)
- Be carefully edited (by humans) – to assure impeccable spelling, grammar and punctuation
- Be augmented with other sources of traffic-building backlinks, such as social bookmarking sites, authoring sites such as Squidoo.com and Scribd.com, websites, the owner’s own blog, guest commentaries on other blog sites, social networking sites such as Facebook, forums, and wikis.
- Serve as a tool that can be posted on websites themselves (not just article directories and external sites) and thus provide a trigger for search engines spiders to refresh website listings.
- Avoid content that substantially duplicates the website or landing page where visitors are directed. These targeted venues need to provide information and value beyond the article.
- Direct users to an array of different landing pages (not just a single website landing page for dozens of different articles) or just to doorway pages or splash pages that provide no value to the user.
- Lead readers to a call to action (usually found in the conclusion) and then naturally flow into a statement of the author’s credentials (with a supporting hyperlink to obtain assistance).
- Feature natural writing so that articles (and their supported websites) are written for users, not search engines spiders (Fore, 2013; Griffith, 2013; Levanto, 2013; Nisbet 2012, 2013a, b; Rainbolt 2013).

**Implications for Public Relations**
Although articles marketing mushroomed as a promotional activity during the past decade, this sub-rosa cottage industry generated little, if any, attention from public relations practitioners and went virtually unrecognized by public relations scholars.

In part, inattention by scholars can be explained by the focus within the academy on studying public relations as the work of those people who label themselves as doing public relations (versus the broader perspective of studying all public relations–like activities by organizations). This neglect can also be attributed to a bias that favors more elegant, theoretical approaches to the field such as relationship management, issues management and crisis responses versus more everyday communications strategies and tactics.

Yet articles marketing is a dubious and potentially threatening development that should be a concern to practitioners and scholars alike. In particular, articles marketing denigrates the quality of public information found online, involves questionable ethical practices, represents a new form of encroachment on public relations, and -- as a form of content marketing -- exemplifies one of the biggest new challenges to public relations as a discipline.

**Denigration of Public Information**

Clearly one of the biggest concerns for public relations involves how articles marketing, as recently practiced, can cheapen the quality of online information available to the public. Although ready access, ease of use, low cost, and the rise of user-generated content have been lauded by Internet boosters for expanding public discussion and debates, this also has led to a rising tide of inaccurate, biased or inaccurate public information. Indeed, an unintended consequence of this “democratization” of online communication has been a decline in access to expert and quality information provided by professional communicators.

Articles marketing is an egregious case of *churnalism*, perhaps the lowest level of journalism where pre-packaged material is used for stories by the news media without further research, fact-checking or scrutiny (Harcup, 2009). The premise behind articles marketing is that online publications accept articles *as written* and forego the ability to edit--a practice expected by sources when submitting traditional publicity releases.

As a field committed to the responsible advocacy and maintaining the integrity of public communication processes (PRSA Code of Ethics, 2000), the public relations profession should be concerned about the impact of practices such as article spinning. From a critical theory perspective, article marketing reflects the ever-expanding commercialization of news where mere information is substituted for legitimately important facts people should know (McManus, 2009). It also illustrates how well-intended clients are unwittingly providing unmerited *information subsidies* (Gandy, 1992) to third-rate website operators.

Articles marketing is a 21st century example of that members of the Frankfurt School of social thought condemned as the mass manufacture or *commodification* of media content by cultural industries. And while public relations organizations might distance themselves from the practice by claiming marketers are to blame, article marketing clearly is a case where commodification is exhibited in a work product closely aligned to the field.

In their critique of how mass media engage in production processes no different from industrial manufacturing, Horkheimer and Adorno (1972/1944; Adorno, 1995) argued that cultural industries boast of providing enlightenment but actually engaged in mass deception. In a commentary that resonates with what’s being practiced today by articles marketers, the authors argued that advertising in the 1940s (even in influential magazines of the day such as *Life* and *Fortune*) was scarcely distinguishable from editorial matter. They opined:
The assembly-line character of the culture industry, the synthetic, planned method of turning out products (factory-like not only in the [movie] studio, but more or less in the compilation of cheap biographies, pseudodocumentary novels and it songs) is very suited to advertising: the important individual points, by becoming detachable, interchangeable, and even technically alienated from any connected meaning, lend themselves to ends external to the work. The effect, the trick, the isolated repeatable device, have always been used to exhibit goods for advertising purposes .... Advertising and the culture industry merge technically as well as economically. In both cases the same thing can be seen in innumerable places, and the mechanical repetition of the same culture product has come to be the same as that of the propaganda slogan. In both cases the insistent demand for effectiveness makes technology into psychotechnology, into a procedure for manipulating men (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972, p. 165).

Horkheimer and Adorno expressed a sharp disdain for advertising, but were only slightly more favorable toward publicity. They contended that “universal publicity” was unnecessary to make people aware of goods available for sale and helped sales only indirectly. Indeed, the only justification for a technique such as articles marketing would be to subsidize ideological media that reinforce the cultural values important to a marketer.

Importantly, they stressed the importance of precise and specific language and would question the often sloppy disregard found in articles marketing. According to the authors, “The more completely language is lost in the announcement, the more words are debased as substantial vehicles of meaning and become signs devoid of quality; the more purely and transparently words communicate what is intended, the more impenetrable [subject to scrutiny] they become” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972, p. 166).

Ethical Considerations

Articles marketing also is wrought with ethical problems, which can be summed up a lack of transparency about the process. Drawing on classic ethicists such as Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill, ethicist Patrick Lee Plaisance (2007, 2009) argues that transparency or openness about media practices assures all the players in the communication process speak the same language and provides understanding about what we say, why we say it, and how we talk. Transparency thus addresses the motives behind a message and encompasses concerns such as trust, secrecy, authenticity, respect and accountability.

Accuracy of content and deception are two of eight ethical concerns in responsible online communications identified previously by this author. Hallahan (2006, p. 121) argued that online content needs to be accurate, complete and current to maintain the confidence and trust of online users—as matters of both duty and users’ rights. Otherwise accurate information can be deceptive if presented in a way that misleads (p. 122).

The accuracy of the content in articles marketing de facto must be questioned based on the inherent use of synonyms drawn from online thesauruses and databases, which invariably introduces imprecision and can compromise meaning (see quote from Horkheimer and Adorno above). Although substitution of a single word for another might not have a material impact, the cumulative effect of multiple manipulations in the same article inherently raises questions of accuracy, authenticity and expertness. It is unclear whether such deception is sufficient to merit
regulatory scrutiny or intervention (such as by the Federal Trade Commission in the United States). However no action is likely absent complaints by duped readers.

Deception is clearly at work in articles marketing strategies. Articles marketed using the techniques described here are not advertorials, which are paid advertisements published to appear like editorial matter and labeled as such. Instead, they are yet a new variety of hybrid message (Balasubramanian, 1994) that combines elements of different classes of media content – in this case, editorial matter and a resource (author) box that promotes the author and contains a hyperlink to a target website landing page or blog. Similar to other hybrid messages, articles marketed in the way represent a form of stealth marketing (Goodman, 2006-2007) where the motive or purpose of the message is not readily evident to audiences based on their (often limited) understanding of persuasion processes (Friestad and Wright, 1994).

Beyond the deceiving the audience about the origins and unique of a particular article, authors and articles directories are potentially deceiving the operators of websites, blogs and e-zines by not fully disclosing the extent to which strikingly similar material is being distributed to others. They also fail to note that site operators might be penalized by search engines by posting duplicate materials. Obviously re-publishers ought to be responsible for investigating their sources. But many do not – just as traditional media forego due diligence because of time, budget and other operational constraints (Harcup, 2006; McManus, 2009)

Public relations practitioners and researchers have been conspicuously silent in condemning such deceptive and exploitative behavior. Interesting, Google -- an organization whose corporate mantra is “Don’t be evil” -- is the only organization that has attempted to address abuses. Yet, the changes instituted through Google’s Penguin and Panda fixes are as much about enhancing search effectiveness and user satisfaction with their services as about the underlying ethical concerns.

**Encroachment into the Publicity Function**

Articles marketing represents a new, digital form of encroachment on public relations. Two decades ago, authors in the field voiced concern about the possible emasculation of public relations by marketers. Marketing imperialism was identified as a threat to public relations because senior marketers (primarily advertising agency executives) sought to gain control over not only traditional advertising but the then-escalating expenditures being directed into sales promotion, direct response, cause-related marketing and special events. What was first labeled the “new advertising” was soon re-christened integrated marketing communication (Schultz, Tannenbaum & Lauterborn, 1993).

Lauzen (1991) explained that the one of the manifestations of marketing imperialism was encroachment, or the assignment of non-public relations professionals to manage the public relations function. Meanwhile advocates of the normative Excellence model of public relations and communications management staunchly argued for maintaining marketing and public relations as separate functions and separate units within organizations (Ehling, White & Grunig, 1992; for a critique, see Hallahan, 2007).

Today, articles marketing represents a new form of encroachment on public relations that is not grounded in any philosophical or opportunistic power play. Instead it results from a tactical effort to achieve a specific marketing goal – website traffic. Indeed, the actual content of many articles is only secondary. This encroachment is coming from the bottom ranks -- rather than the top echelon – of the marketing practitioners and is another manifestation of online guerilla marketing (Levinson, Meyerson & Scarborough, 2008). Many digital marketers freely admit they do not
possess the editorial skills required to directly assume tasks such as article writing. But their efforts are being abetted by ready, willing and able pay-for-hire writers during a period when branded journalism is gaining acceptance (Bull, 2013). The net effect is to wrestle control of or to usurp a function (the placement of bylined and other articles) traditionally within the province of public relations.

Without a doubt, publicists will continue to recommend the placement of exclusive and special articles as part of communications programs on behalf of clients, both online and offline. Consistent with the denigration of information argument suggested above, the real threat to public relations might be to devalue publication of all articles, at least in an online environment. This is especially true if clients unwittingly become convinced that what is said in articles is secondary to driving traffic to a website (where persuasive advertiser-written copy purportedly can be used to prompt the immediate direct responses clients covet--ordering, requesting information, scheduling an appointment, etc.)

Content marketing as a challenge to the public relations.

While articles marketing potentially represents an encroachment on the specific publicity activity of placing articles, it exemplifies a rapidly growing trend where marketers today seek to provide informative, educational and/or entertainment information audiences to audiences and thus endear themselves to audiences. Under this new content marketing regimen, direct, hard-hitting persuasive messages are abandoned in favor of an indirect, more subtle “soft sell” or “no sell” approach. In so doing the aim is to create a conducive environment that still has promotion as its purpose.

Today’s content marketing is essentially no different from the fundamental strategy used for the past century in various arenas of public relations. The premise is simple: advertising sells, publicity tells. Publicity has been shown to be consumers’ preferred source of product information compared to advertising and has consistently been demonstrated to be more credible (Hallahan, 1996, 1999a, b). Indeed, digital marketers have seized upon strategies and techniques quite familiar to most people in public relations. Consider the description proffered by the Content Marketing Institute, a consulting-turned-educational and publishing organization:

Basically content marketing is the art of communicating with your customers and prospects without selling. It is non-interruption marketing. Instead of pitching your products or services, you are delivering information that makes your buyer more intelligent. The essence of this content strategy is the belief that if we, as businesses, deliver consistent, ongoing valuable information to buyers, they ultimately reward us with their business and loyalty (Content Marketing Institute, 2013a).

The CMI (2013b) goes on to explain the purpose is to “attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience—with the objective of driving profitable customer action.” Although public relations scholars prefer to define the field as fostering positive relationships, few practitioners or clients would deny that the ultimate goal such relationship building is to “drive profitable action” -- whether by customers or investors, donors, volunteers, workers or voters (Hallahan, 2014, forthcoming).

Content marketers trace the origins of the new field to the late 1800s and cite pre-Internet examples such as sponsored customer magazines, buyers’ guides, recipe booklets and
educational comic books (Gordon, 2011; Lewton, 2012). Yet these are some of the very same tools cited as innovations in early public relations (Lamme & Russell, 2010).

Ken Dowell of PR Newswire (2013) explained that content marketing reflects several changes in the communications business: the ability of anyone to be a publisher, the shrinkage of traditional media, the questionable effectiveness of online advertising, and changes in online search. “But ultimately it is about producing content that is exactly what your audience wants to read. Exactly what they are looking for. The answer to their search for information,” Dowell wrote. The PRN executive suggests good content can come from either a marketing or PR department and can equal the quality of material produced by a journalist. “Good writers aren’t that hard to find, and neither the number of the opportunities nor the salaries paid by the media are going to make them inaccessible. Photos, videos and other types of images are easier to produce than ever.”

Experts disagree whether content marketing and PR are more similar (Lucey, 2013) or different (Kim, 2013). But the trade publication PR Daily contends that PR cannot ignore content marketing and cites five reasons: 1) major PR firms are embracing it, 2) major media companies are relying in it for new sources of revenue, 3) Fortune 500 companies are launching content marketing sites, 4) at least one well-funded start-up firm [Contently] is specializing in content marketing, and 5) reporters are leaving journalism for content marketing jobs (Sebastian, 2013; see also Bruell, 2013; McDermott, 2013). Content marketing includes the creation of original material of interest to audiences as well as the curation of materials from a variety of sources wherein the organization is recognized as the compiler or as a source of informative, educational or entertaining material (Holtz, 2012; Rosenbaum, 2011).

Evidence of the viability of content marketing can be seen in the publication of books (Lieb, 2012a; Odden, 2012) and magazines (Content Marketing Today) devoted to the topic, as well as workshops sponsored by suppliers and by local PR and communications groups. Both IABC and PRSA plan sessions on the topic at their 2013 national conferences. Content marketing is also the subject of numerous recent articles in trade publications and blog posts (Atkins & Matson, 2012; Bruell, 2013; Creamer, 2012; Duncan, 2013; Green, 2012; Lieb, 2012b; Marketers, don’t be afraid…., 2013; McDermott, 2013; Nicholson & Aiello, 2099; Pulizzi, 2009, 2012a, b; Webber, 2013; Zmuda, 2013a, b).

Robert Rose, a lead strategist at the Content Marketing Institute, described public relations as

A core practice that undergoing fundamental disruption. I’m a HUGE passionate fan of public relations. But I think the practice of public relations has lost its way a bit – especially as it pertains to being the corporate”storyteller.” If there’s one group that should be embracing the ideas of content marketing—it’s PR. And, sadly, because in many cases it has lost its strategic seat at the table (save for crisis management) PR is one of the last departments to actually get to embrace content marketing (Content marketing & PR, 2013).

In today’s increasing digital world, content marketing – including articles marketing – is an important new dimension of integrated marketing communication. Clearly content marketing and public relations communications are complementary and overlap considerably. The marketplace ultimately will determine their relationship through way these tools are used and who produces them.
During the next several years, practitioners and clients will engage in discussions to define and clarify content marketing and its relationship to marketing, advertising, sales promotion, direct response, and public relations and publicity. Public relations scholars need to be part of that conversation. The existing public relations paradigm is under challenge once again as part of the natural evolution of the field, and public relations scholars need to re-think critically the definition and focus of the practice. Content marketing can be viewed as a form of publicity when the latter is broadly defined as an entity “being public” (Hallahan, 2010b). Or, publicity (when defined narrowly as the dissemination of news and information) can be conceptualized as a special form of content marketing that involves the dissemination of news and information through third-party intermediates (such as journalists and bloggers) versus being disseminated direct to audiences.

Clearly the advent of content marketing is far more than simple encroachment or an attempt to take over the public relations function per se. But the consequence might be that marketers, whether intentionally or unintentionally, are co-opting the role of public relations in organizational storytelling and providing valuable information to customers and other important constituents. Practitioners who ignore this important new trend run the risk of allowing public relations to become marginalized as an organizational communication function. Meanwhile public relations scholars need to focus on current topics of relevant to the field. Trends such as content marketing and articles marketing underscore why public relations scholars need to renew their focus on real-world communication issues. Elsewhere, this author has argued that the two constitutive activities of public relations are information seeking and information sharing (Hallahan, 2013). Articles marketing and content marketing clearly involve both.
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Challenges and Key Factors in Leadership in Public Relations and Communications in Mexico

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Abstract

This article presents the main results of a qualitative investigative project on leadership and the culture of communications in Mexico, part of the Cross-Cultural Study of Leadership in Public Relations and Communication Management, coordinated by the University of Alabama and the Plank Center in 24 countries. The first part offers a theoretical review of the subject in question and proposes a brief explanation on the methodology of the qualitative study. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the main aspects of the environment that affect the future of leadership in terms of Communications and Public Relations in Mexico; it is based on the application of a series of in-depth interviews of leaders in the field who represent some of the country’s most important corporations.
Introduction

The world is facing major challenges as a result of technological progress. Humankind now possesses the power that comes with social networks, whose very existence—when added to the power of communications—is generating new lines of ongoing information, connecting the entire world, and free of time constraints. Consequently, the world is producing new dynamics that position the economy, politics and social change under a new world mindset. Events and information that formerly were not divulged for hours or even days because of the time elapsed for them to leave the communities where they were generated and reach beyond, today, as a result of the globalization process and technological developments that man has produced in the name of communications—the Internet for one, cellular phones and social networks—now take less than a minute to make it to the furthermost reaches of every continent and become world news.

From the standpoint of Communications and Public Relations, this situation drives two major challenges for the profession and for present and future leaders in charge of managing communications in every kind of national or multinational organization. The first challenge consists in learning of the type of leadership skills that will be required for dealing with the empowerment of new citizens and consumers; the second entails the need to identify those cultural factors within companies that need to be strengthened if the latter are to better face the challenges posed by social networks in future.

With this purpose in mind, sixteen personal interviews were carried out with Communications and Public Relations leaders in Mexico, representing the main private companies; 25% of these were applied to Mexican firms and the remaining 75% to multinational corporations with operations in Mexico. The sampling of executives interviewed was equally divided: 50% women and 50% men. On average, they all had around 18 years’ professional experience in communications management at different companies. The interviews were held during April, May and June of 2012, with the support of the Mexican Association of Communicators (AMCO in Spanish) and the generous collaboration of the members of its Board of Directors, comprising key communications leaders for the most important companies in Mexico.

Theoretical perspective of the relationship between Communications, Public Relations and leadership

Upon researching the topic of leadership in Communications and Public Relations in Mexico, we are compelled to first look at the concepts of company, communications, public relations and leadership.

The definition of company that we deemed most appropriate for this investigation is the systemic perspective that makes it possible to outline its relationship to Communications. For Alfred Hall and R. Eagen (1962) a system is a set of objectives and the relations between these and their attributes. Within this context, the objectives are called system components, the attributes correspond to the properties of the objectives and the relations keep the system together. In this approach, the concept is that there are interactional objectives—namely, the people that communicate—and these, in turn, comprise systems that interact. This is why Paul Watzlawick (2002) considers that interaction among people entails an exchange of messages and is always developed within the context of certain interactional lines, those that each company establishes. In sum, from this standpoint all conduct is then communication, hence the importance of studying interpersonal communications.
Human interaction is described as a communications system characterized by the properties of general systems: time, as a variable, system and sub-system relations, totality, feedback and equifinality. Interactional systems are considered the natural focal point for a pragmatic long-term impact assessment on communicational phenomena (Watzlawick, 2002, p. 139).

Thus, in organizations, Communications becomes a specialty department that has witnessed multiple variations throughout its development, ranging from communications (whose purpose deals exclusively with the company’s operations) through strategic communications that play a preponderant role in the attainment of results. The latter approach has been given different meanings, ranging from Internal Communications, Organizational Communications, and Corporate Communications all the way through Business Communications, Productive Communications, DirCom and Integral Communications for Organizations. Conversely, Public Relations has been developed and is differentiated from Communications by virtue of being more intrinsically linked to seeking the good will of external audiences toward the company.

Because this investigation picks up again on the concept of the company understood from the systemic point of view, it consequently demands that Communications be considered a strategic element that permits encompassing messages addressed to different audiences under one single cultural umbrella that is geared specifically to the attainment of results. Thus, the definition of Organizational Communications aptly underscores that it takes place within an economic, political, social or cultural system, seeking collective solutions to make it more productive on three fronts: Institutional or Corporate Communications, Internal Communications, Integrated Communications or Marketing and Advertising (Rebeil and RuizSandoval, 1998). Communications has become an integral part of strategic planning in organizations given the crucial role it plays in linking productive processes to the company’s mission (Rebeil and Nosnik, 2011), always led by Communications professionals who contribute to the equation by proposing appropriate solutions for given circumstances and company contexts (Narvaez and Campillo, 2011).

As a result of the foregoing, even when Internal Communications continues to be an important factor to create and maintain good relations among members of the organization, in addition to integrating them and encouraging them to attain their organizational objectives (Andrade, cited in Fernández, 2002). Leadership among the executives in charge of Communications within companies becomes of the utmost importance, for it is they who drive and support programs, and in essence become the face of the company to the various interest groups.

Leadership is related to the highest levels of performance on behalf of collaborators given that their attitude and enthusiasm help create a good job environment. A leader with good personal skills and relations and the ability to direct groups can foster a climate (a culture of productivity) that invites participants to better performance and harder work. Among this leader’s outstanding skills will be that of Communications, given that this favors human relations, the work environment and the attainment of results (Siliceo, 1995).

Hence, leadership when conceived of as building a more productive organizational culture – namely an equitable, meaningful and transcendent approach to the contributions of the workers – (regardless of their hierarchical standing within the organization) must have clear and in depth knowledge of what real productivity is as the basis of organizational competitiveness. (Siliceo, Casares and González, 1999, p.156). It is, then, clear that the role of leaders is not restricted to directing or guiding employees in operational terms, for it is they who will exert a
direct influence on the performance of employees through the bond that results from diverse Communications and Public Relations endeavors implanted in the company. For this reason its impact and relevance is so complete.

In specific terms, in Mexico the development and evolution of this discipline - interestingly enough born from professional need and spheres even before being present in education- “has been determined by the educational, economic and social factors of the environment and not only by its ability to evolve in discipline, practice and representatives” (Rebeil, Arévalo and Lemus, 2011, p. 106). Therefore, step by step, Communications and Public Relations have proven their contribution as a key success factor for organizations, and therefore have attained better understanding on behalf of the types of institutions, organizations and companies that they handle, and from their clients, consumers and citizens as a whole as well (Rebeil and Herrera, at the printing press).

Lastly, it is important to mention that we are dealing with a function that has grown and evolved through generating solutions for the needs expressed in the practice. Communications and Public Relations management has enjoyed the guidance of its leaders throughout its growth, which serves to underscore the importance of its contribution.

**Guidelines and Methodology for Qualitative Study**

The research project on Communications leadership and culture in Mexico is part of a global study (Cross-Cultural Study of Leadership in Public Relations and Communication Management) undertaken by the University of Alabama and Plank Center in 24 countries, including South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, China, Hong Kong, Russia, Lithuania, Estonia, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Chile.

With the purpose of identifying the main aspects of the surroundings affecting the future of leadership in terms of Communications and Public Relations around the world, the study was developed in two phases: quantitative, through an online questionnaire applied to leaders and their collaborators, and qualitative, through in depth interviews of said leaders. This article centers on the qualitative phase of the study and its results.

The process began with the design of a questionnaire to be applied in interviews at the global level, translated into the different languages. This was fundamental, not only out of respect for different languages and the import of the questions, but also to ensure the correct understanding and interpretation of the questions. A list of Communications and Public Relations leaders in Mexico was drawn up, checking to make sure the list was balanced and representative and included the most important leaders in the field in the country - primarily multinational companies, though Communications and Public Relations leaders of Mexican companies also took part in the study.

Once the list of leaders and the questionnaire in Spanish were approved, we proceeded via email to invite them to participate. This was followed by drawing up a timetable for the interviews, the transcription of these to print, producing the results and analyses. Total length of the investigation process was eight months, from October 2011 through May 2012. Thanks to AMCO we were able to interview executives comprising a diverse sampling, enabling us to access a magnificent array of information. Well worth mentioning is that the differences noted between companies and their organizational structures highlighted the differences in positions and functions within the companies. The interviews can be broken down into the following company hierarchies: 11 Directors, 2 Assistant Directors, 3 Managers and 1 Coordinator.
As concerns Mexico, the organizations use different names for the job posts in Communications and Public Relations. The results of our survey are as follows: “Communications” was mentioned three times; “Corporate Communications”, “Corporate Communications and Public Relations” and “Corporate Affairs” were each mentioned twice; and “Internal Service”, “Public and Governmental Relations”, “Corporate Communications and Public Affairs”; “Communications and Content”, “Communications and Internal Marketing”, “Communications and Advertising”, and “Corporate Philosophy”, were each mentioned once.

The main objective of the structural design of the interview was geared toward eliciting the opinion of the executives regarding three major themes: a) the issues of most pressing concern to Communications and Public Relations leaders, b) cultural and structural factors at the heart of organizations, and c) the main defining leadership factors in Communications and Public Relations.

Current Situation of Communications and Public Relations Leadership in Mexico
Following, we present the main findings of the study, divided into the three major themes discussed in the interview. These findings give us a good picture of the current status of the management of Communications and Public Relations in Mexico.

Most Important Issues

Issue of most importance

The results show that the first most important issue for executives was divided evenly into three answers: 1) the concern to have good and reliable Internal Communications so as to engage employees and align them to the company’s business objectives, values and philosophy; 2) produce actions that will attest to the great contribution of Communications endeavors and convince top management of this; and 3) actions needed to better understand the target audiences. Worth noting is that among issues of greatest importance, the following received one mention only: social networks, culture, professionalization of the field and advertising. A fourth issue of top importance for executives is related to the coordination of activities dedicated to the management of business reputation.

These initial results allow us to infer that in Mexico large corporations and their top management still underestimate the importance of Communications as a business process, given that, based on the references obtained, the Internal Communications process holds its own natural place in the understanding of executives. Upon being closer and more exposed to the pressures exerted by stakeholders, the executives first try to get top management to understand the importance of Communications in the daily business process, and, subsequently, they attempt to grasp who they are and how the various target audiences are responding.

The foregoing is related to the budget and financial resources invested in Communications, given that – in those cases where the executives handle the advertising budget – they believe that monies earmarked for advertising strategies are more important and have a greater influence than those financial resources assigned to Internal and Corporate Communications, precisely because of the influence of pressure placed on their audiences.

On the other hand, it is important to mention that the experience gained by the executives allows them to be sensitive to the movements of society and their effects on perception, opinion and conduct as concerns the various audiences. For this reason it is so important to them to understand the different audiences and constantly monitor them.
As concerns the mention made by executives on reputation management, we think that this is where the need to understand the audiences and their perception of the company comes from. This is particularly true in today’s social context where more than ever before we are subject to the speed with which news travels and the impact of the media on business and social contexts in the contemporary world.

Second most important issue

When asked to list the second most important issue faced in their Communications objectives, interviewees mentioned three major aspects: the first was the management of prestige and company image; the second, Internal Communications efforts; and, lastly, the management of social responsibility.

We must also underscore here that regardless of which topic they considered the most important, we noted that the inherent purpose of all leaders is to become more effective in Communications and thus contribute to the attainment of the organization’s objectives.

The study was designed to gain an understanding of the importance of social networks as part of the Communications process. Our findings indicate that in spite of considering social networks to be very important (a fact recognized by all) only four of the interviewees have incorporated the management of social networks in their processes. In some cases, attempts are being made to include them in internal communications processes first and gain learning that will subsequently enable them to carry out actions in this regard with external audiences.

Worth noting is that in the case of multinational companies, the role of the community manager – who deals with social networks on a daily basis – stems from corporate rules established at company headquarters. Some of these companies use social networks as an advertising tool for the management of special offers and product information; nonetheless, as concerns corporate management, activity is sparse and controlled. As a result of the foregoing, we conclude that the matter of social networks in Mexico is still in initial stages and needs more study and structure and must be more focused prior to being fully incorporated into the role played by Communications and Public Relations leaders. Equally important is that companies experience a certain fear of facing consumers and citizens through these digital forms of media.

Cultural and Structural Factors of Organizations

The values most mentioned by Communications leaders in our sampling were the following: in the first place, with the greatest number of mentions, the honesty of the company; secondly, customer service; in third place, and with an equal number of mentions, are professionalism, social responsibility, ethics and innovation.

On the other hand, as regards the factors that the executives interviewed consider fundamental to the success of Communications management, we have: in the first place, taking part in executive decisions; secondly, the position that the function holds within corporate structure, and this specifically refers to the fact that ideally Communications should be placed in the top tier of organizational structure; lastly, interviewees stated that there are no cultural or structural factors that hinder their success.

Leadership in Communications and Public Relations

Heads of Communications mostly determined that organization leaders and top management value and thereby defend their work. As concerns the manner in which they prove the value and effectiveness of Communications and Public Relations, first place in importance went to the implementation of metrics; second place was given to the use and application of
surveys; third place went to measuring recall of messages disseminated among company collaborators; and lastly, carrying out communications audits.

Regarding the most important characteristics and qualities needed to produce excellent leadership, the answers ranged from the need to be strategists, coordinators of group efforts, good communicators and visionaries with equal number of mentions, and lastly the importance of leading teamwork and being well-informed. To a lesser degree, other qualities such as being good planners, showing a spirit of service and the ability to relate to others were mentioned. Lastly, a smaller number of interviewees brought up the following characteristics: consistency, pursuit of the common good, tolerance of frustration, emotional intelligence, passion, competitiveness, assertiveness, open-mindedness, sensitivity and positivity.

Interviewees also mentioned the turning points that drove their career path upwards; these included the importance granted to staying up to date and pursuing continuing education, as well as creating value for the company and ensuring that said value become visible. To a lesser degree, other factors were mentioned, such as: making mistakes and learning from them, learning from others, becoming a strategic company partner, tenacity and keeping up enthusiasm on the job. Other aspects mentioned to a lesser degree were being reliable, serving as a support department for other functions, working at a large company and taking on challenges and maximizing on opportunities as they arise.

The Future of Management and Leadership in Communications and Public Relations in Mexico

Qualitative investigation was fundamental given that it enabled us to learn of the perspectives held by the 16 executives that were the most representative of Communications and Public Relations departments operating in companies in Mexico. As a result of this study we can now elucidate a vision on the future and the most pressing issues to deal with, as well as success factors for leaders in the field.

The leaders interviewed identified the most important challenges that the Communications discipline and its leaders face in the country over the coming three to five years. Most recurrent findings include Digital Communications, matters related to technology and management of social networks. Strategic Communications was among one of the secondary answers, as were the topics of sustainability, specialized segmentation of audiences, and more leadership on behalf of communicators.

Lastly, leaders considered that among the main characteristics that Communications leaders need to exhibit in the coming 10 to 15 years are: being experts in social networks and having the capacity to coordinate teams focused on the common good. Less recurring was the identification of the importance of developing greater learning ability, knowing how to create and offer value added that is demonstrable, and possessing the capability to analyze and anticipate challenges for the work performed. A somewhat recurring trend was that of promoting ethics and transparency, as well as the capacity to better understand globalization. In the last place and with fewer mentions, ongoing specialization and being present before all possible audiences were considered important. The ability to react swiftly and innovate was the least mentioned characteristics by interviewed leaders.

Next Steps in Leadership in Communications and Public Relations

By way of conclusions for this investigation, the first thing we found was that the way of structuring, operating and managing Communications and Public Relations in different private
organizations in Mexico is determined by the social, economic and political circumstances of the country; in the case of multinational companies, this has induced them to adapt some of their global policies and vision to the context of Mexico. In the foregoing cases, Communications has played a crucial role. The study also makes it clear that Business Communication is geared to the attainment of company objectives, regardless of the type of organization in question, therefore the results must be measurable.

In the second place, the ever-changing environment demands continuous adjustments on behalf of the organizations in their Communications and Public Relations systems. This ensures their permanence, and thus they become the choice of millions of consumers globally who not only take into account the characteristics of a product or service in their purchase decision, but also the attributes of the company that backs them. Therefore, image, reputation, presence and corporate social responsibility are subjects that are increasingly important to consumers; this underscores the importance of the role of Communications and Public Relations in the daily operations of any given company, as well as the relevance of creating and implementing strategies that are increasingly tailored to targets in these themes. In this context, management of Communications and Public Relations in the organization becomes a crucial success factor that determines the generation of more links between the company and its interest groups while at the same time increasing the possibility of attaining business objectives. This makes the role of Communications and Public Relations a strategic element that progressively determines the success of companies.

Thirdly, we noted that companies in Mexico, concerned about increasing global competitiveness, seek Communications leaders with expertise and knowledge of key corporate functions that will assist in securing the desired objectives. Leadership that generates productive culture and is geared toward the attainment of results (Siliceo, 1995) today translates as multitask management with greater strategic influence to the degree that the structural and cultural environment needed to develop further, just as the study shows. Communications understood as a system (Watzlawick, 2002) continues being the current, valid and representative approach for the communications function within companies, even in light of the difficulties that globalization and intercultural management add, given their effect on both internal and external audiences through Digital Communications.

The results of the study allow us to note that the function of Communications and Public Relations is increasingly complex; leaders require not only perfecting their skills but acquiring new ones as well, given that both Communications executives as well as their work teams need to reach increasingly specific audiences that are micro segmented and display the complexity of maintaining the essence of the message in multiple channels and diverse languages as well as doing so simultaneously.

The study allows us to visualize both the form and the function, thereby detecting the need to build a new educational model for the development of effective leadership for Communications and Public Relations. This model should be based on the development of competencies founded on traditional knowledge of communications, but integrating a series of new disciplines that are necessary to face the future development of business, the needs of the population and the cultural challenges of the new multicultural societal group of our times.
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Sampling Considerations for Social Media Research

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Abstract
This research investigates the types of sampling issues involved in social media research and provides practical recommendations for reducing errors. Based on a comparison of Twitter data gathered using the exact same search term but using three different sources to collect the data, the study reveals dramatic differences among sources. In addition, the development and testing of search phrases is identified as a crucial component in sampling from social media content. Finally, the study demonstrates that simple random sampling can be used to develop representative samples for analysis.
The increasing popularity of social network sites (aka “social media,” such as Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, etc.) provides marketers with a wealth of consumer data, particularly regarding how consumers talk about brands, issues, and ideas. Owyang and Lovett (2010) identified a dozen social media marketing KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) that might be of interest to public relations, advertising, and marketing professionals: share of voice, audience engagement, conversation reach, active advocates, advocate influence, advocacy impact, resolution rate, resolution time, satisfaction score, topic trends, sentiment ratio, and idea impact. However, the sheer volume of social media messages often limits researchers to using computerized analysis using natural language processing rather than using human coders. While such computerized processing is highly reliable, there are questions about the validity of these types of analyses. For example, sentiment analysis has grown increasingly popular in recent years, however, even experts in natural language processing recognize that the task is quite difficulty, particularly when examining shorter texts such as social media posts (Thelwall, Buckley, Paltoglou, Cai, and Kappas, 2010). Lazarus (2012) identified 10 potentially troubling issues that public relations professionals should consider when conducting sentiment analyses, while Paine (2011) put it more bluntly, arguing that computerized sentiment analysis is “notoriously inaccurate, unreliable and therefore not terrible useful” (p. 598).

The problem is not limited to sentiment analysis. For instance, public relations practitioners may be interested in any of a number of relationship measures such as trust, commitment, or satisfaction, none of which can currently be measured validly or efficiently using text mining and natural language processing for content analysis (Paine, 2011). One solution would be to use sampling to create a representative but much smaller corpus of messages, which could then be coded using human coders.

Surprisingly, sampling is not often discussed in relation to social media measurement. Social media companies regularly release statistics related to most major news events, and these statistics are generally computed from hundreds of thousands or even millions of social media posts (Friess, 2012). As a result, many seem to think of measuring social media as measuring “everything,” which is not the case (Angel, 2011). However, while sampling may allow public relations practitioners and researchers to better measure relationships and other variables of interest, the sampling process itself could introduce error. The purpose of this research is to investigate the types of sampling issues involved in social media research and provide practical recommendations for reducing errors. Errors can be introduced in social media measurement through sources used, search procedures, and sample size.

Sources

Survey researchers have long known that the entire population of interest is almost never available to researchers. The same is true for populations of social media content. Most of the sampling error directly attributable to individual social media sources is due to a lack of completeness. The ability to access social media content varies by source and/or data provider. In most cases, it is not possible to access the entire population of social media content for a particular platform. Users typically have control over privacy settings that restrict access to their content. For example, Facebook currently allows users to set privacy controls in terms of access to content posted as well as access by searches (“Privacy Settings and Tools,” 2012). Twitter allows users to make their entire account private by enabling the “Protect my Tweets” option, which restricts access to approved followers (“Account,” 2012). Beevolve Technologies (2012) estimates the approximately 12% of all Twitter accounts are so protected.
Even when social media account settings are not restricted, the means used to access the content can still restrict one from having access to the entire population of public content. Search options for social media vary. Many social media platforms provide multiple Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) that include various search functions. Most APIs are subject to rate limits that cap the number of results that can be retrieved during a predetermined time period. For retrieving a very high volume of results, rate limiting can prevent one from accessing all relevant content.

Searching through APIs may also be limited by time. For example, the Facebook Graph API allows one to search all public objects in the social graph including public posts, People, Pages, Events, Applications, Groups, Places, Checkins, Objects with location, Event Names, and an individual user’s News Feed (“Search,” 2013). However, in addition to being restricted to public content, Facebook’s current API is limited to searching only the last 1 to 2 weeks in the News Feed.

Twitter provides a number of different APIs, each with its own set of restrictions. The Twitter Search API allows users to search the real-time index of recent Tweets, which is not an index of all Tweets (“Using the Twitter Search API,” 2013). Currently, the Search API is limited to the past 6-9 days. In addition, the Search API focuses on relevance, not completeness. As a consequence, some Tweets and users may not be included in the search results. Twitter also provides Streaming APIs, which allow real-time access to public data (“Public streams,” 2012). Most Streaming API users access a sample stream of public statuses. The exact size of this sample stream and the sampling methodology are unknown. Access to all public statuses (the firehose) requires special permission or use of Certified Data Reseller Products such as DataSift, Gnip, or Topsy (“Certified Products,” 2013). Paine (2011) noted that for Twitter “Most services only get about 15% of the total Twitter firehose, and even services that have a full firehose license only get about 85%” (p. 600).

There are also data providers who use other methods for collecting social media content. For example, Infegy’s Social Radar (www.infegy.com) uses Web crawling technology to collect multiple forms of social content to develop a database dating back to 2007. However, the completeness of the resulting database is unknown.

Ultimately, it is up to the researcher to understand that the source of social media content can introduce to sampling error. In almost all cases, access to the entire population of content is impossible or impractical. As a result, the researcher is often working with some type of sample from the very beginning and the degree of error is typically unknown. The Institute for Public Relations Social Media Measurement Standards Committee recommends a sources and methods transparency table as a means for fully disclosing how data and content are collected (Paine, 2012), which is at least a starting point for evaluating the source of data.

Search

Researchers are rarely interested in general social media content. Instead, they want to identify particular content, usually content that has specific characteristics. To identify this content, researchers must use some type of information retrieval process to collect the relevant content. The most common process is the development and use of a query in the form of a search term or collection of terms (a search phrase). Schafraad, Wester, & Scheepers (2006) suggest that the development of search phrases requires a strict procedure involving testing key words for productivity and selectivity. Productivity refers to recall, the ability to accurately return items of
interest, while selectivity refers to precision, the ability to avoid extraneous items (Stryker, Wray, & Yanovitzky, 2006). These authors recommend that to achieve better recall the searcher can use as many synonyms as possible, use the Boolean term "OR" rather than "AND," avoid proximity terms, and include the entire text (rather than limited fields) for the search. To achieve high precision, the searcher can use specific rather than general index terms, limit the search to specific fields, and link as many terms as possible with "AND" and proximity rules. (p. 417)

McMillan (2000) emphasized the need to understand search techniques for particular search engines online. The same can be said of searching via different social media APIs. Fortunately, the most popular APIs offer extensive documentation (see for example “Using the Twitter Search API,” 2013). It is crucial that researchers familiarize themselves with the specifics of how individual search APIs work in order to create better search phrases.

Sample size

As noted earlier, sampling is not often discussed in relation to social media measurement. This is somewhat surprising given the predominance of surveys using sampling in public relations, advertising, and marketing research. McMillan (2000) found that few studies that applied content analysis to web content provided any discussion of sampling decisions, and suggested that the “requirement for rigor in drawing a sample may be one of the most difficult aspects of content analysis on the Web” (p. 81). McMillan then concluded that additional research was needed to determine appropriate sample size and whether traditional sampling methodologies from media research are also appropriate for online sampling.

Errors related to sample size are those that occur when the sample size is not adequate to provide data representative of the population. There is long tradition of sample size research for content analysis in traditional media (Riffe & Aust, 1993; Lacy & Robinson, 1995; Riffe & Lacy, 1996; Riffe, Lacy, & Drager, 1996; Lacy, Riffe, & Randle, 1998; Lacy, Riffe, Stoddard, Martin, & Kuang-Kuo, 2001). More recently, only a few scholars have examined online sampling. Two studies (Hester & Dougall, 2007; Wang & Riffe, 2010) found that sample sizes for online news content needed to be slightly larger than those for print media. There are currently no published empirical guidelines specifically for sampling social media.

Research Questions

The previous examination of the literature reveals three primary sampling issues for social media researchers and suggests the following research:

RQ1: How do data vary depending on the sources used to access social media content?

RQ2: How can the effectiveness of search terms be evaluated when analyzing social media content?

RQ3: How large of a random sample is needed to adequately represent social media content?

Method

In order to address these research questions, this study uses Twitter data related to the Supreme Court’s ruling on the Affordable Care Act. On Thursday, June 28, 2012, the Supreme
Court ruled to let the Affordable Care Act stand. The reaction on social media was almost immediate. Twitter’s own “Twitter Government” account (https://twitter.com/gov) reported that traffic peaked at approximately 13,000 Tweets per minute just moments after the ruling was announced (Limer, 2012) with a second spike at 12:27 p.m. Figure 1 shows the distribution of Tweets per minute on June 28.

Figure 1

![Breaking News Timeline: Supreme Court on the Affordable Care Act](https://twitter.com/gov/status/218557928456720384/photo/1)

Source: https://twitter.com/gov/status/218557928456720384/photo/1/large

Project for Excellence in Journalism Data

On July 3, 2012, the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) published an analysis of the social media conversations captured from three primary sources (Twitter, Facebook, and blogs) from June 28, 2012, 10:15 a.m. EDT – July 1, 11:59 p.m. EDT (“Social Media Voice,” 2012). Of the three sources, conversation was heaviest on Twitter with a total of 2,133,392 Tweets. Findings included analysis of the public opinions expressed, the focus of the commentary, presidential implications, and storylines over time.

The content analysis was conducted using software developed by Crimson Hexagon and a Boolean search filter to identify relevant material to analyze (“Supreme Court Health Care Ruling,” 2012). The specific search filter was

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health OR insurance OR "supreme court" OR SCOTUS OR mandate OR 
Obamacare OR Romneycare OR reform OR Repeal OR Medicine OR Scalia OR Roberts OR "chief justice" OR "pre-existing" OR preexisting OR HC OR ACA OR "affordable care act" OR "Medicaid" OR "Sup Crt" OR Upheld OR fullrepeal OR Canada OR verrilli OR tax OR constitutional.
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Twitter’s current Terms of Service (https://dev.twitter.com/terms/api-terms/diff) do not allow users to redistribute Twitter content without written permission, which means the Pew Research Center data is not available for download, unlike some other Pew data. Therefore, all
comparisons made with this data are on the basis of the methodology description and the published results.

**Twitter Search API Data**

Immediately after publication of the Pew report, the author wrote a custom Python script to access the Twitter Search API and download Tweets using exactly the same search filter as Pew Research Center’s PEJ study. After duplicates were removed, this process resulted in 1,593,226 Tweets.

**Social Radar Data**

Similarly, the commercial social media monitoring resource Social Radar was used to search Twitter during the same time period using the exact same search term. This process resulted in 23,629,343 Tweets. While Social Radar does not allow one to download this large corpus of Tweets, the service does allow users to download samples of 1,000. The author downloaded 1,000 Tweets for each of the four days in order to have actual Tweets for comparison with the Twitter Search API data.

**Results**

**Data Sources**

The first research question asks “How do data vary depending on the sources used to access social media content?” The most obvious difference is in the number of Tweets returned by using the same search term with three different data sources. As mentioned previously, the Twitter Search API returned 1,593,226 Tweets, Pew’s PEJ data consisted of 2,133,392 Tweets, while Social Radar revealed 23,629,343 Tweets, which is at least 20 million more Tweets than either of the two other sources.

Data differences are not limited to the total number of Tweets in each sample. There are also differences in the distribution of Tweets across the four days studied as shown in Table 1. Although Pew did not release the distribution of their sample by day, Social Radar’s distribution can be calculated in two different ways: distribution of the entire sample and distribution of those Tweets originating in the Eastern Time Zone (based on geo-location data).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Social Radar Full Sample</th>
<th>Social Radar Eastern Time</th>
<th>Twitter Search API</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, June 28</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, June 29</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, June 30</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday, July 1</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There appears to be little difference between Social Radar’s full sample and Eastern Time sample; however, the Twitter Search API distribution is different, with a much smaller proportion of Tweets occurring on the first day. Over the course of 4 days, the pattern of Tweets is somewhat similar with a correlation of 0.76 (see Figure 2).
As shown in Figure 1, there was a secondary spike in tweets per minute at 12:27 p.m. There was no such spike evident in either the Social Radar or the Twitter Search API data. This difference is likely due to differences in search terms used.

**Search**

The second research question asks “How can the effectiveness of search terms be evaluated when analyzing social media content?” One way to examine recall (or productivity) is to calculate what percentage of the Tweets returned are the result of any particular term of the 26 used in the search phrase. Table 2 shows these percentages for the Social Radar sample of 4,000 Tweets and for the entire Twitter Search API sample (data are not available for PEJ sample). The differences are striking. The top search term in the Social Radar data, “supreme court,” ranks eighth among search terms in the Twitter Search API data, where the top term was “Canada.” In addition, the search term “affordable care act” recalled more than 40% of the Social Radar results but less than 1% of the Twitter Search API results. These differences, while dramatic, should be interpreted with caution because the Social Radar data reflects only 4,000 Tweets that are not necessarily selected to be a representative sample of the entire set of 23.6 million Tweets.
Table 2. Percent recall by search term

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Term</th>
<th>Social Radar</th>
<th>Twitter Search API</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>supreme court</td>
<td>50.18</td>
<td>5.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affordable care act</td>
<td>40.33</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health</td>
<td>27.18</td>
<td>19.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACA</td>
<td>23.70</td>
<td>21.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obamacare</td>
<td>18.60</td>
<td>12.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberts</td>
<td>11.28</td>
<td>4.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chief justice</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insurance</td>
<td>10.80</td>
<td>4.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCOTUS</td>
<td>9.68</td>
<td>5.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tax</td>
<td>8.15</td>
<td>10.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upheld</td>
<td>7.58</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HC</td>
<td>6.28</td>
<td>5.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mandate</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>constitutional</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>25.83</td>
</tr>
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<td>Repeal</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
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<td>reform</td>
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<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicaid</td>
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<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romneycare</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
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<td>pre-existing</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fullrepeal</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scalia</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
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<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sup Crt</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verrilli</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages do not add to 100 because some items may be recalled by multiple search terms.

Recall is a bit more difficult to assess in terms of what terms were not used but should have been used. Social Radar’s analysis includes a list of terms that occur often in the search results. Of the top ten terms that appear, only two, “SCOTUS” and “Obamacare,” were in the actual search phrase. The other eight top terms were “afford,” “Obama,” “upholds,” “ruling,” “law,” “individual,” “decision,” and “today.”

Precision (or selectivity) refers to the ability to avoid extraneous items in a search. One measure of precision is the degree to which returned items are retrieved as a result of multiple terms in the search phrase. For example, a Tweet returned solely on the basis of the search term “health” might just be someone referring to a recent trip to a health club, while a Tweet returned by the terms “health” and “Obamacare” is much more likely to be a comment on the Affordable Care Act, which was the topic of this search. For the Social Radar data set, 73.1% of the results were returned as a result of 2 or more key words, while in the Twitter Search API data, only 37.3% of the results were returned due to multiple key words.
Another measure of precision is the degree to which search results are specific to the content in question, which is the Tweet itself in this example. All 4,000 Tweets in the Social Radar sample contained at least one term from the search phrase in the Tweet itself. For the Twitter Search API data, 11.6% of the results did not contain any of the terms in the search phrase. This happened for two reasons. First, URLs in Tweets are typically shortened, but the Twitter Search algorithm searches the original URL. Because only the shortened URLs were downloaded in this data set, it was impossible to determine if the original URLs contained a search term. Second, because the search did not limit results to any specific field, Tweets from users who used a search term as part of their user names were included in the result (i.e., a Tweet from @HealthyGirl would be returned based on the search term “health”).

One of the search terms in the Twitter Search API data looked particularly out of place. The search term “Canada” appeared in 25.8% of the results. One could assume that this term was included in the search phrase on the assumption that some of the conversation around the Affordable Care Act would compare it to the Canadian health care system or reference moving to Canada, but one-quarter of the results seemed excessive. The 129 Tweets identified by the term “Canada” in the Social Radar data were examined for clues. July 1 was Canada Day! There were 42 of the 4,000 Social Radar Tweets that specifically mentioned Canada Day and 13.1% (208,187) of the Twitter Search API Tweets that mentioned Canada Day.

Sample Size

All three samples were so large that human coding would be out of the question. The final research question asks “How large of a random sample is needed to adequately represent the social media content?” This question is investigated using the Twitter Search API sample of 1,593,226 Tweets as a population. Each Tweet was computer coded to see if it contained one of the 26 search terms (see Table 2 above). This provides a set of 26 population parameters against which various samples can be compared.

In survey research, researchers rearrange the formula for standard error of proportion to estimate a minimal sample size necessary to infer to a population with a particular level of confidence. The rearrange formula is:

$$\text{Sample size} = \frac{Z^2 (p) (q)}{c^2}$$

where:

- $Z$ = the Z value associated with the desired confidence level (usually 1.96 for 95% confidence)
- $p$ = the estimated proportion of an attribute in the population (0.5 is typically used since the actual proportion is usually unknown)
- $q = 1-p$
- $c$ = the desired confidence interval expressed a decimal (e.g., 0.03 = ±3 percentage points)

In this instance, computing sample size does not require a correction for finite population because the population in question is so large. Using the formula, in order to be 95% confident that sample statistics are within a confidence interval of plus/minus 3 percentage points, the required sample size is 1,067. For a confidence interval of plus/minus 2 percentage points, the sample size would increase to 2,397. In both instances, the value $p = 0.5$ was used in the formula. However, since it is known that the variable that appears most often is only present in 25.8 cases,
using $p = .25$ gives samples sizes of 800 for plus/minus 3 percentage points and 1,799 for plus/minus 2 percentage points.

In order to test these 4 sample sizes, 100 random samples of each sample size were selected and the proportion of each variable in each of these 100 random samples was calculated. These proportions were then compared with the population parameters. In each instance, if 95 or more of the samples are within the required confidence interval for a given variable, then the sample is representative of the population of 1,593,226 Tweets. Table 3 shows the results of these calculations. For sample sizes 1,067 and 2,397 ($p = 0.5$) the sample statistics for each variable were within ±3 or ±2 percentage points respectively at least 97% of the time. For the smaller samples ($p = 0.25$) there were only 4 total instances when the sample statistics did not reach the 95% threshold.

Table 3. Percent of times sample estimate was within confidence interval

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Term</th>
<th>% of pop.</th>
<th>1067 (±3)</th>
<th>800 (±3)</th>
<th>2397 (±2)</th>
<th>1799 (±2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>25.83</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACA</td>
<td>21.71</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
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<td>health</td>
<td>19.68</td>
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<td>94</td>
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<td>Obamacare</td>
<td>12.22</td>
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Note: Underlined percentages indicate failure to meet 95% threshold.
Discussion & Recommendations

While the results of this research only represent one instance of social media measurement for one particular topic on one particular platform (Twitter), the results indicate that there are very important sampling issues that must be considered when conducting research.

The Data Source Matters.
This study identified dramatic differences in both the amount of content and the makeup of that content based solely on source used to gather the data. Despite using exactly the same search term, the number of results returned ranged from approximately 1.5 million to more than 23 million. And, the distribution of results across the four days in question also differed dramatically.

For researchers and practitioners, the IPR transparency table is a start for understanding how the sources used by vendors differ. While vendors’ reluctance to reveal proprietary methods is understandable, more transparency is needed to evaluate the quality of data. Where possible, multiple sources should be used to test for differences.

Search Term Development Is Critical.
There is no evidence in the Pew methodology report that the search term used in this case was ever tested prior to data collection. As a result, both recall and the precision of the data suffered. This study identified multiple terms that might have improved recall. The most dramatic example from a precision standpoint was the inclusion of the term “Canada” in the search. In addition to the error of adding a significant number of non-relevant results to the data, these additional results could have a profound impact on resulting measures. Both the Pew study and the Social Radar data computed sentiment scores. A tweet such as “Happy Canada Day!” would most likely be computer-coded as having positive sentiment even though it has nothing to do with the topic at hand, the Affordable Care Act.

The need for more extensive search phrase development cannot be understated. When possible, multiple searches using an iterative process should be used to develop the best possible search phrase. If that is not possible, researchers should probably focus on recall first. Then the search terms can be tested against the results they produced. This process of “cleaning” the data before analysis should lead to more valid results.

Sampling Works.
Sample size calculations resulted in samples that were consistently representative of the population for the Twitter Search API data when the standard error of proportion formula used a value of 0.5 to estimate the proportion of an variable in the population, which is the traditional value used. Even when that value was lowered to 0.25 because the actual proportion of all variables was known, virtually all the samples were still representative.

Bigger data is not necessarily better data. Unless researchers are interested in rare events, there’s really no reason not to use sampling. By reducing the size of the data set, it then becomes more efficient to use human coders to analyze the data, especially when the concepts of interest may not be so easily identified by computers.

Future Research.
Additional research is needed to determine if other random sampling methods such as systematic random sampling or stratified random sampling would be even more efficient than the
simple random sample used here, and how those methods would affect sample size requirements. In addition, the sample size requirements presented here are based on a standard error of proportion calculation and are specific to instances where researchers are trying to determine the percentage of times a certain variable occurs in a population. There may be different sample size requirements for interval or ratio levels of measurement.
References


Disaster Public Affairs Training:  
An Initial Test of the Crisis-Adaptive Public Information Model

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Abstract

This study examines how the American Red Cross public affairs department prepares and trains staff and volunteers who respond to disasters throughout the United States. Data were collected using fieldwork methods for five weeks. The results are applied to the crisis-adaptive public information (CAPI) model. This study offers the first test with a nationwide nonprofit disaster response organization.
On a stormy February afternoon in Atlanta, Georgia, I was preparing to do a live camera interview about a tornado that had just destroyed Georgia Tech’s campus and surrounding neighborhoods. I reviewed my notes and silently rehearsed my key talking points. The producer motioned to me and said they were ready. Just as I stepped up to the camera to get my mic and earpiece, I heard a tornado siren. It was the first time I had ever heard one of these warning signals, and I wasn’t exactly sure what it was.

I looked to my left to see the national public affairs director for the American Red Cross running down the convention center hallway, yelling, “This is not part of the exercise! Everyone to the basement!” About 120 Red Cross staff members, volunteers, media trainers, and camera operators made a hasty yet orderly exit down the stairs to the parking garage to wait out the warning. This was my first experience with the American Red Cross Advanced Public Affairs Team (APAT) Training Conference, and the impressively realistic scenario had just been ramped up a notch by an actual tornado warning in the area. Once the warning expired, there were nervous giggles and sighs of relief as the participants walked back up the stairs to resume the grueling public affairs exercises.

The four-day annual training conference is one of several ways the Red Cross trains its national team of elite disaster public affairs workers, a mix of volunteers and employees from the local, regional, and national levels of Red Cross. APAT members deploy to large-scale disasters throughout the United States and beyond to manage media relations and public information efforts. They bring skills and additional resources to local Red Cross chapters that may be overwhelmed by a disaster and need a higher level of expertise to work with the national and international media who are attracted to these events. My mission was to learn how the Red Cross prepares these team members for a wide variety of challenging disaster situations.

This study examines how the Red Cross public affairs department organizes, prepares, and trains staff and volunteers who respond to disasters throughout the United States. I used participant-observation methods to study the organization from its national headquarters over five weeks in 2009. The results of fieldwork and in-depth interviews are applied to an emerging model of crisis-adaptive public information (CAPI), which was developed after field studies with a state emergency management agency’s public affairs unit (Horsley, 2010). The model is named for the way in which public information officers must adapt their job duties, areas of responsibility, geographic location, and lines of reporting to respond to a disaster or other major crisis. This study serves as the first attempt to test the model’s fit with a nationwide nonprofit disaster response organization.

**Literature Review**

*The Red Cross Public Affairs Function*

The American Red Cross network of chapters has employees and volunteers working in various communication positions. While some job titles include public affairs assistant, director of communications, or development director, smaller chapters may not have a designated communicator on staff; in this case, the chapter executive or a staff communicator in another geographic location manages communications for that local office. However, the Red Cross has organized a group of more than 100 advanced public affairs team (APAT) members who are a mix of volunteers and employees from across the country. Originally known as the Rapid Response Team (RRT), which was first implemented in 1994 to work with national media in the first days after a major disaster, the group was renamed APAT in 2007 to better reflect the mission of the team and to improve communication with the media. APAT’s primary goals are to
work with national media to tell what the Red Cross is doing to help, explain who is getting help, describe how long the Red Cross will be providing assistance, and tell publics unaffected by disaster how they can help. While APAT members report directly to the Disaster Public Affairs office at headquarters, the team coordinates with the local Red Cross chapter on public information efforts. Team members deploy to significant disaster events to provide communications staff, support and expertise that the local chapter may not have available on a daily basis. APAT members participate in specialized on-site training, webinars, and other preparation activities prior to deployment.

The American Red Cross has been the subject of several studies, especially in the time since Hurricane Katrina. Of interest to this research are the studies that have examined the Red Cross in the context of communication. Veil and Husted (Veil & Husted, 2012) applied best practices analysis to a case study of the Red Cross’s emergency communications after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The authors identified several key best practices that the Red Cross performed well, but noted that the organization exhibited poor planning for a large-scale disaster, lacked strong partnerships with other organizations that could have helped with the response effort, had cases of misconduct among the largely untrained volunteer force, showed a lack of cultural awareness when dealing with certain publics, and had difficulty showing compassion and empathy. The critique recommended areas that the organization needed to address to improve its disaster communications efforts. Likewise, Fussell, Collins, and Zoch (Fussell Sisco, Collins, & Zoch, 2010) found inadequacies in the Red Cross’s response to organizational crises. The authors founds that the organization’s spokesperson used responses from situational crisis communication theory in only one-third of the newspaper articles in their study and overused the “diminish” strategy, rendering it an ineffective response strategy. The authors noted that the use of a national-level spokesperson in nearly every news story indicated that the Red Cross took the accusations seriously, but suggested that the public and media reaction may have been more positive had the response strategies been more carefully chosen.

Liu, Yin, Briones and Kuch (Liu, Jin, Briones, & Kuch, 2012) conducted interviews with 40 American Red Cross employees to develop their model of social-mediated crisis communication. The authors chose the Red Cross because of the high ranking of its brand and the fact that the Red Cross communicates about crises on a daily basis. The Red Cross is proactive in communicating with its publics via social media channels and quickly addresses misinformation or rumor with corrective information. However, the interviews revealed that while Red Cross staffers have a basic system for responding to social media messages, it is a rather inefficient one in which the staff attempt to respond to all inquiries and messages without discernment, especially given their limitations in personnel and resources.

The Red Cross has successfully used social media to build relationships with the media and its various publics (Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2011). The primary barriers to using social media have been a lack of staff time that was dedicated to monitoring and posting on the organization’s various social media channels. The authors also suggested that the Red Cross headquarters should develop more training and guidelines to ensure consistency of social media use throughout the entire organization, including the local chapters. On a similar vein, a study on 588 Red Cross chapter websites (Schmalzried, Fleming Fallon, & Harper, 2012) found inconsistencies in the type of information that was found on each chapter’s webpage. While none of the websites had all nine emergency communication elements that the authors searched for, some had none and only seven sites had as many as seven of the elements. The authors
recommended that the Red Cross chapters use a template that included all of the key emergency communication criteria that were important for helping the public during a disaster.

Hamner (Hamner, 2008) offered a rare organizational perspective on the changes the Red Cross made to its disaster services human resource system in 2004. The case study examined the difficulties and ongoing problems that were caused by this major organizational change but did find that the changes would enhance organizational effectiveness and efficiencies.

While these studies inform the topics of crisis communication and organizational structure that are addressed by the present research, they do not specifically address the training, preparedness, and organizational structure of the public affairs function that may allow or impede Red Cross communication efforts during disasters.

**Crisis-Adaptive Public Information Model**

This study examines Red Cross public affairs training and preparedness through the lens of crisis-adaptive public information, a model informed by high reliability organizations (HROs) that routinely operate in a chaotic and uncertain environment (Horsley, 2010). HROs successfully operate under dangerous conditions on a daily basis, and this organizational trait applies well to a disaster-relief organization that regularly goes into destroyed cities and towns to help affected residents. However, the Red Cross does not constantly operate under disaster conditions, and the CAPI model takes into account the organizational change that occurs from routine public affairs to disaster public affairs.

CAPI was developed while studying the public affairs function of a state emergency management agency (Horsley, 2010). This study is the first test of the CAPI model with a nonprofit disaster relief organization. During routine operations, communicators in the agency focus on the first two phases of disaster: preparedness and mitigation. The members of the organization participate in training and simulated exercises to help prepare them to respond to a major disaster. During this time, they build up a library of response materials and develop relationships with the media and all stakeholders who may be involved in a future disaster response. In addition, communicators work to mitigate future disasters by educating stakeholders about personal, family, and organizational disaster preparedness. The purpose of mitigation is to prevent or reduce the amount of harm caused by a disaster that ultimately requires the resources of disaster response organizations (government, nongovernmental, and for-profit).

As the state emergency management agency responds to a disaster threat or event, the organization changes significantly. The CAPI organizational attributes increase as the situation becomes more complex and uncertain, and as the organization becomes more tightly coupled with other organizations that are involved in the event. The key attributes that the CAPI model borrows from HROs include: a primary goal of safety, a flexible hierarchy, a culture of reliability, redundancy of critical jobs, tight coupling, and mindfulness. Tight coupling occurs when organizations must work together to bring their resources and abilities to a joint response effort (ex., one organization may specialize in food preparation, while another has the vehicles and resources available to deliver the food to where it is needed). The point of morphogenesis, when the organization creates a new, ad-hoc organization to respond to a specific disaster, occurs when a disaster is declared and the responding organization establishes an emergency operation center (EOC). For public affairs, the ultimate use of CAPI attributes occurs when a joint information center (JIC) is activated. As the disaster is defused, the level of complexity and uncertainty declines, and the organization needs fewer CAPI attributes to function successfully. The organization may escalate or downgrade attributes as needed, but the changes are not
necessarily linear. For example, a terrorist attack may have no warning, and the organization would escalate immediately to disaster mode. Eventually, the emergency management agency returns to the routine mode and applies what has been learned from the disaster to preparedness and mitigation efforts (Horsley, 2010). Figure 1 illustrates the attributes and levels of complexity for an emergency management agency during routine and disaster modes.

Figure 1. The Crisis-Adaptive Public Information Model (Horsley, 2010)

The existing literature on disaster communication in the American Red Cross has not examined how this organization trains and prepares its public affairs personnel to respond to a disaster. Therefore, this research asks the following questions:

RQ1: What formal training does the American Red Cross provide for its public affairs volunteers and staff who deploy to disaster settings?

RQ2: What attributes, if any, from the CAPI model are present in Red Cross disaster public affairs training and preparedness activities?

Method

I conducted the participant-observation and field interviews for this study from January through February of 2009. Much of the preparation for my fieldwork involved taking courses offered by the American Red Cross and the Department of Homeland Security to familiarize myself with the role of public affairs in emergency management prior to entering the field (see
My method of observation was based on the work of Weick and Sutcliff (Weick & Sutcliff, 2007) who observed sailors aboard a U. S. military aircraft carrier to determine the attributes of a high reliability organization. My level of participation would be relatively low initially as I was an outsider to the American Red Cross National Headquarters and intended to be an open and flexible observer. I would adapt my inquiry and level of participation as I learned more information and as opportunities became available (Angrosino, 2007). As my experience with the Red Cross continued over the three-month period, I moved from being a primary observer in the public affairs department to a primary participant in training exercises, as will be explained in the results of my fieldwork. (A more detailed description of my fieldwork experience is discussed in Horsley, 2012.)

My first research site was the American Red Cross National Headquarters building in Washington, D.C. The primary areas of interest included the public affairs department offices, the disaster operations center (DOC), and the “ready room,” where top management meets daily and during disasters to plan response strategies. The second research site was the Advanced Public Affairs Team (APAT) Training conference held at the Emory Conference Center in Atlanta, Georgia. During this 4-day conference in February, I became a full participant in all of the training sessions and exercises. In compliance with my plans approved by my university’s institutional review board, I introduced myself and explained that I was conducting a study in disaster communication each time I met someone new, attended a meeting, or participated in an activity. No one excused him or herself from the research study or asked that I not take notes or make audio recordings during my entire study.

My observations at all research sites were interjected with informal, off-the-cuff interviews as well as more formal, in-depth interviews. I took handwritten notes during all interviews but added a voice recorder to the lengthier interviews with permission of the participant. After I left the research sites, I periodically did follow-up interviews by phone or email to clarify details, conduct member checks, and fill in any gaps that emerged during the study. I transcribed my recordings, drew sketches, took photos, collected documents, and made daily journal entries to use during analysis. I analyzed all data using thematic analysis (Creswell, 2007). Some themes were derived from the CAPI model, while the qualitative method of analysis also allowed for the emergence of new themes from the data.

**Findings**

The participant-observation and interviews yielded large amounts of data, but I limited the results of this study to data related to the organization of the Red Cross public affairs training function that would inform the crisis-adaptive public information (CAPI) model. As the model is divided into “routine mode public relations” and “disaster mode crisis communication,” most of the findings from this study specifically inform the “routine mode.” However, the policies and procedures that are integrated in the training give insight into what would transpire during “disaster mode.” The prevailing theme from the two research sites (the Red Cross headquarters and the APAT conference) was that the Red Cross invested heavily in both time and effort to train public affairs staff.

**Disaster Public Affairs Training**

The American Red Cross has formalized training that it offers to employees and volunteers who wish to work in the public affairs function during disaster. At the time of this study, the organization offered a basic online course in disaster public affairs; an onsite class on
conducted public affairs during a smaller, localized disaster; an onsite class on conducting public affairs during a larger disaster of national concern; and an annual training conference by invitation-only for advanced public affairs disaster personnel. Of most concern to the public affairs staff at the national headquarters is the annual training conference known as APAT (Advanced Public Affairs Team conference). There are approximately 100 men and women nationwide who are selected for the APAT team based on experience, public relations or media skills, and the need for that position in particular regions of the country. These individuals not only deploy to large-scale disasters that attract national and international media, but also become leaders in their home communities to communicate about daily disasters such as house fires and localized flooding. Because the Red Cross responds quickly to a variety of natural and man-made disasters ranging from tornadoes and hurricanes to commercial airline crashes and terrorist attacks, public affairs officers must be well-versed in a variety of situations to communicate those messages to news reporters and the public. All APAT members must be willing to be on call for a certain number of weeks per year, during which they can deploy to a disaster in less than 24 hours.

I participated in the four-day APAT training conference held in Atlanta, Georgia, in February 2009. The Red Cross invited just over 100 veteran and new APAT members and provided hotel accommodations and transportation. As a full participant, I was evaluated and given feedback on all phases of the training. In addition, because of my ongoing field study, conference organizers gave me small roles to play in simulations and included me in the planning sessions prior to the conference. For example, I helped the disaster public affairs manager develop the training scenario while I was visiting the national headquarters, and I played the role of a “reporter” during ambush media interviews as conference attendees arrived at the conference hotel. Throughout the conference planning, the disaster public affairs manager reinforced that she wanted attendees to take the conference seriously, that she did not want attendees to consider it a vacation from their daily jobs, and that she wanted the conference to provide a realistic taste of the pressures of working with media during a disaster. She voiced concerns that managers of employed Red Crossers in local or regional chapters would think of the APAT training as unnecessary or excessive, suggesting that the public affairs function has been criticized or relegated by others in the organization. For example, requiring that participants pay for a private room if they did not want double-occupancy rooms at the conference appeared to be done more to make a point about the fact that this was a working conference rather than the public affairs office simply being thrifty. The shared rooms would also promote team building and reflect the lack of privacy during disaster deployments.

Conference participants received information about the evolving disaster scenario prior to arriving onsite, and the organizers staged their arrival to mimic arriving at a disaster site with limited details on the relief efforts. As participants entered the conference center with luggage in tow, “reporters,” including myself, met the travel-weary team members at the door with an audio recorder in one hand and multiple questions about the Red Cross’s response to the disaster scenario, which was a tornado that struck downtown Atlanta. I was surprised by the response of some of the participants. Many stated that they had not received the scenario details prior to traveling, while others complained that they were tired and just wanted to check into the hotel. The senior director of public affairs, who oversees the conference, told me later that it was not uncommon for public affairs officers to arrive on scene and immediately respond to reporter inquiries with little or no details about the operation. She and her conference organizers wanted to reinforce the realities of disaster deployments and remind APAT members of the basic Red
Cross messaging that they can always use in the first few hours of a disaster response while there are still many unknown facts. This exercise set the tone for the rest of the conference as attendees worked through a complicated, evolving scenario and attended a variety of classroom sessions.

All participants were given two documents during the first general session. The first was an APAT Conference Onsite Information book with the agenda, workshop descriptions, a schedule of individual media training exercises, biographies of presenters, the APAT manual, a disaster services glossary, social media information, and fundraising language. In addition, one section of the book contained information from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) including public affairs protocol and an extensive list of acronyms. The second document was named “Messaging” and included sample disaster messaging in English and Spanish; hot topics (e.g., messaging for specific issues such as working with undocumented clients or policies regarding sex offenders in shelters); and disaster services guidance related to core organizational values and working with the media. On a daily basis, conference organizers handed out updates to the tornado scenario that had information that the participants would need for their media interviews. The Red Cross hired media professionals from television, radio, and newspapers to conduct live interviews, recorded interviews, and remote IFB (interruptible feedback) interviews with anchors in the “studio.” These interviews took place in between classroom activities and discussions in social media, critical thinking and story telling, developing relationships with stakeholders, and photography and videography.

Although some APAT conference attendees were surprised by their sudden emersion into the disaster scenario upon arrival, it was evident that most participants quickly transitioned into a disaster mode of thought and participated fully. The realism of the scenario kept the participants on edge, many of them commenting that they were terrified of being interviewed by the “real” reporters. I observed several participants sitting alone, studying the scenario updates, and appearing to be nervous. When I talked to them, a common comment was that they “didn’t want to mess up” or that “they didn’t want to be tripped up” by the reporter. They were concerned about correctly stating the facts and avoiding potential conflict with the actor reporters who were looking for conflict in the Red Cross response. As a newcomer to the APAT team, I was concerned about doing well in the interviews so that I would be considered for a deployment to a future disaster. Several others echoed this concern, but also wondered if they would be prepared when the time came to work at their first disaster. On the other hand, more veteran communicators took the exercise in stride knowing it was just that — an exercise. One woman, a Red Cross employee from Indiana, commented that the media training was harder than an actual disaster:

“It’s easier to talk about a real disaster because you have tangible details you can talk about and describe. It’s hard to be empathetic on camera when all you have is a scenario update and you have to make up the details.”

Throughout the four-day conference participants, leaders, and trainers shared meals and nightly social time at the conference center lounge or at local area restaurants. The energy and enthusiasm displayed during the sessions and exercises carried over after classes were done. Many of these people had worked together before and become good friends; however, the new members, or “green dots” as they affectionately were called because of the stickers on their name badges, were welcomed into the more veteran groups. As a “green dot” myself, I felt welcomed and part of the whole experience. APAT members rarely deploy alone. Depending upon the magnitude of the disaster and the amount of media attention, APAT teams of 2 or more work
together during a disaster. Long-term disasters require that additional teams come in to relieve the first wave of workers. The teamwork required for the deployments was reinforced not only during most of the training sessions, but also during downtime. Even though APAT members had to complete the media interviews individually, it was common to see members coaching each other before an interview, just as they would in the field. I never noticed competition or sabotage among the participants during the scenario work; everyone appeared to be working toward the same goal of being ready to work in a disaster situation.

CAPI Model Attributes Found in Disaster Public Affairs Training

Many of the attributes from HROs the CAPI model were evident in the Red Cross training. Redundancy of personnel is a major premise of the APAT organization. The APAT members have their day jobs; They may be Red Cross employees working in various functions at NHQ or in chapter offices around the country, or they may be volunteers who are retired, stay at home, or respond to disasters during their vacation time from other jobs. The disaster public affairs manager responsible for deploying team members explained that about 15 percent of APAT members were retirees, about 50 percent were Red Cross employees, and about 35 percent were volunteers, and all have communication, PR, and journalism backgrounds. However, once they deploy as public affairs officers, they dramatically increase the number of public affairs experts on the scene. No single Red Cross chapter could sustain this number of trained public affairs staff on a regular basis, but when this pool of resources is gathered and brought to a disaster site, the sudden redundancy of personnel creates reliability in media relations and public information efforts. Redundancy does not occur during “routine mode,” which would be considered inefficient, but becomes an efficient method of operation during “disaster mode” when there is heightened media interest and a need to communicate quickly and accurately with the public.

A flexible hierarchy is another hallmark of HROs and the CAPI model that was evident in Red Cross disaster public affairs. The disaster public affairs manager explained that she uses a “battle org chart” that “can be scaled up or down” depending upon the disaster. In addition, all APAT members, including Red Cross employees from other areas of the organization, report to her and leave behind their routine responsibilities. This flexible hierarchy ensures that all deployed APAT members take their instructions from and get evaluated by the head of disaster public affairs, avoiding confusion and divided chains of command. With long, stressful days working on the disaster operation, APAT members need to be able to focus on the task at hand. “I will talk to their supervisors to make sure that they understand DOC (disaster operations center) policies and procedures, but make sure that the APATers still communicate with their supervisors,” she explained. The manager added that it is important to educate supervisors so that they will continue to support their employees’ involvement in APAT. For individuals who have jobs outside of the Red Cross, it is their responsibility to communicate with their supervisors to take off the required time to respond to a disaster. Disaster deployments for APAT team members typically last 2-5 days and end once the national media attention wanes. However, it is not unusual to have a longer deployment for larger disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005. APAT members were on deployment for several weeks at a time during the prolonged disaster response and recovery efforts.

A shared goal is another key attribute that is apparent from disaster public affairs training. While HROs focus on the goal of safety, “the American Red Cross prevents and alleviates human suffering in the face of emergencies by mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of
The vice president of communications explained that the goal of the APAT is to focus on stakeholders’ communication needs to include that of the media, disaster victims, donors (of time, money, and blood), partners in the disaster response, Red Cross personnel, and the general public. However, the disaster public affairs manager explained goals in terms of organizational levels, saying, “The role of the DOC is to protect the Red Cross reputation and to think ‘corporate.’ In the field, we need to think about clients and the media. But helping clients is our first priority.” While APAT members receive direction from the DOC, their priorities are localized to the disaster and those who have been harmed. While my participant-observation activities revealed a shared goal among the APAT training participants, the interviews suggested there may be a disconnect between the goals of the national organization and those of the local chapters during a disaster. This phenomenon should be addressed in a future study.

A culture of reliability is perpetuated not only by the APAT training program, but also by the vision of the American Red Cross: to “turn compassion into action” (Mission, Vision, and Fundamental Principles, 2012). Reliability is generated through training, rehearsal, and organizational learning. The disaster public affairs lead spends all of her time during “routine mode” preparing for the next disaster by communicating regularly with APAT team members, collecting members’ deployment availability on a quarterly basis, and assisting with messaging and training for annual conferences. During disasters, she recruits and deploys APAT members, counsels them in the field, and communicates with the affected chapters’ communication staffs or directors so that they understand the type of support they will get from the APAT members. “In training, we want them to know how to give one corporate message and how to put on their best face without giving up ethics,” she said. “We want them to be the best spokespeople and critical thinkers with a strong messaging foundation.” The APAT training conference provides current key messages, refreshes old skills while teaching new ones, and gives attendees opportunities to rehearse what they have learned through intensive media interview exercises. The training they receive during the conference is reinforced throughout the year with topical webinars, email messages, and a monthly email newsletter, “The Rapid Responder.”

Throughout all of the training, the APAT members practice mindfulness: the art of paying attention to signals that may indicate a problem or an opportunity. They learn not to ignore misinformation or rumors in media reports or on social media, and they learn to notice activity in the disaster area that may spur a human interest story, a video for the online newsroom, or a photo that captures the essence of the relief effort. While the team members’ primary focus is learning how to work with national media and develop proactive communications, the vice president of communications said they also serve as “the eyes and the ears” of the Red Cross to monitor local media reports, assess public reaction, and look for potential problems. Because APAT members have access to all Red Cross disaster operations and facilities, they also can use an objective eye to look for issues throughout the organization, including the local disaster headquarters, client relief shelters, client casework centers, and mobile feeding stations. The mindfulness of APAT team members can allow the organization to preempt problems as well as be proactive about pitching new stories or generating online content.

All APAT activities are conducted in a system of tight coupling, a final attribute of HROs and CAPI. APAT members cannot operate entirely on their own during a disaster response. They must seek out and coordinate their efforts with all aspects of the Red Cross operation, including the local chapter management, sheltering, feeding, supply distribution, donations and blood donors” (Mission, Vision, and Fundamental Principles, 2012).
Drives, among others. In addition, APAT members may be working in a joint information center with officials from state, local, or federal emergency management agencies. They rely on leaders within the disaster relief operation to supply them with current statistics, such as the number of open shelters, how many people received assistance, how many meals were served, and where the food distribution locations will be on any given day so that the information can be shared with the media and public. They are also tightly coupled with reporters whom they rely on to disseminate important information in an accurate and timely manner. As the disaster operation intensifies, the level of cooperation and reliance increases, but as the operation dies down, the level decreases. Once tight coupling has reduced significantly, often signified by national media moving on to other stories and leaving town, the APAT team member’s job ends.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

The Crisis-Adaptive Public Information model appears to inform Red Cross disaster public affairs training on all of its key attributes: a commonly shared goal, a flexible hierarchy, a culture of reliability, redundancy of key jobs, tight coupling, and a practice of mindfulness. However, the observations and interviews revealed several key points that should be considered further. The attribute of a commonly shared goal was problematic because there appeared to be two goals: a corporate goal of reputation management, and a localized goal of serving disaster clients and other stakeholders. Although the Red Cross is a nonprofit organization, the leaders often referred to NHQ (national headquarters) as “corporate” as opposed to “chapters” or “regions,” suggesting that this apparent disconnect between NHQ and field offices was not an oversight. While I did not observe any direct consequences of this during my fieldwork, many NHQ leaders mentioned communication challenges with chapters during disaster preparedness and response efforts. For example, the vice president of communications said, “NHQ would promote the Red Cross role (in a disaster response), while the state or region would promote public information for clients.” The disaster public affairs manager noted that “issues with chapters are fairly common. You have to pick your fights. Our goal with chapter communicators is to get them to know us before they need us. We need to do more education with chapters.” She extended the differences in goals to roles, saying, “The difference is the DOC has an advising role, but the field is doing it.” Part of the advising is the consideration of the whole organization’s reputation, while the APAT members have to affirm that reputation in their actions. One example of opposing goals came up during a commercial airplane crash while I was visiting the national offices. The Red Cross responded by supporting the families of those who lost loved ones, but the cost was minimal because the Red Cross did not need to feed and shelter people as it does during a natural disaster. The local chapter executive wanted to use the increased publicity to solicit donations, but the NHQ public affairs staff believed that was the wrong approach. The senior director of public affairs described their strategy:

> We talked to the chapter and told them that we don’t fundraise for mass casualty events because these are sensitive events with loss of life, and it doesn’t cost us that much to respond. The airlines took care of them (the families) and spent money on the response. The Red Cross mainly provided emotional support and served as a buffer between the families and the media. It’s not fair to solicit when we don’t spend a lot of money.

While the local chapter was directly involved in the airplane crash response and saw the increased visibility as an opportunity to raise money, NHQ thought it would send the wrong message and potentially damage the Red Cross reputation.
The differences in communication goals between corporate and nonprofit organizations have been established (Liu & Horsley, 2007; Liu, Horsley, & Levenshus, 2010), but this phenomenon has not been examined within the context of a parent/national nonprofit organization and its chapters/field offices. The hierarchy of a national organization with localized offices suggests that the CAPI model would need to consider these organizational disparities. As the situation escalates and becomes more complex and tightly coupled (see Figure 1), the CAPI attributes, including common goals, must increase. An organization such as the Red Cross would need to reach an agreement on organizational goals to effectively enact CAPI attributes.

Training and rehearsal consumes a majority of the “routine mode” for Red Cross public affairs personnel. Currently, outreach activities and issues management are depicted on the CAPI model, but this research suggests that training and rehearsal also merit inclusion under “public relations” activities. While the attribute of a reliable culture is an important component of CAPI, the training programs and simulations are essential to accomplishing and perpetuating that culture. The training establishes clear expectations for all areas of reliability, including promoting a common goal, educating participants on the hierarchical changes that occur when activating the disaster response, producing trained individuals who can contribute to the redundant resource pool, reinforcing mindful practices, and understanding how to work with partners with which the Red Cross is tightly coupled. The investment in time and resources for training and rehearsal is essential for following the CAPI model; therefore, I suggest adding that to the model rather than simply inferring it (see Figure 2).

While there were some areas of CAPI that did not form a complete fit with Red Cross disaster public affairs training and preparedness, the organizational complications from these omissions suggest that the model is still a good aspirational representation of organizations with high reliability attributes that transition from routine to disaster mode to communicate during public crises. More research must be done, however, on the effectiveness of this model, as is described in the final section.

Limitations and Future Research

As in any qualitative field study, this research was limited by my ability to be on location for an adequate amount of time and to observe Red Cross public affairs personnel participating in all aspects of training and preparedness. While I attempted to observe a significant cross-section of training and exercises at two sites, the data collection and analysis would have been improved by the addition of more researchers. Future research will examine how well the training and preparedness activities correlate with an actual disaster response through additional participant-observation of Red Cross public affairs workers in an active disaster setting. In addition, the effectiveness of the disaster response should be evaluated based upon the CAPI model’s assumptions. The CAPI model also should be tested further with other types of disaster response organizations, such as federal disaster management or other nongovernmental organizations. The field of disaster communication research presents ample opportunities to apply the CAPI model under varying conditions and operating environments.
Figure 2
Revised Crisis-Adaptive Public Information Model

Crisis-Adaptive Public Information Attributes

Level of Complexity and Tight Coupling

Routine Mode
“Public Relations”
Lesser Consequences

Disaster Mode
“Crisis Communication”
Greater Consequences

Recognition of Crisis
Issues Management
Training and Rehearsal
Outreach Activities

Morphogenesis

Triggering Event
(bifurcation)

JIC activation
EOC activation

Disaster Response Organization
Public Affairs Unit
References
New Media, Emergency Planning and Scaled-Up Drills: Risky Business

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Abstract
The American Chemistry Council repositioned the chemical industry with the “essential2life” campaign and built on the success of the seven Codes of Responsible Care®. The Community Awareness and Emergency Response Code promoted a rethinking of how manufacturing sites establish and maintain on-going dialogue with community residents and rehearse emergency response practices. This single instrumental case study analysis focuses on a chemical company’s communication efforts during a scaled-up drill in which community advisory council members participated. The results suggest new media was not an instrumental form of communication at this time, and had the potential to place the company in a risk situation.
Entry Vignette

The snow was piling up on the frosted rectangular windows as 11 of 12 members of ABC’s Community Advisory Council (CAC) gathered over dinner at a local restaurant in town. Not only did they enjoy a tasty dinner, they consumed a crash course in emergency planning, response strategies and the roles they would play for the scaled-up simulated drill at the chemical manufacturing plant in the morning. A tall robust male whose slivers of curly white hair glistened in the fluorescent light spoke to the group in a dialect that communicated he was not a native son. He was the Director of corporate Environmental, Health and Safety, and working in tandem with a mole (plant employee who assists with the design of the drill). They designed a crisis scenario using ingredients stored on-site. “We are conducting this drill to ensure our employees are prepared to manage a crisis situation. We’ve tried to make it as real as possible. We want to identify our weaknesses before such an event to ensure they are managed,” stated the Director of Environment, Health and Safety. While the members nibbled on homemade bread, sipped hot tea and jotted notes on their handouts, they listened carefully to the information and shared that they were concerned they wouldn’t do a good job; they had never done anything like this before. The presenter dispelled their fears and reassured the participants that they would do a great job. “We want to be prepared to manage any crisis event effectively and ensure we have done everything to prevent any harm to our employees, you, the community, and the environment. We don’t want to know what we should have done after the fact.”

Role cards were distributed and the room became lifeless as folks scanned the backgrounds and behaviors of the persons they would portray. That’s until one of the community theater divas roared with laughter. She babbled to the group, “I love this. I play a neurotic cat lover who is fearful and deeply concerned that my kitten may have inhaled something and could die. I have to call-in to the plant repeatedly because I am uncontrollable with emotion.” There was much support that this member would do a phenomenal job. As the snow continued to fall gently on the roads of this modest, economically challenged and aging community, the presenter carefully reviewed that an alarm would sound at exactly 9:00 a.m. The siren would communicate to the employees that an emergency situation is occurring. Each role card provided times for the characters to walk-in and/or call-in to the plant; several would perform numerous times. The EHS director reinforced that each time contact was made with a plant person, the communicator should begin the conversation with the statement, “this is a drill”, to ensure plant staff were aware of the simulation. He also directed the participants to observe and make mental notes of the following: employees’ treatment of participants’ concerns, what type of information was necessary to them, and if the channel used to share information, was satisfactory. As the guests bundled up to brave the cold, expressions of thanks for dinner and inclusion in the drill reverberated. “Well, in less than 24 hours from now, we’ll know how we all did.”

This research study contextualizes emergency response strategies and reports the pre-drill and post-drill reactions of those who participated in a scaled-up drill. Using Grunig’s symmetrical model of communication, all participants’ perspectives are analyzed to identify common themes in relation to the development and maintenance of a relationship, perceptions of the relationship pre-post drill and quality of the information distribution process.

ABC Corporation

This case study is bounded by a specific event that occurred at ABC Corporation’s local manufacturing facility in rural Pennsylvania. ABC is a good place to work; it was invited to join the ranks, with 99 other selectively identified and prestigious organizations, as a “100 Best
Corporate Citizen” recipient. ABC’s Annual Report provides background on the management, corporate philosophy, safety record and sustainability of the company. It is a global developer, marketer and manufacturer of highly engineered specialty chemicals that support the petroleum refining, plastics, crop protection, construction, pharmaceuticals, food safety, and custom chemistry industries. Over 4,000 employees work for ABC worldwide, which provides services to customers in 100 countries. ABC attributes its success to “our ability to understand the evolving needs of our customers, develop innovative, responsible solutions to meet those needs and quickly bring those solutions to market.” The organization competes in the global marketplace with 61% of sales generated in performance chemicals and 39% from fine chemistry services. The Annual Report also stipulates that the organization’s growth is rooted in a corporate philosophy of “staying true to our principles to provide innovative and sustainable solutions without doing harm to people or the environment…our employees take pride in doing things the right way, the first time, every time.” ABC stays true to its fundamental philosophy of doing no harm to people or the environment by conducting quarterly table top drills, and every 24 to 36 months, scaled-up drills to test emergency response preparedness. A discussion focused on drill types will be discussed in a later section. The company has attempted to establish and maintain open communication with more than 80 community residents through the launch, and more than 20 year maintenance, of a community advisory council (CAC). In short, 12 to 15 community members serve 3-year terms as members of the CAC. The group meets bi-monthly for two hours over dinner. The plant manager provides a comprehensive corporate and local plant update that includes the following: environmental, health, safety performance; business forecast; and employment outlook. A unique aspect of each meeting is the opportunity for CAC members to discuss information from the community and request additional information to share with the community. The one-hour presentation on the topic of the CAC’s choice is the centerpiece of the meetings.

The next section explains emergency preparedness and the difference in the type of drills used to test an organization’s ability to respond to crisis situations.

Review of the Literature

Emergency Planning

Past research supports any improvement in emergency response generates a positive outcome. Fegley & Victor (2005) studied employees’ perceptions of crisis and disaster planning. Less than 60% of respondents identified their organizations’ plan for managing a crisis as acceptable. Earlier research by Mitroff and Alpasian (2003) revealed less than 30% of organizations were rated as being prepared for crisis. The August 28, 2005 natural disaster in the western Gulf Coast known as Hurricane Katrina was another emergency planning prompt. Hutchings, Annulis and Gaudet (2008) studied performance improvement professionals in organizations from the Katrina-impacted areas. They found organizations acknowledged understanding crisis plan components as: crisis communication plans, crisis management teams, simulations and drills, and business continuity plans. However, less than 50% reported having all the aforementioned components.

Evidence supports emergency response plans were ineffective despite the heightened awareness ignited by 9/11 and Katrina. Fowkes, Blossom, Sandrock, Mitchell and Brandstein (2010), while studying the impact of specific training modules for emergency preparedness in the Community Health sector, found that 91% of the organizations involved in table top drill exercises improved one or more components of their emergency response plans. Further, the
researchers indicated that table top exercises provide a means to “begin a dialogue before an emergency happens” (p. 518). Research supports that conversing about crisis response and generating and rehearsing plans is a starting point. Peterson and Perry (1999) prepared a comprehensive review of training exercises to promote dialogue about response strategies. However, effective response efforts include development and execution of the components of an entire crisis plan: crisis communication plans, crisis management teams, simulations and drills, and business continuity plans.

As a result of high impact crises, our elected officials have attempted to strategically analyze the current state of emergency response efforts at a more individualized level of analysis. According to the testimony of Corey G. Gruber on June 13, 2007 before the Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness and Response of the Committee on Homeland Security of the House of Representatives:

Emergency responders in America make up less than one percent of the U.S. population. This roughly translates to one firefighter for every 280 people, one sworn officer for every 385 people and one Emergency Management Technician/paramedics for every 325 people.

Our elected officials and their respective advisory groups grappled with the reality of emergency response: contingent upon where people reside, access to emergency responders and sophisticated emergency response plans differ. For example, considering that there are seven people per square mile in Montana, one person per square mile in Alaska while the U. S. average is 87 people per square mile (Anonymous, A-1), it is realistic to conclude that rural communities will face significant challenges, both financial and personnel, to manage emergency response situations. In communities where there are dense populations, it is paramount that the Committee’s findings be shared and appropriate measures put in place to train community members about emergency response procedures.

**Drills**

Emergency response protocols are the culmination of complex and highly structured organization, attention to feedback, and continuous improvement of the process. Responders and response plans must be designed to manage crisis instigated by human-induced actions, such as workplace violence, accidents and fraud; and, natural disasters, such as hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, fires and earthquakes. Two types of exercises are utilized to test, evaluate, and assess response readiness, planning and effectiveness: discussion based-exercises and operations-based exercises. *Public Health Emergency Exercise Toolkit*, a publication by the Columbia University Center for Health Policy, explicates the difference between the types of exercises. Discussion based and action based drills are described as follows: Action based drills are categorized as using operations-based exercises which can be functional or full-scale. Functional exercises focus on testing and evaluating an emergency response system’s capabilities while a full-scale drill requires physical participation by all involved in the effort and is designed to test and evaluate the emergency operations plan in an interactive manner over time.

Fowkes, et. al. (2010) contextualize table top drills as “professionals gathered at a conference table, assigned roles to play in a specific disaster scenario, enacted the scenario and evaluated together their approaches and needs for improvement” (p. 513). Table top drill participants discuss what and how they would manage the crisis based on the given scenario. An associated strength of table top drills is the ability to discuss anticipated actions and potential consequences of inaction. An associated weakness of the table top drill is participants’ exposure
to the management of personal and community emotions and physical limitations caused by the crisis.

The literature supports the benefits of scaled-up drills and the importance of sharing emergency response procedures with community residents. ABC Corporation held a scaled-up drill in which members of its Community Advisory Council participated. This effort to educate a key stakeholder group in how scaled up emergency drills are conducted at the manufacturing site can be used to test Grunig’s two-way symmetrical communication model.

Two-way Symmetrical Model of Communication

The article, Theory and Practice of Interactive Media Relations was published in Public Relations Quarterly in 1990 by James E. Grunig. In this seminal discussion, Grunig develops the foundation for strategic and effective management of public relations and previews the tenets for excellence theory. He states, “an organization that practices public relations strategically develops programs to communicate with the publics, both external and internal, that provide the greatest threats to, and opportunities for, the organization” (p.18). Further, Grunig defines four models of public relations: press agentry; public information; two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical. Grunig stipulates organizations and publics are interdependent. He describes managing interdependence as “building stable, long-term relationships with key publics” (p.18). Wehmeier (2009) describes the need for additional theory in the public relations field as well as the compelling controversy surrounding excellence theory. This discussion focuses on the two-way symmetrical model which is defined as “public relations that uses dialogue, bargaining, negotiation, and strategies of conflict management to adjust the relationship between an organization and its publics” (p. 21). In short, exposure to ABC’s emergency response protocols and crisis communications planning assumes a level of threat and trust: ABC trusts its employees will perform adequately during the simulated drill and risks public knowledge and potential dissemination of this information if they fail. ABC assumes a level of threat and trust. If the community members benefit in some way by the experience of participation in the scaled up drill, and ABC trusts that exposure of its strengths and weaknesses beyond the fence that encapsulates it and has been viewed as a line of demarcation by the community (Jabro, 2009), ABC has the potential to alter community perception of the safety practices at the site. Fall (2004) supports that “most public relations practitioners view crisis as an opportunity” (p.240) and through organizational learning crisis-response strategies are enhanced and more effective tactics are identified. Thus, the research questions guiding this study are listed below:

RQ1: Has ABC Company developed symmetrical communication with the stakeholder group of Community Advisory Council members?
RQ2: How does participation in a scaled-up drill impact CAC members’ perceptions of ABC’s credibility, openness and feedback loop?
RQ3: What information (should be) was communicated during the drill and what information was missing?

Method

Case Study methodology involves studying an issue through a case(s) within a bounded system, setting, or context (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 2010). Creswell’s criteria include that cases contain one or several individuals, data collection that draws on multiple sources, and cases can be single, collective, multi-site or within-site (2007, p.74). This study focuses on one case to illustrate the impact of participation by a stakeholder group in a scaled up emergency drill.
Multiple forms of data were collected for this study: in-depth interviews with the stakeholders (CAC members) and the management team, participant observation of the dinner, drill and debrief meetings, and CAC meeting minutes.

Creswell states that a challenge of the case study method is identifying a clearly defined case, or cases (Creswell, 2007, p.75). This instrumental case study is bounded as follows: A specialty chemical manufacturing plant in a small rural community (population < 5,000) in Pennsylvania opted to conduct an emergency response scaled-up drill. While the site conducts table top drills on a quarterly basis, they tend to conduct scale-up drills every 24 to 36 months due to the number of people involved within the emergency response and corporate communities. Corporate EHS worked with a local plant employee to design a scale-up crisis situation to achieve the following: test site readiness and response protocols and communication practices, identify shortcomings of response strategies, and define ways to improve future response efforts through organizational learning.

Eleven of the 12 community advisory council members agreed to role play during the drill to aid the employees’ ability to react to residents’ concerns during an actual drill. One member was not able to remove herself from work tasks to participate. Telephonic and face-to-face roles included frantic animal loving neighbors, panic-stricken spouse, EPA representative, DEP representative, local teacher, parents of children in day care, community residents coming to the plant, and print, radio, television journalists (journalism students and professional journalists) and e-fluential bloggers.

Data Collection

Face-to-face or telephonic structured depth interviews were conducted with the plant manager, corporate HSE director, two student journalists, the site drill coordinator and 11 members of the advisory council before and after drill participation. Several interview questions support each research question and are described later. The average interview length was 51 minutes with 18 participants (age range: 22 - 81; 7 females, 11 males) pre-post drill. The second data collection effort involved participant observation by the researcher who supervised student journalists, coordinated CAC participation, recorded media response by corporate spokesperson and facilitated the community advisory council meeting the evening of the drill. I have served as a facilitator for the group since 1991 and collect annual data on the quality of the meetings, management’s response to concerns and effectiveness of the CAC experience.

Data analysis followed standard qualitative research conventions: field notes, meeting minutes, and interview notes were transcribed. Participants were identified with a code number. The content was analyzed in the following manner: close read of the transcripts for emergent themes, horizontalization of the data for classification of emergent themes and a final thematic analysis.

Results and Discussion

The data collection and analysis was designed to provide responses to the following research questions guided by depth interview questions, participant observations of several key areas and debrief meeting minutes. Pre-drill and post-drill transcripts were analyzed and the results are presented in the following tables for each research question. Bolded responses indicate the common word/theme across questions.

RQ1: Has ABC Corporation established a relationship with CAC members? The Depth Interview Questions guiding RQ1’s response were: Why serve on CAC? Why participate in this...
drill? What are your personal concerns about an accident at the plant? What are your expectations of the management during a crisis event?

**Table 1: ABC Corporation establishment of a relationship with CAC members**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Drill Interview Themes</th>
<th>Post-Drill Interview Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liaison for company</td>
<td>Amazing process that illuminated the <strong>complexity</strong> of emergency response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important to participate to <strong>understand</strong> chemical process and emergency response process</td>
<td>Be more <strong>supportive of time lag</strong> from sounding of siren to information flow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Share</strong> with others in the community</td>
<td><strong>Information lag was unacceptable</strong> (feedback)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New experience</strong></td>
<td>Phone responders were <strong>patient but clueless</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of my <strong>role</strong> as a member of the CAC <strong>share</strong> what I need</td>
<td>Promised to get back to me and <strong>I waited</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 themes suggest management, journalists and CAC members developed empathy for the other during this process. Initially, roles as liaisons and information sharers were identified as reasons to participate in both the CAC and the drill. Participation in the drill was perceived as a new experience that could be shared with others. During the debriefing, CAC members heard reports from the myriad units that were coordinating efforts simultaneously through incident command. Engineering assessed the shut down and containment efforts; EHS reported time to move employees, check for off-site releases and manage personal protective equipment and potential decontamination locations. Incident command center commended the emergency responders, shared concerns about corporate response time and discussed alternating channels on the walkie talkies to prevent channel clutter. Members of the corporate communication staff, situated at another geographic location, monitored activities, developed and approved messages and slowly provided information to diverse publics. Site telephone responders discussed information exchange and the need for more effective information sharing which was supported by the role players. The CAC commented about credibility of the information conveyed during CAC meetings and willingness of the company to empower members to participate in a very revealing exercise.

**RQ2:** How does participation in a scaled up drill impact CAC members’ perceptions of ABC’s credibility, openness and feedback loop. The Depth Interview Questions guiding RQ2’s response were: What impressions, if any, do you have of ABC? Have your impressions of ABC changed? Describe information you believe to be necessary to learn during a crisis event? Did you feel the information was credible/timely?

**Table 2: CAC members’ perceptions of ABC’s credibility, openness and feedback loop**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Drill Interview Themes</th>
<th>Post-Drill Interview Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good <strong>community member</strong> – gives back</td>
<td>Focus on safety is real</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supports</strong> a lot of events for community</td>
<td>Information was sketchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employees supportive</strong> of company – I know….</td>
<td>Poor ABC. The big guys <strong>stifle them</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Share</strong> what to do and what is happening during events</td>
<td><strong>Understand</strong> why information is sketchy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 provides the pre-post drill interview themes. The pre-drill themes of perceptions of ABC were positive: good community member that give back to the community, employees engaged in community activities, and information shared should focus on what to do and what is happening in real time. Post-drill comments confirmed that ABC’s focus on safety is accurate. Participating in the debriefing provided critical context as to how information flows during an emergency response. This is a context that is not transparent when sitting at home waiting for a telephone responder to provide updates or waiting for a representative of the organization to provide an update of a situation. In short, all participants were privy to information flow and the complexity of information distribution across all channels within and outside of the organization.

RQ3: What information (should be/was) communicated during the drill and what information was missing?

Table 3: Information shared and missing during simulated drill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Drill Interview Themes</th>
<th>Post-Drill Interview Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What should I do?</td>
<td>Need to know vs. want to know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What happened? /How did it happen?</td>
<td>Specific of situation – evasive communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am I hurt?</td>
<td>Impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was anyone hurt?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 summarizes a desire for information that conforms to the components of the journalist’s inverted pyramid during crisis: how did it happen, to whom, when, where and why before the event. After the drill, individuals characterized the quality of information received as sketchy and evasive. A deeper understanding of what you need to know is offered while what you want to know won’t be satisfied right away. Participants indicated a better understanding of all the factors that lead to the understanding of the circumstances surrounding an event and what needs to occur before information is released. The participants wanted face-to-face or person-to-person interaction to allow for follow-up questions. There was no mention of using new media as a response component. However, the age of the recipients may explain the desire for traditional communication.

Conclusion

ABC initiated a relationship with the community more than 20 years ago with its open invitation to all members of the community to serve on the community advisory council. This proactive strategy to enhance response ability and community relationships can be a risky business practice if scale-up drills reveal numerous deficiencies in implementation of the response plan. Of course, deficiency identification is what the drill is designed to accomplish. Further, if an organization has cultivated and maintained a relationship with stakeholders, the stakeholders are more likely to trust information and manage information lag. Finally, stakeholders preferred personal communication regarding crisis information rather than electronic. “If I read or hear something, I’ll call Rose at the Chamber or my neighbor to discuss what I heard.” There was very little support for information retrieval from new media sources. However, the majority of participants in this drill were more senior community members. It would be appropriate to replicate this study with age diverse participants.
References


Social Media Measurement: A Step By Step Approach
Using the Amec Valid Metrics Framework

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Angela Jeffrey & Associates

Abstract

Social media measurement can be fairly simple or highly complex depending on one’s organization’s goals and objectives. But with hundreds of tools, thousands of metrics and all too many self-identified measurement gurus, public relations professionals are struggling through a maze of options, unsure which really matter. This paper combines a review of some key literature surrounding social media measurement, provides updates on industry standard-setting bodies, and provides an Eight-Step Social Media Measurement Process as a place to start. The Process utilizes the International Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communication’s (AMEC; www.amecorg.com) new Valid Metrics Framework (see also Daniels, 2012) and includes a generous Appendix of tools and resources.
Introduction

Social media has taken over the public relations industry, changing forever the way PR professionals are creating programs to meet business goals and communications objectives. By now, it is safe to say that most in-house departments or PR agencies have some type of automated tool to monitor what is being said in social media in a broad sense, with results generated in simple charts or graphs. Others struggle to analyze vast numbers of social citations by hand in an effort to derive deeper insights. However, the majority of PR practitioners (and marketers!) have no real idea of what is working and what is not in their social and digital programs. Take a look at these startling findings from three different surveys:

- Only 22% of 700 survey respondents have a strategy that ties data collection and analysis back to business objectives (Econsultancy, 2012, “Sample”).
- Only 28% of 1500 survey respondents struggle to tie analytics back to their campaign strategy, and only 30% are reporting regularly to management. (Alterian, 2011).
- Fifty-seven percent of 622 marketers surveyed by cited “poorly defined success metrics and key performance indicators” (BtoB, 2012, “On Obstacles to Adoption,” para. 1) as among the top three major obstacles to social media marketing adoption.

So, public relations professionals are not alone in the struggle to put meaningful social and digital measurement programs in place. However, senior management in most organizations is now expecting accountability for these programs, so PR Industry leaders and academics must move swiftly to help.

Of course, there’s been no shortage of ideas on how to measure social media. The market is flooded with books, white papers and articles on a variety of ways to tackle the challenge, with each taking a slightly different tack. According to Olivier Blanchard (2011), President of BrandBuilder (www.brandbuilder.com), there is no “universal right or wrong way to apply social media to an organization’s business model” (para. 3). Since every social media program is different, he is correct.

That being said, some key answers are on their way thanks to the development of new standards for both traditional and social media measurement through a cross-industry collaboration of PR trade bodies; social media analytics, advertising and word-of-mouth associations; and blue-chip client companies. This paper will focus on several of these new developments.

Industry Response to The Need for Measurement standards

Since 2010, the following efforts have been made to establish standards and guidelines for traditional and social media measurement:

- **The Barcelona Declaration of Measurement Principles** – This declaration of standards and practices to guide the measurement and evaluation of public relations was first adopted at the 2nd European Summit on Measurement in Barcelona, Spain, in June 2010. Leaders of the charge were AMEC, the Institute for Public Relations (IPR; www.instituteforpr.org), PRSA (www.prsa.org), ICCO (www.iccopr.com) and the Global Alliance (www.globalalliancepr.org), and David Rockland, Ph.D., Partner/Managing Director at Ketchum (www.ketchum.com). Seven Principles were adopted focusing
primarily on the setting of measurable goals and objectives, and the importance of measuring against business outcomes.

- **Valid Metrics Framework for Public Relations Measurement** – a Post-Barcelona Task Force actualized the principles through a Framework providing eight different matrices. Each matrix provides metrics suggestions for assessing the three phases of PR - **PR Activity, Intermediary Effects** and **Target Audience Effects** -- through the **Communications Funnel**, from Awareness through Action. The matrices address different kinds of PR programs including product/brand, reputation, crisis, non-profit, issues, education and more. The Task Force was led by Ruth Pestana, former Worldwide Director of Strategic Services of Hill and Knowlton, and Tim Marklein, Practice Leader, Technology & Analytics at W2O Group (www.w2ogroup.com).

- **Coalition for Public Relations Research Standards** – A further outgrowth of the Barcelona Principles, and through AMEC, Global Alliance, PRSA, IPR and the Council of Public Relations Firms (www.prfirms.org), the Coalition has created an interactive site where opinions can come together in the creation and adoption of standards for research and measurement. This group, and site, seeks to set standards in three areas: the Communications Lifecycle, Traditional Media Measurement and Social Media Measurement. The public is welcome to comment on the site on proposed standards as they emerge (www.instituteforpr.org/researchstandards).

- **The #SMM Standards Conclave** - Formed in 2011 the Conclave is the social media working group of the Coalition, and has brought together a wide variety of associations and corporations to establish social media measurement standards in six key areas: Content Sourcing and Methods; Reach and Impressions; Engagement; Influence and Relevancy; Opinion and Advocacy; and Impact and Value (http://www.smmstandards.org). Each suggested standard is “open for comments” on the site, with ratification to follow. As of this writing, the first key standards area has been set through the ratification of the Transparency Table (http://www.smmstandards.com/category/content-sourcing-methods), which provides for the consistent reporting of Content Sourcing & Methods. Just some of the players include the IPR, AMEC, PRSA, the Council of PR Firms (www.prfirms.org) and Katie Delahaye Paine (www.kdpaine.com), CMO of News Group International.

Since there is not yet a unified standard in place for measuring social media, this paper will introduce the reader to two processes that should help during the interim period:

- **The AMEC Valid Metrics Framework** – as discussed above with a special focus on the Social/Community Engagement Matrix.

- **Eight-Step Social Media Measurement Process** – this process was developed by this author to make implementation of the AMEC Valid Metrics Process simpler, and was based on earlier work done by Katie Paine. This step-by-step guide not only works through the Framework, but also provides comments and suggested tools from industry luminaries.
1. Define organizational goals.
2. Research stakeholders and prioritize.
3. Set specific objectives for each prioritized stakeholder group.
4. Set social media Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) against each stakeholder objective.
5. Choose tools and benchmark (using the AMEC Matrix).
   - Public Relations Activity
   - Intermediary Effects
   - Target Audience Effects
6. Analyze the results and compare to costs.
7. Present to management.
8. Measure continuously and improve performance.

**Step One: Define Organizational Goals**

An organizational goal is, “a broad idea of what one would like to happen” … whereas an objective is, “a clearly defined statement that includes an action statement (a verb), a timeline and a measurable outcome, according to Drs. Donald Stacks and Shannon Bowen (2011, para. 4, emphasis added). Step One is to simply define broad organizational goals that might be affected by a PR or social media campaign; Step Three will address the setting of specific objectives.

So what are some common organizational goals that a social media program might help achieve? Sally Falkow, Social Media and Digital PR Strategist at Meritus Media, (www.meritusmedia.com) offered some great ideas for goals during a 2010 private training session:

- **Increasing positive brand awareness and reputation.** (A great example was Dell’s incredible turn-around from “Dell Hell”);
- **Establishing thought leadership.** (Consider Sun Microsystems’ revitalization of its brand through dedicated blogging);
- **Increasing sales.** (Think about Stormhoek Wines reaping a 400% sales increase after sending products to bloggers);
- **Reducing R&D spend.** (Consider the 98% of online respondents who said they’d definitely buy a product they had helped evolve through a process like Dell’s IdeaStorm).

Olivier Blanchard (2011) adds goals like improving customer service (think Comcast), extending digital marketing (think Old Spice and Pepsi) and plugging social media into every department (think GM, Starbucks and Best Buy).

Jim Sterne (2010, p. xxvii) suggests that all organizational goals fit within the three viable categories below. His book, *Social Media Metrics*, is an excellent read on how to measure each of these goals on a very granular basis.

- To raise revenue
- To lower costs
- To increase customer satisfaction
Katie Paine (2010) presented a slightly different structure for organizational goals in her blog post, *The Social Media Manifesto*:

- Sales or marketing gains
- Increasing engagement
- Improving relationships or reputation

One other goal not mentioned by any of these authors is to increase brand preference and loyalty. Both Sterne’s and Paine’s directives teach practitioners to keep overarching goals simple and clear, understanding that social media will be only one of many channels needed to reach them. Step Two will focus on researching internal and external audiences to set additional goals for key business units.

**Step Two: Research Stakeholders and Prioritize**

Organizations have many stakeholders and limited budgets with which to reach them. Therefore, once the organizational goals are set, it’s critical to determine the most important audiences to reach. After this step, measurable objectives can be set.

**Internal Research** – The best place to start is to talk with key players within the organization to ascertain where social media can best contribute to goals in areas such as marketing, sales, customer service, HR and so on. Be sure to identify what PR and social media is accomplishing for them now, and what real success might look like. Write-up the internal research findings and then prepare for external research.

**External Research** – This process consists of three parts, and will take considerable effort. But, it is the single most important step one can take in building an effective foundation. The first step is to create a *Social Graph* to identify where in the social media sphere important stakeholders are involved; steps two and three involve listening to what they are saying.

1. **Creating a Social Graph** – *(Finding Key Stakeholders)*

   Sally Falkow recommends one create a *social graph* for each of the organization’s most important brands or services, a process that may take many weeks if it is being done by hand. To do a social graph:

   - Take each key stakeholder group that is important to the organization and obtain names or email lists of their most important members. Alternatively, do keyword searches to find likely stakeholders and influencers. These groups might include the media, bloggers, customers, employees, vendors, analysts, investors, etc.
   - Then, discover where each person is engaged in the social sphere. If necessary, limit the exercise to the most critical groups to the business. One can use an email marketing service like MailChimp (www.mailchimp.com) to get more information about people on an email list. Within MailChimp, plugins like Rapleaf (www.rapleaf.com) can provide detailed demographic information and SocialPro (blog.mailchimp.com/social-pro-connects-your-email-list-to-social-web/) shows where current customers, donors and people on the list participate in social media.
Fliptop (www.fliptop.com) is yet another tool that enables one to add social data to an email list.

- The goal is to determine how best to reach each group and through which social media channels, recognizing that there will be a great deal of overlap.

While this process can be daunting, a number of automated tools and supplier firms can make it easier and are outlined in APPENDIX A.

2. **Surveying (Offline Listening to Key Stakeholders)**
   
   Falkow also recommends running surveys to learn more about stakeholder interests, their opinions about the organization and its competitors, their behaviors and how involved they may be on the social media scale. There are many sources for excellent offline (or online) surveys today, several of which have been included in APPENDIX A.

3. **Online Listening (Keyword and Message Analysis)**
   
   Whether or not one has the chance to do a survey, a great deal of needed information can be gathered from the conversations gleaned through online listening tools in a Keyword and Message Analysis. One can quickly discover what stakeholders are actually saying about an organization and its competitors in terms of recurring themes, complaints, topics and messages.

   With the sheer number of artificial intelligence, automated social media analysis tools in today’s marketplace, it’s relatively easy to set-up Boolean search strings to find keyword and message hotspots. However, the automated tools can only go so far since they suffer from limited accuracy. At some point, a human must analyze what is being said.

   Since no one has time to analyze all social citations about a given topic or message, a simple solution is to pull a random sample of citations from each search. Simple sampling techniques have been provided by CARMA International (www.carma.com) in APPENDIX C.
Also in APPENDIX A are five steps toward conducting a keyword/message analysis, as suggested by Katie Paine (2011, pp. 100-103).

At the end of Step Two, one should have a good sense of the most important stakeholders, where they are active in social media, what they think of the organization and its competitors, and how they can be helped. While smaller companies may not have the resources to undertake all of these steps, they are strongly encouraged to select some type of stakeholder identification and listening program since these measures will form the benchmarks for their entire programs.

**Step Three: Set Specific Objectives for Each Prioritized Stakeholder Group**

At the conclusion of this research, it is time to meet again with key internal managers and together decide which goals and stakeholders will take priority for the PR and/or social media program. Once these choices have been made, one can move to setting specific objectives for each stakeholder group. Remember that an objective must include an action statement, a timeline and a measurement outcome (usually expressed as a % increase).

- If a company’s goal is to increase sales among the 25-54 year old age group, a specific objective might be to increase leads among this target audience by 50% over the next six months.
- Or, if the goal is to increase leads for a new hi-tech product among men 18-24, a specific objective might be to increase Share of Voice by 20% over the next twelve months.
- If the goal is to raise the professional level of employees, a specific objective might be to increase the number of resumes from top college graduates by 15% over the next three months.

Kami Huyse talks about using SMART Objectives in social media in the book, *Welcome to the Fifth Estate* (Livingston, 2011) and also in her whitepaper, *A Commonsense Framework to Measure Social Media* (Zoetica Media, 2011). SMART Objectives were first developed by George Doran (1981) and were intended as a powerful management tool. The steps to building SMART Objectives include making them Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Results Oriented and Time Bound.

Once specific, measurable objectives have been set for each key stakeholder group, it is time to build the communications programs and simultaneously select tactical measurements, or Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). It is important to acknowledge that most plans that get to this point will not be solely designed for social media. They will instead encompass tools from both the online AND offline worlds, and may well include tools from paid media and SEO. But, this paper will remain primarily focused on social media.

**Part Four: Set Social Media KPLs against Each Stakeholder Objective**

A major step in measuring social media is to define one’s KPIs. During a 2010 training webinar, Shel Holtz, principal of Holtz Communication + Technology (www.holtz.com) defined a KPI as a “quantifiable measurement, agreed to beforehand, that reflect the critical success factors of one’s effort.” Whichever KPIs are selected, they must relate to organizational
goals, be key to its success and be quantifiable ... and use technical data, which shows progress over time. Some of the examples Holtz gave included:

- “If one’s goal is to reduce costs, then one would measure the actual cost savings produced by the effort (such as reduced travel costs).”
- “If one’s objective is to increase inquiries, web traffic and/or recruitment, one might select a percentage increase in traffic and/or the number of click-throughs or downloads as KPIs.”
- “If one’s objective is to engage the marketplace, one might seek a Conversation Index greater than 8 and a % increase in engagement as KPIs, leading one to use web analytics or content analysis.” (Conversation Index = # of Audience Comments, Replies or Shares per Post divided by the number of posts).

Key Performance Indicators vary widely depending on the business goals and stakeholder objectives. A few of the popular performance metrics suggested by a Gleanster (2011, pp. 9-10) report that recaps its 2011 survey on Top Performers, include the tracking of:

- The number of data sources and overall volume
- The volume of relevant conversations (to gain a clear sense of who is talking about the brand by age, gender, geography, psychographic and behavior attributes)
- The number of brand advocates and influencers (and those who are engaged) and who is saying what, where and how
- Customer satisfaction and brand advocacy scores like the Net Promoter Score (www.netpromoter.com).

Jim Sterne (2010) cites Erik T. Peterson’s (2006, pp. 7-8) Big Book of Key Performance Indicators as the place to go for web KPIs. Peterson provides five critical tips for effective KPIs. In addition, his free online book comes with a set of Excel templates for the creation and tracking of KPIs.

- “Use rates, ratios, percentages, and averages instead of raw numbers”
- “Leverage tachometers and thermometers and stoplights instead of pie charts and bar graphs”
- “Provide temporal context and highlight change instead of presenting tables of data.”
- “Drive business-critical action” … (i.e. “inspires someone to send an email, pick up the phone or take a quick walk to find help”).

The following paraphrases some KPI guidelines from Paine (2011, pp. 85, 87-88):

- If one’s goals/objectives focus on measuring sales, KPIs might include the % increase in conversion rates, click-throughs to a specific URL, increase in conversations, online donations, membership sign-ups, etc.
- If one’s goals/objectives focus on brand engagement, KPIs might include the ratio of posts to comments; increase in unique visitors; number of returning visitors; number of pages downloaded; number of download requests; sessions lasting longer than five
If one’s goals/objectives focus on improving relationships, KPIs need to include surveys to see increased satisfaction, percent improvement in willingness to recommend, increase in trust or satisfaction scores, and percent willing to do business again.

A wonderful visual example (see chart below) of how easy it can be to sketch out specific KPIs once goals and objectives have been established comes from the web analytics guru, Avinash Kaushik (www.kaushik.net), in his Occam’s Razor post, Digital Marketing and Measurement Model (Kaushik, 2013). This particular plan, which was centered on a website strategy, addresses goals for a home builder who ultimately wanted to generate sales. Three key objectives were set with the following KPIs:

- **Create Awareness** – KPI is Branded Traffic to Website at 7,000 visits/month
- **Generate Leads** – KPIs are email marketing conversions to newsletter subscriptions (45/month) and E-requests for home tours (20/month)
- **Highlight Events** – KPI is Downloads of site event information (150/month)

To set KPI numeric goals, take a look first at historical data. If none exists, take a best guess and adjust as needed after the first months of the campaign.

This paper will discuss more about web analytics for measuring any kind of social media program since web metrics are concrete and easy to track against goals. Be sure to read Kaushik’s (2013) complete article for help getting started with creating a model.
Step Five: Choose Tools and Benchmark (Using the AMEC Valid Metrics Framework)

At this point, one must decide who to measure against, whether it is just one’s own organization over time, or against competitors. Then, one can coordinate his entire measurement program using the AMEC Valid Metrics Framework, which is actualized in eight matrices that have been applied to following types of campaigns: Brand/Product Marketing, Reputation Building, Issues Advocacy/Support, Employee Engagement, Investor Relations, Crisis/Issues Management, Not-for-Profit and Social/Community Engagement. The Matrices enable the selection of select appropriate tools and measures for one’s KPIs across the campaign with a keen eye toward real business outcomes.

To make the Matrices easy to use, the practice of public relations has been broken down into three phases:

- The message or story is created and told
- The story is disseminated via a third party/intermediary, (such as a journalist, influencer or blogger)
- The story is consumed by the target audience, which (hopefully) leads to changes in behavior and business results.iv

These three phases are thus reflected in the Vertical Axis of each matrix as follows:

- **Public Relations Activity** – metrics reflecting efforts in producing and disseminating messages
- **Intermediary Effect** – metrics reflecting third-party dissemination of messages to target audiences
- **Target Audience Effect** – metrics showing the target audience has received the messages and any resulting action-driven outcomes.

The Horizontal Axis then reflects what is commonly known as the Communications or Marketing Funnel with the five stages listed below:

- **Awareness** – are intermediary and target audiences aware of one’s efforts?
- **Knowledge** – are these audiences becoming clearer about the facts?
- **Interest** – are they giving consideration to one’s offer?
- **Support** – have they moved toward supporting the offer?
- **Action** – are they taking action in measurable business outcomes?

Within each Matrix, suitable metrics have been grouped to help one demonstrate a campaign’s success vertically (from simple activity to output and outcome results) and horizontally (through the five communications stages). Bottom line, the goal is to move diagonally across the matrix, from top left to bottom right, to the degree possible.

Valid Metrics for PR Measurement - *Putting the Principles into Action*

Based on the Barcelona Declaration of Measurement Principles

7 June 2011 (see also endnote iv)
From this point forward, this paper will focus upon the AMEC Valid Metrics Framework for *Social/Community Engagement*, which is shown on the following page with a deep dive into metrics for the three phases – Public Relations Activity, Intermediary Effect and Target Audience Effect. The metrics in this example are not all inclusive, but give a solid foundation upon which to start selecting meaningful ones for each state.
**Public Relations Activity**

What actual PR activities will one undertake to build a program? It’s critical to keep track of the efforts that are made by monitoring the types of activities the Matrix above suggests, such as:

- Content creation (the number of assets created, videos/podcasts)
- Social media engagement (numbers of blog posts, blogger events, blogger briefings, Twitter posts, community site posts and events)
- Influencer and stakeholder engagement (what activities were undertaken to drive engagement forward, such as the number of Facebook and Twitter posts, community site posts, etc.)
- Events/speeches, offline community events and traditional media outreach

These data points can later be compared to resulting response and business activity, and can even be correlated to business results. At this point, one doesn’t know if these types of activities had any effect on a program, or not. They are simply a measurement of effort.

**Intermediary Effects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Audience Effect</th>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Interest</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unaided awareness</td>
<td>Owned media site visitors per day</td>
<td>Social network channel visitors</td>
<td>Knowledge of company/product attributes and features</td>
<td>Brand association and differentiation</td>
<td>Relevance of brand (to consumer/customer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aided awareness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Key message alignment [traditional &amp; social media]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impressions/Target audience impressions</td>
<td>Earned media site visitors/day</td>
<td>% share of conversation</td>
<td>Accuracy of facts</td>
<td>% share of conversation</td>
<td>Endorsement by journalists or influencers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social network followers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rankings on industry lists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retweets/Shares/Linkbacks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Expressed opinions of support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% share of conversation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social network fans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video views</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Likes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prominence</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Within social media, several of these metrics could straddle two rows as an Intermediary Effect and/or Target Audience Effect, depending on who’s engaged in the conversation. For simplicity, we have listed these metrics under Intermediary Effect to reflect the general conversation as you would not know if all participants are in your target audience. If the commenters are known to be in your Target Audience, you could reflect those metrics under Target Audience Effect.

**Public Relations Activity**

- Content creation (the number of assets created, videos/podcasts)
- Social media engagement (numbers of blog posts, blogger events, blogger briefings, Twitter posts, community site posts and events)
- Influencer and stakeholder engagement (what activities were undertaken to drive engagement forward, such as the number of Facebook and Twitter posts, community site posts, etc.)
- Events/speeches, offline community events and traditional media outreach

These data points can later be compared to resulting response and business activity, and can even be correlated to business results. At this point, one doesn’t know if these types of activities had any effect on a program, or not. They are simply a measurement of effort.
This is where one ascertains how the media, bloggers and key influencers (third parties) responded to PR activities across Awareness, Knowledge, Interest and Support. Are they communicating the right messages, in a positive manner, in a greater volume than competitive messages? Have they gone so far as to endorse or recommend? The goal for Intermediary Effects is to get past the simplistic quantitative measures in the Awareness column (which are really just proxies for potential awareness), and toward the more sophisticated metrics in Interest and Support.

There are two basic methods for measuring Intermediary Effects:

- **Measuring “owned media”** sites (websites, Facebook and Twitter pages, for example)
- **Measuring “non-owned sites – or earned media”** (everything else)

One caveat for this section must be mentioned here. It is often very difficult, if not impossible, to determine if the responders to Owned and Earned Media are really “Intermediary” channels or are, in fact, “Target Audience” members in social media. AMEC is currently studying this and may issue an update to the Framework later in 2013. The measures shared below are effective regardless of whether an “Intermediary third party” or a “Target Audience member” responded to campaign activities.

- **Measuring “Owned Sites”** – The first step is to benchmark and set measures for each of one’s owned sites, be they websites, blogs, Twitter or Facebook pages, YouTube, etc. Pick and choose the metrics that can best act as KPIs for program objectives and benchmark before the program begins. The following is just an outline, but APPENDIX B includes a full selection of metrics and tools that summarize key advice for:
  - Blogs and Websites
  - Twitter Sites
  - Facebook Sites
  - Bookmarking Sites
  - YouTube, Flickr and Other Image Sites
  - Compound Influence Scores

Track the growth on all the channels mentioned above so one can eventually overlay the scores with PR activities, correlate the two and identify what is working best.

- **Measuring “Non-Owned Site” - Earned Media** – Next, see what Intermediary Effects the media and bloggers are having on the campaign. First, find a good listening platform to bring in as much content as possible. A few free (or nearly free) tools include Google, SocialMention, Twazzup, HootSuite, BlogPulse and IceRocket. Some great paid tools include Vocus, Cymfony, Sysomos, Dow Jones Insight, Seesmic, Alterian SM2 and NM Incite.

Once the content is obtained, determine which KPIs work best, such as: share of conversation, key message alignment, accuracy of facts, expressed opinions, endorsements by journalists or influencers, rankings on industry lists –and other metrics that indicate movement from Awareness, Knowledge, Interest and Support – which will stimulate the Target Audience to act.
Two key methods for measuring Earned Media include the following, which are presented in detail in APPENDIX C:

- Content Analysis – for qualitative evaluation of what is being said
- Source Strength – for quantitative evaluation of earned-media sites

Pulling metrics, regardless of how many are chosen, can take hours of work each week, especially when one uses a bevy of free tools. It’s best to find a paid tool that fits one’s objectives.


- Ask potential providers whether or not they supplement aggregated data feeds with their own web-crawler, and if so, how deep it goes into sites?
- Does the crawler reach the home page only, or can it penetrate down to the specific URL level?
- What kind of data cleaning will be done?
- How much storage will one receive, how far back does it go and how easy will it be for one to access the data?
- Make sure to understand as much as possible about the measurement formulas and weightings used by the tool, recognizing that no formula will be perfect (and many are proprietary).
- Finally, check references, account team and pricing.

**Target Audience Effects**

This is the most exciting section of the AMEC Framework, where it pairs Public Relations Activity and Intermediary Effects with Target Audience Effects. It’s good to recognize that many Intermediary activities may, in fact, be the end goal for some programs. But for most, it is critical to link efforts through all the stages to real business outcomes.

Outcomes can be hard or soft, ranging from leads or sales increases and efficiency savings to brand awareness, customer loyalty and customer service success. There are many ways to measure this final step, which are presented in depth in APPENDIX D and include:

- Surveys
- Statistics
- Web Analytics
  - For Non-E-commerce Sites:
  - For E-commerce sites
- Measuring Across Silos
Step Six: Analyze the Results and Compare to Costs

A major problem public relations practitioners face when trying to pull measurement results together were summarized in a PR News (www.prnewsonline.com) article, *Avoiding Measurement Blind Spots* by Margot Sinclair Savell (2010), Senior Vice President Global Measurement at Hill+Knowlton Strategies (www.hkstrategies.com). She wrote:

*Because of the large volume of social media conversations, people frequently want to provide quantitative metrics only, without looking behind the numbers to determine trends, successes and missed opportunities. They create beautiful spreadsheets that show month-over-month or quarter-over-quarter changes, along with charts to visually demonstrate the data. But data does not equal intelligence. Analyzing the data brings actionable insights and recommendations that can be used to revise future strategy.* (para. 5)

Sinclair Savell is right. Taking the deep dive to glean insights and make course correction is the real reason for measurement in the first place. One must go back and look for the articles and citations underlying spikes and valleys in online and offline coverage. What could have been done differently during those periods? What are the competition’s weaknesses? Where can one grab more of their target audience? If this type of analysis isn’t one’s area of strength, consider outsourcing the data set to a firm that specializes in social media analysis.

In addition to analyzing data for insights, it is critical to compare program costs against identified results. However, most PR results are not financial in nature, so using “Return on Investment” or “ROI” can be tricky. Recent discussions on the topic of ROI led to a spirited debate following the 2012 International PR Research Conference, “ROI – The Miami Debate” which was led by Prof. Tom Watson (Bournemouth University), Prof. Ansgar Zerfass (Leipzig University) and Mark Weiner, CEO of Prime Research. A summary report and audio recordings of this debate can be found at http://www.instituteforpr.org/2012/07/roi-%E2%80%93-the-miami-debate/.

Among several opinions included in the pending Interim Standard is that of Fraser Likely, President of Likely Communication Strategies Ltd. (www.instituteforpr.org/bio/fraser-likely). Likely contends that “ROI is a financial measure that should only be used in cases where both the money invested (the “I” of ROI) and the money earned or saved (the “R” of ROI) can both be measured in financial terms. ROI should not be used when referring to results of non-financial measures.” He further contends that ROI can really only be measured at the organizational level, not at the campaign level. However, not everyone agrees. At this time of writing, the Interim Standard for ROI (currently under development) suggests the following, as penned by Tim Marklein of W2O Group (www.w2ogroup.com):

- ROI should be calculated using the standard financial accounting formula (see below).
- There is some debate about whether ROI can be calculated on a program, which would be treated as an expense in accounting, or should be restricted to the organization overall.
- The term “Results” does not equal “ROI.” We need to use additional measures such as “total value,” as advocated by all authors cited in the document.
The Interim Standards do allow for the idea that programs that directly tie to sales could possibly use the ROI formula. However, for non-sales programs, there are other forms of financial accountability such as the CFA – “cost-effectiveness analysis.” Katie Paine (2011) includes more than a dozen great ideas for cost effectiveness comparisons in her book. Here are a few:

- Factor in the cost-per-click or cost-per-lead to help judge the efficiency of different programs.
- Pull sales data from web analytics and CRM systems and compare against costs.
- Look at cost savings in areas like customer service and recruitment.
- Look at Paid vs. Earned search rankings; if Earned search is doing well, it may be possible to decrease Paid.
- Look at cost avoidance in a crisis situation. What could it have cost if one’s campaign hadn’t calmed things down?
- Look at one’s social capital. Studies have shown that the more relationships one has, the better. Social capital can be measured by looking at data like customer and employee turnover, legal costs and productivity scores.

**Part Seven: Presenting to the CEO**

So how does one pull everything together for the CEO and other management aficionados without presenting a virtual “thud” of information? In her article, *Communicating Results to the C-Suite*, Marianne Eisenmann (2011) of the Chandler Chicco Companies ([www.chandlerchicco.com](http://www.chandlerchicco.com)) recommends finding out how management likes to receive data, and then identify the questions they have in advance. If other departments are reporting regularly, then the PR department should format its report in the same way.

One should tell his story as quickly as possible. The best way is to create a dashboard or scorecard with headlines, bullets and metrics that show trending. Make sure to show how key messages and other variables might have impacted business goals. For instance, did a particular media event drive website visits? Did a particular story link to donations? Highlight especially meaningful conversations, successful blogger outreach, or other anecdotal comments to put everything in context.

Most important, if survey results, correlations to outcomes, or solid tracking data from web analytics exists, be sure to include those results in the summary dashboard as it will resonate best with a CEO.
Step Eight: Measure Continuously and Improve Performance

Measurement should only happen once if one has a one-time event or program. Otherwise, it’s critical that one keeps his measurement program going so better benchmarks and goals can be set, and programs refined, over time. Jim Sterne (2010) defines a “healthy community” as one that is:

- Growing
- Useful (# of posts and page views)
- Popular (traffic and page views)
- Responsive
- Interactive (thread depth, average number of posts in threads and the number of unique contributors)
- Lively (number of posts and distribution)

Without measuring regularly, one would not know whether or not his community, or any PR program, was “healthy.” To stay on track, set a regular schedule for deep analysis and presentations to management.

The remainder of this paper provides deep resources for all phases of the AMEC Framework discussed throughout this paper. Keep in mind that social media analysis methods change at light speed, so one must remain ever-vigilant to seek out new thinking, standards and resources. Good luck!
Appendix A
Research Stakeholders and Prioritize

Creating a Social Graph -

- **Ecairn** (www.ecairn.com) a paid tool that will find communities based on keyword searches, rank the influencers, and organize communities based on one’s objectives. It can map conversations and show one’s progress as one engages. Well worth reviewing.

- **Fliptop** (www.fliptop.com) – an amazing dashboard that accepts email lists or social identifiers (i.e. a twitter handle) and provides one with each person’s social profile. The system returns Names, Age Range, Gender, Location, Employer, Occupation, Influence Score, and all the Key Networks on which the individuals are engaged. As of this writing, the tool locates 25-50% of people searched. Results can also be integrated into other dashboards via an API.

- **Row Feeder** by Simply Measured (www.rowfeeder.com) – a great search system that will track keywords, hash-tags or usernames from Twitter or Facebook and deliver the statistics in Excel.

- **Traackr** (www.traackr.com) – will identify influencers based on keyword searches, and more importantly, by industry type. It provides reach, resonance and relevance by topic, delivering key lists and full influencer profiles. Traackr products range from enterprise to small business and and has gained a strong following among sophisticated social media analysts.

- **WeFollow** (www.wefollow.com) – This free site started as a Twitter directory in 2009 and has since grown to a community of over 1.3 million users. Each member has identified their interests, so they can be identified by special interest and sorted by the Wefollow Prominence Score. This ranking system (while not perfect) allows the user to quickly discover, follow and learn from the most prominent people around the world … and add them to one’s social graph for free.

Surveying Audiences -

- There are hundreds, if not thousands, of primary research firms that provide excellent internal and external in-depth interviews (One-on-One, Dyads or Focus Groups) and full surveys). A few are listed below that this author recommends:
  - **Forrest W. Anderson Consulting** (forrestwanderson.com) - former research director for GolinHarris, Burson-Marsteller and Text 100, and member of the IPR Measurement Commission) -- custom research of any kind with full understanding of the needs of PR.
  - **ORC International** (www.orcinternational.com) (formerly Opinion Research Corporation) – has a great omnibus survey practice as well as custom research
capabilities.

- **Koski Research** (www.koskiresearch.com) – specializes in brand/reputation assessment, opinion research and message testing, as well as other services.
- **C+R Research** (www.crresearch.com) – full service research provider.
- **GfK** (www.gfk.com) – full-service international research firm.

**Forrester** (www.forrester.com) - Forrester provides proprietary research, consumer and business data and custom consulting to help one understand the level of social sophistication among consumers in a given industry. **Forrester's Social Technographics** data classifies consumers into seven overlapping levels of social technology participation, which are: Inactives, Spectators, Joiners, Collectors, Critics, Creators and Consumers. If consumers are Inactive in social media, then offline PR campaigns are needed. If they are highly active – depending, of course, on other demographic and age parameters – they can best be reached through creative online campaigns that are interactive and have the potential for virality. Forrester provides a free tool at [http://empowered.forrester.com/tool_consumer.html](http://empowered.forrester.com/tool_consumer.html) to enable users to get a high-level snapshot of the social technology behaviors of their broad targets. To obtain deeper profiles, Forrester Research's Consumer Technographics® data covers hundreds of brands, consumer attitudes, and behaviors globally and can be purchased on their website or through their sales department.

**iPerceptions** (www.iperceptions.com) – a research firm with innovative website surveys including the award-winning free **4Q website tool**. The 4Q, which is highly recommended by Avinash Kaushik, allows business owners to evaluate the online experience, measure customer satisfaction and quickly implement website improvements based on real visitor feedback.

**SurveyMonkey** – for those without large survey budgets, the web is full of great DIY surveys that can be sent to smaller stakeholder groups. Again, the key question is to determine how engaged the stakeholder groups are in social media along with their
interests, demographics, preferred social platforms, etc. This paper will explore the identification of influencers in more depth later in this paper, but for now, simply look for ways to segment target publics to the degree possible.

Continued on next page
Appendix A
Research Stakeholders and Prioritize
Continued

Keyword and Message Analysis – (Summarized from *Measuring What Matters*)

- Identify what keyword phrases people are using to find one’s site through web analytics tools (such as Google Analytics (www.google.com/analytics) and through keyword tools such as Google AdWords (www.accounts.google.com) or Wordtracker.com (www.wordtracker.com))

- Set-up search strings in Google Alerts or a paid tool using these phrases, and refine to pull up the most relevant results. You can have these searches delivered via email or subscribe to them in Google Reader or other RSS feed readers.

- Set-up an Excel spreadsheet to track posts and articles using these phrases as they come in. In each column, list: Date, Source, Author and Subject, and also note if there are Comments, Links, Trackbacks or Retweets.

- Finally, figure out which sources matter most.

- Figure out how the organization and its competitors are seen. This information will be very important for benchmarking purposes.

Paid tools like Vocus (www.vocus.com), Radian6 (www.radian6.com); Alterian SM2 (www.alterian.com) and Sysomos Heartbeat and Map (www.sysomos.com) are great for specific keyword searches, tracking conversations, rating them with key metrics and sentiment, and outputting results to a spreadsheet for further analysis. These tools can greatly shorten the time required for these tasks compared to using free tools like Google Alerts (www.google.com/alerts), Social Mention (www.socialmention.com), IceRocket (www.icerocket.com) or Addict-o-matic (http://addictomatic.com).

Attensity (www.attensity.com), a leader in customer experience management, reminds users to also check bookmarking sites and structured review pages to find out what stakeholders are searching for, and what their opinions might be. Important sites include Digg (www.digg.com), Reddit (www.reddit.com), Stumbleupon (www.stumbleupon.com), Bazaarvoice (www.bazaarvoice.com) and Yelp (www.yelp.com).
Appendix B
Measuring Owned Sites

The metrics and suggestions that follow are recommended for measuring owned channels, and summarize advice from Jim Sterne, Avinash Kaushik, Katie Paine, Sally Falkow, Kami Huyse, this author, and others.

1. Blogs and Websites

- **Visitors, Unique Visitors and Visits** – Benchmarking these simple numbers for owned sites is important for gauging awareness as intermediaries and target audiences move across the funnel. They can be found in Google Analytics (http://www.google.com/analytics), which is free in the event one doesn’t have access to a paid tool.

  Google has recently expanded its offerings through NextAnalytics for Excel (www.nextanalytics.com), which offers hundreds of charts aggregating one’s website, Facebook page, Twitter page, LinkedIn, YouTube and other data feeds. The software packages range from $299/year to $995/year and deliver data into Excel spreadsheets, charts or graphs. NextAnalytics is definitely worth checking out.

  Web analytics tracks movement from basic exposure/awareness through all the steps of the AMEC Valid Metrics Matrices, and can complete the picture with conversions to sales, memberships, page downloads, and dozens of other metrics. To identify Intermediary activity, look at Referral Sites to see which media sources, blogs or influencers are sending traffic.

- **Comments** – Counting comments is also important for gauging awareness, but to measure further across the Matrices, one should consider using the Conversation Index, which measures the # of Audience Comments or Replies per Post (divided by the total posts or activity). If one is posting more often than he is receiving comments, he is in a broadcasting stage and his audience is not progressing through the stages. One can read how to calculate this score on the post, Measuring the Online Conversation, written by Kami Huyse (2006).

- **Site and Search Rankings and Authority** – Where does one’s site show up in Google Search (www.google.com)? How does it show up in Alexa (www.alexa.com), Compete (http://www.compete.com/us/) or Quantcast (www.quantcast.com) Rankings? What about inbound links? Or Google PageRank? Is all this information available from a single free site? Yes – WMTips.com (www.wmtips.com) provides it in its Site Information Tool (http://www.wmtips.com/tools/info/). This site also provides a great list of the top keywords for which the site ranks. Again, all are great metrics to benchmark before a program begins and track along the way.

- **RSS Subscribers** – To determine how many subscribers a blog has to its RSS feed, head to Google Reader and search for the blog name. It will bring back a list of results that include the number of people who have subscribed to that blog in Google Reader. This is usually only a fraction of the actual subscribers, but it will give an idea and one can watch to see if...
it grows or shrinks over time. It may not be possible to get an accurate listing of subscribers for influencer sites unless they have been disclosed by the influencers. For owned sites, one can get a more accurate count with a paid service like Feedblitz (http://www.feedblitz.com) or a free service like Google’s Feedburner.

- **Linkbacks** – How many people have clicked-through on blog posts or Twitter links? To find out, make sure to use a URL-shortening site like Bit.ly (www.bit.ly), which tracks the number of clicks on the link. Hootsuite (www.hootsuite.com) also provides link tracking as one of its free report options. Jim Sterne (2010) advises coding the links one posts by a unique code that identifies the campaign. To do this, simply add a “?” mark to the end of each link followed by a campaign identifier. Then, when they are re-tweeted, they can be tracked. Kami Huyse (2010) has a nice tutorial about how to do this using Google’s URL Builder tool.

In case a campaign is already in progress, and posts did not use Bit.ly links, it is still possible to get some idea of how many people linked to those posts by going to Google and entering “link:URL.” This method usually undercounts links, but it is a start. Also see Open Site Explorer by SEOmoz (www.seomoz.com).

Continued on next page
Appendix B
Measuring Owned Sites
Continued

2. Twitter Sites

Management tools like Sprinklr (www.sprinklr.com), SproutSocial (www.sproutsocial.com), Hootsuite (http://hootsuite.com), Spredfast (www.spredfast.com) and many others can help to manage a Twitter account more effectively. Both Hootsuite and Spredfast have a fairly robust set of analytics tools built in, including integration with Google Analytics. Cost and access to account authentication will be the main challenges with these tools. Other tools like Rowfeeder and the free Social Mention can gather data on hashtag or descriptive keywords without access to the account. Here are a few metrics to watch:

- **Number of Followers** – count number of Followers at the outset of a program to establish potential awareness, and watch over time to see if this number increases, and more importantly, if it increases with the right types of followers. It’s important to look at one’s ratio of followees to followers with the goal of having more of the former. Some helpful tools (albeit controversial) for vetting one’s followers to spot Intermediary influencers include: Klout (www.klout.com), PeerIndex (www.peerindex.com), SocialMention, TweetLevel (http://tweetlevel.edelman.com/) and Twitalyzer (www.twitalyzer.com).

- **Retweets** - are one’s tweets being passed along by influential people? Again, check some of the tools in APPENDIX A to identify potential influencers. Check out the free tool Retweetrank, www.retweetrank.com, to benchmark and track retweet success.

- **Retweet Velocity** measures one’s likeliness to be retweeted, how quickly his messages have spread and how well they resonate with his audience. Keep an eye out to see if the same people are retweeting over and over, or if new people are passing the messages on. Check free or paid tools to see if it offers a Retweet Velocity score.

- **Retweet Efficiency** – how many retweets does one get per 100 followers?

- **@Replies** – how many messages does one receive per outbound message? Is he being added to lists and building an audience?

- **Conversation Index on @Replies** – how many @replies does one send versus receive per day? Is he broadcasting or participating? To get this index, divide the number of replies by how many one sent out. The goal is to beat 1.0.

Don’t forget to watch for Twitter drop-outs via a system like GraphEdge, which identifies legitimate followers versus bots, followers and unfollowers, one’s churn rate and even “unique names” in second level networks. It is also possible to determine how many of one’s followers are fake at SocialBakers.com http://www.socialbakers.com/twitter.

3. Facebook Sites
Facebook has a robust measurement system built in with **Insights**; however, it only stores data for a rolling month, so if other data is needed – such as top fans and benchmarking against older data – an external tool is needed. **Sysomos** has some basic stats and sentiment, while **PageLever** (www.pagelever.com) is great for more in-depth analysis. Tools like **Quintly** (www.quintly.com) allow one to easily add benchmarking between the client page and competitors. A general note: When it comes to Facebook, **EdgeRank** (www.edgerank.com) is a critical component of whether or not content will get seen. The following are some metrics to consider:

- **Number of Fans or Friends and Active Users** – benchmark the number of fans, friends and active users at the beginning of the campaign, and watch to see if the number grows with influential members of the media, bloggers, Tweeters, etc. Refer to **APPENDIX A** for tools to measure influencers.

- **Number of Comments** – how many comments does one receive in a given amount of time?
- What is one’s **Conversation Rate** – the percentage of feedback one receives compared to one’s postings?

- **Number of Likes** – is this number growing?

All of these basic metrics can be found for free for company pages right in Facebook (www.facebook.com) on the Insights page (if the site is large enough to qualify), and even more metrics are available as discussed above.

### 4. Bookmarks Sites

- Are influencers “going public” with one’s information by tagging links or posts to social bookmarking sites such as **Stumbleupon** (www.stumbleupon.com) or **Reddit** (www.reddit.com)?
- Are they rating one’s products on review sites such as **Bazaarvoice** (www.bazaarvoice.com)? What are one’s scores prior to launching a program?
- How are influencers categorizing one’s sites? Reviewing this information will affect how an organization’s SEO should be set-up. Look at how people are bookmarking critical sites in Delicious by searching for its URL (delicious.com).

### 5. YouTube, Flickr and other Image Sites

- For Video – **YouTube** (www.youtube.com/analytics) is a powerful cultural tool to identify the next viral video hit. It also has a powerful analytics suite, called **Insights**, which provides number of views, unique users and subscribers; links followed to the video; geography and demographics; and engagement through sharing, ratings, comments and favorites – all for free. Another great resource is OneLoad
(http://www.oneload.com/), which provides tracking and analytics of video content on multiple platforms in one place.

- **For Photos** – Flickr’s analytics tool (www.flickr.com) provides a variety of metrics including the number of views per photo, and how referrers found them, are among the stats available through its subscription option.

- **For Social Photos** – Instagram (instagram.com) has taken off in popularity to share photos with a community of friends. Owned by Facebook, this site allows seamless posting to a number of social networks, including Twitter and Facebook. Third-party services, such as Statigram (http://statigr.am) provides important stats for owned accounts, including the number of likes and comments on the account. For Visual Sharing – Pinterest (http://pinterest.com/) is one of the most explosive new social networks. It allows the aggregation of content in a visual format. The third-party tool Reachli (http://www.reachli.com) allows one to load a “pin” to Pinterest and then track its viral spread.

6. **Compound Influence Scores**

There has been terrific debate about the various Compound Influence Scores available through free and paid tools. The biggest problem is most are not transparent, so one doesn’t really know what is being included in the measure. Another problem is some of the most popular ones, like Klout (www.klout.com), don’t factor in influence by areas of interest. Having said this, while none of the scores below are the Holy Grail, they can be helpful in gaining some sense of progress toward establishing one’s online influence, as well as the influence of one’s targets.

- **Klout** - measures influence based on one’s ability to drive action. Every time one creates content or engages in conversation, one has the potential to influence others. The Klout Score, a number between one and 100, is a representation of one’s overall social media influence. Klout pulls in data from twelve social networks, such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Google+ and so on. The science behind the Score examines more than 400 variables on multiple social networks beyond the number of followers and friends. It looks at who is engaging with one’s content and who they are sharing it with. Klout is an imperfect score since it does not take into account topics or areas of influence, though it does list endorsements on topics. These stats are easily gamed.

- **PeerIndex** (www.peerindex.com) – like Klout, PeerIndex provides a 0-100 composite score that is meant to measure online authority. It reflects the impact of one’s online activities, and the extent to which one has built up social and reputational capital on the web. PeerIndex goes beyond popularity and looks at one’s authority on a category by category level using eight benchmark topics. It also determines whether or not one’s audience is listening and receptive. Finally, an activity score is included since that will determine the share of attention one receives. Data is pulled from Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com), Quora (www.quora.com) and one’s Blog. The site provides great information regarding who is Retweeting and
replying to one most often.

- **SocialMention** – yet another composite score based on social media citations in 80+ social media properties. This score is based on: Strength (the likelihood one’s brand is being discussed); Sentiment (the ratio of positive to negative); Passion (the likelihood that those talking about one’s brand will do so repeatedly); and Reach (the number of unique authors divided by the total mentions).

- **TweetLevel** – This free tool is a project developed by Jonny Bentwood (@JonnyBentwood) from Edelman. TweetLevel ([http://tweetlevel.edelman.com](http://tweetlevel.edelman.com)) measures influence, popularity, engagement, and trust on Twitter and gives a score for each area, as well as an overall score. It also looks at what factors make up engagement, demand and reach for a given user and it gives them a category to determine what kind of Twitter user they are: Idea Starters, Amplifiers, Curators, Commentators or Reviewers.
Appendix C
Measuring Earned Media (Non-owned Sites)

1. Content Analysis

Using keyword searches in automated monitoring and analysis systems, organizations can establish where they and their competitors stand in terms of impressions, reach, computer-generated sentiment, general messaging and topics. This exercise will give one the ‘big picture’ with some directional information, and some sense of one’s share of conversation. However, be aware that computer processing of sentiment and messaging is only about 70% accurate, according to Forrester. Thus, it is critical to dig deeper by doing a Content Analysis with human analysts on at least a sample of the coverage. How does one get an accurate and reliable sample of coverage?

During a 2012 PRSA/AMEC Measurement Workshop, this author presented advice from Chris Scully, Vice President Research Director of CARMA International (www.carma.com), for how to create a good sample of clips for human analysis:

- **Sampling Techniques Include:**
  - Use a targeted list of outlets/users (a Key Media list)
  - Use outlets/users that meet other key criteria (Influencer scores, geographies, etc.)
  - Use the whole traditional or social media universe

- **Ensure that your Sample is Random and Large Enough:**
  - Take every Nth article from your designated article universe so you get 500 to – 1,000 citations, which is typically sufficient.
  - Or, get a free “sample-size calculator,” which can determine your minimums to get a margin of error of less than +/- 5 percent, with a 95% degree of confidence. Just search Google for such calculators, such as [this one](#) from Creative Research Systems.

Once you’ve got a good sample, score each citation by hand for variables such as:

- Topic/Category
- Dominance (how much of the story did the organization own?)
- Prominence (how high up in the story was it featured?)
- Sentiment
- Key messages
- Quotes
- Positioning on key issues

It is possible to do this work in Excel, using each row for a media placement and each column for a variable. After running a Content Analysis, and if competitive coverage was included, one can determine where the organization stands in regards to its competitors and against topics and issues as a whole. Refer to Paine (2011) for additional information on how to do a Content Analysis.
Many monitoring and analysis systems are on the market today to simplify this task – especially those that are supported by human analysis teams. CARMA International (www.carma.com), Cision (www.cision.com) and Salience Research (www.newsgroupholding.com) are three that offer automated tools and professional services to provide automated ‘big picture’ and ‘accurate sample’ analysis.

Bottom line – benchmark and continue to measure against KPI goals such as key message penetration, quality of coverage, and how one’s organization stacks up to the competition. Watch especially for endorsements, rankings and expressed opinions in the coverage as those imply “Interest” and “Support” and most successfully lead to Target Audience Effect.
Appendix C  
Measuring Earned Media (Non-owned Sites)  
Continued

2. Source Strength

Now let’s look at whether or not the media and bloggers are helping move one’s audience along the funnel by gauging their reach, strength and actions. An important influencer may not have the largest audience, but may have the right audience to do what one need done.

There are many ways to measure the influence of earned media sites, and if a Social Graph has been done, it will have benchmarked the organization’s status with many influencers at the beginning of the program. As the program matures, one will add many more sites and quantify the value each one has to one’s goals.

- **Opportunities-to-See (OTS) (Impressions)** – While this metric is far from exact, it can be a useful starting point. Few metrics provider services measure down to the URL level, so ending up with inflated numbers from main site pages is an unfortunate result. Nielsen, comScore, Compete and Alexa all generate very different numbers, so one’s data can have major gaps and be of questionable validity. Nevertheless, OTS is an easily obtained number from most monitoring platforms.

- **Reach** – This is a derivation from OTS that attempts to correct some of the inflation, and will usually be a proprietary metric from one’s provider.

- **Traffic** – For influencer’s blogs, traffic can be counted by subscribers and likes; for their Twitter pages, it is counted by followers; for Facebook, it is counted by fans and friends. For influencer websites, it is counted by unique visitors, page views or RSS subscribers. Check www.wmtips.com Site Information Tool for influencer Google page rankings, Alexa rankings, and other traffic-related scores.

- **Authority and Impact** – Check the influencer’s, PeerIndex, Twitalyzer, TweetLevel or Klout scores. Backlinks are another way to see if other sites are referring to a particular blog. Use SEOmoz free Open Site Explorer tool (http://www.opensiteexplorer.org/) to check for backlinks and other relevant activity, such as Facebook Likes, Twitter Shares and Google Plus One shares. Rather than targeting the highest-authority sites for one’s outreach, it’s best to target those that are NOT the highest, since those often receive between 500-1000 product pitches a day! Instead, look at the “magic middle” of the “long tail” where more moderate sites fit one’s niche, and are more personal and influential.

- **Inbound links** – Does the influencer site have contextual links from well-ranked sites and blogs?

- **Reader Engagement** – Does the site seem to get a lot of comments? Do people spend time there?
- **Recommendations** – Does the influencer actively retweet, bookmark, tag and share content? Have they recommended any of the organization’s products or services? Has one seen any inbound traffic from their site to owned sites?

- **Connections** – How many followers or mutual connections do they have?

- **Track Record** – How long have they been around? How many blog posts have they written?

- **Conversion Rate for Referring Sites** – Does their site tend to draw visitors who take action once they reach one’s site in the form of information downloads, registration, or sales? This paper will discuss tracking such “conversions” through web analytics in APPENDIX D.

Finally, mix and match free tools to cross-verify results. Do not rely on just one source.
Appendix D
Measuring Target Audience Effects

1. Surveys
Surveys aren’t new, but survey methods have been updated for today’s technologically-savvy online world. The best way to determine if one’s Target Audience is truly aware, knowledgeable, interested and/or supportive of one’s brand or message, especially in relationship to one’s competitors, is to do an aided- and unaided-awareness survey before and after one’s campaign.

If one happened to do the Social Graph outlined in APPENDIX A of this paper, then this would be the time to conduct a new post Social Graph, to see if sentiment and engagement have changed. Be sure to look back to that section for ideas on which tools to use.

Identifying any type of change along the Communications Stages as the result of a social media campaign is an excellent barometer of success. As mentioned earlier, this can be done oneself with free tools such as SurveyMonkey, or with help from any number of great research companies. Just Google “survey research,” or look at APPENDIX A, to find a variety of options from which to choose.

Don’t forget how easy it can be to survey an audience by embedding a Task Completion Rate Survey on an organization’s website that pops up as people exit. The survey asks if a website or blog has enabled the visitor to complete the task he/she came to do on the site, and if not, why not. Once again, Avinash Kaushik (2008) recommends the free iPerceptions 4Q in his blog post, “4Q – The Best Online Survey For A Website, Yours Free!” More robust paid services, like ForeSee (http://foreseeresults.com/), are also available.

2. Statistics
Another way to link Public Relations Activity and Intermediary Effect to Target Audience Effect is through market mix models, Correlation Coefficients (see below) and other statistical models.

If one has a market mix model, provide the program’s KPIs to the modeler to determine whether there is a causal relationship between those metrics and business objectives. Market mix models are extremely sophisticated and study all parts of a marketing program to determine cause and effect. They are also very expensive, and social media reach numbers may not be high enough to register amidst all the other marketing metrics. For more information, see Representing PR in the Marketing Mix: A Study on PR Variables in Marketing Mix Modeling, an IPR white paper written by Brian G. Smith (2007), University of Maryland, Winner of the 2007 Ketchum Award.

A more accessible method is to use Correlation Coefficients (sometimes referred to as Pearson’s $r$), which is a measure of the association between two variables $X$ and $Y$, giving a value between +1 and −1 inclusive.
Correlation Coefficients can be done right in Excel by oneself, or with the help of one’s marketing department. If campaign objectives were to increase sales, be sure to collect sales and revenue data from the finance or sales departments along with the average sales price, so hard Target Audience Effect data can be correlated against. While correlations are fairly simple, it is best to seek help from an expert since factoring in lead-time to lag ratios can be challenging. In other words, Target Audience Activity should result after Activity and Intermediary Effects have been conducted, and often reflect a product’s sales cycle in overall timing. For example, if a campaign is run in January, Intermediary Effects may be seen immediately, but Target Audience Effects on business outcomes may not show up until June if the normal sales cycle is six months.

A very simplified example of a correlation is shown below. In this case, the goal is to see a relationship between a campaign’s Share of Voice and Sales Leads. For a likely relationship to exist, a correlation should have an r value of at least .7 out of a possible perfect 1.0. The example below shows a low r value of .547, which indicates the campaign may not have a relationship to leads.

![Easy Correlations Calculation!](image)

- Simple correlations can be generated in Excel using one of two commands: =CORREL or =PEARSON
- Setup an Excel spreadsheet with your data tables where the first row is Share of Voice and the second is the desired business result.

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<td>2</td>
<td>Leads</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- In an empty cell, enter the cell numbers of the starting and ending values in each row like this: =Correl(B2:G2,B3:G3)
- Hit enter ... and result appears – in this case a low r = .547.

Continued on next page
Appendix D
Measuring Target Audience Effects
Continued

3. **Web Analytics**

Without a doubt, web analytics is one of the most exciting new frontiers in measurement since tying PR Activity to both Intermediary Effects and Target Audience Effects can be done seamlessly. The public relations industry has never had such an opportunity to track its work so concretely to outcomes at such little cost. If there is one message to be most stressed in this paper, it would be this: spend half a day and learn the ins and outs of a free system like Google Analytics. An excellent book to read ASAP is *Sams Teach Yourself Google Analytics in 10 Minutes* (Miller, 2011). The book is comprised of a series of 10-minute lessons which can be mastered in less than a day. Additionally, Google has developed a great series of “how to” videos aimed at marketing agencies that walk one through the newer features in Google Analytics (http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8CAAA05A0C16E5EC).

For additional excellent and in-depth resources into the many marketing uses of web analytics, see the following two books: *Web Analytics: An Hour a Day* (Kaushik, 2007b) and *Web Analytics 2.0* (Kaushik, 2010).

Seth Duncan (2010, pp. 4-6), Analytics Director at WCG (www.wcg.com), shares the following five reasons one really needs to understand web analytics from his IPR white paper, *Using Web Analytics to Measure the Impact of Earned Online Media on Business Outcomes: A Methodological Approach*:

- They are useful for PR – enabling the segmentation of referring traffic (direct, nonpaid search, paid search, referring search keywords, email campaigns, digital advertisements or earned media).

- They can tell what visitors from a particular story do on one’s site, which pages they go to, whether they are hitting one’s goals, downloading, registering, leaving their email addresses, etc. The percentage of all visitors who take action or click-through is a fundamental measure of success.

- They allow PR to be measured alongside other forms of marketing.

- They can help one develop strategy with empirical evidence. For instance, is a Twitter account resulting in white paper downloads? Is a particular key message working best at getting visits, engagements, registrations? Should resources be shifted from traditional to social? Which audiences are responding?

- Finally, web analytics can replace marketing mix models – which are very expensive and rarely within reach of the PR department. (Author’s note: marketing mix models measure an enormous number of variables in the marketing discipline, so while web analytics is a good solution for social media, it would be a ‘poor man’s’ model, at best.)

Web analytics can measure both hard and soft goals. For some companies, sales or e-commerce is not an option, so they have to look at indications of interest and loyalty. The most
important metrics will be “conversion,” which is “any” desired activity one wants a prospect or customer to engage in. This may be as simple as a click-through to a particular web page, registration to a special community, etc.

There are endless metrics available to look at in one’s web analytics platform, but many suffer from being too tactical. Avinash Kaushik says many of them – visits, page views, time on site, impressions, clicks, emails sent, followers, likes, video views, etc., simply infer that bigger is better. He goes on to say it’s more important to view metrics that span several sessions to look at a potential target’s true interest over time. Tips from two Occam’s Razor posts, *I Got No Ecommerce. How Do I Measure Success?* (Kaushik, 2007a) and *Your Web Metrics: Super Lame or Super Awesome?* (Kaushik, 2011b) are included below.

**Appendix D**

**Measuring Target Audience Effects**

**Continued**

- *For Non E-Commerce Sites:*

  Kaushik advises organizations without e-commerce websites to get away from “averages” that distort what’s really going on, and instead look at “pan-session” (many session) distribution scores:

  - **Visitor Loyalty** – this tells how often a visitor comes to one’s site, so realistic goals can be set for the number of visits one expect per week/month and measure against them.

  - **Visitor Recency** – how long has it been since their last visit? Ideally, it would only be a day or two. If 67% of one’s audience is new (defined in Google Analytics as having been at one’s site “0 days ago,” how can one decrease this number and get them to return?

  - **Length of Visit** – this counts length in seconds and reveals truths hidden in averages. See exactly the point at which an audience is lost. Benchmark that number and see what can be done to lengthen engagement. Having an engaged audience may be the defined business outcome.

  - **Depth of Visit** – what is the distribution in number of pages viewed in each session? How can one this number be increased? Measure the percent of visits that encompass many pages versus those that encompass only a few, and look for growth.

  - **New versus Repeat Visitors** - examine the ratio between new and repeat visitors, and between those that come once and those that return more often each month. The number of repeat visitors should increase.

  - **Conversion Rates in Web Analytics and other Tools** – for non e-commerce sites, some of the Intermediary Effects covered earlier can be considered conversions to outcomes, such as:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metrics</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td># of reader comments per post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td># of replies sent per day compared to # of replies received per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td># of postings compared to # of comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>Task Completion Rate – which is the percent of people who come to one’s website who answer ‘yes’ to “Were you able to complete the task you came to this website to do?” Combine this with “Why are you here?” Take a look at the 4Q survey from iPerceptions, as mentioned earlier, as a survey tool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td># of goal conversions, values and ROI as available from Google Analytics integration with PureResponse - Integrated Analytics by Pure360 (<a href="http://www.google.com/analytics/apps">www.google.com/analytics/apps</a>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookmarks</td>
<td># of bookmarks to one’s sites, which show where they originated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Click-throughs</td>
<td>when analyzing inbound traffic to a website, where did those clicks originate? Are there patterns?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued on next page
Appendix D
Measuring Target Audience Effects
Continued

- E-commerce sites

It is possible today to track every kind of unstructured data found in communications streams all the way through CRM systems such as Salesforce (www.salesforce.com) and sales, enabling side-by-side analysis of social media and internal customer feedback in emails, surveys, private web communities, service notes and chat sessions. These tools provide holistic views of all customer conversations: sentiment, issues and root causes. Some of them even automatically route conversations to the right person in an organization for response, build the relationship and drive towards sales and loyalty. These systems are expensive, but worth every penny for the fortunate organizations that can afford them. A couple great systems include those from Attensity (www.attensity.com) and Visible Technology (www.visibletechnology.com) – the V·IQ Social Performance Dashboard.

For those with smaller budgets, much can be accomplished through Google Analytics or through creating unique URL landing pages which can direct traffic to sign-up pages for more information, contact requests, email registrations or product page views.

In Excellent Analytics Tips #19: Identify Website Goal (Economic Values), Kaushik (2011a) points out how rare it is that a single PR or social media KPI directly converts all the way to an end goal (like a sale).

For example, a sale would be considered a “macro” conversion, which Kaushik says is completed by only about 2% of website visitors. So what about those other actions that have led to conversions; should they not also be considered goals and have financial values?

Kaushik urges practitioners to assign dollar values to all their goals, whether “macro” or “micro,” which enables them to directly compare the per-visit-value of referrals and keywords. They can then identify which tactics are driving the highest financial values – all right in Google Analytics. Just refer back to Sams Teach Yourself Google Analytics in 10 Minutes (Miller, 2011) and read Chapter 14 on “Setting up Goals and Funnels.”

To value a goal, consider how often the visitors who reach the goal become customers. If, for example, a sales team can close 10% of people who request to be contacted, and the average sales transaction is $500, one might assign $50 (i.e. 10% of $500) to a “Contact Me” goal. If only 1% of mailing list sign-ups result in a sale, one might only assign $5 to an “email sign-up” goal. See other creative ways to “guesstimate” micro values in Kaushik’s (2011a) article cited above.

Continued on next page
Appendix D
Measuring Target Audience Effects

- Measuring Across Silos

As activities are tracked through to goals, one may still have questions about what parts of one’s program were the most effective. Seth Duncan (2010), Analytics Director at WCG (www.wcg.com) has written an outstanding white paper, Using Web Analytics to Measure the Impact of Earned Online Media as Business Outcomes that takes a slightly different approach. The following summarizes one method from his paper, which includes a step by step process for downloading relevant referral data, separating out just the earned media, and categorizing it in Excel by:

- **Site Type** (Mainstream Media, Online Media, Blogs, Forums, etc.)
- **Site Content** (National News, Regional News, Business Press, etc.).

In an Excel spreadsheet, simply list Site Types across the columns and Site Content across the rows. Then, fill in the web metrics (unique visitors, engagement metrics or sales conversion rates) for each cell on one of these two bases:

- **Sum** basis (adding up one’s unique visitors that were referred in each category. This indicates whether mainstream media are producing as many unique visitors as blogs, for example).
- **Average** basis (which divides unique visitors by the number of sources in each category). Duncan recommends this approach because of varying sample sizes. For example, blog posts may have sent more visitors, but through how many posts?)

Then, compare the web metrics in cross-tabs of two or more category systems. For example, compare sales conversion rates across Site Type and Site Content categories. This allows one to readily see what Site Types and news Category Sites are the most successful referrers.

Tim Marklein (2011) suggests another method for integrating one’s social media results with traditional news media. Since it is a rare PR program that doesn’t involve both offline and online outreach, it is becoming increasingly important to integrate across silos to get a full picture. Marklein advises to “get in-line” and look at the intersection of data across disciplines as summarized from his article, The Big Shift: Moving from Impressions to Engagement.

- Track social media engagement and audience impressions along with traditional media impressions, in parallel.
- Look at all audience impressions and Cost-per-Thousand Impressions (CPM) across disciplines. (For CPM, divide program costs by the number of impressions that were earned and divide by 1,000).
- Contextualize by noting that the metrics that matter most are those that fit with one’s specific business objective. For example, for a consumer package goods company, *USA Today* may be most important, but for a B2B, WSJ.com may be. If an organization is niched, an industry blog may matter most. This illustrates the need to go beyond impressions and focus on targeted impressions.

- Add in engagement metrics. One can’t interact with *USA Today*, but one can with an online piece by sharing it via email, blogs and Twitter, so the message can be extended to trusted peers!
References


Livingston, G. (2011). *Welcome to the fifth estate: How to create and sustain a winning social media strategy*. Bartleby PR.


Endnotes

1 The #SMMStandards Conclave was formed in 2011 to bring together various associations and perspectives working on social media measurement standards. The organizations include the Institute for Public Relations (IPR), International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communications (AMEC), Council of PR Firms (CPRF), Digital Analytics Association (DAA), Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA), International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), Chartered Institute of PR (CIPR), Federation Internationale des Bureaux d’Extrait de Presse (FIBEP), Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communications Management, Society for New Communications Research (SNCR) and the Media Ratings Council. Client participants include research and communication leaders from Dell, Ford Motor Company, General Motors, McDonald’s, Procter & Gamble, SAS, Southwest Airlines and Thomson Reuters, as well as many major communications agencies.

2 Shel Holtz Webinar information is not accessible on a free basis. These citations were included in Lecture 4: Measuring Social Media in a paid series. www.holtz.com.

3 NPS is based on the fundamental perspective that every company's customers can be divided into three categories: Promoters, Passives, and Detractors based on one simple question — How likely is it that one would recommend [Company X] to a friend or colleague? These groups can be grouped to get a clear measure of a company's performance through its customers’ eyes. Developed by Satmetrix, Bain & Company and Fred Reichheld, info can be accessed at: www.netpromoter.com


5 Fraser Likely presented his paper, “Principles of the use of return on investment (ROI), benefit-cost ratio (BCR), and cost-effectiveness analysis (CEA) financial metrics in a public relations/communication department,” at the fall 2012 Social Media Conclave. The paper is the process of being published.
A Case Study of Facebook Fan Responses to Apology about Racist Content:
Examining the Psychological Components of Involvement, Emotion, and
Responsibility Attribution

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Abstract

Crisis communication research shows that the relationship between emotional venting from the public and expressions of crisis responsibility attribution via social media is not completely understood. Since social media is a new format for communicating with publics, examining public involvement in social media has emerged as an area of interest in conflict management because involvement, anger, and crisis responsibility attribution may be related. To examine involvement, emotion, and responsibility attribution, the researchers content analyzed Facebook consumer comments made after Victoria’s Secret issued an apology about its use of a Native American headdress costume in their 2012 annual fashion show, applying the Contingency Theory of Accommodation, the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), and the Social-Mediated Crisis Communication Model (SMCC) frameworks to guide the research. Using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) software, it was found that comments to the apology contained higher percentages of involvement and emotional processing, and personal pronoun use than comments to a neutral post about the fashion show published to the page almost a month following the apology post. Study findings suggest, however, that apology may be an acceptable form of crisis response via new and social media.
At the November 8, 2012 taping of the Victoria’s Secret Fashion Show, model Karlie Kloss came down the catwalk wearing a Native American styled costume, including a headdress, fringed bikini, and turquoise jewelry. This appearance prompted angry responses on the company’s Facebook page, as fans saw photos of the taping on the page before the December airing. Although the 2012 fashion show was taped November 8, the show was not aired until December 4. Even though the costume had not yet aired, pictures of the costume appeared on the Internet and on the company’s page, triggering postings from angry fans on the page over the outfit.

The Victoria’s Secret Facebook page is quite popular, with over 21,000,000 page likes; 21,308,341 like the page. After complaints and criticism about the outfit, VS posted an apology on Nov. 10. On November, 10, 2012 at 4:15 pm the Victoria’s Secret page posted: “We are sorry that the Native American headdress replica used in our recent fashion show has upset individuals. We sincerely apologize as we absolutely had no intention to offend anyone. Out of respect, we will not be including the outfit in any broadcast, marketing materials nor in any other way.” This post had a resulting 9,813 likes, 383 shares, and 5,064 comments. Over 5,000 fans responded to Victoria’s Secret’s apology for using a Native American costume in their fashion show.

Other organizations, such as Paul Frank Industries Inc. and the band No Doubt, also faced criticism in 2012 for their use of headdresses in their merchandise and media. No Doubt’s apology for their cowboys-and-Indians-themed “Looking Hot” video appeared on their Facebook and Twitter pages while the group erased the video content from all online sources. The group even deleted their apology and comments from their Facebook page to squash the controversy.

Given this context of the Victoria’s Secret controversy, coding for involvement and how it relates to emotional valence and attribution of corporate responsibility in fans’ responses to the Victoria’s Secret apology. The results of this content analysis are important given the recent findings that consumers may prefer apology and related communication when it appears in traditional media (Fisher Liu, Austin, & Jin, 2011). However, the findings on apology in the PR literature are inconsistent as Coombs and Holladay (2012), using the SCCT framework, found that in online posted comments to an Amazon.com apology that posts predominantly expressed apology acceptance.

Additionally, literature on crisis communication shows that there is a gap regarding research on emotional venting from the public and expressions of crisis responsibility attribution through social media (i.e. Facebook) (Choi & Lin, 2008; Coombs & Holladay, 2008). There is also less knowledge of how publics perceive or attribute crises through social media, due to a print media focus (Lee, Park, & Cameron, 2010; Shin, Cheng, Jin, & Cameron, 2005). However, social media have become integral to media relations and communication for organizations (Waters, Tindall, & Morton, 2010). This study fills these gaps by examining responses to an apology released in social media, specifically Facebook. Public involvement has also emerged as an area of interest in conflict management because involvement can affect anger and higher crisis responsibility attribution (Choi & Lin, 2008; Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Hallahan, 2000; Heath, 1997).

In order to examine involvement, emotion, and responsibility attribution, the Contingency Theory of Accommodation, the Situational Crisis Communication Theory, and the Social-Mediated Crisis Communication models are used as theoretical frameworks.

Literature Review
Contingency Theory of Accommodation

The contingency theory details when and why apology is used in a time of crisis in need of conflict management. According to the contingency theory, internal variables and external variables affect the success of an organization’s ability to respond to conflict (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997). In this case, internal and external variables likely contributed to the apology outcome.

Internal variable groups include general corporate/organizational characteristics, characteristics of the public relations department, top management characteristics, internal threats, personality characteristics of involved organization members, and relationship characteristics (Cameron et al., 2008). External variables include external threats, industry-specific environment, general political/social environment, external public characteristics, and the issue under consideration (Cameron, Wilcox, Reber, & Shin, 2008). Internal variables at play probably were internal actors and decision-makers and external variables at play were most likely the social environment and issues under consideration. The external variables are most apparent due to the racist content (relevant to issues and environment).

Cameron et al. (2008) also explains conflict management as a life cycle with four phases, including proactive, strategic, reactive, and recovery phases. Proactive and strategic phases are pertinent to conflict prevention and concern. Reactive and recovery phases include response to a crisis or conflict and rebuilding approaches. This study is most concerned with the reactive phase. The reactive phase has been reached when an issue or conflict has reached a critical point where practitioners must respond to ongoing events in the external communication space. In this phase, public relations professionals use conflict resolution techniques, such as apology/mortification, to manage crises.

Apology Techniques

Apology has been considered to not be a preferred response and has been found to be ineffective as an image repair strategy (Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009). However, apology may be preferred in traditional media (Fisher-Lu et al., 2011). Recent findings also show that apology may be acceptable to use in online media. Coombs and Holladay (2012), using the SCCT framework, found that in online posted comments to an Amazon.com apology that posts predominantly expressed apology acceptance. Therefore, apology released in non-traditional media has been recently found to be an effective way to manage crisis.

While apology may or may not be effective in certain instances, apology is considered a prevalent repair strategy (Benoit & Pang, 2007). Using image repair theory, Benoit and Pang (2007) defined a typology of image repair strategies: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness of event, corrective action, and mortification (apology). By using mortification, the organization seeks image restoration by asking for forgiveness without trying to reduce blame or offensiveness of the crisis or event (Benoit & Pang, 2007).

Apologizing through organizational channels (i.e. the organization’s Facebook page or non-traditional media) is also considered an act of “stealing thunder.” Thus, in this case releasing apology through the company Facebook page is an example of stealing thunder. Stealing thunder is considered as a credible tactic used to control message content (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005). Apology can lead to positive emotional response if it is released in an act of stealing thunder. Publics’ emotional responses are of concern as proper crisis responses can lead to positive crisis resolutions and reputation repair (Jin & Pang, 2010). Correct responses can lead to positive emotions and attitudes toward organizations.
Emotional Situations and Social Media Channels

Emotional response (particularly anger) is a frequent response from publics in crisis contexts (Choi & Lin, 2008; Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Jin & Pang, 2010). The integrated crisis mapping model explicates key emotions relevant to conflict management research. The model identifies anger, fright, anxiety, and sadness as dominant emotions of interest (Jin & Pang, 2010). Cases examined by Cameron and colleagues demonstrate how organizations manage these emotions expressed by publics and the release of information through media to respond to emotion-triggering events.

Public debate, vulnerable to situational factors, can impact accommodation and publics’ stances towards an organization in crisis (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2001; Cameron, Pang, & Jin, 2008). The 2003 SARS crisis is an example in which public contention and emotion may have played a role in organizational stance and strategies (on behalf of Singapore’s and China’s governments). This case also demonstrates that media relations and techniques can shape crisis recovery.

For example, the Singaporean government was able to internalize the SARS crisis and handle the situation through an accommodating, “over-managing” stance (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2006, p. 100). Jin et al. explain that the government was more threatened by the situation than publics. As a result, Singapore’s government was blatantly accommodating and it was able to assure publics and manage publics’ emotions.

Releasing information in a transparent way through appropriate media channels (i.e. via stealing thunder) is also crucial to crisis management. In the SARS case, news media in Singapore (maybe because it is neo-authoritarian, as indicated by Cameron et al., 2008) aided the Singapore government’s management of the situation, acting as a mediator between the government and affected publics (Jin et al., 2006). By contrast, the Chinese government under-managed in their initial de-emphasis of the SARS problem, leading to some negative media coverage and public perception (Cameron et al., 2008). Thus, “over-managing” publics by releasing information through organizational media can be beneficial to organizations in crisis situations. It is possible for organizations to control information release by using repair strategies via social media, rather than traditional media. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory further explains how an organization’s tactics and responses are carried out in anticipation of consumer response.

Attribution and the Situational Crisis Communication Theory

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is beneficial for predicting appropriate ways for an organization to respond and communicate during a crisis situation to keep its good reputation (Coombs, 2007). The theory is derived from Weiner’s (1986) research on attribution theory. According to Weiner, individuals search for causes for an event. In relation to public relations research and activities, attribution is understood as an assessment of who is responsible for the crisis events. Coombs (2007) explains that stakeholders will create attributions regarding the cause of a crisis, which is called crisis responsibility attribution. If responsibility is attributed to the organization, negative emotions and attitudes towards that organization will often occur.

The SCCT is an extension of Weiner’s attribution research and outlines specific steps practitioners take. The theory categorizes organizational attribution during a crisis into three levels: (1) victim (weak attribution), (2) accidental (minimal attribution), and (3) intentional
(high attribution) (Coombs, 2007). After evaluating the attribution level, organizations can decide to respond in four different ways: deny, diminish, rebuild and reinforce (Coombs, 2012). If denial is chosen, attacking the accuser, denial and scapegoating are three available strategies. If diminishing is chosen, organizations can use excuse or justification tactics. If the rebuild response is used, companies choose between compensation and apology. Finally, if reinforcement is chosen, organizations can use bolstering, ingratiation or victimization tactics. Victoria’s Secret chose apology for their response to crisis, so it chose to respond using a rebuild response.

Social-Mediated Crisis Communication Model and Social Media Influence
Complimentary to the SCCT, the social-mediated crisis communication model informs the research of social mediated public responses. The social-mediated crisis communication (SMCC) model was first released as the blog-mediated crisis communication model by Jin and Liu (2010) and Liu et al. (in press). However, it was changed because of findings that opinion leadership is greater through social media versus blogs. The model posits three types of publics involved in interacting with the organization in crisis: “influential social media creators” (create crisis information), “social media followers” (consume the creator’s information) and “social media inactives” (may consume creators info from multiple sources) (Liu et al., 2011). The model additionally proposes that a core reason for publics to use social media during a crisis is for social venting and support (Jin & Liu, 2010). Regarding the Victoria’s Secret case, two publics under examination are influential social media creators and the social media followers. Both publics make up the thousands of commenters responding to the apology.

While Liu et al. (2011) suggest that publics trust traditional media as more reliable during a crisis, they also found that publics still use Facebook to fulfill emotional needs and to share or gather “insider information” (p. 150). Also, even if publics do not actively comment, they may be passively receiving crisis information from Facebook (Liu et al., 2011). Therefore, releasing crisis information via Facebook is a powerful action from an organization.

Social Media and Audience Response
Related to SMCC research, studies on crisis communication show a lack of research on emotional venting from the public and publics’ crisis responsibility attribution via social media (i.e. Facebook) (Choi & Lin, 2008; Choi & Lin, 2009; Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Scholarship also reveals that there is limited knowledge on how publics perceive or attribute crises through social media, due to an emphasis on studying print media effects (Lee, Park, & Cameron, 2010; Shin, Cheng, Jin, & Cameron, 2005). However, social media has become a vital part of media relations and communication for organizations (Waters, Tindall, & Morton, 2010). Social media facilitate timely, interactive communication and allows for dialogue and content exchange between message authors and consumers (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Taylor & Perry, 2005; Wright & Hinson, 2009). Since this study focuses on social media communication as important to creating dialogue with publics, it can contribute to recent studies on new media.

Involvement of Publics
In addition to source, studying public involvement is an interest area in conflict management because involvement may impact anger and higher crisis responsibility attribution (Choi & Lin, 2008; Hallahan, 2000; Heath, 1997). Like Choi and Lin (2008), this current study
identifies involvement as an important variable to examine in future studies using these frameworks (i.e. SCCT and SMCC).

Many definitions of involvement are exhibited in scholarly literature, but felt involvement is most relevant to this research. Felt involvement is as a prevalent definition of involvement in consumer behavior and public relations research (Celsi & Olson, 1988; Choi & Lin, 2008). Felt involvement is one’s perception of personal relevance regarding an issue, event, or object (Celsi & Olson, 1988). It also has motivational qualities that influence cognition of messages and resulting behaviors (Celsi & Olson, 1988).

Felt involvement is additionally explained in the elaboration likelihood model, which suggests that involvement levels within the consumer impact message processing; low-involvement consumers process messages through peripheral routes while consumers with high-involvement process messages using central routes to persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). These notions of involvement define it as a consumer attribute, rather than a fixed characteristic of a product, brand, event, or issue.

Specifically regarding the treatment of involvement in this study, McDonald and Hartel (2000) suggested that publics’ involvement levels influence both emotional processing and crisis responsibility attribution. Given these linkages, involvement was examined as a consumer variable in this research related to emotional venting and crisis responsibility attribution levels.

Emotional Response on Social Media

Through social media networking, publics can comfortably express emotional venting to others and organizations, as the Internet and social media can create a sense of community (Macias, Hilyard, & Freimuth, 2009). Jin and Liu (2010) found that individuals will even turn to social media specifically when emotional venting or emotional support is needed. Given these findings on publics’ social media use, consideration of emotion should be part of organizations’ post-crisis communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2005). Responsibility attribution should be considered as well. When publics perceive organizations as having high responsibility for a crisis, they are more likely to respond with strong negative emotions (McDonald, Sparks, & Glendon, 2010).

Negative emotional response leads to decreases in purchase intention and increases in negative word-of-mouth communication, customer loyalty, and complaining among publics (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Jorgensen, 1996; McDonald, et al., 2010). As indicated before, it is necessary to study involvement as well, with emotion and attribution. High responsibility and high involvement toward an organization during a crisis will lead to strong negative emotions (McDonald, et al., 2010).

As noted, apology may impact publics similarly to other strategies (i.e. corrective action or denial) regarding emotional responses (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). However, this finding occurred when different responses for a low anger situation and for a company without a known prior reputation to participants were compared. This situation may have involved higher anger (due to the racist issues and content involved) and Victoria’s Secret is an internationally recognized company, so its reputation is fixed in consumers’ minds.

In the Victoria’s Secret apology, versus a separate neutral post about the fashion show, comments will be analyzed and compared following these research questions and hypotheses, informed by research that involvement, emotion, and attribution are linked as outcomes in social media expression (i.e. McDonald, et al., 2010; McDonald & Hartel, 2000):
**RQ1:** How will the Victoria’s Secret’s apology post and a neutral post about the fashion show airing (Dec. 5, 2012: “What was your favorite thing about the VS Fashion Show?”) differ in terms of involvement?

**RQ2:** How will they differ in terms of emotion?

**RQ3:** How will they differ in terms of crisis responsibility attribution?

**H1:** The apology post will have higher emotion expressed in the comments.

**H2:** The apology post will have higher involvement expressed in the comments.

**H3:** The apology post will have higher attribution expressed in the comments.

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**Methodology**

**Method and Justification**

To examine the levels and themes of emotions, attribution, and involvement in the responses to the apology posted on Facebook, a quantitative content analysis of comments written in response to the statement were examined. Because of the amount of responses/comments, a quantitative method was deemed appropriate (Kerlinger, 2000; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Studies have examined emotional responses to organizational crisis situations in experimental settings (Kim & Cameron, 2011; Liu et al., 2011; McDonald et al., 2010) and how publics use social media during an organizational crisis (Jin et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2011), so this analysis fits with current research on the emotional and cognitive content of consumer response on new media.

**Data Collection**

Five thousand and sixty four ($N = 5,064$) comments in regards to the November 10, 2012 apology, were downloaded from the Victoria’s Secret page and analyzed. All comments were used in the analysis with a focus on phases following apology, from November 10 to mid-January.

Another posting was run through LIWC as a comparison group of comments to the apology posting. This posting was made on December 5, 2012 and contained a photo of the show’s finale and included a short question and link: “What was your favorite thing about the VS Fashion Show? http://apps.facebook.com/vsfashionshow/.” The posting had 60,113 likes, 2,254 comments, and 2,436 shares. Thus, $N = 2,254$ comments were analyzed using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count software.

**Coding**

All comments were analyzed using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count Program (LIWC), a computer based word count program (Pennebaker & Francis, 1996). LIWC is a validated text analysis method (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). LIWC matches written transcripts against an extensive dictionary, counting words in psychologically meaningful categories. The program then gives percentages of words in different sets of categories and subcategories (i.e. negative emotion is a category, sadness and anxiety are subcategories): 32 psychological construct categories (e.g., affect, cognition, etc.), seven personal concern categories (work, home, etc.), and several additional categories (e.g., punctuation, paralinguistic). Since this study is concerned with involvement, emotion, and responsibility attribution, cognitive processes (for involvement), affective processes (for emotion), and personal pronouns (attribution) were analyzed.
Coding Categories

Involvement: This was understood as felt involvement, or a person’s perception of personal relevance in regards to an issue or event (Celsi & Olson, 1998; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Since the ELM understands felt involvement as occurring with cognitive processing, LIWC was commanded to count cognitive processing words in the comments (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Attribution: Attribution here refers to claims of responsibility or blame (Choi & Lin, 2008). Therefore, personal pronoun words were counted using LIWC.

Emotion: This is understood as positive and negative emotional response (Jin, 2009; McDonald et al., 2010). Thus, words in the comments containing emotional processing were analyzed.

Results

Descriptive statistics analyses and an independent samples t-tests were run in SPSS software to answer the research questions and hypotheses. Descriptive statistics results answered RQ1-3. To compare the psychological content of comments to apology and comments to a neutral post from the company about the fashion show, the t-test was run through use of the SPSS statistical software. This analysis tested H1-3.

Research Questions and Hypothesis Testing

RQ1-3 asked how the Victoria’s Secret’s apology post and a neutral post about the fashion show airing (Dec. 5, 2012: “What was your favorite thing about the VS Fashion Show?”) would differ in terms of involvement, emotion, and attribution.

In regards to the apology comments, within the affective processes category (6.13%), anger (1.83%) and sadness (.29%) were low, as compared to positive emotions (2.92%), and negative emotions (3.20%). Anxiety was expressed comparably less (.28). There were very few swear words at .15%, but many social processes words (9.68%).

In the cognitive processes category (15.10%), causation was expressed comparably less (1.66%) than insight (2.11%). Inclusion (3.39%) and exclusion (3.22%) were comparably occurring in the sample, above causation and insight. Inclusion words fell at 1.68% and exclusion words fell at 1.02%. Additionally, exclamation points only occurred 1.93% of the time and question marks occurred .89%.

Personal pronouns made up 6.96%.

Regarding the second set of VS comments on the fashion show posting, affective processing made up 3.72% of processing. Within that category, positive emotion was at 3.19% and negative emotion was at .53%. There was little anxiety (.03), anger (.19), and sadness (.16%).

Regarding cognitive mechanisms (5.88%), insight (.50%) and causation (.33%) were not robustly expressed. Exclamation points made up 6.34% of the content, while question marks made up .39%. In regards to pronouns, 4.88% of the text consisted of pronouns.

Personal pronouns made up 2.68%.

Answering RQ1-3, these results indicate that the comments differed on the dimensions of involvement, emotion, and attribution between the apology and neutral posts. The apology comments had higher percentages of emotional processing words, cognitive processing words (representing felt involvement), and attribution (personal pronoun usage).

H1, H2, and H3 stated that the apology post would have higher emotion, higher
involvement, and higher attribution expressed in the comments. An independent $t$-test comparing the apology comments found a significant difference between the mean scores (as a result of segmenting the text for apology and neutral post comments) of the two groups for personal pronouns, $t(2) = -26.796, p < .05$, cognitive processes, $t(2) = -8.341, p < .05$, and affective processes, $t(2) = -5.418, p < .05$. The means of the apology commenters were significantly higher than the means of the neutral post commenters for personal pronouns ($M = 13.29, SD = .41$; $M = 4.88, SD = .17$), cognitive processes ($M = 15.80, SD = 1.13$; $M = 5.88, SD = 1.24$), and affective processes ($M = 6.41, SD = .57$; $M = 3.72, SD = .40$). Therefore $H1$, $H2$, and $H3$ are supported.

Discussion and Limitations

This study contributes to Contingency Theory, SCCT, and SMCC frameworks and may indicate that involvement is an important variable to consider in future studies. The study may help public relations practitioners understand how the apology image repair strategy triggers involvement, emotional venting responses, and expressions of corporate responsibility attribution.

It was found that the apology released on the company’s Facebook page made for greater percentages of affective processing, cognitive processing, and personal pronoun use. This suggests that apology as a strategy garners involvement, emotional response, and attribution. The fact that the apology comments (versus the neutral statement) were significantly different on these factors merely is telling of the kind of responses apology will trigger. However, in this case, it was apparent that while individuals may have been greatly involved with the content of the apology, their emotional output and attribution probably cannot be described as anger toward the company. Rather, the data reflects that the fans were emotionally engaged and grappling with the notion that Victoria’s Secret was apologizing for their costuming.

For example, many fans expressed thanks in response to the apology. The word “thanks” were found $n = 71$ times and “thank you” was written $n = 156$ times (i.e. “Thank you Victoria’s Secret!”). Examining the comments from a qualitative vantage, it seemed that people expressed confusion about why the company had to apologize as well. For example, one user wrote, “I hate to hear Natives were offended! The pic of headdress was beautiful! Please quit being so sensitive!”

Despite the fact that the apology comments had a significantly greater density of cognitive, affective, and attribution language in comparison to the neutral post comments, it seems that the use of apology was acceptable in this case about a well established brand and its racially charged mishap.

Limitations

First, it is unclear as to whether the commenters were more so issue involved or involved with the Victoria’s Secret company. Attribution was additionally a difficult concept to explicate and operationally define with the use of LIWC software. Perhaps future research can address these concepts and complement software generated results with more extensive content analysis or textual analysis.

Despite these limitations, researchers can further study the use of apology in different types of cases and regarding an array of sociopolitical or controversial threats. These findings are consistent with past research in that involvement, emotion, and attribution processes were higher in fan responses to apology, but the specific content reveals that attribution was not assigned to the company and emotion was not expressed as anger. Future research should focus
more on these concepts, measurement, and validate whether apology is appropriate to release on social media, as this study suggests.
References


Corporate Crisis Communication: Examining the Interplay of Reputation and Crisis Response Strategies

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Abstract
This 2 (prior reputation: good/ bad) x 3 (crisis response: apology/ sympathy/ compensation) between-subjects experiment examined crisis communication and reputation management for an organization facing high crisis responsibility. Results indicate that stakeholders prefer apology to compensation response strategies. Organizations with a prior good reputation have better post-crisis reviews that those with a prior bad reputation.
Introduction

Corporations, just like politicians and celebrities, are constantly in the public eye and often find themselves in crisis situations. At stake when a corporation is faced with a crisis is its reputation. Corporate reputation can affect a wide range of issues from stock values to employee morale (Hearit, 2001; Lyon & Cameron, 2004). It is thus important that when a crisis strikes, the organization must employ appropriate crisis response strategies with a view to minimizing the impact of the crisis and protecting organizational reputation.

Research has shown that what an organization says and does after a crisis – crisis response strategies – goes a long way toward protecting organizational reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Most post-crisis communication research, however, has relied on case study methods and although case studies offer valuable descriptive data they, “offer little insight into how stakeholders actually respond to crisis response strategies” (Coombs & Holladay, 2008, p. 252). Case studies also offer minimal theoretical understanding of crisis communication (Dawar & Pillutla, 2000; Dean, 2004).

Over the last decade, crisis communication research has begun moving beyond case studies to experimental design methods geared toward assessing the public’s perception of crisis response strategies (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Coombs (2007) urges communication researchers to go beyond the speculation of case studies based on media reports in order to create evidence-based crisis communication. The current study uses an experimental design to investigate the effects of three crisis response strategies (sympathy, compensation, and apology) and pre-crisis reputation on the organization’s post-crisis reputation, anger towards the organization, and negative word-of-mouth about the organization.

In a related experimental study involving the manipulation of four response strategies (apology, compensation, sympathy, and information) for an actual chemical explosion at Marcus Oil, Coombs & Holladay (2008) found that there were no significant differences between sympathy, compensation and apology conditions on company reputation. The lack of significance between the three crisis response strategies could be traced to the nature of the study – an industrial accident where no cause had been determined and the public was less angry about the accident (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Consequently, Coombs & Holladay (2008) suggested that “it is possible that different results could be found if the attributions of crisis responsibility and anger are high” (p. 255).

The current study sought to extend crisis communication research by manipulating sympathy, compensation and apology response strategies for a fictitious organization facing high attributions of crisis responsibility and high public anger as recommended by Coombs & Holladay (2008). This study sheds light on how various crisis response strategies for an organization facing high attributions of crisis responsibility and high public anger, interact with organizational prior reputation. Results from this study will help organizations facing high attributions of crisis responsibility and public anger understand the type of crisis response strategies to use. In addition, the use of experimental method to test the applicability of crisis response strategies will aid the building of crisis communication theory.

Using the theoretical frameworks of reputation management and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), the next section of this paper will review some existing literature on organizational reputation and crisis response strategies.

Literature Review

Corporate Reputation
Because of their ability to communicate to various publics about the nature of an organization, public relations practitioners are responsible for the building and maintenance of a company’s reputation (Wilcox, Ault, Agee, & Cameron, 2000). Coombs (2000) defined the reputation of an organization in terms of relational history, which he said, is built by consistently exceeding the expectations of stakeholders. Delivering on stakeholders’ expectations can include “cutting-edge treatment of customers, open access to the media and extensive involvement in the social fabric of the community” (Coombs, 2000, p. 81).

Frombrun & Van Riel (1997) defined corporate reputation as a collective representation of a company’s past actions that describe its ability to deliver valuable outcomes to stakeholders. Sims (2009) noted that reputation is formed by the perceptions that people have about an organization based upon their prior experiences. Weigelt and Camerer (1988) conceptualized corporate reputation in terms of actions that can be attributed to an organization’s past actions. According to these conceptualizations, corporate reputation is to some extent based on the past actions of an organization.

Doorley and Garcia (2011) argue that a good reputation has both intangible and tangible benefits. Intangible benefits – a feel good about the organization by its customers, employees, and consumer advocates – has the potential of translating into tangible benefits such as an organization attracting better candidates, paying less for supplies, increased profitability, and gaining free press (Doorley & Garcia, 2011).

While a good reputation enhances the perception of an organization as a stable and reliable entity to invest in among potential shareholders, a bad reputation makes it harder for an organization to attract investors and to get financing (Aula & Mantere, 2008).

Although crisis managers believe that prior good corporate reputation can benefit an organization during a crisis, there is a dearth of empirical evidence that can support this proposition (Coombs & Holladay, 2006). Dowling (2002) noted:

… to date there are few published scientific studies of how a crisis (adversely) affects a company’s images and reputations. Much of what (we think) we know is opinion based rather than well researched. For example, many managers believe that a good corporate reputation acts as a type of insurance policy the first time the company faces a serious crisis (p. 252).

Using crisis scenarios of organizations facing negative publicity stemming from claims of sexual harassment and a potentially lethal toxic spill into a river, Lyon and Cameron (2004) found that there were better attitudes toward companies with prior good reputation than companies with prior bad reputation.

Important outcomes emerging from a crisis include anger and negative word-of-mouth among other affective responses (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Anger from stakeholders can ruin the organization-stakeholder relationships, and it can also lead stakeholders to say bad things about the organization to people they know (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). Word-of-mouth is valued by organizations because a positive word-of-mouth is a powerful persuasion tool. Crisis response strategies can affect the anger and negative word-of-mouth outcomes that are created by a crisis.

According to Coombs and Holladay (2006), crisis managers believe that prior good reputation could be beneficial to an organization during a crisis. Since anger and word-of-mouth are important outcomes that could emerge from a crisis, empirical evidence is required to establish the extent to which prior reputation has an impact on crisis outcomes such as anger and word-of-mouth. The following three main effect hypotheses are proposed:
H1: An organization with a prior good reputation will have a better post-crisis reputation evaluation than when that organization has a prior bad reputation.

H2: An organization with a prior good reputation will experience less public anger than an organization with prior bad reputation.

H3: An organization with a prior good reputation will have less negative word-of-mouth than an organization with prior bad reputation.

Crisis Response Strategies

Ihlen (2002) suggested that companies or individuals responding to a crisis could benefit from rhetorical apologia. Apologia is an effective self-defense strategy that is appropriate when individuals have to defend their character (Ware & Linkugel, 1973). Rhetorical strategies could, however, be effective in one situation and not effective in another. Moreover, there are stark differences in the apologetic rhetoric efforts used by corporations and those used by individuals (Heardit, 2001). Apologetic rhetoric strategies employed by a corporation tend to remove the individual human subject (Benoit & Brinson, 1994).

There is a need to recognize that response to a crisis situation is part of the relationship history between a corporation and its publics (Coombs, 2000; Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Heardit, 2001). The loss of a corporate reputation could translate into a huge economic setback for the corporation (Benoit & Brinson, 1994). Since research has proved the usefulness of some apologetic rhetorical devices, corporations faced with a crisis could benefit from employing apologia.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) posits that the potential reputational damage emerging from a crisis is a function of crisis responsibility. Crisis responsibility, the extent to which the public attributes the cause of the crisis, is in turn a function of the crisis type and severity of the damage (Coombs, 2006).

SCCT further posits that the choice of crisis response strategies should be influenced by crisis type. The choice of crisis response strategies can be achieved by matching crisis clusters – victim, accidental, and preventable – to the appropriate response options – denial, diminish (e.g., excuse and justification), and deal option (e.g., concern, compensation, sympathy, and apology) (Coombs, 1995). Crisis responsibility in the victim cluster is “very low and there is little violation of societal norms” hence the need to use denial (Coombs, 2006, p. 249).

There is, however, high crisis responsibility for crises falling under the accidental cluster and therefore, the diminish response option should be used. Coombs (2006) notes that within the accidental cluster “stakeholders are open to influence on attributions of the crisis because the threat is minimal” (p. 249). In the preventable cluster, crises produce “very strong” attributions of crisis responsibility and the deal response options should be used. Strong attributions of crisis responsibility represent serious violation of societal norms thus placing organizational reputation on the line.

Benoit (1995), Benoit and Drew (1997), and Coombs and Holladay (2008) note that researchers have overemphasized the use of apology/mortification as the best crisis response for any type of crisis. The use of an apology involves the organization accepting responsibility for the crisis and asking for forgiveness (Benoit & Drew, 1997). Fuchs-Burnett (2002), Patel and Reinsch (2003), and Tyler (1997) note that accepting responsibility is the highlight of an apology and makes it the most expensive apologetic device financially for a corporation.

When an organization issues an apology, it opens itself to lawsuits and probable economic ruin because the apology is used in court as evidence to win lawsuits against the
corporation (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Rather than use apology which might be costly for the organization, Coombs and Holladay (2008) argue that there are other equally effective but less expensive apologetic devices that a corporation could use thus protecting its reputation.

There are two less expensive strategies, compensation and sympathy, “are as effective as an apology in shaping people’s perceptions of the organization taking responsibility for the crisis because these strategies focus on victims’ needs” (Coombs & Holladay, 2008, p. 253). Both referred to as highly accommodative strategies, the sympathy response expresses concern for the victims while compensation offers victims something, such as financial help, to offset the suffering (Coombs, 2006; Fediuk, 2002).

Coombs and Holladay (2008) found that there was no effect of sympathy, compensation, and apology on anger and word-of-mouth; the three crisis response strategies produced the same amounts of anger and word-of-mouth outcomes. The lack of differences in the amounts of anger and word-of-mouth produced between the response strategies could be attributed to the nature of the study – an industrial accident where no cause had been determined and the public was less angry about the accident (Coombs & Holladay, 2008).

Lyon and Cameron (2004) however found that companies that issued an apology were more likable, and viewed as more ethical and prosocial than companies that issued a defensive response. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that many victims want an apology but empirical evidence is required to verify this assumption (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Since most victims want an apology, one can posit that an organization that uses apology will experience less anger and negative word-of-mouth from its publics.

In the current study, there is a high attribution of crisis responsibility on the organization and a high level of public anger has been created by the crisis in which 116 lives were lost. The following main effect hypotheses will provide additional empirical evidence on whether there are any differences between apology, compensation, and sympathy on post-crisis reputation, anger, and negative word-of-mouth for organizations facing high crisis responsibility.

H4: An organization that uses apology will have better post-crisis reputation evaluation that the organization that uses either compensation or sympathy.

H5: An organization that uses apology will experience less public anger that the organization that uses either compensation or sympathy.

H6: An organization that uses apology will experience less negative word-of-mouth than the organization that uses either compensation or sympathy.

The belief that prior reputation can help an organization during a crisis not only raises the question of the potential power that previous reputations have on subsequent information judgment but also the possible impact that response strategies have on prior good or bad reputations. Research is however lacking on how previous reputations and relationships between the organization and its stakeholders can affect crisis management and specifically, the choice of crisis response to use during a crisis. Lyon and Cameron (2004) proposed interaction effects between reputation and response type but no significant results were found. A possible interaction of prior reputation and response strategy that is addressed in the next hypothesis could shed light on how preexisting relationships between an organization and stakeholders can impact crisis management for an organization facing high crisis responsibility and high public anger.

Exploring whether there are any interaction effects between crisis response strategies and prior reputation on post-crisis reputation, anger, and negative word-of-mouth would extend crisis communication research, which suggests that we should not view response strategy in a vacuum.
devoid of other variables such as prior reputation. The following three research questions are posed:

RQ7: What, if any, is the best combination of prior reputation and response strategy on post-crisis reputation?
RQ8: What, if any, is the best combination of prior reputation and response strategy on anger toward the organization?
RQ9: What, if any, is the best combination of prior reputation and response strategy on negative word-of-mouth toward the organization?

Methods

Participants
Participants were 230 undergraduate students enrolled in mass communication classes at a large public university in South Central United States. About 66\% (n = 152) were female and 34\% (n = 78) were male, and ranged in age from 18-40 years old (M = 21.47, S.D. = 2.28). In terms of classification, 4\% (n = 1) was a freshman, 10.4\% (n = 24) were sophomores, 27.8\% (n = 64) were juniors, and 61.3\% (n = 141) were seniors.

Design materials and procedure
The study used a 2 x 3 between-subjects design to assess two factors in crisis communication and reputation management – prior corporate reputation (good and bad) and crisis response strategies (apology, sympathy, and compensation) – on an organization facing high crisis responsibility.

Respondents in the main study were randomized into one of the six conditions and assigned to read a one-page story of a fictitious airline experiencing high attribution of crisis responsibility following the crash of one of its passenger planes and then fill out an immediate posttest questionnaire. Participants’ stories were identical except for the prior reputation passage (manipulated to indicate that the airline had either a good or bad prior reputation) and the crisis responsibility passage (manipulated to demonstrate an apology, sympathy, or compensation response by the airline).

Two graduate students with background in journalism were used to crosscheck the stories for the Associated Press writing style. A pretest was then conducted with a randomly selected group of 60 undergraduate Mass Communication students similar to the ones who took part in the main study. Participants in the pretest group correctly identified the prior reputation (good or bad) and crisis response strategies (apology, sympathy, and compensation) conditions. Participants for the pretest were also able to indicate that the story reflected a strong attribution of crisis responsibility on the airline.

To ensure high attribution of crisis responsibility on the part of the airline, the story was manipulated to indicate that the airline had failed to schedule the ill-fated plane for routine checks on its fuel tanks leading to an accident in which 116 people had died. The story quoted findings from preliminary investigations into the accident stating that the ill-fated plane was overdue for routine checks on its fuel tanks and that the accident had been caused by multiple fuel tank discrepancies (Appendix A contains one of the stories).

The research was conducted in a classroom setting. Participants received a packet containing directions, a print news story and a posttest questionnaire. In addition, they were verbally instructed to carefully read the news story before proceeding to the questions that followed. The administration took about 15 minutes.

Dependent Measures
The reputation of the airline prior to the accident was evaluated by asking participants for their overall impression of the prior reputation of the airline. Participants recorded their responses on a seven-point semantic differential scale of three items ranging from “very unfavorable” to “very favorable;” “negative” to “positive;” and “disreputable” to “reputable.”

The post-crisis organizational reputation was measured using a 5-item version of Coombs and Holliday’s (2002) Organizational Reputation Scale. One of the items read: “I do not Trust the organization to tell the truth about this incident.” The items were measured using a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” In Coombs and Holliday’s (2002) study, the measure had a reliability coefficient alpha of .84.

Anger toward the organization was measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The scale, which was also adapted from Coombs and Holliday’s (2002) study, had three items, and one read: “I feel annoyed toward Expeditious Airline for what happened.” In Coombs and Holliday’s (2002) study, the measure had a reliability coefficient alpha of .88.

Negative word-of-mouth intention was measured using three items anchored on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” In Coombs and Holliday’s (2002) study, the scale had a reliability coefficient alpha of .76. An example of one of the items is: “I would encourage friends or relatives not to fly Expeditious Airlines.”

**Results**

**Reliabilities**

The reliability coefficients (Cronbach’s alpha) were .80, .76, and .77 for the post-crisis organizational reputation scale, anger scale, and negative word-of-mouth scale, respectively. The three coefficients represented acceptable reliability scores.

**Manipulation checks**

A series of one-way ANOVAs were run to check the manipulation of the three crisis response strategies. Compensation ($M = 5.69, SD = 1.56$) was rated the highest, ($F(2, 227) = 157.4, p < .001$) followed by sympathy, ($M = 5.57, SD = 1.56$), $F(2, 227) = 16.76, p < .001$). Apology had ($M = 5.42, SD = 1.44$), $F(2, 226) = 6.86, p < .05$).

An independent-samples t-test showed there were significant differences between prior good and bad corporate reputation with prior good reputation being more favorable, ($M = 5.07, SD = 1.30$) than prior bad reputation, ($M = 3.33, SD = 1.10$), $t(227) = -10.97, p < .001$.

**Main effects of corporate reputation**

H1 proposed that an organization with prior good reputation will have a better post-crisis reputation evaluation than when that organization has a prior bad reputation. Significant main effects of corporate reputation were detected ($F(1, 224) = 51.64, p < .001$). Results indicated that a prior good reputation resulted in a higher post-crisis reputation ($M = 4.37$) than prior bad reputation ($M = 3.39$). Thus, H1 was supported.

H2 proposed that an organization with prior good reputation will experience less public anger than an organization with prior bad reputation. Significant main effects of corporate reputation were found $F(1, 223) = 10.11, p < .05$. Results indicated that prior bad reputation eliciting more anger, ($M = 5.20$) than prior good reputation ($M = 4.70$). H2 was thus supported.

H3 proposed that an organization with prior good reputation will have less negative word-of-mouth than an organization with prior bad reputation. Significant main effects of corporate reputation were detected ($F(1, 224) = 27.76, p < .001$). Results indicated that an
organization with prior bad reputation is more likely to have negative word-of-mouth ($M = 5.64$) than an organization with prior good reputation ($M = 4.81$). H3 was supported.

**Main effects of crisis response**

H4 proposed that an organization that uses apology will have better post-crisis reputation evaluation that the organization that uses either compensation or sympathy. Results showed significant differences between apology, sympathy, and compensation ($F(2, 224) = 3.48, p < .05$), with apology being rated the highest ($M = 4.10$) followed by sympathy ($M = 3.87$) and compensation ($M = 3.66$). Post hoc analysis showed the differences were between apology and compensation, such that when the airline responded with an apology it had a more positive post-crisis reputation than when it responded to the crisis using a compensation strategy. H4 was thus supported through the significant difference between apology and compensation, but no differences were found between apology and sympathy.

H5 proposed that an organization that uses apology will experience less public anger that the organization that uses either compensation or sympathy. Results showed there were significant differences between apology, sympathy, and compensation on anger ($F(2, 223) = 5.63, p < .05$), with compensation being rated the highest ($M = 5.31$) followed by sympathy ($M = 4.89$) and apology ($M = 4.66$). Post hoc analysis showed the differences were between apology and compensation, such that when the airline responded with an apology, it was likely to elicit less anger than when it responded using a compensation strategy. H5 was supported through the significant difference between apology and compensation, but no differences were found between apology and sympathy.

H6 proposed that an organization that uses apology will experience less negative word-of-mouth than the organization that uses either compensation or sympathy. No significant main effects of crisis response on negative word-of-mouth were detected. H6 was not supported.

**Interaction effects**

RQ7 and RQ 9 asked which, if any, is the best combination of prior reputation and response strategy on post-crisis reputation and negative word-of-mouth. No significant interactions were detected. Interactions were however detected for the RQ8 which asked what, if any, is the best combination of prior reputation and response strategy on anger toward the organization. Results showed there was an interaction effect between response strategy and prior reputation on anger ($F(2, 223) = 3.47, p < .05$), such that for the organization with prior good reputation, compensation ($M = 5.34$) produced more anger than apology ($M = 4.31$). The interaction effect, however, disappeared for prior bad reputation condition with all of the response strategies eliciting strong anger responses (apology, $M = 5.00$; sympathy, $M = 5.35$; compensation, $M = 5.27$).

**Discussion**

This study examined the effects of three crisis response strategies (sympathy, compensation, and apology) and prior reputation (good and bad) on the organization’s post-crisis reputation, anger towards the organization, and negative word-of-mouth about the organization. The study extended Coombs and Holladay (2008) research by examining crisis communication and reputation management for an organization facing high crisis responsibility.

The findings provide insights on corporate stakeholders’ attitudes toward an organization as a function of prior reputation and choice of crisis response strategy. Results indicate that stakeholders prefer apology over compensation response strategies for an organization facing high crisis responsibility. Corporate stakeholders are more likely to get angry toward an
organization that compensates victims following a crisis than they would get angry toward an organization that offers an apology. The results also suggest that stakeholders are more likely to positively evaluate an organization that uses an apology than an organization that employs a compensation strategy. Crisis managers facing crises that generate high attribution of crisis responsibility and anger are thus advised to rely on apology rather than compensation response strategies.

The findings also suggest that organizations with a prior good reputation have better post-crisis reviews that those with a prior bad reputation, often regardless of the organization’s crisis response strategy. Organizations with prior good reputation will have less public anger and less negative word-of-mouth following a crisis than organizations with prior bad reputation. It would, therefore, be advantageous for an organization with prior good reputation to highlight its past achievements when responding to a crisis. The significance of prior good reputation for an organization also highlights the need for pre-crisis public relations to build a strong positive pre-crisis reputation.

This study suggests an interaction between crisis response strategies and prior reputation on stakeholders’ anger toward the organization. Results show an interaction effect between response strategy and prior reputation on anger, such that for the organization with prior good reputation, compensation strategy produced more anger than an apology strategy. This finding perhaps points to the sensitive nature of monetary compensation that an organization with prior good reputation can extend to victims of a crisis. The elicitation of more anger for an organization that uses compensation is indicative of stakeholders’ aversion to compensating lost lives with money.

One of the limitations of this study is that it used a fictitious airline to examine crisis communication and reputation management for an organization facing high crisis responsibility. A different outcome would probably have been obtained had this study been done with real events and organizations.

Future research should also explore the role of social media in crisis situations. Researchers could embed videos to traditional news stories and examine whether they would have different effects on stakeholders’ attitudes toward the organization.
References


Appendix A
Airline probed in Italian plane crash

Saturday, May 8, 2010 | 9:33 PM ET
The Associated Press

A preliminary investigative report into the cause of last week’s plane crash in Perugia, Italy blames the airline for failing to schedule the ill-fated aircraft for the requisite service and maintenance checks.

The airline, Expeditious Airline, is scheduled to launch domestic flights in the United States in late 2012. Its maiden U.S. flight from Dallas to New York scheduled for December 10, 2012 is fully booked.

The investigations conducted by the Italian Civil Aviation Authority in collaboration with the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board and Boeing experts from the United States established that the plane was overdue for routine checks on its fuel tanks.

“We were able to establish that the plane had flown for four months without service checks on its fuel tanks. As standard procedure, the tanks must be serviced after every two weeks” the report read in part. The report points to multiple fuel tank discrepancies that could include fuel leakage and sealant deterioration.

The Expeditious Airline plane crashed approximately two minutes after takeoff killing all 116 people on board. The London bound Boeing 737-800 had passengers from 12 nations, most of them tourists who had travelled to the artistic city of Perugia for holiday.

Among those on board were 43 Americans, 22 Britons, 10 Australians, 5 Brazilians, and 8 Nigerians. An eye witness said “the plane fell head first and its nose was buried on the ground.”

The jet disintegrated on impact.

Expeditious Airline is considered one of Italy’s safest airlines. This is the airline’s first crash since it was established 45 years ago in 1965. It has won Italy’s coveted Airline of the Year award seven times.

In a statement to the media, Expeditious Airline’s Chief Executive officer Mercello Cassani offered an apology to the families and relatives of the deceased: “We at Expeditious Airlines accept responsibility for the air crash. We apologize and hope those who have been affected by the incident can forgive us.”

End

A sample of the manipulations of the three crisis response strategies:

**Sympathy:** “We at Expeditious Airlines are deeply saddened by this incident. The safety of our passengers, employees and stakeholders is of utmost importance to us. Our thoughts and prayers go out to those affected by this incident.”

**Compensation:** “We at Expeditious Airlines will pay for the needs of the families and relatives of the victims of this crash during this time of mourning. To compensate for the loss, an agreement will be reached soon with the negotiating parties on the amount to be paid to those who lost their loved ones.”

**Apology:** “We at Expeditious Airlines accept responsibility for the air crash. We apologize and hope those who have been affected by the incident can forgive us.”
The Effect of Socially Mediated PR Crises on Planned Behavior: 
How TPB Can Help Both Corporations and Nonprofits

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Abstract
Through two online surveys conducted during the recent crises experienced by Lowe’s and by Susan G. Komen, this study gauges people’s thoughts about purchasing or donating toward the organization in crisis and discusses the use of online apologies. Results showed attitudes and social norms held the most sway.
In December 2011, Lowe’s made a controversial decision to pull its advertising from TLC’s program *All-American Muslim*. The choice, and the communication surrounding it, resulted in a public relations crisis for the home improvement company – thousands of angry posts on the company’s Facebook page, threats of boycott, and protesters outside certain stores. Weeks later, in January 2012, Susan G. Komen for the Cure announced new granting criteria that would deny funding to Planned Parenthood. Again, the communication of this decision prompted thousands of followers on Twitter and Facebook to denounce Komen’s actions.

Through two online surveys conducted during the heat of these crises, the current study gauges people’s thoughts about purchasing or donating toward the organization in crisis and discusses the use of online apologies. By combining the two surveys, we can compare the effects on a corporation and a nonprofit organization and provide a benchmark for future research.

Web surveys were run using Qualtrics. Participants were found from across the nation through blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and Mechanical Turk recruiting. The Lowe’s survey received 379 completed responses, and Susan G. Komen received 270 responses.

This study focuses on people’s reaction to the two crises and how they impact people’s intentions to buy or give using the theory of planned behavior (TPB). The application of TPB could help nonprofits better understand planned giving by their stakeholders and help corporations better understand planned purchase behavior following a crisis.

In both cases, attitudes and social norms held the most sway over respondents’ reported intentions to donate or to buy. The authors suggest a paradigm shift in how social media have expanded the referent others to whom we listen and about whose reactions we care.

Recommendations are shared related to how to handle a crisis, how to manage social media responses, and what to consider in terms of the impact of peers on planned behavior. This study should help practitioners better identify strategies to use from both a promotion and a crisis communication standpoint while taking into consideration the impacts on intent to buy, donate or boycott.

When Lowe’s Home Improvement (Lowe’s) decided to pull its advertising from TLC’s *All-American Muslim* in December 2011, #loweshatesmuslims hashtags quickly appeared on Twitter. In an effort to manage its image, Lowe’s apologized on its Facebook page, but that prompted more than 28,000 comments. In fact, the online brawl was pulled from the page by Lowe’s within a few days and replaced with a second apology. Thousands more comments were posted to that apology. The plea from Lowe’s for a civil discussion failed.

Weeks later, Susan G. Komen for the Cure (SGK) had its own battle to face when the AP posted a story Jan. 31, 2012, that SGK was pulling its grants for breast screening from Planned Parenthood (PP). An uproar similar to what Lowe’s experienced was ignited. Pro-life organizations supported the decision, while opposing messages from PP supporters went viral on social media, including a breast cancer survivor’s video on Facebook and #IstandwithPP and #shameonkomen messages spreading across Twitter. The tone of discussion on social media became quite heated, and donations and event participation for SGK were both negatively affected.

The similarities in the social media backlash allow a comparison of corporate and nonprofit crisis responses. Independent online surveys were conducted during the heat of each of these crises to examine attitudes toward purchasing from or donating to the organization in crisis. Drawing on the work of Shaw, Shiu, Hassan, Bekin, & Hogg (2007), the theory of planned behavior (TPB) is used to examine U.S. citizens’ responses to the funding-related crisis at SGK and toward the controversial advertising decision by Lowe’s. The crisis responses are also
analyzed to provide further support for the challenges facing corporate versus nonprofit decision makers. This study seeks to understand how a crisis might impact consumers’ and donors’ planned behavior and whether profit status affects stakeholder behavior. A recap of the organizations in crisis is provided followed by a review of relevant literature.

Organizations in Crisis

Background of Lowe’s Crisis

Lowe’s Companies, Inc., has traded on the NYSE since 1979 and maintains 1,723 U.S. stores with a presence in all 50 states (Hoover’s, 2012). While the company is second in the home improvement category behind Home Depot, it has grown by 50% since 2005, including an international expansion of 24 stores in Canada and two in Mexico. The company is currently listed 50th on the Fortune 500 (Hoovers, 2012).

Lowe’s was one of the companies that advertised on TLC’s program All-American Muslim. According to TLC, the show followed “the daily lives of five American Muslim families in Dearborn, Michigan, one of the most established and largest concentrations of American Muslims in the country and home to the largest mosque in the United States.” Eight All-American Muslim episodes were created, airing between Nov. 13, 2011, and Jan. 8, 2012. According to Allen (2011), All-American Muslim had 1.2 million weekly viewers on average and the highest viewership of 1.7 million for the premier episode.

All-American Muslim faced criticism from Muslims who were not satisfied with how the Muslim faith and lifestyle were portrayed; this disapproval came in addition to denunciation from U.S. citizens who were concerned that it might convert people to Islam (Allen, 2011). Shortly after AAM’s airing, a Florida-based religious organization known as the Florida Family Association (FFA) spoke out against the program, stating that it “riskily hides the Islamic agenda’s clear and present danger to American liberties and traditional values” (Florida Family Association, 2012). The reproach, combined with an economic downturn (Norris, 2012), likely reinforced concern about a media buy on such a controversial program. Lowe’s decided to pull its advertising support from the program as of Dec. 10, 2011. Though the FFA viewed this as a victory, others saw it as an anti-Muslim move by Lowe’s. FFA claimed to have contacted more than 100 companies encouraging them to pull advertising from the program, and many apparently did; however, Lowe’s seemed to take the brunt of the attack from users of social media. A few weeks later, another organization found itself in hot water online: Susan G. Komen for the Cure.

Background of SGK Crisis

The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, Inc., which does business as Susan G. Komen for the Cure and Affiliates, seeks the eradication of cancer through research, education, screening, and treatment (“About us,” 2012). The organization has built relationships with medical centers around the world and has supported breast-cancer research through donations from Race for the Cure events and other fundraising. Prior to January 2012, SGK enjoyed a stellar reputation.

Only certain offices of the 120 U.S. affiliates for Komen for the Cure work with Planned Parenthood. According to Komen:

Nineteen Komen Affiliates fund breast health services through Planned Parenthood programs that have provided breast health education and breast screenings for hundreds of thousands of low-income, uninsured or medically under-served women. In some areas,
Planned Parenthood may be the only local source of breast health care. (“Regarding,” 2011, para. 3)

According to SGK, this grant to PP has funded 4,866 mammograms and 139,000 breast exams, provided breast health education for 160,000 women, and detected 177 cases of breast cancer in the past 5 years (“Regarding,” 2011).

SGK’s rosy image changed dramatically in January 2012 when news agencies reported that the organization would pull funding from Planned Parenthood because of a new policy denying funding to any entity undergoing government investigation. PP qualified because of a Congressional investigation beginning in the fall of 2011 related to abortion funding (Kliff & Sun, 2012). Speculators believed this policy change at SGK was politically motivated, and this perception collided with stakeholders’ expectations of SGK as an apolitical organization with an apolitical cause. The reason for the speculation was that the granting criteria change was made under the new Senior Vice President for Public Policy Karen Handel, who previously advocated for cutting funding to Planned Parenthood when she ran for governor of Georgia (Kliff & Sun, 2012).

Komen for the Cure’s decision to cut funding to Planned Parenthood actually led to increased donations to PP by various activists and supporters. Within 24 hours, the organization received more than $650,000: $400,000 from online donations and $250,000 from Lee Fikes and his wife to replace the lost Komen grants (Kliff & Sun, 2012). New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg also donated $250,000 (Phillips, 2012).

Komen retracted the decision to cut funding from Planned Parenthood three days later. On February 3, 2012, a statement was released by SGK that it would allow funding of Planned Parenthood: “We will continue to fund existing grants, including those of Planned Parenthood, and preserve their eligibility to apply for future grants, while maintaining the ability of our affiliates to make funding decisions that meet the needs of their communities” (Phillips, 2012, para. 11). Handel resigned on Feb. 7.

**Corporate Identity and Image**

Stakeholders’ intentions toward an organization are impacted by the organizational image. A number of researchers have examined the relationship between corporate identity, brand image, and stakeholders (e.g., Balmer, 2001; Brown & Dacin, 1997; Brown, Dacin, & Pitt, 2010; Cheney & Christensen, 2001; Spears, Brown, & Dacin, 2006; Van Riel & Balmer, 1997). Corporate identity is generally viewed as how the organization views itself (Cheney & Christensen, 2001) while the image reflects how stakeholders perceive the organization’s effectiveness and social character (Brown & Dacin, 1997). Image can impact consumers’ reactions to new products from that company. Studies show consumers are more likely to purchase from organizations that are considered socially responsible (Seeger, 1997; Wigley, 2008). Corporations often try to prove their social responsibility by donating to a nonprofit organization (NPO), but NPOs have to prove themselves worthy as well.

In his study on NPOs’ web presence, Jenkins (2012) found that “nonprofit status often served to heighten the participants' expectations and critical eye” (p. 24). Sisco (2012) also pointed to increased scrutiny for nonprofits: “Because of their reliance on public contributions and public trust, NPOs are often judged by higher standards and face higher expectations than most for-profit companies” (p. 91). In order for nonprofits to accomplish anything, they must have donors who share their passions for a cause and who believe donations are being used
appropriately. NPOs depend upon donations and partnerships, so they are in a particularly

delicate position in a crisis.

While their profit statuses differ, Lowe’s and SGK are both well-known brands in the

United States. Brand management involves maintaining an organization’s identity with varied

stakeholders (Cheney, 1991; de Chernatony, 1999). As the notion of corporate identity has

evolved, many organizations recognize the need for more engagement with their publics. “One

of the external challenges is engendering confidence amongst multiple stakeholders about their

brand’s ability to consistently deliver valued outcomes” (de Chernatony, 1999, p. 158). Effective

communication is of key importance. As organizations interact with external and internal

stakeholders, organizational boundaries sometimes blur, which is especially true in the realm of

social media.

With the explosion of social networking, organizations have realized the importance of

communicating with their stakeholders and managing their brands via social media. Facebook,

which celebrated its eighth anniversary in 2012, has as its mission: “to give people the power to

share and make the world more open and connected” (About Facebook, 2012). Facebook now

has a billion monthly users (Zuckerberg, 2012). Twitter, another popular social networking site,

was launched in 2006. It now has 640 million accounts with 72 million active users on a daily

basis and 400 million tweets posted per day across the network (Wasserman, 2012). Many of

these accounts belong to organizations that have their own Facebook pages and Twitter streams.

These social networking sites, among others, have become new channels for relationship

building between organizations and their stakeholders. Reaching this socially networked world is

essential for any brand, but it is not simply about promotion. Benjamin (2011) states, “Gone are

the days when social media was all about marketing through Twitter and Facebook. Brands are

increasingly using the medium to be responsive and contactable and to resolve customer issues in

real time” (p. 33). More companies are developing, enhancing, and monitoring their brands via

social media (Magee, 2012). The effectiveness of such social media use depends on how

organizations communicate their brand in a variety of situations.

Social media’s importance in brand management was famously seen in the Carnival

Cruise Line Costa Concordia crisis. Facebook became “the most active channel for discussion of

the accident” (Magee, 2012, p. 26). Instead of the corporate website serving as the hub of crisis

information, it was Costa and Carnival’s social media channels that were active. With Lowe’s

and SGK, social media were the hub of information related to the respective crises. This suggests

a major change in where organizations need to share corporate communication, particularly

related to a crisis.

Crisis Communication

An organizational crisis, according to Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (1998), is a “specific,

unexpected, and nonroutine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and

threaten or are perceived to threaten an organization’s high priority goals” (p. 233). When the

news broke about its funding changes in early 2012, SGK found itself confronted with an

unexpected series of events that endangered its fundraising abilities, individual relationships, and

donor partnerships. This crisis put SGK’s entire operation at risk. For the unexpected December

2011 organizational crisis faced by Lowe’s, the results could mean a long-term impact in stock

price and sales. Coombs (2012) points out that though crises are unpredictable, they should be

expected. When organizations respond to a crisis, thoughtful leadership is critical. “Crisis

management seeks to prevent or lessen the negative outcomes of a crisis and thereby protect the
organization, stakeholders, and/or industry from damage” (Coombs, 2012, p. 5). Organizational communicators must strategically consider communication options and how those options interact with the organizational values, vision, and situational context (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992). During a crisis, it is important for organizations to maintain open communication channels for stakeholders. Openness “allows the organization to be proactive in presenting its view of the crisis to the media” (Seeger, 1997, p. 245). Unfortunately, the stress of needing quick responses can complicate good decision-making (Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Drumheller & Benoit, 2004; Seeger et al., 1998).

Organizational crises are usually the result of mistakes, oversights, or deficiencies within an organization potentially putting an organization’s image at risk (Benoit, 1995; Seeger et al., 1998). In the case of SGK, the organization “failed to think it through” (Brinker, 2012, para. 6) and faced a barrage of complaints and boycott threats. According to Eric Brinker (2012), “Accustomed to triaging breast cancer, not PR debacles, we stumbled” (para. 6). SGK posted a video apology and transcript from CEO Nancy Brinker announcing the misstep and reversal in the organization’s funding policy (see Appendix A). For Lowe’s, the controversial attention to a media buy decision seemed to come as a complete surprise. They responded with an apology on Facebook on Dec. 10 (see Appendix B). Unfortunately for Lowe’s, the apology only seemed to stir further controversy. Thousands of angry comments were left below this apology, which was then replaced with a second apology that was also responded to with anger as soon as it was posted.

Although both organizations viewed their responses as an apology, neither truly apologized for their organization’s actions. In separate rhetorical analyses of the apologies, neither organization was found to engage in mortification, or a sincere apology (Drumheller, Gerlich, Brock, & Kinsky, 2012; Drumheller, Gerlich, & Kinsky, 2013). Mortification reflects the sincerity of saying “I’m sorry that I hit you,” rather than “I’m sorry that you are upset that I hit you” (Drumheller & Benoit, 2004). Both organizations relied heavily on bolstering instead, which involves reiterating the good deeds and positive past of the organization to revive the stakeholders’ positive affect for an organization (Benoit, 1995).

Lowe’s bolstered its commitment to diversity and argued that pulling the ad from All-American Muslim was out of respect for its stakeholders (Drumheller et al., 2012):

We believe it is best to respectfully defer to communities, individuals and groups to discuss and consider such issues of importance. We strongly support and respect the right of our customers, the community at large, and our employees to have different views. Similarly, Komen was counting on its reputation as a well-respected organization to repair its image. Brinker returned to the mission of the organization in her public statement: “Our only goal for our granting process is to support women and families in the fight against breast cancer.” The decision to change its funding policies appeared inherently political, leading Komen to further bolster: “We do not want our mission marred or affected by politics – anyone’s politics.” This statement was likely inclusive of Handel whose public targeting of Planned Parenthood in her own political race mired the Komen funding decision (Drumheller et al., 2013).

Bolstering is an important strategy for reminding stakeholders of the value of the organization, but it also can undermine efforts to appear sincere. Lowe’s also used the strategies of accident, claiming that the organization had “accidentally” stepped into a firestorm, and blame shifting arguing that the show, All-American Muslim, had become a “lightning rod” for controversial views (Drumheller et al., 2012). In concert with bolstering, these strategies do little
to garner support for an ailing organization. Komen similarly used denial to distance itself from the accusation that the organization had become political, but unlike Lowe’s, used corrective action by reversing its funding policy decision (Drumheller et al., 2013). Although the statement in itself was not enough to repair Komen’s image, corrective action was a necessary strategy for making sufficient progress.

Both Lowe’s and SGK struggled with their statements being viewed as an apology as evidenced by stakeholder responses (Drumheller et al., 2012; Drumheller et al., 2013), which were quickly promulgated through social media. Because of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media outlets, both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations can engage with stakeholders in the open and receive speedy responses; however, the 24/7, immediate nature of sometimes quite impassioned stakeholder engagement via social media has shocked a number of organizations. Crisis managers face a whole new world where boycotts can begin with a comment and the click of a mouse, as Lowe’s and SGK quickly discovered. Social media continue to receive more research attention for organizational communication (e.g., DiStaso & Bortree, 2012), but the topic demands further examination. NPOs need to understand how their crisis communication affects donors, and corporations need to further their understanding of crisis communication’s effects on consumers. The effectiveness of corporate responses to a crisis affects the planned behaviors of constituents.

Theory of Planned Behavior

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) has been used in a variety of contexts to explain individual behaviors, with particular interest in the areas of consumer (e.g., Shaw et al., 2007) and patient (e.g., Wang, 2009) behaviors. The theory states that individual intentions to engage in a particular behavior indicate the likelihood of actually engaging in that behavior in the future (Ajzen, 1985; 1991). Behavioral intentions are a function of three distinct constructs: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. The more favorable an individual’s attitudes and subjective norms, the stronger the intention to behave a particular way as moderated by perceived behavioral control. Although intention does not necessarily mean action, the strength of the intention can provide indication of the likelihood to act.

Various authors have extended the work of Ajzen to include desire (Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001) and ethical concerns (Shaw & Shiu, 2003). Perugini and Bagozzi (2001) define desire as “a state of mind whereby an agent has a personal motivation to perform an action or to achieve a goal” (p. 71). They contend that desire is a necessary antecedent to intent. Shaw and Shiu (2003) added that “Ethical concerns are often ongoing and irresolvable” (p. 1486), thus prompting more effort in decision-making. Shaw et al. (2007) continued research on ethical consumerism, particularly as it related to intentions to purchase goods manufactured in sweatshops, and proposed the need to consider attitude (ATT), subjective norm (SN), and perceived behavioral control (PBC), as well as ethical obligation and social identity as antecedents of planned behavior. Shaw et al. (2007) also found desire “to be pertinent in fully mediating the effect of attitude and partially mediating the effect of subjective norm on intention” (p. 2). Desire is distinct from intention.

Because of the influence of social media on stakeholders in crisis communication, it is of note that important others “can serve to impact personal motivation to act in terms of desire by positively supporting personal motivation or through negatively influencing desire to avoid sweatshop apparel” (Shaw et al., 2007, p. 2). Such discussions with peers related to purchasing or donating decisions and brand identity often take place now via social media. Social media
have the potential to affect TPB because of the introduction of multiple voices exerting pressure on user attitudes. Group norms in online communities (Bagozzi, Dholakia, & Mookerjee, 2006) and social identity (Thorbjørnsen, Pedersen, & Nysveen, 2007) have been found to potentially influence consumer behavioral intentions, but subjective norms did not (Bagozzi, Dholaki, & Pearo, 2007). Online discussions could thus create a convergence of ideas and norms influencing consumer and donor decision making in ways face-to-face peers do not.

To extend previous research related to TPB, this study examines planned donations to a nonprofit and planned purchases from a for-profit in the aftermath of a communication crisis. Specifically, participants were asked to complete independent surveys about consumer attitudes and intentions related to purchasing from Lowe’s and attitudes and intentions toward planned donations to Susan G. Komen for the Cure. These applications of TPB are compared to assess the effects of socially mediated crisis communication on planned behavior in nonprofit and for-profit contexts. Consistent with Shaw et al. (2007) and based on the negative media coverage following Komen’s change in policy and Lowe’s change in its media buying, it is hypothesized:

H1a: Attitude will have a strong positive relationship with desire to avoid donating to Susan G. Komen and to shop at Lowe’s.
H1b: Subjective norms will have a strong positive relationship with desire to avoid donating to Susan G. Komen and shopping at Lowe’s.
H1c: Perceived behavioral control will have a strong positive relationship with desire to avoid donating to Susan G. Komen and shopping at Lowe’s.

H2a: Attitude will have a strong positive relationship with intent to avoid donating to Susan G. Komen and shopping at Lowe’s.
H2b: Subjective norms will have a strong positive relationship with intent to avoid donating to Susan G. Komen and shopping at Lowe’s.
H2c: Perceived behavioral control will have a strong positive relationship with intent to avoid donating to Susan G. Komen and shopping at Lowe’s.

H3: The relationship between attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and intent is mediated by desire in both the SGK and Lowe’s cases.
H4: The relationship between attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and plan is mediated by desire and intent in both the SGK and Lowe’s cases.

Based on brand identity and image research, it is expected that TPB models will be similar regardless of the profit status of an organization. More important will be the identification of stakeholders with the organization, which could implicate necessary organizational crisis communication strategies.

Method

Procedure and Sample

Surveys were created using Qualtrics Survey Software and distributed online through social media sites and through a national online panel data source to ensure that diverse samples were selected. Data were collected in two phases: in late December 2011 through early January 2012 following the Lowe’s announcement, and February 3-8, 2012, immediately following the SGK grant criteria announcement and subsequent apology. Participants were asked basic demographic questions, as well as TPB scale items specific to either the Lowe’s or SGK case.

Of the 270 participants who completed the SGK survey, 37.3% were males and 62.7% were females, with most being Caucasian (84.8%). Other ethnicities identified include Asian (5.1%), Hispanic (3.3%), Black/African American (3.3%), Native American (.7%), and other
Nearly 52% were single with 48% being married or living with a partner. One third of the sample held a 4-year degree (38%), with 18% holding an advanced degree. Those who have some college or completed a 2-year degree made up 37.5% of the sample with less than 6% having only a high school diploma. In the sample, the majority identified as Democrat (39%) or Independent (33%), with the rest identifying as Republican (20%), Libertarian (5%), or Other (3%).

Forty-three states were represented in the SGK sample, with Texas having the most respondents (n=84). Half of the sample lived in suburban areas (49.3%) with the rest of the sample living in cities (33.7%) and rural areas (16.7%). Around 50% of the sample made less than $40,000 annually. Given the income distribution, it is not surprising that one-half of the sample said that less than 20% of their income was expendable, nor that the majority gave less than $1000 per year to charitable organizations (75%).

In the Lowe’s sample, a total of 379 surveys were completed. There was a fairly even balance in gender (48% male and 52% female), while the majority (85.4%) were Caucasian (with 4.3% Asian American, 4% Latino, 3.2% African American, 1.1% Native American, and 2.1% Other). Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 76, with a mean age of 35. Participants self-identified as married (46.7%), not married (47.2%), or in a domestic partnership (6.1%). In addition, they identified as Democrats (34.9%), Republicans (28%), Independents (32.3%), or Libertarians (4.8%). Participant education ranged from a doctorate (5.9%), through master’s (14.4%), bachelor’s (35.1%), some college (37%), and high school (7.7%). Finally, all 50 states and Washington, D.C., were represented in the sample, with the most common location being Texas (29.4%).

**Measures**

Scale items in the TPB survey were adapted to fit the Susan G. Komen and Lowe’s scenarios, with the primary goal of assessing respondents’ planned giving or avoidance of giving to SGK or shopping at Lowe’s. Wording of these items was as consistent as possible to that set forth in Shaw et al. (2007) and modified to reflect attitudes and intent toward donating to SGK following the organization’s controversial decision to stop funding Planned Parenthood, or Lowe’s decision to pull its ads from *All-American Muslim*.

Consistent with prior studies (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Shaw et al., 2007), overall attitudes toward Susan G. Komen for the Cure and Lowe’s were measured using four 7-point semantic differential scales. Participants were asked to rate SGK/Lowe’s on the following dimensions: (a) good–bad; (b) positive–negative; (c) beneficial–harmful; and (d) favorable–unfavorable. The attitude subscale of the TPB had a Cronbach’s alpha of .96 for SGK and .88 for Lowe’s.

Subjective norms (SN) (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Shaw et al., 2007) were assessed by asking whether respondents believed that those who are important to them think they should or should not donate to SGK (or shop at Lowe’s), and whether those referent others would approve of this behavior. Responses to these two items were made on a 7-point scale (should to should not). The subjective norms subscale of the TPB had a Cronbach’s alpha of .68 for SGK, and .81 for Lowe’s.

Perceived behavioral control (PBC) (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Shaw et al., 2007) was measured using three items. Consistent with past research using the TPB (e.g., Ajzen & Madden, 1986), PBC assessed the participants’ perception of control over donating to SGK or shopping at Lowe’s. Responses were made on a 7-point scale (strongly
disagree to strongly agree). The perceived behavioral control subscale of the TPB had a Cronbach’s alpha of .79 and .81 for Lowe’s.

Desire to avoid donating to SGK or shopping at Lowe’s was measured using two items. Responses were made on a 7-point scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The desire subscale of the TPB had a Cronbach’s alpha of .94 for SGK and .97 for Lowe’s.

Behavioral intentions (BI) (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Shaw et al., 2007) were measured with two items asking participants their likelihood of avoiding donating to SGK (or shopping at Lowe’s) and intent of avoiding donating to SGK or shopping at Lowe’s. Respondents used a 7-point scale ranging from very unlikely to very likely. The behavioral intentions subscale of the TPB had a Cronbach’s alpha of .87 for SGK and .88 for Lowe’s.

Next, planned behavior was measured using two items. Consistent with past research, the plans participants have made to avoid donating to SGK (or shopping at Lowe’s) were assessed. Responses were made on a 7-point scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The desire subscale of the TPB had a Cronbach’s alpha of .93 for SGK and .96 for Lowe’s.

Finally (and separate from TPB scales), respondents’ planned giving to both Susan G. Komen and Planned Parenthood was measured via a pair of identical questions (one per organization), in which participants were asked to indicate whether they planned to start giving to each charity, increase giving, decrease giving, quit giving, or maintain the same level (which may or may not include prior giving).

Results

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) analyses were conducted using AMOS 4.0 software (Wothke & Arbuckle, 1996) with maximum-likelihood estimation. These analyses were conducted in parallel fashion for both SGK and Lowe’s. Structural Equation Models were calculated for a Base Model (attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control effect on plan), Partially Mediated Model 1 (attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control relationship to plan as mediated by desire), Partially Mediated Model 2 (attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control relationship to plan as mediated by intent), and Fully Mediated Model (attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control relationship to plan as mediated by desire and intent). An examination of the differences between the measured model (CFA) and the proposed models (SEM) revealed reasonably good overall fits for both SGK and Lowe’s. Table 1a and 1b compare the goodness of fit between the models for both SGK and Lowe’s, along with other relevant measures. A comparison of the four proposed models and the measured model (CFA) supported the fully mediated model as providing the most acceptable path relative to the measured model. This was determined by comparing the X²’s and the normed X²’s of the models. The fully mediated model presented no significant change of the X² (8.95 for Lowe’s and 3.51 for SGK) nor a significant change in the normed X², with an increase of .022 for Lowe’s and a decrease of .038 for SGK. Both the fully mediated Lowe’s and SGK models also returned CFIs (CFI; Bentler, 1990) and RMSEAs (RMSEA; Steiger & Lind, 1980) indicative of acceptable fits (Bentler & Bonett, 1980; Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Hu & Bentler, 1999). This suggested that no other alternative path from that of the proposed models were needed.

Table 2a and 2b report the regression weights for the path models, with Figure 1 depicting the relationships for Lowe’s, and Figure 2 depicting the relationships for SGK. Results for both models show that all constructs had significant and positive effects on the dependent
variables, with the exception of PBC on INTENT (inverse relationship and not significant for Lowe’s; positive relationship yet not significant for SGK). Based on these results, support was thus found for all hypotheses except H2c in both models (see Tables 2a and 2b).

Tables 3a and 3b report the descriptive statistics summarizing respondents’ planned giving to Susan G. Komen and Planned Parenthood. Of particular interest is that PP is the unwitting beneficiary of the SGK controversy. Collectively, 41% of respondents said they would either start giving to Planned Parenthood or increase their donation levels, while only 2.5% said they would decrease or discontinue funding Planned Parenthood. In contrast, only 18.1% said they would increase support or start giving to Komen, while 17.8% said they would decrease or discontinue support. Komen may have gained some support, but also lost a nearly equal percentage of givers. Reports of giving in the wake of the controversy support these results as affiliates and the national office report lower donations and race participation. In a recent Race for the Cure in Washington D.C., 37,000 crossed the finish line; about 25,000 fewer racers than in previous years (Fessler, 2012). Concurrently, the New Jersey chapter was down at least $300,000 in donations received (Lee, 2012). Across the country, Race for the Cure had 19 percent fewer participants than the previous year (Wallis, 2012).

Discussion

The lack of significant relationships between perceived behavioral control (PBC) and INTENT indicates that respondents’ perceptions of their ability to control their giving (to SGK) or their shopping (at Lowe’s) do not have any consequence in their intentions to avoid/not avoid both the nonprofit and the retail chain. The positive relationship in the SGK case is consistent with the notion that donating is strictly volitional and could be avoided with no detriment to the giver. Whereas avoiding products made by sweatshop labor (Shaw et al., 2007) reflects a nuanced decision of commonly purchased items, donating to a charity is optional and is derived from available discretionary household funds. In the case of Lowe’s, the negative relationship may hint at some respondents feeling there may not be reasonable substitute stores nearby. The other positive and significant relationships, though, attest to the important roles that both attitude (ATT) and subjective norms (SN) play in planned behavior. This is particularly true for attitude, which is the second most significant construct in relation to desire (DES), and most significant construct in relation to INTENT (in the Lowe’s case), and the most significant constructs relating to DES and INTENT in the SGK case. In other words, what the respondents feel about the company will ultimately have a very strong influence on future shopping or donating.

These attitudes tie into the expectations of organizational responses to crises. Although bolstering is useful to remind stakeholders of the values and mission of the organization, missteps will be carefully weighed against other options. Lowe’s might lose a little by not engaging in corrective action and reversing its media-buy decision (Drumheller et al., 2012), but limited alternative hardware stores might mitigate stakeholder concerns. In contrast, had SGK not reversed its funding policy to continue funding PP (Drumheller et al., 2013), it is likely that the organization’s recovery would be much more difficult to achieve because there is a plethora of philanthropic choices. NPOs are likely to be held to higher standards to earn donations (Jenkins, 2012; Sisco, 2012).

The findings also point to the impact social media can have on people’s planned behavior. The forum of an organizational Facebook page, as well as the completely unregulated and un-moderated Twitter feeds of the public, allow anyone with an opinion to voice it easily. These opinions shared with others may influence their behavior. It is entirely possible that the
results reported herein are a result of just this phenomenon. Organizational crisis responses could dictate the direction of the social media discourse. Savvy social media representatives are needed in both corporate and NPO settings.

Such media savvy was demonstrated in the Komen crisis by Planned Parenthood and its supporters in spreading their message via social media. With three official Twitter feeds, PP was much more active in the social media space than SGK: @PPFAQ, with health information for 9,859 followers; @PPact, for the advocacy arm with 56,201 followers; and @HeyPP, aimed at teens with 1,124 followers (as of July 2012). In comparison, SGK has two official feeds: @KomenfortheCure and @komenadvocacy, with 43,581 and 2,748 followers respectively (as of July 2012). According to Panepento (2012), Planned Parenthood posted the news of the funding cuts on both Twitter and Facebook on Tuesday, Jan. 3 while SGK waited until Wednesday to post news on its Facebook page. Some suggest that this delay to speak out in social media made things worse for SGK (Panepento, 2012). This would certainly seem consistent with these results. If influential peers were not inspired by SGK to share more positive statements about the organization through social media, the only voices would be the dissenters, thus creating an exodus of SGK supporters.

In the case of Lowe’s, the company utilized its Facebook page to post an apology. The result was tens of thousands of comments (many negative), which Lowe’s then completely removed. Lowe’s then posted a second apology, which also generated thousands of replies. This illustrates the importance of having a well-conceived social media strategy and policy (for corporations and organizations alike). Understanding that social media allow for brands to have conversations rather than just one-way communication might have helped Lowe’s avoid the missteps it took immediately following its original decision to pull its advertising. Additionally, a well-constructed, sincere apology could have accepted responsibility for giving the impression that the organization was bowing to pressure from FFA while removing fodder from anti-Muslim individuals.

It is possible that the effects of subjective norms are magnified in the social media era because the notion of one’s peer group has been redefined. No longer are individuals limited to face-to-face interaction, nor temporal nor geographic exchanges. Instead, social media allow for the interaction between people and their acquaintances across multiple layers of life, and, in the case of corporate and organizational pages, with people completely unknown to the user. These layers are connected easily by social media and can span decades and continents. Corporate responses need to take into consideration the quick and critical responses made possible by social media. False organizational statements, for example, can be quickly refuted with evidence provided by social media stakeholders.

This research helps public relations practitioners in the nonprofit realm by expanding the theories available for their use. Our results are very similar for both a for-profit company and a non-profit organization. Applying the theory of planned behavior, once relegated to psychology and consumer behavior, adds another tool in the PR practitioner’s toolbox for better understanding the organization’s stakeholders. In other words, the theory of planned behavior is not only useful in understanding buying behavior but also giving behavior. In this case, we found that intent to donate/shop was mediated by desire, and respondents’ plan to donate/shop was mediated by their intent. While attitude was the best predictor of giving/shopping, the role of what respondents perceived others thought should not be underestimated. This goes back to Shaw et al.’s (2007) extension of the theory: it is not just what people think but what they think others think.
While giving is a different activity from consumer shopping, the application of the theory of planned behavior to this scenario is still a valid one, and demonstrates the possible influences of others on the decisions individuals make. In other words, social pressures can affect planned giving as much as they impact planned buying. Because of social media, peer influence can extend far beyond immediate family, friends, and co-workers, because the social graph connects people who may or may not even know each other (Johnson, 2012). What current social media networks have also introduced is the power of archival data. Though an organization can control the information it posts on its own website, stakeholders can search Twitter based on a hashtag used by dissenters, which is completely out of the control of an organization. In another example, Facebook’s new timeline layout can be beneficial for an organization as it tells its story through time, but when crises hit, it can keep that stamp of a crisis on the organization forever. The organization might choose to erase information from that time period leaving an obvious hole, which Lowe’s chose to do on its Facebook page after the crisis resulting from pulling advertising from *All-American Muslim*. This, however, has ethical implications and could potentially lead to further damage to an image. Organizations, including NPOs, need to use social media with extreme caution. It is important to engage with stakeholders, to listen, to be part of the conversation and to address inaccurate posts, but it should not be used lightly. For nonprofits that likely cannot afford professional monitoring services, this may suggest a new role for certain volunteers.

**Conclusion**

It is evident that image and brand perception for corporations like Lowe’s and NPOs like Susan G. Komen are affected by attitudes and subjective norms via social media. Whereas 10-20 years ago individuals would be exposed to subjective norms only through their temporal spheres of face-to-face contact, they are now exposed to the perceived views of many by virtue of computer-mediated contact. More importantly, attitudes toward companies and organizations can be significantly affected as well. The impacts in this instance are plans to avoid donating to SGK (which should be a cautionary tale for NPOs), as well as plans to avoid shopping at Lowe’s. Crisis management is an imperative function for any organization, regardless of profit status, but NPOs need to be acutely aware that discretionary funds can be easily diverted if their image is not protected. Furthermore, that subjective norms would outweigh an individual’s own attitudes in the Lowe’s case is a significant indicator of how planned behaviors (and by extension, image and brand perception) can be affected via social media.

**Limitations**

This study is limited in that it utilized two small, non-random samples. The study is also limited in that the TPB, as applied in the Susan G. Komen controversy, was not applied to Planned Parenthood. While it would be interesting to apply the TPB framework to Planned Parenthood giving, it would have presented a time-consuming (and likely confusing task), to have respondents complete two batteries of TPB questions. Thus, the TPB was applied to only the principal player in this controversy (SGK).

The fact that the controversies occurred during the winter (a relatively quiet time for SGK races and events, and not peak shopping season for home improvement projects in the case of Lowe’s) may also have reduced the impact than had it occurred during other parts of the year when both SGK and home improvement play larger roles. It is possible that, had the controversies occurred during other parts of the year, the effects could have been substantially
larger. Still, the samples are diverse geographically, with good representation across age groups and gender, and there is little reason to suspect that any other samples would respond differently. Furthermore, it was critical to measure public perceptions and plans immediately after the controversies in order to assess short-term effects, as well as serve as a benchmark for future studies.

Finally, it should be considered that plan is not necessarily action. In other words, while respondents may indicate (via the model) they will avoid donating to SGK or shopping at Lowe’s, and also report their giving plans with regard to Susan G. Komen and Planned Parenthood, only a longitudinal study would allow for examination of actual donation (or non-donation) and shopping behavior resulting from the controversies. It is possible that respondents might avoid donating to SGK or shopping at Lowe’s in the short-run, only to return there in the long-run; it is also possible that, while donors and shoppers exhibit the effect of social pressure when in the context of planned behavior, there may be a disconnect when it comes to actually donating/not donating or shopping/not shopping. A future examination of SGK’s donations and race participation data at both the aggregated and local levels, as well as Lowe’s sales data, would be able to reveal long-term effects. Similarly, in the context of SGK, it may be prudent to compare long-term donations to Planned Parenthood.

Areas for Future Research

Numerous opportunities exist for extending this research, both in the context of for-profit retailers and non-profit organizations. With the results of this study forming a baseline group of planned giving to Susan G. Komen (via the theory of planned behavior), and the self-reported planned giving to both Komen and Planned Parenthood, it would be valuable to reconsider the subject during the peak of Komen’s races and fundraising activities (autumn), as well as subsequent longer term effects several years hence. These future studies need to be compared to longitudinal financial figures for both organizations in order to determine the long-term effects on each (if any), as well as to determine if what people say is indeed what people do.

There is also potential for applying TPB to a nonprofit during a period of non-crisis. Certain charities are controversial in themselves with or without a crisis, and those could lend themselves to studies of planned giving, and, how the same aspects of attitude, desire, social norms, and perceived behavioral control impact giving.

Nonprofit organizations, like any organization, need to develop and practice crisis management plans inclusive of social media. In particular, this study shows that the influence of peers must not be overlooked. Finding ways to connect to opinion leaders within social media can help an organization better manage crisis communication efforts. As such, volunteers could serve key roles as social media managers and assistants in strategic communication. Donations are the lifeblood of any NPO, deserving of the protection of effective crisis communication.

A future examination of Lowe’s sales data at both the aggregated and same-store level would be able to reveal long-term effects of the controversy. If there are few or no reasonable shopping substitutes in particular markets, shoppers may return to Lowe’s in short order (or never leave in the first place). Even in markets with substitute retail outlets, it is possible that any ill feelings shoppers had toward Lowe’s may be lessened via marketing activities such as promotions, pricing strategies, and advertising. Thus, longitudinal data at both the corporate and local levels would be needed to ascertain lasting impact of the controversy.

Clearly TPB can provide a means for comparing how NPO and corporate crises impact stakeholder attitudes and behavior intentions, which can assist with analyses of crisis
communication. With social media options increasing and playing a larger role in organizational crises as they develop, both NPOs and corporations will benefit from understanding how attitudes and social norms impact not only the crisis, but the responses to the crisis as well.
References


Drumheller, K., Gerlich, R. N., & Kinsky, E. S. (2013, April). I#standwithPP: Social media threats to organizational legitimacy #komen. Paper to be presented at the conference of the Southern States Communication Association, Louisville, KY.


Table 1a

Model Comparison: Lowe’s

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Base Model</th>
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<th>Measured Model</th>
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Table 1b

Model Comparison: Susan G. Komen for the Cure

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Incrementa 1 Fit

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Parsimony

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Table 2a

*Fully Mediated Model: Lowe’s*

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<th>p</th>
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Table 2b

*Fully Mediated Model: Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure*

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Table 3a
*Planned Giving to Susan G. Komen*

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<td>Increase giving</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
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Table 3b
*Planned Giving to Planned Parenthood*

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<td>Quit giving</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>99.6</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
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<td>Total</td>
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Figure 1: Lowe’s Fully Mediated Path Model
Figure 2: SGK Fully Mediated Path Model
Appendix A
Statement from Susan G. Komen Board of Directors and Founder and CEO Nancy G. Brinker

DALLAS - February 3, 2012 - We want to apologize to the American public for recent decisions that cast doubt upon our commitment to our mission of saving women’s lives. The events of this week have been deeply unsettling for our supporters, partners and friends and all of us at Susan G. Komen. We have been distressed at the presumption that the changes made to our funding criteria were done for political reasons or to specifically penalize Planned Parenthood. They were not.

Our original desire was to fulfill our fiduciary duty to our donors by not funding grant applications made by organizations under investigation. We will amend the criteria to make clear that disqualifying investigations must be criminal and conclusive in nature and not political. That is what is right and fair. Our only goal for our granting process is to support women and families in the fight against breast cancer. Amending our criteria will ensure that politics has no place in our grant process. We will continue to fund existing grants, including those of Planned Parenthood, and preserve their eligibility to apply for future grants, while maintaining the ability of our affiliates to make funding decisions that meet the needs of their communities.

It is our hope and we believe it is time for everyone involved to pause, slow down and reflect on how grants can most effectively and directly be administered without controversies that hurt the cause of women. We urge everyone who has participated in this conversation across the country over the last few days to help us move past this issue. We do not want our mission marred or affected by politics – anyone’s politics. Starting this afternoon, we will have calls with our network and key supporters to refocus our attention on our mission and get back to doing our work. We ask for the public’s understanding and patience as we gather our Komen affiliates from around the country to determine how to move forward in the best interests of the women and people we serve.

We extend our deepest thanks for the outpouring of support we have received from so many in the past few days and we sincerely hope that these changes will be welcomed by those who have expressed their concern.
Appendix B:
Lowe’s Home Improvement, Inc. Apology

It appears that we managed to step into a hotly contested debate with strong views from virtually every angle and perspective – social, political and otherwise – and we’ve managed to make some people very unhappy. We are sincerely sorry. We have a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion, across our workforce and our customers, and we’re proud of that longstanding commitment.

Lowe’s has received a significant amount of communication on this program, from every perspective possible. Individuals and groups have strong political and societal views on this topic, and this program became a lighting rod for many of those views. As a result we did pull our advertising on this program. We believe it is best to respectfully defer to communities, individuals and groups to discuss and consider such issues of importance.

We strongly support and respect the right of our customers, the community at large, and our employees to have different views. If we have made anyone question that commitment, we apologize.

Thank you for allowing us to further explain our position.
Public Relations/Communication Department CCO Reporting:
What Information Do CEOs Truly Need?

Fraser Likely
Likely Communication Strategies Ltd.

Abstract

The extant literature provides limited empirical evidence on the specific information needs an Organizational Head/Chief Executive Officer (CEO) has concerning the Public Relations/Communication (PR/C) function. In other words, from the flip side of this same coin, little research has been conducted on what information the PR/C function and its Chief Communication Officer should report to the CEO? What information do CEOs (or another executive to whom the CCO reports) need to understand the direction, management, internal relationships, activities and performance results of the PR/C function - in order to assess its contribution to the organization and thus determine its intrinsic value.

This conceptual paper presents a theoretical model for the reporting of requisite information from the PR/C department/CCO to the CEO, by adapting Peter Drucker’s five dimensional Information Executives Truly Need framework. The identification of information possibilities in the construct of the model comes from a review of four relevant streams of PR/C research: roles; leadership; strategic management; and valuation, evaluation and measurement.

As a theoretical and exploratory work, this study provides no empirical data. Rather, this study analyzes the extant literature, explicates the concept of information provision and reporting to the CEO, and develops a framework for use in future research.
Introduction

The late Fred C. Repper (1992) wrote the following words in the initial Excellence Study book: *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*. That was over 20 years ago.

“After all, no (one) has a greater desire than the CEO to find out what public relations contributes to the organization” (p. 113)

Fred C. Repper was a Public Relations/Communication (PR/C) professional. During his time as a member of the Excellence Study team, he had become a consultant, having just retired from a long and distinguished career in PR/C management. In his time, he was Chief Communication Officer (CCO) to eight Chief Executive Officers (CEOs). He died in 2001, shortly before the last book of the Excellence Study was produced, with that book dedicated to his memory: “… He provided insight into the world of the working professionals to which we–as academics–do not have such ready access as he did” (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002).

But, two decades on, the profession still does not know what, precisely, a CEO needs to “find out.” While there is anecdotal evidence (Lukaszewski, 2008), there is yet empirical evidence. To summarize: “… we do not know much about the experiences of public relations practitioners in educating CEOs about the abilities of public relations …” (Bowen, 2009, p.430). What information does a CEO need that would allow the CEO to make an informed determination about the contribution the PR/C function is making? What knowledge and understanding must the CEO have so as to ascertain the value she or he would place on the PR/C function? Does the profession know by which yardstick, or surely today a meterstick, CEOs need to employ to evaluate how effectively or even cost-effectively the PR/C function is performing? There is as yet no scientific evidence, due to the lack of sustained empirical investigation, about the information CEOs need, from which they can inform themselves. In other words, what information should CCOs report to ensure an informed and thus educated CEO?

Driving Force

The impetus for this research project came from a client of the author. The author is a consultant and was in the midst of an engagement that involved, in part, the design and development of the first performance measurement system for a PR/C department - one that identifies the services and activities of the department, captures the performance of those services and activities at various levels and evaluates the results of the activities. As is typical in these types of assignments, a part of the discussion focused on the reporting of such activities as conducting research, analysis and planning, identifying and evaluating risk and providing strategic counsel as well as their sub-activities such as proffering forewarning, providing operational (strategy execution) advice, conducting issues management scenario planning and inserting timely, evidence-based insight into decision-making.

In practical terms, examples of these types of activities included how to report the fact that the PR/C function was able to keep the organization out of a potentially damaging media story, how the maintenance of a relationship with a stakeholder group allowed for the identification and then negotiation out of a developing situation that may have become publically embarrassing or how the identification of risk within an a new operational initiative potentially prevented the creation of an organization-made public issue. Decisions were required concerning the reporting of these activities and the question was how to represent these activities, particularly since they were perceived as being of ‘higher value’. These were activities that were
considered ‘strategic’ and were activities that consumed a fair proportion of available time and effort, and thus budget. Yet, they were difficult to represent on a results-based scorecard or a common output-oriented dashboard.

Consideration of these more ‘preventive’ activities then led to a discussion of the extent to which the CEO and the executive team fully understood the scope of the PR/C function and the range of the services and activities undertaken, and funded. Simply, the question became: was reporting performance data, particularly output data with occasional outcome data, sufficient? Would this results information suffice in meeting the CEO’s information needs? Certainly, it did not represent the full scope of the function’s work, nor the complete context in which the function made a contribution. It was at this point in the deliberations that the CCO, reporting to a new, recently hired CEO, asked if there was empirical research in the PR/C literature on the information CCOs usually report to CEOs or a list of the information CEOs request and require. That is, what information sources would allow the “CEO to find out what public relations contributes to the organization.”? Not wanting to wade through a number of semi-pertinent studies, the CCO expressed preference for a “best practice” list. The author could not find such a list, nor for that matter any research studies that were on topic.

While the author knew that extensive research has been and is being undertaken on PR/C roles, leadership, strategic management and valuation, evaluation and measurement, the author wasn’t familiar with any research that ‘rolled-up’ or aggregated the learning from these streams of PR/C research, specifically with regard to a CCO-CEO reporting relationship and the information needs of the CEO. Thus, this conceptual paper attempts to bridge a gap with regard to CCO information reporting, between and among existing research studies conducted by these various streams of the structural-functionalist school of public relations research.

**Purpose**

The intent of this research is to identify, construct and populate a theoretical framework for CCO information reporting to the CEO. As a theoretical work, this research provides no empirical data. Its purpose is to propose a CEO Information Needs Framework, based on Peter Drucker’s (1995) *Information Executives Truly Need* model. This, then, is the first stage of a longer research project. The second stage will be qualitative, the development of a questionnaire and the conduct of with interviews with CEOs. The final stage will be quantitative, surveying CEOs, with research questions and hypotheses for the empirical study built on the previous insights.

**Methodology**

The methods chosen to develop a theoretical framework, essentially a hypothesis, first included the identification of an existing conceptual model that could be adapted from the Drucker framework for use here. This was referred to as the Base Framework. With a concept in place, the extant literature on PR/C roles, leadership, strategic management and valuation, evaluation and measurement was analyzed to extricate findings on CEO information needs. This review included research studies that involved CEOs and their views on PR/C. The findings from the literature review were used to support the population of the conceptual framework. This second framework was referred to as the Advanced Framework. Finally, the author reviewed the findings from various audits and organizational reviews conducted by his firm over the past five years. These were proprietary reports prepared for clients. In particular, a secondary analysis of interview notes taken from 10 completed executive interviews with CEOs and 15 interviews with
Tier II executives - to whom the CCO reported - was conducted. Findings were sorted into the five categories of information in the framework and compared to the results of the literature review. From there, the author developed a Final Framework, that combined the findings from the literature review and the findings from the secondary analysis of the interview notes into a series of statements under each of the five categories of the framework.

Model for a Theoretical Framework

While the literature provides ample discussion on setting up information systems from an information technology perspective, there is less emphasis on the actual content needs within these systems. That is, research on what information needs to be gathered, transmitted and received in a way that it timely, complete, accurate and malleable for additional analysis is limited. Gorry and Morton (1989) suggest that such an information framework “should exist only to support decisions” (p. 50) and should include a “summary of information requirements” (p. 51). They further state information requirements are for decisions involving operational control, management control and strategic planning (p. 49). They emphasize, then, that information needs span both lagging and leading indicators. In all three of these decision cases, information on end-state objectives, outputs and outcomes or lagging indicators are balanced with leading indicators or information on predictive or desired outcomes as well as information on early warnings of risk related to planned performance. An information needs framework will allow for both types on indicators and provide both leading and lagging information for operational control, management control and strategic planning decision-making.

The information needs of organizational executives have not been studied broadly. Some research has been conducted around executive environmental scanning for information (Auster & Choo, 1994; Choo, 1994; Watson, Rainer, Jr. & Koh, 1991). Other research has been prepared on critical success factors - factors that must receive on-going attention - around the identification of information needs (Rockart, 1979; Poon, & Wagner, 2001). To our knowledge, no research has been produced on the information reporting needs of CCOs, although a study was conducted on Chief Marketing Officers (Ashill & Jobber, 2001). That all said, research on information needs carried out by Peter Drucker, research that meets the criteria established by Gorry and Morton above, provides a broad based view point for examining executive needs. Drucker’s (1995) research is summed up in a seminal article published in the Harvard Business Review.

Drucker (1995) provides a framework that includes five categories of information: foundation information; productivity information; competence information; resource allocation information; and environment information. These five categories represent the information that all executives, as he says, truly need. Drucker calls each of these five categories, tools (p. 12). Each should be seen as a diagnostic tool, in that information received by the executive must be active and not passive and thus be actionable. Do note that recent research studies have found a similar set of categories to what Drucker proposed. Davenport (2010) reports on a study of CEO information needs: “In a down economy, executives want information on receivables and payables more quickly (50\% mentioned this type) as well as on budgets, spending, and costs (also 50\%), cash flow (47\%), strategic and operational risk (40\%), and employee performance and productivity (36\%). In a growing economy, executives said they want information more quickly on employee satisfaction (27\%), market share (13\%), inventory levels (12\%), supplier and partner data (12\%), and scenario plans and simulations (12\%).

Drucker’s (1995) Foundation information includes the “oldest and most widely used set
of diagnostic management tools” (p. 13), which is financial data. He cites cash flow, liquidity projections and other typical financial data sets. These are “… likened to the measurements a doctor takes at a routine physical: weight; pulse; temperature, blood pressure, and urine analysis. If the readings are normal, they do not tell us much. If they are abnormal, they indicate a problem that needs to be identified and treated” (p. 13). The second tool is productivity information, the productivity of key resources. Here he cites the measurement of all costs, including productivity, economic value added (the productivity of all factors of production) and activity and process benchmarking measurements. Competence information is his third diagnostic tool. Drucker includes your core competencies, your competitors’ core competencies, your leadership gaps and the need for innovation as areas for measurement. The fourth tool is resource allocation information, the “allocation of scarce resources – capital and performing people” (p. 17). It includes capital appropriation process measurement - of cash flow, return on investment, payback period and discounted present value. Is an investment successful? When should results be expected? It also includes measurement of whether the right people are in the right positions. Have we allocated human resources appropriately? Have we assigned talent appropriately? Are the expectations for high performing people appropriate? Will performance suffer if high performing people are away or leave?

Drucker states that: “Those four kinds of information tell us only about the current business … for strategy, we need organized information about the environment” (p. 19). “Strategy has to be based on information about markets, customers, and noncustomers; about technology in one’s own industry and others; about worldwide finance; and about the changing world economy … it is always with noncustomers that basic changes begin and become significant” (p. 20). This environmental information is the fifth tool. Measurement is against intended strategy, goals, strategy execution and revised, emergent strategy (as per Mintzberg, 1994).

Although, Drucker’s framework is meant to cover all executive positions, it is possible to tailor it to a CCO’s needs. Formative information would include information on PR/C department budget allocations, revenue sources, expenditure forecasts and proposed new investments. It would include historic, proposed and comparative information on spend. The second, productivity information, involves information on communication product, communication channel/media and program/campaign performance effectiveness, on their performance cost-effectiveness and on efficiencies and thus on PR/C employee productivity. For the third, information on collective and individual competence, it embodies determinations of PR/C core vs. noncore competencies, internal client relationships, corporate level result measurement as well as innovation. Resource allocation information includes information on the allocation of PR/C department resources against corporate and business line objectives, the cost-benefit analysis for communication products, channels and programs and allocation of resources to internal client requirements. Finally, the fifth – environmental information – incorporates information on internal and external stakeholders and publics, on issues and risk, for corporate and business line strategy formulization, strategy execution and strategy formation processes.

Since the PR/C function works in a matrix environment for the most part (Grunig, J. 2006: Grunig, L., Grunig, J. & Dozier, 2002) reporting to and accountable to both an executive supervisor and to client/business partners, the executives that require information from the CCO include both the CEO/senior executive and the internal client/business partner executive. In 30-60% of organizations, the CCO may report directly and functionally to the same executive, a Tier II executive such as the Chief Marketing Officer, the Chief Human Resources Officer, the
Chief Strategic Planning Officer or the Head of a business/operational unit. In the remaining 40-
70% of situations, the CCO reports directly to the CEO and functionally to an internal client.
These percentages have held up through a variety of research studies (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier,
2002; Bowen, 2006; Swerling, Sen, Bonefeste, Rezvan, Lee & McHargue, 2010; Spencer
Stuart/Weber Shandwick, 2012). Given this typical dual reporting arrangement, we have
modified the Drucker framework to include both the CEO (or other executive) to whom the CCO
reports directly and the Tier II executives to whom the CCO reports functionally. Figure 1 below
provides a view of the basic framework, including the variables under each category of
information.

Figure 1. Basic Framework of PR/C Department Information Reporting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Executive Level</th>
<th>Foundation Information</th>
<th>Productivity Information</th>
<th>Competence Information</th>
<th>Resource Allocation Information</th>
<th>Environmental Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CEO/Executive (Direct Report)</td>
<td>• Department budget • Revenue sources, • Expenditure forecasts • Proposed new investments</td>
<td>• Communication product and communication channel/media performance effectiveness • Performance cost-effectiveness • Efficiencies • PR/C employee productivity</td>
<td>• Core vs. noncore competencies • Internal client relationships</td>
<td>• Department resources against objectives • Cost-benefit analysis for communication products, channels and programs • Allocation of resources to internal client requirements</td>
<td>• Stakeholders and publics • Issues and risk • Corporate and business line strategy formulation, strategy execution and strategy formation processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier II Executive (Functional Report)</td>
<td></td>
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Literature Review

In this section, we review the literature on PR/C roles, leadership, strategic management and valuation, evaluation and measurement streams to determine support, if any, for the variables displayed in Figure 1, CEO information needs. We then review a number of research studies that involved CEOs and their views on the CCO. These steps will help to further populate a framework by adding detail to the five categories of CEO information need and CCO information reporting provision.
This stream of public relations research is a mature research subject in PR/C academia, one with a particularly long history. It has also been a topic of interest with professionals, most recently, albeit in a general way, through the Global Alliance initiatives of the Stockholm Accords (Global Alliance, 2010) and the Melbourne Mandate (Global Alliance, 2012).

The history of research on role enactment by public relations/communication practitioners is well described (e.g., Broom & Smith, 1978; Dozier in J.E. Grunig, 1992; Dozier & Broom, 1995; Toth, Serini, Wright & Emig, 1998; Moss, Warnaby & Newman, 2000; van Ruler 2000; L.A. Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001; L.A. Grunig, J.E. Grunig & Dozier, 2002; DeSanto & Moss, 2004; Likely, 2004; Moss, Newman & DeSanto, 2005; van Ruler & Verčič, 2005; DeSanto, Moss & Newman, 2007; Bowen, 2008; Hamrefors, 2009; Steyn & Everett, 2009; Johansson & Ottestig, 2011; Zerfass & Franke, 2012)

The conceptualization of the roles professionals play has evolved in the over three decades of research. Dozier (in L.A. Grunig, J.E. Grunig & Dozier, 2002) and Zerfass (2012) tracked this evolution in great detail. Dozier cites Broom’s early (and sustaining) contribution to roles research. Further research by Broom and Dozier (1995) led to the reworking of Broom’s four-role model. They compressed the first three roles - expert prescriber (subject matter expert and knowledge broker), communication facilitator (communication producer), and problem-solving process facilitator (issues management supporter) - into one single role: manager. The manager-technician role model became the dominant conceptualization of practitioner roles.

Some researchers suggested that “although the manager-technician dichotomy offers a useful means of distinguishing between broad patterns of practitioner activity, it may mask significant variations in the way practitioners operate in different task environments or in different organizational or societal contexts” (Moss, Warnaby & Newman, 2000, p.279) and have shown interest in examining the manager role more closely, particularly as it relates to the strategic management of the organization. Moss, Warnaby and Newman (2000) also sought out and interviewed “senior-level” practitioners, heads of the PR function in private and public sector organizations in the United Kingdom, and asked these practitioners what they did and how they spent their time. They found considerable time spent in meetings and on the administrative work required for managing their department and their staff. Wright (1995) also had researched senior level practitioners and “a third major organizational role for public relations—communication executive comprised mainly of corporate senior vice presidents of public relations and communication who report directly to CEOs” (p. 183).

Dozier (in L.A. Grunig, J.E. Grunig & Dozier, 2002, p. 228) has suggested that there are two forms of managerial expertise: the administrative manager; and the strategic manager. The first develops goals and objectives, prepares budgets, develops strategies to solve PR problems, manages organizational response to issues and manages people. The latter conducts evaluation research, uses research to segment publics and performs environmental scanning. The Administrative Manager is more involved in the “day-to-day operations of a well-run department.” The Strategic Manager is “tied to a set of strategic tools” allowing the department to “contribute to the organization’s strategic planning process.” Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001, p.229) also described a third role, a role they called agency profile. They found that this ‘senior advisor’ role comprised “senior-level activities” such as: “meeting with clients/executives, counseling management, supervising the work of others, and conducting and analyzing research.” In their qualitative research, there was much richness in the description given to the
manager role. Focus group participants interpreted the role as having these qualities (2001, p.230): “challenging and motivating people, teaching them, mentoring, getting subordinates to stretch and become ‘all they can be,’ understanding others, rallying support, budgeting, having a vision, and being able to do it all: accounting, budgeting, technical designing, planning, strategic thinking, processing and synthesizing information, setting goals, and so forth.”

The management work of senior level professionals continued to be a source of research throughout the 2000s for a particular team of researchers (DeSanto & Moss, 2004; Moss, Newman & DeSanto, 2005; DeSanto, Moss & Newman, 2007). This team found a five-dimensional model for roles enacted by the senior level professional: (1) monitor and evaluator – work and department administration; (2) trouble-shooting/problem-solver – managing organizational challenges; (3) key policy and strategy advisor – inputting and advising organizational executives; (4) issues management expert – environmental scanning, intelligence gathering, analysis, and issue identification; and (5) communication technician – still holds the pen to the creation of content (2004). Likely (2004) also argued that the manager role as described by Broom and Dozier was not in itself complete and also suggested a third role: “The executive leader role takes many of the activities described as part of the enactment of the manager role to a higher level of conceptualization. Where the manager, for example, developed goals and objectives for the branch, managed the branch budget, managed people or planned public relations programs, the executive leader repositioned the branch (vision; direction; purpose), identified, acquired and re-allocated resources, developed a comprehensive HR regime and developed an integrated planning framework. The executive leader also designed organizational structures, developed learning and training programs, created centres of expertise and formalized relationships with clients. From the evidence, this conceptualization of a higher-level role is more than simply a fuller depiction of the manager role” (p. 143). He went on to suggest that the original manager role could be subdivided into three distinct roles: “Whereas the strategic managerial aspect of the manager role primarily manages public relations problems and programs, and the administrative management aspect manages the on-going operations and administration of the communication branch, the executive leader role manages the communication function by leading change to the positioning, organization, human-assets, governance and environment and culture of the function” (p.143).

Van Ruler and Vercic further elaborating on the counseling role by including the following sub-roles: “… coaching its members in the development of their communicative competencies, by conceptualizing communication plans, and by executing communication means, using informational, persuasive, relational, and discursive interventions” (van Ruler & Vercic, 2005, p. 265). More recent research into roles of senior PR/C executives includes an ethics role – “indeed perform the role of ethics counsel or corporate conscience in their organizations” (Bowen, 2008, p. 289), a strategic management role – “communication executives have a distinct strategic managerial role within their organizations. The executive role involves three different performances: the organizational leader; the communication leader; and the communication manager” (Johansson & Ottestig, 2011, p. 145), and an internal communication consulting role – “… including the “inbound” activities of listening and monitoring to inform overall strategic decision-making” (Zerfass & Franke, 2012, p. 28).

Zerfass and Franke argue that an internal communication consulting role for senior PR/C executives is nothing new, linking this role back to studies by Moss, Warnaby & Newman (2000), Grunig, L.A., Grunig, J.E. & Dozier (2002), Moss, Newman, & DeSanto, (2005), van Ruler & Vercic (2005) and Hamrefors (2009). They describe a counseling role as follows: “the
task of observing the environment regarding communication-related topics, interpreting the results and information, and integrating them into task-related, organizational decision-making processes, as well as creating awareness of the necessity of this integration by giving advice from a communicational expert perspective. At the same time, it accomplishes a basis on which organizational members can reflect and adapt their own actions” (2012, p. 853). They go on to describe a framework for internal consulting that includes the following four dimensions: “a) recommending communication activities and techniques, b) providing and supporting communication competencies, structures, and processes, c) integrating communicative insights into task-related decision making, d) building and encouraging awareness of the communicative dimension of any management activities or task-related decisions” (2012, p.856). The third has significance here. “Expert consulting for task-related issues integrates communicative insights for decision-making processes within organizational functions. Along this line, communication professionals may not only be asked to announce decisions taken in other departments, but they can also provide communicative insights, information, knowledge, and experience prior to those decisions” (2012, p.857).

Over the years, the original manager-technician dichotomy has evolved. The manager role has been further divided and sub-roles explicated, particularly as a senior level executive role. Taking this senior level role, can we identify various role enactment activities as described by the researchers and place those activities within each of the information categories in our framework? Taking each of the five categories of information singly, the research above suggests that some of the role enactment described corresponds to these five categories.

Under *Foundation Information*, role enactment contains these activities: administrative work required to manage the department (Moss et al, 2000); budgets (Dozier, 2002); accounting, budgeting (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001); and budget (Likely, 2004).

For *Productivity Information*, the following role enactment activities were identified: supervising the work of others (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001); and manage people, HR regime (Likely, 2004).

Under *Competence Information*, researchers identified the following role enactment activities: meeting with clients/executives (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001); learning and training programs, centre of expertise (Likely, 2004); and coaching (van Ruler and Vercic, 2005; Johansson & Ottestig, 2011).

Under *Resource Allocation* information, activities include: allocated resources (Likely, 2004); proposals to fund projects (Moss, Newman & DeSanto, 2004).

Finally, for the last category of information, *Environmental Information*, role enactment information included: environmental scanning (Dozier, 2002); research, processing and synthesizing information (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001; Moss, Newman & DeSanto, 2004); environmental scanning, intelligence gathering (Moss et al, 2004; Johansson & Ottestig, 2011); and listening and monitoring information (Zerfass and Franke, 2012).

**PR/C Leadership Research**

This second area of research may or may not be considered a sub-set of roles research, but even if it is or isn’t, it is less well developed than roles research and has only come into its own in the 2000s. Little research on the leadership characteristics of the PR/C head was conducted in previous decades. Certainly, leadership is not mentioned in the Excellence Study, where reference is limited to “manage people” with leadership subsumed under the role title “administrative manager” (Grunig, L.A., Grunig, J.E. & Dozier, p.228).
Leadership in public relations has been defined as: “a dynamic process that encompasses public relations executives’ personal attributes and efforts in leading the team to facilitate mutual relationships inside and outside of organizations, to participate in the organization’s strategic decision making processes, and to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations they represent” (Meng, Berger, and Gower, 2009, p. 10). Here, leadership is enacted in two ways: one as the leader in a public relations department; and two as a leader - among other leaders - in organizational strategic management processes.

A number of approaches have been taken for the study of CCO leadership characteristics. Likely (2004) examined what CCOs actually did as leaders – within their own communication department, under a number of leadership categories or approaches: the Strategy Approach (built around the creation, testing, and design of long-term strategy); the Human-Assets Approach (built around managing the growth and development of individuals); the Expertise Approach (built around creating an area of expertise that will be a source of competitive advantage); the Box Approach (built around developing an explicit set of controls and detailed, prescriptive policies, procedures and rewards); and the Change Approach (built around the creation of an environment of continual reinvention). The argument is that leaders employ one or perhaps two primary approaches to leadership, in that it is within these approaches that they spend their majority of their time and thus make the majority of change happen. The results of the study suggests that CCO leaders use all five approaches overall, but each leader focused on one or two as their primary modus operandi. A similar behavioural approach was taken by Choi and Choi (2008) when they studied the leadership behaviours of practitioners and found seven behaviours: upward influence; coordination of communication; internal monitoring; networking, representing various interests and points of view; providing vision; and acting as change agents. They grouped these dimensions in to two overarching dimensions: relations focused; and change focused. They found that two behaviours - providing vision and acting as a change agent – were strongly correlated with the perception of public relations adding value in an organization. A study by Werder and Holtzhausen (2009) also analyzed leadership behaviours and found two different behavioural styles of leadership: transformational; and inclusive. The former transform the department through visioning, policy change, employee motivation and inspiration and innovation. The latter engage employees in participative and collaborative problem solving and decision-making.

Taking a different tact, Reber and Berger (2006) examined CCOs perceptions of leadership characteristics, characteristics that supported effective strategic communication management at the executive level of the organization. The six characteristics of CCO leadership were: self-dynamics; team collaboration; ethical orientation; relationship building; strategic decision making capability; and communication knowledge management capability. These six were deemed important to the ability of the CCO to be influencers at the executive level. The authors found that CCOs were most influential in crisis situations and least in on-going strategic decision making. These findings were supported by the research of both Meng et al (2012) and Meng and Berger (2013). Further to the six characteristics above, Meng et al suggested that “strategic decision-making capability, problem-solving ability, and communication knowledge and expertise are the three most important qualities of excellent leadership” for CCOs (2012, P. 18). Hamrefors also examined leadership characteristics and found four that “constitute the role of the communicator as a contextual leader” (2010, p. 146). They were: System Designer, Mediator, Coach and Influencer. These leadership characteristics are not mutually exclusive, though one
may be primary with a CCO at any given time. The first, Systems Designer, participates in the design of organizational and departmental processes and structures. The second, Mediator, creates a common sense of meaning by ensuring the executive team - of the organization or the department - shares understanding coming from various perspectives. Next, Coach, educates to improve the communicative skills of others. Finally, Influencer, means “incentivising people to change their reality in a more progressive direction” wherein the CCO facilitates conceptual thinking.

From this research on CCO leadership and extrapolating from the research on behaviours and characteristics, can we identify leadership activities and place those activities within each of the information categories in our framework?

Under **Foundation Information**, leadership contains these activities: none.

For **Productivity Information**: Box Approach (Likely, 2004); coordination of communication and internal monitoring (Choi & Choi, 2008); and team collaboration (Reber & Berger, 2006).

Under **Competence Information**: Expertise Approach, Human Assets and Change Approaches (Likely, 2004); acting as change agents (Choi & Choi, 2008); employee motivation, inspiration and innovation (Weder & Holtzhausen, 2009); communication knowledge management capability and strategic decision making capability (Reber & Berger, 2006); coach and Influencer (Hamrefors, 2010).

Under **Resource Allocation** information: systems designer (Hamrefors, 2010).

Finally, for **Environmental Information**: Strategy Approach (Likely, 2004); providing vision, and representing various interests and points of view (Choi & Choi, 2008); visioning (Weder & Holtzhausen, 2009); problem-solving ability (Meng et al, 2012); and mediator (Hamrefors, 2010).

**Public Relations Strategic Management Research**
The place of the public relations function in the strategic management process of an organization is the third stream of research to be considered. It is a relatively newer area of study but one for which a “theoretical edifice” has been constructed (Grunig, J., 2006, p. 156). J. Grunig described how the Excellence Study became the mechanism to bring together disparate thinking on public relations and strategic management. The view of those on the Excellence Study team about public relations value to a strategic management process was described thusly: “... we asked CEOs and heads of public relations the extent to which public relations contributed to strategic management in six specific ways: 1) regular research activities, 2) research to answer specific questions, 3) other formal approaches to gathering information, 4) informal approaches to gathering information, 5) contacts with knowledgeable people outside the organization, & 6) judgment based on experience. ... All but the last of these six contributions consist of methods of scanning the environment of the organization for information relevant to strategic management” (p. 161). The informational results from environment scanning and the judgment applied in sorting, weighing and analyzing scanning information were the contribution.

J. Grunig elaborated further on this information provision role for the public relations function in strategic management: “... Both the Excellence Project and research I have conducted since with Jeong-Nam Kim of Purdue University show that the amount of research done by a public relations department is strongly correlated with the respect and value that senior managers have for the communication function — more than any other variable that explains that value. I believe that research is an integral component of strategic public relations. Without it,
the public relations function will continue to serve only in a messenger role and not a strategic role. To participate in strategic management, public relations executives must have unique information to provide to management. Research provides them this information” (Gohr, 2013). The importance of environmental scanning as an antecedent to the enactment of strategic communication has been reported by other researchers, including Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Verčič & Sriramesh (2007). A more holistic and sophisticated conceptualization of environment scanning is as a ‘reflective role’ (for a summary of the reflective role, see Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012, p. 292). Grunig, L.A. et al noted that “…involvement in strategic management and knowledge of how to do environmental scanning and strategic thinking about public relations are probably the strongest attributes of excellent public relations departments” (2002, p. 157).

The concept of strategic management was examined in the Excellence Study and subsequently in the adoption of the generic principles. The former provided 14 characteristics of excellent communication departments and three effects of their communication programs. The Excellence Study researchers defined generic principles as “that in an abstract sense, the principles of public relations are the same worldwide” (Grunig L.A., Grunig, J.E. & Dozier, 2002). Nine principles, derived from the characteristics of excellent public relations as identified in the Excellence Study, were articulated as (Verčič et al, 1996): involvement of public relations in strategic management; empowerment of public relations in the dominant coalition or a direct reporting relationship to senior management; integrated public relations function; Public relations as a management function separate from other functions; the role of the public relations practitioner; two-way symmetrical model of public relations; a symmetrical system of internal communication; knowledge potential for managerial role and symmetrical public relations; and diversity embodied in all roles. Subsequently, J. Grunig (2009) listed the generic principles as: empowerment of public relations; integrated communication function; a separate communication function; headed by a strategic manager rather than a communication technician or an administrative manager who supervises technical services; involved in strategic management; two-way and symmetrical communication; diverse; and ethical. These eight J. Grunig called essential, noting that: “the generic principles have been described in different ways in different publications” (2009, p. 2).

Besides the contribution of environmental scanning and strategic thinking to organizational strategic management, research has been conducted on public relations planning role in strategy formulation. Steyn states that “…public relations … assists and organization … to adapt to its societal and stakeholder environment by feeding into the organization’s strategy formulation process intelligence …” (2007, p.139). Steyn (2007) goes further and examines organizational strategy formulation and formation at various levels as well as public relations strategy formulation and formation at parallel levels. In an earlier publication, Steyn & Pugh (2000) describes a strategist role in an organizations strategic management and examines in detail strategy and planning models for public relations.

Under Foundation Information, strategic management contains these activities: none. For Productivity Information: strategic management contains these activities: none.

Under Competence Information: knowledge potential for managerial role and symmetrical public relations (Verčič et al, 1996); involvement in strategic management and knowledge of how to do environmental scanning and strategic thinking about public relations are probably the strongest attributes of excellent public relations departments (Grunig, L.L. et al,
2002); the judgement applied in sorting, weighing and analyzing scanning information (Grunig, 2006); strategist role in an organizations strategic management (Steyn, 2007).

Under Resource Allocation information: amount of research done by a public relations department (Grunig interviewed by Gohr, 2013).

Finally, for Environmental Information: methods of scanning the environment of the organization for information relevant to strategic management (Grunig, 2006); reflective role (Hallahan, Holtzhause, van Ruler, Verčič & Sriramesh, 2007); public relations … assists and organization … to adapt to its societal and stakeholder environment by feeding into the organization’s strategy formulation process intelligence (Steyn, 2007).

Public Relations Valuation, Evaluative and Measurement Research

This stream of research has a relatively long history extending into the 1960s and 70s and was renewed more recently, with considerable scholarship in the past dozen years (Lerbinger, 1977; Lindenmann, 2005; Watson, 2012; Likely & Watson, 2013). The stream includes research on the valuation of the public relations function as well as the evaluation of communication programs and campaigns and the measurement of communication products and channels.

Research into the valuation of the public relations function has taken on many forms. Various researchers, from Fleisher & Mahaffy (1997) to Vos & Schoemaker (2004) to Zerfass (2008) to Wehrmann, Pagen & van der Sanden (2012), have identified the concept of Balanced Scorecard as a method of valuation for the function. Fleisher and Mahaffy (1997) proposed measures adopted from the four perspectives of a Balanced Scorecard: Innovation and Learning Perspective; Audience/Client/Customer Perspective; Operational Perspective; and Financial Perspective. They included a variety of performance indicators under each perspective, including competency measures, cost per measures, productivity measures as well as product/channel/campaign performance effectiveness measures. Zerfass (2008) developed a scorecard based on the Balanced Scorecard approach, but with five perspectives: Process Perspective; Socio-Political Perspective; Potential Perspective; Customer Perspective; and Financial Perspective. He proposed such factors of success as: balanced budget; quality and service; power of innovation; workforce optimization; and transparency. Wehrmann, Pagen & van der Sanden (2012) addressed the Operational or Internal Perspective and included four indicators: communications quality; organization of the communications department; communications means; and communications expenditures.

Other researchers have examined a monetary valuation for public relations (Brody, 1985; Ehling, 1992; Kim, 2001; Weiner, Arnordsdottir, Lang & Smith 2010; Likely, 2012; Likely & Watson, 2013). Certainly, the monetary value of intangibles created by public relations is still open to argument. The application of the financial concept of return-on-investment (ROI) is cited as improperly utilized (see Likely, 2012; Likely & Watson, 2013), although the term is still widely ‘thrown around’ within the profession. Likely (2012) argues that financial concepts such as cost-effectiveness analysis and benefit-cost ratio are more fundamental to a financial valuation than ROI. These measures will yield cost-effectiveness, efficiency and ultimately productivity measures when applied, particularly against baselines and benchmarks. A series of researchers - Brody (1985), Ehling (1992), Kim (2001), Nicholson (2001) and Likely (2012) - explored investments in public relations or public relations expenses or public relations allotted resources or budget.

A good number of researchers have focused primarily on the evaluation of the outcomes of public relations programs, including Dozier & Ehling (1992), Grunig, Grunig & Dozier (2002;
Chapter 9, Lindenmann (2003), Weiner (2006), Watson & Noble (2007), Grunig (2008) and Michaelson & Stacks (2012). On the other hand, only a limited number of researchers, such as Lindenmann (2003), Watson & Noble (2007), Paine (2007; 2011) and Philips (2009), have examined communication product outputs or communication channel distribution and outtakes. In both cases, the measurement focus is first on measurement process and then second on result. For the second, focus is on effectiveness measures, tying results to higher-level objectives and being able to action results obtained. Various researchers have stated that “the real challenge is to figure out what to do with the information” (Paine, 2007, p. 186; see also Weiner, 2006, p.162; Watson & Noble, 2007, p. 236). “Management will not have the time (nor interest) to review reams of data” (Watson & Noble, 2007, p. 236). While the value of output, outtake and outcome measurement, particularly outcome, and the need to tie these ‘levels’ of measurement together seems well-described by researchers, little research has been conducted on how and where to present those results and on how they contribute to executive information needs.

Under Foundation Information, Valuation, Evaluative and Measurement Research contains these activities: financial perspective (Fleisher & Mahaffy, 1997); balanced budget (Zerfass, 2008); communications expenditures (Wehrmann, Pagen & van der Sanden, 2012); investments in public relations or public relations expenses or public relations allotted resources or budget (Brody, 1985; Ehling, 1992; Kim, 2001; Nicholson, 2001; Likely, 2012).

For Productivity Information: cost per (Fleisher & Mahaffy, 1997); product/channel/campaign performance effectiveness measures (Fleisher & Mahaffy, 1997); workforce optimization (Zerfass, 2008).

Under Competence Information: Innovation and Learning Perspective: competency measures (Fleisher & Mahaffy, 1997); power of innovation (Zerfass, 2008).


Finally, for Environmental Information: none.

Surveys of CEOs

For the Excellence Study, researchers interviewed a number of CEOs (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002). Though asked about how they valued the function, they were not asked about their information requirements directly. A few, more recent research projects have sought to engage CEOs. White & Murray (2004) interviewed 10 CEOs who provided responses in two areas of particular interest: environmental scanning – “look out for risks to reputation” and “looking out for changes to the business environment” and “provide guidance in managing external relationships”; competency – “be a coaching and advisory service to top management” and “caliber of people providing public relations services” and “quality of the advisors at work in the practice.” Gregory (2011) found that CEOs also commented on these two general areas: environmental scanning – “valued public relations in those areas that affected corporate reputation directly” and “CEOs wanted regular updates on risks, potential issues and advice on how to deal with key stakeholders”; competencies – “concern that CEO’s had about the ability of practitioners to handle the level of complexity facing Boards.” Steyn & Green (2006) interviewed 120 executives in a single company and asked about role enactment, based on four public relations roles: PR strategist; manager; technician; and educationalist. This ‘dominant coalition’ expressed the need for all four roles and judged the educationalist role (educator/coach) to be the most valuable.

The Arthur Page Society (2007) conducted a qualitative study involving 31 CEOs and reported the results in their report: The Authentic Enterprise. CEOs. The study found that CEOs
thought CCOs should operate in three ways: reactive communications leaders; proactive communications leaders; and interactive communications leaders (p. 17). The findings also indicated that CEOs believed that “the skills and attributes that CEOs are looking for in their top communications executives have expanded. Experience in communications is taken for granted, and not considered enough anymore” (p. 40). Similar to the Steyn and Green educationalist role above, the report cited “the need for the communications head to educate the rest of the company on communications skills in general” (p. 47). CEOs said that they required “unique, fact-based perspectives” and wanted information from the CCO on: “internal and external reputation tracking; analyses of company performance before and after events that impact reputation; and reputation comparables or case studies” (p. 52).

Under *Foundation Information*: none

For *Productivity Information*: none.

Under *Competence Information*: caliber of people providing public relations services (White & Murray, 2004); educationalist role: educator/coach (Steyn & Green, 2006); Experience in communications is taken for granted, and not considered enough anymore; educationalist role; reputation comparables or case studies (Arthur Page Society, 2007).


Finally, for *Environmental Information*: environmental scanning (White & Murray, 2004); internal and external reputation tracking; analyses of company performance before and after events that impact reputation (Arthur Page Society, 2007).

From the findings of the literature review, we can elaborate on the Base Framework. Figure 2, following, includes the addition of these findings, demonstrating that indeed research has been conducted on topics within the five categories of CEO information needs.

**Figure 2.**

**Advanced Framework of PR/C Department Information Reporting**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Executive Level</th>
<th>Foundation Information</th>
<th>Productivity Information</th>
<th>Competence Information</th>
<th>Resource Allocation Information</th>
<th>Environmental Information</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CEO/Executive (Direct Report)</td>
<td>• Department budget • Revenue sources, • Expenditure forecasts • Proposed new investments</td>
<td>• Communication product and communication channel/media performance effectiveness • Performance cost-effectiveness • Efficiencies • PR/C employee productivity</td>
<td>• Core vs. non-core competencies • Internal client relationships • Corporate level result measurement • Innovation</td>
<td>• Department resources against objectives • Cost-benefit analysis for communication products, • Stakeholders and publics • Issue and risk • Corporate and business line strategy formulation, strategy execution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tier II Executive (Functional Report)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conceptualization Post Literature Review</td>
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<td>- Administrative work required to manage the department (Moss et al., 2000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Budgets (Dozier, 2002)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Accounting, budgeting (Grunig, Toth &amp; Hon, 2001)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Budget (Likely, 2004)</td>
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<td>- Financial perspective (Fleisher &amp; Mahaffy, 1997)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Balanced budget (Zerfass, 2008)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Communications expenditures (Wehrmann, Pagen &amp; van der Sanden, 2012)</td>
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<td>- Investment</td>
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<td>- Supervising the work of others (Grunig, Toth &amp; Hon, 2001)</td>
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<td>- Managing people, HR regime (Likely, 2004)</td>
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<td>- Box Approach (Likely, 2004)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Coordination of communication and internal monitoring (Choi &amp; Choi, 2008)</td>
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<td>- Team collaboration (Reber &amp; Berger, 2006)</td>
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<td>- Cost per (Fleisher &amp; Mahaffy, 1997)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Product/campaign performance effectiveness measures (Fleisher &amp; Mahaffy, 1997)</td>
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<td>- Workforce optimization (Zerfass, 2008)</td>
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<td>- Meeting with clients/executives (Grunig, Toth &amp; Hon, 2001)</td>
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<td>- Learning and training programs, centre of expertise (Likely, 2004)</td>
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<td>- Coaching (van Ruler and Vercic, 2005; Johansson &amp; Ottestig, 2011)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Expertise Approach, Human Assets and Change Approaches (Likely, 2004)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Acting as change agents (Choi &amp; Choi, 2008)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Employee motivation, inspiration</td>
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<td>- Allocated resources (Likely, 2004)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Proposals to fund projects (Moss, Newman &amp; DeSanto, 2004)</td>
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<td>- Systems designer (Hamrefors, 2010)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Amount of research done by a public relations department (Grunig interviewed by Gohr, 2013)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Environmental scanning (Dozier, 2002)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Research, processing and synthesizing information (Grunig, Toth &amp; Hon, 2001; Moss, Newman &amp; DeSanto, 2004)</td>
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<td>- Environmental scanning, intelligence gathering (Moss et al., 2004; Johansson &amp; Ottestig, 2011)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Listening and monitoring information (Zerfass and Franke, 2012)</td>
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</table>
ments in public relations or public relations expenses or public relations allotted resources or budget (Brody, 1985; Ehling, 1992; Kim, 2001; Nicholson, 2001; Likely, 2012)

• Communication knowledge management capability and strategic decision making capability (Reber & Berger, 2006)
• Coach and influencer (Hamrefors, 2010)
• Knowledge potential for managerial role and symmetrical public relations (Vercic et al, 1996)
• Involvement in strategic management and knowledge of how to do environmental scanning and strategic thinking about public relations are probably the strongest attributes of excellent public relations

• Strategy Approach (Likely, 2004)
• Providing vision, and representing various interests and points of view (Choi & Choi, 2008)
• Visioning (Weder & Holtzhausen, 2009)
• Problem-solving ability (Meng et al, 2012)
• Mediator (Hamrefors, 2010)
• Methods of scanning the environment of the organization for information relevant to strategic management (Grunig, 2006)
• Reflective role (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler,
departments (Grunig, L.A. et al, 2002)
• The judgement applied in sorting, weighing and analyzing scanning information (Grunig, 2006)
• Strategist role in an organization’s strategic management (Steyn, 2007)
• Innovation and Learning Perspective: competency measures (Fleisher & Mahaffy, 1997)
• Power of innovation (Zerfass, 2008)
• Caliber of people providing public relations services (White & Murray, 2004)
• Educationalist role: educator/coach (Steyn & Green, 2006)
• Experience in

Verčič & Sriramesh, 2007)
• Public relations … assists and organization … to adapt to its societal and stakeholder environment by feeding into the organization’s strategy formulation process intelligence (Steyn, 2007)
• Environmental scanning (White & Murray, 2004)
• Internal and external reputation tracking; analyses of company performance before and after events that impact reputation (Arthur Page Society, 2007)
Communications is taken for granted, and not considered enough anymore; educationalist role; reputation comparables or case studies (Arthur Page Society, 2007)

**Conclusion**

In Figure 2 above, we noted that the initial conceptualization is generally supported by the literature review. That is, these five categories of information are indeed subjects of public relations research, for which research findings have been drawn.

The author then took Figure 2 or the Advanced Framework and compared the topics under each category with the findings from a secondary analysis of interview notes from proprietary interviews with CEOs and Tier II executives. That comparison provided a more sophisticated and nuanced appreciation of the type of information that could populate the framework. As well, the comparison allowed for a better understanding of the sources for each type of information.

Figure 3 following, the Final Framework, denotes the five categories as well as the type and sources of information that a CCO could report to a CEO.

Figure 3.

**Final Framework of PR/C Department Information Reporting**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Line or Staff Function</th>
<th>Information on previous and proposed spends</th>
<th>Information on legacy program requirements</th>
<th>Information on PR/C team and individual executive performance and organizational relationships and networks</th>
<th>Information on the allocation of resources against organizational priorities/objectives</th>
<th>Information on the benefit-cost ratio for proposed new investments</th>
<th>Information from internal silo boundary spanning about strategy execution discontinuities as input into the organization’s emergent strategy formulation process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business Line or Staff Function Head/CF O/CMO/CHRO</td>
<td>Information on Account Executive and support unit performance</td>
<td>Information on value vs. cost for programs/campaigns</td>
<td>Information on innovative</td>
<td>Information on the allocation of resources (capital &amp; people) to the business line or staff function (on programs; on</td>
<td>Information on markets/customers, stakeholders and publics for input into business strategies and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Therefore, there is evidence to suggest that these categories of information and their subsets of topics are an appropriate foundation on which to build hypotheses for the conduct of qualitative and quantitative research with CEOs themselves.

Davenport & Manville (2012, p. xi) suggest that reporting information and fulfilling information needs is but a first step. The second step is for the CEO to become fully knowledgeable through information and education. The third and final step is for the CEO to be able to use this informed knowledge base to make appropriate judgments. In this case, judgments are about PR/C function and CCO budgets, productivity, competence, resource allocation and environment intelligence.
References


The New Role of News Release: What Induced the Change in Linguistic Expression in the News Release?

Hinako Suda
Junichiro Miyabe
Hokkaido University

Abstract
The advent of the Internet has changed the role of news release which is one of the most universal tools for the PR activities. Taking this as a long-term trend of change in communication environment, Japanese companies experienced drastic change in PR environment due to the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011. This paper aims (1) to examine linguistic change in the news releases after the earthquake and (2) to explore the background factors behind the change. We conducted a content analysis of 9,480 news releases which 30 Japanese companies issued before and after the earthquake and evaluated features for news release users on the corporate websites. We confirmed linguistic change after the earthquake, but the degree and direction of the change varied among companies, suggesting that the recognition of the role change of news release might have affected the linguistic expression in the news release.
Introduction

There is a growing trend of Internet and social media usage in PR activities throughout the world. One of such activities is distribution of news releases through the official web site. We are now witnessing the role change in this traditional tool. The Internet has expanded the target audience of news releases from journalists to include stakeholders and general public. This expansion of audience group is recognized as a new opportunity for PR practitioners to enable direct communication with stakeholders and general public. Moreover, language researchers reported some differences in both structural and textual characteristics between print- and web-based news releases. However, how the role change affects the content of news releases has not been fully researched.

In this research-in-progress paper, we attempt to demonstrate a possible link between these changes by focusing our attention to the news release of Japanese companies. Since the increased level of PR activities of Japanese companies has been recognized after the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, it is assumed that corporate messages including news releases have changed after the earthquake. We report the results of content analysis which show linguistic change in news releases after the earthquake, the results of user interface evaluation which reveal differences in the degree of companies’ efforts to utilize news release for direct communication with their publics, and the relationship between the linguistic change and the degree of efforts.

Theoretical Underpinnings of the Analysis

New Role of News Release

News release is one of the most universal tools for the PR activity and perhaps the most traditional tool available to PR practitioners. While it was traditionally considered to be written for journalists who might retell the company's news to the public, as recent studies in the field of public relations pointed out (Argenti & Barnes, 2009; Redish, 2007; Scott, 2007; Strobbe & Jacobs, 2005), the Web has changed the audiences of news releases, and organizations can now send messages directly to their publics. With this audience change, the role of news release has been expanded to directly contribute to build and maintain good relationships between the public and organizations.

News releases not only provide the company's information to the users who visit the site with purpose, but also create opportunities to make general Web users visit their website. Because contents of the news releases are displayed for search results such as Google or Yahoo, they would contribute to enhance the visibility of the company, products or services, and expand the business opportunity. Moreover, as Redish (2007) pointed out, since copies of news releases can be displayed on other websites, or quoted by Web writers or bloggers, they might live longer than the original ones on the company's website and continue telling the stories.

Linguistic Change in News Releases

Language researchers have conducted number of researches using news releases since mid-1990s drawing attention to the distinctive format and style of news release (e.g., Askehave & Swales, 2001; Jacobs, 1999a, 1999b; McLaren & Gurău, 2005). As one of those researches, Catenaccio (2008) used both print- and web-based news releases for the study, and stated that "Web distribution may have caused some textual conventions to shift" and "promotional language appears to be higher in e-releases than in traditional press releases" (p. 15). Furthermore, Strobbe & Jacobs (2005) found, "A more direct kind of discourse reminiscent of direct mail is used (including superlatives and other persuasive features, direct reader address, imperatives and emphatic all-capital typography)" (p. 290).

Although their main purpose was to capture and illustrate structural or textual
characteristics of news releases, not to develop a public relations theory based on the results obtained from the analysis, their findings indicate that the language use in news releases vary according to the audience. This means that the audience design theory proposed by Bell (1984), that is 'Speakers are designing their style for their audience' (Bell, 1984, p. 197), can be applied to news releases. However, the relationship between linguistic change and the role of news release has not been fully researched.

**Impact of the Great East Japan Earthquake**

Unexpected or sudden environmental change also affects public relations activities in companies. The Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011 could be considered one of such environmental changes, and Japanese companies have been experiencing drastic change in public relations environment after the earthquake.

According to the survey conducted by Teikoku Databank (2011), nearly 80% of companies stated the earthquake impacted their business. Other survey results showed that a majority of the companies had already conducted or undertaken a review of company-wide management plans, individual business plans, or business continuity plans within two months after the quake. With regard to public relations activities, Keizai Koho Center (2012) conducted a mail-in survey on November 22nd through December 22nd 2011 among 533 public relations practitioners (achieved a 43.9% response rate). They reported that more than half the companies stated the workloads of public relations department increased compared to the previous year, and the earthquake was regarded as one of the causes.

Since the earthquake impacted not only organizations but also their stakeholders such as employees, customers, shareholders, investors, business partners, local residents, it is possible to say that all companies in Japan came under some kind of influences at the same time. In view of the above researches and observations, we propose the first hypothesis.

**H1:** Linguistic expression in the news release has changed after the earthquake.

However, it has not been confirmed how widely the role change of news release is recognized in Japan. It is more than likely that this recognition motivates companies to use news releases to directly communicate with their publics. In addition, Japanese companies usually place news releases under the corporate information section on their websites without having a press room (such as "News room", "Media", "Press", and so on) which is especially designed for journalists, unlike many companies in other countries. It is therefore, deduced that companies with the recognition of the role change of news release take conscious effort to utilize news release as a means to communicate with their publics, and to build and maintain good relationships with them. We now add the second and third hypotheses to consider how the role change of news release influences the content of news releases.

**H2:** The degree of effort to utilize news release varies among companies.

**H3:** Linguistic expression in the news release reflects companies' effort to utilize news release.

With these three hypotheses we try to consider internet-induced change and natural disaster-induced change as two impact factors of communication environment for Japanese companies.

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1 Internet-based survey titled “Survey on corporate attitudes towards the effects of the earthquake disaster and reconstruction assistance” (conducted on March 23rd through 31st 2011, and achieved a 48.6% response rate among 22,097 companies.)
Method

Data Collection
We selected 30 Japanese companies (see Appendix A) from the ranking list of Brand Japan 2012 conducted by Nikkei BP Consulting (2012) which compiled through the survey of general public and business persons. First, we downloaded the news release data that the companies issued during the period from March 11, 2010 to March 10, 2012, which then divided into two periods with the event of the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011. We excluded news releases directly related to the earthquake (e.g., report of damages and losses to the business, announcement of office/factory reopen, consolatory message to victims and so on) since they are likely to contain some kind of special expressions. As shown in Appendix A, we used a total of 9,480 news releases (all written in Japanese) for content analysis.

Analysis
We combine quantitative content analysis and user interface evaluation to test three hypotheses. Appendix B provides brief information on preparation for content analysis and the software.

Content Analysis
To test the first hypothesis "Linguistic expression in the news release has changed after the earthquake", we analyzed linguistic change viewed from three aspects: stylistic characteristics, use of words, and context of communication. As indicators of change in stylistic characteristics, we adopted the POS (part-of-speech) ratio of nouns : verbs : (adjectives + adverbs + adjective verbs) : other word classes, and frequencies of main word classes. These indicators are widely used in linguistic and literary studies including those conducted by Japanese scholars (e.g., Jin, 2000; Kabayama & Jugaku, 1965; Kudo, Murai, & Tokosumi, 2011). In order to examine the change in use of words, we selected ten hi-frequency verbs which are commonly used among the companies as key verbs, and used the frequencies of those verbs as indictors. For the third aspect, context of communication, we examined the change in co-occurring nouns with given verbs by drawing co-occurrence networks which enable visual comparison of co-occurring words and the relationships between those words.

User Interface Evaluation
Prior to testing the second hypothesis "The degree of effort to utilize news release varies among companies", we made a checklist of features for news release users (see Appendix C). This was done based on the literature review on concepts of usability, usability evaluation methods, and dialogic communication on the web (e.g., Gordon & Berhow, 2009; Ingenhoff & Koelling, 2009; Hallahan, 2001; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2003; Nielsen, 1994, 1998, 1999; Pettigrew & Reber, 2010).

Then we assessed the usability of the News release section and the availability of RSS feeds (timely delivery) and social media features (user involvement) on 30 companies' websites according to the checklist. Based on the evaluation results, we picked out two groups of companies, a high-effort group composed of the top five companies and a low-effort group composed of the bottom five companies. Then we examined the difference between the two groups.

Analysis of Relationship between Two Factors
To test the third hypothesis "Linguistic expression in the news release reflects companies' effort to utilize news release", we compared linguistic change after the earthquake between the high-effort and low-effort groups by using the indicators for three aspects of change described in the content analysis section above.
Results

Content Analysis

The results of chi-square test which compared the POS ratio before and after the earthquake indicate that the stylistic characteristics of news releases changed after the earthquake. We observed that 26 out of 30 companies (nearly 90%) showed statistically significant change in the POS ratio: 22 companies at the .001 level, three companies at the .01 level, and one company at the .05 level (see Appendix D and E). In regard to the use of words, the frequency of ten key verbs changed significantly, $\chi^2 (9) = 75.74, p < .001$. The results of chi-square test for each key verb showed that the frequencies of seven key verbs changed significantly after the earthquake, but the direction of change (increased or decreased after the quake) differs among verbs: two verbs increased and five verbs decreased with different significance levels, as shown in Appendix F.

Moreover, the degree and direction of change also vary among companies. For example, relative frequency of the verb “challenge” increased in 11 companies after the quake, while it decreased in 18 companies (see Appendix G for details). The comparison of co-occurrence networks also showed varying patterns of change among companies. There are even some companies with little change. Thus, the first hypothesis “Linguistic expression in the news release has changed after the earthquake” was partially supported.

These results suggest that there exist company-specific causes behind the change.

User Interface Evaluation

We evaluated the 30 companies' websites by focusing on features for news release users on August 1, 2012. The highest score was 28, while the lowest was 9. The mean score was 19.6 with the standard deviation of 5.16. This result indicates that the degree of effort to utilize news releases varies among companies.

In order to examine the differences in two groups: high-effort group and low-effort group, we compared the mean scores of each criteria (see Figure 1). The chart shows a clear difference between the two groups. The scores of "Timely delivery" and "User involvement"

![Figure 1. Bi-plot of the relative scores in six criteria of two groups.](image)

To compare the efforts between two groups, we calculated the mean score of each criterion for each group, and then plotted the relative scores obtained by dividing the mean score by the highest possible score in a radar chart.
depict a sharp contrast between them. Thus, the second hypothesis “The degree of effort to utilize news release varies among companies” was supported.

**Analysis of Relationship between Two Factors**

First, we compared the change in stylistic characteristics between the high-effort group and low-effort group. As summarized in Table 1, the high-effort group showed greater change than the low-effort group both in the POS ratio and the frequency of each POS (see Appendix H for details).

**Table 1. Comparison of Change in Stylistic Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significance level</th>
<th>POS ratio</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Nouns</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Verbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of companies with significant change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p &lt; .001$</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p &lt; .01$</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p &lt; .05$</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of companies with no significant change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. POS ratio = part of speech ratio. High = high-effort group. Low = low-effort group. Adj/Adv = adjectives + adverbs + adjective verbs.*

Next, we examined change in frequency of key verbs. As shown in Table 2, the number of key verbs whose frequency significantly changed after the earthquake and the direction of change (increased or decreased) of each verb differ in two groups. Change in the low-effort group looks greater than the high-effort group, but Table 3 shows more important differences. Giving attention to the two verbs, "aim" and "challenge", which are often used to

**Table 2. Comparison of Change in the Frequency of Key Verbs – Results of Chi-square test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High-effort group</th>
<th>Low-effort group</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>df = 1</th>
<th>p value</th>
<th>df = 1</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>do</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>13.41</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>decreased</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>add</td>
<td>28.76</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aim</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>decreased</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eliminate</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differ</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.41</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>decreased</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>direct</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>decreased</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feel</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td></td>
<td>23.85</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>decreased</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>challenge</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>increased</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Change = change after the quake. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.*
express or describe one's goals, objectives, or intentions including vision and mission, the mean scores of these two verbs are increased in the high-effort group and decreased in the low-effort group. Those results suggest that the news releases issued by high-effort group companies changed more positively than those of the low-effort group companies.

Lastly, we compared the change in co-occurrence networks of key verbs between the two groups. Figure 2 and Figure 3 illustrate the co-occurrence networks of "challenge" and nouns that have a high co-occurrence with the verb in news releases issued by Toyota Motor from high-effort group and Seven & i HD from low-effort group, respectively.

As shown in Figure 2, the network of those words in Toyota's news releases clearly changed. Before the earthquake, two nouns (environment and society) were tightly connected with "challenge", and after the earthquake, other four nouns (development, customer, activity and contribution) are added. The noun(s) which have high centrality\(^2\) in the network changed from one noun of "action" to seven nouns (environment, security, activity, product, customer, person, and engine). This result indicates that with the verb “challenge”, specific and consistent messages representing Toyota’s intentions and objectives are expressed in the news releases more clearly after the earthquake.

In contrast, Figure 3 which compares the networks of one of the low-effort group does not present any noteworthy change. In both time periods, no particular nouns had tight connection with "challenge" and nouns with high centrality are not observed. In other words, no particular nouns are repeatedly used as object of the verb "challenge", suggesting that the company's intentions, objectives, or goals are not expressed clearly in their news releases.

Thus, we found some evidence that support the third hypothesis “Linguistic expression in the news release reflects companies' effort to utilize news release”.

---

\(^2\) Centrality is widely-used for measuring the relative importance of nodes within a network. There are three major categories: degree centrality, which measures the importance of a node by the number of edges the node has; closeness centrality, which measures how close a node is to others; and betweenness centrality, which measures how frequently a node appears on all shortest paths between two other nodes. We employed the betweenness centrality to identify keywords in the messages.
Parameter setting for drawing co-occurrence networks in KH Coder

- Word class of extracting words: Noun
- Number of nodes: 30 (top 30 words with the high similarity value)
- Number of edges: 60 (default value in KH Coder)

*Figure 2. Change of co-occurrence networks* of "challenge" – Toyota Motor (high-effort).

*Figure 3. Change of co-occurrence network* of "challenge" – Seven & i HD (low-effort)
Discussion

In this paper, we have demonstrated the possible link between the role change of news release and linguistic expression. Even though the definitive evidence for the hypotheses has not yet provided, it is reasonable to conclude that the recognition of the new role of news release affects linguistic expression in the contents. We have also found our research methods to be useful in measuring companies’ efforts to utilize news release for direct communication with their publics. By agreeing to what Hallahan (2001) proposed, “communications produced in public relations can be considered products” (p. 236), we confirmed that combining user interface evaluation and content analysis enables evaluation of the product.

What we have been looking at is the dynamics of public relations activities responding or taking advantage of the change in communication environment. In this paper, we focused on the two factors. One is sudden and drastic change caused by natural disaster that changed planning and operational environment for companies, and the other is more long-term change caused by the Internet and ICT. We have recognized that both factors affected the PR activities and tools for the activities.

Although the results suggest that both the Great East Japan Earthquake and the role change of news release have affected the content of news releases, we are not yet able to separate the influence of these two factors. One possible solution is to set the different time frame. We divided sample period into two periods with March 2011 as the dividing point. Shifting the dividing point or extending the observation period may clarify the effect of those factors. In addition, there could be other causes which have greater impact than the two factors. Since all companies we examined in this paper are B2C (business-to-consumer) companies, adding B2B (business-to-business) companies might help find company- or industry-specific causes.

Our tentative results suggest that our analyses may lead to a new approach to evaluate public relations effectiveness. Lindenmann (2003) states that “In the long-term, PR measurement and evaluation involves assessing the success or failure of much broader PR efforts that have as their aim seeking to improve and enhance the relationship that organizations maintain with key constituents” (p. 2). Continuous efforts to create and deliver consistent and clear messages are essential to achieving the goal. As we confirmed that content analysis reveals the consistency and clarity of messages, with the extension of the observation period we may be able to examine such long-term efforts and to observe the time series variation. Using this variable for analysis together with variables which developed for measuring perceptions, knowledge, or attitudes of constituents may make it possible to provide more comprehensive evaluation methods.
References


Rinder, J. (2012). The Importance of Website Usability Testing. Retrieved from


## Appendix A

### List of companies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company name</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Number of news releases</th>
<th>2010-2011</th>
<th>2011-2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Panasonic</td>
<td>Electronics, consumer electronics</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>352</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Toyota Motor</td>
<td>Automobile</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>232</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Sony</td>
<td>Electronics, consumer electronics</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>182</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Oriental Land (O.L.C)</td>
<td>Real Estate, Operator of Tokyo Disneyland</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Fast Retailing</td>
<td>Apparel and clothing chain, SPA</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Nissin Food Products</td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>139</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Suntory</td>
<td>Beverage</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>310</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Yamato HD</td>
<td>Couriers and Express Delivery Services</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Rakuten</td>
<td>Internet service</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>133</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 Seven &amp; i HD</td>
<td>General Merchandise Stores</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Toshiba</td>
<td>Electronics, consumer and industry</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>151</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Sharp</td>
<td>Electronics, consumer electronics</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>198</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Honda Motor</td>
<td>Automobile</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>169</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Nissan Motor</td>
<td>Automobile</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>248</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Softbank</td>
<td>Communication service</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Calbee</td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Kewpie</td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Asahi Breweries</td>
<td>Beverage</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>141</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Aeon</td>
<td>General Merchandise Stores</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>155</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Lion</td>
<td>Toiletry goods</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>111</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 Lion</td>
<td>Toiletry goods</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>111</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Lion</td>
<td>Toiletry goods</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>111</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Ajinomoto</td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Family Mart</td>
<td>Convenience store chain</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>481</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Ito En</td>
<td>Beverage (Green tea products)</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Kao</td>
<td>Toiletry goods</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lawson</td>
<td>Convenience store chain</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mazda Motor</td>
<td>Automobile</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mitsubishi Motors</td>
<td>Automobile</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>NEC</td>
<td>Electronics, consumer and industry</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Olympus</td>
<td>Optical instruments manufacturing</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sagawa Express</td>
<td>Couriers and Express Delivery Services</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>4,965</td>
<td>4,515</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Preparation for content analysis

As a preparation for content analysis, we processed the raw data downloaded from corporate websites by taking the following steps:

1. Convert HTML/PDF documents to text files.
2. Classify files into two folders ("Before" and "After" the quake) for each company.
3. Combine all files inside a folder into one file.
4. Perform morphological analysis (word segmentation and part-of-speech tagging).

For step 3 and 4, we used a free software for quantitative content analysis called KH Coder*. It provides various kinds of searching and statistical analysis functions by using ChaSen for morphological analysis, MySQL for searching and extracting data, and R for statistical computing and graphics as back-end tools.

*HK Coder
This software was developed by Koichi Higuchi, an associate professor of Social Sciences at Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan. It is available at http://khc.sourceforge.net/en/.

Appendix C

Checklist of features for news release users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Criteria</th>
<th>Checkpoint</th>
<th>Score Yes/No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target audience</td>
<td>Target audience is the public (not limited to journalists)</td>
<td>3/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Usability</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>&quot;News&quot; section is reachable within one click from the Homepage</td>
<td>3/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language choice</td>
<td>English version is available</td>
<td>3/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readability &amp; findability</td>
<td>Information is categorized using tabs or graphical icons</td>
<td>2/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Links to related information are provided</td>
<td>2/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Links are recognizable</td>
<td>2/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Users can search targeting only news releases</td>
<td>2/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of search results displayed per page can be changed</td>
<td>2/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consideration for user environment</td>
<td>News releases are displayed in HTML format (not as PDF)</td>
<td>2/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Print feature or PDF file for printing is provided</td>
<td>1/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Font size is adjustable</td>
<td>1/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely delivery</td>
<td>RSS service is provided</td>
<td>3/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User involvement</td>
<td>Social sharing buttons (like Facebook Like and Tweet button) are placed on each news release</td>
<td>3/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Highest possible score</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix D
Change in Stylistic Characteristics – Results of Chi-square test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>POS ratio (df = 3)</th>
<th>POS frequency</th>
<th>Verbs (df = 1)</th>
<th>Adj/Adv (df = 1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Panasonic</td>
<td>105.99</td>
<td>96.54</td>
<td>11.56</td>
<td>10.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toyota Motor</td>
<td>3896.42</td>
<td>2905.65</td>
<td>490.02</td>
<td>206.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sony</td>
<td>41.52</td>
<td>10.71</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>28.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriental Land (O.L.C)</td>
<td>25.72</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>10.25</td>
<td>14.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast Retailing</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nissin Food Products</td>
<td>32.16</td>
<td>18.39</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>9.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suntory</td>
<td>441.40</td>
<td>131.86</td>
<td>116.23</td>
<td>124.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yamato HD</td>
<td>174.61</td>
<td>143.16</td>
<td>18.93</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rakuten</td>
<td>16.06</td>
<td>10.62</td>
<td>0.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seven &amp; i HD</td>
<td>10.28</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toshiba</td>
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<td>0.84</td>
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<td>3.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharp</td>
<td>1763.83</td>
<td>1388.77</td>
<td>132.71</td>
<td>74.73</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>0.41</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.13</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>3.95</td>
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<td>4.17</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>69.69</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3.99</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>13.38</td>
<td>42.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Mart</td>
<td>161.22</td>
<td>14.88</td>
<td>40.16</td>
<td>112.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ito En</td>
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<td>4.74</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kao</td>
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<td>0.24</td>
<td>8.61</td>
<td>1.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lawson</td>
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<td>178.21</td>
<td>15.45</td>
<td>5.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazda Motor</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>201.47</td>
<td>22.73</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.97</td>
<td>9.71</td>
<td>24.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>54.36</td>
<td>11.56</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** POS ratio = the ratio of nouns : verbs : (adjectives + adverbs + adjective verbs) : others.
Adj/Adv = adjectives + adverbs + adjective verbs.
**Appendix E**
Total Number of Companies with Significant Change in Stylistic Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significance level</th>
<th>POS ratio</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nouns</td>
<td>Verbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p &lt; .001$</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p &lt; .01$</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p &lt; .05$</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(not significant)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adj/Adv = adjectives + adverbs + adjective verbs.*

**Appendix F**
Change in Use of Words - Results of Chi-square Test for each Key Verb

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change</th>
<th>$\chi^2$ (df = 1)</th>
<th>$p$ value</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>do</td>
<td>14.60</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>*** decreased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>add</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aim</td>
<td>7.22</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>** decreased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>include</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eliminate</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differ</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>* increased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>direct</td>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>* decreased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feel</td>
<td>24.77</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>*** increased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>* decreased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>challenge</td>
<td>10.27</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>** decreased</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Change = change after the quake. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. The verbs are listed in descending order of mean score of relative frequency (n=30).*
## Appendix G
Change in the Frequency of "Challenge" and Chi-square Test Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of tokens</th>
<th>Raw freq.</th>
<th>Relative freq.</th>
<th>Test result</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>After</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>After</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panasonic</td>
<td>780,389</td>
<td>655,727</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toyota Motor</td>
<td>393,367</td>
<td>280,195</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sony</td>
<td>320,497</td>
<td>308,667</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriental Land (O.L.C)</td>
<td>56,613</td>
<td>16,864</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast Retailing</td>
<td>48,093</td>
<td>39,375</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nissin Food Products</td>
<td>66,581</td>
<td>74,042</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suntoy</td>
<td>378,984</td>
<td>289,051</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yamato HD</td>
<td>75,409</td>
<td>64,776</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rakuten</td>
<td>165,809</td>
<td>106,754</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven &amp; i HD</td>
<td>55,301</td>
<td>44,484</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toshiba</td>
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<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharp</td>
<td>142,366</td>
<td>228,340</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>47</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Calbee</td>
<td>42,574</td>
<td>31,909</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kewpie</td>
<td>65,709</td>
<td>40,231</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Asahi Breweries</td>
<td>210,523</td>
<td>138,316</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>Aeon</td>
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<td>310,191</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mitsubishi Motors</td>
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</table>

*Note. Relative freq. = frequency per 100,000 words. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. The frequency in bold indicates that it increased after the earthquake.*
### Appendix H
Change in the Frequencies of Main Word Classes - High-effort and Low-effort Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before the quake</th>
<th></th>
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<th>After the quake</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Verbs</td>
<td>Adj/Ad</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Nouns</td>
<td>Verbs</td>
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<td><strong>High-effort group</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>313</td>
<td>17,680</td>
<td>5,965</td>
<td>834</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>3,225</td>
<td>319,03</td>
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<td>8,207</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3,225</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>88,791</td>
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<td>3,225</td>
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<td>168,62</td>
<td>59,561</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7,069</td>
<td></td>
<td>88,791</td>
<td>15,02</td>
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<td>3,225</td>
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<td>168,62</td>
<td>59,561</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Low-effort group</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10,664</td>
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<td>52,319</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>1,343</td>
</tr>
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<td>Calbee</td>
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<td>2,300</td>
<td>1,522</td>
<td>28,260</td>
<td>7,902</td>
<td>1,646</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adj/Adv = adjectives + adverbs + adjective verbs.*
Updating pride: How 21st century gay pride organizations strategically use social media to manage relationships with key stakeholders

Dean E. Mundy
Appalachian State University

Abstract
This study investigates how LGBT Pride organizations in 10 major U.S. cities—Boston, Charlotte, Denver, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Miami, New York City, Philadelphia, Portland, and Washington D.C.—use social media to build and maintain quality relationships with their local communities. Their insights reveal how social media can help, and hinder, the success of such massive, public events.
Introduction

The June 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City’s Greenwich Village marked a significant transition in the gay movement. Gay citizens and their allies for the first time retaliated against discriminatory civic policies that targeted the gay community. A newly visible community emerged from the riots, focused on how to advocate actively and strategically on behalf of LGBT issues. In the decades since, some of the most visible markers of this transition—of the movement itself—have become the annual gay pride celebrations, which commemorate the 1969 Riots. Major cities around the world hold these pride celebrations. Sao Paulo, Brazil’s gay pride parade, for example, now hosts more than three million people annually.

Four decades of progress indeed have created a significantly different operational context for today’s gay pride organizations, and the tactics used to communicate and execute today’s events necessarily have shifted. Developing and fundraising for these events requires months of strategic planning. With small staffs and operating budgets, organizers must reach tens of thousands (and in some cases millions) of people: LGBT constituents, political figures, celebrities, corporate sponsors, city governments, religious organizations, and an infinite number of LGBT allies and ally organizations. As a result, pride organizers must rely—at least to an extent—on social media. Accordingly, this study investigates how the advent of social media has influenced how gay pride organizers communicate with and engage their local communities. The findings, from interviews with leaders of Pride organizations in 10 major U.S. cities—Boston, Charlotte, Denver, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Miami, New York City, Philadelphia, Portland, and Washington D.C.—outline the role of social media in planning these massive public events and maintaining the complex network of stakeholder relationships.

Participants argued that social media play a role in their outreach strategy, but they also emphasized that it does so primarily as a supporting, complementary tool. The director of Portland’s Pride explained, for example, social media keep volunteers engaged during the slower times of the year. The director of Los Angeles’ Pride organization, “Christopher Street West”, cautioned that social media actually can detract from an effective outreach strategy; social media actually has reinforced the merits of face-to-face communication and the limitations of online engagement.

Literature Review

Studying the communication strategies used by gay pride organizations allows public relations to shift away from a focus on traditional organizations, and toward a focus on how organizations can use public relations to exact social change (Dozier, D.M., & Lauzen, M. M., 2000). Gay pride organizations present a unique challenge in the context of public relations scholarship. They have the tricky task of representing LGBT citizens who simultaneously could be considered internal and external publics: they are independent citizens who may not be know a particular advocacy organization, but whose causes form that organization’s mission; these citizens are pride organizations’ constituents. Moreover, because the LGBT community is a minority that spans all other minorities, lesbian, gay male, transgender, and bisexual constituents all have pursuits unique to their experience. LGBT-focused organizations must craft communication strategies that engage them all.

Public relations’ relationship management theory provides an effective framework through which to explore these complex dynamics. This study also requires an understanding of how organizations can use their online presence to establish productive dialog with and among stakeholders. Relationships are the key-unifying concept in public relations (Ferguson, 1984),
and the relationship management framework emphasizes the importance of a communication strategy that pursues long-term, quality relationships between organizations and their publics. As Ledingham and Bruning (1998) explained, “An organization–public relationship is the state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political, and/or cultural well-being of the other entity” (p. 62). Quality relationships result from communication practices that establish mutual trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment (Ledingham, L.A., & Bruning, S.D., 2000), as well as mutual legitimacy, satisfaction, and understanding (Dimmick, Bell, Burgiss, and Ragsdale, 2000) between organizations and publics.

Certainly, power differentials exist between organizations and publics, and they each have certain perceptions regarding their ability to influence the other (Hon and Grunig, 1999). In these cases, it is important for the more powerful organizations to seek increased involvement from their publics. Regardless, as Coombs (2000) underscored, organizations and publics do expect certain things from each other. If these expectations are not fulfilled, or if the expectations between an organization and its publics are incongruent, then these crucial relationships could be jeopardized.

These core dimensions of relationship management parallel the challenges facing gay pride organizations. These organizers must design events that convey the infinite diversity of the LGBT community and its allies. They also must connect movement organizations and issues across a variety of community stakeholders, including the LGBT population; the broader community itself; civic and political leaders; city planning personnel; the religious community; media; additional LGBT advocacy organizations; allies and ally organizations; and corporate sponsors. These stakeholders—both within the LGBT community and outside of the community—wield different degrees of power and hold different expectations. Organizers must understand these dynamics in order to achieve mutuality, a process that takes time. Many pride organizations have worked for more than four decades to forge quality relationships between their city’s LGBT population and the broader community, which reflects relationship management’s premise that quality communication outcomes result from long-term strategies (Ledingham, 2003).

In the context of social activism and advocacy, scholars caution that communication research must not position this process as an “us versus them” dynamic. Ganesh and Zoller (2012), for example, called for communication research that investigates best practices of collaboration with activist organizations. The authors argued that communication research too often has approached activism as aggressive, violent, and threatening. They highlighted L. Grunig’s (1992) example—regarding how activism limits organizational effectiveness—to demonstrate that such a restricted perspective tends to “unreflexively characterize activists in terms of violence, construing them as incapable of conversation, consensus, or relationship building” (Ganesh & Holler, p. 71). That said, while a focus such as Grunig’s limits productive understanding of activist engagement, relationship management—and its long-term focus on mutuality—has great potential for exploring advocacy communication and consensus building. Along the way, however, there must not be an assumption that consensus requires “participants put aside pre-existing interests and goals” (Ganesh and Holler, p. 71). Rather, public relations research has an opportunity to reposition activist and advocate engagement as a positive, collaborative process achieved through dialog and the pursuit of long-term quality relationships.

At the heart of this process is the fundamental importance of substantive dialog (Bruning, S.D., Dials, M., & Shirka, A., 2008; Taylor, M., Kent, M. L. & White, W. J., 2001; Taylor, M. &
Kent, M. L., 1998). The Internet, particularly social media, provides unique ways to establish a productive dialog and, in turn, quality relationships between organizations and publics, especially for organizations operating with small staffs and budgets (Coombs, 1998). Kent, M.L., and Taylor, M., (1998) provided a strategic framework, guided by five fundamental principles, that can facilitate dialogic relationships with publics via the Internet. They argued that an effective online presence—the organization’s website—allows for public feedback; provides useful, quality information; regularly updates content to maintain long-term, repeat interest; allows straightforward site navigation; and strategically links to external sites and resources for user benefit. Taylor, M., Kent, M. L. & White, W. J. (2001) found, however, that organizations often do not take advantage of the dialogic capacity of the Internet. Their study of environmental advocacy organization websites found limited ways for the public to contact and engage the organization directly.

In order to establish productive online dialog, organizations must speak with an online “human voice” when engaging their publics; publics respond positively to organizations that are able to respond quickly, openly, and transparently with their publics via social media outlets (Kelleher, T., & Miller, B. M., 2006; Kelleher, 2009; Sweetser, K. D. & Metzgar, E., 2007; and Yang & Lim, 2009). Men, L. R. and Tsai, W. S. (2012) found that social network sites (SNS) have a unique opportunity to cultivate relationships with publics through dialog. They clarify, however, that culturally driven expectations help direct how organizations interact with publics via social media. For example, collectivist publics, “rely greatly on extended social networks for emotional exchange, and they value trust and the relationship” (pg. 729). Compared to individualistic cultures, collectivist publics more heavily look to SNS for an organization’s human voice. They seek human-to-human interactivity and engage those organizations that respond directly to individual posts and comments. Similar to Taylor, Kent, and White’s (2001) findings, however, Men and Tsai (2012) found that organizations do not use SNS to their full advantage.

At the heart of effective, online relationship management between organizations and publics is a productive organization-public dialog that pursues substantive human-to-human interaction. As the literature demonstrates, however, organizations often do not take full advantage of the Internet, particularly social media, in establishing an organization-public dialog. Certainly, the benefit of the Internet—particularly social media—as a great equalizer for organizations with small staffs and budgets, holds true for LGBT advocacy organizations. As the findings will demonstrate, however, in the context of social advocacy questions remain regarding the most effective ways in which social media can contribute to long-term goals of relationship management such as trust, involvement, and commitment. Accordingly, the core research question guiding this study asked, “How and to what extent do 21st century LGBT pride organizations leverage social media to establish productive dialogs and manage effective relationships with their publics?”

Methodology

In-depth interviews with 11 directors of LGBT pride celebrations in 10 major U.S. cities—Boston, Charlotte, Denver, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Miami, New York City, Philadelphia, Portland, and Washington D.C.—provided the data for this study (Table 1). Participants were targeted through purposive sampling: individuals in leadership positions with pride organizations in major U.S. cities. Emails initially were sent to pride organizations in 17 U.S. cities, all of which were chosen for their regional diversity. It was important to gauge social
media strategy in a variety of geographic and political contexts; certainly, the operational context in Boston differs somewhat from that in Charlotte or Indianapolis.

Although each city was important to this study, it was imperative to include the perspectives of New York City and Los Angeles. The 1969 Stonewall Riots began at the Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street in New York. Those Riots were the first demonstration of gay pride, and precipitated today’s international pride movement. Los Angeles of course reflects a west coast perspective. More importantly, its official name, “Christopher Street West”, reflects its status as the second oldest pride celebration. Given the size of New York and Los Angeles, as well as their places in history, both cities have extensive experience adapting to communication challenges and establishing relationships with a variety of publics.

Because of the national scope of this study, interviews were conducted via Skype. They lasted between one and one and a half hours each. Semi-structured interviews—guided by an interview guide that allowed for flexibility depending on individual responses—explored these organizations’ overall communication strategy (McCracken, 1998). The social media-focused findings specific to this study therefore represent only one portion of a broader project. Respondents outlined the history of their organization, their role at that organization, the major planning considerations, the planning process, and their approach to communication and outreach. Specific to their perspective regarding social media, respondents outlined if, how, and to what extent they use tools such as interactive websites, Facebook, emails, blogs, and Twitter used to promote Pride. They also discussed if they felt social media has helped or hindered their community’s overall ability to mobilize support for these celebrations.

Interview data were transcribed by the researcher and then analyzed qualitatively through a constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2000), moving from open, to axial, and ultimately selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The findings from the 10 major U.S. cities provided requisite saturation regarding how these advocacy organizations leverage social media as part of their broader communication strategy. All participants, except one, agreed to use their actual name rather than a pseudonym. That said, to aid flow and readability, the findings reference the applicable city, rather than the individual.
**Findings**

The cities represented in these findings—Boston, Charlotte, Denver, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Philadelphia, Portland, and Washington, D.C.—hold events that each host between 10,000 and 1.7 million people annually. Collectively, these findings outline how the pride organizations representing these cities use social media to reach, and engage, between 3.5 and 4 million people annually (Table 1). Each participant expressed varying levels of social media ability, and they acknowledged that incorporating social media into their broader strategy was a work in progress. That said, the participants’ comments revealed common, consistent perspectives regarding the role of social media in their broader communication.
strategy. They emphasized how social media provides quick, affordable direct ways to deliver news and connect with their stakeholders, but they cautioned that its reach is limited. Too much reliance on social media can detract from establishing quality relationships. That said, if used consistently, there are ways social media can maintain stakeholder engagement throughout the year. Finally, participants indicated that their unique operational context is important in determining how social media fits into their broader communication strategy. Each pride has unique dynamics that help influence how these organizations use social media.

**Quick, Direct, Affordable News Source**

Participants argued that social media—primarily Facebook, Twitter, and interactive websites—provide effective, efficient ways to communicate important news quickly and directly to their stakeholders. As the president of Portland’s Pride Northwest explained, “We’re on Facebook, and because our staff person is much more savvy in social media, it’s become very effective in getting the word out…. We focus on getting information directly out to the community, and not depending on third party media.” The director of New York’s Heritage of Pride emphasized social media’s role as a central news source for the community, but highlighted that the viral nature of social media also allows the organization’s exposure to grow quickly as a result. He explained, “We’ve become a source where people can get anything LGBT-related in terms of news. So we’re not the ones to create the news, but it’s easy for someone to share with their friends… So it increases your fan base easily.” The president of Washington’s Capital Pride echoed that social media had enabled them to become the go-to source for pride-related news, but they emphasized how the use of social media also helps convey organizational transparency. He explained, “We had a change in headliner, a change in venue, and event locations and times. And we were able to reach out in real time that showed a lot of transparency of the organization.”

Consequently, participants indicated that social media tools are becoming more effective than traditional public relations tools such as news releases and direct mail. Portland Pride’s president argued, “We do use press releases, which we’ve found to be pretty ineffective.” The representative of Indy Pride explained that they have good relationships with local radio stations, but getting television coverage has been difficult, primarily because traditionally they have been family owned. He argued, “If they were corporate owned we’d probably have a better chance.” He emphasized, however, that they have not done press releases, explaining, “I’m very much not an old media kind of guy…. I’m a big proponent of Facebook and using that to the best of its ability. That’s really our bread and butter.”
by 20,000. As New York’s director summarized, “I think press releases are still important, but it’s becoming more that viral word of mouth kind of thing. If you contact six key people who can really get your message out, then that’s how you really build press following.”

The participants from Washington’s Capital Pride explained that part of the shift to social media, away from traditional media outlets, is cost. They explained, “Part of the allure of social media is that it was free for us. You know? Advertising is expensive…. So we used social media as free advertising.” The organization, they explained, used Hootsuite for their social media analytics, which showed they pulled in more than three million impressions. They added that in the first year of their social media strategy, “We also went from close to 1200 followers to 5800 followers. We saw it was a very economical and effective way to communicate.”

*Interaction vs. Engagement: The limits of social media*

Despite the ability of social media to provide affordable, quick, direct, transparent communication between an organization and its publics, participants consistently cautioned that organizations also must be aware of social media’s limitations. First, in order to throw such massive events successfully, these organizations must rely on a strong stable of volunteers, and most participants have found that social media is not a good recruiting tool. The Deputy Director of Boston Pride emphasized, for example, that volunteer appreciation events following a pride event serve as ideal recruiting tools for the next year. She argued that face-to-face events “are far more effective than thinking somebody from your Facebook page is just going to show up at a meeting and get involved.” She explained, “You might have 8,000 Facebook friends but they’re very distant. You know the cultivation of volunteers and board members doesn’t come from the Facebook page. It’s really looking at what are your other strategies.” The operating director for Miami Beach’s pride echoed, “The challenge is being in front of them at different things before the event. You have to get their contact information there, and then try to get to them in a variety of ways.” New York’s managing director added, “When you’re doing stuff on facebook, it’s more about the branding. It’s more about getting the brand out there…. but it’s very hard to motivate people to do stuff on Facebook. That’s been a big challenge for us.” Portland’s Pride Northwest president clarified that they have been able to begin developing a volunteer database from their Facebook page. Regardless, she argued, “Social media can be very passive, and that’s the challenge, how do you get people engaged.” Indy Pride has found, “Volunteers is really something that we’re still trying to get a good handle on, to be honest…. we haven’t cracked that nut yet. Our volunteer chair did try to do some Facebook reach out, but [we] honestly just need to do a better job.”

Participants cautioned that focusing on social media could detract from a good holistic communication strategy. The president of Los Angeles’ pride summarized:

One of the things I think we’re making a mistake in our communication, is that we spend too much time emailing, or instant messaging each other versus having a conversation. I think our community drives social media better than anybody. I think the downside to that is that I don’t think we as a community are picking up the phone or having face to face conversations when issues are coming up. Instead we send out a global email or an instant blast about something versus having conversations…. I think one-on-one conversations, or group conversations, are far more critical.

The Deputy Director of Boston Pride echoed that having a solid social media strategy, in fact, should free up individuals to pursue the more-important conversations. For example, even if there is a shift toward social media away from more-traditional public relations tools in terms of
disseminating news, having conversations with media is still crucial. She explained, “If I had somebody to take care of the social media stuff, then I could do larger stuff like walking into every television station, walking into every newspaper, walking into every radio station, introducing myself and putting Boston Pride on their radar, having a name with a face.”

Participants emphasized that because they have to reach so many diverse publics, they must rely on multiple tools. As the director of New York’s pride explained, “I think social media is a tool, and critical tool. I don’t think it’s the only tool in your kit that you should use.” The Co-Chair of Pride Charlotte echoed, “Twitter and Facebook really reach a certain age group, and if you get into the LGBT community in their 40s and 50s, a little older, then that’s not always the best way to reach them.” Denver’s event director added that even though certain traditional communication tools, such as direct mail, are no longer relevant, “We use all mediums for all different goals. So we use e-newsletters, television, radio, FB, posters, flyers for all aspects of the festival.”

*Constant and Consistent Contact*

Even though social media limits the extent to which an organization can truly develop one-on-one relationships, several participants argued that there are still ways to improve engagement. Specifically in terms of volunteerism, participants emphasized that would-be volunteers regularly need to be given something to do, especially during the slower times of year. As the Director of New York’s pride explained, “We try to keep in contact. One of my big goals when I started was to improve their social media, because they weren’t utilizing it the way they needed to. Now, it’s how do you stay relevant after pride is over. I think we have a good formula down.”

The organizations that have been able to do keep stakeholders engaged throughout the year have experienced some success in converting their Facebook followers to in-person contributors. Charlotte and Portland’s pride organizations, for example, have been able to begin pulling from their online communities to develop volunteer databases. The co-chair for Pride Charlotte argued, “one of the things we’ve found about volunteers…. you may get someone to come for the first time to do something. But if we as an organization don’t have our act together, and have tasks for them to do, they’re not going to stay around.” The president of Portland’s Pride Northwest summarized:

Volunteers who care about the organization want something to do. So, we’re trying to ensure that we have something consistently for them to do: inventory our storage unit, letter stuffing. It’s boring stuff, but we put that out there on Facebook and we’ll have half a dozen people show up…. We’re creating this constant and consistent bond. It’s like I’m not getting in touch with you because I need something from you. It’s ‘let’s all do this together.’ They end up being some of our best allies, our best promoters, because they know the actual stuff that goes into making it happen.

*Knowing Your Operational Context*

While participants’ comments revealed common, consistent perspectives regarding the role of social media, they also acknowledged that each city’s pride reflects their unique operational context and guiding culture. For example, New York—because of the Stonewall Riots—occupies a rare, central role in the overall gay movement. People from around the world make annual treks to participate in the event that began the pride movement itself. Accordingly, the executive director of New York’s pride explained that their organization’s Facebook page is
the largest pride Facebook page in the U.S. and Europe. Only 33% of its fans, however, identify as living locally. People consider New York, the director clarified, a “destination pride”. New York’s social media strategy therefore is central to reaching a significant portion of their stakeholders: those who live well outside of the city. The participants from Washington’s Capital Pride explained that they see the potential in D.C.’s event also becoming a destination pride, and they have shaped their social media strategies accordingly.

Charlotte and Miami Beach, on the other hand, recently restarted their annual prides. Accordingly, each has focused on developing an annual celebration with a more-formal structure that better-engages the local community. Finally, Philly Pride is somewhat of a contextual outlier from the other cities. The senior advisor explained that the organization sponsors two events annually: the main pride celebration, and Outfest, which they claim as the world’s largest youth-focused coming out celebration. That celebration attracts a range of visitors from outside of Philadelphia. The advisor to Philly Pride indicated, however, that the annual pride event does not necessarily incorporate a formal social media strategy per se. The event has become a mainstay within the city—citizens know what to expect and when to expect it. The senior advisor therefore argued there is not currently a need to change course. Beyond the organization’s webpage and a basic Facebook page, they have not yet established a formal social media presence.

**Discussion**

Despite Philadelphia’s unique context, perspectives regarding the role of social media in communicating pride events were largely consistent. Participants argued that social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and interactive organizational websites, provide effective ways to disseminate important information quickly and directly. Moreover, organizations still use traditional public relations tools such as news releases. Partly due to its affordability, however, there has been somewhat of a shift toward making social media a central part of their communication strategies. That said, participants cautioned that too much of a focus on social media can detract from a good communication strategy. Nothing can substitute for face-to-face engagement, whether that happens with would-be volunteers, supporters, or traditional media outlets. Organizations therefore should balance social media strategies with opportunities for one-on-one engagement.

That said, some organizations have experienced limited success converting online followers and fans into active contributors. In those cases, organizations have focused on engagement during the slower times of the year, post pride. It is important, participants argued, to make supporters feel as if they are contributing throughout the year, not just when they are needed most during pride. These contributors, in turn, become organizational advocates, and can help recruit and spread the organizational message. Finally, these organizations must remember their operational context and how that context influences their use of social media. Destination prides, such as New York’s, must rely on social media and an interactive website, in order to communicate with supporters across the world. Prides that focus primarily on engaging local citizens, such as Philadelphia’s, may not invest as much time into social media outreach.

Participants’ perspectives regarding social media reflect the core dimensions of quality organization-public relationships: mutual trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment (Ledingham, et al., 1997). These organizations use their websites and Facebook pages to deliver timely information to their stakeholders, and participants argued that they provide key ways to start a dialog. As a result, several organizations have become the “go-to,” trusted source for pride-related news. The strategies employed by these organizations, however,
particularly highlight the importance of establishing mutual involvement, investment, and commitment with their publics. Participants argued that people interested in the work of pride want something do throughout the year. They need to be able to contribute. Accordingly, those organizations that have used social media to reach out and recruit consistently throughout the year—especially in the slower times—have had success in building a more active stable of volunteers. In other words, pride organizations must demonstrate their involvement, investment, and commitment to their stakeholders consistently, not just during the month surrounding pride. Similarly, these organizations’ publics want to demonstrate their involvement, investment, and commitment to pride throughout the year. As participants explained, this mutuality is crucial to long-term success.

The findings also respond to Kent and Taylor’s (1998) five principles that help facilitate productive dialog between organizations and publics via an organization’s online presence. In addition to providing quick, direct, quality information, participants argued that social media—if used thoughtfully—should establish two-way communication with publics. Moreover, their comments emphasized the importance of updating content throughout the year in order to maintain interest and keep key stakeholders engaged. Reflective of Taylor, Kent, and White’s (2001) study, however, participants acknowledged that they still do not use social media to its greatest potential. Questions remain regarding the most effective way to use social media as a tool for active engagement, beyond serving primarily as a source of news.

Finally, participants discussed the importance of maintaining a human voice for their organization. That said, while research has explored how an online presence can help establish that human voice (Kelleher, T., & Miller, B. M., 2006; Kelleher, 2009; Sweetser, K. D. and Yang & Lim, 2009), these participants argued that there is really no substitution personal interaction. They explained that social media actually has reinforced the importance of one-on-one, actual human interaction. Boston Pride, for example, hosts a river cruise where they can have one-on-one conversations with individuals to build their volunteer based. The President of Los Angeles’ pride, Christopher Street West, explained that having actual conversations is perhaps the most important thing organizations can do to engage publics. Participants agreed that the public relations tools they use are changing, and the shift to social media-based tools benefit organizations with small staffs and budgets. Regardless, the shift does not negate the importance of true human dialog. Rather, the shift reinforces the importance of that dialog.

Conclusion
This study examined how the pride celebrations in ten major U.S. cities use social media in their broader communication strategies, which collectively must reach close to four million people. The findings revealed two key takeaways. First, a successful event largely depends on how these organizations engage their stakeholders in the slower times of the year, rather than during the month surrounding the main pride event. Second, while these organizations still use traditional public relations tools, there is a shift toward social media as the central means of news distribution. More importantly, this shift has reinforced the importance of actual face-to-face interaction, and it has raised questions regarding how organizations can balance a social media strategy with one-on-one and group conversations. In a sense, participants argued that an effective strategy must incorporate the latest online technologies, and return to the most traditional form of communication: the human conversation. Future research should explore this balance and how organizers of massive events, such as pride celebrations, can effectively manage human conversations among millions of stakeholders.
References


Co-creating Organizational Changes in Social Media
– A Theoretical Framework

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Abstract
The purpose of this article is to propose a theoretical framework in which change is understood as an on-going, cyclical organizational process and communication in social media is used to co-create innovative change solutions. Based on a literature review, we develop a theoretical framework that could be used by public relations managers for developing strategies aiming at co-creating organizational changes. Our main proposition is that organizations should engage their stakeholders and particularly their employees on a more equal foot when finding new solutions to cyclical changes that make organizations more effective, efficient, participative, and innovative. In this paper, we explore these issues from a theoretical perspective and discuss the role of public relations in helping to co-create organizational changes.
Introduction

Organizational change has been and continues to be challenging for any modern organization. A widespread and common statement in much of the management literature is that “organizations must change and they must do so constantly” (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, & Ganesh, 2004). In organizational change studies, the importance of change communication is a special interest area and several scholars and practitioners argue that internal communication plays a vital role during organizational change (e.g. Elving, 2005). Very often internal communication is regarded as a tool for information and explanation of the planned change from a sender (the management) to a passive receiver (the employees) (Johansson & Heide, 2008). However, researchers who view communication as a socially constructed process argue that communication should not be simplified and conceptualized as a mechanistic linear transmission process. Instead, communication should be regarded as a reciprocal process in which meaning is socially constructed (Putnam, 1983). Noticeably, the literature on change communication as a socially constructed process tends to focus on how employees understand and make sense of the changes, but has sporadically considered the potential active role that employees could play in helping organizations to find new solutions to changes. Specifically, those organizations that socially construct changes as cyclical processes of organizational life, and in which changes are not simply the consequences of economic and financial issues or crises but are understood as processes driven by innovation, can benefit from a continuous involvement of employees in such processes.

As some scholars noted, social media are important platforms for dialogue and sharing (e.g. Kent & Taylor, 1998), for generative learning communities (e.g. Lewis, Pea, & Rosen, 2010), for enriching internal communication (e.g. Sievert & Nelke, 2012), and we would add, important platforms for co-creation. The purpose of this paper is to expand the existing research on social media use in organizations by applying it to change management. The theoretical question we address is how social media under certain circumstances can be used in organizations to make employees actively participate in the strategic definition, creation, and implementation of change solutions. The main focus in addressing this question is how a company can work towards a culture of collaboration in which employees potentially feel engaged and motivated to proactively share their thoughts, opinions, and ideas on strategic matters of interest to the organization’s goals across borders and time zones on social media, allowing an international organization to benefit from the knowledge of and engage in dialogue with its employees from all over the world. Accordingly, we suggest a theoretical framework for handling change management, built on the dialogical approach that includes the adaptation of a proactive change communication strategy, moving beyond participation to co-creation of change solutions through the use of social media.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we briefly review literature on change management and change communication to link it with studies on innovation management. We will then review the main factors and elements that affect change communication including employee roles in change management and their motivation for participating in change solutions. An explanation and discussion of the concept of co-creation related to employee participation will follow. Next, key results of studies and reports on social media and knowledge creation and sharing are presented, and the premises for their use as a co-creation strategy are discussed. We will then analyze the characteristics of some of the most widely used social media in internal communications, namely blogs, wikis and Yammer, and examine the potentials and pitfalls of these social media in an organizational context and in relation to co-creation. In the last section of the paper, we will introduce the theoretical framework for co-creating organizational changes in social media and we will discuss possible issues in implementing it. The paper concludes with a reflection on some of the potential roles of public relations in organizations in relation to the proposed framework.
Organizational Change and Change Communication

Organizational change has become a familiar topic for today’s executives and managers. In this context, a central concern for managers is how to encourage and effectively lead ongoing and continuous organizational change, and communicate about them to employees in order to facilitate commitment and identification with the organization (Zorn, Page, & Cheney, 2000). This trend has only increased in the last two decades. Already in 1979, Kotter and Schlesinger (p. 106) stated that “most companies find that they must undertake moderate organizational changes at least once a year and major changes every four or five”. Change in organizations often occurs due to rapid and unpredictable environmental changes such as market globalization, increasing competition, development of new technologies, and changing customer demands. In order to respond to these external changes, managers tend to change their organizations through reengineering, restructuring, downsizing, or through the introduction of new management systems (Zorn et al., 2000). In this respect, the competitive advantage of an organization no longer only depends on its production facilities or financial strength, but to a great extent on its capacity to embrace change and be innovative (Peus et al., 2009). However, some changes are more intense and potentially more threatening than others. The literature primarily distinguishes between first- and second-order changes. First-order changes are minor adjustments and improvements that involve only certain parts of the organization. They do not change the core of the organization. A second-order change is a fundamental change that alters the organization at its core and is irreversible (Cheney et al., 2004). In this sense, change can be characterized as multidimensional because many aspects of the organization change, and multilevel because changes happen at many hierarchical levels in the organization. Second-order changes are often associated with external forces such as an event or crises that precipitate the change and consequently are more difficult to anticipate (Kezar, 2001). According to Cheney et al. (2004), there are many graduations of change in between these two extremes which could include reengineering, organizational operations, the development of new products and services, or a campaign to change the corporate identity of the organization (p. 324).

The change literature seems to be dominated by two main approaches: a traditional, rationalistic approach and an emergent, interpretive approach (Johansson & Heide, 2008). Scholars within the traditional rationalistic approach view change as something episodic, intermittent, and discontinuous that can be planned and controlled by management (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Here, change is regarded as a rational and linear process that is relatively uncomplicated as long as a programmatic step-by-step sequence is followed in a change model (e.g. Kotter, 1996). The study on organizational change in this approach has mainly focused on explaining change processes and primarily why these often seem to fail. In this respect, employee’s attitudes, receptions, and reactions toward change has been a topic of major interest for scholars within the field. Especially employees’ resistance to change and cynicism are commonly identified as causes and contributors to failure (e.g. Stanley, Meyer, & Topolnytsky, 2005; Cartwright & Holmes, 2006). A frequent argument in this literature is that strategic management communication plays an important role in the production of change and in overcoming employee resistance and cynicism to change (e.g. Qian & Daniels, 2008; Kichen & Daly, 2002; Barrett, 2002). In this perspective, the key roles of communication are mainly to announce and explain change, create understanding, and build ownership of the change (Ford and Ford, 1995). According to Johansson and Heide (2008), this traditional and rationalistic approach can be criticized for treating communication as a tool for information and explanation of the planned change from a sender (the management) to a passive receiver (the employees). As long as employees are well informed and the right media is used, communication will reduce employee uncertainty and resistance toward
change. For example, Barrett (2002) stress that communication is the glue that holds an organization together in a change process. According to Barrett (2002), communication must inform and educate employees in the vision of the company, strategic goals, and what the change means to them. Additionally, communication must motivate employee support for the organization’s new direction and encourage higher performance. Similarly, Kitchen and Daly (2002) state that communication plays an important role with regard to the successful implementation of change and organizational development. They conclude that employees can only work effectively and participate in the organization if they are well informed.

Researchers within the emergent, interpretive perspective hold an opposite view. Here, change is regarded as a phenomenon that occurs within communication. A change process is created, maintained, and constituted by communication. In other words, change occurs as a result of people communicating (Ford & Ford, 1995). The emergent and interpretive approach regards change as continuous, which means that change tends to be ongoing, evolving, and cumulative (Weick and Quinn, 1999). Here, change is not perceived as an ad hoc activity that organizations do in response to fluctuations of their internal and external environments. On the contrary, it is a strategic decision-making process in which an organization sees change as an opportunity to further develop. Organizations that perceive change as an ongoing, cyclical activity of their lives develop and implement strategies, tactics and operations that support an adaptive environment. In this connection, Weick and Quinn (1999) suggest that researchers focus on “changing” instead of “change” because “changing” means greater appreciation of change as a process that is never off. In this way, Weick and Quinn tend to make researchers more attentive to change as a cyclical process without an end state. In the interpretive perspective, the planned communication approach is also contrasted with a view on communication as a reciprocal process in which meaning and reality is socially constructed through the words, symbols and actions that employees evoke (Putnam, 1983). Consistent with this approach are the theories on sense making by Weick (1995), which focus on dialogue and shared meanings among organizational members. People have different experiences and therefore differ in their understanding and interpretation of events. Thus, in a change process employees will make sense of a change situation in different ways when they tend to make meaningful sense out of an uncertain and ambiguous organizational situation (Weick, 1995). Hence, communication has the main function of helping the organization to create sense around planned changes, which are seen as “occasion[s] when new and social realities are produced through communication (Johansson & Heide, 2008, p. 294). Seeing change as a cyclical process implies a type of communication that is oriented towards social transformation and in which the dimension of power and dominance plays a great role. Change is not something decided, communicated and implemented by the management, but it is the result of a number of interactions between the management and employees and is negotiated and performed through discourse. In discussing the contribution of strategic communication to organizational change, Invernizzi, Romenti and Fumagalli (2012) indicate four contributions of communication, each focusing on a specific aspect of change management. These are aligning, energizing, visioning, and constituting. Particularly relevant for our discussion on understanding change as a cyclical organizational process and embracing change as part of the life of an organization is the energizing function of communication. According to these authors, the energizing component deals with the role of communication in stimulating an orientation towards innovation in organizations and in the creation of a culture of collaboration among stakeholders to drive innovation by taking into consideration existing resources, competence developments and knowledge diffusion (Invernizzi et al., 2012, p. 485). In this connection, communication with an energizing purpose helps an organization in developing a culture of sharing and collaborating and by doing so it defines a specific organizational culture (Hatch, 1993;
Johnson, 1996; Martins & Terblanche, 2003; Schein, 1985). Consequently, communication has an important role in creating an understanding of changing processes as innovation driven activities (c.f. Elving, 2005; Invernizzi et al., 2012; Linke and Zerfass, 2011).

**Bridging Change with Innovation Literature**

Organizations of any type need to adapt, change and re-structure their processes to meet new and compelling social, economic, political and cultural demands and to remain competitive in today’s global economy. Being innovative secures a competitive advantage (Zerfass & Huck, 2007). Innovation in organizations is often understood as the creation or adoption of an idea or behavior new to the organization (Daft, 1978; Damanpour, 1996; Damanpour and Evan, 1984; Lam, 2005). Typically, it is related to the introduction of new processes, new technologies, new products/services, and even a new culture. Though innovation as a concept has existed for a long time, the study of managing innovation is something that researchers from different fields have directed more and more attention to since the beginning of the twentieth century. Among the first ones, Schumpeter (1943) argued for the needs by firms to constantly transform the economic structure from within in order to be better and have more effective processes and products. Thus, literature on innovation and organization is very diverse and according to Lam (2005) even not well integrated into a coherent theoretical framework. As mentioned the scope of this paper is to focus on change management understood as a cyclical process of an organization’s adaptation and on the use of social media for co-creating change solutions. Therefore, it is not our intent to provide a complete overview of studies in organizational innovation, but rather pinpoint some aspects of innovation literature that are relevant for our discussion on change management.

In an organizational context, innovation is understood as positive changes leading to more efficiency, productivity, quality, competitiveness, market share, and other organizational aspects. Wolfe (1994) reviewed a number of studies about organizations and innovation and concluded that until early 1990s the understanding of innovative behavior in organizations was relatively undeveloped. According to Lam (2005), literature on organizational innovation has primarily concentrated on three streams of research focusing on either how innovation diffuse (diffusion of innovation research), on what determines organizational innovativeness and how organizations develop new knowledge (organizational innovativeness research), or on which processes are needed to implement innovation in organizations (process theory research). Communication plays a marginal role in all these streams of research (Zerfass, 2005); it is seen as a tool to support the diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 1995). Zerfass (2005) and Zerfass and Huck (2007) argue that in a more globalized and competitive world, communication should not simply be conceived as a tool for promoting innovation, but instead play a major role in innovation management. Accordingly, communication as a process could support the creation and co-creation of innovation. Zerfass (2005) introduces the concept of innovation readiness to explain the ability of an organization to innovate and posits that communication is a crucial element for coordinating actions and adjusting interests. Zerfass’s innovation readiness framework (2005) gives equal importance to organizational factors (e.g. the extent by which an organization is open to innovation solutions proposed by internal and external stakeholders and to change its social practices) and social factors (e.g. the extent by which institutions from the public and private spheres cooperate productively and support innovation diffusion). This also underlines the need for continuous exchange between producers, suppliers, customers, competitors, banks, associations, universities, research institutes, and policy makers in order to create innovation clusters.
Organizational innovation and organizational change are intertwined concepts. The perspective on change as a cyclical process and the concept of innovation share similar characteristics. Both require transformations of the organizational culture and of different structures, procedures, routes, and approaches in reaction to environmental conditions (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2007; Linke & Zerfass, 2011; West & Farr, 1990). However, they also differ to the extent that change does not necessarily require new ideas or does not always lead to improvements in the organization as innovation does (Martins & Terblanche, 2003; West & Farr, 1990). Furthermore, change is often responsive to organizational issues, whereas innovation is proactive. To summarize, change management understood as a cyclical, ongoing process of an organization adapting to different environmental conditions can become innovation management when an organization transforms its reactive culture of adaptation into a proactive one and looks for new ideas to be more effective, competitive, and future-oriented.

Since change is foreseeable in any organization, and thus it is often unavoidable, we argue that organizations should seriously start re-considering how they want to approach it. Change intrinsically has a negative connotation for most employees, whereas innovation does not. Therefore, van Vuuren and Elving (2008) propose organizations to label changing process with innovations, adjustments, or learning processes. Researchers on innovation management underline the importance of developing an organizational environment with a culture of open communication, information and knowledge sharing, and co-creation. Such environment is seen as a prerequisite for establishing and maintaining collaborations and cooperations of different internal and external stakeholders, which are necessary in order to develop innovation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003; Zerfass & Huck, 2007).

Employee Participation in Developing Innovative Change Solutions

Not all stakeholders are equally important in the innovation process and not all are in the position of contributing meaningfully with ideas for innovative change solutions. Internal stakeholders, e.g. employees, are considered very important not only because they are directly affected by organizational changes, but also because of their specific know-how. Linke and Zerfass (2011) believe that employees are one of the most important sources for innovation. These scholars argue that “if [the] management wants to establish an innovative culture according to [its] business philosophy, [it] must listen to employees and trace each step from philosophy to action” (Linke & Zerfass, 2011, p. 335). Similarly, researchers such as Dougherty (1996), Hartmann (2006), Mast, Huck, and Zerfass (2005) and Martins and Terblanche (2003) claim that employees should be empowered in organizations and should be part of the innovation process encompassing different organizational boundaries. Different studies indicate that employees’ commitment, participation, creativity, and shared responsibility towards innovation processes are important elements for effective innovation (Dougherty, 1996; Lau & Ngo, 2004) and impact how employees make sense of changes and contribute to changing solutions. An organization should focus on creating mechanisms for increasing learning, development, and participative decision making (Hurley & Hult, 1998) through the promotion of co-creation activities, in which anyone in the organization can be involved, rather than simply helping employees to make sense of changes decided by the management, or outsourcing to small groups of employees the tasks of finding change solutions.

Employees’ motivation to go beyond their designated role and get involved in spontaneous and innovative activities also has a positive impact on employees’ identification with the organization (Hartmann, 2006). The stronger it is, the more they will participate in innovation creation. Among others, Ruck and Welch (2012) pinpoint that organizational identification is very important for employees’ commitment to the organization, sense of
belonging to it, awareness of its changing environment, and understanding of its evolving aims. Existing research also indicates that employees that identify with the organization tend to have a more supportive attitude towards change and a higher work satisfaction (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; van Dick et al., 2004). A high level of identification is also associated with a higher likelihood that employees will take the organization’s perspective and act in the organization’s best interest (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). Further, organizational identification has also been closely linked to employee participation in decision-making because it signals to employees that they are seen as included and valued members of the organization (Fuller et al., 2006). In a study by Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick (2002), results show that employees who participate in important decision-making processes perceived that they were valued and trusted to act in the organization’s best interest. This perception, according to Allen and others (2003), influences employees’ level of behavioral responses. These scholars argue that if management offers participation but is not open to receive input and/or does not act on it, then employees are unlikely to feel that the organization truly offers participation, which will consequently affect their participation in a negative way. As a result, Neumann (1989) suggests that empowering participative structures must be in place in order for employee participation to be successful during organizational change.

Co-creation for Employee Participation

Co-creation is a concept originally developed in consumer-firm interaction studies (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) to explain the generation and on-going realization of mutual firm-customer value. Co-creation refers to the praxis of product or service creation in which suppliers and customers collaboratively work together (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). As Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2003, p. 14) clarify “a unique co-creation experience is neither company nor product-centric. Neither is it customer-centric in the limited sense of a company being responsive to how customers use and consume its products and services”. The concept of co-creation has been adopted in studies concerning business, marketing, management, leadership, and public relations. Recently, the concept has been used to explain how organizations can improve different systems and processes, including transforming traditional corporate practices such as training, performance management, and communications into co-creative interactions, how they can generate innovation, cut costs, increase employee engagement, and generate added value (Ramaswamy & Gouillart, 2010).

Co-creation can thus be a useful strategy for change management, since it shifts the perspective of changing processes as something decided by the management to something jointly planned and agreed with employees. Through discursive processes, change can be jointly shaped and shared in the form of “multi-layered conversations” (Johansson & Heide, 2008, p. 296). Collaborative and discursive processes support individuals’ construction of their knowledge and understanding of their organizational worlds (Chreim, 2006; Johansson & Heide, 2008) as well as contribute to the definition of new solutions and ideas (Zerfass & Huck, 2007). Thus, communication plays a key role in co-creation, because it is through communication exchanges that organizations and stakeholders agree on the terms of their interactions and make sense of their and the other part’s contribution to the interactions.

Co-creation can work if the dimension of power and dominance are conceived as equally as possible. In change management studies, changes are often the result of decision-making processes that reflect the power and dominance of the management over general employees (Cheney et al., 2004; Cornelissen, 2008). Applying a co-creation approach in change management would require a re-balancing of power and dominance between the management and the employees. Furthermore, a co-creation approach in organizational changes can work if there is a strong motivation from the management and employees’ sides
in collaborating together and generating and implementing joint innovative ideas. Hence, for applying co-creation in organizational changes, an organizational culture promoting innovation and oriented to collaborations must be in place. Internal communication can play a strategic role in this respect (Ruck & Welch, 2012). Furthermore, organizations need also to consider processes and structures that facilitate organization-stakeholder interactions and to provide platforms through which co-creation can take place.

**Social Media as Co-creation Platforms**

Social media are a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61; Valentini & Kruckeberg, 2012). Previous research in marketing communication and public relations on social media has primarily examined the social media use for external purposes and stakeholders (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011; Eyrich, Padman, & Sweetser, 2008; Diga & Kelleher, 2009). Social media and co-creation have been the focus of other studies on learning (Lewis et al., 2010; Dalsgaard & Paulsen, 2009) and from a brand and product-development perspective, also referred to as crowdsourcing, a network theory in which consumers are actively involved in designing the products they consume (Brabham, 2008; Tapscott & Williams, 2008). Research on social media and employee co-creation has been rather limited due to this predominance of an external communication perspective in the literature. In this paper, we offer an internal communication perspective on the use of social media, in which employees are seen as co-creators of change and where social media are the channels in which co-creation occurs. As a result, we decided to focus only on social media that have been so far used for internal communication purposes because of their open-source and intra-organizational nature. These are blogs (weblogs, online journals with forums for discussion), wikis (collectively compiled knowledge bases in the style of Wikipedia), and Yammer (business collaboration platform and enterprise social network). The chosen social media exemplify a certain use within the three different categorizations of social media use, i.e. forum, knowledge sharing and social networking bases.

In organizations, social media are increasingly used for knowledge management mostly as communication platforms for knowledge diffusion and for knowledge implementation, but they could potentially also offer a contribution for knowledge creation (Riemer, Diederich, Richter, & ScifleetP, 2011, p. 2). Riemer et al. (2011) describe social media by means of ‘generations’. First generation of social media’s primary scope is the manifestation of explicit knowledge by enabling the joint creation and authoring of content (such as blogs and wikis). This is followed by a second generation of social media in which knowledge creation is enabled through the sharing via social connections, conversation and interactive exchange (like Facebook and Yammer). Social networking services have emerged as a space for information sharing, idea generation, problem solving, and relationship building and are designed to encourage the development of communities of practice, and to stimulate knowing experiences, rather than to merely facilitate knowledge transfers (Riemer et al., 2011).

**Existing Studies on Social Media for Internal Communications**

A general feature of most of the current studies on the use of social media in internal communication is that it is primarily practitioner-based and consultancy made, and not theoretically founded. Researchers Bernoff and Schadler (2010) at Forrester Research Institute write in their book *Empowered* how and why organizations should let go of their top-down approach in controlling organizational activities and communications and trust more those employees with an embedded Facebook-DNA to write on social media. An
example of this is the global cloud computing organization EMC Corporation’s use of social media for employee engagement. EMC has both an internal social media platform for employee collaboration and an external one allowing access to 250,000 customers and employees, who can connect one to another directly on the social media platform. Paladino (2012), a co-branded employee at EMC, describes how the corporation has several hundred co-branded employees who blog and many thousands unofficial brand managers on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc. He indicates that most content creators are flattered and honored when the corporation decides to reuse – and thus promote – their contents (Paladino, 2012).

In relation to the work of Bernoff and Schadler and the example of EMC, one may add that the open approach suggested and documented is built on an organization where openness, transparency, and dialogue are internally promoted by the company, from top to bottom. This aspect is crucial for such a strategy to succeed. Employees are only capable of communicating honestly externally if the internal environment, i.e. the organizational culture, allows for such open communication.

Looking at other studies, a Danish recent investigation by SocialSemantic (2012) of 2742 Danish companies indicates an increased use of social media in the work place, and furthermore shows that managers have high expectations when implementing social media strategies. According to this report, the areas in which social media use has increased are innovation management (R&D), product and process development, human resources management, organization management, and public relations. The report concludes that a professional use of social media can potentially improve communications and collaborations in the work environment, and subsequently make it easier to share ideas and knowledge.

In relation to change management and employee participation, a Study Report on Change and Communication ROI (Towers Watson, 2012) with 600 organizations from a broad cross section of industries and countries sheds new insights on the pivotal role that effective change and communication processes play in global organizations today. According to the findings of this study, the way companies handle employee communication is fundamentally changing, largely due to increased expectations, diversity and globalization, as well as the growth of social media and networking. The claim is that organizations with both highly effective communication and change management practices are more likely to significantly outperform peer organizations that are not highly as effective in either of these areas (Towers Watson, 2012).

Overall, these studies reveal an increasing interest in social media by practitioners and a subsequent high expectation for implementing interactive communications. However, not much research has been done on the actual use of social media for co-creation in organizations and the role of employees in such a strategy. In a study on applying the concept of change with that of social network in internal communication, Sievert and Nelke (2012) stated that they did not find any specific literature on change and networking in social media. Sievert and Nelke conclude that the transition of individuals, teams, and organizations is only possible from a change theory perspective by providing an integrative and holistic management that accept new technological possibilities of internal communication as a real enrichment instead of a threat. According to Sievert and Nelke (2012), a requirement is that management should be willing to follow a real “listen and learn approach” when being criticized.

**Social Media for Internal Communication: Blogs, Wikis and Yammer**

Existing research on social media for internal communication has primarily focused on three types of social media, i.e. weblogs, wikis and Yammer. Weblogs, or simply said blogs, are some of the first generation channels that allow for a more democratic use of the Internet, since everyone can be both the author and co-producer of web contents. Blogs
started out essentially as informal online diaries, loosely maintained by individuals as a way of recording events in their lives, mainly to keep friends and family members informed and amused (Pitt, Parent, Steyn, Berthon, & Money, 2011). Though blogs are still personal, many blogs have also started to be used in the business world (Cortini, 2009), and a large and growing number of blogs have specific agendas such as media coverage of politics, or facilitating communication processes among individuals and organizations (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, Valentini & Romenti, 2011). A simple working definition of a corporate blog is that of Puschmann (2010, p. 15): “A (primarily textual) blog used in an institutional context to further organizational goals”. Idealistically, corporate blogs give voice to stakeholders and employees and they are used when organizations want to promote free discussion and dialogue (Cortini, 2009). Corporate blogs basically serve the construction of a firm’s reputation and are often part of the already existing communication strategy of marketing and public relations departments. Internal blogs – also referred to as blogs behind the firewall (Charman, 2006), or employee blogs (Efimova, 2009), i.e. personal blogs where individuals talk as corporate employees, or personal blogs where the blogger makes continuous reference to his/her working experiences and company – have the potential to shift the balance of power from employers to employees, as employees gain the ability to communicate their concerns to other employees, customers, neighbors, stockholders, and other parties interested in the employer (Cortini, 2009). An internal blog potentially allows employees to get their own messages out in a quite visible manner, both to the public, and at the same time to an internal audience. Cortini (2009) defines blogs for internal communication as klogs (knowledge blogs). Klogs’s main purpose is to support corporate intranets and manage organizational projects from distance, offering a virtual shared space, which is visible and updated everywhere and by everyone with a shared password. However, the blog-technology is only a format and potential facilitator of communication and dialogue.

Wikis are software for enabling multiple people to create, edit and comment on documents or wiki pages in a collaborative manner and allow their users to engage in dialogues at a different pace than if it was face-to-face (Payne, 2008, Distaso, 2012). Wikis are claimed to mark an important step away from the mechanistic knowledge harvesting and collecting strategy of the late 1990s, potentially making both the creation of organizational knowledge and its diffusion more visible and transparent. Wikis (and to a certain extent blogs) still place emphasis on the explicit manifestation and accumulation of content, whereas social media of the second generation, also known as enterprise social networking platforms, are interactional spaces for knowledge creation, which put emphasis on social relationships, interactive communication and ad-hoc sharing (Riemer et al., 2011, p. 5), typically through short messaging communication, referred to as micro-blogging.

Micro-blogging allows users to send short messages into a message stream from which users can create their own personalized information view by following the messages of a select number of users. Corporations are increasingly showing interest in micro-blogging for group communications and information sharing in their emerging social networks. One of the strongest examples of enterprise micro-blogging techniques is Yammer, a social media service that was officially launched in September 2008, also known as ‘the enterprise version of Facebook and Twitter’ (since it operates behind the firewall). It is used by more than 90,000 companies and organizations worldwide (Riemer et al., 2011, p. 3). The service is organized using the concept of networks, with one network representing one company, and users can join easily by registering their corporate email. The front resembles that of Twitter or Facebook with a posting stream and the ‘follower’ principle being the dominant features. Groups that are established according to theme and networks can be created. Files, links, and images can be shared; direct messages are embedded as well as functions like bookmarking of posts, tagging, mentioning of and replying to other users (Riemer et al., 2011). According
to Riemer et al. (2011), Yammer is primarily used for opinion and clarification, i.e. users asking others for their opinions, for voicing their own opinion on work-related matters or for engaging in clarifications of various matters of interest. Yammer is also used for problem solving and support and updates and notifications purposes. The former “reflects communication that is intended to solve specific (often pressing) problems or to find resources to support one’s immediate work and ask for solutions to a problem” (Riemer et al., 2011, p. 6). The latter reflects the intention to provide others with work-related updates regarding status, tasks, and events. However, as Riemer et al. (2011) indicate, posts that refer to concrete task updates and immediate task coordination are rare. Another possible use of Yammer is information sharing which captures the sharing of work-related information and news mainly in the form of web URLs with others out of their own initiative, without others requesting that information, i.e. proactively sharing resources with whoever might be interested. Self-marketing and provide social feedback are also mentioned as communicative purposes, however more rare than the former four types. The study of Riemer et al. (2011) concludes that Yammer is predominantly a conversational medium, where people interact and discuss, rather than only inform others about themselves (like Twitter) or about immediate task/team context.

Possibilities and Pitfalls of Social Media

For internal communication, social media generally offer a higher degree of direct online, two-way communication and hence an increased potential for dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 1998). The use of social media can be summarized to these four overall possibilities. First, they can enable communication on value and knowledge sharing. Second, they can provide ways to speak in a human and often less formal and more direct voice within or outside an organization. Third, they can document expertise and share it through networking, and finally, they can boost creativity through unexpected connections between people and ideas (Efimova, 2009).

The use of these platforms will, however, always depend on the users and the context of use (Valentini & Kruckeberg, 2012), since the use of social media in organizations above all is contextually and culturally bound. In other words, how organizations facilitate the use of social media, and how they allow employees to use them, may differ substantially. Social media policies may vary and often reflect the general communication policy of a company and more implicitly the organizational culture. The use of open, conversational and social platforms is a cultural change that for many clashes with the highly formalized business communications in which a strong etiquette that discourages employees from expressing their opinions often rule (Charman, 2006). Activities such as blogging, online knowledge sharing and online social networking potentially break down communication barriers, providing employees with a forum to talk one to another and even to disagree with a company’s activities. Management can consider this as threatening or as enlightening (Charman, 2006). A key point of using social media in corporations is that social media practices are shaped by the organizational context and hence, if social media are to serve for change management, the company has to take its point of departure in this context and communicate clearly to the employees the expected participation in these platforms with new innovative ideas as well as explaining the purpose for engaging in conversations and knowledge sharing in social media, while creating room for doing so.

A Framework for Co-creating Organizational Changes in Social Media

The main theoretical discussions of this paper are summarized in table 1. The first column shows the four major understandings of changes, whereas the second column presents the major communication approaches in change communication. The third and
fourth columns summarize the role of stakeholders, specifically employees, in change management and communication decisions and the way social media are used correspondently. There is no straight, direct linking between change definition, change communication approach, role of stakeholders and social media use. An organization that understands change as a linear process could apply a co-creating change communication approach, although co-creation in the linear process is primarily used for a single, defined issue and its applicability has temporal and purposive limits. In other words, co-creation in a linear process is used only when a change is needed, and once a change solution is agreed, there is no need to co-create further. Similarly, organizations that see change as cyclical and ongoing processes in their organizational lives, may still perceive change communication as rational/realist activity with no intention to involve their employees. Accordingly, in this perspective the social media use is primarily for sending contents about the change and new tasks. Overall, different combinations of understandings, approaches and uses can be implemented; however, we believe that a truly innovative organization should consider change as innovation development and conceptualize change communication so to embed its stakeholders more into the organization’s strategic decision making.

Table 1 – Overview of approaches to change management, change communication, role of stakeholders and social media use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change definitions</th>
<th>Change communication approaches</th>
<th>Roles of stakeholders</th>
<th>Social media uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linear process</td>
<td>Rational/realist</td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>One-way; content diffusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple linear processes</td>
<td>Sense-making</td>
<td>Active in making sense of otherwise decided changes</td>
<td>Two-way asymmetrical; platform for sharing meanings and discuss decided changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyclical process</td>
<td>Social transformational</td>
<td>Active in negotiating changes</td>
<td>Two-way asymmetrical; platform for collecting feedback on proposed changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyclical and innovation driven process</td>
<td>Co-creation</td>
<td>Active in co-constructing change solutions</td>
<td>Two-way symmetrical; platform for sharing knowledge, for creating together innovative change solutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bearing in mind differences in the types and forms of changes and in the history, culture, business market and management of an organization, our proposed theoretical framework for Co-creating Organizational Change in Social Media (COCiSM) is highlighted in the last row of table 1 (grey cells). As indicated in previous research (e.g. Weick & Quinn, 1995) change is often a cyclical process that never stops. Adapting a perspective that regards change as cyclical has clear implications to communication, which should be considered as a reciprocal process in which solutions and meanings are co-constructed (e.g. Zerfass & Huck, 2007) and in which employees, as one of the primary organizational stakeholders, are empowered by an open culture of innovation to share ideas and solutions about possible changes. In such perspective, the establishment and use of social media, for example blogs, wikis and Yammer, could be extremely relevant for supporting dialogue and facilitating knowledge sharing across units, departments and offices. As literature indicates, the success of the proposed COCiSM framework depends on a number of factors including employee motivations, organizational culture, organizational structure, and management mentality. First, there will be no creation if employees are not interested in or willing to participate in sharing knowledge and creating change solutions. Second, a culture for innovation that is supported by the management must be in place. Third, a governing and authoritarian mentality of management should be replaced by trust and sharing powers. In co-creating processes, in fact, the power is distributed among participants including the management who has to be open to receiving input and to be expected to act on it (c.f. Allen et al., 2003). And this action needs to be communicated explicitly for the employees to see that management has listened and implemented the suggestions made. Visibility is also an important element here: when employees’ messages and feedback is made transparent for everybody to see, it becomes even more evident and visible the situations where management do not give an answer or respond in any way. Fourth, the organization should also have adequate technological structures for enabling co-creation and clear social media policies. Finally, it will be hard to implement the proposed COCiSM framework if communication is not conceptualized as an essential organizational function contributing to the organization’s core objectives and the public relations manager is not part of the dominant coalition. The proposed framework should not be considered an attempt to reduce organizational complexity in change communication but instead it offers indications on how to handle decisions concerning the main tenants we postulate in change management and communication.

Role of Public Relations Practitioner in The Cocism Framework

Change and innovation management are critical organizational functions, and public relations practitioners should be an integral part of change/innovation teams. Hence, in relation to the proposed COCiSM framework we foresee three major roles for the public relations practitioners as exposed by existing literature on the subject (see for example Grunig, 1992; Hutton, 1999; Smith, 2012).

- Analyst role: a public relations practitioner can help an organization choose the best change perspective based on his/her knowledge of internal and external environments, his/her understanding of stakeholder concerns and capacity to take into consideration and analyze an organization’s existing structures and processes vis-à-vis to its industry and business, its culture and history, and other relevant contextual elements (c.f. Grunig, 2011).

- Facilitator role: public relations as a managerial function that help organizations in establishing and maintaining mutual beneficial relationships with their stakeholders
(Ledingham, 2003) - also known as a bridging function (c.f. Grunig, 2006) - can help organizations in creating a supportive environment, in encouraging employees’ participation and explaining the reasons for their involvement through the use of conversations, dialogue and consultations (Ford & Ford, 1995). By supporting organizations in setting transparent guidelines for rewarding employees’ social media presence, which Samuel (2012, October 29) argues are important for employee participation in social media, public relations can also contribute in boosting employee participation.

- **Content and channel management role:** depending on the chosen perspective for change management (i.e. defined as a linear, a multi-linear or a cyclical process), at strategic level, a public relations manager can help an organization decide its change communication strategy, specifically whether the purpose of change communication is to inform stakeholders or to enable dialogic processes for the co-creation of innovative solutions and knowledge sharing. At the tactical level, a public relations practitioner can be in charge of defining contents and managing channels for change communications. A public relations practitioner can contribute to crafting contents and choosing the most appropriate channel for change communications when the organizations opt for informing employees about decided changes, but he/she can also perform the function of a content collector and moderator of employees’ inputs in social media when the organization decides to use social media for enabling discussions on possible innovative change solutions. In this respect, a public relations manager/practitioner can perform a ‘liaison role’ (Dozier, 1992) between the management and employees in the social media platform. He/she can be the administrator of the social media platform, the coordinator of discussions, and in general responsible for the integration of online contents across platforms.

The three proposed public relations’ roles are not mutually exclusive. Quite the opposite, they are all indispensable during the process of transformation that is vital for becoming a truly innovative organization. Our literature review on change management and innovation management in management and organizational studies highlights an increasing scholarly interest in understanding better the role of communication because communication is a process through which change is comprehended, socially constructed, and practiced. At the same time, the construct of change brings in a multiplicity of stakes and stakeholders and thereby it calls for more theoretically grounded studies dealing with stakes and stakeholders in change/innovation management, an area in which public relations scholarship can contribute in a substantial manner (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 2000; Smith, 2012), but has not noticeably done so yet.

**Conclusions**

In this paper we presented a review of research into change management and change communication related to literature on innovation management, employee participation, co-creation and the use of social media. These concepts are linked, and the result is a theoretical framework in which change is understood as a cyclical organizational process and communication in social media is used to co-create innovative change solutions. The main idea of our heuristic framework is that organizations should engage their stakeholders and particularly their employees more equally when it comes to finding innovative change solutions that make organizations more effective, efficient, participation and innovation oriented rather than simply communicating changes planned and decided by management. In this paper, we explored these issues from a theoretical perspective and underlined some
potential of social media for co-creating organizational changes. We then discussed possible problems in implementing our proposed COCiSM framework and elaborated on the roles of public relations for co-creating organizational changes.

The paper contributes to the fields of change management and change communication by linking public relations scholarship in social media with studies in innovation and co-creation management, a research area that has only received limited attention. The development of the COCiSM framework is merely a first step to approaching change from a cyclical, innovative perspective. Our proposed COCiSM framework has some limitations because of its theoretical nature. Future research should further study the proposed COCiSM features in a real corporate environment to test their value for developing an organizational culture of innovation and improving employee participation in an actual change communication situation.
References


The Role of New Media in Reputation Management: What’s the Price of Ignorance?

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Abstract

Even though there are still some open issues on defining the concept of reputation, most scholars agree that it is primarily a perceptual phenomenon instead of an inherent property. Reputation is based on a collective judgment of a group of observers’ and is mostly based on an organization’s past performance (Vidaver-Cohen, 2007). However, some authors believe that reputation is not only the result of past performance but also “a strategic construct that includes deliberate attempts to manage and monitor relations between organizations and their multiple stakeholders” (Schultz et al., 2000, p. 5).

This study is a part of a bigger project in which a Croatian university is trying to overcome a series of problems that have largely affected its reputation. Reputation measurement and management in the featured university is mostly accidental. Among a range of problems, one of the obvious issues is the refusal to recognize social media as a relevant channel of communication with various publics, specifically the new generation of digital natives that are currently making up the majority of the student body.

Blossom (2009) defined social media as: “any highly scalable and accessible communication technology or technique that enables an individual to influence groups of other individuals easily” (p.29). Applications emerging from this new technology offer a wide range of opportunities for reputation management. As Aula (2010) states, social media have several implications on corporate media strategy due to the fact that they allow easy searching, open participation, a minimal publishing threshold, dialogue, community, networking and the fast spread of information and other content through a wide range of feedback and linking systems. He also adds that in terms of reputation management, social media content cannot be controlled in advance and that as such it cannot be managed in the same way as conventional media. The question raised from these conclusions is how do young generations perceive various media, the traditional and the new, and what type of information do they exchange through them? A study by Friedl and Tkalac Verčič (2011) showed that contrary to popular opinion, not all people below 30 are completely immersed in digital technology. The results of the mentioned study showed that even though digital natives prefer digital media in their personal lives, this is not necessarily reflected in their business lives.

This paper focuses on the assessment of students attitudes towards both existing media channels and new communication media, both in their “private” and “university” life. The main question is: What media preferences do students have regarding formal information about their university and are these media preferences the same as in their informal, social communication? The paper presents the results on the posed research question, puts it in the context of organizational reputation management, and expands on theoretical and practical implications of the results.
Defining Reputation

Reputation is a perceptual measure of organizations and as such is completely subjective; it describes the totality of an image that an organization has with all its stakeholders and publics. Concepts that are connected to reputation include identity, image, prestige, corporate social responsibility, relationships, recommendations, word of mouth and others. While reputation is an aggregate of internal and external perceptions, some authors believe that the distinction between internal and external is blurring (Balmer and Gray, 1999; Cheney and Christensen, 2001; Gummesson, 2000). Other authors go even further, suggesting a direct relationship between identity and image and from there to an aggregated reputation (Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun and van Riel, 1997). Image thus becomes ‘a reflection of an organization’s reality’ (Argenti, 1998, p. 74). From such a perspective, communication directed to insiders can be used as part of a broader change of the management process (Ahmed and Rafiq, 2002).

Reputation is becoming one of the fundamental factors on which corporate success is shaped (Key, 1995) as well as an important intangible asset (Dolphin, 2004). Organizational reputation can be important in at least three contexts: company preference in doing business in ceteris paribus conditions, support in troubled times, and in the valuation in the financial market place (Greyser, 1999). In the mentioned contexts, reputation is more than a result of past performance; it becomes a “a strategic construct, which includes deliberate attempts to manage and monitor relations between organizations and their multiple stakeholders” (Schultz et al., 2000, p. 5).

Today, most academics and business professionals agree that a good reputation is one of the most valuable intangible assets any organization can have. It helps in reducing stakeholder uncertainty on future organizational performance, it increases competitive advantage, it can add to public confidence and it can also create value through increasing an organizations ability to receive a premium for products (Vidaver-Cohen, 2007). An organization can successfully build reputation with various publics and through that produce positive outcomes such as motivating consumers to buy products, attracting employees, attracting investors and building good relationships with the local community as well as with suppliers and distributors (Fombrun, 1996). One of the features of good reputation is that it helps in protecting the organization from failure in times of crisis through “reputational capital” (Vidaver-Cohen, 2007). On the other hand, reputational damage can have a very negative effect on an organization’s short-term success and its long-term survival (Alsop, 2004).

Fombrun (1996) defines corporate reputation as a perceived representation of past organizational behavior as well as a prediction of an organization’s future behavior; i.e. it represents the general desirability of an organization to all its stakeholder groups, in comparison to the competition. Reputation is an estimation of a way in which an organization is perceived internally, among employees, and externally, among interest groups in its institutional surroundings. Even though this definition of corporate reputation can partially be applied to academic institutions as well, some elements of image and identity are different in university settings.

University Reputation

Universities everywhere are facing increased competition as well as decreases in funding, whether government or private. The result of this is that universities either become focused on understanding their publics and adopt a market orientation (Ressler and Abratt, 2009) or pay the price. In Croatia, decades of government funded academic monopolists are coming to an end and private schools are slowly entering the market. The time in which academia was beyond reproach is over, and it is becoming clear that stakeholder perceptions
cannot be ignored. In competitive environments, universities have to actively engage in reputation management. Reputation management requires an understanding of how different stakeholder groups perceive reputation, or in other words it requires an understanding of the construct of reputation (Ressler and Abratt, 2009).

Generally, strategic management of reputation presupposes that we can measure it through time and improve its score. This practical implication of the construct of reputation is devalued by a multitude of approaches to the construct (Helm, 2005) that produce many definitions (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001). As a result, there are various approaches to measurement. Barens and van Riel (2004) identified three main strands. The first one is concerned with ranking organizations based on stakeholders expectations regarding selected characteristics of companies; its best known representatives are Fortune’s annual “Most Admired Companies” report and the Reputation Institute’s “Reputation Quotient” (RQ). The second one measures corporate personality as an analogue to personality traits and is best represented in the “Corporate Personality Scale” developed by Davies et al. (2001; 2004). The third main approach is concerned with the perception of an organization’s honesty, reliability and benevolence as possible indicators of corporate reputation; it is represented in the “Corporate Credibility Scale” developed by Newell and Goldsmith (2001).

Besides these three main lines of research, Barens and van Riel (2004) also identified some less prominent approaches. They conclude their review with an observation that the three dominant streams of research in reputation are rooted predominantly in empirical research with weak theoretical underpinnings; however, selection of a particular measure for concrete research should be based on theoretical and practical considerations. The idea of reputation as a construct representing aggregated perceptions of people in and around organizations (Fombrun, 1996) is expressed in a formula in which reputation is a function of identity and image (Wartick, 2002). Here, identity stands for what an organization is within (Balmer and Dinnie, 1999) and image for how outsiders perceive it (Bernstein, 1986). The importance of organizational identity can be seen from the argument that “organizational identity provides a cognitive and emotional foundation on which organizational members build attachments and with which they create meaningful relationships with their organization” (Hatch et al., 2000, p. 16).

This means that different stakeholder groups can have different images of an organization as well as different concerns (Tkalac Verčič & Verčič ?). There isn’t a distinct theory of stakeholders since all of them are based on the same principles – that organizations should regard the needs, interests and influence of the publics affected by their policies and operations (Bucholz and Rosenthal, 2005). Long term success and survival of organizations is defined by their ability to establish and maintain relationships with their stakeholders (Post, Preston and Sachs, 2002). In a typical academic institution, stakeholders include students, faculty, employers and others. According to Ressler and Abratt (2009), “a university’s reputation is affected by the collective experiences of each stakeholder group and how the school is perceived to treat its various stakeholders”. This is why in a competitive environment universities must actively engage in reputation management. “Reputation management requires a solid understanding of the construct of reputation and how target audiences perceive and respond to university reputation” (Ressler and Abratt, 2009, p. 39).

Even though the concept of reputation has become one of the central notions of various scientific areas, the existing literature and number of empirical studies aimed at the reputation of academic institutions is still fairly small. The study of all elements of reputation, from its formation, through defining key publics to designing particular measurement instruments and tracking potential changes in organizational reputation, are the key to good reputation management.
The complexity of the problem is evident in the competition of various ranking systems developed as indicators of university reputations. The European Union decided to fund its own, called the U-Multirank system, as a more balanced report as compared to the Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities and the Times Higher Education World Universities Ranking. While the latter two are accused of being biased towards research performance, the U-Multirank rates universities according to their research reputation, teaching quality, international orientation, success in knowledge transfer and regional engagement (Mundell 2013). However, at the time of its launch in February 2013, the League of European Research Universities representing 21 elite institutions (including Oxford and Cambridge) opposed the project.

**Measuring Reputation in Academic Settings**

In the study of business school reputation, according to Vidaver-Cohen (2007), there has been a widespread measurement of the construct through ranking systems. Various qualitative and quantitative measures are being used for determining a school’s position relative to its competitors. Quantitative criteria include variables such as faculty research productivity, student scores on entrance exams, admissions selectivity and graduate starting salary and job offers extended. Qualitative criteria include the perceptions of alumni, employers/recruiters, current and prospective students and deans of peer institutions.

It seems clear that it is important to understand the expectations of various stakeholders towards the organization, because it is the gap between organizational activities and expectations of its key publics that creates dissatisfaction (Sontaite and Bakanauskas, ?). Stakeholders should be prioritized and an organization should focus on a limited number of stakeholders in order to successfully manage reputation. According to this view, the most important stakeholders should be identified if an organization is trying to build good reputation.

When all the stakeholders are identified and reputation is defined as an aggregate of internal and external perceptions, it becomes an open issue what the real distinction between internal and external is (Balmer and Gray, 1999; Cheney and Christensen, 2001; Gummesson, 2000). Other authors go even further, suggesting a direct relationship between identity and image and from there to an aggregated reputation (Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun and van Riel, 1997). From such a perspective, communication directed to insiders can be used as part of a broader change of the management process (Ahmed and Rafiq, 2002). This is why, in this study, the main focus was on the students.

The school that was focused on in this paper is the Faculty of Economics and Business, the largest business school in Croatia and a part of the University of Zagreb. The University of Zagreb was founded in 1662, among the first of universities in Europe. Today, the Faculty of Economics and Business Zagreb is the leading and the largest institution of higher education for entrepreneurial education in the region. The Faculty performs undergraduate and graduate degree programs as well as postgraduate doctoral and specialist studies in the field of economics and business. Currently, the Faculty of Economics and Business Zagreb has 13,204 students. Each year, 1500 students graduate from the Faculty of Economics and Business.

**Building Reputation through Social Media**

Contemporary generations are living in a completely different environment than previous ones, shaped by easier information gathering and access to knowledge. For organizations, it raises an important question: what media preferences do digital natives have regarding communication channels (Friedl and Tkalac Verčič, 2011)?
Blossom (2009) defined social media as: “any highly scalable and accessible communication technology or technique that enables an individual to influence groups of other individuals easily” (p.29). Applications emerging from this new technology offer a wide range of opportunities for reputation management. As Aula (2010) states, social media have several implications on corporate media strategy due to the fact that they allow easy searching, open participation, a minimal publishing threshold, dialogue, community, networking and the fast spread of information and other content through a wide range of feedback and linking systems. He also adds that in terms of reputation management, social media content cannot be controlled in advance and that as such it cannot be managed in the same way as conventional media. The question raised from these conclusions is how do young generations perceive various media, the traditional and the new, and what types of information do they exchange through them? A study by Friedl and Tkalac Verčič (2011) showed that contrary to popular opinion, not all people below 30 are completely immersed in digital technology. The results of the mentioned study showed that even though digital natives prefer digital media in their personal lives, this is not necessarily reflected in their business lives.

Since social media, through their use of mobile and web-based technologies, allow a new, completely interactive way of communication, this allows students (as well as everyone else) to potentially share, co-create, discuss and modify user generated content (Business Horizons Volume 54, Issue 3, May–June 2011, Pages 241–251), which can clearly add to the quality of communication and improve student satisfaction responses.

The results presented here are a continuation of a bigger study of academic reputation management in which a Croatian university is trying to overcome a series of problems that have largely influenced its reputation. Various scandals and other issues have been affecting academic institutions in Croatia. Some of the schools went through a series of crises and one that was affected the most was the Faculty of Economics and Business. Reputation measurement and management in the featured school is mostly accidental. Among a range of problems, one of the obvious issues is the refusal to recognize social media as a relevant channel of communication with various publics, specifically the new generation of digital natives that are currently making up the majority of the student body.

In the preceding study, three key publics were chosen and a questionnaire was developed based on Vidaver – Cohen’s (2007) adaptation of Fombrun’s reputation quotient. The questionnaire follows 8 dimensions of academic reputation (performance, product, service, leadership, governance, workplace, citizenship and innovation) and was applied to 1000 respondents from the mentioned three key publics: students of the school (N = 446); employees of the school (N = 154) and the general public (N = 400). The study was based on the presumption that if reputation is defined as a function of perceptions both inside and outside an organization, it should be possible to measure reputation within various stakeholder groups with a single tool. The main goal was to explore the direction and size of possible gaps in perception of various stakeholder groups of the business school in question. The results showed that students’ perception of the school was significantly worse than employees’ or general publics’. The general public had the best (but still not very good) view of the business school (graph 1).

The fact that the students are very unhappy with their school causes all sorts of problems for the school but mostly has a serious negative effect on its reputation. It seems that one of the first issues the school should address is student dissatisfaction. Through in depth interviews and used questionnaires, it was found that students don’t feel they have a place to turn to with their questions and problems. There are no official channels of communication for the students. The school doesn’t have any presence on social media sites.
Occasional professors that have an interest in this form of communication develop their own media sites, but this is more of an exception than a rule.

Graph 1. Reputation judged by three key publics on 8 dimensions

Tredinnick (2006) defined social networking sites as those sites driven by user-participation and user-generated content. It seems that social media offer a variety of ways for students to become involved with their schools. Through communications with students on Facebook and other social media applications, universities and schools try to develop relationships with important publics. The topic of online relationship development in public relations has been introduced by Kent and Taylor (1998), while it is becoming common for organizations to develop their strategic virtual communication strategies to maintain and improve their relationships with publics (Kelleher, 2006).

The aim of the study therefore was to assess students’ attitudes towards both existing media channels and new communication media in their “private” and “university” life. The main question was: What media preferences do students have regarding formal information about their university and are these media preferences the same as in their informal, social communication?

**Method**

308 undergraduate students from four marketing classes at the Faculty of Economics and Business participated in this study. All of the students were 4th year students. In each of the classes, the purpose of the study was explained to students and they were asked to fill out a paper and pencil questionnaire if they wished to do so. The questionnaire consisted of 16 questions concerning their habits in using social media. Half of the questions used a five point Likert type scale. After they filled out the questionnaire, they were given information on where they could find out about the results of the study.

**Results**
Of the respondents (N = 308), 71.3% indicated that they used web portals to follow the news, while 61.2% of them watched TV regularly. 50.8% of the students stated they read newspapers on-line, while only 11.7% read printed papers. Less than one quarter of questioned students (18.1%) listen to the radio occasionally.

As for social media, nearly all (91.5%) responded that they use some form of social networking sites, while only 2.6% stated that they don’t use any form of social media. 66.1% of the respondents use online photo management and sharing sites (such as Flickr or YouTube). 25.7% of them use blogs and forums while only 4.9% stated that they occasionally use microblogging sites (such as Twitter). Less than 4% of the students that participated in the survey ever comment on products or services on various company web sites.

Graph 2. Frequency of social media use

When asked how often they use social media, quite predictably, the majority of students (90%) stated that they use them more than once a day. Another 8% uses social media once a day, while only 0.3% use them less than once a month. 56% of the student sample answered that they are connected to a company or an organization through social media. Most of those connected to a company or an organization state that the reason for that is their interest in specific products of services of the organization in question. Another 31.6% seek information about the organization or it’s industry, while 24.1% have an interest in looking for employment or internship in the organization. Only 3.3% use social media to complain or give suggestions to organizations.

As for the university/business school, it is clear that social media are an important source of information for the students. The majority (88%) claim that they communicate about the business school through social media. When asked if they use official professors’ social media sites, 27% of them state that they do. 8.1% claim that there are no official professors social media sites. 3.3% follow a professor on Twitter, while 18.1% don’t do any of the above. 61.0% of the students read and comment on (unofficial) forums connected to the business school. Most of the students believe it is important to receive information about classes and lectures through social media (shown in graph 3).
When students were asked where they seek official information about the business school, most of them (93.5%) said it was through the school’s web page and more than half (57.5%) answered that they ask their friends. Only 31.9% use some form of social media to find answers, while another 21.8% get their information from professors. 13.7% of the students seek official information on one of school’s bulletin boards. In comparison, when asked what would their preferred way of finding out official information be – 88.3% mentioned the school’s web page; 32.6% of them would prefer the school’s official social media; 30.3 would still prefer to ask their friends (via social media) and 5.2 stated that their preferred media of communication for this type of information would be bulletin boards.

As for the importance of receiving information about the school through social media, most students agree that it is important. 26.1% believe it is very important; 35.8% think it is important; 27.4% state they don’t have an opinion one way or the other; 3.6% say it is not important; and 7.2% claim it is not at all important (M = 3.7). Almost the same percentages of students believe that the business school’s presence in social media would add to its positive perception. 28.7% of students think it would add a lot; 36.2 believe it would add some; 22.1% of the students state that it doesn’t matter; and 6.5% of students think it wouldn’t add or it wouldn’t add at all, respectively.

Students of the Faculty of Economics and Business feel relatively unhappy with their school and there are obvious issues to address. When asked if they feel there is a (official) place they can turn to when they have a problem at school, almost two thirds (66%) said no. The majority of the students (82%) believe that social media could help with that issue.
Discussion

The results of this study indicate that social media are perceived as an important tool of communications for the students in the featured school. Contrary to similar previous research on the use of social media by internet natives in a business setting (Friedl and Tkalac Verčič, 2011), students in the studied school expressed an explicit preference for use of social media for functional communication over traditional media and on par with their private use of social media. This raises important issues for both management of academic institutions (at the level of corporate university and faculty communication) and their teachers (who have to find a way to integrate the new media behavior of their students in their pedagogy).

Established academic institutions have survived centuries because of both their abilities to adjust to changes in the world around them as well as their in-build inertia. Academic autonomy has always favored professors over students. While this has been changing in the past three decades due to accelerating marketization of university education and repositioning of students as customers (buying academic services), social media pose new opportunities and threats to power balances, governance structures and reputation of academic institutions. Similarly to large commercial organizations, educational institutions will have to embrace (not so new any more) social media and with them changing relations between generations: while practically all contemporary students are digital natives, their senior professors are not.

This study has found a gap between student expectations in media use and university offerings in Zagreb, with visible discrepancy in reputation in student population as compared with staff and the general public. It is quite possible that at least a part of that gap is due to problems in communication. Reputation management is to a large extent communication management and as students in their use migrate from traditional to social media, reputation management to a large extent becomes management of social media.

Practical implications of reputation and its measurement are manifold and can have business as well as political consequences as evident in the current concerns over the EU U-Multirank project for European universities and their international comparison. Reputation management of universities and their schools with more focus on social media will change balances between different stakeholders in university governance.
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Networked Micro-diplomats: International Students as a Specific Case of Within-border, Foreign Public Diplomacy

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Abstract
This study looks at the role of within-boarder, foreign publics, specifically international students, as potential micro-diplomats and the communicative actions they use to embrace a role as either an adversary or advocate for their host country to members of their home country. Their role as a networked public and the potential implications of their megaphonning behaviors on the soft power of their host country is discussed. Specifically the paper presents and proposes to test two models of communication flow and the potential impact these may have on the host country’s soft power. The paper represents research in progress and although data has been collected the number of participants is not yet great enough to run statistical procedures.
The end of the Cold War Era brought many changes to the face of diplomacy and the power structure of the world (Nye, 2004b). The shift from a bipolar power system in which two countries, The United States and the U.S.S.R., essentially dominated the global structure to a multipolar globalized system where power is more dispersed with several significant players, dictated a shift in how nations interact with one another (Nye, 2004b). Traditional international relations tactics of hard power, using force, threats, coercion and the military to get what one wanted, were less practical and less likely to be viewed as legitimate or appropriate tactics by the democratic nations. The shift in the power structure was also coupled with a move to globalization, creating a world where nations were now more interdependent and more thickly connected to one another.

As a result of these shifts, hard power approaches to international relations became more potentially damaging to the nation trying to use them for a number of reasons. First, because the dispersal of power was now multipolar no one nation had such a powerful sway over the others. Second, because more nations relied on each other economically they were less likely to impose themselves on each other in traditional ways as it could harm necessary relationships. Third, nations were also more likely to stand up, sometimes collectively, to those who were trying to enact forceful tactics on others. For example, the United Nations keeps aggressive nations in check, through the power of collective decisions by various nation states on what is and is not legitimate behavior. Fourth, the increase in democratic nations, from 39 in 1974 to 117 in 1997, also necessitated a change in the approach that nations took with one another in their diplomatic relations (Diamond, 1999).

These changes prompted new conceptualizations of types of international relations and new structures on which to base them. Power, or the ability to get the outcomes one wants (Nye, 2004), was and still is an issue but the way one went about getting that power had to change. The most prominent response to “hard power” was that of “soft power” developed by Nye in 1989 (Nye, 2008). Soft power is a country’s ability to get what it wants through appeal or attractiveness to others instead of coercion or payment (Nye, 2004). There are three key sources of a nation’s soft power: culture; values and domestic practices; and perceived legitimacy of its foreign policies (Nye, 2004b). Nye further refined these in 2008 saying that soft power rests on a nation’s “culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)” (Nye, 2008b, p. x). Here it is the parentheticals that are key in determining if the attractiveness can actually be influential.

Soft power is interesting in that the subjects of it matter as much as the agents. Simply possessing the correct resources for soft power does not guarantee its success (Nye, 2008b). In fact, soft power can be diminished or destroyed through deception, extortion, and blatant manipulation. What is significant about the two key components of soft power (attraction and persuasion) is that “‘attraction’ is codetermined and persuasion is socially constructed” (Watanabe & McConnell, 2008, xxiv), making it essential that the subjects buy into the nation or culture’s attractiveness and see it as genuine as opposed to a propagandistic mirage. As many scholars have noted the soft power of truth is a very scarce but important resource in public diplomacy (Nye, 2004a; Etzioni, 2007; Yun & Toth, 2009; Payne, 2009). Therefore, if the subjects of the nation’s soft power efforts do not believe what the nation is promoting about itself or have experiences that are largely inconsistent with what it is touting they are likely to engage
in communicative actions that will take away from rather than add to that nation’s soft power. Which leads us to another major shift in diplomacy.

With the change in emphasis moving from hard to soft power came a shift in who might be involved in public diplomacy or an agent of soft power. Previous constructions of diplomacy focused exclusively on nation states as the sole actors of significance (Doyle, 1997; Morgenthau, 1978). However, with soft power came the inclusion of non-state actors as significant players in the field of diplomacy. Individuals, academia, business, and nongovernmental organizations all approached the issue of public diplomacy and how it might be used to repair local and global divides (Payne, 2009). New conceptualizations of public diplomacy have reflected these changes. Terms such as participation, exchange, and dialogue have entered the conversation about what diplomacy is and what it looks like as “people expect a more interactive and participatory role” (Zaharna, 2005, p. 2; Vickers, 2004).

Introducing this larger group of players into diplomacy led to more complex coalitions between groups, which in turn produced more complex outcomes (Nye, 2008b). It is this condition of complex interdependence that necessitates the use of soft power instead of hard power in so many contexts. Because so much is at stake and so many different relationships and linkages exist it is not possible for one to just go in and take what they want anymore, the likelihood that this would greatly damage key relationships of their own is too great. It is the crucial role of soft power and the ways it can be enacted, that has opened up acts of diplomacy, attraction, and influence to more grassroots movements and allowed for the development of sociological diplomacy or what others may call “citizen diplomacy” or people-to-people contact.

The Networked Individual and Communicative Action

Individuals are now, perhaps more easily than ever, in a key position to control their interactions with their networks and share their voice with exponentially large groups of people through the advent of modern technology, digitalization, and social networks. International students then are in a critical role where they can choose to act as advocates or adversaries for their host country, as they have both the means to engage their networks and invested groups of friends, family, and classmates at home who are interested in hearing about their experiences abroad. Their choice to take on this role as a micro-diplomat and communicate actively about their experiences determines whether or not they have an impact, positive or negative, on the soft power of the country. It is here at the intersection of globalization, digitalization, communicative action, and educational exchange that sociological diplomacy happens.

International students are both in-group and out-group members at the same time. They are both part of the United States society and education system and foreign to it. This positions them to enact the behavior of megaphoning (Kim & Rhee, 2011). Megaphoning is the communicative action of sharing information about a group an individual is a part of to other individuals who are not a part of the group (Kim & Rhee, 2011). The concept of megaphoning was introduced within the context of employee behavior as an application of information forwarding and information sharing, both of which were developed in the communicative action part of the problem solving model (CAPS, Kim, Grunig, & Ni, 2010) and the situational theory of problem solving (STOPS) (Kim & Grunig, 2011). Through megaphoning employees spread positive or negative information about the organization to members of the external publics (Kim & Rhee, 2011). This concept easily maps onto the situation of international students if the nation, society, and/or university is considered to be the organization of which they are a member and their social networks in their home country are considered to be the external publics. This
combined with the lessons from the Cluetrain Manifesto about the role of the individual (Locke, Levine, Searls, & Weinberger, 1999) gives international students a critical vantage point from which to enact activism. In the new digital market place the voice of the individual is prioritized and seen as more valid than that of an organization (Locke, Levine, Searls, & Weinberger, 1999). Therefore an insider of the organization, or in this case nation, society, and/or university, is likely to be able to produce an account of the organization that is likely to be valued, believed, and prioritized over official government statements or national news. According to Kim and Ni (2011):

> Because migrants have more substantial, direct, and natural, rather than superficial, indirect, and artificial interaction and contact with the hosting countries, their experiences and perceptions are more credible with people in their home countries. And because migrants still have connections with people back home, they can more easily enhance or destroy the hosting countries’ reputation or the resources of soft power. (pp. 140-141)

Much research has confirmed this strategic value that hosting international students brings to relational public diplomacy (Atkinson, 2010). It becomes important then to identify what sorts of situations may encourage this megaphoning or communicative action by international students for or against their host country as it could have a critical impact on the soft power of the nation.

According to the situational theory of problem solving (STOPS), individuals who identify a problem will organize to resolve it provided that they feel involved with the issue, motivated to act, and believe they can have an impact on the situation through their actions (Kim & Grunig, 2007b; Kim & Grunig, 2011). When these criteria are all met the individuals who make up the public, are likely to engage in communicative action or activism to attempt to solve the problem and draw attention to or correct the issue. These active behaviors could include information forwarding, information seeking, and information forefending, the former being key in megaphoning behavior (Kim & Grunig, 2007a; Kim, Grunig, & Ni, 2010). Information forwarding has become simple and practically instantaneous through the use of digital social media. It is defined as the active sharing or passing on of information related to the problem or issue and can be exercised through conversations, emails, tweets that can then be retweeted, blogs, Facebook posts that can be “liked” and “shared” as well as other means of communication. Information seeking is the active searching for information or resources to help with the issue. This also often takes place in the online or digital arena but can occur in face-to-face interactions. Last, information forefending is conceptualized as the active selection and rejection of different information based on how it fits a set of criteria (e.g. validity, consistency with beliefs or goals) (Kim & Grunig, 2007a; Kim, Grunig, & Ni, 2010). It is key to note, particularly when considering the role of micro-diplomacy, that individuals often seek information that confirms their existing belief about something; therefore, if their original interactions with a society are mostly negative they may seek confirmation that others experiences are similar to theirs and vice versa.

With respect to communicative action, digital communication technologies have altered to some extent the limitations or obstacles that individuals and publics feel about being able to express their opinions and address the issue. Wellman (2002) has noted the rise of networked individualism in that the individual essentially carries his or her network around with them, through some digital technology, choosing to engage or not engage with it as often as they would like. This reflects to some degree a lessening of the level of constraint recognition these groups feel, which encourages them to take action more freely. Kim and Ni (2010) have noted that active publics exploit online communication space because these media allow them to feel more
powerful and more empowered to share their thoughts. In introducing these public relations theories in conjunction with megaphoning it is important to note that communicative action in problem solving (Kim & Grunig, 2007a; Kim, Grunig, & Ni, 2010) and the situational theory of problem solving (Kim & Grunig, 2007b; Kim & Grunig, 2011) do not dictate that the issue must be negative. Therefore these behaviors can be viewed as having the full ability to either add to or take away from the nation’s soft power.

The concepts of positive and negative megaphoning are both situational and cross-situational communicative actions. This means that they may be situational -- increasing for a short time due to a dramatic increase in international student fees -- or may be dormant or chronic -- continuing and reappearing even after the situational motivation has declined, such as when a person asks them about their experience studying in another country years after it has ended. Thus it is possible for activism to potentially become a continuous or recurrent behavior that would be strong enough to trigger information flows in communicators’ social networks. The relationship between a foreign public (international students) and its host country, which is established through person-to-person contact, serves as the stimulus for any communicative action about the host country. Therefore careful management of the relationships between international students and their host country is important as their perceptions of this relationship will influence the valence and size of communicative actions the publics take (Kim, 2012). It is very important to remember that this relationship with the host country is twofold and as a result of the communicative action that the international students engage in it extends beyond the individual or diaspora within the host country to those in their social networks. In their reconceptualization of the communicative action of publics, Kim, Grunig, and Ni, (2010) outlined the potential of communicative action to spread through an individual’s social network in a multiple-step flow of information (See Figure 1). The message moves from the focal communicant – who is directly involved and high in communicative action – to the peripheral communicants, members of the focal communicant’s network who receive the message or megaphoning through some channel. In turn, these peripheral communicants who have medium levels of communicative action may or may not share these messages with their own networks reaching still a more peripheral communicant (Kim, Grunig, & Ni, 2010). This resharing of the message can theoretically continue indefinitely as long as the peripheral communicant contacted has a high enough level of communicative action or motivation to send the message forward and as long as their network has enough new people in it that the message does not get stuck circling the same network over and over. This idea also illustrates Metcalfe’s (1995) calculation of the impact of a network’s reach.

Metcalfe (1995) asserts that the value of a network can be found by squaring the number of people in the network. Thus, a network of 10 people has a true value of 100 and a network of 100 has a true value or reach of 10,000. Though there is some debate about the exact math that should be used to calculate the value of a network the bottom line is that the power and reach of the network is significantly greater than just a couple times the size of the network. Therefore the potential reach of postings on various social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and others should not be taken lightly. A message that was originally posted to a network of 20 friends may soon reach more than 400 through retweeting, sharing, and liking the comment or photo. Looking at the reach of networks in this way the importance of having a positive relationship with within-border foreign publics to a country’s soft power becomes quickly apparent.
Sociological, or individual to individual (Yun & Toth, 2009), public diplomacy, takes place in the first part of this relationship through the direct relationship and interactions between the international student (focal communicant) and the host country. The student’s perceived relationship with the country is based on their direct interaction with people of the host country. It is a behavioral relationship in that it is contextual, sociological, and based on actual interactions (Grunig & Kim, 2011; Kim, Hung-Baesecke, Yang, & Grunig, in press). The second part of the relationship, which involves members of the social network (peripheral communicant) of the individual who has a direct relationship with the host country, essentially reflects the outcomes of the sociological diplomacy and as such the critical exchanges in which the soft power of the country is helped or harmed. The individuals in this second-level relationship have an indirect and tangential relationship with the host country which is based on what they hear from the international student and perhaps other things they know about the host country from the media or their own government, resulting in a reputational relationship (Grunig & Kim, 2011; Kim, et al., in press). These reputational relationships are influenced by the experiences of others and new information. For example, parents who perceived a positive relationship when choosing to send their children to school in the United States to receive an education may feel differently if their child is treated unfairly or experiences racism. The resulting negative megaphoning and word of mouth may more easily damage soft power of the host nation because soft power inherently relies on the country’s appeal and attractiveness to others through its culture, ideologies, and institutions (Nye, 2004).

International students may essentially experience both levels as they likely have a reputational relationship with the host country through the media or friends and classmates who have gone there to study before they move themselves to begin their direct, behavioral relationship with the host country. This behavioral relationship may or may not confirm the reputational one. Yun and Vibber (2012) recently found some support for the idea that students abroad would at least attempt to act as advocates or adversaries on behalf of their host country when communicating with people in their home country.

Chinese students who were originally drawn by South Korea’s soft power and the appeal of cultural exports known as “Hallyu” or the “Korean Wave,” changed their opinions about the country drastically after their interaction with the country and its citizens (Yun & Vibber, 2012). A national survey of Chinese students studying in Korea reported “Forty-one percent of Chinese students in Korea hold anti-Korea Sentiment” and it made the headlines of all the major newspapers and TV programs (Yun & Vibber, 2012, p. 77). The case study illustrates that the Koreans actual treatment of the Chinese in general, as well as compared to their treatment of other groups of foreigners, drastically changed the Chinese opinions about Korea. The Chinese felt the Koreans were prejudiced and two-faced in their treatment of them. This finding along with the u-curve pattern mentioned earlier make it important to understand how drastically opinions of the host country may change after interacting with the society directly.

Yun and Vibber (2012) also found that the Chinese students projected their negative perceptions of the Koreans on to their Chinese counterparts in mainland China. However, this projection was not entirely accurate as the Chinese in Korean saw the Koreans themselves as the greatest source for the anti-Korean sentiment where the mainland Chinese focused on the Korean government. Perhaps most interestingly and unexpected was the impact that was found on the attitudes of Chinese in Korea to a third country, Japan. There was some evidence that the media coverage and views of Japan presented by the Korean media impacted the Chinese view of Japan (Yun & Vibber, 2012).
This case study, though not generalizable to the situation of international students in the United States, does show that there is value in further pursuing the multiple dynamic relationships between international students, their host country, home country, and even third party countries. It seems clear that multiple parties are attempting to influence the views of other publics: international student to home country; host country to international student to home country; host country to international student about third party country; etc. It is also significant to note that even a very positive pre-contact evaluation of the host country did not necessarily make the sociological or direct-people-contact more positive or effective. This may have serious consequences on the communicative actions the international students take in situations where there are as they are likely to feel fooled or deceived and may react more strongly in engaging their negative megaphoning about the host country through their socialdigital networks.

Major Factors that Influence Relationship Perception

As the perceived relationship between the student and the host country acts as the impetus for their communicative action, it is important to review what factors may influence their perception. Various scholars have attempted to conceptualize the major sources of soft power that influence these perceived relationships, both behavioral and reputational (Kim & Ni, 2011; Yun & Kim, 2008; Yun & Toth, 2009; Pratt, 1989). Kim and Ni (2011) define the three antecedents of soft power as follows: political and economic interactions; people-to-people interactions; and cultural interactions (See Figure 2). Notice again that that role of governments or institutions is not as prominent as the role of individuals or other groups in developing this soft power, which highlights the significance of sociological diplomacy. The second antecedent of people-to-people contact more immediately impacts the direct or behavioral relationship with a country. However, it does not always include direct face-to-face contact. Kim and Ni (2011) acknowledge the role of information technology in making people-to-people interaction cheaper and more accessible to many. As expressed previously this medium can be particularly persuasive in shaping individuals perceptions about a given place or country when the individual providing information is seen to be credible.

The third antecedent, cultural interactions, reflects more immediately on the indirect, reputational relationship with a country through individualized consumption of cultural products such as music, literature, art, and films which can lead to the development and amplification of a perception about the cultural products and the country of origin (Kim & Ni, 2011). Through developments such as the globalization of economies, social media, and new media technology greater individual participation in international relations by making these types of cultural and media diplomacy materials has become possible (Signitzer & Wamser, 2006).

In a separate attempt to delineate sources of soft power, Yun and Kim (2008) identified three predicting variables: ethnic relations, between country relationship quality, and normative performance (reputation) of the country. They found that relationship quality had the most significant influence on soft power and that ethnic relations had a sizeable and significant effect as well. This result is both good and a bit surprising. Ethnic relations were based on sociological globalism and direct interaction with members of other ethnicities. So these results are helpful in that they confirm that sociological public diplomacy has a significant effect on soft power. However, relationship quality was a measure of the relationship between the individual’s home country and the host country or other country in question, which was similar to the construct of political and economic interactions from Kim and Ni (2011). This suggests that political and economic relations between nation states still hold more sway over a country’s perceived soft
power than direct interactions with people of those countries or ethnicities. This project will attempt to further probe this issue to see if one or the other has a stronger impact on the soft power of a nation.

**Method**

The research for this study is being done at a large Midwestern university that is known for having a significant population of international students and networking globally. The selection of this research site allows for two major benefits. First, the substantial population of international students in this one location provides the potential of a large sample size. Second, the likelihood that the international student community is more established and empowered here than in other universities where they are small in number or proportion to the larger student body could be influential to their communicative behaviors abroad and their willingness to express their experiences in the survey.

The 2011 Open Doors report declared the university that has been selected for this research to have the second largest international student population for a public university and fourth largest overall in the United States. The number of international students has continued to grow in recent years. In the 2010-11 school year, it had 7,934 international students as part of its student body– 13% higher than 2009-10 and a huge 44% higher than the 2008-09 school year. The number for the 2011-12 school year has grown again to 8,562. Michael Brzezinski, dean of international programs as quoted on the university website states that "With its high international ranking and broad-based alumni network, [the university] is a first-choice destination for many international students, attracting a growing number of undergraduate students from Asia, particularly China" (Neubert, 2011). Although it cannot be substantiated, the broad-based alumni network referred to here may in fact reflect international alumni who are building the soft power of the university and the country through their word of mouth and recruiting others.

When looking at the data for the current year, the International Students and Scholars’ Office reported that international students comprised 21.8% of the total student body in the Fall 2012 (ISS, 2012). Of those, 4,974 students were registered as undergraduates, forming 16.5% of the undergraduate student body. International graduate students formed 39.4% of the overall graduate and professional student body, with about 3,588 students enrolled at this level. All of these numbers have increased slightly since the previous year when international students were 20% of the total student body (ISS, 2011). The research site university is home to students from 125 countries and faculty and staff from 75 nations, according to the same ISS report. In terms of students sent, China (3934) and India (1309) are the two countries with the largest representation in the University, followed by South Korea (832), Taiwan (266), Malaysia (232), Indonesia (111), Turkey (89), Pakistan (81), Kazakhstan (77) and Canada (72). This represents a small shift, as last year Kazakhstan did not make the list and Mexico was the tenth country. In addition the only group that grew significantly over the last year was that of China increasing from 3,272 to 3,934. All other groups stayed roughly the same.

This university poses a fertile ground for research into the topic of study abroad and its potential for diplomacy because of its sizable and diverse international population. In particular, the fact that students come from a variety of countries that have varied relations with the U.S. is an important addition to earlier research that was largely conducted with students from countries who were on very good terms with the U.S. The population here represents a variety of Middle Eastern and Asian countries with mixed relationships with the U.S. Although no one country has
a large population there are enough individuals across countries to get a better understanding of how more tenuous relationships impact behavior and perception of the relationship.

The study will be administered through a two-stage online survey that will make use of both convenience and snowball sampling techniques. In the first stage students at the university will be recruited to participate in the study through either the Communication Department’s Research system or through invitations via the International Students and Scholars listserv and/or Facebook page. Because a sizeable number of international students is critical to the success of the survey, extra effort will be taken to recruit members of these groups, including posting with individual nationality based student organizations’ Facebook pages or listservs if given permission. The current target sample would include 200 Chinese students, 150 Indian students, 100 Korean students, and 200 U.S. students. These groups have been chosen based on their sizeable representation at the university. The students participating in the survey will be awarded extra credit (0.5%) through the Communication Research Participation system for completing the approximately 20-30 minute-long survey.

For the second stage of the survey process students will be offered the chance to earn additional extra credit by providing the names of three friends or family members with whom they communicate regularly and who are presently residing in the home country (for international students) or somewhere outside of Purdue (for domestic students). A shortened version of the survey will be sent to them. To avoid language barriers, native speakers will translate the survey into Chinese, Korean, and Hindi. As these are the language groups with the largest populations at the university they will be offered in addition to English. The students will receive additional extra credit prorated up to 0.5% for each person who completes the survey, up to 3 people or 1.5%. This will be tracked by having the survey generate a random number at the end that the solicited friend or family member will send to the student who will then send it to me.

This second stage of surveying is important in order to test some hypotheses about the effects of megaphoning and the impact of direct contact with the host country on its soft power. In addition to running a variety of basic statistical tests to evaluate hypothesis listed throughout this paper, this project will use multi-group analysis and run structural equation models (see Fig. 3 & 4) with two different groups: the international students in the host country (1) and the people they recruited to participate in the survey (2). These models will be used to help assess whether or not individuals with direct behavioral relationships with the country hold significantly different perceptions of the host country than those who have only reputational relationships with the country and how it impacts their communicative action about the country. The models will be run separately and then run comparing one to the other.

The ability to test the model in Figure 4 will be dependent on how many second-order responses are received. If students are not sharing the survey link with people in their home country or if the invited parties are not completing the survey there is a danger that the sample size would be too low to run this model. Provided that the sample size is large enough this model will allow for the exploration of the role of international students as micro-diplomats through examining the relationship between their communicative action and others perceptions and responsive communicative actions.

Research Questions

RQ1: To what extent do within-boarder, foreign publics communicate about their experiences abroad to individuals back home?
RQ2: What influence does the communication of individuals abroad with those in the home country have on the perceived relationship between the members of the home country and the host country (e.g. the soft power of the country abroad)?

RQ3: How do members of the home country communicate about the host country as a result of their perceived relationship with it?

RQ4: What is the role of digital and social media in opinion formation, opinion spread and opinion change?
References


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Figure 1: Illustration of intercommunication using the communicative action model variables. (reprinted from Kim, Grunig, & Ni, 2010).
Figure 2. Antecedents of soft power: A positive model. (reprinted from Kim & Ni, 2011)
Figure 3. Structural Equation Model of Soft Power and Megaphoning for International Students
Figure 4. Structural Equation Model for Micro-Diplomacy to Reputational Relationship Holders (citizens of the home country) through Megaphoning.
The Delphi: An Underutilized Method of Scholarly and Practical Research for a Public Relations Field in Transition

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Abstract
The paper is created through a literature review of similar articles on Delphi studies in other domains, notably health communications, followed by an examination of some studies conducted to advance issues in public relations. The authors explore the most appropriate situations for using a Delphi and list the benefits and disbenefits of different aspects or applications of the method.
In *prconversations.com*, Toni Muzi Falconi (cited by Yaxley, 2010) mused about the increasingly broad and amorphous public relations industry. He wrote that no matter what gathering of public relations people he attends—the 2010 World PR Forum in Stockholm, the annual BledCom Symposium, or master’s courses at New York University, for example—philosophical discussions about public relations always get reduced to the same basic question: *But what is public relations, anyway?*

Falconi is not alone in recognizing the vague nature of public relations. As the industry transitions from traditional foundations to the Internet-driven, globalized arena, basic worldviews and conceptions of public relations are more confusing and debatable than ever. What does this mean for scholars of public relations? How will the industry reach greater clarity about its nature and its contributions to organizations and society? From where do we get the new perspectives around the principles and practices in the field? Answers to these questions continue to come from ongoing scholarly investigation into the industry, and the new studies incorporate a variety of research methods. Traditional methods, such as surveys, content analyses, case studies, and in-depth interviews will continue to guide research on new concepts and directions in the field. But other methods that are not as well-known can also offer new insights into the complexities of this expanding industry. One effective means for examining uncharted territory in public relations or any other industry is the Delphi technique.

This paper introduces, analyzes, and explains the Delphi, particularly as it applies to public relations. Developed around 1960, the Delphi has since been used by scholars and forecasters as an early exploration into complex issues or domains. In the past two decades, the method has been employed for research in public relations on at least ten occasions (including by the authors of this paper). However, aside from these studies, the public relations literature has little discussion about the technique and its possible applications or implications for research in the field. This paper is intended to dissect the Delphi method so as to offer guidance to public relations scholars who wish to use it in future studies. The authors explore the most appropriate situations for using a Delphi and identify the benefits and disbenefits of different aspects or applications of the method. They review the development of the Delphi methods from its early, paper-based roots to the Internet era which offers new tools for increasing the number of respondents and “speeding up” process.

The paper is created through a literature review of similar articles on Delphi studies in other domains, notably health communications as well as an examination of recent studies that have been conducted to advance issues in public relations.

**Qualitative Research in Public Relations**

When conducting formal research, it is important to find the method that best addresses the demands of the given study. If research looks into an established domain with concrete variables and hypotheses, surveys or experiments can be used. However, if a topic is highly complex, loosely defined, or investigated in a natural setting, qualitative methods can be more appropriate (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) wrote that qualitative research is a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 3). Qualitative approaches are now used often in communication research, where “many central research issues cannot be adequately examined through the kinds of questions that are posed by hypothetical deductive methods and addressed with quantifiable answers” (Jensen, 1991, p. 1).

In using qualitative methods, researchers must satisfy the expectations of science (Anderson, 2010) and reduce biases that sometimes exist toward “soft scientists” (Denzin &
Lincoln, 2000, p. 7). It has been argued, though, that qualitative research can have great
strengths. Marchel and Owens (2007) explained that some criticisms “stem from limited
understanding of the standards of judgment applied to the research … What quantitative
researchers refer to as the validity and reliability of research, qualitative researchers reframe as
the credibility and trustworthiness of research claims” (p. 304).

When sufficient rigor is applied, qualitative inquiries are increasingly seen as significant
additions to social science—even more than can be achieved through quantitative research
(Madill & Gough, 2008). Ponterotto (2010) explained that researcher and participants act as
“co-investigators, thus leveling the power hierarchy common to many quantitative designs” (p.
583). The research framework and direction can be revised as new data emerges (Anderson,
2010), in contrast to quantitative approaches that often force participants to respond to
predesigned and inflexible instruments. In entering a natural setting, the researcher can show
interest in participants’ life experiences and thus can suspend “previously held conceptions and
stereotypes” (Ponterotto, 2010, p. 583).

The public relations arena is naturally dynamic and characterized by ambiguous human
relationships (Elmer, 2007). Stakeholders are constantly shifting, the Internet creates a forum
fraught with uncertainty, and issues can arise from any place at any time (Sirkin et al.,
2008). This is especially true when crossing national borders into an expanding realm of contextualized
environments (Molleda & Moreno, 2006; Wehmeier, 2006). Building relationships in and across
cultures requires sensitivity, and the cultural construct is difficult to define and operationalize for
research (Sriramesh, 2007). Such circumstances require phenomenological interpretations that
maintain a richness of meaning and accurately portray the situation being examined.

Qualitative methods, therefore, are suitable for studying public relations. More than two
decades ago, Toth (1986) explained that critical approaches should be used to expand
understanding of public relations theories. Broom and Dozier (1990) and Daymon and Holloway
(2002) also asserted that there was an important place for qualitative research in public relations.
More recently, Van Dyke (2005) stated that “qualitative methodology was best suited to reveal
the meaning of communication processes, outcomes, and lived experiences” related to so many
facets of the public relations environment and to effective management of public relations
programs (p. 161).

The Delphi Research Technique

As mentioned, one qualitative method that promises effective investigation in certain
situations is the Delphi technique—hereafter referred to as Delphi. The term Delphi refers to a
town in ancient Greece from which Apollo’s predictions were transmitted to futurists in the land.
As a result, Delphi always has been associated with forecasting, and that continues today
(Delbecq et al., 1975; Uhl, 1983). The time frame for its origination varies from the late 1940s to
the 1960s (Nielsen & Thangadurai, 2007), but scholars often attribute its source to the Rand
Corporation (Landeta, 2006). From early Rand studies the Delphi gained a following mostly
from the celebrity of participants such as science fiction writers and futurists Arthur C. Clarke
and Isaac Asimov (Woudenberg, 1991).

The purpose of the Delphi is to facilitate a discussion that elicits a broad range of
responses among selected experts in a given domain or around a particular topic. Kennedy
(2004) explained, “The Delphi method provides an opportunity for experts (panelists) to
communicate their opinions and knowledge anonymously about a complex problem, to see how
their evaluation of the issue aligns with others, and to change their opinions, if desired, after
reconsideration of the findings of the group’s work” (p. 504). Nielsen and Thangadurai (2007) added, “The Delphi method is based on a dialectical inquiry that encourages the sharing and exploring of divergent points of view” (p. 151). The idea is for the discussion to either “cause the range of answers to converge on the midrange of the distribution or [to] show a clear and reasoned dichotomy” (Vercic et al., 2001, p. 375).

Generally there is no one prescription for conducting a Delphi (Delbecq et al., 1975; Tersine & Riggs, 1976). On the surface, the Delphi is a relatively simple method of research. The process works through a series of “rounds” or “waves” (Vercic et al., 2001, p. 375). Two rounds is considered to be the minimum number and three seem to be the most effective number for producing the desired results—but these numbers hardly represent a rigid rule (Landeta, 2006; Linstone & Turoff, 1975). The process often begins with loosely structured, open-end questions or propositions and moves toward more quantifiable data or identifiable patterns through the combined input of the participants—but this, too, can be flexible. The goal is to move through the process until, as Vercic et al. (2001) noted, the discussion shows consensus or it becomes clear that there is no consensus. And this is far from simple.

The Delphi seems especially conducive to group problem identification situations where there is a "lack of agreement or incomplete state of knowledge concerning either the nature of the problem or the components which must be included in a successful solution" (Delbecq et al., 1975, p. 5). Powell (2003) wrote that the Delphi “is useful for situations where individual judgments must be tapped and combined in order to address a lack of agreement or incomplete state of knowledge” (p. 376). It also “is a method of structuring communication between a group of people who can provide valuable contributions in order to resolve a complex problem” (Landeta, 2006, p. 468). But in studies that rely on group participation, the very nature of socialization can create "process problems," as it were. Typical of these drawbacks is a halo effect that develops when one or two individuals dominate the conversation, (Kerr, 2009) or a bandwagon effect, when some participants are intimidated into silence or mask real opinions to be seen as agreeing with the majority (Tersine & Riggs, 1976). A well conducted Delphi can ameliorate these flaws because the participants do not physically gather for the study (Kennedy, 2004). Therefore, individual opinions are allowed to flourish in relative anonymity (Rowe, Wright, & Bolger, 1991).

When it comes to usage in an industry, the Delphi seems most effective as a normative process in which the experts seek to identify the practices and procedures that should exist to attain maximum effectiveness (Powell, 2003). Because of its utility in this regard, Rieger (1986) discovered through a study in the 1980s that more than 80 percent of all the known dissertations using the Delphi at that time (more than 250 dissertations) were seeking answers to normative questions. While the method peaked in the 1990s, it is still used among certain researchers even today. Landeta (2006) examined journal articles in the social sciences between 2000 and 2004 and unearthed more than 1,000 articles that had used the Delphi as a primary or secondary method of research. Similarly, Landeta (2006) found close to 900 dissertations and master’s theses using the method in a 15-year span from 1990 to 2004.

Because it is a forecasting technique, the Delphi also tends to stay abreast of the most recent scientific advances. Articles and books frequently lag behind actual research because of the time necessary for writing and printing. A Delphi study, by contrast, can provide a more updated exchange of information than a literature search by drawing upon the current knowledge and experiences of experts (Nielsen & Thangadurai, 2007) and rapidly reproducing it. Tersine and Riggs (1976) claimed that the Delphi has been incorporated into a variety of situations and
diverse fields. It has been used for forecasting in sociological and technological realms and in education, business and industry, public administration, health and nursing, and numerous other research arenas (Rieger, 1986). And, although the process seems to have been largely ignored by scholars in international business, it has “a proven track record in global forecasting, public policy and strategic planning” (Nielsen & Thangadurai, 2007, p. 148).

The Delphi in Public Relations

Given that the Delphi is about problem solving and negotiation, the method can be particularly useful for public relations practitioners and scholars. The Delphi, noted Nielsen and Thangadurai (2007), is “well-suited to comprehensive investigation of complex environments characterized by uncertainty…. Unlike research questions best answered by quantitative methods which are essentially about counts and measures of things, the Delphi method encourages in-depth communication about the nature of things to provide answers to research questions aimed at the what, how, where, and when” (p. 151). This is important for public relations because, as VanSlyke Turk (1986) stated, "Increasingly, situations faced by today's organization ... demand this kind of pooled judgment, for this is an age of maximum feasible participation'...." (p. 17). If that was true in the 1980s, certainly it would be much more relevant in today’s highly complex and challenging global environment. More recently, Duke (2009) considered “the method seems well-suited for public relations because it enables researchers to collect opinions from a select group of highly qualified practitioners who work at competing organizations in a wide geographic area” (p. 321).

The Delphi does not enjoy widespread use in public relations, but it has been employed occasionally to gain a sense of priorities and perspectives in the field. Scholar Mark McElreath seems to be the first and perhaps the most prolific Delphi researcher over the years. In 1980, he engaged the method to study research priorities in North America, and nearly a decade later he replicated that same study (McElreath 1980, 1989). Blamphin (1990) then used the Delphi to explore the value of focus groups in public relations research and practice; then White and Blamphin (1994) conducted a priority study for the United Kingdom which helped identify sixteen topics of importance. Sheng’s (1995) Delphi analyzed the issues behind multicultural public relations. Wakefield (1997) then extended that thinking when he tested the Grunig (1992) principles of excellence in public relations in a 21nation Delphi on effective management of public relations in the global arena. At the same time, Synnott and McKie (1997) published a Delphi on public relations research priorities, also emphasizing international issues. They acknowledged McElreath's approach by basing their research on his 1989 study.

Vercic et al. (2001) ended the 20th century with a three-year study that compared basic definitions and worldviews of public relations in European nations. As the authors stated, “The article confronts a U.S.-based definition of public relations as relationship management with a European view that … argues also for a reflective paradigm that is concerned with publics and the public sphere; not only with relational (which can in principle be private), but also with public consequences of organizational behavior” (p. 373). van Ruler et al. (2004) used email as the communication tool, in an ultimately unsuccessful Delphi study which failed to achieve consensus. The study had a high initial response rate of 84%, but this had dropped to 62% in the final round.

Boynton (2006) reported that use of the internet-based Survey Monkey software for a Delphi study on ethical decision making in public relations had shortened the distribution and response times. Watson (2007, 2008) subsequently conducted a Delphi of senior public relations
panelists from around the world to assess global priorities in the field, to identify gaps between academic research and the prerogatives of practitioners, and to classify research topics that could use funding. His study was particularly significant because it represented two major shifts in the way Delphis can be conducted. First, he followed Boynton (2006) in taking advantage of the new social media technologies by creating a blog site specifically to seek participants and proceed through the study. Second, instead of progressing from the typically recommended open-ended format to more objective, coded assessments, his Delphi asked for rankings in the first two rounds and then moved to open-end comments in the final round. The study also was a bit unusual in that it was completed in less than four months; however, like van Ruler et al (2004) and Boynton (2006), the study showed potential benefits of using social media to produce contemporaneous results. Kerr (2009) commented that the “use of email as a Delphi tool quickens the process from months to weeks” (p. 127) and aids momentum of group participation. Since Watson’s study, there has been a (relative) flowering of the use of the Delphi method, with studies by Duke (2009), Kerr (2009), Wehmeier (2009), Tkalac Vercic et al (2012) and Zerfass et al (2012) being published. All have used email and internet communication, which has sped up the research process. Another study on practitioner attitudes toward public affairs issues was in progress in the UK, as this paper was being finalized (S. Davidson, 2013, personal correspondence).

The Delphi Process

There is no universal definition of the Delphi technique, as mentioned (Sackman, 1974). There also are no prescribed rules or procedures for incorporating the method into a given study (Evans, 1997; Keeney et al., 2006). The Delphi is applied in many various ways, some of which only slightly resemble the original process developed by the Rand Corporation (Goldschmidt, 1975). Perhaps for this reason, Powell (2003, p. 376) explained that “an abundance of methodological interpretations are demonstrated, leaving the technique open to criticism.” That said, a fairly typical pattern seems to have evolved for Delphi studies (Powell, 2003). In early usage of the method, Delbecq et al. (1975) outlined ten different steps, but generally the process has since been reduced to six main elements or considerations: (1) selection of the participants and solicitation of their involvement; (2) determination of the number of rounds needed for the study; (3) development of the various instruments; (4) responses and participation as the study progresses; (5) analysis of data from the various rounds; and (6) preparation of a final report. Each of these phases or considerations is explained below:

The ultimate objective, said Sheng (1995), is "for panelists to work toward consensus by sharing and reconsidering reasoned opinions with regard to comments, objections and arguments offered by other panelists" (pp. 99-100). However, Delphi studies can be useful even if consensus cannot be achieved, as long as the "holdouts" (those who continue to disagree with the majority) are given an adequate vehicle for voicing their continued rationale (Rowe et al., 1991). Those outlying opinions should then be represented somehow in the final report (Pill, 1971). According to Delbecq et al. (1975), a study of this type can last up to two years although studies (referred to above) in the past decade are typically completed in a four to six month period.

Selection of Participants

After the main research question is conceptualized and the Delphi is determined as the best method for investigating that question, the selection of Delphi panelists begins. Panel
members should be experts selected according to five criteria: (a) they must have a basic knowledge of the problem area; (b) they must have a performance record (expert status) in the particular area under study; (c) they must be objective and rational, (d) they must have time available to participate until completion of the study; and (e) they must give the time and effort to participate effectively (Tersine & Riggs, 1976). Watson (2008) advised that to maintain continuity of participation and responses, “researchers need to consider whether those who are being selected as “experts” will be prepared to engage in a study that may take much more time and effort than quantitative surveys do” (p. 106). He recommended a formal invitation to the ‘experts’ prior to the first round in order to develop loyalty to the study over time. Wehmeier (2009), however, found that despite commitments toward participating in his international study, only 32 of 50 who agreed to take part completed the first round. Mortality of participants is an issue to be discussed later in this paper.

In Delphi research, the number of panelists is not as important as their expertise (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). In fact, the first Delphi solicited the opinions of just seven experts on the subject of atomic warfare (Pill, 1971). The literature, while emphasizing the need for qualified experts, gives differing advice about the minimum size for a Delphi sample. Duke (2009) decided that a homogeneous group of ten to fifteen would “offer good results. Therefore, the seventeen-member panel probably was an appropriate number” (p. 322) for her study, which was completed with fourteen participants. Kerr (2009) also relied on the rubric of ten to fifteen participants from a homogeneous background (educators) and completed her study with eleven participants. Wehmeier (2009), taking note of the Boynton (2006) and Watson (2008) research, had a target of thirty experts, commenting that “many scholars prefer a maximum of 30 participants” (p.268). In accordance to this thinking, the Zerfass et al (2012) two-stage study on social media had 32 experts (Fink & Fuchs, 2012).

In public relations, it often is appropriate and perhaps even desirable to capitalize on this combined interest and experience of both scholars and practitioners. According to Pavlik (1987), public relations scholarship should be of concern to both of these groups. Academics understand the theories and principles that lead to enhanced performance, but many of them have not practiced in the field enough to understand the day-to-day realities. Practitioners, on the other hand, are immersed in the daily experiences but often do not understand the theoretical principles that form the basis of effective practice. They are then reduced to the "trial by error" judgments that can be inefficient at best and costly at worst in international circumstances. Recognizing the strengths and weakness offered by either academic or practitioner data, a combination of these theoretical opinions and daily experiences is the best way to develop useful theories for future practice. Watson (2008) used a three-part sample for an international study of research priorities which, in addition to academics and practitioners, involved CEOs (or similar title) or public relations industry and professional bodies. These were included “because of their overview of the whole sector and not just the issues that impinged on individual academic or professional respondents” (Watson 2008, p. 107)

The desired experts are chosen usually through what Newman (1994) called a “snowball approach.” This means that a few widely acclaimed experts are selected and asked if they would be willing to participate. They are then asked to produce names of others whom they view as experts in the field. Often, four or five lists of experts are obtained this way. The best potential panelists are those whose names appear on more than one of the lists (Delbecq et al., 1975). Once the list is produced, the people on the list are contacted and asked to participate.
The experts who are originally selected to help initiate the snowball process should be "likely to possess relevant information or experience concerning the objectives toward which decision makers are aiming the Delphi" (Delbecq et al., 1975, p. 88). Because of their experience, the participants should have many contacts whom they believe also would have expertise. Thus, they are asked to provide the names of another 10 to 20 potential respondents. The names are collected and contacts are made to complete the desired respondent pool. Nielsen and Thangadurai (2007) noted that this snowball approach, which uses people already seen as experts in a given domain of study, is important; this "helps speed up the process of gaining access and agreement from the participants as [experts] recognize more readily that they are being invited to join an elite group" (p. 159).

After participants are selected, a first questionnaire is developed and sent to them. This is called the first round. Delbecq et al. (1975) distinguished between two types of first-round instruments in a Delphi. The typical format has one broad question that allows the participants to lead the study into subcategories and variables. This is the open-end approach mentioned above. The alternate design can "approximate survey research, where variables are already developed and concern is only with refinement and movement toward consensus concerning the relative importance of individual variables" (p. 90). This is the closed-end format. However, Rowe et al. (1991) warned that too much structuring of the first instrument sabotages the intent of the Delphi by limiting the valuable forum of ideas and opinions that the experts are meant to provide.

The questionnaire contains either open-ended or closed-ended questions or propositions that seek detailed responses. Powell (2003) claimed that the most effective Delphis are those whose first round instruments are open-ended so that the experts have the greatest opportunity to help frame the questions to be investigated. This approach also "increases the richness of the data collected" (p. 378). Once the responses are returned, they are transcribed and coded. In earlier times, responses would be separated into declarative statements and then each statement was placed onto an index card so that the statements could be analyzed for patterns and exceptions (Delbecq, et al., 1975). Today, this entire process is done through various computer techniques.

Before creating a second round instrument in the mid-1990s, one of the authors had the opportunity to present a paper at the BledCom international public relations research symposium in Slovenia. This provided a forum for feedback from about 40 senior academics and practitioners from different parts of the world. This was important because Delbecq et al. (1975) recommended that another group of decision makers should be involved in the assessment process beside the respondents "to appraise the utility of the information obtained" (p. 85).

The second "round" of the Delphi can begin by creating a second instrument to which the participants again respond. It usually is necessary to develop the second round instrument using an approach that Pill (1971) referred to as "the method of summed ratings" (p. 61). Delbecq et al. (1975) also outlined this alternative. The instrument usually contains closed-end, declarative statements that reflect the first-round responses. Attached to the right of each statement typically are Likert scales with five points - strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree (the summated ratings). Respondents are asked to read the statement and mark the point on the scale that most represented their opinion about that statement. Also, below each statement and scale were three lines, on which the panelists could give additional comments to explain their reasoning if they so desired. With this process, the participants can react to each other’s opinions and ideas. In creating the instrument, the researcher should be careful not to infuse his or her own biases into the process.
Participants are asked in the second round to re-examine their own positions and revise opinions as they feel necessary. According to Delbecq, et al. (1975), Likert scales can be attached to each of the statements in the second instrument so that respondents can indicate to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement shown. The statements selected for the second round should represent both the majority and outlier comments from the first round. This way, respondents would have a second chance to agree or disagree with the full spectrum of opinions on each proposition. In essence, they could respond to each other's opinions, an important characteristic of an effective Delphi study (Landeta, 2006).

It is perhaps important to note that the objectives for the first and second rounds are somewhat different. The first round instrument remains open ended to allow for the broadest possible diversity of responses without losing control over the information sought. The second round, by contrast, provides a closed-end format where ranges of opinions and feelings were then corralled into a more objective format. Another important difference is that in the second round, instead of responding to propositions from the researcher, the panelists are now “communicating” with each other. In other words, with few exceptions the second-round statements should be included in the exact wording of the first-round responses.

This Delphi pattern that moves from open-end to closed-end instruments is consistent with one format suggested by Delbecq et al. (1975). It also satisfies Agar's (1986) suggestion that qualitative data be allowed to emerge from the respondents themselves to maintain the holism and richness of that being studied. At the point when the respondents receive a second instrument, a real "discussion" process emerges among the experts in the study. This is when they can really respond to what their colleagues have collectively fed back to the researcher about the relevant questions and issues.

Assuming that the second instrument accurately reflects the collective statements of the panelists, this process can begin to accumulate the authentic opinions the experts are producing and move toward consensus. This discussion of the qualitative data from the first round is the very element that makes such data rich (Pauly, 1991). It starts to reflect the realities that are "out there" and, in this case, begins to crystallize the debate.

As mentioned earlier, the goal of the second round is to achieve consensus. The important consideration in this process is that group members are communicating with each other - they are responding, as much as possible, to verbatim statements of their peers. When the responses are returned, the researcher again analyzes them to determine how much consensus has been achieved. At this point, if the data show no significant consensus, it is typical to send out a third round of questions based on second-round feedback. This process can continue until consensus has been reached or it becomes apparent that consensus will not be achieved.

With the data entered into the computer, the researcher can seek patterns within the responses. Outcomes can range from simple histograms that showed the dispersion and the means for each statement, to ANOVAs to explore for differences in opinions based on gender, location, and status. Statistically significant differences would not be appropriate with such small sample sizes, but patterns of opinions within the demographic groups can be found. In any Delphi process, a third round of responses may be used (Delbecq, et al., 1975). According to Sutherland (1975), the main goal of a Delphi is to reach consensus within the panel. However, Powell (2003) suggested that consensus is not always a mandatory ingredient. Diversity of opinions also can be valuable even after completion of the Delphi, particularly in a previously unexplored field, if they indicate the current state of the field and offer potential direction for the future. As Delbecq et al. (1975) and Tersine and Riggs (1976) indicated, at the end of the second
round the researcher must make a decision as to whether a third round is critical to learning more about the subject under study.

It is important to ensure that the conclusions of the study reflected a broad range of expertise. This use of pooled judgment is intended to satisfy the criteria outlined by Van Slyke Turk (1986) for advancing the understanding of a relatively unexplored domain. It also is meant to overcome the problems of potential personal bias mentioned by Agar (1986) and Landeta (2006), the difficulties of group socialization outlined by Tersine and Riggs (1976), as well as the sheer impossibility of pulling together a group from all over the world.

Limitations of the Delphi

Over the years, the Delphi technique has attracted some critics because of perceived limitations. As Goldschmidt (1975) and Landeta (2006) have argued, however, the criticisms are not so much about the Delphi method itself as about the improper application of the method by some researchers. Nevertheless, criticisms involve such potential weaknesses as improper selection of the participants, mortality (panelists dropping out of the study), and inappropriate configuration of the first round instrument. Another limitation, related more to the intercultural aspect of some studies than to the characteristics of the Delphi, is the potential for misunderstanding the instruments and responses due to language and cultural differences of the researcher and participants. Tkalac Vercic et al (2012) reported that despite sending all their Delphi study communications in English, they received responses to their first round in English, French and German across a four-month period, which indicates there may have been linguistic and cultural barriers to transcend.

The first weakness, poor panel selection, surfaces when “experts” selected for the study are not really experts. As Kuhn's (1970) research suggested, the “traditional wisdom” that has been accepted in a domain may be invalid. Thus, there is no guarantee that the opinions of experts will produce accurate results. This could be problematic in some aspects of public relations. For example, when public relations is practiced on a global scale, it is possible to use a sample survey of officers in national associations (see Watson, 2008 for a recent example). If these people have little experience outside of their own nations, involving them in a so-called global study might become a case of what James Grunig once referred to as “pooling ignorance.” However, it generally is acknowledged that if a person has significant education and experience in a given field, that person's opinions should be valuable in helping that field grow toward a state of maturity (Pill, 1971).

The second limitation involves research mortality, or participants dropping out before completion. Even when all of the respondents begin with honorable intentions, unforeseen changes in priorities, illnesses, or even deaths can occur over time. Such losses can skew the results (Babbie, 1989). Therefore, it is important to try to keep all participants committed until the end. This problem could surface in any research project, but it can be a particular problem in a Delphi study because, as Reiger (1986) and Landeta (2006) have explained, the length of time required to complete a Delphi can be anywhere from several weeks to two years.

Related to mortality is the potential detriment of insufficient motivation. Participating in a Delphi requires much more than simply filling out a questionnaire. Respondents are asked to carefully think through possibilities, consequences, and other factors surrounding the questions and to write or record their thoughts in depth. They are required to participate not just once, but two or three times. If they are not expressly interested in the study, or do not see its relative
merits, they can lose their willingness to participate. Their motivation also can wane if the study has too many rounds, or drags on too long (Woudenberg, 1991).

Some of the recent Delphi research discussed earlier in the paper suffered from a range of mortality problems. Duke (2009) and Kerr (2009), for example, suffered losses of two or three participants from panels of fourteen or fifteen, whereas Wehmeier (2009) saw his participation rate tumble by 36 per cent in the first round and a further six per cent in the second round. However, the study was completed with 29 members. Commenting on the 2012 social media Delphi in central Europe, Zerfass and Linke commented that “securing that all experts participate in all steps in the planned time was demanding” (A. Zerfass and A. Linke, personal correspondence, March 2013). Their approach called for the design of a study appropriate for the research objectives whilst attractive for the experts to open and take part in. This study retained its thirty two experts through both rounds, which were conducted by email.

An inadequate first-round instrument also has been identified as potentially problematic. Rowe et al. (1991) criticized the "vast majority of studies" that used structured first-round instruments instead of open-ended questionnaires. They contended that the structured questionnaire does not necessarily guarantee a poor Delphi study, but it does limit the involvement of the panelists in constructing the parameters for study, thus negating the very purpose for including experts in the Delphi. "While this simplification is reasonable in principle," they explained, "the actual questions used [in a closed-ended instrument] are often highly suspect" (p. 241). Counter to that argument, however, are the examples of studies by Synnott & McKie (1997) and Watson (2008), which successfully followed the outcomes of earlier Delphi studies (notably of McElreath, 1989) to construct a first wave of discussion based on more closed-end questions.

The factor that is connected to intercultural diversity is the potential for misunderstandings caused by differences in language and cognition. This is especially true in a project involving international respondents (Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Tkalac Vercic et al., 2012). Terms that might be understood in one cultural context can take on different meanings or nuances in another culture. Also, because intercultural studies often are conducted in a more universal language like English (as the vast majority of references in this paper were), the researcher has to rely on the extent to which all participants from the various countries understand that language and comprehension invariably ranges from excellent to poor. Therefore, great care must be exercised to preserve comprehension levels.

**Criteria for Evaluating a Delphi Study**

As Pavlik (1987) explained, good research in an underdeveloped domain contributes to its current practice as well as to the establishment of a theoretical framework for future research. Qualitative research that explores a new field is essentially an ongoing dialogue; when one study is completed, others are encouraged to scrutinize, critique, and add to the discussion. This is how knowledge expands in a new and dynamic field. This exploratory research process is quite different from quantitative research of the more operationalizable constructs. Similarly, criteria for assessing a qualitative study are different from the criteria for evaluating quantitative research. Evaluators of quantitative research determine whether or not a study meets the criteria of validity and reliability. A study is valid if it truly measures what it is supposed to measure. It is reliable if the measurement tools used are consistent or can be replicated (Broom & Dozier, 1990; Babbie, 1989).
Babbie (1989) noted that a "certain tension often exists between the criteria of reliability and validity. Often, “we seem to face a trade-off between the two" (p. 125). The reason for this, he claimed, is that science often demands specificity in measurements; yet this specificity robs concepts of their "richness and meaning." Experiments, for example, are highly reliable, but their validity can be questioned because the results were obtained in a laboratory rather than in a "real world" setting. By contrast, a case study can be meaningful to public relations scholars and practitioners, but the subjective nature of the case method can reduce its reliability.

The Delphi technique is not generally intended to be a quantitative study, so constructs of validity and reliability technically do not apply to it. However, the Delphi probably would be considered more valid than reliable, although it attempts to address both concerns. Whereas a case study is sufficient with one or two “units of observation,” the Delphi technique calls on the opinions of a larger number of experts. Thus, it comes closer than a case study to reflecting the “real meaning” of validity described by Babbie (1989). Most studies in the public relations field, for example, solicit the expertise of scholars and practitioners from many nations who are experienced with at least some extent of its theory and practice. The results of their combined expertise should be highly useful for future practice. If the study instruments were designed properly, the number of respondents should contribute to the reliability of the exploration.

The Delphi technique also should have more validity than if a questionnaire were distributed among a random sample of practitioners with some type of public relations practice title. As indicated earlier, as well as in the Excellence Study (J. Grunig, 1992), the mere act of being placed in a certain position is no guarantee that the practitioner has learned the activity in an appropriate or useful manner.

**Ethical and Practical Considerations**

Any research project must adhere to certain ethical principles to preserve the dignity and privacy of the participants. In addition, there are practical considerations that affect the integrity of the data collected. These concerns are discussed below.

*Anonymity and Confidentiality:* One main ethical concern for participants of a study is that their involvement remains confidential. This is particularly important in a Delphi study, because knowing who other panelists are could skew their responses.

*Voluntary Participation and Personal Harm:* A major element of social research is that any participation should be voluntary. Participants should be instructed beforehand that any information or opinions they supply will be used for research purposes and publication. In addition, the researcher should always protect individual responses, releasing information as aggregate data.

*Subject Mortality:* Landeta (2006) indicated that respondents must continue with the Delphi process through each stage. This continuation of respondents needs to be nourished as much as possible in any research process (Babbie, 1989). To maintain interest, the researcher should work quickly between each round of instrument mailings.

*Influence of the Researcher:* Another concern in any research project is the ability to collect the data without undue influence on the data collected (Sheng, 1995). If the researcher influences the data in any way that may "lead" the respondents to similar opinions (a concept similar to "biasing" the questions in a survey), it will skew the results (Babbie, 1989). In presenting questions or propositions to panelists, it is important to include a variety of questions specifically intended to "challenge" each question presented.
Conclusion

Broom (2006) commented that if the public relations industry is going to continue its advancement, the field cannot limit its enquiry or the methods it uses. His comments about the need for more research and theory building in public relations are particularly relevant:

Public relations is not so developed that we can draw a boundary around a body of knowledge and limit our enquiry to what is reported in public relations literature. Rather we are in the early stages of building theory that may someday provide a foundation for the emerging profession and its practice (Broom, 2006, p. 141).

Qualitative research, as exemplified by Delphi studies, offers greater richness and insights than do quantitative methodologies. Delphi studies, although much less used than other forms of qualitative enquiry, are now aided by advances in communication technology to delve into issues of contemporaneous importance to public relations with rapid turnaround. This paper has set out a case for wider use of this method which can be applied across cultures and types of knowledge and expertise including academics, senior practitioners and public relations industry leaders. Their expert discussion can assist the field to develop both theory and practice in consensual manners that offer benefits to many. While not without its limitations, the technique is one which, in situations of uncertainty that often characterize relationships between organizations and stakeholders, has the potential for useful application to the public relations field.
References


**IPRA’s Code of Athens – the first international code of public relations ethics**

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**Abstract**

In 1965, the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) adopted an International Code of Ethics, which became known as the Code of Athens, as its statement of public relations ethics. The Code reflected the hopeful, post-World War 2 ethical framework with its linkage to the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948.

Many public relations leaders of the time saw public relations as a force for social progress and a bulwark against oppressive regimes in the Communist world and military dictatorships. A code of ethics was an early imperative of IPRA which came into being 10 years earlier and followed its Code of Conduct, adopted in 1961, which was known as the Code of Venice. Both codes were adopted by the Centre Européenne des Relations Publiques (CERP) and several national public relations associations. They were widely promoted.

Using sources from the IPRA archive, the paper explores the evolution of the Code, its implementation and modification. A feature of the debate within IPRA about the Code was whether it was a statement of ideals to which members should aspire or a statement of standards. The view of prominent IPRA members from Anglo-American countries was that the Code, while laudable, was unenforceable. There are, however, no archived records of disciplinary action against members.

The paper will also consider the practice implications of preparing and implementing universal ethical statements in public relations and allied communication fields.
Introduction

At Athens, Greece on May 12, 1965, the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) adopted a draft of an International Code of Ethics for public relations practice. The Code had been an object of the nascent IPRA since 1952 and was to become a major promotional strategy of the organisation as it grew from the mid-1960s onwards. Largely written by the French public relations leader Lucien Matrat (IPRA 2001), it followed an earlier IPRA Code of Conduct (known as the Code of Venice; See Appendix 1) and was adopted wholly or in a modified form by many public relations professional associations in subsequent years (IPRA 1995).

In this paper, which is based on material from the IPRA archive held at Bournemouth University (Watson, 2011), the formation of the Code of Athens is traced from the early 1950s until the early 1970s in a chronological manner. It discusses IPRA’s presentation of the Code externally, as well as the internal debate between two leading members about its relevance and implementation, which led to major revision just three years after it was adopted. Reviewing the great emphasis on the Code’s dissemination by its main author, Lucien Matrat, the paper will also consider whether it became a publicity strategy of IPRA and not the proposed standard for ethics in public relations sought by its founders. The paper will commence with consideration of the role of ethical codes and conclude whether they can be ‘universal’ across all cultures, religions and ethical backgrounds, as IPRA hoped and claimed. This will, it is hoped, advise current and future ethical discussions in public relations.

Ethical Codes

Most public relations professional bodies and trade associations have some form of ethical and/or practice rule or code. Typical examples are those of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and the Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA) in the United Kingdom. CIPR has a four-section document including a Code of Conduct; PRCA has a Professional Charter for all members plus specialist versions for public affairs and healthcare. Both have complaints and arbitration procedures. The PRCA code commences with a general exhortation for members:

A member shall:

1.1 Have a positive duty to observe the highest standards in the practice of public relations. Furthermore a member has the responsibility at all times to deal fairly and honestly with fellow members and professionals, the public relations profession, other professionals, suppliers, intermediaries, the media of communication, colleagues, and above all, the public. (PRCA, undated, p. 1)

CIPR has similar tenets in its Principles which have four elements – Integrity, Competence, Transparency and avoiding conflicts of interest, and Confidentiality (CIPR, undated). Bowen (2007) comments that in public relations, ethics includes values such as honesty, openness, fair-mindedness, respect, integrity, and forthright communication” (p.1). These values appear to be widely applied around the world. Many codes also have a “best interests of the profession” element, for example the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). Wright (2006) says that PRSA had “enhancing the professional” as a fundamental value.

Moving the discussion beyond specific codes, L. Grunig & Toth (2006) noted that many public relations bodies “have norms or codes of ethics that prescribe respect for diversity and cultural difference” (p. 46). They particularly identified the IPRA code of ethics for stating that
its members shall “pay due regard to, and uphold, human dignity, and … recognize the right of each individual to judge for himself/herself” (ibid, p. 46). International public relations organisations, of which IPRA was the first one, have “led in recognizing the importance of diversity and cultural interest – perhaps because their members have frequently crossed borders” (ibid, p. 47).

Wright (2006), a long-time prominent IPRA member and a leading US public relations academic, also acknowledges the Code of Athens obligation for respect of human rights including those related to “intellectual, moral and social needs” (p. 189). He also introduces its moral core which separates it from the many codes of conduct for practitioners:

The code recognizes the power of public relations in the global society, noting the need for ethical conduct by public relations professionals who have the ability to reach and potentially influence millions of people. Such power must be restrained, according to the code, “by observance of a strict moral code” (ibid, p.189).

In the history of the Code of Athens’ development and implementation, which follows, the insertion of a human rights-focused moral core for this Code of Ethics will be seen to be an unintended consequence of IPRA’s founders’ desire to establish such a code. Other elements of this code and the Code of Conduct (the Code of Venice adopted in 1961) were similar to other professional codes of their time and have influenced current codes significantly, as indicated by Bowen (2007), CIPR (undated), L. Grunig & Toth (2006), PRCA (undated), and Wright (2006).

1952 – 1960

Although IPRA was not formally established until 1955, discussions in Europe had begun in 1949. Among its draft ‘Objects’ agreed in 1952 was a code of ethics on an international scale. Minutes from 1953 report on the previous year’s discussions:

(i) Aims and objectives
That an International Association should have as its aims
a) The raising of the standards of Public Relations practice in all countries
c) Explaining public relations to the world outside the profession
e) Consideration of the problems facing public relations officers in all countries
… professional ethics (linking the codes now being compiled in several countries)
(London & Hastings Minutes, 1953, p. 3)

It can thus be seen that preparation of a code of ethics was a priority task. This was reinforced in 1955 when IPRA was established at a meeting in London on April 29, 1955: a modified version of the 1952 decision was adopted as an ‘Object for the Association’:

e) To review and seek solutions to problems affecting public relations practice common to various countries, including such questions as the status of the profession, codes of professional ethics and qualifications to practice (London Minutes, 1955a, p. 4).

At its second Council meeting in The Hague, Holland later that year, a French member Etienne Bloch was commissioned to undertake research into “professional ethics, status and qualifications” (Hague Minutes, 1955b, p. 3) and prepare a report. This was presented to the Council’s next meeting in Paris the following year and IPRA decided to move forward:

It was generally agreed that the Association should move towards a position where it could advise its members of the professional standards expected of them (Minutes underlining), and that work should continue towards this end after the Council members had had an opportunity of studying the subject in the light of local conditions in their various countries (Paris Minutes, 1956, p.6).
(Bloch’s reports are not in the IPRA archives). A leading US practitioner Robert L. Bliss was the chair of the IPRA Research Committee at the time. In a later memoir he reported that the Code of Ethics had been a very high priority for the new association but that it was developed as a Code of Conduct. The Code of Ethics came later.

Goal 1: To develop and propose a Code of Ethics. There was some question over the use of the word ‘Ethics’ at such an early stage in IPRA’s development, so the name was changed to ‘Conduct’. The 10-member international committee worked diligently for four years on the Code which was reviewed and accepted by the Board at the Second World Public Relations Congress in Venice in 1961 (Bliss, 1984, p.41).

This priority was also stated in the Minutes of the Fifth Council meeting in Brussels in 1958. A progress report was accepted at The Hague in 1960 with agreement that IPRA’s Constitution would be amended “to provide for the inclusion of a code of conduct as soon as this has been drafted and at the same time to include procedure to enforce the code once adopted” (The Hague Minutes, 1960, p.14).

Code of Venice

The Code of Professional Conduct (see Appendix 1) was adopted with minor amendments at the Council meeting in Venice on May 22, 1961 (Venice Minutes, 1961) and was agreed by the IPRA Assembly and 2nd IPRA World Congress (IPRA, 1995) the following day. It quickly became known as ‘The Code of Venice’.

The Code of Conduct, sometimes contemporaneously referred to a code of ethics (Paris Minutes, 1962), set standards of conduct towards employers and clients, the public and media, and towards colleagues. Much later in 2009, “conduct towards digital channels of communication” was added (IPRA Code of Venice, 1961 & 2009, p. 2). The general tone was similar to current codes of practice (as mentioned above). There were calls for fair dealing, honesty, respect for confidential matters, public interest and practitioner reputation. It also forbade acceptance of bribes, and the undermining of a fellow practitioner’s relationship with an employer or clients. Although IPRA’s history later claims that disciplinary enforcement of the Code was to be passed to national PR bodies (IPRA, 1995), there are no records that this decision was made. In 1962, it formed a Professional Practices Committee “to enforce respect for the Code of Conduct” and decided that the “Code of Conduct should be included in the application form and signed by all new members joining up” (Paris Minutes, 1962, pp. 13-14). This Committee continued well into the 1970s.

The Code of Athens

The decision to create a Code of Ethics is not recorded in the extant IPRA archive. There are, however, two organisational narratives which were later compressed into one story of IPRA’s commitment to a higher standard of ethics in both content and aspirations. According to the Minutes of IPRA Council meetings, there is no mention of a plan for a Code of Ethics until it was launched by Lucien Matrat at the Montreal Council meeting in November 1964. The minutes of the Berlin 1963 Council meeting, however, refer to comments by the chair of the Professional Practices Committee there was “difficulty in enforcing the Code of Conduct. Some countries have voluntarily adopted the IPRA Code. The aim should be to achieve a world-wide common pattern of ethics” (Berlin Minutes, 1963, p. 8). But no decision was made to prepare a Code of Ethics.
Matrat’s narrative, however, tells of the formation of a working group, led by him, meeting throughout 1964 (Matrat, 1964). Its members included the current IPRA president John Keyser and a past-president Denys Brook-Hart, five French practitioners and a French and a Belgian academic. IPRA’s history (IPRA, 1994), which has much finessing, claims that the association has been a full party to the draft code presented by Matrat to the IPRA-organised World Public Relations Conference in Montreal, Canada in November 1964 and that it has been presented by a past-President, Denys Brook-Hart. Minutes, however, show that it must have been a surprise to its Council which had not seen it before:

The President informed the Council that Mr. Lucien Matrat has produced a paper for the World Congress on “Ethics and Conduct”. His proposal was to establish an international code of ethics. In his paper he emphasized the difference between a code of conduct and a code of ethics. Mr Keyser [then IPRA president] felt that this was an important matter and both he and Mr de la Motte [French Council member] hoped that IPRA would take cognisance of this proposal before the World Congress. He recommended that this paper should be read by members and discussed at the Athens meeting … Copies of the paper will be made available to members of the Council (Montreal Minutes, 1964, p. 16).

IPRA’s Newsletter, which was posted to members around the world, does not appear to have communicated either code to members. Although the file is incomplete, copies held in the archive from 1959 to 1979 have no substantial reference to the Codes, such as in a draft form for members to peruse and consider. There is one reference to Code of Venice amendments in a March 1962 edition (IPRA Newsletter, March 1962). There are, however, three missing copies in mid-1965 when the Code of Ethics was adopted (in May) and later approved at the end of the year. There is a passing reference to its mention in Communiqué, another IPRA newsletter, in 1965 (Eden-Green correspondence, 1968) but there are no copies in the archive.

IPRA’s later narrative was that there was “wide consultation prior to its (Code of Ethics) unanimous adoption by the General Assembly at Athens on 12 May 1965” (IPRA, 1994, p. 92). This was highly inaccurate as the IPRA Council preceding the General Assembly had grave doubts about its adoption without consulting the membership.

Mr Pavlidis [IPRA Hon Secretary] spoke in favour of the adoption of the proposed Code of Ethics as it would raise the status of the public relations. Mr Keyser pointed out that the regular members of IPRA had not had the opportunity to study the proposed Code but could not see why Council should not accept it. Milton Fairman asked if there was a copy in English (Athens Minutes, 1965, p. 4).

(Fairman’s comment was appropriate as Matrat operated solely in French and presented papers to IPRA only in his native language). Other Council members argued that it should not be mandatory on members; that Council could not accept it before members had seen it. It was decided that the Council would accept the draft Code but that members would be sent the draft. “It was agreed to call this Code the Code of Athens” (Athens Minutes, 1965, p. 4). The Council would later adopt the Code of Ethics later that year but in mid-1965, it was as much a mystery to its members as it was to the general membership.

The code proposed by Matrat, in French, was based strongly on the UN Declaration of Human Rights. He proposed it as a universal code of ethics for public relations and an important differentiator of public relations from what he considered lesser forms of communication. As will be seen, it was highly philosophical but it would be challenged by anglo-American practitioners as being overly and unfairly prescriptive, and unenforceable. As to why Matrat took on the task and was allowed by IPRA to take it forward, there appear to be two answers. The first
is that Matrat, like Albert Oeckl in Germany, had a self-image of being the father of public relations in his homeland and, in Matrat’s case, of European public relations (Xifra, 2012). He was the founder-president of the Centre Européenne des Relations Publiques (CERP) for an initial six year period from the late 1950s. This was a time when CERP and IPRA had many common senior members. Matrat retained an influential leadership position as Secretary-General in CERP for most of two decades (ibid). The philosophy of public relations was an important concept for him, as expressed in the Minutes of the Athens meeting in 1964:

Mr Matrat explained the need for such a Code and said that by such a Code we were proposing to enter into the dialogue of civilisation. That dialogue requires the respect of the moral rights of man as an individual (Athens Minutes, 1965, p.3).

His mantra was that public relations was a higher calling. Later, in 1969, Matrat told an IPRA meeting in Dublin that “true ethics are not just to be a moral background, but also a mode of professional and everyday life, underlining the role of PR as a continuous effort towards the acceptance of sincere and sound human relations” (Dublin Minutes, 1969, p. 6). In 1978, he continued to promote his case for the Code as it “both differentiates public relations from merely a type of sociological propaganda, and becomes, because of its principles, a fundamental code of behaviour” (Matrat, 1978, p. 15).

Matrat’s case for a code of ethics in addition to a code of conduct or practice was made several times. It is captured in IPRA’s 1994 history, which expressed the Matrat paradigm:

… national codes of professional conduct must take into account the laws, usages and customs in force in each country and the prevailing circumstances. An ethical code, however, prescribes the behaviour of public relations practitioners in relation to people, considered as ‘human beings’. Since the nature of the human being is universal, there can only be one ethical code (p. 92).

This was consistent with his promotion of the ethical canon as being universal and thus above the pragmatic behaviours of practitioners and their work relationships. Its conception as a complete set of strictures, however, fell foul of anglo-America practitioners with a different view of the liberties of human behaviour.

The second reason that Matrat produced the Code was that IPRA benignly passed the task to him as a willing volunteer. The UK public relations pioneer, Tim Traverse-Healy, the sole living founder of IPRA, said in a 2011 interview:

We were an idealistic lot and I think we were setting the concept of the idea of public relations and could see that reflected in the code of ethics as produced by Lucien Matrat … We felt it would help define public relations internationally … IPRA could use it by having it documented (and) codified … and Lucien Matrat picked up the baton and worked extremely hard (Traverse-Healy, 2011, p. 9).

He continued:

It’s all part of this whole feeling of post-war, brave new world, everything else like this, League of Nations, young, modern sense, camaraderie, new world and so on. And therefore the thought that we all had a community of standards was seen as a good thing; Matrat tapped into that (Traverse-Healy, 2011, p. 10).

The Code that Matrat produced, and most records acknowledge that he was the principal author, comprises a contextual introduction linked to the UN Declaration of Human Rights. This is followed by 13 elements or rules. (See Appendix 2 for the full code).

The introduction explains the fundamental rights and dignity of all human and states that public relations practitioners “can substantially help to meet these intellectual, moral and social
needs” (IPRA 2001, p.6). The use of techniques that permit communication with millions of people gives practitioners “a power to be restrained by the observance of a strict moral code” (ibid, p. 6). In three clusters, these call for (1) practitioners to aid fellow humans to achieve their full stature and rights; to foster free flow of information; to conduct themselves in a manner that gives confidence to others; and to consider their public-professional and private behaviour as having an effect on the profession’s reputation; 2) To observe the Declaration of Human Rights; have regard to the dignity of others; establish moral conditions for true dialogue for all parties; act in the best interests of all parties – organisation and publics; act personally to avoid misunderstanding and with integrity to all parties; and (3) be truthful, circulate information based on ascertainable fact; not take part in any activity affecting human dignity and integrity; and not use any manipulative methods (IPRA, 2001).

While elements calling for truthful and non-manipulative communication, behaviour that builds confidence in others and recognition of the integrity of others are common in codes, the Code of Athens’s link to the Declaration of Human Rights and claims upon personal behaviour proved difficult for some members. For example, the first and fourth rules were that members: Shall Endeavour

• To contribute to the achievement of the moral and cultural conditions enabling human beings to reach their full stature and enjoy the indefeasible rights to which they are entitled under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

• To bear in mind that because of the relationship between his/her profession and the public, his/her conduct – even in private – will have an impact on the way in which the profession as a whole is appraised (IPRA, 2001, p. 7).

At one end of the spectrum, practitioners were being asked to change the world; at the other they had to have exemplary private lives. In other situations, it was possible for members working in countries with less-than-perfect human rights and information controls to be automatically in breach of the Code, but with little or no chance to remedy the situation. As the critical response to the Code shows in the next section, IPRA had slept-walked into a morally-intense code which was not implementable. Rather than repent, it chose to use it as a promotional tool.

Criticism and Revision

Although the Code had been adopted in 1965 and further endorsed at the Barcelona meeting in 1966 (Barcelona Minutes, 1966), there was continued debate about its relevance to public relations practice. The critique was led by Alan Eden-Green of the UK, Chief Executive – Public Relations for the British Oxygen Company (BOC). The Code was again debated at the IPRA Council in Rio de Janeiro in 1967 (Rio Minutes, 1967), after which Eden-Green wrote to Matrat, who had not attended it.

His critique was that the Code placed many IPRA members automatically in breach of its rules but was also restricting their human rights to take employment as they wished. The tenor of Eden-Green comments is very terse. They are worth considering in detail as they indicate the problems of creating universal ethical codes which do not account for cultural/social understandings or effective implementation:

… it is the way the Code is worded, that inevitably involves us in political matters. It seems to me, if we are honest about it, that the sections I quoted place a moral obligation to raise a protest when we see human liberty or dignity being threatened, but they certainly would prevent any IPRA member from working for a government which does
not uphold Human Rights. The Code, in fact, is not a set of guide-lines, but a set of rules. It says “must” and “must not”. I doubt whether that was your intention but, as you know, I have always had the misgiving that it was too rigid and put us off being committed to a set of standards we could not live up to (Eden-Green correspondence, 17 October 1967).

Eden-Green continued, making a case for a more pragmatic approach:

I believe – and so do many of my British colleagues – that such Codes are highly desirable, but only provided they will stand the test of examination. At the moment we most certainly have members working for governments which, it could be said, restrict basic human rights … I personally believe the Code should be regarded only as an ideal and that it is not practicable to restrict our members in the way the Code appears to do (Eden-Green correspondence, 17 October 1967).

Eden-Green concluded by offering his support for the Code with “acceptable wording” and asked for Matrat to send him six copies of the Code in English.

Matrat replied, as usual, in French in early November 1967 defending his approach which was utterly based on the UN Declaration of Human Rights and citing the endorsement of religious leaders, including Pope Paul VI, as justification for the moral certainties that it expressed. He also proposed that IPRA could invoke the Code against a country which was restricting human rights or limiting the media.

Eden-Green was not mollified by Matrat’s response, but commented collegially that “there is no great difference of opinion between us” (Eden-Green correspondence, 24 November 1967). He added that his concern remained with the wording of the Code and not its aims or content. In response to Matrat’s contention that the Code had social and religious support, Eden-Green struck back with:

It has not (author’s emphasis) been praised by any high religious or political authorities in this country. The latter, I am sure, would immediately say: “This is fine – Do you enforce it?” To which we would have to say: “No”.

You see, the Code is not worded as if it were an ideal to aim at. It says, quite specifically, that a person must “Respect and uphold the dignity of the human person …” etc. “and must undertake not to lend his assistance to …” (Eden-Green correspondence, 24 November 1967).

Eden-Green argued later in the letter that IPRA members must be allowed to act according to their conscience. He offered an example that while most members considered that apartheid was wrong, they would not seek to expel a fellow member who promoted fruit exports for the South African government or a hotel in that country but that penalty, he said, was implied by the Code of Athens. Eden-Green warned that IPRA was in danger of over-promoting the Code and it should not seek publicity for it. “Public Relations has suffered a great deal here (the UK) and in the USA because it has sometimes made claims that it could not honour” (ibid). There were misgivings about the Code from other Council members in Rio and some amendments were needed to allay their fears and made the Code. “If we do not do this, we remain very vulnerable to public criticism” (ibid).

Eden-Green had continued doubts about the Code: “Personally I would like to see the Code completely redrafted” (Eden-Green correspondence, 8 April, 1968). He offered minor but textually important changes such as replacing “Shall Undertake” with “Shall Endeavour” in clauses 5-9. These moved the emphasis from demand to best effort. Eden-Green’s central point was that the Code “imposes a condition which I do not think we can always demand of our
members” (Eden-Green Correspondence, 8 April 1968). At IPRA’s Tehran meeting in 1968, his amendments were accepted (Tehran Minutes, 1968).

The Code as a PR Strategy

Using a five-step strategy promoted by Matrat, IPRA had gained support from many national public relations bodies and had staged photo-based presentation events that involved Pope Paul VI, the presidents of India and the Council of Europe and various heads of state and government ministers. While these gave ‘name check’ value to the Code and promoted its acceptance in the public relations sector, Matrat’s strategy was baser in its desired outcomes than he had promoted earlier.

In March 1967, he had circulated a strategy document with the portentous title of ‘Procedure recommended for the using the Code of Athens for the purpose of reaching a wider audience and obtaining prestige for our profession’ (Matrat, 1967). Seeking ‘prestige’ for public relations had not been one of the Code’s 13 rules, but the Frenchman wanted the Code to demonstrate that “public relations (is) a guide to social behaviour and as a science of communications” (ibid, p. 1). It was also “the only way to differentiate public relations from a certain type of sociological propaganda” (ibid, p. 2). Ahead of his time, Matrat posited the Code strategy as a form of symmetrical communication in which by understanding the social groups the organisation was interested in, public relations would become an essential part of its business success:

It is, in fact, a “reciprocal” or “two-way” communication (Matrat’s underlining) which aims at establishing and maintaining permanent exchanges leading to a climate of mutual trust and confidence between the business concern and the social group affected by its actions (ibid, p. 3).

In reality, the Code became a promotional tool for IPRA and its advocacy of public relations. Later in 1978, Matrat let the pretence of moral leadership slip further. In an IPRA Newsletter article which was almost a replica of the 1967 one, he wrote about the Code recognition campaign being technically “perfectly feasible. In fact, it is nothing else but a public relations programme applied to a Code of Ethics” (Matrat, 1978, p. 17).

IPRA’s history has a section entitled ‘Enforcement of the Ethical Code’ (IPRA, 1994, p. 92) which says that soon after the Code was adopted the organisation had “rejected the idea of a disciplinary council but the Code should have the widest possible dissemination” (ibid, p. 92). There is no evidence for this decision in the IPRA archives, which carry reports from the Professional Practices Committee and the ‘Code Matters’ committee (anglicised version of its French title) to its Council.

Indeed, there are examples of reports that no transgressions had been reported. From 1965 to 2002 (the last date of material in the archive), there are no archival references to any IPRA member being either reported for a breach of either Code or being disciplined. This apparent anomaly has been raised by the author with four past Presidents and Secretaries whose IPRA corporate memories range from 1965 to 2002 (and beyond). None recalled any member being disciplined under the Code of Ethics. For an organisation which was based on personal membership, this is an extraordinarily exemplary disciplinary performance across 37 years. Perhaps Matrat’s prestige building strategy delivered reputational results but it can be contended that for all its lofty attributes, there is little evidence that the Code of Athens could be implemented in order to police the moral behaviour of public relations practitioners or any other aspects of their practice,
Discussion and Conclusions

The Code of Athens continued in its 1968 modified form until 2011 when it was merged with other IPRA codes into an 18-point code. In one way, it had passed a test of endurance. Although it is extensively referred to books, there is little evidence that it was much more than a promotional tool for IPRA as its photo files of presentations show. IPRA, as noted above, does not appear to have ever invoked the Code against a member. Its membership, which only ever peaked at little more than 1000 in 1980s, was obviously not attracted by the moral stance. This may, however, have been a minor judgement as most national PR bodies already had codes of conduct in place by the late 1960s.

Wright (2006) argues that the Code of Athens has benefits, as well as defining “truth” in information dissemination in a tougher manner than other codes:

(It) addresses the importance of informed decision making. Under this code, public relations professionals should “recognize the right of each individual to judge for himself/herself.” The code states that practitioners should establish conditions for dialogue” that recognize the rights of parties involved to express their views. As such, the model seems to reflect the democratic ideals of marketplace models adopted in the United States and elsewhere.

… In the section that outlines prohibited behaviours, the Code of Athens requires that “the truth” should not be subordinated to other requirements and information “not based on established and ascertainable facts” should not be circulated. This last provision seems to suggest that truth can be defined on a more objective standard – i.e. that truth can be judged by whether the information is provably true or false – than do many codes, including the PRSA code, which requires members to “adhere to the highest standards of accuracy and truth (Wright, 2006, p. 180).

For modern codes of practice, the IPRA example has practical lessons that are worth considering. These are that an organisation should not walk blindly into adoption of these statements. Matrat, with great belief in these principles and considerably guile, took on a task while the organisation dithered in the years 1962 to 1964 and delivered a solution which was adopted on behalf of members. There must be a ground-up approach to ethics in order that there is wide acceptance of codes and rules, and the ability to implement them. IPRA was forced to retain an ethical Code which it was never to invoke. The outcome was that it became a promotional tool – a classic “PR exercise”, as Matrat admitted in 1978: all image and little substance.
References


APPENDIX 1

Code of Venice

Code of Venice on professional conduct

Adopted in 1961 and amended in 2009, the Code of Venice is an undertaking of professional conduct by members of the International Public Relations Association and recommended to Public Relations practitioners worldwide.

In the conduct of Public Relations practitioners shall:

Conduct towards Employers and Clients

1. Have a general duty of fair dealing towards employers or clients, past and present.
2. Not represent conflicting or competing interests without the express consent of those concerned.
3. Safeguard the confidences of both present and former employers or clients.
4. Not employ methods tending to be derogatory of another practitioner’s employer or client.
5. Not, whilst performing services for an employer or client, accept fees, commission or any such consideration in connection with those services from anyone other than the employer or client without the express consent of the employer or client.
6. Not propose to a prospective client that fees or other compensation be contingent on the achievement of certain results nor enter into any fee agreement to the same effect.

Conduct towards the Public and the Media

7. Conduct themselves with respect to the public interest and with respect for the dignity of the individual.
8. Not engage in practice which tends to corrupt the integrity of any channel of communication.
9. Not intentionally disseminate false or misleading information.
10. At all times seek to give a faithful representation of the organisation which the practitioner serves.
11. Not create any organisation to serve an announced cause but which actually serves an undisclosed interest nor make use of any such existing organisation.

Conduct towards Colleagues

12. Not intentionally injure the professional reputation of another practitioner.
13. Not seek to supplant another practitioner with that practitioner’s employer or client.

Conduct related to digital channels of communication (2009)

14. Act in accordance with the above with special care when using the Internet and other digital media as channels of communication.

Sanctions

IPRA members shall, in upholding this Code of Venice, agree to abide by and help enforce the disciplinary procedures of the International Public Relations Association in regard to any breaching of this Code.

Reference:

APPENDIX 2
CODE OF ATHENS
Code of Athens introduction and text

Introductory text (p.6)
Lucien Matrat, the father of CERP and an IPRA Member Emeritus, had outlined the Code of Venice. He was also principal author of what became the Association’s moral charter and the principal code of ethics for public relations worldwide – the Code of Athens. The original draft of the Code was prepared with the help of the 1963-65 IPRA President John A. Keyser, IPRA Secretary Manos Pavlidis, CERP Chairman Guido Rossi del Lion Nero and Philippe Hurteau and Vincent Levaux, both representing the university teachers. It based on the United Nations “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” and was adopted unanimously by the IPRA General Assembly in Athens, Greece May 1965. The Code of Athens has, over the years, been translated into some 20 languages. Copies of the Code have been presented to numerous Heads of State and the Pope.

INTERNATIONAL CODE OF ETHICS
Author: Lucien Matrat, Member Emeritus (France) Adopted by IPRA General Assembly, Athens, May 1965 and modified at Tehran, April 1968

CONSIDERING that all member countries of the United Nations Organisation have agreed to abide by its Charter which reaffirms "its faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person" and that having regard to the very nature of their profession, public relations practitioners in these countries should undertake to ascertain and observe the principles set out in this Charter,

CONSIDERING that, apart from "rights", human beings not only have physical or material needs but also intellectual, moral and social needs, and that their rights are of real benefit to them only insofar as these needs are essentially met,

CONSIDERING that, in the course of their professional duties and depending on how these duties are performed, public relations practitioners can substantially help to meet these intellectual, moral and social needs,

And lastly, CONSIDERING that the use of techniques enabling them to come simultaneously into contact with millions of people gives public relations practitioners a power that has to be restrained by the observance of a strict moral code.

(p.7) On all these grounds, the International Public Relations Associations hereby declares that it accepts as its moral charter the principles of the following Code of Ethics and that if, in the light of evidence submitted to the Council, a member of the Institute should be found to have infringed this Code in the course of his professional duties, he will be deemed to be guilty of serious misconduct calling for an appropriate penalty.

Accordingly, each member:

Shall endeavour:
To contribute to the achievement of the moral and cultural conditions enabling human beings to reach their full stature and enjoy the indefeasible rights to which they are entitled under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
To establish communication patterns and channels which, by fostering the free flow of essential information, will make each member of the group feel that he/she is being kept informed, and also give him an awareness of his/her own personal involvement and responsibility, and of his/her solidarity with other members;
To conduct himself always and in all circumstances in such a manner as to deserve and secure
the confidence of those with whom he/she comes into contact;
To bear in mind that because of the relationship between his/her profession and the public, his/her conduct - even in private - will have an impact on the way in which the profession as a whole is appraised.

**Shall undertake:**
To observe, in the course of his/her professional duties, the moral principles and rules of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
To pay due regard to, and uphold, human dignity, and to recognise the right of each individual to judge for his/herself;
To establish the moral, psychological and intellectual conditions for dialogue in its true sense, and to recognise the fight of the parties involved to state their case and express their views;
To act, in all circumstances, in such a manner as to take account of the respective interests of the parties involved: both the interests of the organisation which he/she serves and the interests of the publics concerned;
To carry out his/her undertaking and commitments, which shall always be so worded as to avoid any misunderstanding, and to show loyalty and integrity in all circumstances so as to keep the confidence of his/her clients or employers, past or present, and of all the publics that are affected by his/her actions.

**Shall refrain from:** (p.8)
*Subordinating the truth to other requirements;*
*Circulating information which is not based on established and ascertainable facts;*
*Taking part in any venture or undertaking which is unethical or dishonest or capable of impairing human dignity and integrity;*
*Using any manipulative methods or techniques designed to create subconscious motivations which the individual cannot control of his own free will and so cannot be held accountable for the action taken on them.*

**Tim Traverse-Healy, United Kingdom, President 1969-73, Member Emeritus**
If public relations is genuinely all about communicating and dialogue and concern for the public interest, then the public interest must prevail above all else. We have a moral obligation and a professional responsibility to confront the issue of public rights and not to ignore it. If we wish as a group to enjoy public support then individually and jointly we must put the public first and be seen to do so. Truth, openness, confidentiality, privacy, conflict of interest, honesty and fair dealing are all matters governed by personal and corporate conscience and they lie at the very heart of our own relationship with the public we exist to serve. Unless the relationship we enjoy with the public is beyond question, how can we possibly presume to advise others in regard to their public relations?

**Carolyn Fazio, USA, President 2000**
As new business cultures are defined and established venues are strengthened, it is essential for international public relations practitioners to have clear, reliable points of reference to guide their actions and decisions. For this, the IPRA Codes and Declarations are exemplary.

**Reference**
How PR Faced the Challenge of the “Information Superhighway”

Tom Watson
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Abstract

Before the Internet, social media and search engine optimisation, there was the “information superhighway” and the “Megachip age” in the 1980s. Although PR practitioners were slower than other communicators to recognise the potential of Internet and social media, there was some discussion thirty years ago.

Drawing on the archive of the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), this paper reviews 21 papers of contemporary discussion over a 15 year period from 1981 to 1996 and draws lessons about the stages of adoption of innovative technology by practitioners.

The views of practitioners varied over time. In the initial period from 1981 to 1987 their attitudes ranged from advancing the potential for rapid international outreach (Plank, 1983; Hietpas, 1984) to gloom about deskillling (McPhail 1987) and the future irrelevance of public relations counselling (Pessalano, 1984).

From 1989 to 1996, as PR 1.0 (use of email) came in practice, there was less comment but continued concern that the faster information flow was leading to communication “dis-information” (Linning 1995). Only in 1996 was the term “Internet” introduced and lauded as beneficial development (Wilson, 1996).

Overall, public relations practitioners are portrayed as slow to understand the benefits of the rapid technical advances in communication and holding doggedly to models of mediated communication. They also failed to foresee that information would be available for more people through IT developments, rather than fewer. The very evident reticence displayed by the IPRA publications sample may indicate why the digital communications sector was able to form outside the purview of the public relations sector and became a competitor to it (Theaker, 2004; Earl & Waddington, 2012).
Introduction

This paper is an initial study of historic practitioner attitudes towards the opportunities and problems of information technology (IT) as seen through the prism of one organisation, the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), and its publication, titled initially as IPRA Review and, from 1986, International Public Relations Review. It is thus a limited view and sets the scene for further research from a broader base of archives and literature.

IPRA was chosen partly as a convenience sample by the author, as its archive (Watson, 2011) is held at Bournemouth University, but also because it is potentially the most internationally-operating public relations organisation in its access to current academic and professional views in the 20-year period from 1977 to 1996 when the application of IT and then the Internet to public relations became well-established.

The paper uses a timeline-based narrative to show the developing practice behaviours of the IPRA membership with themes elicited to show specific attitudes. It will also consider why several authors ignored the impact of IT when discussing the future of public relations during that period.

The first paper dates from 1981 (Matrat, 1981) and the last is 1996 (Wilson, 1996). Over this 15 year period, there is evidence of growing awareness of the changes offered by new telecommunications technology but there was considerable doubt as to their value for effective public relations. The changes were typified with grand titles such as Communication Revolution (Ploman, 1982), the Information Age (Plank, 1983), the Megachip Age (Hunter, 1984), Information Technology (McKeone, 1989), Digital / Information Superhighway (White & Blampin 1995) and eventually as the Internet (Wilson, 1996). There were many ‘ages’ and ‘revolutions’ in a very short period.

1977-1981

The scan of IPRA Review starts with an article by one of the pioneers of European public relations, the Frenchman Lucien Matrat. He was responsible for IPRA’s Code of Athens statement on ethics in public relations practice adopted in 1965 and had remained at the heart of IPRA into the 1970s. Matrat effectively ran CERP, the European public relations organisation from outside Paris for nearly two decades (Xifra, 2012). In his “future of public relations” article of 1981, he made no mention that technology would potentially affect the theory and practice of public relations. His emphasis was that public relations was a trilogy: “a social policy, an analytical tool and a means of communication based on dialogue” (Matrat, 1981, p. 2) which was invaluable for the managements of organisations. From IPRA Review’s first publication in 1977 to Matrat’s article four years later, there were no articles on future public relations developments or IT. Although the study was planned for a 20 year period from 1977 to 1996, it effectively began in 1981.

1980s

Having initially ignored IT, IPRA articles gradually referred to its potential benefits. These were mostly shaped in terms of new, expanded and faster techniques for communication in general. Ploman (1982) commented that IT would lead to greater convergence and integration of services and “the collection and transfer of information (which would) become an industry and trade in its own right” (ibid, p. 26). Information as a commodity would impact on the market economy and form new professions “that serve as information brokers (consultancy firms, film sales agents, news agencies) and whose activities consist of the collection, sometimes also the
production and sale of information” (ibid, p. 25). These are areas of economic activity associated with public relations but Ploman did not overtly link them to the discipline. Indeed, he warned of a threat to the individual from control of information and its manipulation by large technologically-strong organisations. The themes of information control and of “over-communication” also appeared throughout the 1980s (Plank, 1983, Ford, 1984, McPhail, 1987).

In 1983, the first article that linked IT with public relations was written by Betsy Ann Plank, a leading US practitioner and, at the time, working for the Illinois Bell Telephone company. She placed public relations at the heart of the Information Age: “The public relations profession is uniquely qualified to be a catalyst, a steward, an architect in that enterprise (in improving the value and quality of life as the Information Age impacts on society)” (Plank 1983, p. 38). Adding that:

We are a creative, resourceful breed. We public relations professionals will capture the new communications technologies and make them our own. They are a candy store for us – exciting, rewarding, with promise to help improve our craft and productivity, expand our effectiveness, influence and income (ibid, p. 37).

She added notes of caution: “While those sugar plums dance seductively in our heads”, there are implications of the Information Age for society. Instant opinion feedback and polling would threaten “thoughtful time needed to nurture American genius for compromise and consensus” (ibid, p. 37). Other impacts foretold were a return to cottage industries, information deficit for poor people, overload in an information-intensive society and effects upon privacy.

In the same year, the US public relations commentator and author Philip Lesly, in the first of two “future of public relations” articles in *IPRA Review* in a three year period, echoed Plank’s modernist future:

An important determinant of the future of public relations, of course, will be the rush of new technology that affects communication (Lesly, 1983, p. 22)

He particularly identified the role of broadcast technologies. Satellite and cable transmission of radio and television “will get many distant people to understand the same viewpoint” (ibid, p. 22) and “a vast increase in the number of voices” (ibid, p. 23). There was to be growth in specialist journals and narrowcasting. Like Plank, he said that information would be available “almost anywhere”. Computers and fax will “get exactly the same message to many places at exactly the same time and almost immediately” (ibid, p. 23).

Lesly also predicted incorrectly (as did many others) “that vast volumes of paper … will be reduced” (p. 23). However, mail and courier costs would fall and costs of electronic transmissions would be low.

All of this had monumental importance for public relations, said Lesly. The nature of publics that practitioners must deal with, the extent of the influences affecting the human climate, the number and nature of the channels, the principles of communication and persuasion and relationships with governments, clients and media were being transformed rapidly.

Hietpas (1984), then developing a programme for communications/PR professionals at College of St Thomas in St Paul, Minnesota, identified seven trends expected to arise from new communication technology such as the merging of telecommunications, computer and office equipment. These were:

1. New opportunities to reach external audiences;
2. The ‘de-massification’ of the media was creating new publications and channels on television;
3. Greater accuracy and creativity, because time will be saved on processing of text, spelling etc, which gives more time for creativity;
4. The development of artificial intelligence, via heuristic programming;
5. The evolution of the electronic cottage that promotes working from home but may lead to “dehumanisation of communication” (p. 24);
6. Greater understanding between nations, notably by teleconferencing, data transfer and video conferencing;
7. Potential for improved internal communications with employees; using video programmes, electronic blackboards and teleconferencing.

Echoing Plank (1983), he also issued a rallying call to the public relations sector: “We have the opportunity to assume the role of leaders in this fascinating communications environment. The age we live in – the information/knowledge age – is certainly the most significant in human history” (Hietpas, 1985, p. 25).

The British public relations author and educator Sam Black was more pragmatic in his discussion of global trends in public relations (Black, 1984). While noting the potential power of “the rapid development of electronics in the field of communication (ibid, p. 26), he argued that it was the counsel of practitioners that would be most valued.

I have little doubt that a computer could be programmed to produce public relations programmes to meet most situations but I do not think we have much to fear from competition from computers if we fulfil our advisory and counselling role” (ibid, p.26). He developed this case by calling for practitioners to “keep abreast of all the latest developments” (ibid, p. 30), adding:

If we regard ourselves as communicators only we shall be undoubtedly restricted to the function of message carriers, but if by our wise counsel we justify our claim to be part of the management team then I foresee an exciting and profitable future for us and all our colleagues in the coming years of challenge and opportunity (ibid, p. 30).

The Orwellian year of 1984 also brought the beginning of industry discussion and debate. In a report of a “Public Relations in the Megachip Age” symposium at the University of Florida (Hunter, 1984), a wide range of attitudes were reported: from gloom about the long-term future of public relations (John Pessolano), through Sam Black-type pragmatism (Fraser Seitel) and caution (Paul Ritt) to modernist positivity (John Bailey). It demonstrated that public relations in the USA, at least, was going through a ‘sense-making’ process in the same way as nearly 30 years later the practice is trying to interpret to value of social media in its many platforms.

A gloomy scenario was offered, with some irony, by Pessolano, a public relations counsellor:

(By) the year 2010 [25 years hence] public relations no longer existed. We had reached this deplorable state of affairs by overconfidence, apathy and mediocrity. Public relations people have abdicated government relations to lawyers, research to marketing, and most routine functions to management consultants. Our professional societies were either dead or on their last legs – a bleak picture indeed (Hunter, 1984, p. 12)

In the cautious central position of this discussion, Ritt of the telecommunications company GTE Laboratories, advised that public relations practitioners needed to manage the effects of technological change by understanding the “fear-causing attributes of technology” (ibid, p. 11) and help the public prepare for these “impact areas” (ibid, p.11). “Society fears the uncontrollable deterioration of humanity’s supremacy over events and public relations people are well situated to allay these fears” (ibid, p. 11).
Seitel took a middle path and, quoting from Hunter’s report, “maintains that public relations is still a personal consulting relationship and will remain so. He is excited by the future, asserting that with the new technology, new competition, and new pressures, public relations will become even more indispensable to management” (ibid, p. 13).

Bailey of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) was more upbeat and claimed that the Megachip Age would provide “voices and networks for millions which will make them stronger in future” (ibid, p. 12).

**Modernist**

Bailey’s modernist approach was an emerging theme in the IPRA publications: that of the liberating and democratising power of the information technology. It had been stated earlier by Plank (1983) and Hietpas (1984) and was again offered to the journal’s readership by Maisonrouge, an IBM staffer, who claimed higher and democracy-enhancing values: “information is not only power; it also the raw material of truth, beauty, creativity, innovation, productivity, competitiveness and freedom” (Maisonrouge, 1984, p. 32), adding that “with increased communication can come increased understanding among people” (p. 35). There was some evidence that it was being challenged by other authors.

Shortly after the Maisonrouge article, Jackson (1984)’s paper titled “the future of public relations” did not discuss the impact of technology. He focused on the importance of engagement between people and organisations in “a world changing as swiftly as ours” (ibid, p. 14).

Ford, the chairman of a technology company, however, expressed another theme that appeared several times during the 15-year period: that of “information overload” that will confuse people through the sheer volume of messages targeted at them directly and indirectly. Ford’s paper was titled aggressively as “Talk is too cheap – Information fallout pollutes communication” (Ford, 1984, p. 16). He opened his critique with an (unsourced) reference from historian Daniel Boorstin that people were suffering from a disease called ‘overcommunication’.

As we hungrily embrace more and more technology to create and disseminate more and more information, to more and more people simultaneously, are we not in danger of losing our bearings as to whether we have anything worthwhile to say? (ibid, p. 17)

Ford argued that communication effectiveness could be improved by the work of public relations advisers: “Counsel us in more effective use of this bonanza of communication conduits. Help us develop a more self-controlled approach in what we say and how, when and where” (ibid, p. 18). Ford did not, however, suggest how this could be enacted.

In the 1984 Arthur W. Page Lecture, Douglas Hearle of Hill & Knowlton made one of the first attempts to alert the US public relations sector to the practice changes that would be wrought by electronically-based communication. In particular, he advised against reliance on print-based communication and in favour of new techniques of preparing material for electronic media. Public relations needed to make a “steady effort to resist letting a print orientation dominate how communications are handled” (Hearle, 1984, p. 21).

Thus, in public relations in this country it is still not always reflexive to consider electronic communications. Print still holds first claim to the affections of more than a few practitioners, and some have to be dragged kicking and screaming into dealing with broadcast communications. Even then, the temptation very often is to adapt material created for print to television or radio. But even electronic print – telexes for instance – call for a different approach to effective writing simply because of the economics of the medium.
The process of changing to reflect the advances in communications as we move away from, or at least reduce our dependence upon, print media is slow but it is taking place (ibid, p. 21).

Hearle concluded his speech by calling for greater intellectual effort to go into message content which “must be every bit as imaginative and innovative as the means of delivery” (ibid, p. 21).

In reviewing IPRA Review papers over the next five years from 1985 to 1989, is notable that contributors seldom addressed the practical implications of IT upon public relations. Lesly (1985) in his second paper entitled “the future of public relations” discussed nine functions “that the public relations person should be expected to perform today” (pp. 15-16) but none were related to understanding and using new technology in the practice of public relations. All were sound advice and the closest to link with new technology were “utilising communication in all its facets … to bring the organisation into confluence with the attitudes of the publics, rather than in conflict with them.” (p. 16). The nine functions were followed with ten “guidelines that make effective communication possible”. None was linked by Lesly to technology that enabled wider dissemination or direct contact.

McPhail (1987) contributed an article with the encouraging title of “the impact of the computer age on the public relations field” but concentrated on the impact of computers, robotics and other IT upon employment which, he argued, would lead to more low-skilled jobs as skilled ones are replaced. Public relations was, however, not discussed in this context.

**Education**

In the period from 1983 to 1986, several articles discussed public relations education, the impact of information technology and current public relations practices. Authors included Douglas Newsom, Melvin Sharpe and the Commission on Graduate Study in Public Relations. Articles in IPRA Review 8(3) in 1984 discussed the progress of PR education in the UK, Canada and Germany but did not review the need for education to take account of new technologies. Newsom (1984), in discussing international perspectives in public relations education in the US, obliquely referred to technological factors: “When modern technology shrunk the world to an inter-dependent community, the need for nations to affect the international climate of public opinion became an imperative” (ibid, p. 30). Sharpe (1985) in his article on public relations education’s needs and advancement reviewed the body of knowledge in public relations, professional skills, understanding of business and management and of research techniques. He made no mention of the impact of new technologies on the future development of public relations education.

Hesse (1985) described the Report of the Commission on Graduate Study in Public Relations, which had been established by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) to prepare a recommended curriculum for graduate public relations degrees. Included in the Commission membership were well-known academics and practitioners including William Ehling, James Grunig, Frank Kalupa and Betsy Ann Plank. There was no direct reference to technology’s impact, only a recommended course (unit) for a Masters programme:

*Public Relations Programming and Production* (3 semester hours): Advanced programming and writing as well as production, as these procedures relate to contemporary media (for example, commercial or in-house radio, television and cable systems, electronic mail, direct broadcast satellites, electronic newspapers,
teleconferencing). Given the technology of information delivery, which accelerates at an alarming pace, graduate program planners may want to expand this segment into two courses (ibid, p. 6).

Sharpe (1986), discussing public relations as an emerging profession, did not refer to the impact of new technology at all, but wrote that “the complexity of communications and of the public relations function makes it clear that an interdisciplinary, professional education is needed for the training of future practitioners” (ibid, p.10). In a study of PR practice in the UK, Arber (1986) did not mention or find discussion of the impact of technology, other than an oblique reference to “the practice of public relations is changing its emphasis to meet demands of a turbulent environment” (p. 40).

Perhaps most surprising of all, and contemporaneous to the IPRA Review sample, was the organisation’s Gold Paper no.5: The Communicative society - a new era in human history (Stonier, 1985). It summarised Plank’s (1983) article:

Among the new opportunities cited by Ms Plank is the new media technology. Video had become a booming business in the 1980s and represents a new opportunity for the PR profession. The same will hold true later in the decade for data bases, expert systems and for computer software of all sorts. Increasingly the clients will either be smaller independent companies or small units of large companies.” This will be the result of flattening of organization hierarchies. “… large PR firms may find it wise to re-examine their own structures as they move deeper into an information age” (ibid, p. 9).

So much for the Gold Paper’s title claim of a “new era in human history” – and public relations’ part in it – IT was overlooked as a key trend for the “new era” and dismissed in little more than a sentence of summarised thoughts from a two-year-old journal article.

Engaged

By the mid-late 1980s public relations, as evidenced by IPRA Review, has engaged with the impact of information technology mostly peripherally (Ploman, 1982; Lesly, 1983; Hietpas, 1984; Black, 1984; Maisonrouge, 1984; Ford, 1984; Lesly, 1985;) or not at all (Matrat 1981, Jackson, 1984; Newsom, 1984; Hesse, 1985; Sharpe, 1985; Arber, 1986; Sharpe, 1986; Stonier, 1986; McPhail, 1987). Only three journal articles (Plank, 1983, Hearle 1984; Hunter, 1984) attempted to discuss the impact upon public relations, with only Hearle’s discussion in 1984 addressing practice implications.

Much more recent discussion (Earl & Waddington, 2012; Theaker, 2004) shows that public relations worldwide continued to lag behind the developments in IT and digital media. Francis Ingham, director-general of the Public Relations Consultants Association in the UK was quoted recently as saying: “the very fact that the media as we knew has changed so quickly has caught both communication people and brands on the hop. One of the main difficulties the public relations industry faces is that we have got used to communicating mainly via print and have been doing it for so long” (Earl & Waddington, 2012, p. 36). Comparison with Hearle’s advice to practitioners 28 years (Hearle, 1984) earlier shows that public relations may have been unable to move on from the ‘custom and practice’ of press-based media relations on which its heritage is based (Watson 2012).

In the nine years from 1987 to 1996, there were only four articles in International Public Relations Review (formerly IPRA Review) that addressed IT and public relations. Two gave practical advice (McKeone, 1989; Wilson, 1996); others considered information overload (Linning, 1995) and public relations research priorities (White & Blamphin, 1995).
McKeone, a UK practitioner, shared the experience of his London-based consultancy’s use of IT to manage information and establish new services, such as media evaluation. The firm, which appears to have been a UK pioneer in the use of IT for public relations had installed its first two personal computers in 1978 (at a cost of £20,000 – “a veritable fortune for a ‘gimmick’”, McKeone, 1989, p. 30). It had continued to invest in technology in the intervening decade but had yet to see the industry undertake investment in IT.

The term ‘Information Technology’ (IT) contains the word ‘information’, yet the public relations industry has been surprisingly slow to use it. Public relations consultancies with no word-processing capabilities still exist, and there are many in-house public relations departments that have to use computer systems that are of little or no use to them. Over the last few years, however, computer based information services have become available that have given the industry a range of research, communication, and information management tools that have become very useful – too useful even for ostriches (ibid, p. 28).

The PR applications current at this consultancy in 1989 were “word processors and electronic mail for distributing information” (ibid, p. 28); online PR information and mail distribution services, databases and spreadsheets for programme planning and monitoring; storage of documents; online research databases as used for monitoring media. Benefits included fast turn-around of material between the agency and clients in a crisis; and the monitoring of media in a crisis or a takeover. “Stories can also be filed with newspapers, magazines and freelances using electronic mail” (ibid, p. 29).

McKeone’s consultancy was finding that the rapid expansion of IT in PR activities was demanding ever-increasing computer storage. “PR professionals will soon be needing the gigabytes (millions of kilobytes) that optical storage offers” (ibid, p. 30). The company had a network of 35 terminals which linked to central servers and extensive training on their use.

Although this consultancy was an exemplar at the time, there is little evidence that its investment IT for public relations purposes was typical as McKeone’s comments on the slow uptake of IT indicated. He was, however, positive about increased use in the future.

The public relations industry is discovering some of the things that information technology can offer them, and the process of discovery and change is accelerating. Some of the advantages which the public relations industry can gain from information technology can only be gleaned in an integrated environment, where several of the services are used together” (ibid, p. 31).

Internet

After McKeone’s article, practical discussion of IT drops from the IPRA publication’s editorial offering for seven years and was revived by another practitioner who introduced the term “Internet” for the first time. In a largely self-promoting article, Wilson (1996) wrote about the transition of a Portland, Oregon agency (now part of Fleishmann-Hillard) from early email to setting up its own website and email address. By 1996, it was still introducing the Internet and World Wide Web to the PR audience; no mention was made of the potential of social media. Websites were positioned by Wilson as marketing tools and the Internet valued for dissemination of material to the media and for correspondence.

Wilson posed the question: “Why has the “Net” taken off so suddenly? After all, the history of the Internet and its underlying technology are more than 20 years old” (p. 11). He answered it by identifying three factors – the introduction of the first web browser (Mosaic),
falling costs of modems to enable online communication and the availability of low-cost PCs able to handle multi-media applications. All had arrived from 1993 onwards.

Few things have more profoundly affected the practice of public relations than the dawn of desktop computers, followed a few years later by the advent of instantaneous global communication. Now, however, the two forces have converged to create a revolution in public interaction based on digital electronic communications.

If this revolution can be described as a hurricane, its eye is certainly the Internet, although swirling around at gale force are other technologies and commercial propositions” (ibid, p. 10).

For this practitioner and his organisation, the Internet allowed them to create websites for clients, integrate advertising with public relations, direct mail and other marketing activities, and communicate with consumers. It was, thus, an integrated marketing communications tool. “As a means of distributing any form of intellectual property, i.e. anything that can be reduced to a digital form, it is unparalleled” (ibid, p. 13).

McKeone (1989) and Wilson (1996) returned IT to practical importance and reinforced the modernist benefits of the technology for public relations, as advocated earlier by Plank (1983), Hearle (1984) and Hunter (1984). Practitioners, as illustrated in this small sample, were only slightly behind the academy. A recent study (Yi & Ke, 2012) identified only five published research papers concerned with online or Internet-related public relations in the period from 1992 to 1996. Some articles must have been prescient, as 1992 is regarded as the year when the public (including public relations practitioners) gained access to the World Wide Web (Greenlaw & Hepp, 1999, cited in Yi & Ke, 2012).

Linning (1995), however, reverted to the information overload theme of a decade before (notably Ford, 1984) and identified the potential for “anonymous and malicious” material being posted on the Internet (ibid, p. 13).

Business sees the superhighway as a new advertising and sales medium … This is fine if public relations practitioners simply aspire to be publicists and sales promoters. But if, as (UK PR pioneer) Tim Traverse-Healy has argued, public relations practice requires that three ingredients need to be present in our endeavours – truth, concern for the public and dialogue - the practitioners must take a wider perspective (ibid, p. 14).

Linning concluded by calling for “public relations to define its role in the digital neighbourhood in the public interest” (ibid, p. 16) but did not indicate how this role definition would be enacted or implemented. There was an implication that public relations practitioners can only view the Internet (which he also calls “digital neighbourhoods” (ibid, p. 16)) as a zone for publicity-type practices. This was a similar view to Wilson (1996) and Linning indicated that there was another higher form of public relations which could be conducted without reference to the Internet, although both Hearle (1984) and McKeone (1989) had argued for or demonstrated the benefits of IT in public relations strategy and practice between six and eleven years earlier.

The final IPRA contribution was a public relations research priorities benchmark study (White & Blamphin, 1995). It demonstrated that, amongst knowledgeable practitioners, the impact of IT on public relations was an important research issue. They reported their international delphi study outcomes in an International Public Relations Review Academic supplement to the journal under the heading: The Impact of Technology on Public Relations:

A number of practitioners were concerned with “the advent of the digital superhighway/information superhighway.” There is need to:
• Research the impact on public relations of rapidly changing and developing information technology and
• Research how our business will take advantage of the information superhighway (ibid, p. 4).

This indicated, after more than 15 years of discussion in an international public relations body and its main publication, that “sense-making” of technological change was being sought, rather than guidance on best practice. In other comments to the delphi study, practitioners identified its importance: For example, “long term, this – technological advancement – could be a big issue” and “impact of technological change on the communication profession is underestimated” (ibid, p. 4).

Discussion and Conclusions
Because this study concentrates on one organisation’s publications, there are limitations in the generalizability of the outcomes. IPRA, however, was the sole international public relations body over the 15-year period and was at the zenith of its membership with between 750 and 1000 members from up to 60 countries (Watson, 2011). Wright (2006) said IPRA was a “relevant, resourceful, and influential professional association for senior-level, international public relations practitioners” (p. 184). Technologically-developed countries such as the US, UK, France, Germany and Australia all had significant numbers of senior, experienced practitioners in membership. There is thus a trade-off between the narrowness of the publication sample and the internationality and experience of its authors and readers, many of them with access to the evolving information technology.

Some authors from Matrat (1981) onwards were figures of national and international significance as thought leaders. In the US, Plank, Lesly, Newsom and Sharpe were well known in both practice and academia, Hearle was a considerable figure in the rapidly-growing, US-led international public relations consultancy business; Black and Matrat were both leading figures in IPRA and known around the world. Others were less significant but had their views communicated world-wide.

Using a coding process to identify the central theme of each article, there were three broad attitudes expressed. The first and most frequent (nine articles) did not consider IT’s impact on public relations at all, notably in discussion of education; these are the “Ignorers”. The second group (seven) was that IT would have an unspecified impact on public relations practice; this was referred to earlier as “peripherally” and is a ‘Cautious, Sense-making’ view. The third discrete group (five) were ‘Modernists/Adopters’ who extolled the benefits of the new technology and need for change. Others were concerned about ‘information overload’ as an outcome of inevitable change.

An initial inclusion is that, as Hearle (1984) and McKeown (1989) suggested, public relations was so rooted in its media relations practices and relationship with print media that it was not able to see the opportunity offered by new technology. Watson (2012) has commented that evidence from the adoption of measurement and evaluation methods shows public relations was largely a publicity practice with a strong media relations bias from the 1950s onwards. As publicity often relies on personalities and personal relationships between the media and practitioners, perhaps IT was not seen as relevant until the mid to late 1990s.

The next stage of this research is to test the taxonomy of Ignorers, Cautious Sense-Makers and Modernist/Adopters to see whether it applied within other, nationally-based public relations and communications bodies such as IABC, CERP, PRSA and (C)IPR amongst others. It
is a significant question to investigate as to why educators so overlooked the impact of IT upon the training and education of current and future practitioners. In IPRA and the *IPRA Review* there were constant discussions from the 1970s onwards about the development of international standards in public relations curricula (Watson, 2011), but little progress made.
References


Abstract

This research-in-progress seeks to uncover a deeper understanding of how influence works online, and how we might measure influence beyond the outputs and outtakes. In this literature review, several salient themes emerge:

Influence explained via social impact and opinion leadership
  - Mixed results on both accounts

Influence applied by a group on its individual members
  - By and large, literature supports this principle
  - Social identification with the group leads to being influenced by its members

Influence as a consequence of position in a social network
  - Two researchers did the same experiment and got different results. One study finds that influence rises according to position, but influence wanes as the scale of the network increases
**Introduction**

If the corporate communication and marketing industry has a bête noire, it surely is how to measure influence, particularly in the online world. The use of social media in public relations, and in marketing, depends on figuring out who influences whom. Blogger and public relations practitioner Justin Goldsborough and his commenters consider the issue potentially unresolvable (Goldsborough 2011). Trade press and self-described experts offer facile, conflicting, and self-promoting methods of influence measurement that lack a serious research base. For example, witness the success of companies like Vitrue and Altimeter (Williams 2010), and Klout, which styles itself as the standard on influence despite significant criticism from practitioners (Paine 2012, Gilliat 2012). Vitrue assigned the value of a Facebook fan (now called a “like”) based on a series of arbitrary figures. Altimeter sought to prove a correlation between revenue or stock price and social media activity, never considering that successful organizations might invest more in social media than their less successful counterparts.

Reaching back to the mid-twentieth century, we have tried to understand the process and power of influence in context of communication effectiveness. Lasswell even has a maxim that should be familiar to anyone in the business of communication: “who says what to whom in what channel with what effect?” (Lasswell, 1948). In the first 50 years of mass communication scholarship, practitioners struggled to understand this basic mechanism of influence, person-to-person and many-to-few.

I have been thinking about online influence for some time (Williams 2011, Williams 2010) and am becoming convinced that the path to effectively measuring influence lies in two parts: first, better understanding the nature of how influence works interpersonally and in groups, and second, approaching measurement from a qualitative rather than quantitative angle. In this paper, I review a selection of current literature, then propose a possible approach to developing a qualitative process of measuring online influence.

**Literature Review**

This section is organized according to these principles:

1. Influence concerning social impact and opinion leadership.
2. Influence applied by a group on its individual members, to include the impact of homophily.
3. Influence as a consequence of position within a social network.

*Social Impact and Opinion Leadership*

From the literature, it is clear that influence can emerge as a consequence of scale, proximity, or importance to the receiver, what Latané calls social impact; or by virtue of the authority expressed by the sender.

Latané (1981) defined a theory of social impact based on the product of social forces, which he defines thus:

- **strength**, “the salience, power, importance, or intensity of a given source to the target;”
- **immediacy**, “closeness in space or time and absence of intervening barriers or filters,” and
- **number of sources**, “how many people there are.” (p. 344)

The interaction of these forces brings about impact, for which Latané offers an equation that in essence says that the amount of impact someone experiences will depend on some power,
of the number of sources \( N \). However, he adds a counterproposition—that in certain circumstances, such as when the number of receivers is too large, this scale works against the sender, diminishing his or her influence on the receivers (Latané, 1981).

Latané points to years of experiment showing that we are influenced by others, and says that increases in “strength, immediacy, and number of people who are the source of influence should lead to increases in their effect on an individual.” (p. 345) He cites an experiment from Asch (1951), who had students answer a question alone or after a series of researchers had offered incorrect answers to the question. Confronted by a consensus at odds with their own judgment, a significant number join the consensus rather than continue to defect from it. This conformity only lasts until there are three people in the consensus, at which point the influence begins to wane. These data would indicate that scale in social media as a function of influence is overrated, however accurate the model might be in describing the process of influence.

Miller and Brunner (2008) apply Latané directly to online influence, including strength and immediacy as variables and excluding number owing to the environment of their experiment. In the experiment, they create a sterile online environment where visual and auditory cues are blocked as sources of influence, and have 60 students work together on a decision-making situation. They spent a half day or so interacting, with only a numerical identifier as avatar, and were instructed to avoid posting identifying text in the discourse.

Miller and Brunner (2008) used the Wonderlic comprehensive personality profile materials to define strength as consisting of four personality traits: emotional intensity, sensitivity, assertiveness, and exaggeration, then coded these traits from transcripts of the online discourse. The number of contributions from each participant and the total number of words of those contributions became the measures of immediacy. Finally, the researchers polled participants as to who was directive, or influential (either negatively or positively), in their group tasks.

The primary findings were a mixed bag. Two of the strength factors demonstrated impact on influence: assertiveness and exaggeration. Two strength factors failed to do so: sensitivity and emotional intensity. For immediacy, the more contributions and the more total words in those contributions, the better. In both these dimensions, however, the data show a plateau in influence. Influence wanes as strength and immediacy increase, which echoes Latané (1981) and Asch (1951).

Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) posited the “two-step flow” model of mass communication, where “opinion leaders” receive information from organizations through the news media, and send them on to less informed people with a supposed imprint of authority based on the relationship between opinion leader and end recipient. In a time when just about anyone can be perceived as an expert and have the platform to publish their opinions, whither two-step flow?

If we consider why someone might be an opinion leader, Latané’s factors make sense. Supervisors, parents, professors, and clergy hold power of different stripes over us, and few would declare otherwise. People with similar jobs or academic majors as ours, or colleagues bearing information we desire have great salience to us. A panic-stricken person imploring us to get out of a burning building does so with great intensity, as might a public speaker moving us with eloquence or fiery prose. In social media, the search for influencers and opinion leaders goes on unabated, even to the door of Google.

PageRank, which is central to Google’s search algorithm, calculates value of a page based on several factors, but mainly frequency of being linked to. PageRank is a means of
establishing opinion leadership in this context, as the action of linking to a page can be construed as an endorsement of its content, and as Google is the authority for internet content, it facilitates the opinion leadership transference.

Baldwin (2009) ran down a number of possible means of measuring influence in the online Bible of social media, Mashable, articulating a mathematical model claiming that influence was a function of personal brand, times knowledge times trust squared, and extolling the virtues of Google PageRank as a marker of trusted content. Rubel (2008) said “PageRank is the ultimate way to measure online influence.” (p. 42) The reliance on the linked-to metric, however, has left PageRank open to charges of being manipulated through “Google Bombs”, which occur when someone adds words or phrases to a website to artificially inflate its ranking. (Karch, n.d., “Are there flaws in PageRank?” para. 10), and “Google Bombs” para. 1).

Trusov, Bodapati and Bucklin, (2010), tracked daily log-in data for a major social networking site, inferring that increases in daily logins indicated greater appreciation for content from across one’s site network. They examined the relationships among network members who were at the top-level, those who were connected by direct invitation and at other levels, those who were “friends of friends.” They evaluated whether content from within members of this top level caused changes to login frequency and length of stay on the site, positing that such changes are evidence of influence of the top level on the rest of the members. Further, the researchers examined whether second-tier members showed similar impact of influence on other member levels.

The results supported their belief, showing that users did influence one another both directly and indirectly, that is, the influencers’ affected duration and frequency of logging in into second and even third tiers by working through the lower tiers’ primary influencers: Allison influences Charles and also Dawn, though Allison and Dawn aren’t connected, because Dawn is connected to Charles. This supports the concept of two-step flow. If we want to reach Dawn and Charles, we target Allison as opinion leader.

But how would we measure the efficacy of that? It’s a bit of a leap of faith that frequency and duration of being logged in to a social networking site would actually be a function of influence. What if it’s something else, for example, shared interest, or enthusiasm for a particular piece of content?

Shinton (2012), a chemist and communication consultant to researchers and scientists, sees influence as a function of connection and relationships, offering her opinion that her Twitter feed “gives me a wide range of insights that are invaluable for my work with researchers and gives me a mechanism for sharing these…the greatest benefit has been in the development of a wider, more diverse network” (p. 1989). She claims to be influenced by her network, as well as being an influencer as an opinion leader. This would seem to support Trusov, et. al. (2010), however anecdotal the remark, and Katz and Lazarsfeld’s (1955) two-step flow.

The two-step flow is not without detractors. Consultant and blogger Greg Satell in “Exploding the ‘influentials’ myth”, (2011), writes that recent scholarship has debunked the concept of a star chamber of connected people who influence a much larger set. Satell cites the work of Yahoo!’s Duncan Watts, who famously declared that the concept of marketing to influencers was nonsense (Thompson 2008). Bakshy, Hofman, Mason and Watts (2011) conducted research on 1.6 million users of micro-blogging site Twitter encompassing 74 million tweets (the colloquial name for a posting on the web site). On Twitter, to form a network, users “follow” other users they find interesting, and get followed themselves. Posts from these
followers can be forwarded on, or “retweeted” to share content with the network. The frequency of this retweeting and the number of followers a user has, creates an extended network. Bakshy, et. al. (2011) found that the most influential users were those with a large number of followers, and who were retweeted frequently in the past. This finding would seem to support two-step flow, but they note that using follower size (popularity) and frequency of being retweeted as metrics for influence might lead to incorrect targeting and less effective results. The cost of using the “most influential” users in a communication campaign is greater than the likelihood of success, suggesting instead that a wider net of less influential users would bring about a more cost-effective result.

Groups, Homophily, and Common Interest

What role do groups play in terms of influence? Liao (2005) says that the rate of adoption of innovation is fastest when powerful individuals in the social system enact it, and slowest when it relies on collective decisions. Does this argue for groups being sources of resistance? Flanagin (2000, as cited in Liao 2005) found that social pressure was a factor in successful innovation adoption. Liao (2005) also cites Burt (1987), who found that a doctor’s adoption of a new drug was predicted by whether his peers supported the same drug. The perception that your group is supportive—the extent to which your social identity is tied to the group—seems to be a marker for influence.

Drawing upon work by Dholakia, Bagozzi and PEARO (2004) on how membership in a group exerts a collective influence on the member, Okazaki (2009) fits social identity into a triad of influence producers, somewhere between desire, and social intention to perform an act, then adds other theoretical nails into his model’s structure. “Social identity represents the core aspects of the individual’s identification with the group. The model is completed with three additional dimensions: (1) uses and gratifications, (2) opinion leadership and (3) inherent novelty seeking.” (Okazaki 2009, p. 445)

Okazaki also mentions Hennig-Thurau and Walsh (2004), who declared that social orientation through information and community membership were motivators for people to read material online. This links to Shinton (2012) and her use of social media to both gather information and disseminate it within her network.

The concept of joint decisions made possible by overall social identity and influenced by group dynamics is also present in Bagozzi, Dholakia and Mookerjee (2006): “Tajfel (1978) suggested that a person achieves social identity with a group through the development of awareness of one’s membership in the group together with the emotional and evaluative significance of this membership” (p. 102). If this is so, measuring the strength of identification with a group should offer insight into how the group is driving influence on its members. This is fertile ground for future research.

Interestingly, van Dijck (2012) sees online networks in thrall to commercial interests manipulating the process of forming connections, with potentially serious consequences. “The novelty of social media platforms is not that they allow for making connections, but lead to engineering connections” (p. 168). He also points out that the digital footprint, the trail of information left behind in online behavior, might be used to influence behavior online and off. We see this in fact, with websites like Facebook and LinkedIn suggesting connections based on the second tier of users – your digital friends – and context advertising based on searches. This commercial focus, van Dijck (2012) argues, replaces real influence with “attention, popularity
and connectivity. In the ‘attention economy,’ attention means eyeballs and (unconscious) exposure” (p. 170) to advertising. Popularity emerges from the activities the platform seeks to prompt, rather than objective norms. The impact on influence is obvious. Practitioners currently use popularity, such as on Facebook and Twitter, as at least a partial proxy for influence, as per Klout, for example, (http://klout.com/corp/kscore) Are social media groups, given van Dijck’s perspective, natural outgrowths, or mere tools for commercial exploitation?

Bisgin, Agarwal and Xu (2012) undertook a study of the impact on social media of homophily, the tendency of individuals to associate and bond with similar others, using three social networks, Blog Catalog, Live Journal, and Last.fm. They were looking for evidence that similar interests would be a causal factor for the creation of online relationships. Bisgin, et.al., analyzed the user-generated tags and categories and compared across the populations on each site. They found that the creation of ties online is more random than we think. “For both the data sets, over 40% of the friendship ties were only 1% similar in their content, and over 95% of the friendship ties were less than 50% similar…Content similarity does not breed connections” (Bisgin, et.al., 2012, pp. 229-230). This supports Bagozzi (2006), Okazaki (2009), and Dholakia (2004) regarding the ways that groups do exert influence on members.

**Position in Social Networks**

Krebs (n.d.) explains that social network analysis categorizes participants (nodes) in a network according to their position within it. More than its individual properties, these nodes exist in terms of connections to other nodes, but moreover, in terms of the distance they would have to travel to get to all other nodes. Kitsak, et.al. (2010) provided a more detailed (and more mathematical) explanation of this concept, using epidemiology and extrapolating to information diffusion. They found that the most efficient spreaders of the virus aren’t those with the most connections, they are the ones with the most connections nearest to the core of the network. Those at the core are closer to everyone else and can reach them in fewer steps.

Add the ability to control the flow (of viruses, or information) and we discover the node capable of the greatest influence. Think of a gatekeeper—perhaps the CEO’s secretary—who is one step removed from the most powerful individual in a firm. The secretary also is one step removed from the CEO’s direct reports. The capacity for influence that reaches far and wide is very strong in the secretary as she is a broker between nodes and groups of nodes. Here we see the prospect for two-step flow – the secretary as main influencer and target for dissemination of information.

Borge-Holthoefer and Moreno (2011) conducted virtually the same experiment as Kitsak, et. al. (2010), using rumor spreading, with diametrically opposed results. Borge-Holthoefer and Moreno (2011) found that nodes at the core of a network were more likely to be information sinks, what they termed “firewall nodes,” (p. 1) interrupting the flow of the rumor across the network. It doesn’t matter, they claim, where rumor dissemination begins, as the spreading capacity did not differ according to position in the network. Their research shows, paradoxically, that the firewall nodes invariably are at the core of the network. A strategy designed to follow Kitsak, et.al. (2010) and the two-step flow, namely, targeting the nodes at the center, would have the opposite of the intended effect (Borge-Holthoefer & Moreno 2011).

Katona, Z., Zubcsek, P., & Sarvary, M. (2011), would offer a different perspective on the example of our secretary. In their experiments on diffusion of information, they find that the potential influence of nodes grows according to the prestige of being an information broker, but decreases as more and more nodes come onto the network. The more that nodes cluster together,
the more powerful the influence effect on adopting innovation, up to a certain limit. They conclude that scale is not the path to building adoption. Rather, building a very strong, interconnected network is an important path. The strongest interconnected nodes operate best at the center of the network—just as noted by Krebs (n.d.) and Kitsak, et.al. (2010), and a node’s influence – whether for good or ill, plateaus at some point, as Miller and Brunner (2010) found. This finding is crucial for practitioners using social media for corporate communication purposes. As Bakshy, et. al. (2011) found, determining individual influence is unreliable, and those seemingly most influential might not offer the best chance for success.

In summary, according to the literature, opinion leadership as a marker of influence is highly variable, and group influence is inconclusive, as is the role of position in a social network, to codifying influence.

Research Questions
Measuring influence accurately will require investigating each of the preceding three focus areas further, but especially teasing out more from the social impact theory (Latané 1981), which I believe holds much promise for the field. The demand for quantitative, predictive metrics has led to less that optimal findings, as Miller and Brunner (2008) and several others demonstrate. A qualitative assessment would improve understanding of the fit of the social impact theory, because we need to move beyond mere observation and discover what people are thinking when it comes to influence. Therefore, I would seek to answer these questions, offered together with a hypothesis for each drawn from my understanding of the literature:

- What are appropriate online indicators of strength? Strength emerges from trust, which follows from credibility.
- What are appropriate online indicators of immediacy, and what thresholds exist that affect the perception of immediacy? Immediacy is strongly related to proximity, i.e., a friend is more immediate than the friend of a friend, and the scale of the friend network will govern the perception of immediacy.
- What are perceptions of appropriate scale in social networks? Driving for ever-larger social networks diminishes the perception of influence, while fostering stronger connections in a smaller network increases them.
- To what extent does online influence differ from offline? The result of influence differs online versus offline.

Methodology
According to Zaltman (2003), we must better understand how customers think in order to design appropriate strategies to market to them. Moving away from the obvious and uncovering tacit knowledge through use of projective techniques is the only practical method of doing so. To that end, I would design a series of projectives for use in interviews, ethnographies and focus groups to reach behind the veil of the obvious. In the interviews and ethnographies, I would follow an outline similar to this:

- Who has influenced you the most in your life? Tell me a story about a time when you learned a lot from that person. (Seeking a lexicon of influence, possible keywords.)
- What are some of the most important things to you when deciding whether to read a book, an article online, or to seek a new job? (Seeking to get context of how the subject processes information and data.)
- When you think about the internet, what are some of the most important tasks you do there? What do you wish the internet had more of? Less of? (Seeking to understand how the subject thinks about the internet, potential angles toward influence.)
- Think about the people in your social network. What do you think motivates them? Tell me a story about them as though they are an animal... Or, here are some magazines. Make a collage that describes how that person behaves online...)

I would recruit research subjects in two ways. First, to test assumptions, I would conduct a series of pilot interviews from among my personal network. Second, I would recruit for interviews from social networks Twitter and Facebook, aiming for a mix of practitioners, students, and academics. For ethnographies, I would recruit via my personal network, adding a snowball sampling technique to reach beyond my first level network. The method in the ethnographies would be to observe subjects as they worked online, noting their behavior and asking questions throughout. The use of projectives will be critical here to drill down on motivations and perception of impact. Focus groups fill out the menu of methods, with participants recruited in similar fashion.

**Discussion**

Academic literature is relatively scant on the subject of online influence. It is a challenge to understand what is in someone’s mind; objectively, I might have a hard time explaining why someone or some idea influences me. Why risk sinking time and effort into the topic?

I believe that the future of public relations (or, more broadly, organizational communication) depends on solving the mystery of social media influence from a much broader perspective than the current marketing focus. Much work has been done to tease out the threads of a buying decision, of which public relations certainly plays a part, but whither reputation? In marketing terms, whither brand? Even those who ascribe to the concept of integrated marketing communications (which I typically shorten by removing the word, “marketing”) admit that intangibles play a significant role that is poorly understood. It is my hope that this research may in some way illuminate these issues and help build a foundation for future research.
References


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A Need for Power, Achievement, or Affiliation? Exploring the Influence of Personality, Attraction, and Perceived Career Fit in Public Relations Education

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Abstract
This study explores the application of the attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) framework to the existing research on undergraduate student preconceptions about public relations. It investigates three individual personality traits (i.e., need for power, need for achievement, and need for affiliation) that are likely to play a role in the attraction of undergraduates to the manager role of public relations. Additionally, this study extends the understanding of the student-public relations attraction process beyond personality traits and preconceptions by examining the mediating role of public relations manager role aspirations on perceived fit of a career in public relations. An online survey was conducted among 307 undergraduate students enrolled in two sections of the introduction to public relations course at a large, southeastern university. The results of the study indicate that the ASA framework is a promising theoretical perspective from which to study questions of attraction to public relations education. Specifically, this study demonstrates that need for power has a significant, positive relationship with public relations manager role aspirations. Additionally, manager role aspirations and need for power have a significant positive relationship with perceived career fit. Public relations majors were more likely than non-public relations majors to have high manager role aspirations and perceived career fit. Implications of this research are presented and recommendations for future research is discussed.
**Introduction**

More than a decade ago the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) identified public relations education as the field’s major concern for the 21st century because of an increasing industry demand for qualified practitioners1 (CPRE, 1999). Since that time, scholars have investigated the congruence between what practitioners expect graduates to know and what students are taught (Di Staso et al., 2006; Hatzios & Lariscy, 2008; Sriramesh & Hornaman, 2006; Stacks, Botan, & Turk, 1999), student perceptions of work life after graduation (Sha & Toth, 2005), and student preparation for professional practice (Gower & Reber, 2006) in an effort to understand how public relations education influences and is influenced by professional practice.

An underexplored area in this line of research concerns the preconceptions that attract university students to study public relations. A few qualitative and descriptive studies have demonstrated that new public relations students, as well as students in other majors, hold a number of media-influenced misperceptions about the profession (Bowen, 2003; Bowen, 2009; Brunner & Fitch-Hauser, 2009; Fall & Hughes, 2009). Bowen (2009) noted that persistent misperceptions about public relations among university students limits the major’s “ability to be perceived as a first choice major, and the ability to attract students with aptitudes for analysis, honesty, and strategic management” (p. 409). She concluded that the management function of public relations is at risk if students, the future of the profession, continue to be attracted to it for the wrong reasons. While research in this area has raised important questions about why students choose to study public relations and the potential impact of not attracting “the right” students to the major, it has not developed or applied a theoretical framework to understand the process that attracts students to study public relations.

This study seeks to understand the factors that play a role in the attraction of undergraduate students to the public relations major. It proposes that the attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) framework from the personnel psychology literature (Schneider, 1987; Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995) can be used to understand and explain undergraduate student attraction to public relations. As applied in this study, the ASA framework predicts that certain students will be attracted to study public relations because they see a fit between their personalities and preconceived ideas about public relations. This framework has been applied primarily to job seekers after graduation (e.g., Schneider, Smith, Taylor & Fleenor, 1998; Schaubroek, Ganster & Jones, 1998). However, it also has been applied to the sorting process that occurs as students seek an academic major prior to entering the job market (Boone, van Olfen, & Roijakkers, 2004).

The purpose of this study is to apply the ASA framework to better understand the process of undergraduate student attraction to public relations through a survey of undergraduate students enrolled in a public relations program that adheres to PRSA’s educational guidelines (CPRE, 1999, 2006). This research investigates the relationship between personality and public relations manager role aspirations by focusing on three individual personality traits that have relevance to the managerial and technical functions of public relations and are likely to play a role in the attraction of students to the field: need for power, need for achievement, and need for affiliation. Based on the ASA framework, a key assumption of this study is that students who aspire to enact the public relations manager role hold a preconception of public relations as a management

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1 The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) reported that in 2010 there were 320,000 jobs for public relations managers and specialists and predicted a job increase of 21% over the next 10 years, a faster than average growth rate.
function and possess personality traits that are typical of managers in general. Additionally, this study extends the understanding of the student-public relations attraction process beyond personality traits and preconceptions by examining the relationship between public relations manager role aspirations and the perceived fit of a career in public relations.

**Literature Review**

*Public Relations Management and Education*

Scholars have defined public relations as a management function (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006; Grunig & Hunt, 1984); however, research has demonstrated that public relations practitioners enact both manager and technician roles in organizations (Broom, 1982; Broom & Dozier, 1986; Dozier & Broom, 1995). Generally, public relations managers participate in organizational decision making. Specifically, public relations managers can serve as the organization’s authority on communication (i.e., expert prescriber), collaborate with upper management in defining and solving public relations problems (i.e., problem-solving process facilitator), and mediate the relationship between organizations and external publics by facilitating the exchange of information between them (i.e., communication facilitator; Broom & Dozier, 1986). In contrast to the management role, public relations technicians produce and disseminate public relations materials based on the direction of managers. These practitioners typically are asked to write and edit public relations materials and conduct media relations. Although technicians do not participate in organizational decision-making, managers rely on technicians to produce and disseminate public relations tactics.

Because the public relations function needs a seat at the management table to implement effective public relations programs (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995; White & Dozier, 1992), scholars have stressed the need for education in public relations management in the academy (Grunig, 1989; Heath, 1991; Kinnick & Cameron, 1994; Turk, 1989; VanLeuven, 1989). Moreover, public relations practitioners have recognized the need to include management concepts and skills in public relations education. For example, PRSA’s Commission on Public Relations Education reported that public relations graduates ought to know management theories and be able to apply management skills (CPRE, 1999, 2006). Across a variety of studies, scholars have reported that both educators and practitioners agree about the skills needed by graduates of public relations programs as well as the content of curriculum that should be taught in these programs (Di Staso, Stacks, & Botan, 2006; Sriramesh & Hornaman, 2006; Stacks et al., 1999). However, Di Staso et al. (2006) reported that both groups saw a need to improve education on the managerial aspects of public relations as the industry shifts its focus from technical execution to strategy and research. This study proposes that students who aspire to enact the public relations manager role have developed a preconception of public relations as a management function.

While educators and practitioners have emphasized the management role of public relations, research suggests that many students entering the major are not aware of the management emphasis of the curriculum. Instead, many students are attracted to public relations because of perceptions formed through exposure to stereotypical depictions of the profession in the news and entertainment media (Bowen, 2003; Bowen, 2009; Fall & Hughes, 2009). Scholars have reported that the most common of these misperceptions relate to the technical aspects of public relations work such as interpersonal relations (Brunner & Fitch-Hauser, 2009; Sorto, 1999), media relations, and event planning (Bowen, 2003). Additionally, research has found that students confuse public relations with marketing and advertising (Bowen, 2009), hold negative
perceptions of the profession (Bowen, 2009; Fall & Hughes, 2009), and are unaware or misinformed about the work performed by public relations professionals, including writing, managing, researching, and relationship building (Bowen, 2009; Fall & Hughes, 2009). The persistence of these misperceptions has caused concern that not enough has been done to address the faulty assumptions that students rely on to evaluate public relations as a potential major and future career path (Bowen, 2003, 2009). Therefore, students who are attracted to public relations based on these misperceptions will not have aspirations to enact the manager role.

Attraction-Selection-Attrition Framework

One way to understand how these misperceptions affect student enrollment in and completion of undergraduate public relations programs is to study the issue with the attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) framework from the personnel psychology literature. According to the ASA framework, individual personalities, attitudes, and values\(^2\) determine the goals, structure, and culture of organizations (Schneider, 1987; Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995). In other words, the “people make the place” (Schneider, 1987, p. 446). Based on this idea, the ASA framework proposes that job seekers are attracted to organizations because they see a fit between their individual personalities and an organization’s attributes. Next, it proposes that organizations typically hire applicants with personalities that reflect organizational goals and culture. Finally, the framework suggests that employees who are not “a fit” for the organization will choose to leave. The outcome predicted by the ASA framework is that personalities within organizations will be homogeneous while personalities across different organizations will be heterogeneous (Schaubroeck, Ganster, & Jones, 1998). Experimental research has supported the relationship between personality type and organizational attraction (e.g. Bretz, Ash, & Dreher, 1989; Cable & Judge, 1994; Saks & Ashforth, 2002; Turban & Keon, 1993), as well as the homogenization of personalities within organizations (Jordan, Herriott, & Chalmers, 1991). Additionally, longitudinal studies of job seekers have demonstrated support for the complete ASA cycle (e.g., Schaubroeck et al., 1998; Schneider et al., 1998).

Boone, van Olffen, & Roijakkers (2004) used the ASA framework to investigate whether a similar process applies to the selection of majors by undergraduates during their university studies. They reasoned that students experience a similar process as they select a major. For example, some students may be attracted to a major that will lead to a career path that suits their personality. While others students will make an initial decision about a major only to find that the career path they have chosen does not fit their personality, causing them to change majors. They chose the personality trait locus of control (i.e., internal and external) as their individual attribute. They reported that students of one personality type were overrepresented in some majors and underrepresented in others, providing evidence for the expected outcome of the ASA framework. Additionally, the theory enabled the researchers to predict which personality types would be over- or under-represented in specific areas of study. The authors found support for the attraction phase of the cycle by examining the relationship between student personality type and the relevance of information used to decide on a major. They reported that a student’s choice of majors is more likely to be related to individual personality when the choice is based on individual “interests and opportunities for self-realization” (p. 75). The authors concluded that the ASA sorting process for some job seekers begins long before they apply for jobs; it begins when they select a major as undergraduate university students.

\(^2\) The individual characteristics that are of interest in ASA research—personality, attitudes, and values—will be referred to in this paper by the term personality. This is a common practice among scholars in this line of research (e.g., Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995).
Since the purpose of this study is to explore the attraction phase of the ASA framework, it adopts the approach of previous studies in examining perceptions of fit as an indicator of attraction (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1996; Saks & Ashforth, 2002). This study proposes that undergraduate students with certain personality types will be attracted to study public relations. Student perceptions of fit between their individual personalities and a career in public relations are likely to be influenced by exposure to the media, interpersonal interactions, and information they have sought or received about the major. Therefore, this study assumes that the goals, structure, and culture of public relations against which an individual evaluates the fit of his or her personality will be influenced by the preconceptions that students hold about the discipline. As noted in the previous section, this study is interested in preconceptions about public relations as a managerial function. Based on this logic, this study proposes that public relations manager role aspirations will mediate the relationship between individual personality traits and perceived career fit.

**Need for Affiliation, Need for Achievement, and Need for Power**

The individual personality types selected for this study were need for affiliation, need for achievement, and need for power. These personality traits were derived from research about the influence of individual needs on motivation and behavior (McClelland, 1985). In theory, these needs are not mutually exclusive, but individuals possess all three needs in different degrees (Taormina, 2009). These personality traits have been used consistently in organizational behavior research on leadership and managerial effectiveness (e.g., McClelland, 1965, 1970; Stahl, 1983). Additionally, research has shown that these traits are present in similar levels for both male and female managers (e.g., Chusmir, 1985; Jenkins, 1987). These traits were selected because of their alignment with the manager and technician roles of public relations and their ability to transcend gender.

Need for affiliation is associated with establishing and maintaining warm and friendly personal relationships (McClelland, 1961). Individuals who have a high need for affiliation are motivated by social interaction. In particular, these individuals crave harmonious relationships that provide a sense of closeness (Veroff & Veroff, 1980). In the organizational context, employees with a high need for achievement usually work in jobs that require social interaction and teamwork (George & Jones, 2012). In terms of this study, it is logical to assume that students who are attracted to public relations because it allows them to work with people or plan social events (Bowen 2003, 2009; i.e., technician role) will have a high need for affiliation. These students are most likely to hold misperceptions of the field that are consistent with portrayals of public relations in the news and entertainment media.

In addition, research has suggested that individuals who have a high need for affiliation may not make good managers. These individuals are reluctant to sacrifice relational harmony to influence subordinates to accomplish work tasks; and, ultimately, they can be more worried about personal relationships than organizational goals (Andersen, 2009; McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982). In addition, research has shown that successful business executives typically have a low need for affiliation (McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982). This research suggests that individuals who are attracted to public relations to fulfill their need for affiliation may not successfully make the transition to the manager role later in their career, or may have difficulty balancing their relational needs and the expectations of being a manager. Those who have a high need for affiliation are likely to hold aspirations to enact the public relations manager role.

Individuals with a high need for achievement have a strong desire to meet standards of
excellence set by themselves or others (Veroff, Reuman, & Feld, 1984). These individuals tend to engage in moderately challenging activities that involve skill, effort, planning, and goal setting (McClelland, 1961). Additionally, they seek out activities that require personal responsibility and feedback about their performance (McClelland, 1961). Their focus is on doing something well or better (McClelland, 1978). As a result, individuals with a high need for achievement are more likely to work in jobs that satisfy their need to excel, such as entrepreneurial business or business management (George & Jones, 2012). For example, McClelland (1965) found that undergraduates who scored high in need for achievement before graduation were most likely to be entrepreneurs ten years later. Additional research has shown that a high need for achievement is an important factor in managerial success and promotion (McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982; Stahl, 1983).

These findings indicate that students with a high need for achievement will be attracted to study public relations because of its goal-setting, strategic planning, and evaluation functions (i.e., problem-solving process facilitator or communication facilitator roles). In other words, these students are likely to hold preconceptions of public relations as a management function. Moreover, students with a high need for achievement may be attracted to the technician role because it could allow them to pursue excellence in specialized skills such as writing, editing, and designing. Therefore, these students may also be susceptible to misperceptions about public relations, but not to the same degree or for the same reasons as students with a high need for affiliation.

Individuals who exhibit a high need for power are motivated to exert emotional and behavioral influence over others and receive recognition for their actions (Winter, 1973). Their focus is on making an impact rather than doing something well (McClelland, 1978). From an organizational perspective, a high need for power motivates and enables managers to influence subordinates to achieve organizational goals (McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982; McClelland & Burnham, 1976; Winter, 1991). Research has demonstrated that the need for power among successful top-level managers eclipses their needs for achievement and affiliation (McClelland & Burnham, 1976). For example, one study found that the performance and effectiveness of sitting U.S. presidents was directly related to a high need for power (House, Spangler, & Woycke, 1991). Top-level public relations managers with a dominant need for power likely include chief communication officers (CCO), vice presidents of communication, department directors, agency principals, and high-demand consultants. Students with a singular need for power will likely be drawn to the management aspects of public relations where they can have an impact on the organization, such as counseling senior management and participating in organizational decision making (i.e., expert prescriber role).

However, research has shown that among middle- and lower-level managers, managerial effectiveness appears to be a function of high need for power and high need for achievement (Stahl, 1983). These public relations managers are likely to be department and account managers. Students with a high need for power and a high need for achievement want to make an impact and excel at their work tasks (i.e., problem-solving process facilitator or communication facilitator roles). In both of these cases, students with a high need for power who are studying public relations are likely to hold preconceptions of the discipline as a management function because they see within it the potential to exercise influence and leadership.

**Hypotheses**

This study proposes that the ASA framework can be used to understand the process of undergraduate student attraction to public relations by investigating whether certain personality
traits are related to aspirations to enact the public relations manager role. Furthermore, this study proposes that the congruence between personality traits and public relations manager role aspirations will influence a student’s perceived fit of public relations as a viable career option. Therefore, the attraction-fit process proposed in this study is that students with specific personality traits will be attracted to the public relations manager role, which will increase the perceived fit of their personality and a career in public relations. The relationships among these constructs are illustrated in Figure 1. The following hypotheses were derived from these propositions:

H1: Need for power is positively related to public relations manager role aspirations.
H2: Need for achievement is positively related to public relations manager role aspirations.
H3: Need for affiliation is negatively related to public relations manager role aspirations.
H4: Public relations manager role aspirations will mediate the relationship between personality traits and perceived career fit.

![Diagram of ASA constructs](image)

*Figure 1.* The proposed conceptual relationships of the ASA constructs adopted in this study.

**Method**

**Sample**

The population of interest for this study was undergraduate students enrolled in the introductory public relations course at a university where the curriculum follows the Commission on Public Relations Education’s (CPRE, 1999, 2006) guidelines. Undergraduates enrolled in the introductory course were selected because previous research has focused on this group in studying misperceptions and public relations attraction (Bowen, 2003, 2009). A large, southeastern university was selected for this study because its undergraduate public relations program is consistently ranked among the top programs in the country and is accredited by ACEJMC and PRSA. Additionally, this university offers multiple sections of the introductory public relations course each semester, providing a large and diverse group of students from which to recruit study participants. A convenience sample of students was used for this study by recruiting participants from two sections of the introductory course in the fall 2012 semester. The total of 307 students was enrolled in both classes.

Of the 262 students who responded to the online questionnaire, 76% were female and 24% were male. The majority of respondents were sophomores (39%) or juniors (39%).
However, the sample also included seniors (18%), freshman (4%), and one graduate student. In terms of majors, 40% of the respondents identified themselves as public relations majors. Nearly the same number of students (38%) identified themselves as majors from a different discipline (e.g., English, marketing, sports management, finance, political science). Students majoring in advertising (15%), telecommunications (5%), and journalism (3%) were also represented in the sample. A majority of the survey respondents were in the 19 to 20 age group (66%), while nearly a quarter were in the 21 to 22 age group (23%). Additionally, 8% of respondents were in the 17 to 18 age group and 3% were in the 23-35 age group. Caucasians comprised 60% of the sample, followed by African Americans (21%), Hispanics (12%), Asian/Asian Americans (3%), and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (1%). Additional demographic information of the 262 survey respondents is presented in Table 1.

This sample was consistent with the characteristics of samples used in previous research on the preconceptions of students in introductory public relations classes (Bowen 2003, 2009). Bowen (2003) reported that the sample for her qualitative survey of students in the introductory public relations course mostly consisted of public relations majors who were juniors. However, she noted that students from other mass communication disciplines, as well as students form management and marketing, were also enrolled in the course and were included in the sample. It is interesting to note that in the sample for this study there were nearly as many public relations majors as there were students majoring in disciplines other than mass communication.

### Table 1

**Demographic profile of survey respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic characteristics</th>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>% (n = 262)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age*</td>
<td>17-18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19-20</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21-22</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23-28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29-35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public Relations</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
African American 54 21%
Asian/Asian American 7 3%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander 2 1%
American Indian/Alaska Native 1 0%
Other 10 4%

* The mean and the median student ages were 20. The standard deviation of student age was 1.71.

**Measurement**

*Personality Traits.* Need for affiliation, need for achievement, and need for power were measured using 15 items from Steers and Braunstein’s (1976) Manifest Needs Questionnaire (MNQ). This instrument was developed to provide a valid and reliable measure of workplace needs. The items in the MNQ measure manifest rather than latent needs by asking questions about behaviors that typically satisfy needs in the workplace. Each of the three needs is measured by five-item scales. Subjects are asked to agree or disagree with statements about how they typically behave at work using a seven-point, Likert-type scale anchored by “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree.” Because students do not have extensive work experience, in this study they were asked to agree or disagree with the MNQ statements that “best describe what you think you will do (or try to do) on the job after you graduate.”

Need for affiliation consisted of the following five items: (1) “When I have a choice, I try to work in a group instead of by myself,” (2) “I pay a good deal of attention to the feelings of others at work,” (3) “I prefer to do my own work and let others do theirs,” (4) “I express my disagreements with others openly,” and (5) “I find myself talking to those around me about non-business related matters” (p. 254). Cronbach’s alpha for the need for affiliation scale was .75. Need for achievement consisted of the following five items: (1) “I do my best work when my job assignments are fairly difficult,” (2) “I try very hard to improve on my past performance at work,” (3) “I take moderate risks and stick my neck out to get ahead at work,” (4) “I try to avoid any added responsibilities on my job,” and (5) “I try to perform better than my co-workers” (p. 254). Cronbach’s alpha for the need for achievement scale was .72. Need for power consisted of the following five items: (1) “I seek an active role in the leadership of a group,” (2) “I avoid trying to influence those around me to see things my way,” (3) “I find myself organizing and directing the activities of others,” (4) “I strive to gain more control over the events around me at work,” and (5) “I strive to be ‘In command’ when I am working in a group” (p. 254). Cronbach’s alpha for the need for power scale was .86.

**Manager Role Aspirations.** This study adopted Lauzen’s (1992) 4-item scale to measure manager role aspirations. This scale was based on Broom’s (1982) public relations manager role index. While previous measurement of public relations roles included items that asked practitioners to reflect on the amount of time they actually performed certain managerial and technical tasks (e.g., Broom, 1982; Broom & Dozier, 1986; Dozier & Broom, 1995), Lauzen’s (1992) scale was developed to measure the “managerial activities they would ideally like to do” (p. 73). The manager role aspiration scale asks respondents to report how often they would like to perform four managerial tasks in their ideal public relations job using a seven-point, Likert-
type scale anchored by “never” and “always.” The four items used to measure manager role aspirations addressed the participants desire to (1) “be the organization’s expert in solving public relations problems,” (2) “be accountable for the success or failure of the public relations program,” (3) “take responsibility for the success or failure of the organization’s public relations program,” and (4) “make communication policy recommendations and/or decisions” (p. 72). Cronbach’s alpha for the manager role aspiration scale was .87.

Perceived Career Fit. Perceived career fit was measured by adopting three items used by Cable and Judge (1996). In their longitudinal study of perceived fit between personal and organizational values, the authors compared a one-item measure of perceived fit from their first measurement to two related items used in their third measurement. They reported a Cronbach’s alpha of .87 for the three items. The three items used to measure perceived career fit in this study were: (1) “To what degree do you feel your personality is a ‘match’ or fit for a career in public relations?” (2) “Do you think the values and ‘personality’ of the public relations industry reflect your own values and personality?” and (3) “My personality matches those of current public relations practitioners.” Participants were asked to respond to the first question using a seven-point, Likert-type scale anchored by “not at all” and “completely.” They were asked to respond to the second and third questions using a seven-point, Likert-type scale anchored by “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree.”

Measurement reliability. Prior to testing the hypotheses, the reliability of the measurement scales was examined based on the data collected for this study. The first scale examined was the MNQ, which was used to measure student personality traits; however, the MNQ did not fare well in this study. Cronbach’s alpha was .734 for need for power, .598 for need for achievement, and .146 for need for affiliation. The need for power scale was the only one to exceed Nunnally’s (1978) accepted level of reliability of .70. However the alpha achieved in this study was considerably lower than the alpha reported in the original MNQ study (α = .86). As a result of their low reliabilities, the need for achievement and need for affiliation measures were dropped from the study. Subsequent analysis of the public relations manager role aspirations scale resulted in a Cronbach’s alpha of .855, while analysis of the perceived career fit scale produced a Cronbach’s alpha of .837. Both of these scales exceeded Nunnally’s accepted level of reliability.

In addition, the dimensionality of the three measurement scales (i.e., need for power, public relations manager role aspirations, and perceived career fit) was evaluated by exploratory factor analysis (EFA). All three scales were analyzed using the principal axis factoring extraction method and an Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization rotation method. The results of the EFA revealed that all of the items for each measurement scale loaded on a single factor. Factor scores obtained from the EFA of all three scales were used for the hypothesis testing in this study.

Questionnaire Design
An online questionnaire was developed for this study using Qualtrics (https://www.qualtrics.com/). The questionnaire consisted of 38 questions and required approximately seven minutes to complete. It was organized into four blocks. One block for each of the three variables identified in the literature review (i.e., personality traits, manager role aspirations, and career fit) and one block for demographic questions. Questions within each of the variable blocks were randomized. The online questionnaire was pretested with 16 undergraduate public relations students. Two changes resulted from the pretest: (1) The presentation order of the variable blocks was randomized to minimize an order effect. (2) All of
the questions in the survey were classified as forced-response to minimize the amount of missing data.

In October 2012, the author secured permission from instructors of both sections of the introductory public relations course to distribute a link to the revised questionnaire to the students in their classes. The instructors agreed to provide extra credit to students who completed the survey. A link to the revised questionnaire was emailed to the class instructors with a message from the author in the body of the email thanking students for their participation and providing instructions about how to access and complete the online questionnaire. Course instructors sent an initial email containing the link to the survey and the message from the author. After four to five days, the instructors sent a reminder email to students encouraging them to participate in the study. Of the 307 students enrolled in the two sections of the introductory public relations course, 262 completed the online survey for a response rate of 85%.

Results

Preliminary Data Analysis

Before testing the hypotheses of this study, a preliminary data analysis was conducted using SPSS 20.0. Variables were computed for each scale used in the study by calculating an average score for each scale. Table 3 reports the means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlations among the variables used in this study. The means of the variables ranged from 5.08 to 5.21, and the corresponding standard deviations were between 0.93 and 1.10. The correlation coefficients ranged from .343 to .419.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations among the variables nPwr, PR Manager Role Aspirations, and Perceived Career Fit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Pearson Correlations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 = Need for power</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 = PR manager role aspirations</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>.33**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 = Perceived career fit</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>.36**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; ** p < .01 (two-tailed)

Hypothesis Testing

H1 proposed that need for power would be positively related to public relations manager role aspirations. Correlation and multiple regression were used to test the relationship between these two variables. As shown in Table 3, need for power and public relations manager role aspirations were positively correlated. However, these results consider all of the students enrolled in the introductory public relations course regardless of major. Since the demographic profile of the sample revealed that public relations majors only constituted 40% of the sample, a stepwise regression was used to examine the effects of need for power and major on public
relations manager role aspirations. To conduct this analysis a binary dummy variable was created that categorized students as either public relations majors (1) or non-public relations majors (0). The results of the stepwise regression are presented in Table 4. This analysis found that both need for power ($\beta = .32, p < .001$) and public relations major ($\beta = .13, p = .025$) were positively related to public relations manager role aspirations. These results indicate that students who have a high need for power will also have high aspirations to enact the public relations manager role. They also suggest that public relations majors are more likely to have higher public relations manager role aspirations than students from other disciplines. While neither relationship was very strong, need for power was a better predictor of public relations manager role aspirations than public relations major. Results from the ANOVA test for the fit of the regression model demonstrate that the complete model was significant ($R^2 = .127, F(1, 260) = 18.85, p < .001$) and explained significantly more variance than the model that only included the need for power variable ($R^2_{change} = .017, F(1, 259) = 5.06, p = .025$). However, both independent variables (i.e., need for power and student major) only accounted for 12.0% of the variance in public relations manager role aspirations. Based on the results of these tests, H1 was supported.

Table 4
Results of Stepwise Regression Analysis for Public Relations Manager Role Aspirations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>model 2</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$t$</td>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$t$</td>
<td>$p$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for power</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR major</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.110</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.127</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>32.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$Df$</td>
<td>1, 260</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2, 259</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$P$</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H2 and H3 could not be tested because the scales used to measure these variables did not meet minimum standards of reliability. Some of the unexplained variance in public relations manager role aspirations likely would have been explained by the variables in these untested hypotheses.

H4 proposed that public relations manager role aspirations would mediate the relationship between personality traits and perceived career fit of public relations. Multiple regression was used to test this hypothesis. The independent variables used in this were need for power, public relations manager role aspirations, and the interaction between need for power and manager role aspirations. The interaction variable was used to evaluate the proposed mediation effect of manager role aspirations on the dependent variable (i.e., perceived career fit), both of these independent variables were included in the analysis. As noted earlier, a dummy variable was created and used as an independent variable to examine the effects of public relations major on perceived career fit.

The results of the stepwise regression are presented in Table 5. The analysis found that
need for power (β = .28, t = 5.06, p < .001), manager role aspirations (β = .25, t = 4.38, p < .001), and public relations major (β = .23, t = 4.32, p < .001), had a significant positive relationship with perceived career fit. However, the mediating effect of public relations manager role aspirations was not significant. Therefore, this regression model predicts that students with a high need for power are expected to report a high perceived career fit, while controlling for the other variables in the model. Likewise, the model predicts that students with high manager role aspirations are also expected to report a high perceived career fit. Note that the beta weight for need for power was slightly larger than the beta weight for public relations manager role aspirations indicating that a change in need for power is expected have a slightly greater impact on perceived career fit than a change in public relations manager role aspirations. Additionally, the model predicts that public relations majors are expected to have a higher perceived fit than non-public relations majors.

Table 5
Results of Stepwise Regression Analysis for Perceived Career Fit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>model 2</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>model 3</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>β</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for power</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>6.89</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager role aspirations</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR major</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Adjusted R²          | 0.151 | 0.219 | 0.269 |
| R²                   | 0.154 | 0.225 | 0.277 |
| F                    | 47.5  | 37.64 | 33.02 |
| df                   | 1, 260 | 2, 259 | 3, 258 |
| p                    | < .001 | < .001 | < .001 |

The complete regression model including the three independent variables was a good fit for the data, explaining 26.9% (adjusted R²) of the variance in perceived career fit (R² = .277, F (3, 258) = 33.02, p < .001). The full model explained more of the variance in perceived career fit than the model containing only need for power as a predictor variable (R² = .154, F (1, 260) = 47.5, p < .001) and the model that contained need for power and manager role aspirations (R² = .225, F (2, 259) = 37.64, p < .001). In the complete model, the need for power variable explained 15.1% of the variance, while the public relations manager role aspirations variable explained 7.1% (R² change = .071, F change (1, 259) = 23.66, p < .001), and public relations major added an additional 5.2% of explained variance (R² change = .052, F change (1, 258) = 18.63, p < .001). Multicollinearity among the independent variables was not an issue since the variance inflation
factor (VIF) was less than 10 (VIF < 1.146). Therefore, based on the results of the stepwise regression, H4 was not supported.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to apply the ASA framework to better understand the process of undergraduate student attraction to public relations. In an effort to complement the research on student preconceptions, this study investigated the relationship between personality traits and public relations manager role aspirations. The study of this relationship was crucial to understanding the role of student preconceptions about public relations on the attraction process. Additionally, this study sought to extend the understanding of the student-public relations attraction process beyond personality traits and preconceptions by examining the relationship between public relations manager role aspirations and the perceived fit of a career in public relations.

**Scale Issues**

This study adopted Steers and Braunstein’s (1976) Manifest Needs Questionnaire (MNQ) to measure need for achievement, need for affiliation, and need for power. While the MNQ has been used successfully in numerous studies in the organizational behavior literature (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1994; Miller & Dröge, 1986), the need for affiliation scale and the need for achievement scale were found to be unreliable in this study. These scales were designed to measure manifest needs by asking questions about behaviors that typically satisfy those needs in the workplace. Because students typically do not have the same level of work experience as those who have graduated and entered the workforce, students were asked to respond to the MNQ statements by relating them to “what you think you will do (or try to do) on the job after you graduate.” Therefore, the unreliability of the scales is most likely related to the students’ unfamiliarity with the work context and their inability to project their current needs onto a workplace situation. Future research can address this issue by selecting measures for need for achievement, need for affiliation, and need for power that are more general and not bound to a participant’s familiarity with a particular context.

It is interesting to note that the need for power scale was reliable enough to be used in the study. The relative success of the need for power scale can be explained by the wording used in the five items of this scale. While the need for achievement and need for affiliation scales focused on business and work-related behaviors, the need for power items focused on group-related behaviors. It is likely that, because students frequently work in groups to complete class assignments, these questions provided a familiar enough context that the scale could reliably measure students’ need for power.

**Personality and Attraction to the Manager Role**

This study found that the personality trait need for power was positively related to public relations manager role aspirations. Although the correlation was not strong, this finding is in line with previous scholarship in the organizational behavior literature that managers typically exhibit a high need for power (e.g., McClelland, 1978; McClelland & Burnham, 1976). This finding provides empirical support for the proposition that students with a need for power will likely be drawn to the management role of public relations where they can have an impact on the organization. Additional, longitudinal research is needed to discover whether students who exhibit a high need for power and aspirations to enact the manager role translate into a career as
a public relations manager sometime after graduation.

In spite of the statistically significant relationship, need for power only explained 11% of the variance in public relations manager role aspirations. Although the other two personality trait variables (i.e., need for achievement and need for affiliation) were not reliable enough to include in the analysis of this study, it is reasonable to assume that reliable measures of the two variables would have accounted for some of the unexplained variance in public relations manager role aspirations. Additional unexplained variance may also be the result of unstudied personality traits that are related to manager role aspirations, such as locus of control, self-monitoring, or personality type (i.e., Type A and Type B).

Determinants of Perceived Career Fit

While this study did not find support for a mediating effect of public relations manager role aspirations. The results demonstrate that manager role aspirations has a significant positive relationship with perceived career fit. In this study, manager role aspirations was used to gauge whether student preconceptions of public relations were in line with a management-centered curriculum. The findings indicate that manager role aspirations can predict perceived career fit; however, manager role aspirations only explains 7.1% of the variance. This means that public relations manager role aspirations only plays a minor role in how students evaluate the fit of public relations as a potential career option, even at a university that has been recognized for its efforts to incorporate PRSA’s management-focused education guidelines (CPRA, 1999, 2006) into its curriculum. This means that students are relying on other preconceptions about public relations to make their evaluation of fit between their personality traits and a career in public relations.

These findings are consistent with previous research about student preconceptions about public relations (Bowen, 2003; Bowen, 2009; Brunner & Fitch-Hauser, 2009; Fall & Hughes, 2009; Sorto, 1999). It is likely that some of these unmeasured preconceptions may be related to the technician role of public relations. Students may have had experiences with internships, student-run agencies, and public relations practitioners that have caused them to form preconceptions about public relations as a primarily a technical function that is responsible to writing, editing, producing, and disseminating tactics (Broom & Dozier, 1986; Dozier & Broom, 1995). In this case, students may be aware of the manager role but have found the technician role more appealing. However, some of the unexplained variance may be explained by misperceptions about public relations that students have learned from the media (Bowen, 2003; Bowen, 2009; Brunner & Fitch-Hauser, 2009; Fall & Hughes, 2009).

The results of this study also indicate that there is a direct positive relationship between need for power and perceived career fit. Based on this empirical evidence for a direct relationship between need for power and perceived career fit, it is logical to assume that the other personality traits (i.e., need for achievement and need for affiliation) would also have a direct relationship. The direct influence of these additional personality trait variables could be a source of the unexplained variance in perceived career fit. In fact, personality trait variables seem to be better at explaining the variance in perceived career fit than the manager role aspirations variable. The results of this study indicated that need for power explained 15.1% of the variance in perceived career fit while manager role aspirations explained only 7.1%. A plausible explanation for this finding that is consistent with previous research is that students do not know enough about the theory and practice of public relations to evaluate career fit based on future role enactment. Support for this conclusion can also be drawn from students’ inability to project their
current motivational needs onto a workplace situation using the MNQ. Bowen (2009) found that students exhibited a lack of knowledge about public relations and tended to confuse it with marketing and advertising. She reported a telling illustration about students’ lack of knowledge about the business-oriented nature of public relations:

I was clueless about P.R. I remember going in our first day, our assignment was write ‘what you think P.R. is’ and ask two other people what they think and then like compare and contrast. I had a hard time figuring out what I was going to say because I just had no idea. (p.406)

Because many students’ preconceptions about public relations are based on the technical aspects of the profession, perhaps the inclusion of a measure of public relations technician role aspirations into the model also would account for some of the unexplained variance in perceived career fit. Based on these finding a revised conceptualization of the relationships among personality traits, public relations role aspirations, and perceived career fit are presented in Figure 2.

![Figure 2](image)

*Figure 2.* The revised conceptual relationships of the ASA constructs based on study findings.

**Public Relations Majors**

An interesting finding of this study was that public relations majors were more likely than non-public relations majors to have public relations manager role aspirations and have a higher perceived career fit. On the surface, this result seems like a foregone conclusion. Of course, public relations majors should know more about the career as they begin their studies than non-public relations majors. Furthermore, if students did not think their career choice would fit their personality and aspirations then they would have chosen another major. The interesting aspect of this finding is that the influence of this variable, and the amount of variance it explains, was so small. While this study found a significant difference between public relations majors and non-public relations majors, the size of the relationship indicates some public relations majors probably do not have manager role aspirations and do not see themselves as a fit for this career path. On the other hand, this may be an indication that some non-public relations majors do have communication-related manager role aspirations and see public relations as a viable career path for them. In addition, other variables (i.e., need of power and manager role aspirations) had more predictive power than the public relations major variable. Apparently, there is still work to be done in helping new public relations majors understand and get excited about the management focus of the industry and potential to capture some students from other disciplines through a similar effort.

**Implications**

The personality trait need for power appears to be one factor among many that attracts
students to study public relations because it reinforces aspirations to enact the public relations manager role. However, manager role aspirations appear to be only a minor factor influencing the perceived fit of public relations as a career choice. As has been noted in previous research, other factors influencing perceived fit most likely derive from student perceptions about the technical aspects of public relations, as well as misperceptions of the field from its stereotypical portrayal in the media. This finding supports previous suggestions from scholars that more should be done to increase understanding about the discipline among students to attract those who would be interested in public relations management (Bowen 2003, 2009). It is hoped that this study can facilitate a response to Bowen’s (2009) call for “public relations educators and professionals, especially industry associations, to use their expertise to conduct public relations on behalf of the function of public relations” (p. 409).

While these global issues for the field are complicated, and it will take time to develop an industry-wide solution to the problem, educators, especially those who teach introductory public relations courses, can begin to improve student understanding of the management role of public relations in their individual classes. Instructors can address student misperceptions by highlighting public relations theories related to management and discussing the skills necessary to manage communication in the introductory public relations class. It may take time for the field to address this issue, but individual teachers can influence these preconceptions and misperceptions one student at a time. Ultimately, this effort is important because of the effect it will have on helping students meet their full potential and the impact the attraction process will have on the organizations that hire graduates from university public relations programs.

Limitations and Future Research

This study had a few limitations that readers should keep in mind as they interpret and apply its findings. First, this study used a convenience sample of undergraduate students in two sections of the introductory public relations course at one large university. Although the sample size is large, the use of a non-random sample this population limits the generalizability of this study. Future research can address this limitation by conducting a systematic random sample of universities that offer introductory public relations courses and then taking a random sample of students enrolled in those courses. Second, the scales used to measure the personality traits need for achievement, need for affiliation, and need for power did not perform as well as the author hoped they would. In fact, two of the scales were dropped from the study. This limited the study from fully exploring the effects of needs motivation on student attraction to public relations. Future studies can address this limitation by selecting more robust measures of these personality traits that are independent of the work context.

Conclusion

While the results of this study were incomplete, its findings can help public relations educators better understand the process of attraction that draws different types of students to study of public relations. Personality traits appear to play an influential role in the attraction process. Public relations manager aspirations only play a minor role. These findings can help teachers of introduction to public relations courses adapt and tailor the content of these courses to address student preconceptions and misperceptions about public relations. Additionally, its findings provide an empirical foundation for future research in investigating the ASA model in public relations education and professional practice.
References


Customer Relations in Social Media: Social Media Usage Motives, Expected Responses From Organizations, and Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

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Abstract
More and more organizations are attempting to use social media as a public relations tool to establish and maintain good customer relations. This study explores customers’ motives for using social media, the responses they expect from organizations, and predictors of positive electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Using a web questionnaire, this study surveyed 17,254 consumers in the United States and uncovered several significant findings. First, the study results suggest that protecting oneself and others from bad companies or products are the top two reasons for consumers to share information in social media environments. Second, the results suggest that consumers expect companies to change policies if they have negative experiences with the company and make negative comments. Empty apologies are the least effective response from companies. Others expect organizations to offer discounts on future products or services or give a refund in these situations. Third, the results of correlation and multiple regression analyses suggest that confidence, integrity, pride, and passion are strong predictors for customers’ positive eWOM. The more engaged a customer is with a brand, the more likely he or she will be to write positive comments on social media sites about the company, brand, product, or service. The results of this study extend the knowledge about customer relations in social media. (This study reflects completed research.)

Introduction
The number of social media users increases every year. According to Madden and Zickuhr (2011), about two-thirds (65%) of adult Internet users said they use a social networking site (SNS) such as Myspace, Facebook, or LinkedIn. “The pace with which new users have flocked to social networking sites has been staggering; when we first asked about social networking sites in February of 2005, just 8% of Internet users — or 5% of all adults — said they used them” (Madden & Zickuhr, 2011, p. 2).

Because of the rising popularity of social media, more and more organizations are using it as a tool to establish and maintain good customer relations. Thus, organizations would like their customers to write positive, not negative, comments and create positive electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. To develop effective customer relationship management strategies in social media, organizations must understand customers’ motives for using social media. They must also know how to prevent negative eWOM by effectively handling social media criticism and diffusing customers’ anger. However, according to a survey conducted by Useful Social Media (2012), one out of five (20%) companies are completely unprepared for social media criticism or negative comments. Only 15% are fully engaged with the problem. To help corporate executives better prepare for social media criticism and develop effective social media initiatives, this study explores customers’ social media usage motives, expected crisis responses from organizations, and predictors of positive eWOM. Previous studies that addressed these issues are summarized in the following sections.

Consumers’ Social Media Usage Motives

To effectively communicate with customers in a social media environment, organizations must know why and how customers use social media. Kalmus, Realo, and Siibak (2011) conducted a study to investigate how personality traits and socio-demographic factors affect motives for Internet use. They surveyed 1,507 respondents aged 15 to 74 in Estonia in 2008. Factor analysis results for 31 online activity items revealed two underlying motives for Internet use: social media and entertainment (SME) and work and information (WI). SME factors include activities representing “personal need for entertainment, fun, self-expression, and maintaining social relations” (p. 393). Examples of SME activities are searching for and managing information regarding friends and acquaintances on an SNS, posting and updating information about themselves on an SNS, communicating with friends and acquaintances, searching for interesting and exciting information, and exploring online cultural activities. WI activities are related to institutional roles and related needs. Examples of WI activities are searching for information on public institutions, communicating with officials, managing public business online, using e-services, online databases, and online banking, shopping online, and gathering relevant information for making purchases. Kalmus et al. argued that these broad motives represent two aspects of an information environment: “a personal/relational aspect and an institutional aspect” (p. 393).

Kalmus et al. also explored how socio-demographic factors predict Internet use motives. The results suggested that SME was negatively correlated with education but positively correlated with perceived income. WI was positively correlated with education and perceived income. Thus, the results implied that young people are more likely to use the Internet for SME. Kalmus et al.’s (2011) research identified people’s motives for using the Internet and provided some basic understanding about why people do so. It is interesting to know that SME and WI describe the two major types of Internet usage motives in Estonia. However, the study
did not specifically focus on people’s motives for using social media. Additionally, the study only surveyed respondents in Estonia, not Internet users in the United States.

Another study provided more specific information about consumers’ motives for using social media and the relationship between customer engagement and social media use (James & Asplund, 2011). According to James and Asplund, people may use social media to influence, entertain, inform, learn, warn, create, or share their opinions. James and Asplund provided a typology to analyze consumers’ motives for using social media. However, their study did not address the relative importance of each social media usage motive. To extend James and Asplund’s research, the present study aims to provide more details about consumers’ motives for using social media.

**Electronic Word of Mouth**

The emergence of Internet-based new media facilitated the development of eWOM (Chu & Kim, 2011). Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, and Gremler (2004) defined eWOM as “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet” (p. 39). Indeed, because of the popularity of social media, many consumers can freely express their opinions about companies, brands, products, and services in social media. For example, consumers can choose to “Like” a product or company on Facebook. Consumers can also post positive or negative comments on various social media sites, such as ratemyprofessors.com, apartmentratings.com, or corporate-sponsored sites. Corporate executives would like their loyal customers to write positive comments and advocate for their brands, and they also want to reduce negative comments.

**Corporate Responses to Consumers’ Comments and Image Repair Strategies**

Organizations must effectively handle customers’ negative eWOM in social media environments. According to Evans and McKee (2010), listening, analyzing, and responding to customers’ comments on social media is an ongoing process. “Actually addressing process issues that are driving negative conversations or implementing suggested innovations to further strengthen brand loyalty or enhance competitive advantage create the real payoff following the adoption of social technology in business” (p. 214). Otherwise, negative WOM may evolve from a problem to a crisis. According to Fearn-Banks (2007), “a crisis is a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting the organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name” (p. 8). Because of the nature of connectivity on SNS, consumers’ network friends may respond to each other’s comments. If a lot of consumers make negative comments about a company’s products or services, this could affect the corporation’s image and sales volume, leading to a corporate crisis. Therefore, it is important for corporations to address consumers’ negative comments carefully, thus reducing negative comments.

Because customers’ negative comments on an SNS can directly affect a company’s image and may evolve into a corporate crisis, the Image Repair Theory (Benoit, 1995; Benoit & Drew, 1997; Benoit & Pang, 2008) provides a theoretical foundation for this study. If an organization’s image has been damaged in social media, the executives and public relations practitioners have to restore it by incorporating effective strategies. Benoit and Drew (1997) categorized 14 types of image restoration tactics into five major categories: (1) denial, (2) evasion of responsibility for event, (3) reducing offensiveness of event, (4) corrective action, and (5) mortification. First,
denial means that the accused can simply deny the act occurred or shift the blame. Second, evasion of responsibility means that the accused can make excuses, for example claiming that the intentions of the wrong act were good, to reduce of responsibility and gain forgiveness from the other party. In addition to good intention, provocation, defeasibility, and accident are three other tactics that are used to evade responsibility.

Third, reducing offensiveness “is meant to deal with the offensiveness of the act in question rather than with responsibility of that act” (Benoit & Pang, 2008, p. 250). There are six strategies to reduce offensiveness: bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attack accuser, and compensation. Benoit and Pang provided explanations about each strategy. The bolstering strategy attempts to strengthen the audience’s positive feelings toward the accused to neutralize the negative feelings. The minimization strategy refers to lessening the perceived seriousness of the event. The basic idea of the differentiation strategy is to distinguish the offensive event from similar, but more offensive actions — so in comparison, the offensive event does not look so bad. The transcendence strategy means putting the offensive act in a more favorable context. The attack-accuser strategy refers to criticizing the accuser to undermine his or her credibility and minimize the effectiveness of the attack. The compensation strategy is often used in the consumer context. For example, the retailer can offer positive reinforcement, such as cash, goods, services, or discounts on other products or future purchases, to offset the negative feelings toward a wrongful act.

Fourth, the corrective action strategy, in which the company promises to correct the problem, is one of the most effective image repair strategies because “people want problems to be resolved and prevented” (Benoit & Pang, p. 251). Finally, the mortification strategy means that the company admits wrongdoing and asks for forgiveness.

Another frequently used crisis management theory is Coombs’ (2008) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). The SCCT seeks to provide guidelines and alternatives that crisis managers can adapt to their own unique situations. “SCCT works from a list of ten crisis response strategies that are grounded into three postures. A posture represents a set of strategies that share similar communicative goals and vary in terms of their focus on protecting the crisis victims (victim-orientation) and taking responsibility for the crisis” (Coombs, p. 266). The three postures are (1) deny posture (low concern for victim and responsibility acceptance), (2) diminish posture, and (3) deal posture (high concern for victim and responsibility acceptance).

Coombs (2008) provided detailed explanations for each posture and each crisis response strategy. First, the deny posture represents three strategies that claim that there is no crisis or that the organization is not responsible for the crisis. The three strategies are attack the accuser, denial, and scapegoat. In the attack-the-accuser strategy, the crisis manager confronts the accuser. The denial strategy means that the crisis manager simply claims no crisis exists. In the scapegoat strategy, the crisis manager blames someone outside the organization for the crisis. Second, the diminish posture uses two strategies — excuse and justification — to alter stakeholder attributions by reframing how stakeholders should interpret the crisis. The excuse strategy means that the crisis manager minimizes organizational responsibility by denying the intention to harm and/or claiming inability to control the events. In the justification strategy, the crisis manager minimizes the perceived damage. Third, the deal posture represents five strategies that seek to improve the organization’s reputation by addressing victim concerns. The ingratiation strategy means the crisis manager praises stakeholders and/or reminds them of past good works. The concern strategy means that the crisis manager expresses concern for the victims. In the compensation strategy, the crisis manager offers money or gifts to victims. The
regret strategy means that the crisis manager expresses the organization’s regret about the crisis. In the apology strategy, the crisis manager indicates organizational responsibility for the crisis and asks for forgiveness from stakeholders.

Coombs and Holladay (2008) compared the effectiveness of different crisis response strategies — apology, compensation, sympathy, and information only — by surveying 167 undergraduate students with a case-study approach. The students read a news story about a crisis caused by an oil company and evaluated the oil company’s post-crisis reputation based on different crisis responses they received. The results of Coombs and Holladay’s study suggested that the students reacted similarly to sympathy, compensation, and apology response strategies. Thus, they argued that people react similarly to any accommodative strategy and, therefore, apology is not the best strategy.

Benoit’s (1995) Image Repair Theory and Coombs’ (2008) SCCT offer options companies can use when their corporate image is damaged. Because negative comments and customer criticism in the social media environment could inflict such damage if not handled properly, an increase in negative comments can evolve into a corporate crisis. Organizations must use appropriate image repair strategies to restore their corporate reputations. Thus, Benoit’s (1995) Image Repair Theory and Coomb’s (2008) SCCT provide a theoretical foundation for this study.

Customer Engagement and Positive Word of Mouth

In addition to reducing customers’ negative comments, corporations also want to encourage their loyal customers to post positive comments on social media sites. Previous research (e.g., Godes & Mayzlin, 2004; Gremler, Gwinner, & Brown, 2001) suggested that customers’ positive word of mouth (WOM) communication is considered strongly beneficial for organizations because of its influence on their revenue and growth. According to Hong and Yang (2011), the emergence of new media, such as blogs and social media, has expanded the space of WOM communication. Thus, it is critical for public relations practitioners to build an environment that encourages positive WOM communication.

Since creating and maintaining positive eWOM is many companies’ goal, it is important to know the predictors of positive eWOM. Hong and Yang’s research results (2009) suggested that corporate reputation and customers’ relational satisfaction predict customers’ positive WOM intentions. Most importantly, “customer-company identification mediates the influence of organizational reputation on positive WOM intentions” (Hong & Yang, p. 381). Hong and Yang defined customer-company identification as “the customer’s perception of oneness with or connection to an organization where the customer defines himself or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization” (p. 386). Hong and Yang suggested companies obtain a favorable reputation, cultivate a satisfactory relationship with customers, and foster customer-company identification.

James and Asplund (2011) discussed the relationship between customer engagement and customer advocacy for the company/brand. According to James and Asplund, emotionally engaged customers are more likely to be socially engaged customers who will work for your company or brand within their social network. They suggested that the first step in a social media initiative is determining who your most emotionally engaged customers are. This implies that customer engagement may predict positive WOM. What are the components of customer engagement? According to McEwen (2005), there are four levels of customers’ emotional engagement with brands: (1) confidence, (2) integrity, (3) pride, and (4) passion. First,
confidence refers to customers’ trust and faith in a brand. Second, integrity refers to customers’ perceptions about being treated fairly and being able to count on the company to reach a fair and satisfactory resolution if problems arise. Third, pride means customers feel that they are valued, appreciated, and personally respected by the brand and its representatives. Finally, passion implies that customers feel the specific brand is perfect for them and can’t imagine a world without this brand.

After reviewing the literature, this study poses three research questions:
RQ1: What are customers’ social media usage motives?
RQ2: What are customers’ expected responses from organizations after making negative comments in social media?
RQ3: What are the predictors for positive electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in social media?

Methods
Survey Instrument and Respondents
A quantitative questionnaire survey was conducted in the United States in September and October 2010. The results are based on a Gallup panel study consisting of web surveys completed by 17,254 adults, aged 18 and older (Gallup, 2007). Respondents were not compensated for participation and were assumed to be competent Internet users based on their preference and ability to complete the survey via the web. The data were weighted to demographically represent the U.S. adult population.

The questionnaire instrument used in this study included questions measuring respondents’ emotional attachment with a brand and communication behaviors regarding companies and brands in social media. The questionnaire also captured demographic data about respondents. Their ages ranged from 18 to 93, with an average age of 49.7. Of the respondents, 8,323 (48.2%) were male and 8,931 (51.8%) were female.

Respondents reported diverse educational levels and employment status: 5,477 (31.7%) were high school graduates, 4,219 (24.5%) had some college, 1,094 (6.3%) had trade/technical/vocational training, 2,617 (15.2%) were college graduates, 2,907 (16.8%) had done postgraduate work, and 880 (5.2%) had less than a high school diploma. About one-half 8,869 (51.4%) of respondents were employed full time, 1,579 (9.1%) were employed part-time but were not full-time students, 804 (4.7%) were full-time students, 3,726 (21.6%) were retired, 1,322 (7.7%) were homemakers, and 951 (5.5%) were not employed.

Scale Development
To measure respondents’ level of brand engagement, four scales — confidence, integrity, pride, and passion — were created. The confidence scale items are: always delivers on promise and name I can always trust. The integrity scale items are: fair resolution of any problems and always treats me fairly. The pride scale items are: treats me with respect and feel proud to be a customer. The passion scale items are: can’t imagine a world without and perfect company for people like me. All items are measured by 5-point Likert-type scales (1= strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Copyright © 1994-2000 Gallup, Inc. All rights reserved.

Reliability analysis (based on Cronbach’s coefficient alpha) was conducted. Reliability scores for confidence, integrity, pride, and passion were .94, .93, .87, .77, respectively.

Results and Discussions
RQ1: Social Media Usage Motives
To discern social media usage motives, the survey asked a multiple-choice question: “Looking back, what would you say was your primary purpose in trying to connect people together about a company/brand?” By looking closely at the items included in the present study, the researcher found that the most popular purposes for respondents to talk or write about their thoughts about a company/brand are to inform others (36.6%), share their views (27.6%), and learn something new (21.8%). A small number of respondents said they use social media to influence others (3.2%), warn others (2.8%), connect with others (1.4%), entertain others (.9%), or create something new (.2%).

Because sharing information is one of the most important reasons for consumers to talk or write about companies, brands, products, and services, a follow-up question was asked to discover the reasons why consumers share information or pay attention to other people’s opinions. The survey instructed respondents to rank the importance of different reasons for sharing information about companies, brands, products, and services with others. These reasons were measured by 5-point Likert-type scales (1 = not at all important; 5 = extremely important). The means for these items based on 5-point Likert-type scales are summarized in Table 1.<Inset Table 1 here>

The top two reasons for consumers to share information online are: (1) protecting themselves from bad products or companies and (2) protecting others from bad products or companies. The results of this analysis suggest that consumers attempt to protect themselves and others from bad companies or products through information sharing. This supports James and Asplund’s (2011) argument that people use social media to inform, warn, and share their opinion. When customers send out strong messages in social media to warn and protect others, this may negatively affect a company’s image and sales volume. Thus, companies with social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and blogs) should closely monitor their customers’ comments. If there are negative comments, companies should effectively handle these comments.

RQ2: Customers’ Expected Corporate Responses

Previous research suggested that customers can create negative eWOM when their experiences with companies, products, brands, or services are below expectations (Samson, 2006). Samson also found that negative WOM has stronger effects on customer loyalty and customer acquisitions than positive WOM. For example, “a negative experience decreases loyalty to a greater degree than a positive experience increases loyalty” (Samson, p. 649). Because of the significant effect of negative WOM, organizations have to properly handle negative customer comments and keep negative WOM to a minimum.

Respondents were asked: “Earlier you told us that you felt fairly negative toward a company/brand. If a representative of the company were to contact you now, in which of the following ways could the company/brand make you feel more positive toward them?” The response options were: (1) give a discount on future products or services, (2) contact you directly and apologize, (3) change its policies, (4) give you a refund, or (5) other. Respondents were asked to choose yes or no for each corporate response. The results of this study suggest that customers’ expected responses from a representative are having the organization change its policies (72.2% yes), offering discounts on a future product or services (38.5% yes), giving a refund (30% yes), and apologizing (26.3% yes). About half (54.6% yes) thought some other way would work, too. This finding is important because it implies that an empty apology is the least desired response, with only one-quarter of respondents saying an apology is their expected
response from companies. Instead, many more respondents expect companies to initiate systematic changes by changing corporate policies or compensating them (e.g., offering discounts on future products or services).

This finding is somewhat different from Coombs and Holladay’s (2008) research result. Coombs and Holladay found that college students responded similarly to sympathy, compensation, and apology strategies. However, the results of this study suggest that compensation is more effective than apology in social media environments. The differences may be caused by the differences in the research context. Coombs and Holladay’s study was conducted in a college classroom setting. The present study is a web survey of consumers aged 18 to 93 with different educational levels and employment status. The demographics of our respondents are more diverse. In addition, this study also focuses on consumers’ expected response from organizations after making negative comments in social media, and it was conducted in the social media/web environment.

RQ3: Predictors for Positive eWOM

Since creating and maintaining positive eWOM is many companies’ goal, it is important to know the predictors of positive eWOM. Correlation and multiple regression analyses were conducted to investigate the relationships between brand attachment and positive eWOM. Four levels of brand attachment, (1) confidence, (2) integrity, (3) pride, and (4) passion, served as the predictor variables for analysis. Respondents were asked, “How positive or negative was what you said or wrote about a company/brand when you most recently discussed it with others?” This question was measured by a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = extremely negative; 5 = extremely positive). The higher score of this question indicates a more positive eWOM. This question serves as the dependent variable of the multiple regression analysis.

The results of Pearson correlation analysis suggest that confidence (r = .72, p < .001), integrity (r = .70, p < .001), pride (r = .70, p < .001), and passion (r = .76, p < .001) are positively correlated with positive eWOM. The results of multiple regression analysis show that the four types of brand engagement are significant predictors for customers’ positive eWOM, F(4,4214) = 1471.25, p < .0001. The multiple correlation coefficient (R) is .76, R² = .58, Adjusted R² = .58, indicating that 58% of the variance in positive eWOM is accounted for by the linear combination of the four types of brand engagement. The more engaged a customer is with a brand, the more likely he or she would be to write positive online comments about the company, brand, product, or service. The results of multiple regression analysis are summarized in Table 2.

The results of this study support James and Asplund’s (2011) argument that emotionally engaged customers are most likely to be socially engaged customers who will advocate for a company within their social network, because the statistical results suggest that customer engagement components are significant predictors for positive eWOM in social media.

Conclusion

Practical Implications

By surveying 17,254 consumers and asking various questions to explore their social media usage behaviors, this study contributes to the body of knowledge about customer relations in social media. The scope of this study is broad because it investigates three important issues, including consumers’ social media usage motives, expected responses from organizations, and predictors of positive eWOM. The findings can help organizations understand why and how
customers use social media to share information and express opinions about companies, products, and services. The top two motives for consumers to share opinions online are: (1) protecting themselves from bad products or companies, and (2) protecting others from bad products or companies. Thus, companies must closely monitor customer comments in social media and effectively handle negative comments. The findings also answer two practical questions that corporate executives want to know: (1) how to reduce additional negative comments online by effectively responding to customers’ negative comments and (2) how to encourage loyal customers advocate for the company/brand by posting positive comments online. The answer to the first question is that customers expect organizations to change policies and compensate them if they have negative experiences with the company/brand. An empty apology is the least effective response.

The answer to the second question is that organizations must engage with customers first to foster positive eWOM online. The results of this study suggest that the four stages of customers’ emotional engagement (confidence, integrity, pride, and passion) act as predictors for positive eWOM. What can organizations do to increase customers’ emotional engagement with the brand? Based on the results of this study, the researcher would suggest that organizations keep their brand promises, find workable solutions (e.g., give refunds or discounts) when problems arise, and provide excellent customer service. By doing so, organizations can establish and maintain a high degree of trust and confidence in their brands. Confidence is also built by a company’s employees, services, and customer communications. In a social media environment, customers expect responses from companies if they ask questions online. Many customers also want to participate in online discussions and express their opinions. Therefore, responding to customers in a timely manner with honesty and consistency is important. Furthermore, the researcher suggests that companies make friends with their customers in social media environments. Companies should build an online brand community and encourage customer participation in social media, cultivate connections, and create enjoyable experiences in the social media environment. Positive interactions in the social media environment can foster overall customer pride and passion about the product as well.

**Theoretical Implications**

This study brings additional knowledge about eWOM in the social media environment. According to Hong and Yang (2009), WOM is an understudied area, despite its growing importance to companies. This study identifies effective ways of handling negative eWOM in social media and the predictors for positive eWOM. Thus, this study adds knowledge to an important but understudied area in public relations.

The results of this study also have theoretical contributions by providing empirical evidence to identify the most effective corporate crisis responses in social media based on Benoit’s (1995) Image Repair Theory and Coombs’ (2008) SCCT. The results of this study suggest that changing corporate policy is the most desired corporate response when consumers make negative comments in social media. This strategy is similar to Benoit’s (1995) corrective action tactic. Offering discounts for future products or services and giving a refund are also effective response strategies. These two strategies are similar to Coombs’ (2008) compensation strategy. Apologizing is the least desired response from organizations. Making an apology is the same as Coombs’ (2008) apology strategy. It is interesting to know that an empty apology is not an effective corporate response strategy in the social media environment. Instead of expecting apologies from companies, consumers expect corrective actions and deals after making
negative comments online. Thus, the results of this study extend the applicability of Benoit’s (1995) Image Repair Theory and Coombs’ (2008) SCCT in social media.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

This study offers insights into customer relations in social media by surveying more than 17,000 consumers in the United States. However, this study did not survey consumers in other countries. Future studies may survey consumers in different cultures and compare the results with the present study. By doing so, cultural similarities and differences in consumers’ social media usage motives, eWOM, and expected corporate responses can be further explored.
References
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<th>Items</th>
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<th>S.D.</th>
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<td>To protect others from bad products or companies</td>
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<td>To save money through special discounts or offers</td>
<td>3.34</td>
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<tr>
<td>To express my unique point of view</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To feel connected to people that have the same interests and opinions as me</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To influence others' opinions</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To create something new</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To build my credibility</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To feel like part of something bigger than myself</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be recognized by my peers</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 17,254
Table 2: Summaries of Multiple Regression Analysis for Customer Engagement Predicting Positive Electronic Word of Mouth (Enter Model)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive eWOM (B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>.40***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>.16***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>.20***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion</td>
<td>.05**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model Significance</td>
<td>P &lt; .0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Standardized Beta (B) is reported. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.
Abstract

With upcoming signs of a new economic downturn, investors, analysts, business media and other stakeholders within the financial community act within an atmosphere of high uncertainty. Information and rumors are triggered by a myriad of discussions on the Internet and social web. Corporations listed on the stock market cannot ignore this highly volatile situation. However, little is known about the practice of strategic communication with investors and other financial stakeholders from an international perspective. The research presented here closes this research gap by analyzing the state of financial communications on the social web in an empirical study. It compares activities of corporations and their investor relations departments in the most important markets worldwide: the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Japan.
Introduction

There are thousands of companies listed on stock exchanges around the globe as well as companies with shares traded outside of stock exchanges on “over-the-counter” markets. All these companies have a need in investor relations (IR) expertise and typically have an in-house investor relations officer (IRO), an IR department or subcontract IR to communication agencies. IR is the highest paid PR sub-function as well as the one that is the most likely to have a seat at the proverbial management table (Laskin, 2010a). Within the last few years, IR experienced quantitative and qualitative growth regarding its status within companies (Laskin & Koehler, 2012), set of stakeholders (starting with serving institutional investors, today IR addresses all minor and major players within the financial markets including creditor relations), topics (evolving from shareholder value and regulation centered issues to corporate governance and sustainability) and tools (moving from personal communications to online platforms).

The Internet and social media have changed the traditional rules of IR. Dialogue and relationship building on the web and with retail shareholders are increasingly recognized as next level in financial communications (Laskin, 2012; Koehler & Zerfass, 2011). Therefore, the lack of communication expertise among IROs is a troubling factor. As long as communication is focused on professional capital market participants like institutional investors or analysts, a finance background and reporting line to the CFO tends to be useful. As new stakeholders are evolving or at least making themselves visible, a deeper understanding of strategic communication, messaging, and online engagement becomes necessary. The research presented here analyzes how listed corporations are dealing with a highly participatory and fragmented communication environment on the web.

Literature Review

Communication scholars (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; Argenti, 2007; Zerfass, 2010; Broom, 2009; Laskin, 2010a) as well as professional bodies (e.g. PRSA, IPR) define IR as a sub-function of public relations (PR) or corporate communications. Whereas the strategic role of the communication function in general as well as its different spheres (internal, market communications, PR) and practices (crisis communication, public affairs, issues management etc.) are analyzed quite well, research on IR was virtually non-existent within communication studies for a long period (Petersen & Martin, 1996; Marston & Stracker, 2001; Laskin, 2009). Larissa A. Grunig (1992) posed more than ten years ago that IR plays an essential role within publicly owned companies as shareholders belong to the three priority publics due to providing capital for investments and growth. Most recently, PR academics developed a deeper interest in IR (Laskin 2009, 2010a, 2011; Kelly, Laskin, & Rosenstein 2010; Ditlevsen, 2012; Hoffmann & Fieseler, 2012). However, a meta-study by Laskin and Koehler (2012) reveals that professional IR in the United States and Europe is still largely a financial function. Only a minority of respondents in the studies analyzed characterized their educational experience as communication, reported to a chief communication officer, or worked in PR departments.

IR can be defined as “a strategic management responsibility that integrates finance, communication, marketing and securities law compliance to enable the most effective two-way communication between a company, the financial community, and other constituencies, which ultimately contributes to a company's securities achieving fair valuation” (NIRI, 2003). This was not the case in the earlier years of the profession. The main characteristics are approved by PR academics as well (Kelly et al., 2010; Laskin, 2010a). Previous definitions of the National Institute for Investor Relations (NIRI), the US-based and also largest association of IR
professionals worldwide, called IR “a marketing activity,” with no mention of two-way communications and its interdisciplinary, and suggested the goal as “positive” effect on share price (Ryan & Jacobs, 2005) rather than fair value (cf. Laskin, 2010b, for an overview of the historical eras of IR and their characteristics). Today, even finance scholars acknowledge that “firm/investor communication has undergone sweeping metamorphoses. [IR] have become a two-way conduit of information” (Bassen, Basse Mama, & Ramaj, 2010, p. 71). Marketing scholars integrate relationship management within investor relations (Hoffmann, Pennings, & Wies, 2011; Hoffmann, Tutic, & Wies, 2011) and suggest further exploring whether “the role of IROs generally has expanded beyond external marketing toward one of having an impact internally on strategic choices” (Hockerts & Moir, 2004, p. 156).

**Investment Decisions and Communication Processes in the Age of Social Media**

Gathering and providing information online is quite important for financial decisions today. The amount of people who use online sources as a basis for potential investment decisions has risen significantly at an international level (Sprenger & Welpe, 2010). In the US for example, 37 percent of the online population receive their financial information, such as stock quotes or mortgage interest rates, online and 11 percent even buy or sell stocks, bonds or mutual funds online (Pew, 2010). Not surprisingly, corporations use these platforms as well for their IR activities. It has been argued that online IR helped significantly to improve transparency and real-time information of all market participants (Ki & Chung, 2011).

Social media add several new dimensions to financial communications on the web: structuration, interpretation, and networking are typical functions that can be fostered by integrating participative platforms into the overall IR strategy (Zerfaß & Sandhu, 2008). Social media is used as an umbrella term to encompass various characteristics such as user-generated content, collaboration, participation, communication, virtual dialogue, social interaction and content creation (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). While many companies have by now incorporated social media in their PR and communication strategies, the full potential is seldom exploited (Wright & Hinson, 2012; Linke & Zerfass, 2012).

As for disclosure policies in general, there are mandatory (e.g. Ad-hoc releases, directors’ dealings, corporate governance statement, or SEC filings for US-listed companies) and non-mandatory elements of online IR (e.g. analyst announcements, FAQs, interactive factsheets, stock price tracker, financial calendar, or investor and analyst presentations) (Koehler, 2011a, b; Ettredge, Richardson, & Scholz, 2002). The use of online tools in financial communications has been approved by stock authorities for modernizing the disclosure system (SEC, 2009). Authorities have not yet included social media into their statutory notifications and disclosure policies. However, there are already discussions in the profession whether external platforms such as Twitter are appropriate channels to distribute compulsory statements to the financial community and whether they might replace traditional providers of these services in the future.

Instruments and activities represent only one area of change (Laskin, 2012). IROs have to deal with new opinion leaders on the social web, and most importantly, with a change of how investment decisions are shaped and made. Investors as well as intermediaries (analysts, financial journalists) use social media for a selective search of information as well as for publishing user-generated content, for communicating and collaborating with others interested in specific shares (Brunswick, 2010, 2011; DES & DVFA, 2011; Levick & Morgan, 2011). As a result, Twitter or the online community www.seekingalpha.com have established themselves as effective predictors of stock movements and earnings surprises (Sprenger & Welpe, 2010;
Bollen, Mao, & Zeng, 2011). Investment professionals refer to social media as a valuable knowledge base, a mean to test whether own investment decisions might be wrong, and a noisemaker for the stock to go up (SeekingAlpha, 2012). Retail shareholders rely on social media for other purposes: they demand their voice to be heard and prefer social media for opening a path to the democratization of access to the company’s IR function. Mobile access to information is another trend within the financial community (Kurtosys, 2012; Forrester, 2011). This rising demand adds to a number of benefits that IROs enjoy when implementing social media: New information technologies provide direct access to a broad set of investors on a real-time basis. Smaller listed corporations – also called small caps, where "cap" is short for capitalization, a measure by which a company's size is classified – may benefit from an increased awareness, amplified content and identifying new investors (Blankespoor, Miller, & White, 2010; Wang, Berens, & van Riel, 2012). Large caps can outperform their competitors by acting as innovators. Studies indicate that web IR activities improve stock exchange liquidity (Singer & Cacia, 2009).

Research on Online and Social Web Communications with Investors

In general, online communications has to be distinguished from interactive social media communications (Zerfaß & Pleil, 2012). Research on online communications focuses on companies’ websites whereas interactive social media communications includes participative tools on websites as well as external platforms.

The potentials and limitations of online and social media platforms in PR as well as the actual use in the profession have been a focus of research during the last decades (Duhé, 2012; Ye & Ki, 2012). Comparisons between Europe and the United States reveal that digital and social media channels are more frequently implemented in US organizations (Swerling, Thorson, & Zerfass, 2012). Research on online financial communications is quite established (Ki & Chung, 2011). There are analyses within and among countries, i.e. for Japan (Marston, 2003), for the US (Ki & Chung, 2011), for the UK, US, and Germany (Deller, Stubenrath, & Weber, 1999) and globally (Bollen, Hassink, & Bozic, 2006), including independent variables like industrial sector, company size, or free float (i.e. Bollen et al., 2006; Ettredge et al., 2002). Deller et al. (1999) found that, in the USA, IR via the Internet is more common and offers more features than in the UK and Germany. Variables as company size, level of internationalization (foreign listing and foreign revenue), proportion of shares available to individual investors and disclosure environment are significantly related to the extent of online IR activities (Bollen et al., 2006).

Despite the potential of social media for IR, an analysis of eight peer-reviewed journals from January 2005 to March 2011 by Murtarelli and Invernizzi (2011) has shown that the field was not researched within academia until that point of time. Since then, Fieseler, Hoffmann and Meckel (2010) and Köster (2012) have published conceptual papers on social media challenges for IR, Miller (2011) has analyzed case studies, while Elliott, Hodge and Sedor (2012) have discussed the usefulness of online videos to make important announcements to the financial community. Within the profession, IR associations as the National IR Institute (NIRI) in the US or the UK-based IR Society (IRS) have published whitepaper on online and social media for their members (NIRI, 2012; IRS, 2011). The United States Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) most recently released advisory notes on how to use social media (SEC, 2012a, b).

Empirical insights about IR on the social web are rare. A series of studies based on content analyses has been conducted at the University of Leipzig in Germany (Köhler, 2010; Koehler, 2011a, b; Koehler & Zerfass, 2011). The 2011 benchmark study in five countries highlighted a lack of consistent strategies towards online financial communications. IR on the
social web were already practiced, especially on corporate IR websites. However, listed companies rather stuck to their traditional instruments and uploaded presentations from investor conferences, analyst meetings, or conference calls. Dialogical approaches like blogs, chats, or other aspects which offer the possibility for feedback, grew in importance. However, those instruments were still nascent. IR professionals were even more cautious when considering external social media platforms like Twitter or Facebook. Social media were mostly used for information purposes and not for online interaction with shareholders or intermediaries. There were significant differences between various countries and stock indices. Whereas French and UK businesses were more involved in interpretation via social media, Japanese blue chips solely referred to the information function. Businesses in the United States clearly led the field with a broad and functionally balanced social media engagement. Topics most often discussed were financial figures, CSR and others. “Others” meant non-mandatory announcements that are not part of the statutory and legal requirements according to disclosure and dissemination policies. Different channels were used for various topics: Financial figures, strategic partnerships, CSR, and others tended to be the topics most suitable for external social networks. Changes in the composition of the board, mergers and acquisitions, cooperation, and strategic decisions were more prevalent in social media platforms integrated in IR websites (Koehler & Zerfass, 2011).

Relationship Building and Dialogue in Online IR

Literature review reveals a growing research interest in relationship building and dialogic practices through online communication in general (Murtarelli & Invernizzi, 2011). However, the terms often remain unclear: “Although relationship cultivation strategies are critical topics to Web 2.0; PR scholars have focused on dialogue, conceived as an orientation […] as a conceptual evolution of symmetrical communication, or more generally as ‘any exchange of ideas and opinions’ […]” (Murtarelli & Invernizzi, 2011, p. 8). The concept of two-way symmetrical communication has long been known as most effective when interacting with stakeholders (Grunig, 2009). Yet, it has to be asked whether companies employ a dialogic approach within their strategic online communications and whether the term “dialogue” adequately describes the actions undertaken. Within the field of PR research, dialogues tend to be normative connoted in reference to Grunig and Hunt’s two-way symmetrical model. However, the term is not that clear; Piezcka (2011) argues “that, despite the key normative position occupied by the concept of dialogue in much mainstream [PR] scholarship, [PR] as an academic discipline has not engaged extensively with the theory of dialogue” (p. 288).

Dialogues are characterized by the exchange of speakers’ roles, dynamics and openness of the process, and a certain lack of control (Zerfaß, 2010). Therefore, dialogues have to be distinguished from dialogue-oriented or interactive communication which already offer feedback possibilities and represent a pre-condition for dialogic communication but do not fulfill the mentioned characteristics. Dialogues can further be characterized by different communication styles. It is possible to use a persuasive, argumentative or informative communication style (Zerfaß, 1996) – dependent on the speaker’s intention for engaging in a dialogic communication process which includes bargaining, negotiation, argumentation, instructions, manipulation, advertising, and others (Zerfaß, 1996, 2010). The term “dialogue” in modern speech philosophy refers to those argumentative communication processes when parties agree to “coordinate in good faith on their plans of action” (Habermas, 1984, 1987). In accordance to Habermas, only argumentation serves as precondition for relationship building. Relationship management is inherent within the concept of PR (Broom, 2009; Grunig et. al., 2002). However, communication
is only one possibility for corporations to build relationships with stakeholders; communication management and relationship management are not identical (Zerfaß, 2010). Therefore, the relationship building potential of dialog communication or even dialogues needs more critical reflection and thorough research by PR scholars.

Kent & Taylor (1998, 2003) introduced a conceptual framework for the analysis of relationship building with relevant stakeholders through online dialogues. They identified five principles which foster online relations: dialogic loop, usefulness of information, generation of return visits, intuitiveness/ease of the interface, rule of conversation of visitors. Yet, their approach focused on websites, social media are not included. They missed to reflect on theoretical concepts of dialogue, especially concepts other than normative models as the two-way symmetrical model of communication. Dialogues are referred to as a “highly desired product of [PR] activities” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 30) without mentioning that there are also non-ethical intentions for dialogic processes like manipulation (Zerfaß, 2010). “Dialogic communication […] refers to any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions. Dialogic denotes a communicative give and take” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 325). The definition lacks rigor: Dialogue-oriented and dialogic communication processes are not the same according to speech philosophy; and dialogic communication serves only as one possibility for corporations to build relationships with stakeholders. In fact, Kent and Taylor’s principles are more about dialogue-orientation and not necessarily about argumentative dialogues. Moreover, in reference to the technological developments at that time, online communication was hardly able to foster argumentative communication in the Habermasian understanding.

Social media might expand the perspective and foster argumentative communication on the web. Droller (2012) analyzed dialogue-oriented/interactive and dialogic communication of German and US non-profit organizations via participative tools on corporate websites (e.g. blogs) and the use of external platforms like Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube. She expanded Kent and Taylor’s principles for communication and relationship building by integrating user comments, user ratings, and company’s reaction to comments. Whereas structuration (referring to Kent and Taylor’s principles of usefulness of information and ease of interface), automatic dissemination (referring to principle of usefulness of information), constant actualization (referring to principle of generation of return visits), and possibility of feedback (refers to principle of dialogic loop) represent preconditions for dialogues, Droller’s additional categories enable dialogic communication. Kent and Taylor’s fifth principle, the rule of conversation of visitors which recommends that no external links should occur on corporate websites, lacks relevance as external platforms are an important part of social media communications. Research based on this conceptualization has shown that the potentials of dialogues and argumentation are rarely used in practice (Droller, 2012).
In financial communications, trustworthiness of sources and consequently personalization are additional characteristics that have to be taken into consideration when analyzing social media communications. Sweetser (2010) found that disclosure in social media campaigns positively impacts relationship building. For a highly sensitive legal area as IR, trustworthiness of source is an even more important precondition for relationship building. Whereas IROs are used to make all information disclosed publicly available and information dissemination online is quite established, online dialogues offer a greater challenge. Surveys among corporate communication managers in Europe reveal that competencies for online dialogues are self-assessed as only moderate, whereas US communicators reveal a deeper understanding (Swerling et al., 2012). The authors attribute the findings on the widespread usage and influence of social media in the United States, and the higher cultural differences that European organizations have to deal with. Yet for IR purposes, Laskin (2012) is skeptical whether relevant publics like institutional investors do really seek online- and public interaction and seeing that their industry is quite competitive, investment decisions are based on analyses. He argues that instead of engaging financial publics, social media may be limited to distributing information.

Based on these insights from previous research, the framework depicted in Figure 1 has been constructed to analyze dialogue-oriented and dialogic financial communications on the Internet and social web.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Research questions for this study comprised three areas: social media activity, online dialogue, and mobile information. Moreover, differences within five major international markets as well as the influence of independent organizational variables were identified.
RQ1: To what extent are social media tools for IR implemented on the websites of corporations listed in the leading stock market indices in the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Japan?

H1: Social media tools are implemented by companies of all major markets.
H2: The number of tools and intensity of use differs among the five countries, and they are most prevalent in the US.
H3: The variety of tools and topics has increased in all indices, compared to previous studies.

RQ2: To what extent are independent social media platforms used by corporations listed in the leading stock market indices in the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Japan?

H4: Independent platforms are significantly used more by companies of all major markets in comparison to previous studies.
H5: The number of platforms and intensity of use differs among the five countries, and they are most prevalent in the US.
H6: Specific IR channels are rarely used; however the variety of topics discussed have increased compared to previous studies.

RQ3: How do corporations engage in an online dialogue in the leading stock market indices in the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Japan?

H7: Dialogue-oriented communication is already initiated by international large-caps, but on a low level.
H8: US companies listed in the Dow Jones Industrial Average are most engaged in dialogic communication with financial publics.

RQ4: How are mobile applications used by corporations listed in the leading stock market indices in the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Japan?

H9: Mobile applications are rarely offered by international large-caps.

RQ5: Which independent variables influence the use of social media within IR?

H10: Companies in the technology industry as well as those in the software, telecommunications and media industry are more engaged than those operating in other sectors.
H11: Companies serving business-to-consumer markets use social media more often than those operating in a business-to-business environment.
H12: Companies with higher free float and higher percentage of retail shareholders are more engaged in social media activities.
H13: Social media engagement positively influences analyst coverage, trading volume, share performance, number of foreign investors, and reduces volatility.
H14: Companies with more employees working in the IR department are more engaged in social media and more likely to participate in dialogic communication.
H15: Companies engaging in dialogic communication are less threatened by shareholder activism.

Methodology

The empirical study focused on the 150 largest global corporations listed on DJIA (Dow Jones Industrial Average, USA), FTSE (Financial Times London Stock Exchange Index, UK), CAC (Cotation Assistée en Continu quarante, France), DAX (Deutscher Aktien-Index, Germany) and NIKKEI (Nihon Keizai Shimbun Index, Japan). Content analysis was used to
investigate both the IR websites run by the 150 companies and their use of external platforms (Twitter, StockTwits, Facebook, Google+, YouTube, Flickr, SlideShare, Scribd, LinkedIn, Xing, and Retail Investor Conferences (RIC)). RIC is a platform for hosting virtual conferences which addresses both institutional and individual investors, and offers the possibility for discussions online. Table 1 provides an overview of the social media tools and platforms investigated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tools on corporate investor relations websites</th>
<th>External social media platforms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RSS feed</td>
<td>Content sharing platforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podcast</td>
<td>SlideShare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webcast</td>
<td>YouTube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video/Vodcast</td>
<td>Flickr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weblog</td>
<td>Scribd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media newsroom</td>
<td>Microblogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chat</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiki</td>
<td>StockTwits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social bookmark</td>
<td>Social communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagcloud</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook buttons / Like</td>
<td>Google+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter buttons / Tweet</td>
<td>Business platforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google+ buttons / Plus one</td>
<td>Xing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share buttons (different platforms)</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links to external platforms</td>
<td>IR related platforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile website</td>
<td>Retail Investor Conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IR app</td>
<td>StockTwits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Social media tools investigated in the study

StockTwit can be classified both as a micro blog and as an IR related platform.

The codebook for the content analysis was based on the theoretical framework depicted above and previous studies (Zerfass & Koehler, 2011). It included platforms and tools, predominant functions, topics, ratio between obligatory information and published news via social media, possibility for feedback, dialogue and relationship building with stakeholders, mobile applications, and no. of users, links, and service features. Topics refer to mandatory information to be published by the issuer and include financial figures, annual general meeting (AGM), director’s dealings, liquidity problems/debt overload, corporate governance, litigations, corporate actions, dividend, change in board of management / important personal decisions, M&A’s, strategic company decisions, cooperation/joint ventures / strategic partnerships, F&E / new products / inventions / patents, sustainability (CSR) topics, and other. “Other” refers to non-mandatory IR related topics and includes e.g.: appearance of the company on external conferences, important awards/achievements for the company, general introduction of the company, its products, employees etc. Analysis covered the period from December 2011 to
March 2012 (independent variables: January 31, 2012). The content analysis of IR websites covered three months, plus the last AGM, last two quarterly earnings announcements, and one analyst conference (obligatory measures). The content analysis for external platforms covered one month, but not within companies’ quiet period, and obligatory measures as for the IR websites. As independent variables industrial sector, sales market, index membership, free float (percentage of shareholders owning less than 5% of shares outstanding), percentage of retail shareholders, no. of employees within IR department, analyst coverage, foreign investors, volatility (mean values for domestic market within last 250 trading days), share performance (mean values for domestic market within last 250 trading days), trading volume domestic market (no. of overall shares traded on a daily basis at domestic stock exchange, mean values for 52 weeks, Japan: 200 days), trading volume US market (mean values for direct listings or American Depositary Receipt ADR, for 52 weeks, Japan: 200 days; without DJIA), and shareholder activism (no. of resolutions supported by less than 90% of shareholder votes during last AGM, see Hoffmann et al. 2011 for theoretical background) were included.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables (mean values)</th>
<th>Industrial sector (no. of companies in %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employees in IR department (no.)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free float (%)</td>
<td>78.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail shareholders (%)</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysts covering the company (no.)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign investors (in %)</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trading volume – domestic market (no. of shares traded daily)</td>
<td>13,579,442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trading volume – US-market (no. of shares traded daily)</td>
<td>665,180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volatility (%)</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share performance (%)</td>
<td>-3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shareholder activism (no. of resolutions supported by less than 90% of shareholder votes during last AGM)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales market (no. of companies in %)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Sample of the empirical study in detail (n = 150 listed corporations in 5 countries)

Table 2 shows the sample in detail. The content analysis was performed by two trained coders. Inter-rater and intra-rater reliability was tested and Cohen's kappa coefficient proved to be 0.82 and 0.85 for nominal scales, 0.86 and 0.92 for metric variables. Statistical analyses was based on the methods of social sciences (descriptive and analytical statistics), using SPSS software tools. Results have been statistically evaluated by Pearson's chi-square, Monte Carlo, Kruskal Wallis or Wilcoxon tests and are classified as significant for $p \leq 0.05$. Statistically significant group differences were tested with variance analyses, and dependencies were tested via correlations. For this purpose, the correlation coefficient was determined for each instance, either Pearson's or Spearman's Rho, depending on the data volume ($\alpha = 0.05$).
Results

Social Media Activity on The IR Website (RQ1; H1, H2, H3)

Nearly all companies within the sample employed social media on the corporate IR website (DJIA, FTSE, CAC: all 30 companies within each index; DAX: 29 companies, NIKKEI 24 companies). Only slight differences occurred between major markets according to applications applied on the IR website: RSS feeds and webcasts remained on top as in previous studies from 2011 and 2009 (Köhler 2010, Koehler 2011a, b). External links and share buttons which link to Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn experienced the most significant growth; chat or wikis were not used at all. Japanese large-caps did not integrate podcasts and videos within their financial communication; blogs were most used by US large-caps – however, on a low level with only ten corporations (see Table 3). A variety of tools increased in 2012. A growing no. of different tools were offered on the IR website; increased external engagement can be one reason for that (share buttons, links etc. directly refer to IR presence on external platforms).

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RSS feed</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td>Podcast</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
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Table 3: Online tools on IR websites in 2012 and 2011 (n = 150 listed corporations in 5 countries)

Note. Other: e.g. social media survey, virtual shareholder magazines, interactive annual reports, personalized websites. Share button within the 2011 study included like and tweet button. New tools within the 2012 survey compared to 2011: tag cloud, plus one button, QR code and SMS service. Monte Carlo significance test showed significant differences between indices for the following tools: podcast, webcast, external links, tag cloud, share button, text message (SMS) service, mobile website, and blog.

Differences occurred when comparing the no. of different tools: there were companies with even more than 20 different applications on the IR website, mostly DAX and DJIA corporations, most NIKKEI businesses employed between one and five different tools. Among US large-caps, use of social media buttons and links increased significantly. A notable rise in the
no. of mobile applications and IR apps occurred within the German DAX but still on a low level. Social media newsrooms including IR topics were least employed by companies in all markets. Overall, H1 was confirmed.

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Table 4: No. of publications on IR websites and external platforms (n = 150 listed corporations in 5 countries)

IR websites: Kruskal Wallis H-Test found significant differences between indices for the following variables: publications via podcast, publications via webcast, publications via share button, publications via IR blog and external links.

External platforms: Monte Carlo test showed no significant differences between the indices according to number of publications.

DJIA corporations most intensely released information via social media on the IR websites (see Table 4), H2 was confirmed. Share buttons as well as blogs and newsrooms were most actively used; webcasts most often in reference to no. of companies but not in reference to the no. of publications (see Table 4). Correlation analysis (Spearman’s rho) confirmed significant dependencies between no. of publications and videos (r = 0.539), share button (r = 0.516), Like button (r = 0.497), IR blog (r = 0.492), Tweet button (r = 0.477), podcast (r = 0.435), Plus One button (r = 0.403), webcast (r = 0.317) and social media newsroom (r = 0.170).

Financial figures were the most common topic discussed on IR websites, followed by sustainability, AGM, and other IR related issues. When comparing the no. of social media publications on the IR website and no. of IR releases traditionally published at all, AGM was the topic most often referred to. Obviously, social media tools are qualified to report about the most important corporate event, at least for shareholders, and engage those investors who are not present. There were correlations between topics and tools on the IR website. Strongest significant correlation were between IR blog and sustainability topic (r = 0.676), cooperation (r = 0.532), litigations (r = 0.473) and changes in board of management (r = 0.473). Video correlated
with financial figures ($r = 0.497$) and cooperation ($r = 0.437$), podcast with financial figures ($r = 0.494$) and dividends ($r = 0.345$). Strong correlation existed for Facebook like button with the topics sustainability ($r = 0.528$) and F&E ($r = 0.465$), for tweet button with F&E ($r = 0.487$) and sustainability ($r = 0.474$), plus one button with sustainability ($r = 0.463$) and F&E ($r = 0.406$), share button with sustainability ($r = 0.450$) and financial figures ($r = 0.446$). Blogs seemed to be most suitable for CSR topics, financials connected with diverse tools. There were only slight differences among indices in reference to topics released in social media (see Table 5). H3 was confirmed.

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Table 5: Key IR topics discussed (n = 150 listed corporations in 5 countries)

Note. IR websites: Kruskal Wallis test confirmed significant differences between the indices according to the topics “financial figures”, “annual general meeting”, “dividends”, “change in board of management”, “cooperation”, “strategic company decisions” and other IR related topics. Correlations analysis with Eta confirms significant dependencies between the indices according to the topics “financial figures” ($\eta = 0.368$, p < 0.001), “annual general meeting” ($\eta = 0.381$, p < 0.001), “dividends” ($\eta = 0.393$, p < 0.001), “change in board of management” ($\eta = 0.341$, p < 0.001), “M&A’s” ($\eta = 0.262$, p = 0.040), “cooperation” ($\eta = 0.350$, p < 0.001), “strategic decisions” ($\eta = 0.305$, p = 0.006), “CSR” ($\eta = 0.306$, p = 0.006) and other IR related topics ($\eta = 0.374$, p < 0.001). External platforms: Kruskal Wallis test confirmed significant differences between the indices according to the topics “annual general meeting”, “cooperation”, “F&E”, “others” and “translations”. Correlations analysis with Eta confirms significant dependencies between index and “financial figures” ($\eta = 0.306$, p = 0.006), “dividends” ($\eta = 0.283$, p = 0.016), “cooperation” ($\eta = 0.251$, p = 0.05), other IR related topics ($\eta = 0.381$, p < 0.001), “translations” ($\eta = 0.340$, p = 0.001).

Social Media Activity on Independent Platforms (RQ2; H4, H5, H6)

130 companies were communicating financial topics on social networking sites, compared to 77 in the 2011 analysis (Koehler, 2011b). Most of them used overall corporate channels on those platforms and only 12 companies employed specific IR channels. Those included SlideShare, Twitter, ScribD, StockTwits, and RIC. Most IR channels were employed by US large-caps (DJIA 7; DAX 4; FTSE 1). However, there was a higher adoption rate of external social media platforms among European large-caps in comparison to 2011. Japanese blue chips still lagged behind their international competitors (see Table 6).
Table 6: Use of external platforms in 2012 and 2011 (n = 150 listed corporations in 5 countries)

Monte Carlo test showed significant differences between the indices.

Among the external platforms, Twitter and LinkedIn are most popular among the listed corporations researched. There were slight country-specific differences regarding the preferred platforms (see Table 6). The comparison of publications showed that companies communicating externally with the financial community were much more engaged referring to the no. of presentations (SlideShare, ScribD), videos (YouTube), tweets and re-tweets (Twitter, Stock Twits), posts and comments (Facebook, Goolge+), or photos (FlickR; see Table 4). Twitter and StockTwits were most intensely used; FlickR was solely related to WalMart’s publications. Correlation analysis (Spearman’s rho) confirmed significant dependencies between no. of publications and SlideShare (r = 0.205), YouTube (r = 0.248), Flickr (r = 0.337), StockTwits (r = 0.218) and Google+ (r = 0.193). CAC topped FTSE companies with no. of publications via social media in relation to IR releases. US- and German large-caps had the same level of intensity (no. of publications via social media in proportion to no. of IR ad hoc news releases). US large-caps were most active, German large-caps ran more platforms. H4 was confirmed and H5 was rejected.

Financial figures were most often referred to, just as on the IR websites. Yet, AGM was the no. 1 topic in reference to IR ad hoc releases. Live tweeting started to gain popularity for that annual occasion. On average, there were 21 tweets within each live session on Twitter and 18 Tweets for each live session on StockTwits. DAX companies were most engaged in live tweeting with 8 companies (DJIA 5, FTSE 2, CAC 5, NIKKEI 1). StockTwits as specific IR microblog was less used by companies (2 DAX, 2 DJIA, 1 FTSE). On Twitter and StockTwits, translations played a role as well as European and Japanese companies communicated both, in their national language and in English. Especially for retail shareholders, this approach is convenient. There were correlations between topics and tools on independent platforms: Sustainability was best communicated via SlideShare (r = 0.469), YouTube (r = 0.336), and Facebook (r = 0.325), financials via StockTwits (r = 0.540) and Twitter (r = 0.407). StockTwits also correlated significantly with cooperation (r = 0.474) and other IR related topics (r = 0.452), the content sharing platform Scribd with F&E (r = 0.441). There were only slight differences among indices in reference to topics released in social media (see Table 5). H6 was confirmed.
Dialogue and Relationship Building in Online IR (RQ3; H7, H8)

The prevalence and intensity of social media dialogue was analyzed based on the framework depicted in Figure 2. It is based on previous studies (Droller, 2012; Koehler, 2011a, b; Köhler 2010) and has proven to be suitable for researching social media communication.

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Table 7: Companies using dialogic communication approaches and tools on their IR websites in 2009, 2011 and 2012 (n = 150 listed corporations in 5 countries)

No significant differences between indices found.

Only a few companies in the sample used a dialogic approach and provided tools with feedback possibilities on the IR website (see Table 7) or comment functions on external social media platforms (see Table 9), answered users’ comments, handled critics openly and did not delete unpleasant topic-related contributions. US large-caps were most dialogic on both IR website and external social media platforms. Users within the US highly participated in online conversations referring to IR related topics. DJIA companies offered 151 IR publications with feedback possibility on their IR website, 1,906 comments/ratings were made by users to those. Comments or ratings included blog comments, recommendations via likes, tweets, plus ones or shares. DAX was on second rank with 53 publications and 232 comments/ratings by users, the ratio for FTSE businesses was 17/9, for CAC 34/32, and NIKKEI 33/6.

DJIA published 133 “social media messages” on the IR website which included Tweet buttons with counter, 133 messages which included Like buttons with counter, 20 messages which included Share buttons with counter, and 57 messages which included Plus one buttons with counter. The no. of reactions by users was 4,522 for the Tweet button, 3,929 for the Like button, 498 for the Share button, and 67 for the Plus one button. Each counter displays the no. of times that a post/news release has been recommended on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+ or other social media services. Adding counters may increase interaction by users as they can see how other readers are participating. DAX companies were completely without counters; all other indices operated on a much lower level than US blue chips. Interestingly, the Facebook Like button was actively used by Japanese users in response to companies’ messages via social media on the IR website, the Share button in response to FTSE large-caps.
Figure 2: Framework for analyzing dialogue and relationship building

Own figure based on Droller 2012, Koehler 2011a, b. On XING, LinkedIn and RIC, only IR presence on channel comprised. No reactions and comments collected on StockTwits. Tweet: Message on Twitter/ StockTwits (maximum of 140 signs). Stickertag: Tweet is assigned to specific ticker symbols via $. Hashtag: Tweet is assigned to specific topic via #. Retweet (RT): Forwarding of somebody other’s tweet via @. Direct message: Answering another Twitter user directly (cannot be displayed due to private conversation).

Basic functions of social software according to Zerfaß & Sandhu (2008) include information (e.g., RSS feeds), structuring (e.g., social bookmarks, wikis), interpretation (e.g., podcasts, video casts, and blogs), and networking (e.g., social communities). The content analysis investigated to which degree each function was fulfilled (4 = fully applies, 3 = largely applies, 2 = partly applies, 1 = does rather not apply, 0 = does not apply at all). Each function was not exclusively linked to a specific tool but there were predominant functions of specific tools which also fulfilled other functions to a minor degree. External platforms were not part of the differentiation of functions due to platform inherent functions by definition, e.g. the social network Facebook, the micro blog Twitter. However, all different functions can be fulfilled to a certain degree by social media (both by tools on a website or external platforms). The data shows that DJIA companies were more likely to network, DAX to inform and structure, FTSE and CAC had the most balanced engagement (see Table 8).

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Table 8: Use of social media functions in IR (n = 150 listed corporations in 5 countries)

Average = mean score; SD = standard deviation; F = F-ratio for one-way ANOVA F-test statistic. Results are significant for p < 0.05; rounded figures. Significant differences between indices according to social media functions found.

When looking at independent social media platforms, Facebook seemed more relevant than Google+ for reaching investors and getting in conversations with shareholders. On average, companies had 94,570 (2011: 10,874) Facebook followers, 41,201 Google+ followers. Twitter was more used than StockTwits with 20,507 (2011: 4,369) followers on average per company (StockTwits: 30 followers). Twitter seems more relevant for IR purposes than StockTwits (see Tables 10, 11). IR related videos were highly requested on YouTube. On average, each company had 3,640 YouTube followers (all indices) and views of YouTube videos with financial content totaled to 14,500 for DJIA companies, compared to 1,337 for DAX, 1,186 for FTSE, 2,848 for CAC, and 7,056 for NIKKEI. SlideShare was especially demanded in the UK (3,631 views on average per FTSE company; in comparison 1,873 for DJIA, 637 for DAX). There were on average 25 downloads from DJIA companies on SlideShare, 9 from DAX, 25 from FTSE businesses. No companies within NIKKEI and CAC were present with IR topics on SlideShare. Only four DJIA companies used Scribd – AT&T, Chevron, Cisco Systems, and Hewlett-Packard (1,018 views on average per DJIA company). Business networks were quite established within the financial community: LinkedIn had high popularity among IROs worldwide (despite Japan), Xing was especially prominent among German IROs. One average, DJIA IROs had 239 contacts on LinkedIn (FTSE IROs 175, DAX IROs 150, NIKKEI IROs 73). On Xing, German IROs had on average 231 contacts. In most companies, more than one IR employee had a personal profile on LinkedIn.
Table 9: Dialogic approaches in IR on external social media platforms: Ratings, comments, reactions by users in response to companies’ messages (n=150 listed corporations in 5 countries).
Rating elements are only on Facebook (Like Button) and Google+ (Plus One Button). Comments involve retweets on Twitter, reactions involve mentions on Twitter. No comments and reactions on StockTwits collected. On YouTube, possibility for comment according to channel and single videos is given. Kruskal Wallis test showed significant differences between the indices according to no. of ratings / no. of publications via social media and no. of comments / no. of publications via social media.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of ratings / no. of publications via social media on external platforms (average per company)</th>
<th>No. of comments / no. of publications via social media on external platforms (average per company)</th>
<th>No. of reactions / no. of comments on external social media platforms (average per company)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DJIA</td>
<td>0.128</td>
<td>4.091</td>
<td>0.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAX</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>0.617</td>
<td>0.101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTSE</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>0.872</td>
<td>0.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAC</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>0.916</td>
<td>0.129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIKKEI</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>0.108</td>
<td>0.375</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: No. of dialogue-oriented elements on Twitter (n = 150 listed corporations in 5 countries).
Kruskal Wallis test confirmed significant differences between the indices regarding mentions and retweets on Twitter.

As social media is focused on social rather than media, users demand conversation rather than broadcasting. While US users of IR tools were quite engaged, shareholders within other countries did not react to social media publications by the IR department (see Table 9). So for IR, it is hardly possible to speak of an online dialogue in general, this only applied to US large-caps. Tools with feedback possibility included blogs, webcast with feedback function on the IR website but also like and share buttons as users actively rate and share information published by the company. Different patterns of behavior occurred between online users worldwide. It became obvious that dialogue depends on both corporations’ but also users’ willingness to interact (see Tables 9). However, feedback possibilities can still be provided to a greater extent: nearly half of the companies (47 out of 97) on YouTube deactivated the possibility for users’ channel comments. Whereas dialogue was still best practice, a dialogue-oriented or interactive approach was already employed: disclaimers, personalization, links, download options; share buttons, rating and other platform-specific functions offer preconditions for online conversations (see Table 10 for dialogue-oriented elements on Twitter). Disclaimers are important for IR due to a legally sensitive area in which trust in a source is important for relationship building. 17 companies on Facebook, 15 on StockTwits, 6 on YouTube, 5 on Twitter, 2 on Flickr, and 1 on Google+ included disclaimers. Structuring via links accounted most for Twitter with 807 links to
the IR website by all companies, 85 to other external platforms. Links were included less on other platforms. Kruskal Wallis test showed significant differences between indices regarding no. of links. H7 and H8 were confirmed.

**Mobile Applications for IR (RQ3; H9)**

Mobile applications like mobile websites or apps, including the use of blogs or social networking sites on mobile devices, grows in importance and receive high adoption rates (Forrester, 2011; Kurtosys, 2012). However, according to this study large-caps did not account for their shareholders’ demands. While mobile applications were increasingly offered by corporate IR in 2012 compared to the year before, the overall rate of implementation was still low (see Table 3). IR apps showed the highest growth rate among mobile applications and mobile websites were the mobile tool implemented most often by international corporations. German and British large-caps scored highest in the social media mobility index (see Table 11). US, French and Japanese large-caps offered their shareholders less mobile services. The results were somehow surprising as mobile services are not related to legal constraints, loss of control or personal resources. Mobility as an important service feature and growing demand among (financial) users was not yet accounted for by most international large-caps. H9 was confirmed.

**Overall Social Media Engagement of Listed Corporations Based on Indices**

In order to answer the research questions as well as for ranking and benchmarking the companies included within the sample, three indices for activity, dialogue and mobility were developed (see Table 11).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DJIA</th>
<th>DAX</th>
<th>FTSE</th>
<th>CAC</th>
<th>NIKKEI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Social Media Activity**
| Index (average)         | 63.2 | 63.4 | 41.6 | 43.9 | 14.1   |
| **Social Media Dialogue**
| Index (average)         | 55.3 | 30.1 | 24.3 | 26.4 | 10.4   |
| **Social Media Mobility**
| Index (average)         | 8.7  | 14.2 | 11.9 | 7.7  | 4.8    |

Table 11: Social Media Activity, Dialogue and Mobility Indices (n = 150 listed corporations in 5 countries)

Indices based on mean values. Kruskal Wallis test confirmed significant differences between the indices for Internal Social Media Dialogue Index, External Social Media Dialogue Index and Social Media Dialogue Index. Correlation analysis (Spearman’s rho) confirmed significant dependencies between Internal Social Media Dialogue Index and External Social Media Dialogue Index ($r = 0.607$), Internal Social Media Dialogue Index and Social Media Dialogue Index ($r = 0.845$), External Social Media Dialogue Index and Social Media Dialogue Index ($r = 0.917$).
The various indices have been calculated and evaluated in the following sense (all indices were based on mean values):

1) The Social Media Activity Index ISMA was based on the social media use and the intensity of use: ISMA = Internal Social Media Activity Index IISMA+ External Social Media Activity Index IESMA.
   ISMA = Internal Use of Social Media Index (usage of social media (no. of different tools) on the IR website) + Internal Intensity of Use Index (intensity of use (no. of publications via social media / no. of IR ad hoc and news releases) on the IR website).
   IESMA = External Use of Social Media Index (usage of social media (no. of different tools) on external platforms) + External Intensity of Use Index (intensity of use (no. of publications via social media / no. of IR ad hoc and news releases) on external platforms).

Kruskal Wallis tests confirmed significant differences between the indices for Internal Social Media Activity Index, External Social Media Activity Index and Social Media Activity Index. Correlation analysis (Spearman’s rho) confirmed significant dependencies between Internal Social Media Activity Index and External Social Media Activity (r = 0.659), Internal Social Media Activity Index and Social Media Activity Index (r = 0.874), External Social Media Activity Index and Social Media Activity Index (r = 0.932).

2) Social Media Dialogue Index ISMD = Internal Social Media Dialogue Index IISMD + External Social Media Dialogue Index IESMD.
   IISMD = Use of dialogical tools on the IR website (no. of different tools with feedback function) + intensity of use (no. of publications with feedback function / no. of IR ad hoc and news releases + no. of publications with feedback function / no. of publications via social media) + intensity of feedback (no. of comments and ratings / no. of publications with feedback function) + degree of implementation of networking function.
   IESMD = Use of social media on external platforms with feedback possibility (no. of different tools) + intensity of use on external platforms (no. of publications via social media / no. of IR ad hoc and news releases) + dialogue oriented elements (e.g. links, disclaimer, hashtags) + intensity of dialogue (no. of comments and ratings / no. of publications with feedback function + no. of company reactions / no. of comments).

Kruskal Wallis tests confirmed significant differences between the indices for Internal Social Media Dialogue Index, External Social Media Dialogue Index and Social Media Dialogue Index. Correlation analysis (Spearman’s rho) confirmed significant dependencies between Internal Social Media Dialogue Index and External Social Media Dialogue Index (r = 0.607), Internal Social Media Dialogue Index and Social Media Dialogue Index (r = 0.845), External Social Media Dialogue Index and Social Media Dialogue Index (r = 0.917).

3) Social Media Mobility Index ISMM = Use of mobile applications on the IR website (no. of different mobile tools) + degree of implementation of mobility function. Mobile applications were mobile website, IR app, virtual/hybrid shareholders meeting, text message (SMS) service, AGM online voting. Mobile use of external social media platforms did not depend on companies’ mobile activities in particular. However, corporate engagement on external social media platforms served the growing no. of mobile users.

Table 12 shows the overall list of the top-ranked corporations in the sample. Best practices within the different fields are explained in detail within the full research report for this study (Zerfass & Koehler, 2012). Companies listed in all stock market indices implemented social media on their IR websites. External social media platforms remained less employed, but are on the rise compared to previous years. In 2011, US companies were on the forefront of IR
2.0 engagement. The research revealed that German large-caps caught up and performed on the same level as US large-caps in regard to social media activities or even outperformed in the field of mobile applications. UK and French corporations improved their engagement; Japanese large-caps were still least active within the sample. However, US large-caps as early-adopters and frontrunners led in the field of dialogic approaches to online IR.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Social Media Activity Index</th>
<th>Social Media Dialogue Index</th>
<th>Social Media Mobility Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Deutsche Telekom</td>
<td>Microsoft</td>
<td>Allianz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>SAP</td>
<td>Cisco Systems</td>
<td>Royal Bank of Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>BASF</td>
<td>Intel</td>
<td>BAYER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Cisco Systems</td>
<td>General Electric</td>
<td>Siemens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Wal-Mart</td>
<td>AT&amp;T</td>
<td>BASF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Alcoa</td>
<td>Hewlett-Packard</td>
<td>Royal Dutch Shell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Intel</td>
<td>DJIA</td>
<td>Daimler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Johnson &amp; Johnson</td>
<td>BASF</td>
<td>Unilever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Royal Dutch Shell</td>
<td>Deutsche Telekom</td>
<td>SAP / Volkswagen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Munich Re</td>
<td>DAX</td>
<td>Rolls Royce Group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: Top 10 corporations ranked by social media activity, dialogue and mobility

Social Media Engagement and Independent Variables (RQ 5; H10, H11, H12, H14, H14, H15): Corporations’ activities and dialogic approaches were influenced most by the indices in which the companies were listed. However, the industrial sector accounted for online dialogues as well: Software, technology and telecommunication corporations employed most dialogic online IR. H10 was confirmed. There were no differences within social media engagement between B2B or B2C companies within this study (see Table 13). Therefore, H11 was rejected.
Table 13: Social Media Indices and independent variables

Social media activities positively influenced the no. of foreign investors, analyst coverage and trading volume within the domestic market; volatility was negatively influenced. A dialogic or dialogue-oriented approach within online and social media IR as well as the employment of mobile services positively influenced trading volume (domestic market), analyst coverage and no. of foreign investors. Volatility was negatively influenced by online dialogues. This research also showed that social media activities as well as dialogic approaches depended on the no. of employees within the IR department. H14 was confirmed. Obviously, online engagement requires personal resources and is not made “on the run”. Mobile services were not related to the no. of staff. Surprisingly, no dependencies between IR social media engagement and trading volume within the US market (direct listing or ADR), free float, no. of retail shareholders, shareholder activism, or share performance could be found within this study (see Table 13). H13 was only partly confirmed. H12 and H15 were rejected.

Discussion and Implications for IR Practice

This study revealed that social media as a component of IR websites is a common feature used by listed companies in the five major international markets researched. External social media platforms are utilized less often, but are on the rise compared to previous years. Whereas US companies were on the forefront of IR 2.0 engagement beforehand, German large-caps have caught up and perform on the same level as their US counterparts and even outperform them in
the field of mobile applications. UK and French corporations have improved their engagement. Japanese large-caps are still least active within the sample. However, US large-caps as early-adopters and frontrunners lead in the field of dialogic approaches. Dialogue and relationship building can be seen as the next level and challenge within online IR.

Really getting in a virtual dialogue with shareholders and other members of the financial community is demanding and does not only require new technical platforms, but resources, structures, a strategic online approach and especially the company’s willingness and ability to listen and participate in these conversations (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012; Macnamara, 2013). US large-caps clearly lead the field within dialogic online IR at the moment. As seen with social media activities, they will prospectively be challenged by other countries and indices in regard to online conversations. Communication style will also be of importance: an argumentative rather than informative or even persuasive communication style serves as a precondition for relationship building. Shareholder conversations online can be challenging for a department that has to obey regulatory provisions and disclosure policies. However, it is established practice to deal with institutional investors and analysts offline in one-on-ones or other personal meetings. IR has the expertise in such conversations in which non-disclosed information is not intended to be communicated. The experiences are to be transferred to online communications. Mobile applications and mobile use of social media platforms will gain importance within IR. This study shows that mobility is currently not focused on by international large-caps. This will probably change as mobile usage further grows and IR apps, mobile websites etc. are demanded by shareholders.

Corporations are challenged to develop an individual approach to social media which fits into their specific corporate cultures and is related to equity culture and social media adoption within financial markets. It will be important to have an online and social media strategy that does not only rely on best practices and currently hyped platforms, but accounts for overall IR strategy (shareholder targeting, equity structure) and aims.

**Limitations and Future Research**

This research only focused on the top 30 companies in five major financial markets. The findings should be stretched out over small and mid-cap companies in those countries or to more countries. Therefore, analysis could provide a broader picture regarding the social media engagement of financial communicators around the world. As neo-institutional theory suggests that there has to be front-runner companies when establishing a new business practice, the empirical prove in the field of IR 2.0 has still to be made.

Another limitation concerns the methodological approach chosen within the study. Content analysis revealed companies’ use and dialogical approach towards online financial communications. However, interviews with IR officers could reveal the aim of the engagement. Does SAP or Cisco really engage in web 2.0 to interact with shareholders online or is there engagement kind of an “alibi” because it may be accepted by technology companies to act as forerunners? Quantitative and qualitative interviews could give deeper insights in motivation, strategic approach, monitoring tools, or stakeholders. Obviously, comparing results from the interviews and the content analysis would provide even more insights.

Measuring dialogue is hard to achieve. Dialogue means listening and talking in the same way. When it comes to “the architecture of listening” (Macnamara, 2013), organizations have to be asked to get to know their specific approaches. Within the study, organizational responses were comprised, but no response times analyzed and a qualitative analysis of comments could
not be performed. Best practices show that organizations responded also towards critical comments. However, the study at hand lacks an overview of the relationship between negative, neutral, positive comments and how financial communicators dealt with those. One reason for this lack within the methodology was that the goal of this study was to identify whether a dialogic approach is apparent at all. As expected, it was found that only a minority of companies employ a dialogical approach within the Internet until now. Further investigations are recommended to aim at the concrete content level.

As the social media landscape is changing quickly, platforms included within the study can only be a starting point. More specific financially related platforms like StockR or SeekingAlpha could be included. Also, country-specific platforms might be analyzed (comScore, 2011). Interviews with the users, e.g. retail shareholders, institutional investors, financial journalists or analysts would give further insights in usage patterns and expectations towards financial communications online. Zerfaß, Köhler, Kiss, Adler, Haker, Müller, Ratter, and Raulf (2012) have conducted the first studies for German retail shareholders but there are no comparative research projects until now. As IR and financial communications will continue to be one of the most important fields within international strategic communications, a broad field of opportunities for further research becomes visible.
References


Social Media Newsrooms in Public Relations
Developing a Conceptual Framework and Researching Corporate Practices
in the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany

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Dana Melanie Schramm
Seedmatch, Dresden, Germany

Abstract
The rise of social media in organizational settings has opened up new horizons for strategic communication. However, there are also drawbacks. Arguably the most important one is increased complexity. Many communication departments use a multitude of platforms ranging from corporate websites, campaign microsites and blogs to services like Facebook, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, Flickr, Slideshare and the like to reach out, address, communicate and interact with stakeholders. The diversity of channels and fragmentation of audiences lead to situations where external stakeholders, employees, top management and even public relations professionals themselves find it difficult to access the totality of social web communications in which an organization is involved. Social Media Newsrooms (SMNRs) have been introduced as instruments to reduce this complexity. While there are many definitions and manifestations in practice, the basic idea is straightforward: SMNRs aggregate social media content provided by the organization and/or thematic content about the organization and its key issues from several platforms in one place. Unlike traditional online newsrooms, which are designated as professional information sources for journalists, they are usually open for comments and dialogue, and they address a broad range of stakeholders. Although SMNRs have been used in public relations practice around the world since the concept was first introduced in 2007, empirical evidence is still missing. This paper closes the research gap by a) introducing SMNRs from a conceptual perspective based on a literature review, b) exploring opportunities and challenges for strategic communication, c) researching empirical manifestations and modes of usage by corporations in three major international markets (United States, United Kingdom, Germany) based on a comprehensive content analysis of the 600 largest companies and 2,045 affiliated brands and subsidiaries, and d) explaining implications for the practice of public relations.
Introduction

The potentials and limitations of online and social media platforms in public relations as well as the actual use in the profession have been a focus of research during the last few decades (Duhé, 2012; Ye & Ki, 2012). At the same time, consultants, agencies and authors of business books have not rested to propagate the implementation of nearly every channel and technology that has emerged – ranging from long-forgotten list servers and virtual world applications to mobile media, which has been identified as the field with the largest gap between importance and implementation in public relations (Zerfass & Tench, 2012). One of those instruments, which is mentioned in nearly every applied publication on social media relations, is the Social Media Newsroom (SMNR). The concept was introduced in the United States by a consultancy (SHIFT Communications, 2007) and has since been heavily discussed in blogs, online communities and books advising on social media communications. The discussion is mostly attuned to the benefits of such platforms, which aggregate social media content provided by an organization and/or thematic content about an organization and its key issues from several platforms in one virtual place on the corporate website or on a specific website (Brown, 2009; Hay, 2009; Seiple, 2011). Along this line, several SMNRs of major corporations have been presented as best practices and received awards in renowned industry competitions.

Despite this intense discussion for more than five years, a comprehensive examination of SMNRs has not taken place so far. While a number of case studies have been published, nothing is known about the actual implementation of such platforms in corporate practice. Also, it is not known whether real-life applications make use of the manifold advantages described in the literature, i.e. whether SMNRs serve as a starting point for dialogical communication and relationship building with a broad variety of stakeholders and whether they are used to present and discuss the full range of topics shaping the identity of the organization.

Why does it make sense to research this specific type of social media application in public relations? In today’s global online environment, companies and other organizations utilize a large number of owned and public channels for their communications. They publish text, images, videos, links and other forms of content (i.e. PDF documents) on corporate websites and blogs, campaign microsites, Twitter, Facebook, Google+, YouTube, Flickr, Slideshare and so on. Organizations and those speaking on their behalf leave marks everywhere. At the same time, more content about companies, products and relevant issues is produced by online media and by social media conversations among stakeholders. The basic problem that arises from this development is a growing flood of information and sources as well as a rising complexity of the communicative representation of any organization within the public sphere. Stakeholders searching for general corporate information on the social web might end up watching a product video on YouTube, which may even be a fake uploaded by someone else. Bloggers who are interested in multimedia content snippets will find it difficult to use traditional online newsrooms aimed at journalistic research patterns, while most journalists might prefer to see contextual information and ongoing online debates in addition to plain press releases. Last but not least, many employees, business partners, top management and public relations professionals themselves are interested in ways to reduce the complexity and to assess all communications from, and probably also about, their organization on the social web.

Social Media Newsrooms are designated to address this challenge by providing a single access point to social web information and conversation for a specific organization (Holzinger & Sturmer, 2012, pp. 173-202). Online communications are not manageable in the same sense as corporate media and even media relations might be. Communication professionals in the United
States and in Europe report that corporations have more touch points with their publics and less control over their messages than five years ago (Swerling, Thorson, & Zerfass, 2012). SMNRs are an approach to getting hold of this in a very subtle and strategic way. While communication is not limited to the official standpoint of the corporation, and feedback as well as ongoing debates in external communities are displayed, the platform itself, as well as the choice of integrated channels, topics and degree of dialogue, is controlled by the organization. Obviously, this will not prevent investigative journalists or critical stakeholders using other sources and making up their own mind. But the vast majority of stakeholders rely on search engines (Google, Bing) for information retrieval (Purcell, Brenner, & Rainie, 2012). SMNRs are easily spotted and ranked high by search engines because they bundle a lot of traffic as well as inbound and outbound links, which is a relevant criterion for most algorithms used by these services.

This paper explores the field from a theoretical point of view. It starts by reviewing the literature, introducing a comprehensive definition of Social Media Newsrooms, and describing opportunities and challenges ascribed to the instrument. The framework used to describe SMNRs is based on the functions of social software identified by Schmidt (2007) and the principles of dialogic communication by Kent and Taylor (1998). Building upon these insights, research questions and hypotheses for the empirical study are presented. The study itself is a quantitative content analysis conducted for the 200 largest companies (by revenue) in the United States, United Kingdom and Germany in August 2012. As many as 2,645 websites on the corporate, business unit and brand level were identified and analyzed, but only 100 of them contained SMNRs. In a next step, all identified newsrooms were investigated in detail. Data were evaluated by descriptive and analytical statistics using SPSS. Results show that the basic added value of any SMNR to provide a simple, fast and clear access to important corporate information is not realized comprehensively. Moreover, “corporate speech” is predominant and specific opportunities connected to SMNRs are rarely used. The paper explains a full range of results. It closes with recommendations for the implementation of SMNRs and shows perspectives and consequences for the practice of public relations.

**Literature Review**

A review of descriptions of Social Media Newsrooms in both the Anglo-American and German-language debate since 2007 has identified a number of overlapping approaches, but no common definition. The concept was originally introduced in February 2007 by Todd Defren, founder of SHIFT Communications, a former public relations agency in San Francisco, which has now developed into a major integrated digital communications consultancy. SHIFT introduced a sample template for constructing SMNRs (see Figure 1) and described the aim of those platforms as opening and broadening corporate communications. An SMNR “is intended to get companies thinking about how to present themselves to broader audiences; to motivate greater participation and openness; and potentially boost organic website SEO [Search Engine Optimization]. In part, it is also intended to both ‘microchunk’ news content and make most elements ‘subscribable’, so visitors can readily pick-and-choose, receive-and-share only those content aspects that are relevant to them, as individuals. … Neither a Social Media News Release nor a Social Media Newsroom are intended for any one specific audience. They are intended to meet the needs of people-journalists, bloggers & laypeople” (SHIFT Communications, 2007). It is important to understand that the debate about Social Media Newsrooms was rooted in the discourse on media relations. At that time, bloggers had criticized traditional, text-based and non-interactive press releases as less suitable for their daily work. PR agencies like SHIFT
Communications started publishing Social Media Press Releases with shorter bits of text, multimedia content, links to social media platforms, feedback options etc. (Ward-Johnson & Guiniven, 2007). A next logical step was to rethink the design of traditional corporate newsrooms on company websites. The basic idea, mentioned in the quote above, was an evolvement that would enable public relations to keep pace with the communication needs of journalists, new opinion makers like bloggers and broader audiences alike. Brown takes a rather restricted view by defining SMNRs as “an evolution of the digital press office or pressroom” on a website by means of the social web (2009, p. 130-131). This perspective is also supported by Schindler and Liller (2011).

Figure 1: Social Media Newsroom Template proposed by SHIFT Communications (2007)

Mathauer, on the other hand, supports a broader approach: “The social media newsroom is a dynamic information and communication platform on which the company combines classic public relations content while contents of various Web 2.0 services are aggregated to build a comprehensive and sustained dialogue with its target groups” (2010, p. 6, translated). Hay (2009, p. 262) defines SMNRs mainly by their technical characteristics. Usually, any SMNR is
constructed like a blog based on a platform like WordPress or another content management system. Each headline or content displayed links to an internal or external site with a permanent Internet address (URL). Information is thus linked directly and permanently. Based on this, the concept might be linked to the definitions and characteristics of blogs and corporate blogs.

**Definition and Elements**

The following definition shall be used for this study. It combines the different strands of thoughts discussed above and takes a comprehensive, but also non-normative approach:

*Social Media Newsrooms (SMNRs) are modular online platforms which aggregate and present content published by the organization or content dealing with the organization from different social web applications. They are published by organizations as part of a corporate website or as a stand-alone website. Content is usually displayed in reverse chronological order; it is frequently added using content management software (for press releases, PDF downloads, etc.) or automatically via widgets which display data from other platforms (photos from Flickr, videos from YouTube, etc.). SMNRs are open to a broad variety of external and internal stakeholders. Depending on the platform technologies, content and communication style, they can be used for information presentation and retrieval as well as for dialogic communication and relationship building.*

Typical elements of Social Media Newsrooms described in the literature (Brown, 2009; Hay, 2009; Ruisinger, 2012; SHIFT Communications, 2007) are:

- press releases and/or social media releases as well as other news published by the organization, including an archive;
- graphics, images, audio and video elements;
- headlines and links to external reports about the organization, based on a media monitoring or social media monitoring;
- content from social media channels used by the company (tweets from a Twitter channel, post from Facebook profiles and corporate blog, PDF presentations from Slideshare);
- basic information about the organization, i.e. image brochures, annual reports;
- calendar of events (e.g. schedule of media events, trade fairs, industry dates);
- links to company-owned or company-related websites;
- contact details for communication representatives (name, position, phone, e-mail; to some extent also LinkedIn profile and Skype address);
- options to subscribe content, for example via RSS feeds;
- tag cloud;
- search function;
- social bookmarking services.

An SMNR is usually characterized by its modularity, which allows adding, rearranging or deleting content and “building blocks” by public relations professionals who take care of the platform, and sometimes even by the users who can select or deselect content. Obviously, any SMNR requires up-to-date and changing social media content. The instrument is especially suitable for organizations that frequently publish news releases and news items, run several social media channels and continuously communicate with their stakeholders (Ruisinger, 2012).
This also means that setting up an SMNR might look like a quick-win project at first glance because a lot of existing information can be integrated. But running the platform needs a lot of attention because the organization’s communication on the social web will be more transparent than before.

Due to the flexible approach, SMNRs can be used for quite different strategic objectives. The existing literature is merely descriptive by outlining basic elements, features and benefits as well as normative objectives like dialogic communication and multi-stakeholder dialogues. Empirical insights into the objectives would have to be based on interviews with organizations or analyses of strategy papers for SMNRs; such research is not known until now. Nevertheless, it is possible to name opportunities and challenges for public relations which come along with this instrument.

**Benefits and Opportunities of Social Media Newsrooms**

SMNRs provide a platform for external and internal stakeholders, including journalists, to obtain, research and verify information and media content about an organization and related issues (activities, products, strategies, strategic topics, standpoints …) from a single trusted source. SMNRs offer the following benefits for users – if the features are included:

- a simple, fast and clear access to public information issued by the organization: press releases, audiovisual material, news, corporate messages, campaigns and services, as well as content posted on internal and external social media platforms;
- overview of the social media discourse about the focal organization;
- opportunities for commenting and communicating directly with the organization;
- up-to-date content and information retrieval based on automatic updates;
- archives for many types of content (e.g. press releases, annual reports);
- license-free multimedia material (photos, videos, audio files etc.);
- pull distribution (e.g. via RSS) enables professional newsgathering for journalists, bloggers and other interested parties; future news will not be missed.

From the point of view of an organization and its public relations function, the added value and opportunities provided by SMNRs are (see e.g., Brown, 2009; Hay, 2009; Ruisinger, 2012; Wuebben, 2011):

- improved communication service for external and internal stakeholders (including journalists and bloggers) by establishing a multimedia hub in the social web;
- establishing feedback loops and dialogic communication with broad audiences;
- expanding and bundling relationship building on the social web;
- promoting credibility, openness and digital reputation among social web audiences;
- opportunity for framing the discussion about the organization through the selection and presentation of sources, keywords and topics;
- agenda setting and positioning the organization in a broad way;
- search engine optimization;
- more chances of being talked and reported about due to increased chance of reporting by the benefits described above for journalists and other multipliers;
- cost savings through declining information requests by phone or by e-mail;
- opportunities to monitor, evaluate and link discourses across different platforms;
- flexible options to add, change or delete sources and selection criteria for the information displayed in SMNRs without the necessity to use IT services (important in crisis situations, mergers which cannot be announced beforehand etc.).
This overview shows that SMNRs can be a very effective tool for public relations. Moreover, these platforms are well known and heavily promoted in corporate practice, at least in countries with a highly professional communication profession like the United States and Western Europe. It can be expected that a majority of large companies in those regions use SMNRs by now.

Requirements and Challenges

Despite the long list of opportunities, not all organizations will be able to run SMNRs effectively. This is due to the fact that a number of specific requirements have to be met before starting such a comprehensive communication platform on the social web. Ideally, any instruments including SMNRs should contribute to overall organizational goals. This means that types and priorities of stakeholder relations, topics and communication activities to be supported by a newsroom have to be defined beforehand, based on transparent planning processes (i.e. using value links and scorecards) and key performance indicators which are necessary to evaluate the platform performance. This is especially important because SMNRs are dynamic and flexible by nature. Success, failure and need to develop can only be identified if clear objectives have been defined.

Like any social media platforms, SMNRs can only be established and sustained if governance structures and resources – ranging from financial budgets to competencies of internal and external staff involved – are at hand (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012; Linke & Zerfass, 2012). Being able to produce relevant and current content which meets stakeholder expectations is as essential as the competence to adapt this content for different social media services. Otherwise, the transparency provided by SMNRs will have negative effects on the image and reputation of the organization (Ruisinger, 2012). Based on this line of thought, it can be expected that SMNRs will be more often implemented by larger organizations which operate in markets with many stakeholders and a large variety of communication topics (business-to-consumer) and in tech-savvy industries with talented social media staff (media, telecommunications and software).

When comparing legal requirements, a major challenge in European countries like Germany and the United Kingdom is data protection, especially with regard to the integration of social plug-ins on company websites. Social plug-ins are a key technological element of any SMNR. They are under criticism because they collect data, e.g. date and time of the page request and the IP addresses of all users of the site. The owner of the site on which the social plug-in has been implemented is responsible for protection against data privacy violations. According to the European Union, personal data in this sense “is any information relating to an individual, whether it relates to his or her private, professional or public life. It can be anything from a name, a photo, […] posts on social networking websites or [the] computer’s IP address. The EU data protection rules apply when a person can be identified, directly or indirectly, by such data. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights says that everyone has the right to personal data protection in all aspects of life: at home, at work […] or on the Internet” (European Commission, 2012, p. 1). Obviously, this legislation makes it more difficult and costly for European organizations to implement SMNRs. Moreover, comparative studies show that social media platforms for public relations are used to a lesser extent in Europe than in the United States. As a consequence, SMNRs will probably be more prevalent in the US than in Europe.
Towards a Theoretical Framework

Obviously, the discussion of opportunities and challenges for Social Media Newsrooms could be expanded and detailed in many aspects. In order to structure the characteristics and to derive more hypotheses for empirical research, it is necessary to integrate the dimensions in a theoretical framework. As SMNRs are initiated as a part of strategic communication and public relations activities, it makes sense to expand an empirically proven typology by Schmidt (2007) which describes three different functions of social web applications. While this author argues mainly on the individual level, the same functions are relevant for corporate actors. SMNRs are relevant for **information management**. They serve as platforms for presenting, arranging, aggregating and linking content from different social media and online channels. This basic function is the core aspect and widely described in the literature, comprising a variety of practical goals from information services to agenda setting. As the concept has evolved from traditional media newsrooms on corporate websites, press releases and news play an important role. However, SMNRs are also important means for **identity management**, meaning that they enable organizations to present a selective view of their own personality. This has been mentioned above when discussing framing opportunities. Specific choices of channels, topics, communication styles etc. position the organization in its stakeholder environment. The flexible newsroom technology allows for quite diverse presentations, i.e. a company might use an SMNR purely for distributing business-related information with few feedback opportunities, or it might present itself as an opinion leader stimulating and linking online debates about public issues in a very interactive way. Last but not least, SMNRs are important for **relationship management**. Organizations may use newsrooms to establish and nourish communicative interactions with a multitude of stakeholders. In contrast to other ways of communicating, those relationships on the social web will mostly not be hidden, but visible to others.

A number of prerequisites for relationship building and information management on the social web have been identified in the literature. Kent and Taylor (1998) name five principles for building relationships through online public relations, which can be adapted to social media communications (Droller, 2012). Several of those principles are implemented in the basic features of any SMNR, especially the ease of the interface and the generation of return visits by updating content. However, the usefulness of information (second principle by Kent & Taylor) is a key challenge for every Social Media Newsroom. By definition, those platforms should address a broad variety of stakeholders. This, on the contrary, makes it difficult to present content that is attractive to specific users. According to previous research (Schmidt, 2007), means for **structuring and categorizing social media information** (i.e. tags, keywords, flexible selection criteria) are most important to cope with this challenge. Thinking of relationship management, Kent and Taylor (1998) point out that **feedback options** are a prerequisite for a dialogue between an organization and its stakeholders (first principle; dialogic loop). While social media technologies at the backbone of any SMNR usually provide such options, it is not self-evident that these options are activated or used in each case. The flexibility of the approach makes it possible to construct SMNRs with hardly any feedback elements.

If dialogues are facilitated, another distinction has to be made. It would be naïve to argue that any dialogical, two-way communication is symmetrical or oriented towards an exchange of ideas and joint problem solutions. Speech philosophy and its applications in public relations theory tell us that we have to distinguish between different **communication styles** (Zerfaß, 1996). Basically, it is possible to use a persuasive, argumentative or informative communication style. The persuasive communication style is characterized by the fact that the communicator tries to
exploit emotional bonds and existing preferences of the recipient in order to push solely his own interests. Dialogue, in this case, results in an exchange of ideas and words, but not in building up joint visions and mutual relationships. Argumentative communication, on the other hand, relies on the insights of everybody involved. The communicator will not impose a fixed world view or solution, but stimulate a joint process of clarifying interests and searching common ground with the recipient. An informative communication style is characterized by the prevalence of presenting knowledge without a specific end. So it is very much up to the recipient and his situation and interpretation of how the dialogue will materialize on the relationship level. While the distinction of the communication styles is analytical, empirical research has proved a significant influence of the style used by organizations when posting Facebook messages on the frequency of user comments. Content analysis of 100 non-profit organizations in the United States and Germany showed that an argumentative communication style stimulated a mean of 16.49 comments, while a persuasive style provoked 4.38 comments and an informative style only 1.51 comments (Droller, 2012, pp. 108-109).

Concluding these theoretical considerations, it can be estimated that organizations will use SMNRs to present a broad range of content with a specific focus on press releases and news. In order to utilize the advantages of social web communications for multiple audiences, SMNR content will most probably be categorized and structured and deal with a broad range of social, economic and ecological issues, which helps to position the organization in its stakeholder network. In order to exploit the full potential of SMNRs, organizations will initiate dialogues by offering feedback opportunities and by using an argumentative communication style.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

In order to shed light on the practice of Social Media Newsrooms in corporate practice, an empirical study across three major international markets was conducted. The research is limited to corporations which are arguably spearheading social media use in public relations both in the United States and Europe (Swerling, Thorson, & Zerfass, 2012). The overall research question was:

*RQ: To what extent do the 200 largest companies each in Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States use Social Media Newsrooms (SMNRs) in terms of quantity, content and functions, and which variables influence the use of these platforms?*

This relatively broad question was specified by several research questions and hypotheses which are derived from presuppositions discussed in the theoretical section of this paper:

*RQ1: To what extent are SMNRs used by the 200 largest companies in Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States?*

**H1:** The majority of companies analyzed operate at least one SMNR (Quantity).
**H2:** The number of SMNRs differs among the three countries (United States, United Kingdom, Germany), and they are more prevalent in the US (Spread).

*RQ2: Which contents and functions are implemented in SMNRs used by the companies in the international sample?*

**H3:** The majority of SMNRs integrate and display press releases and/or news, which is also the core content of traditional online newsrooms (Content).
**H4:** The majority of SMNRs give users the opportunity to categorize and structure content (Information management).
H5: The most important topics dealt with in SMNRs are social, economic and ecological issues which allow the company to position itself in a broad stakeholder environment (Identity management).

H6: Most SMNRs offer feedback opportunities for users which provide opportunities for a dialogic loop (Relationship management).

H7: The majority of SMNRs are characterized by an argumentative communication style, while persuasive and informative approaches are less prevalent (Communication style).

RQ3: Which independent variables influence the use of SMNRs?

H8: Companies with higher annual revenues are more likely to use SMNRs than smaller organizations (Size).

H9: Companies in the technology industry as well as those in the software, telecommunications and media industry use SMNRs more often than those operating in other sectors (Industry).

H10: Companies serving business-to-consumer markets use SMNRs more often than those operating in a business-to-business environment (Market segments).

Methodology

A quantitative content analysis was conducted to answer the research questions posed above. The population is 600 companies in three major markets, the 200 largest companies each in Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States, according to their revenue in the 2011 fiscal year. The selection was based on rankings published by major newspapers and business magazines. In Germany, the ranking “Deutschlands größte Unternehmen in Zahlen” (Germany’s largest companies in numbers) issued by the country’s leading quality newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung in July 2012 has been used (F.A.Z., 2012). In the United States, the “Fortune 500 2012” list by Fortune Magazine from May 2012 proved to be a valid source (Fortune Magazine, 2012). In the United Kingdom, the sample was composed by combining the “FT UK 500 2012” ranking by the Financial Times from July 2012, which includes only listed companies, with the “Top Track 100 2012” ranking of non-listed companies in the UK published in June 2012 by the Sunday Times in cooperation with market research company Fast Track (Financial Times, 2012; Sunday Times, 2012).

The study was conducted in a two-week period in August 2012 by a single researcher, based on a codebook that had been derived from the theoretical framework and a pretest. An intracoder reliability test was performed using Holsti and Pearson coefficients. The overall reliability was .96 for nominal scales and .80 for metric variables.

In a first step, it was necessary to identify any Social Media Newsrooms used by the companies in the population. This was done by analyzing the corporate website of every company in any country in which the organization is part of the top 200 ranking. Search functions on the website were fed with the keywords “social media”, “newsroom”, “Facebook”, “blog”, “Twitter” and “YouTube”. It was assumed that this should help to identify any SMNRs integrated on the corporate website, SMNRs which are linked but offered on specific websites, as well as external social media channels which were tracked to check whether they are integrated into a newsroom. Additionally, the press or media relations section of each website was examined to verify whether SMNRs are offered under this label. If both search strategies proved to be unsuccessful, the search engine Google was used to trace any existing SMNRs of the companies. This was done by combining the keywords “social media newsroom”, “social media”, “press” and “newsroom” with the related company name. In a second step, every SMNR
which had been identified was analyzed in more detail regarding its structure, content, prevalent communication style etc.

Obviously, SMNRs can be used as a public relations tool on the corporate level, but also by subsidiaries, divisions and brands of the companies researched. It can even be expected that some companies in the sample will utilize social media primarily in those realms, depending on the overall communication strategy. For instance, automotive company Daimler AG operates a specific SMNR in Germany for its passenger car division Mercedes-Benz Classic. External stakeholders, journalists and bloggers will often search for popular brand names instead of the corporation itself on the social web.

This had been taken into account in the content analysis. Brands and subsidiaries of the companies in the sample were identified by consulting the corporate websites, the annual report of the corporations and three major brand rankings (Interbrand, 2011; Millward Brown, 2011; Brand Finance, 2012). Afterwards, the same multi-step approach as described above was used to identify SMNRs operated by brands and subsidiaries.

Overall, 600 companies plus 2,045 subsidiaries and brands in three countries were examined. Statistical analysis software (SPSS version 18) was used to perform the data collection and analysis.

Results

The empirical study showed that there is a sharp contrast between the praise for Social Media Newsrooms in the literature and the implementation of these platforms in corporate practice. Moreover, the content analysis suggested that a majority of those companies who have already implemented SMNRs are not utilizing them to a full extent.

Implementation and types of Social Media Newsrooms (RQ1; H1, H2)

The first research question asked about the use of SMNRs by the 200 largest companies each in the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany. The analysis unveils a low rate of implementation. In spite of the differentiated research method described above, only 100 SMNRs could be identified: 47 in the US, 34 in Germany, and 19 in the UK.

Some companies operate several SMNRs due to their consolidated subsidiaries and brands. In Germany, 25 out of the 200 largest companies have at least one SMNR (12.5 percent) and nine companies run two SMNRs. In the US, 23 companies operate at least one SMNR (11.5 percent), two companies have two SMNRs, one company has four platforms (Coca-Cola company) and one company (Procter & Gamble company) runs 20 different SMNRs. In the UK, 15 companies operate at least one SMNR (7.5 percent), two companies run two and one company (HSBC Group) has implemented three SMNRs. To sum this up, 63 companies use one or more SMNRs.

When comparing SMNRs on the corporate level, neglecting subsidiaries and brands, 21 out of the 200 largest US companies use an SMNR (10.5 percent), which is about the same ratio as Germany with 18 companies (9.0 per cent), but significantly more than the nine companies identified in the UK (4.5 percent).

Irrespective of the organizational background, SMNRs may differ according to their overall focus and type. The total of 100 SMNRs identified was categorized to catch possible differences in this respect. A majority (55 of 100) of SMNRs mainly contain information directly related to the particular company and its activities. Twelve focus on brands or products, two present the company as an employer, and 25 clearly aim at customers and keep them informed.
Six SMNRs are related to specific topics or issues beyond the own company or product world: electro mobility (Siemens), software and business (IBM), current research results (Pfizer), Shell Eco-Marathon (Shell), current music (Virgin Group), or sports and sport sponsorship (G4S Ltd., a company in the security industry). No campaign newsroom could be identified. A country-to-country comparison shows that more than half of the SMNRs identified in the US either provide information about brands and products or are used for customer service and information (55.3 percent). SMNRs in Germany and the United Kingdom are mainly designated to represent the company and its activities. Statistical analysis revealed a significant, moderate correlation between the type of SMNR and the country in which the SMNR is used (Cramer’s V = .308).

Hypothesis 1 has to be rejected. Only 10.5 percent (63 out of 600) of the 200 largest companies each in the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany operate at least one SMNR. This is far less than the majority, which was expected.

Hypothesis 2 was partly supported by the analysis. SMNRs are more prevalent in the United States. However, the number of companies using at least one SMNR and the number of companies using SMNRs on the corporate level is about the same in Germany. The larger number of newsrooms in the US is mainly driven by the fact that two major consumer companies have implemented several platforms for their brands. Apart from this, SMNRs have clearly been less popular as public relations tools in the United Kingdom until now.

Elements and contents of Social Media Newsrooms (RQ2; H3)

The second research question asked about the contents and functions implemented in the SMNRs operated by the companies in the sample.

In this context, it is important to provide a general overview of the social web applications utilized by the newsroom platforms. Several software characteristics enable and limit types of contents and functionalities. Table 1 shows how often popular social web technologies and platforms are either integrated into the SMNRs, which means that content is directly fed and displayed to any user visiting the SMNR, or linked to the SMNR, meaning that there is a link but no content is shown within the newsroom itself.

Twitter (integrated by 92 percent of all newsrooms), YouTube (integrated by 86 percent) and Facebook (integrated by 56 percent) are the most popular applications in Social Media Newsrooms. RSS feeds (linked by 62 percent) and Social Bookmarking Services (linked by 50 percent) are also quite relevant. However, due to the nature of those services, they are not used to feed content into the newsroom but to enable users to mark and forward online content. Services mentioned in the category “other applications” include discussion forums, microblogging platform Stock Twits, location-based service Foursquare and photo-sharing service Instagram. A special feature in the SMNR of Telefónica Germany is audio support: text content, i.e. press releases, can be read out loud, and even the entire SMNR can be downloaded as an MP3 file.

Cross-country comparisons show that Facebook is poorly integrated in the UK. Only 21.1 percent of British SMNRs feed Facebook directly, which is significantly less than in the US (57.4 percent) and in Germany (73.5 percent). Germany is also leading when it comes to the implementation of blogs (50.0 percent). Flickr, a social sharing service for photos and similar content, is fed into 42.1 percent of SMNRs in the UK, compared to 35.3 percent in Germany and only 6.4 percent in the US. With regard to the type of SMNRs, it should be noted that YouTube is almost always integrated in SMNRs focusing on brands, products or customer services (94.6 percent). Blogs are integrated more frequently (47.7 percent) in SMNRs that provide overall information about the company and its activities.
An analysis of different types of content integrated in SMNRs shows that 79 of the 100 SMNRs in the sample provide an access to press releases, either by integrating them directly into the newsroom (39 percent) or by linking to press releases on another platform (40 per cent) (see Table 2). News pieces which do not correspond to the formal structure of a press release are displayed in 25 SMNRs and linked by an additional 12 platforms. Fifty newsrooms in the sample integrate press releases and/or news. An external view on the company and related topics is provided by 28 percent of the SMNRs by integrating or linking media monitoring content. Almost the same number of SMNRs offer other textual content like brochures, press kits, forum posts, speeches, or interviews with and biographies of the managing board. Non-textual content is also relevant: 40 percent of the newsrooms have integrated a database with images, pictures or graphics, and 28 percent offer a calendar of events. When it comes to content retrieval, tag clouds which draw attention to key terms and topics are seldom used (13 percent). Surprisingly, 14 SMNRs do not offer any search function, e.g. the newsrooms run by Lufthansa and Dell.

A comparison by country shows a highly significant, moderate correlation between the use of press releases in an SMNR and the country to which the SMNR refers (Cramer’s $V = .444$). Press releases are more frequently integrated in Germany (58.8 percent) than in the UK (47.3 percent) and the US (21.2 percent). It has to be taken into account that many US companies use SMNRs for products, brands and customer communication, which seldom involve press releases. There is a highly significant, strong correlation between the type of SMNR and the use of press releases (Cramer’s $V = .669$). Typically, SMNRs on the corporate level address journalists and include media-related content.

### Table 1: Social software applications used in SMNRs (N=100, absolute frequencies)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social web application</th>
<th>SMNRs integrating the application</th>
<th>SMNRs linking to the application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSS Feed</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Bookmarking</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Plug-ins</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flickr</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vodcast</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podcast</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other applications</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slideshare</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vimeo</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiki</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Hypothesis 3 was not confirmed. Fifty percent of the SMNRs analyzed integrate and display either press releases or news pieces, i.e., although the target has only just been missed, not a majority. A larger number of newsrooms provide access to press releases and news by linking to content on other websites. But here the basic idea of a one-stop information platform is not implemented.

**Information Management and Structuring (RQ2; H4)**

Social Media Newsrooms structure content from different sources by arranging and linking it on a single website. Structuring is directly related to the filtering, selecting, evaluating and managing of information (Schmidt, 2007). In order to provide useful information for a variety of users, Social Media Newsrooms should allow a categorization of content, for example related to specific topics, types of information or social media applications.

The analysis unveiled that only 23 percent of the 100 SMNRs identified included such options. Some examples are the SMNRs run by the Centrica Group, General Electric Healthcare and Mercedes-Benz Social Publish. 36.8 percent of British SMNRs enable users to categorize content, compared to 26.5 percent in Germany and 14.9 percent in the US. Related to this, with the exception of some thematic newsrooms (i.e. sport sponsorship by G4S Ltd.), there is no cross-linking of the aggregated content; posts from different sources are usually not related to each other. This is another indicator that the information management dimension is less developed in most SMNRs.

Hypothesis 4 has to be rejected. Less than a quarter of the Social Media Newsrooms researched give users the opportunity to categorize and structure content (23 percent).

**Identity Management (RQ2; H5)**

Identity management is essential for companies in order to illustrate various aspects of themselves, for example to position themselves in society and to differentiate themselves from competitors. Self-representation on the social web is usually one of the main goals when implementing a Social Media Newsroom. In order to attract broad audiences, a wide spectrum of topics seems to be appropriate. It was estimated that a presentation of views on social, economic and environmental issues would be a widely used technique to stimulate discussions with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content element</th>
<th>SMNRs integrating the content element</th>
<th>SMNRs linking to the content element</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text content</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press releases</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media monitoring results</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other textual content</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press archive</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image database</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calendar</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tag cloud</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search function</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Content elements used in SMNRs (N=100, absolute frequencies)
stakeholders and to utilize SMNRs for agenda setting. Table 3 shows the results of the content analysis. A distinction was made between whether a topic is presented or discussed on the platform (i.e. in Twitter or blog posts integrated into the newsroom) or whether the platform links to external channels, where the topic can be investigated.

Services and products clearly dominate the self-representation of US, UK and German companies in their Social Media Newsrooms. Only the thematic-style newsroom by G4S Ltd. on sports and sports sponsorship does not refer to market-related offers. There are no significant differences between the three countries in the sample. Fewer than one-third of the SMNRs integrate debates about broader issues, and even fewer (6 percent) explain corporate standpoints on current questions. While more information is accessible via links, the overall identity presented in Social Media Newsrooms is often limited to the business side of the company. Notable examples of companies who foster a more comprehensive approach to identity management by integrating content relevant for a variety of stakeholders are Unilever and Whitbread in the United Kingdom.

Hypothesis 5 was falsified. The most important topics dealt with in SMNRs are services and products, which were identified in 76 percent of the newsrooms, while social, economic and ecological issues and a broader approach to identity management are only prevalent in 31 percent of the SMNRs analyzed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>SMNRs integrating elements which discuss the topic</th>
<th>SMNRs linking to elements which discuss the topic</th>
<th>SMNRs which do not discuss the topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Services and products</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social, economic and ecological issues</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation with other organizations</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General facts and figures</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate standpoints</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mission statement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic principles</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Topics discussed in SMNRs (N=100, absolute frequencies)

**Relationship Management (RQ2; H6)**

Among the most important reasons for implementing Social Media Newsrooms are opportunities establishing dialogic communication and building relationships with stakeholders. It was analyzed to what extent elements integrated in SMNRs offer feedback facilities. Eleven SMNRs allow users to interact directly on the platform, responding to content provided via Twitter, YouTube, blogs, news, press releases or other textual content. But the content analysis did not reveal one single sequence in which a company post was commented on by a user and the company replied again. Twenty-four SMNRs display user comments posted in social media channels (i.e. Facebook, blogs) on the platform, and 49 SMNRs show comments made by the company in those channels. Here, participation is showcased, but these are not starting points for initiating dialogues. Some SMNRs do not even provide the most basic prerequisites for stakeholder communications: three newsrooms include neither contact details nor a contact form,
and six provide an anonymous contact form without any specific details. Only 62 percent of the SMNRs name a contact person, which is especially relevant for journalists and bloggers searching for background information and interview partners.

While the vast majority of SMNRs represent only monologues, examples show that some companies have exploited the participatory potential of SMNRs:

- The Marathon Oil Corporation enables users to tweet directly from its SMNR.
- Stakeholders may comment on blog post when using the SMNRs provided by Berghaus Ltd., General Electric Healthcare, Pfizer Think Science Now, Costa Coffee, Centrica, and Virgin Group (“Redroom”). Virgin and Pfizer also offer comment options for YouTube videos on their platforms.
- General Electric Healthcare, Puma, Berghaus Ltd., Carat and the Manpower Group allow users to give feedback on news pieces on their SMNRs.
- Visitors of the Costa Coffee Press Office SMNR can even submit feedback to press releases; and it is possible to comment on music reviews in the Virgin Group SMNR.

Hypothesis 6 could not be verified. Only a minority (11 percent) of SMNRs offer feedback opportunities for users and provide opportunities to start a dialogue. In fact, not a single dialogue going beyond comments from either the company or a stakeholder were observed during two weeks of analyzing Social Media Newsrooms of the 200 largest companies each in the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany. Relationship management seems to be a less developed aspect of SMNRs until now.

**Communication Style in Social Media Newsrooms (RQ2; H7)**

The codebook for the content analysis used criteria defined and tested by Droller (2012, p. LIII) to identify the prevalent communication style in SMNRs. Up to 30 messages or information chunks displayed in each newsroom were coded. Argumentative communication is coded if a company motivates users to comment, if it replies to statements made by stakeholders or if different positions are discussed. A persuasive style has been coded if a company instructs users to act in a specific way or if it underlines its own position. In the case of mainly neutral information, an informative style is at hand. While the codebook worked quite well, it was still not possible to clearly assign a prevalent communication style for 12 percent of the newsrooms in the sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication style</th>
<th>SMNRs</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasive</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentative</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not clearly attributable</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Prevalent communication style in SMNRs (N=100)

Results reported in Table 4 show that 50 percent of the analyzed SMNRs predominantly rely on an informative communication style, followed by 35 percent with a persuasive approach and only 3 percent with an argumentative style. Argumentative elements stimulate dialogues, as previous research has shown (Droller, 2012). This kind of communication was utilized most often in a Social Media Newsroom dealing with career issues by German retailer Otto Group and in corporate SMNRs run by Procter & Gamble and Simyo. There is a significant, moderate
correlation between the type of SMNR and its communication style (Cramer’s V = .335). A persuasive information style dominates in SMNRs which focus on customer service (52.0 percent) and brands or products (58.3 percent). There is no significant correlation between the prevalent communication style and the country.

Hypothesis 7 was falsified. The majority of Social Media Newsrooms are not characterized by an argumentative communication style, but by informative approaches. The content analysis shows that SMNRs are not designed as platforms which stimulate or even realize dialogues and argumentative communication between companies and stakeholders.

Independent Variables Influencing the Use of SMNRs (RQ3; H8, H9, H10)

Implementing and running a Social Media Newsroom needs resources, both financially and in terms of qualified employees who are able to communicate on the social web. It was estimated that companies with a higher annual turnover, with operations in the technology industry, software, telecommunications and media industry and those in business-to-consumer markets use SMNRs more often than those with other characteristics.

Hypothesis 8 has been verified. In order to compare revenues of the 600 companies in the sample (200 each from the US, UK and Germany), the values reported by the rankings mentioned above (Fortune Magazine, 2012; Financial Times, 2012; Sunday Times, 2012; F.A.Z., 2012) were converted into the euro currency. We excluded companies in the financial sector because their level of revenue is not comparable to other industries. The conversion was made in August 2012 based on an exchange rate of 1.25 USD and 0.79 BPD equaling 1.00 EUR. Spearman and Kendall’s tau-b correlation measures were applied to test the relationship between the existence of at least one SMNR and the turnover for each company. The relationship proved to be slightly positive (Spearman’s rho = .131; Kendall’s tau-b = .106) on a high level of significance (p < .01). It can be assumed that companies that have a higher revenue use more budgets for the implementation of social media activities including SMNRs.

Hypothesis 9 could not be verified. Companies in the technology, software, telecommunications and media industry are often closely associated with the Internet and social web, and previous studies have shown that they are generally more tech-savvy than other industries. The analysis revealed that 31.2 percent of all companies which belong to the telecommunications industry have already implemented at least one SMNR (5 out of 16). The figures for the other industries are 29.0 percent for the technology industry (9 out of 31), 28.6 percent for the media industry (6 out of 21) and 20.0 percent for the software industry (2 out of 8 companies). 26.7 per cent of all companies assigned to the consumer goods industry use SMNRs (8 out of 30). All other industries are lagging behind, with rather low figures in the automotive (6.1 percent) and retail sector (4.8 percent) and no SMNRs at all in the insurance, financial services and construction sector. However, statistical analysis showed that there is no significant relationship between the industry and the use of SMNRs. This independent variable does not influence social media activities.

Hypothesis 10 was verified. Business-to-consumer companies use SMNRs more frequently (12.3 percent) than business-to-business companies (5.9 percent). Most SMNRs are implemented by companies which operate in both segments (14.2 percent). Notably, HSBC Bank offers one newsroom for business banking and another one for personal finances. There is a significant weak correlation between a company’s business segment and the use of SMNRs (Cramer’s V = .130). This weak correlation is also confirmed by the PRE-level lambda test (significance value <= .004).
Discussion

The empirical analysis shows that the potential of Social Media Newsrooms for public relations and corporate communications is not fully exploited in practice, at least not by large companies in key markets which are especially exposed to the rising complexity of information on the social web. Only 10.5 percent of the 600 largest companies in the United States, United Kingdom and Germany have implemented at least one SMNR. The rate differs only slightly, with Germany and the US leading the field, followed by the UK. Overall, 100 SMNRs have been identified and analyzed in detail. The number is highest in the US due to the fact that a number of companies run several newsrooms, not only on the corporate level, but also focused on specific brands. While SMNRs were originally introduced in public relations as a means to enhance traditional media newsrooms on corporate websites and foster relationships with journalists and bloggers, many US companies use them as an instrument for marketing and consumer communications. Examples of this type of SMNR are the platforms provided by Florida Power & Light Company and Pampers (Procter & Gamble). This was observed less often in Germany and the UK, probably due to data protection laws in the European Union, which require more caution when interacting with private users.

A closer look at elements and content integrated in and linked by SMNRs indicates a focus on basic channels like Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and blogs, as well as on content which is also accessible through traditional online newsrooms (press releases, news, images). Headlines and links to external views about the company, i.e. by integrating content from media or social media monitoring, are seldom implemented.

From the users’ point of view, many benefits ascribed to Social Media Newsrooms are not put into practice. The literature review concluded that SMNRs can provide a one-stop platform on the social web for obtaining, researching and verifying information and multimedia content about a company and related issues, as well as for contacting representatives of the organization. While all of the newsrooms analyzed aggregate information from several sources, three out of four fail to offer features for categorizing and structuring content. Tag clouds are only implemented in 13 out of 100 SMNRs. Some platforms even lack search functions. With the exception of one thematic newsroom, there is no cross linking between the aggregated content displayed in SMNRs. Basic information like mission statements are often missing. Most newsrooms are still far away from offering a one-stop information base for journalists, bloggers and other stakeholders. Along this line, feedback options, contact data and other opportunities to start a dialogue with the company are only offered by a minority of the SMNRs evaluated (11 percent). With the exception of six newsrooms that focus on specific topics and use an agenda-setting approach, most platforms resemble traditional “corporate speech”. While additional research involving user surveys and evaluating online statistics would be necessary, it is quite safe to claim that most SMNRs do not fulfill the principle of usefulness of information (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

From a company and public relations perspective, a similar conclusion has to be drawn. SMNRs can be classified as a lost opportunity for strategic communication. The basic idea of establishing an improved communication service for external and internal stakeholders, including journalists and bloggers, which might also reduce inquiries via phone and e-mail and thus reduce costs, is seldom put into practice. There are some improvements for information management, but it is questionable whether this justifies the investments for setting up and running a newsroom. The same is true for relationship management. Missing feedback options
and contact data as well as the marginal use of an argumentative communication style reduce the chance for initiating dialogues and building relationships on the social web. Last but not least, only a few companies utilize the vast opportunities of SMNRs for identity management. Framing discussions and influencing the public agenda by aggregating content in a strategic manner and by positioning the company and its representatives in a broader stakeholder context are rare. Products and services are the most important topics in many newsrooms. This adds to the overall impression that most companies use Social Media Newsrooms in a quite old-fashioned manner for reaching out and for conducting monologues. However, a closer look at thematic newsrooms like those by Siemens on electro mobility and by Pfizer on current research results as well as stakeholder-specific SMNRs like the career newsroom run by the Otto Group might show paths to a more comprehensive and strategic use of such platforms.

**Limitations and Further Research**

As the empirical study presented here focuses on Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States, the results cannot be considered as being representative for other countries, especially for countries with different intensity of social media use in society and by organizations. Also, the sample consisted of companies, and it can be assumed that non-profit and governmental organizations use Social Media Newsrooms in a different way.

With regard to the country-to-country comparisons and the number of researched SMNRs, it is important to note that a limitation of this study is the lack of comprehensive lists disclosing relationships between corporations and their subsidiaries and brands. Despite the differentiated approach to identifying all newsrooms run by the 200 largest companies each in the three countries, completeness cannot be ensured. In addition, it should be noted that the strong representation of product- and brand-specific SMNRs in the United States can be partly traced to one company, Procter & Gamble, which champions the use of Social Media Newsrooms worldwide. Obviously, a content analysis of social web platforms can merely be a snapshot of the time when the study was conducted. This is especially true for SMNRs, which are dynamic and modular per definition. A replication of the study would be necessary to identify developments over time. Qualitative studies are a necessary help to research strategic and tactical objectives which motivate public relations professionals to start SMNRs. Moreover, it should be investigated to what extent and how SMNRs are used by journalists, bloggers, consumers and other stakeholders. Such research should combine uses and gratification approaches with theories of productive and interactive audiences on the social web (Sullivan, 2013).

From the professional point of view, the study provides the first comprehensive insight into an important public relations instrument that has been propagated in the industry for more than five years. Both the theoretical considerations and the empirical results should enable public relations practitioners to analyze existing SMNRs for their organizations or clients. The study should also help them develop newsrooms that utilize the full power of such platforms in terms of information, identity and relationship management. Social Media Newsrooms offer a full range of opportunities for public relations. As in many other fields, it needs strategic thinking and creative power to unfold the potential and productivity in corporate practice.
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How is Diversity Portrayed in the Websites of Brazilian Corporations?
An Analytical Study

Helga S. Pereira
Brigham Young University

Abstract

This study aims to investigate how some of the largest and most successful Brazilian corporations define diversity and portray it to the publics that access their websites. Through the analysis of ten websites of the top Brazilian corporations, retrieved from the Forbes 2000 Biggest Public Companies list, this study aims to look into a few issues relative to diversity.
Introduction

Diversity in general has been an increasingly important concept not only in the United States but also all around the world. In Brazil however, the term is fairly new to the vocabulary of its corporations. Before the mid 1990’s diversity was not widely discussed in such corporations; however, because of the discussions about the racial and gender inequality that started taking place at that time – fostered mostly by some minorities that thought they were being excluded – the Brazilian government, and later Brazilian corporations, started giving more attention to it (Fleury, 2000).

Through the years that followed since the mid 1990’s, corporations in Brazil have been trying to establish a more diverse workplace for their employees, but through the lenses of those companies, diversity has mostly meant giving opportunities to women and Afro-Brazilians (Fleury, 2000, pp. 21–25). Because of the limited focus, other minority groups such as people who are not White but are not considered Afro-Brazilians and homosexuals for example, have been largely ignored, and that has caused a lot of controversy in regards to the matter.

In 2003 the Brazilian government created a quota system for admissions into Brazilian federal institutions of higher education – a program that would allocate 40 percent of the available spots for Afro-Brazilians. This quota program generated a great deal of dissension because other groups in the Brazilian population have felt that they were somehow being excluded and that Brazil was again becoming a racist nation (Fry & Maggie, 2004, pp. 153–159). Some changes have been implemented by the Government in regards to diversity, such as the creation of public universities’ admissions quotas, but those were only related to education and not to employment opportunities for the people. Corporations, particularly, seem to have lagged in these efforts.

This study aims to investigate how some of the largest and most successful Brazilian corporations define diversity and portray it to the publics that access their websites. Through the analysis of ten websites of the top Brazilian corporations, retrieved from the Forbes 2000 Biggest Public Companies list, this study considers the following issues: is diversity portrayed or discussed at all in the company’s website? If so, what does the company state about diversity? Are there any visuals (images) that convey its concept of diversity in its website? By answering these questions it will be possible to draw a picture of where diversity stands today in the eyes of Brazilian corporations, which can be a good indicator of how Brazil as a nation has responded to the matter. Determining Brazil’s standpoint can also be of great value in creating a basis for comparison with diversity perceptions and ideas in other nations.

Diversity

For the last several years, the theme of diversity has seemed to become more present in people’s lives, especially in the lives of those who are part of corporate and governmental organizations. However, the theme has proven to be a hard one to discuss, since definitions of diversity vary. Plaut (Denton & España, 2010) has observed that diversity is seen through a “socio-cultural framework”, which means that the distinctions that we see in the society are not a product of nature or an abstract concept, but instead, those happen because of everyday interactions (p. 140).

Diversity, according to Denton & España (2010) can be explained by two models: the color-blind model and the multiculturalism model. The color-blind model posits “that people are essentially the same, thereby advocating the notion that references to race should be avoided or ignored and that social differences should be assimilated into a superordinate identity” (p. 140).
In this case then, we should not take into consideration the person’s ethnic background, since it would not matter according to this model. It is essentially a collective model, instead of an individualistic one. The multicultural model on the other hand, argues that differences among groups in fact should be taken into account, and most of all – these differences should be valued (p. 140). This model then emphasizes the importance of individualism when it comes to the building of diversity.

The color-blind and multicultural approaches, however, are not the only ones that can be used to define diversity. Cultural diversity can be viewed under different perspectives: at the societal level, at the organizational level, and at the group or the individual level (Fleury, 2000, p. 20).

Diversity, according to Oliveira, Rodrigues & Pereira (2007), is not only a representation of a certain cultural group in a system but also defined by age, personal and corporate history, educational levels, life style, sexual preference, among others (p. 6). According to Fleury (2000), “diversity is defined as a mix of people with different identities interacting in the same social system. In those systems, there are majority and minority groups that coexist. The majority groups are the ones whose members have historically gained advantage in terms of economic resources over the other ones” (p. 20).

Majority, in Fleury’s (2000) lens, is not related to the number of people, but instead, it is determined by the socio-economic status of those people.

According to Unzueta, Knowles & Ho (2012), diversity has been defined as “the distribution of differences among the members of a unit with respect to a common attribute X, such as tenure, ethnicity, conscientiousness, task attitude, or pay” (Harrison & Klein, 2007, p. 1200) and, more simply, as heterogeneity in “personality attributes, personal values, work attitudes, education, and lifestyle” (Laio, Chuang, & Joshi, 2008, p. 112). Thus, diversity now seems to encompass heterogeneity in a wide range of dimensions—not just racial composition, as was originally intended when the term came into common use (Unzueta et al., 2012, pp. 303–304).

There are other things that also need to be taken into consideration when defining diversity. Demographics such as race, religion, age, education, and parenting style for example are some of these aspects (Unzueta et al., 2012).

One interesting aspect that Unzueta et al. (2012) point out is that diversity constructs will be based on the person that is defining them. These constructs will be based on the person’s social agendas. For a Brazilian, diversity might be something totally different than what it is for a Japanese, for instance (p. 304). In a nutshell, as the authors would say, “diversity may be in the eye of the beholder” (p. 307).

**How Diversity Became a Relevant Topic**

Since 1960 there have been several political movements that were pro racial integration, and these movements have caused laws to be approved in regards to the equality of opportunities for education and work to all. These movements started in the United States and Canada, and since then the subject of diversity has been very important for companies (Fleury, 2000). The first important step towards diversity was the United States’ Affirmative Action program. Created in the end of the 1960’s, it was an answer to racial discrimination that was a constant in companies and also in educational institutions (p. 19). According to Thomas Jr. (1990), Affirmative Action was based on five premises:

1. Adult, white males make up something called the U.S. business mainstream.
2. The U.S. economic edifice is a solid, unchanging institution with more than enough space for everyone.
3. Women, blacks, immigrants, and other minorities should be allowed in as a matter of public policy and common decency.
4. Widespread racial, ethnic, and sexual prejudice keeps them out.
5. Legal and social coercion are necessary to bring about the change (p. 107).

**Diversity Since the 1960’s**

Even though the premises on which Affirmative Action in the United States was created were useful in the 1960’s, times have changed and these premises now have proved to become obsolete with regard to the American country. According to Thomas Jr. (1990), “the realities facing us are no longer the realities affirmative action was designed to fix” (p. 107).

Some of those realities are important to be recognized by U.S. companies. First of all, “more than half of the U.S. work force now consists of minorities, immigrants, and women, so white, native-born males, though undoubtedly still dominant, are themselves a statistical minority” (p. 107).

In the current scenario, American corporations are doing whatever they can to adapt to the changes that have been brought to the concept of diversity, meaning they are trying to find talents wherever they can in order to become more competitive with other companies (p. 107).

Another aspect that may be worrisome to companies is that women and minorities unfortunately lack the necessary training and education to occupy positions of higher caliber (Thomas Jr., 1990).

**Managing Diversity in American Companies**

As of the 1990’s in the United States, there were several companies that have decided to take the matter of diversity in their own hands and implement several different strategies for better management of diversity. Apparently, these strategies so far seem to have worked for those companies. Among them we can list Avon, Corning, Digital, P&G, and Xerox (Thomas Jr., 1990, pp. 108–115). Avon for example, decided to first of all provide the adequate training on all levels of employees. The idea behind that training was to change people’s perceptions on diversity and therefore, change their behavior. They also formed a multicultural participation council, which basically got together on a regular basis to discuss diversity management practices. Employees are also sent to a three week training where they work out their cultural differences with their co-workers and become open-minded about others’ ideas. Examples such as Avon’s reinforce the idea that managing diversity is an ongoing task, since ideas around it are constantly changing, and need to be observed and put into action.

In order for a company to be able to manage cultural diversity successfully, it is important that that company “adopts a holistic focus in order to create an organizational environment that will make it possible for everyone to fully develop their potential in realizing the company’s objectives. It is not a package with ready solutions, neither a program to resolve the question of discrimination and prejudice” (Fleury, 2000, p. 20).

**Diversity in Brazil**

Brazil is a 512-year old country. “Discovered” in 1500 by Pedro Álvares Cabral, it has gone through several changes in its political and societal structure. When Cabral arrived in Brazil, he realized the potential the country had to offer in terms of riches that could be sent back
to Portugal, so immediately he started to “import” African slaves to populate the country and work for the colonizers. Quickly the country was divided into colonies, just like the United States were later in the history, and those colonies each had their own bosses, but who really “ran the show” were the African slaves with their hard work. The reason why the Portuguese brought the slaves to Brazil was that, according to Natural Selection laws by Charles Darwin, the Europeans rationalized that they could in fact, appropriate themselves of people that in their point of view, were considered inferior, such as the African Blacks and the Indigenous people that lived in Brazil at the time it was “discovered” (Santos & de Jesus, 2010, p. 1).

This theoretical superiority that was idealized by the Europeans governed the way Brazil “grew up” to be what it is nowadays. Since the time slavery was abolished on May 13, 1888, Blacks have never ceased to be treated as inferior, and even though they were not slaves anymore, they still had (and have) been stereotyped as inferior. In 2012, with its sizzling and growing economy and with so much to offer, Brazil still has to deal with social inequalities and lack of opportunity, which unfortunately, are based on race and social class.

In Brazil, as well as in the United States, human diversity is a very complex subject because it not only involves biological aspects, it also involves sociological, anthropological and psychological aspects, and in this case it is pretty much impossible for a concrete concept to be arrived at (Santos & de Jesus, 2010).

It is important to note however, that:

- Brazilians value their diverse origins, including their African roots, which are present in music, in culinary, in religious syncretism; they like to think of themselves as a society that does not carry prejudices against race or color. On the other hand, it is a stratified society, in which the access to educational and professional opportunities and to the prestigious job positions in the market is defined by economic and racial origins (Fleury, 2000, p. 19).

**Brazilian Government Policies in Regards to Diversity**

In 2003, in response to several requests from women’s movements and afro-Brazilian movements for a policy that would support the promotion of racial and gender equality, the Brazilian Federal government created a National Qualification Program (Programa Nacional de Qualificação, PNQ), which was designed to give equal professional and educational opportunities to those two minorities (Moraes & Gassen, 2004). Under the umbrella of the PNQ, two departments were created to focus specifically on those causes: Seppir – Secretaria Especial de Políticas de Promoção da Igualdade Racial, and the SPM – Secretaria Especial de Política para a Mulher (Moraes & Gassen, 2004).

According to Moraes, and Gassen (2004), professional qualification “is associated with education, which is a citizenship right, and it has to contribute to the democratization of work relationships, adding a social character to the development model” (p. 23), the development model being the PNQ.

The idea behind this project was to improve the qualification processes in Brazil, which would be beneficial to the underprivileged, which in this case are the ones who – economically and socially – have a harder time getting themselves inserted into the job market (Moraes & Gassen, 2004). The authors argue that professional qualification is a set of policies that are between work and education, and that they are linked to a development project, which would reduce inequalities and guarantee income distribution to the population (Moraes & Gassen,
Some United Nations’ statistics in regards to worldwide women and employment presented by Moraes, and Gassen (2004) are:

- Women are responsible for 2/3 of the work done in the world, and yet they receive only 1/3 of the income
- Women retain 1/10 of the world’s income
- Women own less than 1/100 of the world’s properties
- Out of the almost 1.3 billion people that live below the poverty line, 70% are women (p. 26)

In Brazil women receive, on average, half of the income of the men, and Black women receive half of the White women’s income (Moraes & Gassen, 2004). Those statistics show that Black women are, according to the authors, the most underprivileged group of the Brazilian society.

Following affirmative actions, the Brazilian Government has also decided to institute quotas for admissions to public universities in order to provide the minorities with access to higher education (Fry & Maggie, 2004). This quota program has been implemented aiming to benefit Blacks, which are considered the minority group, but it seems that the Government has forgotten to take into consideration aspects other than race. Since Brazil is comprised of so many races and ethnicities, it would be fundamental for the government to consider other aspects such as economic situation. Brazilians as a people do not see the difference between a Black person and the other races such as the morenos, mulatos, caboclos, and cafuzos. And with that, “there are no ambiguous spaces in the quotas policy. The morenos claros and escuros, the mulatos, and the cafuzos would have to migrate to one of the two categories of legal and official taxonomy” (p. 157) – which would be either Black or White.

In theory, Affirmative Action works just fine, but when put in practice, at least in Brazil, it might not have the same positive effects as the theory outlines (Fry & Maggie, 2004). As a final thought, Fry, and Maggie (2004) state: “the introduction of quotas would be, in this line of interpretation, the consolidation of the formation process of a two-raced Brazil” (p. 159).

Since 2003 though, the Brazilian government has made some changes to the quota system. In 2008, the Pnaes (Programa Nacional de Assistencia Estudantil) was created to support the “permanence of lower class students who are enrolled in undergraduate courses in federal higher education institutions” (“Pnaes”, 2010.). In this case, socio-economic status would be the main criteria of selection of these students, which would give more opportunities for people of other ethnic backgrounds that are in a hard financial situation to have a shot at the academic life. The program also provides assistance for those students such as housing, transportation, health, among others, and those actions are initiated by the institution to which they are admitted (“Pnaes”, 2010).

Since 2005 a program named Incluir (Include), created by the MEC – Education and Culture Ministry has been “proposing actions that guarantee people with disabilities full access to federal universities. Incluir aims to create and consolidate accessibility nuclei, where institutional actions are taken to integrate people with disabilities to the academic life, eliminating behavioral, pedagogic, architectural, and communication barriers” (“Programa Incluir”, 2012).

**Managing Diversity in Brazilian Companies**

Due to several minority groups that are part of the Brazilian society, the topics of sexual and racial inequality, as well as disability, have gained strength and have been widely discussed
in Brazil (Fleury, 2000). In 1996 a program by the Brazilian government was created and entitled *Programa Nacional de Direitos Humanos* (National Program of Human Rights), and one of the acts that were implemented due to this program was the one in regards to workplace relationships discrimination. Then, and only then, the topic of diversity has started to gain force in the discussions among Brazilian corporations and subsidiaries of multinationals (Fleury, 2000).

By the year 2000, most of the companies that were trying to implement some form of diversity policy were subsidiaries of North-American companies. A study was conducted by Fleury (2000), among 15 companies – some of them were Brazilian and some of them were American subsidiaries, and the study was synthesized in three relevant categories: 1. Recruiting and human resources selection process; 2. Training policies; and 3. Communication (p. 23).

In the area of recruitment and human resources selection, the results showed that companies were in fact, investing in projects that would help diversify their workforce, giving priority to the gender aspect of diversity – in other words, they were recruiting more women in order to balance their employee body. According to Fleury (2000) only one of the companies researched stated that it was also including Blacks in its recruitment strategies.

When it comes to training policies, the companies seemed to have been sending their managers to trainings regarding cultural diversity and interactions, but out of the 15 companies that were surveyed, only one in fact had invested in developing such a program (Fleury, 2000).

Lastly, in the communications aspect of diversity, companies seemed to be investing in intra-communication projects that aimed to inform the objectives of their diversity programs to all their employees (Fleury, 2000).

But diversity seems to be an ever-changing theme in general. When applied to Brazil, it is important to explore it in the current scenario in order to create a basis for comparison with the American perspective as well as the perspectives of other countries.

**Method**

To perform this study, ten of the biggest public Brazilian companies – public meaning with shares in the worldwide stock market – were selected out of the *Forbes 2000 Biggest Public Companies* list. Forbes is one of the most reliable sources of business-related information. It is associated with Thomson Reuters, one of the largest news media agencies in the world. The criteria used for selection, was the order in which the companies were ranked in the Forbes list.

According to the ranking, the first position among the Brazilian companies belongs to Petrobrás – Petróleo Brasil, which occupies the tenth position in the overall list. It is followed by Itaú Unibanco Holding (#31), Banco Bradesco (#43), and Banco do Brasil (#54), Vale (#56), Itaúsa (#154), Eletrobrás (#320), Companhia Siderúrgica (#536), Cemig (#593), and Tele Norte Leste (#601).

A content analysis of the websites for each selected company was performed in order to answer the following questions: *Is diversity portrayed or discussed at all in the company’s website? If so, what does the company state about diversity? Are there any visuals (images) that convey its concept of diversity in its website?* The analysis sought to find whether aspects related to diversity in the workplace were somehow displayed throughout their web pages, as it also aimed to check what types of messages (verbal or visual) were being conveyed in regards to diversity.
Table I

*Ranking of Brazilian Corporations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company Name</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Brazil Ranking</th>
<th>Forbes Ranking</th>
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<td>Petrobrás Petróleo Brasil</td>
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<td>Tele Norte Nordeste (Oi)</td>
<td><em>Communications</em></td>
<td>10</td>
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</table>

Source: Forbes 2000 Biggest Public Companies (Retrieved November 6, 2012 from http://www.forbes.com/global2000/#p_1_s_a0_All%20industries_All%20countries_All%20states )

The first step of the analysis was to find if there were any mentions at all in regards to diversity in the websites, by accessing their homepages and from that point trying to find any categories under which diversity could fall. Usually, Brazilian websites will display this type of information in their “About” tab, under “Corporate Governance”, and the subcategories will vary depending on the website.

The second step was to look for details about diversity in the statements where they were found. For example, do the websites just mention diversity, or are they more specific as to what it is? The third and final step in this process is to analyze diversity-related is in regards to the visuals of the websites. Are there any examples of diversity in race and gender in pictures, videos, graphs, or tables in those websites? Any depictions of race and gender diversity on the website as a whole will be accounted for. By the careful analysis of these three areas of focus it became possible to draw a pattern of where diversity stands in the eyes of Brazilian corporations.

**Results**

For the purpose of this study, ten Brazilian-based corporations had the content of their website analyzed. Out of the ten companies researched, half of them mention the word diversity in their website. The other five companies do not talk or portray diversity in any form.
Out of the five companies that mentioned the word diversity, only two have specifics as to what diversity means to them, as well as images to depict it. Two other companies mention diversity in their website content and give more detailed information on it, but there are no images that relate to the topic in those. One company talks about diversity and presents images, but does not specify what diversity is.

**Petrobrás – Petróleo Brasil**

Out of the ten companies researched and analyzed, Petrobrás (Petrobras.com, n.d.) is the one that seems to be more into diversity practices – at least that is what they are trying to convey with their website. By performing a thorough analysis of the content the author was able to identify content that indeed has to do with diversity. Under the “About Us” section, more specifically under “profile”, there is a depiction of an Afro-Brazilian businessman (possibly portrayed as an employee of the company) smiling and seeming to be very satisfied with working for Petrobrás. Under the “Governance” tab, right on the main page, there is a male Brazilian depicted. He does not appear to be completely Caucasian but most likely a mix of Hispanic/Latino and Caucasian, which is very common in Brazil. Under the “Code of Ethics” there is a small picture (thumbnail) showing several Petrobrás employees in their different background races and in that same picture women and men are equally depicted. On another section of the “About Us”, more specifically “Bylaws”, there is a small picture (thumbnail) depicting a Black woman, a Native Brazilian girl, and a cabocla (mix of Native Brazilian and Caucasian).

There were also other places in the website where diversity seemed to be depicted as well. Under the “Energy and Technology” tab, in the “Technology and Research” subcategory, there is a large picture of two female chemists – one appearing to be Caucasian and the other appearing to have some middle-eastern features. However, it is not clear what ethnicity she is.

The section of the website that has the most content related to diversity is the “Environment and Society” section. On their main page there is a large picture of several children appearing from being of different races – all of them seeming to be Brazilian, but their ethnic background is not completely distinguishable. Some have Afro-descendant features while others have straight black hair (Native Brazilian Indians), and some have some Caucasian features, but all of them are a mix. On the website’s first subcategory, “Valuing Diversity” is where most of the content related to diversity is presented. First of all, on the top of the page there are three videos related to initiatives that Petrobrás has taken to promote sustainability, culture, and diversity. One specific video that lasts about eight minutes talks about Petrobrás’ Global Presence and in that video there are several employees around the world who are from different races and who talk about how the company values their work and what it does to preserve and respect their culture and traditions. One specific female employee from Libya talks about how Petrobrás, knowing of the customs of the country, allows either her father, brother, or husband to accompany her when she has a business trip and pays for the costs of taking one of them with her.

Under the same section, the main text talks about how the company is really concerned with the aspects of diversity and sustainability. It says:

Our goal is to become an international benchmark in social responsibility in business management, contributing to sustainable development.

We believe permanent dialog is fundamentally important in order for us to attain our goals. We seek to reduce risks, avoid negative social impacts, and to generate
positive results through our relationship with the communities that neighbor our operations.

By knowing the reality that surrounds us, we can ensure social insertion and improve people's quality of life, always with respect for diversity.

The great importance of Social Responsibility, to us, translates into investments. We support projects that contribute to the reduction of poverty and social inequality, promoting the protection of human rights and ensuring access to culture and sports.

In addition to projects that encourage income generation and work opportunities, we pay special attention to education for professional qualification and to ensure the rights of children and adolescents. Thus, we do our part as one of the largest companies in the world and contribute to the development of the planet (para. 4-7).

There are more depictions in other subcategories of the “Environment and Society” section. Under “Labor”, they continue to describe their practices to encourage diversity in the workplace:

Petrobrás is set into motion by the work of people on all continents. We count on the diversity of cultures, knowledge, and talent. We invest in our employees because we know it is impossible to achieve excellence in financial results, productivity, and technology without valuing people.

For this reason, our professionals' careers are constantly encouraged by means of training programs, opportunities for promotions, remuneration at market standards, educational benefits and health insurance, among others.

The values, acquired throughout our history, are among our greatest riches, which we call intangible assets. These are essential factors for companies to create value and competitive edge, classified as human, organizational, and relationship and technological domain capital.

Respect for human and cultural diversity and non-discrimination are principles that are essential to us. We guarantee the right to difference, ensuring each worker, regardless of their characteristics, full conditions to develop their talent and potential [emphasis added] (para. 1-4).

These are all the depictions and mentions of diversity that occur in the website. Under other tabs there are company’s performance in the market, value of shares, and investor-related content, more on the financial aspect, but there are no further images or mentions of diversity.

Itaú Unibanco Holdings

The next website analyzed was the Itaú Unibanco Holding’s website (Itau.com, n.d.). Overall, this company’s website content does not have images that relate to diversity. In fact, there are barely any images. The main focus is on charts and graphs related to financial information to current and potential investors.

Under the “Corporate Governance” section, in the “Corporate Governance Policies” subcategory, it talks about the initiatives that the company has taken in regards to sustainability, but there is no detailed information or mentions to the word diversity. The only part of the text where they say something about social-oriented initiatives is: “Itaú Unibanco implements its social and cultural investments through the Itaú Social Foundation, the Unibanco Institute and
the Itaú Cultural Institute, the first institution focusing on public education and the third, on the dissemination of Brazilian culture” (sec. 10).

*Banco Bradesco*

Its website (Bancodoplaneta.com, n.d.) is very wide in content, but there are not many graphics overall. Since it is a financial institution the lack of images could be expected somehow. Under the “Responsible Management” tab there is a section that talks about diversity however. This is what it states:

Traditionally, the Organization reflects the rich variety of the Brazilian people, with their different races, creeds, educational levels and income groups, providing equal opportunities for all to enter their first job, followed by training and possible personal and professional development.

The Bank closed 2011 with 104,412 employees, 51,266 of whom women (47.3% in leadership positions) and 53,146 men. It employs 22,813 African-Brazilians, 10,729 of whom in leadership positions. One member of the Board of Directors is female, and, at the beginning of 2012, Bradesco appointed its first female Executive Officer to head (para. 1-2).

Other than the paragraph cited above, there are no further depictions or mentions of diversity throughout the website. The focus on diversity through the lens of Bradesco is mostly on females and on Afro-Brazilians.

*Banco do Brasil*

Just as with Itaú Unibanco and with Banco Bradesco, both financial institutions, Banco do Brasil’s website (bb.com, n.d.) does not seem to have images that depict anything. There are a lot of financial indicators and content in regards to the history of the company, just like with the other websites, but visuals do not seem to be a part its contents. Under the “Corporate Governance” tab, in the Code of Ethics, there is a small paragraph that mentions the word diversity: “We acknowledge, accept and valuate the diversity of people in the Conglomerate”, but there are no specifics as to what diversity means through their lenses.

*Vale*

There have been some changes on the Vale’s website (Vale.com, 2012). Before there was a direct option that would take the person navigating to the “Human Rights” tab, which no longer exists, and there it was possible to find some content on diversity – very limited however. On the new platform under the “Sustainability Report” tab, in the “Community” subcategory there is a small photo gallery with pictures of Native Brazilian Indians and some Afro-Brazilian children as well. Under the “People” tab, there is a paragraph on diversity, which states, “Owing to the global character of our operations, respect for cultural diversity is for us, a firm assumption. The Vale Human Rights Policy and Code of Ethical Conduct reinforce our stance against any kind of discrimination” (para. 1). Another paragraph mentions: “In 2011, female representation among our professional numbers grew, representing a victory in the predominantly male mining sector. Our commitment to diversity is also reflected in our benefits policy, which accepts same-sex companions as dependents” (para. 2-3).
Underneath the text there are several images of people who work for Vale – this time there are many women depicted and also people from other nationalities and cultures, which can be perceived by the images in themselves – different skin colors, clothing, and facial features. Another interesting feature of the pictures is that most of the employees are smiling – conveying the message that they are all happy to be part of the Vale family. The website is rich in image content, but only under the “People” tab it is possible to find pictures that represent diversity.

Itaúsa
Itaúsa (itau.com, n.d) is a subsidiary of the Itaú Unibanco Holding. Its website adopts the format of the other financial institutions, but in this case since the company deals with other kinds of fields, not only financial information is disclosed but also information about the other sectors. There are no images in the website except for the header that contains a perspective picture of a building. Under the “Code of Ethics” section there is a statute, but it does not mention diversity at all. It only talks about the hiring process and how it is supposed to be fair and transparent.

Eletrobrás
The Eletrobrás website (Eletrobras.com, 2010) has a whole section on diversity which starts with the following statement:

The pursuit of equality of opportunities for all persons – regardless of their gender, color, race, age, sexual orientation, social origin, physical or mental capability – is a commitment of Eletrobrás in relation to human rights and non-discrimination. This commitment is expressed in the Eletrobrás companies’ Code of Ethics and in the company’s Guidelines for Social Responsibility (para. 1).

The statement in itself is very specific, talking about race and gender, as well as other variables that can be taken into consideration when talking about diversity. Right after the first statement there is a whole section on gender and race equity, where a project named Gender and Race Pro-Equity Program was adopted by Eletrobrás to promote diversity in the workplace. The program has been in effect for four years at Eletrobrás, and is based on three pillars, as follows:

1. Promotion of citizenship and combating discrimination in access, remuneration, rise and remain in employment of women and men;
2. Commitment to equity of gender and race, prioritizing people management and organizational culture of the company/institution;
3. Organizations can adopt good labor practices with criteria of equity of gender and race as opportunities to improve the management of the company/institution and to foment the technological innovation, economy, productivity and efficiency of quality goods and services (para. 3).

The company also mentions some awards that it has received for the adoption of gender equity practices, and the last part of the section talks about the inclusion of same-sex partners as beneficiaries of an employee’s health plan. No visuals of diversity are represented in the website however.

Companhia Siderúrgica Nacional (CSN)
CSN (mzweb.com, 2012) is the largest Brazilian Steel Company, providing materials especially to the automotive and small appliance industries in the country. Its website contains good examples of socially responsible practices; however nothing is mentioned about diversity. Under the “Code of Ethics”, there is a whole section dedicated to sustainability and environmental commitment, and also a section on relationships with employees, but again, nothing has been mentioned or implied in regards to diversity. When it comes to images, the website does have some visuals but none of them portray diversity in any form. Except for a couple of images, there are no other depictions of human beings. One of the pictures portrays an employee all covered in safety equipment; therefore his face cannot be seen. The other image portrays a large train wagon with an employee by it, but the employee himself is not on the foreground of the picture. The remaining content shows the company’s facilities and projects, but without any humans depicted.

Cemig

Cemig is an energy provider that fulfills the needs of the citizens of the Minas Gerais State, located in the Southeast Brazilian region. It has been in operation for 59 years and it is one of the largest Brazilian companies. Its website (cemig.com.br) has many tabs but only one of them seems to maybe have some content on diversity. The tab is the “Sustainability” one, under the “Programs” section. Under that subcategory there is a part that talks about social initiatives that have been taken by the company such as sustainability indicators and community-related projects. However, no mention of diversity has been done in the website. One of the links that could contain something in regards to diversity – the “Human Resources Policy” link that is found within the text was not working at the time this research was conducted.

Navigating through its images it is possible to find some that do depict people from different backgrounds, but in this case those pictures are of the community instead of the employees.

Tele Norte Leste (Oi)

The last company analyzed, Tele Norte Leste, more known as Oi (which means “hi” in English) was created in 1998. Initially it was called Telemar, but in 2002 the name Oi was given to the mobile sector of the company. Oi’s growth was so significant that eventually the whole company and its subsidiaries adopted the Oi name. It is the largest telecommunications company in Brazil, servicing all 26 states plus the Federal District.

Under the “Company” tab, in the “Sustainability” section it is possible to find a paragraph that talks about diversity, but more on a community standpoint (ri oi.com.br, n.d.). It states:

Oi’s social responsibility arm, Oi Futuro [emphasis added], created in 2001, is designed to increase access to knowledge in order to accelerate and promote human development, with projects in the education, sustainability, sports and culture areas nationwide. The name underlines the institute’s philosophy of working in the tertiary sector, which is to promote a brighter future for the children and youth of the country by reducing geographical and social gaps and by developing the concept of citizenship in them [through] the exchange of experiences and appreciation of cultural diversity in Brazil [emphasis added] (para. 1).
Even though it mentions the words cultural diversity, it does not give specifics as to what it would be. By reading the content, the perception was that it was more aimed towards the community and promotion of cultural aspects instead of gender and race diversity when hiring employees.

The website is easy to navigate and the information is easily found throughout the whole site. There are images on the website, one of them portrays children in Rio de Janeiro in one of the company’s projects, and the children depicted are from different ethnicities and genders as well. Other than that there are not clear portrayals of diversity throughout the site.

Table II

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**Discussion**

The sample selected for the study was a small one, for the purpose of this study. However, it was possible to draw a pattern from this analysis. First of all, only one of the financial industry companies, Banco Bradesco, mentioned diversity in their website. The other institutions did not – at all – say anything about it. All of the financial institutions represented in the sample have international presence; most of them have subsidiaries in the United States, which is a country that encourages diversity in all aspects.

The companies that possessed all three attributes looked for in the analysis were Petrobras – Petróleo Brasil and Vale. Both of them work with natural resources and have worldwide presence, which may explain the reason why their depictions of diversity are more ubiquitous in their online contents.
The remaining corporations had some content on diversity, which is a great leap from the 1990’s when the topic started gaining more importance in Brazil. It still appears however, that more specific information on diversity needs to be added to those websites.

There are still many questions that could be addressed with further study and analysis. A more in-depth research of more diversity messages and with a larger sample could give a solid basis for where diversity is at the standpoint of Brazilian corporations. Also, comparing Brazilian companies with corporations around the world might prove to be a good source of information for corporations in general, so they can implement initiatives that can improve the companies’ performance in terms of socially responsible practices.
References


Forbes (2012, April 18). The world’s biggest companies. Retrieved November 6, 2012 from, http://www.forbes.com/global2000/#p_1_s_a0_All%20industries_All %20countries_All%20states


Santos, C. C. R., & de Jesus, G. G. (2010). O preconceito racial dentro das multinacionais como...


Abstract

The U.S. Navy emphasizes the importance of issue management and has long analyzed the issues’ development through Meng’s (1992)\(^1\) issue lifecycle model. Although being the most widely mentioned issue lifecycle model in public relations literature (e.g., Regester & Larkin, 1992; Renfro, 1993)\(^2\), Meng’s model does not account for several constructs specific to the Internet era, nor for the role of publics during the issue lifecycle.

The purpose of this paper is to revise Meng’s issue lifecycle model. Specifically, the author re-examined the issue lifecycle by following two approaches: (1) theoretical inferences based on public relations, public affairs, and updated issue management literature; and (2) quantitative content analysis containing the news stories of two issues that have recently affected the U.S. Navy: Spice (synthetic marijuana) and Sexual Assault.

At a theoretical level, the revised issue lifecycle model included several new constructs: Internet and social media, issue’s lifecycle path, internal versus external issues, and type of organization. Also, this paper explained the relationship between publics and organizations through the lens of the engagement concept. This concept provides an explanation for how publics and organizations can collaborate in shaping meaning.

Quantitatively, regression analysis tests were conducted to answer three RQs. The findings revealed that stakeholders’ coverage length, level of organized activism, and tonality correlate with an issue’s progression in time. Also, the analysis showed that the level of (legislative) pressure is correlated with the amount of organization’s stakeholders’ media visibility and to the actions an organization takes to minimize the effects of an issue.

The value of this study is theoretical, practical, and methodological. Theoretically, the author offers a revised issue lifecycle model and contributed to the development of the issue management literature. At a practical level, this paper provides recommendations for how organizations could better monitor an issue’s lifecycle and account for the constructs that influence an issue’s development. From a methodological perspective, this is the first study to analyze the issue lifecycle quantitatively, through content analysis and regression analysis.

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Introduction

Chase and his colleague, Barry Jones, first defined an issue as being “an unsettled matter which is ready for decision” (Chase, 1984, p. 38). Later, Crable and Vibbert (1985) provided a new definition: “An issue occurs when a problem becomes focused on a particular question that calls for dispute and some sort of resolution” (p. 62). More specifically, any kind of problem or trend (internal or external) that is significant for an organization can become an issue in the future. The issues lifecycle has been described and analyzed through various models over the last decades. Among those, Meng’s (1992) model is the most developed one and encompasses five stages: potential, emerging, current, crisis, and dormant. This paper will employ two case studies provided by the U.S. Navy—Sexual Assault and Spice—and will use regression analysis to detect the variables that trigger an issue to move from one stage to the next.

Theoretical Considerations

The origins of issues management can be traced to an exact time and place: Howard Chase, (Chase, 1976a, 1976b). Chase described issues management as a management practice specific to the petroleum industry, which was at that time facing various problems such as oil shortages and customer hostility (Hainsworth, 1990a). However, studying issues management is challenging due to two reasons: the lack of agreement among scholars regarding a model and the lack of a well-established theoretical framework. Scholars in issues management have a long history of criticizing previous authors’ work (Crable & Vibbert, 1985; Ehling & Hesse, 1983; Hainsworth & Meng, 1988). As a result, articles on issues management have not yet reached a consensus in regard to key concepts, constructs and variables.

Ehling and Hesse (1983) identified a series of conceptual shortcomings existing in Chase’s (1984) definition of issues management. According to the two authors, Chase did not clearly establish whether issues management is a function specific to public relations professionals or specific to the board of directors. Also, Chase’s model was criticized for not clearly defining terms such as *issues*, *new management science* and *systems approach*.

Crable and Vibbert contributed to the body of literature by making a distinction between *issues* and *problems*. According to the authors, issues are “created when one or more human agents attaches significance to a situation or perceived problem” (p. 5). Hainsworth and Meng (1988) criticized Chase for failing to make clear the difference between issues management and corporate planning. Also, Hainsworth and Meng established that identification and influence are the core elements of issues management. Later, Heath (1997) defined issues management as “the management of organizational and community resources through the public policy process to advance organizational interest and rights by striking a mutual balance with those stakeholders” (p. 274). Unlike Chase’s (1982) definition, Heath emphasized the importance of balancing the organizations’ and stakeholders’ needs.

More recently, scholars have contributed to the development of issues management literature by assessing online issue threats (Coombs, 2002) and reconciling the three approaches of issues management—systems, strategic, and rhetoric—into a more complex one: the engagement framework (Taylor, Vasquez, & Doorley, 2003).

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3 Howard Chase initially referred to issue management, and not issues management.
To summarize, although the definitions and views on issues management vary among scholars, authors have reached a consensus in terms of the starting and ending point of an issue lifecycle. Issues emerge from trends, problems, or events that, in some cases, can be predicted.

The Issue Lifecycle Model
    As mentioned earlier, this paper will employ Meng’s (1992) issue lifecycle model, primarily because it accounts for previous authors’ contribution, and secondly because Meng’s model has long been used by the U.S. Navy. Jones and Chase (1979) were the first to bring to light the idea of an issue lifecycle. Their model focused on how corporate decision-making could be made by assessing the issue lifecycle. A few years later, Crable and Vibbert (1985) discussed the issue lifecycle from a public policy perspective, stating that issues go through five clearly defined stages: potential, imminent, current, critical, and dormant. In 1990, Hainsworth moved one step further and defined the model more carefully, accounting for the elements that correlate with the transition of an issue from one stage to the other. Last, Meng (1992) refined the earlier issue lifecycle models by explaining why, when, and how the public relations/public affairs responsible should identify and respond to issues. The five stages (potential, imminent, current, critical, and dormant) of Meng’s (1992) issue lifecycle model are presented below (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Meng (1992) — Issue Lifecycle

The potential stage can be identified “when some person or group demonstrates its interest in the issue” (Crable & Vibbert, 1985, p. 5). At this stage, issues managers, public affairs, or public relations practitioners should identify trends, assign a working group, and plan a potential course of action. In other words, the potential stage “is a defined condition or event which has the potential to develop into something of importance” (Regester & Larkin, 2002, p. 39). At this point, the threat becomes an issue.

If an issue survives the potential stage, it evolves into the emerging status. At this stage, two elements play a central role: publics and media coverage. A public is defined as “a group of individuals with varying degrees of commitment who face a similar problem, recognize that the
If an issue continues to evolve, it reaches the current stage. At this stage, besides the publics and the media, the public policy process starts playing a crucial role. Thus, from this stage on, the organization has to follow the rules imposed by the public policy agenda.

At the fourth stage, the issue becomes critical in Crable and Vibbert’s (1985) terms and a crisis according to Regester and Larkin (2002). Despite the difference in terminology, the characteristics of issues in this stage are similar. People who identify themselves with the issue gather in activist groups and seek a resolution to the issue. In this phase, there is little that the organization can do to control for the issue development.

Crable and Vibbert (1985) labeled the next stage dormant. These are issues that have gone through the previous stages and have disappeared from the public agenda for a while. However, issues rarely die. “The dormancy of a resolved issue can be disturbed when someone—at a later time, under new circumstances—sees the potential of the issue again” (p. 7). Furthermore, an issue might become dormant earlier in the issues life cycle and continue the evolution process later, when groups’ concerns rise.

Assumptions of the Issue Lifecycle Model

As it was discussed above, the issue lifecycle models have evolved through critique and extension. Although Meng’s model (1992) is the most updated and pertinent five-stage model, it has several weaknesses. First and foremost, “a key to the entire concept of issues management is the premise that the development of public issues can be anticipated by comparison with the behavior of similar issues in the past” (Renfro, 1993, p. 30). Meng’s model does not account for past issues.

A second assumption is the linearity of the issue lifecycle model. However, examples of issues that can revive anytime exist in any area, but these issues are specific to organizations performing within high-risk environment. An example of such a company would be Exxon Valdez. After the oil spill in Alaska, the issue went through all the stages and became dormant (Regester & Larkin, 2002). However, anytime a new spill occurs, the issue revives.

A third assumption consists of thinking that all issues are external. The issue lifecycle model discusses the evolution of issues among groups that later become activist groups. These are groups outside of the organization. Moreover, the issue lifecycle model mentions the importance of the mass media in the issue development. However, issues could be internal as well and could evolve without the use of mass media. For example, many companies could not afford to pay their employees’ salaries on time during the recent recession. This is a negative trend that could become an internal issue if public relations or public affairs professionals cannot manage it correctly.

Fourth, Meng’s model (1992)—based in part on similar work by Hainsworth (1990)—assumes that, at the potential stage, the birth of an issue can be established. On one hand, one can rarely track down the birth of an issue. Events and trends succeed at such a high speed that the issues can hardly be identified at their early beginning. On the other hand, issues emerge all the time, because people’s values and expectations are changing (Renfro, 1993).

Fifth, the mass media influence is listed as having an impact only from the emerging to the current stage, and then from the current to the crisis stage. One should notice that today’s
environment does not require the presence of mass media for an issue to develop. Social media can be much more influential. Or, an issue could evolve without the use of media, especially in the case of an internal issue.

Last, the issue lifecycle model explicitly shows the media and the organization as being the main entities that influence an issue’s trajectory. However, the model implies the significance of publics. Throughout an issue’s lifecycle, the interaction between publics and the organization impacts the issue’s evolution. In addition, the publics become even more relevant when the issue is internal and directly affects the internal publics. Under these circumstances, the organization has to build an internal environment that favors communication and trust.

Drawing on the above mentioned constructs and based on these assumptions, the following section proposes additional constructs to be integrated in Meng’s model (1992).

**An Improved Model for the Issue Lifecycle**

The aforementioned weaknesses provide the potential of inserting new constructs into the issue lifecycle model. These constructs emerged through theoretical inferences and not all of them will be tested in the present paper. The revised issue lifecycle model and constructs are presented below (Figure 2).

**Figure 2:** Issue Lifecycle (Revised Model)

*Internet and social media.* The current social, economical, and professional environments are shaped by the changes that have taken place because and through the Internet. From an issues management perspective, publics (activists) have gained more power than ever before, and traditional media coverage has lost its key status because of social media (Jaques, 2006). Therefore, in the Internet era, the issue manager should not focus solely on traditional media, but also on social media, blogs, e-mails, etc. (Kent, 2008; Kent, Carr, Husted, & Pop, 2011).
**Issue’s evolutionary path (skipped, interrupted, stopped, recursive, cyclical).** Meng (1992) did not consider the various kinds of influences a skipped, interrupted, stopped, recursive, or cyclical issue could have on the issues path. From this perspective, Bigelow, Fahey, and Mahon (1993) suggested that, depending on the level of intensity and diversity, issues can follow six different paths: normal, interrupted, skipped, stopped, cyclical, or recursive. Bigelow et al.’s model is illustrated below (Figure 3).

**Figure 3:** Bigelow, Fahey, & Mahon (1993)—Issue’s evolutionary path

Issues management. The issue management construct is listed in Meng’s (1992) model as being part of the cycle from the potential to the transition between the emerging and current stages. In other words, the model implies that an organization can only manage an issue in the first three stages. However, one should emphasize that the organization’s power to influence an issue does not totally diminish after the current stage.

**Pressure and development of issues.** Although somehow accounting for the intensity and diversity of issues, Meng’s (1992) model labeled these two variables differently: pressure and development. According to Meng, pressure refers to the reaction of the publics concerning the issue. The stronger the publics feel about the issue, the more likely they are to become activists and the more pressure they could put on the organization. Development, on the other hand, refers to the evolution of an issue from one stage to the other, until reaching the dormant stage.

**Methodology**

The data employed for this study consists of media coverage for two case studies—sexual assault and spice— and was provided by the U.S. Navy. The Sexual Assault issue received regular media coverage, and sexual assault victims decided to speak up. This case study is important not just for the U.S. Navy itself, but for the civil society as well. Although comparisons between the number of sexual assaults among the civilian community and the U.S. Navy are hard to make, Kaye Whitley, Director of the Department of Defense, mentioned that the number is comparable (Garamore, 2010). In 2010, the U.S. Navy reported 1.6 sexual assaults per thousand members. In the United States, there were approximately 207,000 sexual assaults per year (Rainn.org). Adjusted by the population, that would mean 0.66 sexual assaults per thousand civilians.
The second issue discusses a substance called spice—a form of synthetic marijuana—that is also branded as K2. Although the substance was not initially forbidden in the United States, the Department of Defense has had strict rules against the consumption of any synthetic drugs. Approximately 3,000 cases of poisoning caused by spice resulted in calls to the poison centers across United States in 2010. If a Sailor is found to have consumed spice or any other drug substance, the U.S. Navy will discharge him or her. Spice consumption within the U.S. Navy emerged into the media in July 2009. At that point in time, the media coverage discussed 22 cases of spice consumption (Slavin, 2009). By 2012, the number of sailors investigated for spice consumption exceeded 700 (Watson, 2012).

Research Questions
RQ1: How does time correlate with the development of media coverage?
RQ2: What variables correlate with an increase in legislative pressure (as specific to the transition between the emerging and the current stage)?
RQ3: What variables correlate with an increase in the level of media awareness due to stakeholders’ action (as specific to the issues’ transition from the emerging to the current stage)?

Case Study, Content Analysis, and Regression Analysis
As stated earlier, this paper will include two case studies: Sexual Assault and Spice. The two case studies will be analyzed through quantitative content analysis. According to Kerlinger (2000), content analysis is a method of studying data in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner. By systematic, Kerlinger meant that the data should be analyzed according to a set of pre-established rules set by the researcher. The data should be inter-coded to ensure the uniformity in the coding. By inter-coding the data, the researcher obtains a higher degree of reliability. Second, content analysis should be objective. If different researchers code the same set of data, the results obtained should be replicated. In other words, researchers should try to overcome their personal biases when coding and interpreting the data. Third, content analysis is defined as being quantitative (Kerlinger). By using quantitative content analysis, the researchers will obtain generalizable results. Also, researchers can use statistical tools to make sense of the data. Since this paper aims to analyze the evolution path of issues and reveal the outcomes that result from the interaction of various variables, the most suitable statistical method is simple linear regression. In addition to simple regression, probit regression will be employed for dichotomous dependent variables.

Codebook and Intercoder Reliability Test
The goal of creating a codebook is to provide a clear definition of the constructs and of the variables, and to make sure that the researchers achieve reliability (Neuendorf, 2002). Thus, the data for this paper was coded according to the codebook attached in the Appendix. In order to conduct the intercoder reliability test, two coders were assigned: the author and a representative of the U.S. Navy. The coder training consisted of discussing each variable and its definition to ensure a similar understanding of the codebook overall. As part of the training process, the codebook was revised several times. After a consensus has been reached, each coder individually conducted the final coding. For the final intercoder reliability test, the researchers coded 10 articles for each case study. Afterwards, the author ran the reliability test in SPSS for each variable and for the constructs. The intercoder reliability results are listed in Table 1.
Table 1

Intercoder Reliability Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRESSURE</td>
<td>$K^a=.90$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUBLICS/STAKEHOLDERS</td>
<td>$K=.90$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORMAL CONSTRAINTS</td>
<td>$K=.74$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEDIATION/AMPLIFICATION</td>
<td>$K=.87$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPPORTUNITY TO INFLUENCE</td>
<td>$K=.82$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORGANIZATION</td>
<td>$K=.73$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADDITIONAL VARIABLES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical versus emotional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotes</td>
<td>$r^b=.84$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person Quoted</td>
<td>$K=.71$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue mentioned in the title</td>
<td>$K=.81$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organization mentioned in the title</td>
<td>$K=.80$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$a=$ Krippendorff test  
$b=$ bivariate correlation

Results

Testing for Assumptions

Four tests were performed on all variables in order to test for the assumptions of regression analysis: missing data, outliers (univariate and multivariate), normality, and collinearity. The results indicated that there was no systematically missing data. Of 121 cases (in the sexual assault dataset) and 76 cases (in the spice dataset) none was missing. This was because the data were manually coded through content analysis. Using $+/-4 \sigma$ from the means as the criteria to detect univariate outliers, stakeholders’ coverage length in the sexual assault dataset was the only one that had a standard deviation above this threshold: $M = 3.0992, SD = .898$. Examination of the individual cases $+/-4 \sigma$ from the mean indicated that no stakeholder coverage was specific to the first week, when coverage on sexual assaults within the U.S. Navy started being published. A second step in testing for outliers consisted of checking for multivariate outliers by using Mahalanobis’s $D^2$. However, Mahalanobis’s $D^2$ showed that the data set contained no multivariate outliers (at $p< .0001$). When examining the level of normality of continuous variables, the results indicated that, in the sexual assault dataset, stakeholders’ coverage length was negatively skewed and tone of the story had positive kurtosis. However, because asymmetry in the distribution of the data was expected, no transformation was attempted. In terms of collinearity, there was no correlation higher than .80 between the IVs. Also, none of the VIF values was higher than 10 and no tolerance level lower than .10.

RQ1: How Does Time Correlate with the Development of Media Coverage?

In order to answer to RQ1, five simple regression analyses were performed on each dataset. A single-predictor regression model was used for each dataset to answer the RQ regarding an issue’s temporal progression in media coverage. The dependent variables are: stakeholders’ coverage length,
level of organized activism, specialized media (dichotomous), general newspaper (dichotomous), and tone of the story. The dependent variable is an issue’s progression in time. Since running several regression analyses to answer a single research question would increase the chance of obtaining Type I error, the Bonferroni correction was used. After the Bonferroni correction, the $p$ threshold was established at .012.

In the case of the space dataset, none of the models was significant. For stakeholders’ coverage length, $F(1, 75) = .762, p = .385$ and the adjusted $R^2$ was -.003. For level of organized activism, $F(1, 75) = .716, p = .400$ and the adjusted $R^2$ was .004. For specialized media, $F(1, 75) = 4.630, p = .035$ and the adjusted $R^2$ was .046. For general newspapers, $F(1, 75) = 1.148, p = .287$ and the adjusted $R^2$ was .002. Last, for the tone of the story, $F(1, 75) = 2.921, p = .038$ and the adjusted $R^2$ was .025. Thus, no predictor was significant. All results for the spice dataset are presented in Tables 2-6.

Table 2
Stakeholders’ coverage length: spice dataset (RQ1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>SE ($B$)</th>
<th>$T$</th>
<th>$P$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.303</td>
<td>.396</td>
<td>8.944</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progression in time</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>-.101</td>
<td>-.873</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. $F(1, 75) = .762, p = .385, R^2 = .010, adjusted R^2 = -.003$

Table 3
Level of organized activism: spice dataset (RQ1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>SE ($B$)</th>
<th>$T$</th>
<th>$P$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.283</td>
<td>.500</td>
<td>5.569</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progression in time</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>-.098</td>
<td>-.846</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. $F(1, 75) = .762, p = .400, R^2 = .010, adjusted R^2 = -.004$

Table 4
Specialized media: spice dataset (RQ1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>SE ($B$)</th>
<th>$T$</th>
<th>$P$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.782</td>
<td>.248</td>
<td>3.168</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progression in time</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.243</td>
<td>-2.152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. $F(1, 75) = 4.630, p = .035, R^2 = .059, adjusted R^2 = .046$

Table 5
General newspaper: spice dataset (RQ1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>SE ($B$)</th>
<th>$T$</th>
<th>$P$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.547</td>
<td>.258</td>
<td>2.121</td>
<td>.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progression in time</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-.124</td>
<td>-1.071</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. $F(1, 75) = 1.148, p = .287, R^2 = .015, adjusted R^2 = .002$
In the case of the sexual assault dataset, three models were significant: stakeholders’ coverage length, level of organized activism, and tone of the story. For stakeholders’ coverage length, \( F(1,120) = 6.73, p = .011 \) and the adjusted \( R^2 \) was .046. For level of organized activism, \( F(1,120) = 40.78, p < .001 \) and the adjusted \( R^2 \) was .249. For specialized media, \( F(1,120) = 1.656, p = .201 \) and the adjusted \( R^2 \) was .005. For general newspapers, \( F(1,120) = 1.148, p = .06 \) and the adjusted \( R^2 \) was .008. Last, for the tone of the story, \( F(1,120) = 25.32, p < .001 \) and the adjusted \( R^2 \) was .169. All results for the sexual assault dataset are presented in Tables 7-11.

### Table 6

**Tone of the story: spice dataset (RQ1)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE (B)</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.688</td>
<td>.419</td>
<td>8.809</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progression in time</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>-.195</td>
<td>-1.709</td>
<td>.092</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes.** \( F(1, 75) = 2.922, p=.092, R^2 = .038, \) adjusted \( R^2 = .025 \)

### Table 7

**Stakeholders’ coverage length: sexual assault dataset (RQ1)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE (B)</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.631</td>
<td>.220</td>
<td>16.510</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progression in time</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-.231</td>
<td>-2.595</td>
<td>.011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes.** \( F(1, 120) = 6.736, p=.011, R^2 = .054, \) adjusted \( R^2 = .046 \)

### Table 8

**Level of organized activism: sexual assault dataset (RQ1)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE (B)</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.995</td>
<td>.315</td>
<td>3.162</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progression in time</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.505</td>
<td>6.386</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes.** \( F(1, 120) = 40.782, p<.001, R^2 = .255, \) adjusted \( R^2 = .249 \)

### Table 9

**Specialized media: sexual assault dataset (RQ1)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE (B)</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.561</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>4.543</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progression in time</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.117</td>
<td>-1.287</td>
<td>.201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes.** \( F(1, 120) = 1.656, p=.201, R^2 = .014, \) adjusted \( R^2 = .005 \)

### Table 10

**General newspaper: sexual assault dataset (RQ1)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE (B)</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.330</td>
<td>.120</td>
<td>2.762</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progression in time</td>
<td>&lt;.000</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>.939</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11
Tone of the story: sexual assault dataset (RQ1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE (B)</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.536</td>
<td>.188</td>
<td>18.781</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progression in time</td>
<td>-.012</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.419</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12
Legislative pressure: Sexual assault dataset (RQ2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE (B)</th>
<th>Wald χ²</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-.454</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td>5.922</td>
<td>.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders’ coverage length</td>
<td>-.544</td>
<td>.284</td>
<td>3.679</td>
<td>.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of organized activism</td>
<td>1.216</td>
<td>.222</td>
<td>29.927</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National media</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.691</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional media</td>
<td>-.138</td>
<td>.738</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue mentioned in the title</td>
<td>1.209</td>
<td>.686</td>
<td>3.104</td>
<td>.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization in the title</td>
<td>-.148</td>
<td>.445</td>
<td>.111</td>
<td>.739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization’s actions</td>
<td>-.822</td>
<td>.464</td>
<td>3.612</td>
<td>.057</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. Cox and Snell = .587, Naselkerke = .796, Chi-square = 107.028, p < .001

RQ2: What Variables Correlate with an Increase in Legislative Pressure (as Specific to the Transition Between the Emerging and the Current stage)?

In an attempt to answer to RQ2, two logit regressions were performed on the sexual assault and spice dataset. A seven-predictor logit model was used for each dataset to answer the RQ regarding an increase in legislative pressure. The independent variables are: stakeholders’ coverage length, level of organized activism, regional coverage (dichotomous), national coverage (dichotomous), organization’s actions (dichotomous), issue mentioned in the title (dichotomous), and the organization mentioned in the title (dichotomous).

In the case of the sexual assault dataset, the model was significant (Chi-square = 107.028, p < .001) and the pseudo $R^2$ was .796 (Nagelkerke). Three predictor variables were significant (or very close to the traditional cutoff): level of organized activism ($B = 1.216, Wald = 29.907, p < .001$); stakeholders’ coverage ($B = -.544, Wald = 3.679, p = .055$); organization’s actions ($B = -.822, Wald = 3.612, p = .057$). See table 12 for additional details.

In the case of the spice dataset, the model was significant (Chi-square = 16.056, p < .001) and the pseudo $R^2$ was .340 (Nagelkerke). Two predictors were significant: stakeholders’ coverage ($B = 1.688, Wald = 7.632, p = .006$); organization’s actions ($B = 2.448, Wald = 7.907, p = .005$). Table 13 provides additional details.
Table 13

Legislative pressure: Spice dataset (RQ2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE (B)</th>
<th>Wald x²</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-.539</td>
<td>.238</td>
<td>5.138</td>
<td>.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders’ coverage length</td>
<td>1.688</td>
<td>.611</td>
<td>7.632</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of organized activism</td>
<td>-.355</td>
<td>.389</td>
<td>.834</td>
<td>.361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional media</td>
<td>-.819</td>
<td>.610</td>
<td>1.804</td>
<td>.179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue mentioned in the title</td>
<td>2.042</td>
<td>1.283</td>
<td>2.533</td>
<td>.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization in the title</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>.828</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization’s actions</td>
<td>2.488</td>
<td>.871</td>
<td>7.907</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. Cox and Snell = .249, Naselkerke = .340, Chi-square = 16.056, p < .001

RQ3: What Variables Correlate with an Increase in the Level of Media Awareness Due to Stakeholders’ Action (as Specific to the Issues’ Transition from the Emerging to the Current Stage)?

In order to answer RQ3, two multiple regression analyses were performed on each dataset, individually. Seven predictors were included in the model: stakeholders’ coverage length, level of organized activism, national media (dichotomous), regional media (dichotomous), issue mentioned in the title (dichotomous), organization mentioned in the title (dichotomous), and organization’s actions (dichotomous).

The results for the sexual assault dataset showed that the model was not significant (F (5,115) = 1.167, p = .330) and the adjusted R² was .007. The results are presented in Table 14.

Table 14

Increasing awareness due to stakeholders’ actions: Sexual assault dataset (RQ3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE (B)</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.613</td>
<td>.879</td>
<td>5.300</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders’ coverage length</td>
<td>.167</td>
<td>.247</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.675</td>
<td>.501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of organized activism</td>
<td>.175</td>
<td>.158</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>1.111</td>
<td>.269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue with the media</td>
<td>.550</td>
<td>.449</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>1.225</td>
<td>.223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No dialogue with the media</td>
<td>2.411</td>
<td>2.450</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td>.984</td>
<td>.327</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. F (5, 115) = 1.167, p = .330, R² = .048, adjusted R² = .007

In the case of the spice dataset, the model was significant (F (3, 75) = 1.167, p = .007) and the adjusted R² was .120. One predictor was significant: level of organized activism (B = -1.121, β = -.292, p = .010). The results for the spice dataset are detailed in Table 15 below.

Table 15

Increasing awareness due to stakeholders’ actions: Spice dataset (RQ3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE (B)</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>6.307</td>
<td>2.029</td>
<td>.3109</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders’ coverage length</td>
<td>.451</td>
<td>.589</td>
<td>.087</td>
<td>.766</td>
<td>.446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of organized activism</td>
<td>-1.121</td>
<td>.424</td>
<td>-.292</td>
<td>-2.644</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue with the media</td>
<td>1.341</td>
<td>.870</td>
<td>.175</td>
<td>1.542</td>
<td>.127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. F (3, 75) = 4.409, p = .007, R² = .155, adjusted R² = .120
Discussion

As mentioned earlier, the regression analyses have only partially answered the three research questions. The variables employed for this thesis were based on the revised issue lifecycle model that is rooted into Meng’s (1992) issue lifecycle model. The following section will examine and interpret the results specific to each research question.

RQ1: How Does Time Correlate with the Development of Media Coverage?

The first RQ aimed to answer a broad, but essential, question regarding the issue lifecycle model. Out of the five regression equations, none was significant in the case of the spice dataset. In the sexual assault dataset, progression in time significantly correlated with stakeholders’ coverage length, level of organized activism, and tone of the story. Thus, no equation can be validated across the two datasets. The assumption behind RQ1 was that, as an issue evolves over time, the stakeholders’ coverage in the media and the level of organized activism increase. An additional assumption was that negative tonality would correlate with an issue’s evolution.

When interpreting the results within the issue lifecycle model, every time the level of pressure listed on the left side of the graph increases, the issue moves further from the emerging to the current stage. Although these two stages could not be captured in the analysis because of the limited amount of data available, we know from previous research that ‘pressure’ is a construct that starts gaining media visibility only after an issue reaches the emerging stage (Hainsworth, 1990; Meng, 1992). Notably, the results within the sexual assault datasets showed that stakeholders’ coverage length, level of organized activism, and tone of the story are correlated with an issue’s progression in time.

At a theoretical level, the results reveal that the ‘mediation/amplification’ construct impacts an issue’s development. Concerning the practical implications of the results, organizations are advised to monitor the stakeholders’ media coverage, level of organized activism, and the tonality in particular. However, one cannot suggest to organizations to only focus on monitoring the significant variables, since these variables had limited influence.

RQ2: What Variables Correlate with an Increase in Legislative Pressure (as Specific to the Transition Between the Emerging and the Current stage)?

Once the results had shown that the level of organized activism was the only validated predictor of an issue’s evolution in time, RQ2 analyzed the issue lifecycle model at a narrower level. One of the variables specific to the ‘pressure’ construct in the issue lifecycle was legislative pressure. RQ2 attempted to reveal the predictors that influence an increase in legislative pressure and, inferentially, in the level of pressure mentioned in the issue lifecycle model. As in the case of RQ1, the number of predictors that could be used was limited; however, the amount of variance explained was higher than in the case of RQ1.

In the sexual assault dataset, three variables were statistically significant: stakeholders’ coverage length, level of organized activism, and organization’s actions. In the spice dataset, two variables were statistically significant: stakeholders’ coverage length and organization’s actions. Thus, two variables could be validated across the two datasets: stakeholders’ coverage length and organization’s actions. The assumption behind RQ2 was that the higher the amount of stakeholders’ visibility in the media, the more legislative pressure the organizations will face. A second assumption was that the more actions the organization takes to solve the issue, the more the level of legislative pressure will decrease or stabilize. However, the results showed that, although the two variables (stakeholders’ coverage length and organization’s actions) influenced
the level of legislative pressure on the organization, it was not clear if the effect was negative or positive.

When managing the sexual assault issue, both the amount of coverage stakeholders received and the amount of actions the organization took to prevent the issue made the organization more prone to facing legislative pressure. However, when dealing with the spice issue, both stakeholders’ visibility in the media and the amount of organization’s actions correlated with a decrease in legislative pressure. The difference across the spice and the sexual assault issues could be attributed to the nature of the issue, to the types of actions the organization undertook in each case, or to the types of stakeholders that were mentioned.

Theoretically, the results revealed that the ‘issue management’ construct could be moved higher on the graph in order to display the issue’s management influence on the level of legislative pressure. Also, the ‘mediation/amplification’ and ‘organization’ constructs could be merged in the issues management graph to better represent the fact that they are intertwined. From a practical perspective, organizations are advised to monitor how their actions are portrayed in the media and their stakeholders’ level of media visibility. In doing this, the organizations should apply the codebook listed in Appendix. In addition, since the regression models only provided limited explanation for how the media coverage could reveal the level of legislative pressure, organizations are advised to monitor how their dialogue with the media is portrayed in news stories as well.

**RQ3: What Variables Correlate with an Increase in the Level of Media Awareness Due to Stakeholders’ Action (as Specific to the Issues’ Transition from the Emerging to the Current Stage)?**

According to the issue lifecycle model, ‘mediation/amplification’ represents a key construct in an issue’s evolution. In order to determine what predictors correlate with the media amplification of an issue, ‘increasing awareness due to stakeholders’ actions’ was used as the DV. As in the case of the previous RQs, the number of predictors that could be included in the regression equation was limited. Additionally, the emotional versus logical variable did not respect the regression assumptions and had to be excluded from the equation. Overall, RQ3 was the least answered research question. The only predictor that had statistical significance was level of organized activism. However, this predictor could not be validated across the two datasets. Therefore, the researcher cannot explain the results of RQ3 within the broader framework of the issues lifecycle model. Also, no practical implications and conclusions of the results could be drawn.

Having presented how the results of each research question impact the issues lifecycle model, the next part will focus on presenting a broader interpretation of the results. More specifically, the next section will use the internal documents received from the U.S. Navy to discuss three new constructs added to the issue lifecycle model (Internet and social media, issues lifecycle path, and internal versus external issues). In addition to these three constructs, the difference between a governmental and a for-profit organization will be explained from an issue management perspective.

**Implications on the Issue Management Theory**

The Internet and social media represent new additions to the issue lifecycle model. Meng’s (1992) model did not account for this construct, but one cannot ignore its importance in today’s media landscape. In the Internet era, any issue manager should account for the influence
of Internet and social media. In this context, monitoring the media coverage is not enough anymore. As Coombs (2002) mentioned, the Internet triggers issues to move faster from the potential to the current stage, making the transition between these stages almost unnoticeable. People evolved from gatekeepers to potential creators of content, which means that, nowadays, any public could potentially become a group of activists that could attempt to influence an organization. From this perspective, the present paper aimed to account for the impact of the Internet and social media on both the spice and sexual assault cases. However, no data could be collected from social media and the researcher only had access to limited amount of data from blogs. As a consequence, the present paper cannot account for any further implications of Internet and social media than the ones mentioned in the literature review.

From a practical standpoint, the U.S. Navy provided the researcher with a few internal documents containing ‘talking points’ and detailing the issue monitoring process and the people involved in the process. These documents revealed that the U.S. Navy had some of its personnel committed to monitoring social media. However, the U.S. Navy has neither saved nor analyzed the data.

A second construct introduced in the revised version of the issue lifecycle model was the issue’s evolutionary path (Bigelow et al., 1993). The present research project did not include enough case studies to account for different types of evolutionary paths (normal, interrupted, skipped, stopped, cyclical, or recursive). In addition, issues cannot be monitored from the potential stage till the last stage by only including media coverage. Despite these methodological limitations, the results of sexual assault and spice datasets showed that none of these issues were interrupted, skipped, stopped, or cyclical. Both issues followed a normal transition between the emerging and the current stage, by displaying a larger amount of media coverage and more legislative pressure. From this perspective, spice and sexual assault could be considered as having followed a normal issue’s evolutionary path. However, one should be cautious when making this statement, since the possibility that these two issues would revive cannot be excluded. Therefore, a cyclical or recursive evolutionary path represents a possibility as well.

A third construct introduced in the revised issue lifecycle consists in the difference between internal and external issues. Although Meng’s (1992) model did not account for this difference, the type of issue (external versus internal) can also shape an issue’s evolution. Unlike external issues, internal issues could become even more pressing, since the organization not only has to manage the media relations, but also the effect of an issue on the internal publics. In the case of Spice, an essential part of issue management took place internally and was not fully reflected in the media. The internal documents received from the U.S. Navy showed that the organization conducted an internal awareness campaign to prevent sailors from consuming spice. Similarly, the internal data covering the sexual assault issue revealed a focus on managing the issue internally, rather than externally. Before taking any internal measures, the U.S. Navy conducted a survey showing that almost three out of five sailors and marines perceived sexual assault as being an issue. As a consequence, the U.S. Navy founded the sexual assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO), a U.S. Navy branch.

Although the internal data showed the relevance of managing the issue internally, past issues management research has solely focused on providing guidelines for external issues. No research was conducted on internal issues (Taylor, 2003). By only focusing on the external damage on the organization, past studies have ignored a significant group of stakeholders. Although the objectives of this paper did not include a quantitative analysis of the effect of spice
and sexual assault on the organization’s internal reputation, public affairs managers and issues managers are advised to account for the internal impact of issues.

Besides the difference between internal and external issues, the type of organization can also impact an issue’s evolution. Although the type of organization has shaped the evolution of spice and sexual assault, Meng’s (1992) model did not account for this new construct. For example, the RQ2 results showed that stakeholders’ coverage length and organization’s actions were positively related to legislative pressure in one dataset, but negatively related to this variable in the other dataset. This inconsistency in terms of results might be influenced by the fact that the issues were internal and the organization is a governmental institution, having the duty to offer public service. As Bowen et al. (2011) mentioned,

Military officers operate in a more nuanced arena. For many commanders in the wake of the Vietnam War, the media were viewed at best as an impediment to their mission and at worst as an enemy. Public affair’s mission was to keep the dogs away. (p. 20)

Thus, the U.S. Navy’s past is still influencing today’s relation to the media. The media might be more speculative because the U.S. Navy is a governmental institution, while the U.S. Navy might be more cautious in regard to the information released.

Engagement as Framework for Understanding the Transition between Stages

As Figure 2 implies, the publics represent the third main concept in the issue lifecycle model. This paper has attempted to explain the role media play in an issue’s evolution. While managing the issue, the publics’ reaction represents a barometer for understanding an issue’s evolution, which could be used in addition to the media coverage that was analyzed in this paper. The publics’ reaction becomes even more relevant in the case of internal issues, when the organization and its internal publics have to collaborate toward reaching a common goal. The internal documents received from the U.S. Navy indicate that an important step into managing both the spice and sexual assault issues was the collaboration with the internal publics. Although the management literature discusses three main perspectives on issues management –public policy, corporate, and social (Kingdon, 1984; Mahon & Waddock, 1992; Meng, 1992; Post, 1978; Tombari, 1984) – none of these provides an explanation for why and how the U.S. Navy and its internal publics should collaborate. Thus, in the next section, the author will introduce a concept that can explain the relationship between the organization and its publics. This concept is called ‘engagement’.

The engagement framework is rooted in the co-creational perspective on public relations. The co-creational perspective “sees public as co creators of meaning and communication as what makes it possible to agree to shared meanings, interpretations, and goals” (Botan & Taylor, 2004, p. 652). Erentaite, Zukauskiene, Beyers, and Pilkauskaite-Valickiene (2011) discussed the concept of engagement by applying it to the news media. In other words, the authors analyzed whether news media had an influence on the teenagers’ interest to be involved in future civic activities. The results showed that both higher interest in the news media and more discussions regarding the news media correlated with a higher level of civil engagement.

From an issue lifecycle standpoint, the engagement approach implies that the relationships with the publics do not start in the potential stage, and, more importantly, do not end once an issue became dormant. By perceiving and treating its key publics as being dialogue partners and understanding that publics are now empowered, organizations should be able to minimize the impact of an issue. Having an engagement foundation, the publics would better understand the organization’s position and response. Moreover, the publics might be willing to
put less pressure on the organization when an issue emerges, since legislative pressure only influences an issue’s transition later. From the perspective of measuring the effectiveness of dealing with an issue through the engagement lenses, Taylor et al. (2003) suggested the use of several variables, such as communication quality, quantity, length of time, and feedback.

**Limitations**

From a methodological perspective, the researcher has confronted with several challenges. First, the amount of data available was limited from various perspectives. The data only included media stories and a few pages of internal data; no data could be collected from social media. Although discussions on both the sexual assault and spice issues were published on Twitter and Facebook, the U.S. Navy did not collect the data as they were published. Also, the author could not collect the data later because of privacy reasons related to Facebook and because Twitter data is deleted after a certain number of days. Thus, lacking any social media data, this paper could not test for the ‘Internet and social media’ construct introduced in the revised issue lifecycle model.

From a theoretical standpoint, the lack of consistency in the literature raised difficulties in positioning the results of this study within the larger theoretical framework of issues management. From this perspective, the relationship-management theory and the concept of ‘engagement’ provided a more complex and better-developed theoretical framework for understanding the results of this study. Also, Meng’s issue lifecycle model was developed solely at an empirical level. This posed difficulties in creating the codebook, establishing the variables that would be part of each construct, and choosing the variables to be tested through the six regression analyses.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The value of this study is theoretical, practical, and methodological. Theoretically, the author offers a revised issue lifecycle model and contributed to the development of the issue management literature. At a practical level, this paper provides recommendations for how organizations could better monitor an issue’s lifecycle and account for the constructs that influence an issue’s development. From a methodological perspective, this is the first study to analyze the issue lifecycle quantitatively, through content analysis and regression analysis. From a methodological perspective, future researchers are advised to further analyze the issue lifecycle quantitatively. Either regression analysis tests or other methods of analysis could reveal new correlations and, thus, lead to a better understanding of the issue lifecycle model. Also, future researchers could use the codebook presented in Appendix A and revise it. Finally, many of the variables listed in the codebook remained untested. Future research should try to include and test more variables. From a theoretical standpoint, both the issue management theory and the issue lifecycle model need further development. Future researchers are invited to find more arguments that could explain the role of engagement within the issue management literature. Finally, future research could consider possible new ways of theoretically improving the issue lifecycle model.

Thus, the purpose of this paper was to revise Meng’s issue lifecycle model. Specifically, the author re-examined the issue lifecycle by following two approaches: (1) theoretical inferences based on public relations, public affairs, and updated issue management literature; and (2) quantitative content analysis containing the news stories of two issues that have recently affected the U.S. Navy: spice (synthetic marijuana) and sexual assault. Both goals were achieved.
References
CONSTRUCT

Variable

Level of Measurement

1) Story number. A story number will be assigned to each story. The coder will write the number on top of the printed page and on the coding sheet. Spice stories will be assigned a number beginning with 1; sexual assault stories will be assigned a number beginning with 50, thus the first story will be 501. Note: OpEd coverage signed by a representative of the U.S. Navy will be excluded from the analysis.

I. PRESSURE

Stakeholder is defined as any person, organized or unorganized group whose actions related to the issue are likely to affect the U.S. Navy. More specifically, stakeholders at a minimum include: Department of Defense (DoD), regulators, NGOs, general public, traditional media reporters/opinion leaders, social media opinion leaders, and internal stakeholders.

2) Stakeholders’ coverage length (IV). Stakeholders’ coverage length is the amount of lines (full and partial) in which the story discussed about any of the organization’s stakeholders (see var. 3). All stories will be in a word document, at a one-inch margin.

   Ordinal
   Mandatory variable

Coded as:
   1. None
   2. Low (≤25% of the total article)
   3. Medium (26-75% of the total article)
   4. High (≥76% of the total article)

Note 1: If there are multiple stakeholders mentioned, please count the number of lines for all of them.
Note 2: If there is more than an issue mentioned, please only code for the issue we are analyzing (spice or sexual assault).

II. PUBLICS/STAKEHOLDERS

NGO is defined as any non-governmental organization operating as a legal entity that work as a group toward at least one common goal that is likely to affect the U.S. Navy. More specifically, NGOs include organization such as LLP, LLC, C Corp, 503(c), etc.

Affinity Group is defined as any small group of activists (usually up to 20), either hierarchical or non-hierarchical, based on a common ideology, issue, activity, role or skill, whose actions are likely to affect the U.S. Navy.

3) Types of stakeholders mentioned (IV). To identify the types of stakeholders mentioned in the story, the coders will read the entire story.

   Nominal
   Conditional variable

Coded as:
   1. Regulators (NOAA NMFS, DOI, Congress)
   2. NGOs and Affinity Groups (including veterans)
3. General Public
4. Traditional Media Articles/Reporters/Opinion Leaders
5. Social Media Articles/Opinion Leaders
6. Directly Involved Individual Internal Stakeholder (the sexual assault victims or assailants, Sailors who consumed spice, providers of spice)
7. Highly Ranked Individual Internal Stakeholders and representatives of the U.S. Navy (such as references to Adm. John Harvey, commander of United States Fleet Forces Command in Norfolk, or Vice. Adm. Adam M. Robinson, U.S. Navy surgeon general and chief, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery)
8. External Stakeholders (DoD, Pentagon, Navy Medicine)

Note: If there is more than one stakeholder mentioned, please code for the first stakeholder that is being mentioned in the article.

III. FORMAL CONSTRAINTS

4) Level of organized activism -both organizations and individuals- (IV). The degree to which activist groups are organized in relation to the organization (as mentioned in the story).

*Ordinal*
*Mandatory variable*

Coded as:
1. None
2. Low (Individuals filing complaints, individual citizens addressing the issue)
3. Medium (NGO-level activity, including explicit citing of interest on the issue or interaction with organizations regarding the issue)
4. High (individual or NGO filed a lawsuit or Notice of Intent -NOI-, taking direct action, publicly protesting or contacting the Congressperson regarding the issue)

IV. MEDIATION/AMPLIFICATION

5) Progression in time (DV). The number of weeks the issue was discussed in the traditional media.

*Ordinal*
*Mandatory variable*

Coded as:
1. Week 1
2. Week 2
3. Week 3...

Note: The coders will check the calendar and code each week of data in order, from one to X.

6) Type of traditional media (IV). The type of traditional media where the story was published. To identify this, the coders will read the lines before the body text.

*Nominal*
*Mandatory variable*

Coded as:
1. Specialized media (publications that pertain to the U.S. Navy and/or the Army, such as Navy Times, Navy News Service, and Navy Live)
2. General Newspaper
3. General TV
4. General Radio
5. Internet
6. Wire service/bureau

Note: Specialized media includes the Navy News Service, although this medium is a wire service.

7) Coverage of the traditional media (IV). To identify this, the coders will think in terms of how broadly the media where the story was published are disseminated.

**Ordinal**

**Mandatory variable**

Coded as:
1. Regional Coverage
2. National Coverage
3. International Coverage

Note: This variable will be coded accordingly to the DMAs and Top Newspaper lists provided in Bacon’s 2005.

V. OPPORTUNITY TO INFLUENCE

8) Organization’s actions (IV). To identify this, the coders will consider whether the story mentioned any actions that have been taken by the organization (U.S. Navy specifically) to prevent the development of the issue. Future actions will NOT be coded.

**Nominal**

**Mandatory variable**

Coded as:
1. Yes
2. No

9) Type of actions (IV). To identify this, the coders will consider any type of tactic the organization used to prevent the development of the issue.

**Open-ended**

**Conditional variable**

10) Dialogue with the media (IV). To identify this, the coders will consider whether the story mentioned any response from the organization (U.S. Navy) to the media.

**Nominal**

**Mandatory variable**

Coded as:
1. Yes (The story mentions that the U.S. Navy was contacted and the organization discussed with the media)
2. No (The story mentions that the U.S. Navy was contacted by the media, but the organization refused to provide any information)
3. Not yet (The story mentions that the U.S. Navy was contacted by the media, but the organization has not yet provided any information)
4. Not mentioned (None of the above is mentioned)

11) Tone of the story about the organization’s actions (IV). Story tone when referring ONLY to organization’s actions to prevent the development of the issue and to the internal stakeholders. In other words, do NOT include in tone analysis story content discussing victim/antagonist, External Stakeholders’ or the public’s actions.
**Ordinal**

*Conditional variable*

Coded as:

1. Highly Negative (the story is extremely critical about the organization’s actions and uses many words that have a negative connotation). Please look for an abundance of negative verbs and negatively connoted terms.

   Example: *Military courts do not protect a victim’s identity as carefully as the civilian justice does. Confidential conversations between a victim and a psychologist, medical professional, even a chaplain can be used by defense attorney. And there is skepticism that attackers will be punished* (sexual assault, 9/7/2011).

2. Negative (the story is somewhat critical about the organization’s actions and uses a few words that have a negative connotation). Please look for sentences that suggest/imply what the U.S. Navy’s course of action should be. Also, negative stories should be based on facts more than highly negative stories.

   Example: *Instead of providing access to military attorney, the Defense Department typically directs victims to victim advocates, who serve as the equivalent of a rape crisis counselor in the civilian world. While a victim advocate can be an important ally, the conversations that a victim has with an advocate are not confidential and can be subpoenaed in court. The fact that these conversations can be used against them is encouraging victims to come forward. In the civilian world, 36 states established a privilege between victim advocates, and similar rights must be afforded to service members* (sexual assault, 2/27/2011).

3. Neutral (the story presents facts about the organization’s actions without any positive or negative adjectives; the story was balanced –both negative and positive-). Please check if the story provides facts and no opinions.

   Example: *The legislation would require the Defense Department to provide all alleged victims of sexual assault access to a military lawyer who can represent their interest. Currently, defendants are guaranteed such access, but victims are not* (sexual assault, 5/24/2011).

4. Positive (the story presents the organization’s actions in a positive light). Please check if there are positively connoted terms, and for adverbs such as “already” or “also,” which emphasize the positive terms.

   Example: *The general behind the PSA already has reinforcements. The drug Enforcement Administration recently outlawed many spice ingredients. The military has also begun using a drug test that can detect spice, although it’s not a random drug test* (spice, 8/1/2011).

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**VI. PERIOD OF INCREASING AWARENESS**

12) Increasing awareness due to stakeholders’ actions (DV). The number of times that the stakeholders’ actions were mentioned per week.

*Ratio*

*Mandatory variable*

Coded as:

*Note: All the articles pertaining to the same week will be assigned the same number of times that the stakeholders’ actions were mentioned in that particular week. If the same stakeholder undertaking the same type of action is mention more than once in a story, please count that as only one action.*
Example of stakeholders’ actions: ‘discharging students’, ‘investigation on Spice’, etc.

VII. ORGANIZATION
13) Legislative pressure (DV). To identify this, the coders will consider whether any kind of legislative pressure on the organization (U.S. Navy) was mentioned.

Nominal
Mandatory variable
Coded as:
1. Yes
2. No

VIII. ADDITIONAL VARIABLES
14) Logical versus Emotional (IV). To identify whether the story is emotional or logical, the coders will pay attention to the adjectives used and to the tone. The variable refers to how emotional vs. logical the story and the tone of the reporters are.

Nominal
Mandatory variable
Coded as:
1. Emotional – over 75% of the article is emotional (predominantly emphasizes emotions, not facts; highly opinionated)
   Example: Military courts do not protect a victim’s identity as carefully as the civilian justice does. Confidential conversations between a victim and a psychologist, medical professional, even a chaplain can be used by defense attorney. And there is skepticism that attackers will be punished (sexual assault, 9/7/2011).
2. Neutral –approximately equal amounts of the article are emotional and logical (presenting a balanced viewpoint; not too many statistics, but not emphasizing emotions).
   Example: In March, in response to growing popularity of spice, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration used emergency authority to make five chemicals used in it and other “fake pot” products illegal for open sale. The Navy said that its urine-testing process has some ability to detect the new drugs. (spice, 10/20/2011).
3. Logical –over 75% of the article is logical (highly emphasizing facts and numbers, statistics)
   Example: According to the report, the Department of Defense had two sexual assaults per 1,000 service members in fiscal year 2009. The Army reported 2.6 per 1,000 soldiers; the Navy reported 1.6 per 1,000; the Air Force reported 1.4 per 1,000; and the Marine Corps had 1.3 per 1,000 (sexual assault, 3/16/2010).

15) Quotes (IV). Code whether a representative of the U.S. Navy was DIRECTLY quoted in the story.

Nominal
Mandatory variable
Coded as:
1. Yes
2. No
Note: Representatives of the U.S. Navy include sailors, victims, students, commanders, spokespeople, etc.

16) Person Quoted (IV). If the story quoted a U.S. Navy representative, mention the name and the position of the person who was quoted from the list below.

**Nominal**

**Mandatory variable**

Coded as:
1. Institutional Internal Stakeholders (such as quotes of representatives the Navy)
2. Directly Involved Individual Internal Stakeholder (quotes of the sexual assault victims or assaulters; Sailors who consumed spice)
3. Highly Ranked Individual Internal Stakeholders (quotes of individuals such as Adm. John Harvey, commander of United States Fleet Forces Command in Norfolk, or Vice. Adm. Adam M. Robinson, U.S. Navy surgeon general and chief, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery)
4. None

*Note: If there are more representative quoted in the story, please code the FIRST PERSON QUOTED.*

17) Issue mentioned in the title (IV). To identify this variable, the coders will only read the title of the story and determine whether the issue was SPECIFICALLY cited.

**Nominal**

**Mandatory variable**

Coded as:
1. Yes
2. No

*Note: This includes mentions of ‘synthetic pot’ instead of ‘spice’.*

18) The organization (U.S. Navy, or any Navy command or references to direct employees [Sailors [active or reserve], civilians, dependents, retirees]) mentioned in the title (IV). To identify this variable, the coders will only read the title of the story and determine whether DoD or the U.S. Navy was mentioned.

**Nominal**

**Mandatory variable**

Coded as:
1. Yes
2. No
Examining the Relationship between Corporate Associations and Brand Loyalty: The Moderating Role of Product Involvement

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Abstract

Through conducting an online survey among college students, this study examined the relationships between two streams of corporation associations (i.e., corporate ability associations and corporate social responsibility associations) and brand loyalty. Additionally, this study explored the moderating effect of product involvement on these relationships. Its results contribute to corporate communication scholarship regarding corporate associations and customer-brand relationships. Corporate communication practitioners will also find the results useful in designing effective association-building strategies to boost brand loyalty among customers.
Introduction

When communicating with customers, corporations can choose whether to present themselves as a market leader who is “doing well” in delivering high-quality products or services, or as a responsible citizen who is “doing good” to promote the well being of the society. For example, in its Refresh Project, Pepsi actively engaged customers in a dialogue on how to improve communities, the efforts of which were well acknowledged among Pepsi’s customers and industrial analysts (Luan & Ailawadi, 2011). Samsung, on the other hand, confidently advertised the innovativeness of its new product in the “Elephant Plays with Galaxy Note” spot, which was reported to help achieve a sale of 5 million dollars within five months (Pardee, 2011). As corporations embed distinct emphases into their message design, customers are likely to develop different associations with these corporations (i.e., associations regarding corporate ability (CA) of “doing well” versus associations concerning corporate social responsibility (CSR) of “doing good”; Kim, 2011). Therefore, an important managerial question arises: Which streams of associations should corporate communication cater to, and under what conditions?

In addition to cultivating desired corporate associations among customers, corporate communicators are constantly being reminded of another grand goal of their efforts: to forge brand loyalty among customers. Representing a type of relational capital, brand loyalty has remained central to the success of a business operation for decades (Fournier & Lee, 2009). It transcends its intangibility and becomes a cradle where tangible returns grow (Hess, Story, & Danes, 2011). These tangible returns include the increase of customer share of wallet (Rauyruen & Miller, 2009), the boost of sales (Chen, Sen, & Liao, 2009), the growth of shareholder value (Bick, 2009), etc.

While the significance of building customer associations with and loyalty towards a corporation and its brand are both well-recognized, it is necessary for corporate communicators to ask whether these two communication objectives can be aligned with each other. In another word, what is the relationship between corporate associations and brand loyalty? Although several empirical studies (e.g., Caruana & Ewing, 2010; Suh & Yi, 2006) have examined the linkage between corporate associations and brand evaluations, it is still unclear how specific streams of corporate associations—CA and CSR associations—are related to brand loyalty. Moreover, some academic research (e.g., Suh & Yi, 2006) has shown that the relationship between corporate associations and brand evaluations may vary under different conditions, such as the degree to which a customer is involved with a corporation’s product (i.e., product involvement). Thus, another important question is, how do the relationships between individual types of corporate associations and brand loyalty differ by customer’s product involvement?

Responding to these inquiries, we conduct an online survey. The survey aims to explore the relationships between different streams of corporation associations and brand loyalty, as well as the moderating role of product involvement on these relationships. Findings of our survey contribute to the growing body of knowledge on corporate associations and customer-brand relationships. Moreover, our findings provide corporate communicators with insights into which corporate association-cultivation strategy is most relevant when a corporation attempts to boost loyalty among its customers.

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1 In our study, we use the term “corporation communicators” or “corporate communication practitioners” to represent corporate public relations practitioners.
Literature Review

In this section, we first review previous studies to provide conceptual and operational definitions of the major constructs examined. These include corporate associations with its subset variables: corporate ability (CA) associations and corporate social responsibility (CSR) associations; brand loyalty; and product involvement. Then we proceed to introduce the proposed relationships between corporate associations and brand loyalty, and the presumed moderating effect of product involvement on these relationships. Figure 1 summarizes the suggested relationships among all the constructs.

![Figure 1](image.png)

**Figure 1.** The proposed conceptual relationships among the studied constructs. Arrows with a solid line are relationships examined in this study. Brand familiarity is the control variable.

**Corporate Associations**

Various conceptualizations of corporate associations have been offered in literature. In this study, we adopt Brown and Dacin’s (1997) definition and consider corporate associations\(^2\) as perceptions, inferences, and beliefs about a company; a person’s knowledge of his or her prior behaviors with respect to the company; information about the company’s prior actions; moods and emotions experienced by the person with respect to the company; and overall and specific evaluations of the company and its perceived attributes. (p. 69)

Furthermore, we follow Brown and Dacin’s (1997) work and classify corporate associations into two categories: corporate ability (CA) associations and corporate social responsibility (CSR) associations. CA associations refer to the information stored in a customer’s mind regarding how capable a corporation is in producing, developing, and delivering products or services (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Kim & Rader, 2010; Kim, 2011). It emphasizes the hard-core

\(^2\) A majority of previous studies have examined corporate associations from customers’ perspectives (e.g., Kim, 2011; Madrigal, 2000), despite that corporate associations can also be forged among other stakeholders such as employees, community members, suppliers, and investors (Kim & Rader, 2010). To create a baseline for comparison with prior work, we choose to emphasize customers’ corporate associations in this study.
competence of the corporation as a profit-making entity in society. Noticeably, previous studies (e.g., Kim & Rader, 2010; Kim, 2011) have suggested that CA associations are a multi-dimensional construct consisting of six different but interrelated aspects. These aspects include customer perceptions towards the corporation’s 1) capability to develop innovative products or services, 2) ability to deliver high quality products or service, 3) expertise in the manufacturing of products, 4) manufacturing facilities’ efficiency, 5) market leaderships, and 6) global success.

On the other hand, CSR associations address a customer’s knowledge of a corporation in relation to how well it fulfills its social, environmental, and political responsibilities (i.e., non-product or service related responsibilities; Brown & Dacin, 1997; Kim & Rader, 2010; Kim, 2011). Therefore, the focus of CSR associations revolves around the corporation’s role as a responsible citizen in society rather than a profit-making entity. Similar to CA associations, CSR associations have been conceptualized as a construct of six dimensions, including customer evaluations of the corporation’s environment responsibility, philanthropic giving, social diversity, care for communities, educational commitment, and commitment to public health (Kim, 2011).

It is important to note that previous research has been using corporate associations interchangeably with some other constructs such as corporate image and corporate reputation (Brown, 1998). However, differences among these constructs exist. That is, corporate associations are an overarching term which covers any theoretical perspectives concerning corporate image and reputation (Brown, 1998). As a special set of corporate associations, corporate reputation refers to what external stakeholders consider as central, enduring, and distinctive (CED) to a corporation (Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2006). Corporate image, however, reflects what internal stakeholders perceive as CED to the corporation (Brown et al., 2006).

**Brand Loyalty**

Since its first mention by Copeland in 1923, brand loyalty has been defined in more than 200 ways (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978). Despite the definitional disparity, many scholars agree that brand loyalty entails two dimensions: a behavioral dimension reflected by customers’ repeated purchase of products or services under a specific brand as well as an attitudinal aspect revealed by customers’ psychological attachment towards the brand (Dick & Basu, 1994; Jacoby, 1971; Nam, Ekinci, & Whyatt, 2011). Moreover, these scholars posit that the attitudinal dimension of brand loyalty is comprised of cognitive, affective, and conative components3 (Jacoby, 1971; Yuksel, Yuksel, & Bilim, 2009). Therefore, to capture the dual dimensionality of brand loyalty, we follow Jacoby and Chestnut’s (1978) definition and consider the construct as

1) the biased (i.e. non random), (2) behavioral response (i.e. purchase), (3) expressed over time, (4) by some decision-making unit (5) with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and (6) is a function of psychological (decision making, evaluative) processes. (p. 80)

Brand loyalty has been a focal construct in marketing, advertising, and public relations literature. It has been used as a central measure of brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Nam, Ekinci, & Whyatt, 2011) and as a crucial criterion to evaluate the effectiveness of corporate communication

---

3 Cognitive loyalty represents customer attitudinal preference for a particular brand over other competing brands; it is built upon customer brand knowledge (Pedersen & Nysveen, 2001). Affective loyalty emphasizes customer emotional responses to a brand, while conation loyalty reflects customer behavioral intention to buy a brand (Back, 2005; Yuksel, Yuksel, & Bilim, 2009).
and marketing strategies (Knox & Walker, 2001). The benefits of cultivating and maintaining strong brand loyalty have been well documented in previous studies. For example, research has shown that brand-loyal customers are more likely to pay more for a brand because they believe the brand contains unique values that no other brands can offer (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). In addition, these customers are more likely to generate favorable word of mouth about the brand and repeat their purchase behavior; as a result, corporations are able to keep a satisfactory customer retention record (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Furthermore, through strengthening brand loyalty among customers, corporations can enlarge their market shares or obtain a premium price for their brands (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

Product Involvement

In the fields of marketing and advertising, a widely-cited definition of product involvement comes from Celsi and Olson (1988). As they suggested, product involvement is the extent to which a customer considers a product as personal relevant; such relevance can be either situational or enduring⁴ (Bennett, Härtel, & McColl-Kennedy, 2005; Celsi & Olson, 1988). High involvement occurs when the product is thought to reflect a customer’s self-image, represent a customer’s ego structure, or be of high costs (Bennett, Härtel, & McColl-Kennedy, 2005; Chen & Tsai, 2008; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). When high involvement circumstance arises, customers tend to initiate complex cognitive activities such as formal research and planning so that they can arrive at a purchase decision or other evaluative conclusions with great confidence (Bennett, Härtel, & McColl-Kennedy, 2005). Past research has identified several product categories that demand high involvement from customers. These include but are not limited to personal computers, cameras, automobiles, and fashion apparel (Drossos & Fouskas, 2010; Nkwocha, Bao, Johnson, & Brotspies, 2005; Zaichkowsky, 1985).

In contrast to high product involvement, low product involvement indicates a customer assigns limited personal interest to a product, allocates the product on the periphery of their value system, and associates the product with few costs (Bennett, Härtel, & McColl-Kennedy, 2005; Zaichkowsky, 1985). A few product categories have been found to elicit low involvement from customers, such as soft drinks, breakfast cereals, candies, and tissues (Drossos & Fouskas, 2010; Zaichkowsky, 1985). In short, the level of involvement that a customer has in relation to a product plays a crucial role in determining their attitudes and behaviors towards the product and its brand (Bennett, Härtel, & McColl-Kennedy, 2005; Knox & Walker, 2003)

The Relationships between Corporate Associations and Brand Loyalty

A key proposition of our study is that corporate associations—CA and CSR associations—have a positive relationship with brand loyalty. This proposition gains support from a large stream of communication and marketing literature discussing how corporate image and reputation, as two major subsets of corporate associations, contribute to the formation of brand loyalty. For instance, Zeithaml (2000) claimed that reputation, developed through customers’ direct and indirect experiences with a corporation, has become a litmus test for customers to make evaluations of the corporation’s brand and products; as a result, customers’ purchase decisions are impacted. Zeithaml’s (2000) statement was endorsed by Nguyen and Leblanc (2001). In their study, brand loyalty was found to become higher when corporate image and

---

⁴ Situational involvement is temporal and varies across purchase situations, whereas enduring involvement refers to “the knowledge about the product category that a customer gains over time and that is stored in long-term memory” (Bennett, Härtel, & McColl-Kennedy, 2005, p. 99).
reputation were perceived as strongly favorable. Their findings mirror the results of Gounaris and Stathakopoulo’s (2004) research. Through conducting a survey among 850 customers, Gounaris and Stathakopoulo (2004) identified that corporate reputation was positively related to brand loyalty which was manifested by both supportive behaviors such as repeated purchase, positive word of mouth; and by favorable attitudes such as strong emotional attachment. In addition, Caruana and Ewing (2010) extended prior work into the online environment, and also spotted that corporate reputation was associated with brand loyalty in a positive manner.

Recently, communication and marketing scholars have been increasingly emphasizing the significance of CSR associations to brand loyalty building. For example, Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) observed that customers were more likely to have positive attitudes towards socially responsible corporations. Meanwhile, de los Salomones, Crespo, and del Bosque (2005), in agreement with Maingan and Ferrell (2001) and Jones (1997), posited that customers’ CSR associations determined customers’ buying decisions, and more importantly, their decisions of forming brand loyalty with the corporation. Similarly, van den Brink, Odekerken-Schröder, and Pauwels (2006) identified that customers’ CSR associations created by a corporation’s strategic cause-related marketing campaign led to brand loyalty. To recap, through summarizing the insights from past empirical studies, we postulate that corporate associations are positively related to brand loyalty.

The Moderating Role of Product Involvement

Another important assertion of our study is that product involvement negatively moderates the relationships between corporate associations (i.e., CA and CSR associations) and brand loyalty. To provide the rationale behind this assertion, we draw on research on accessibility-diagnosticity framework. Developed by advertising and marketing scholars (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Lynch, Marmorstein, & Weigold, 1988), the accessibility-diagnosticity framework contends that the probability that a piece of information will be used to make a judgment depends on two factors. One is the accessibility of the information, meaning the ease with which the information can be retrieved from a person’s memory (Biehal & Sheinin, 2007). The other is the diagnosticity of the information, referring to the extent to which the information can be used alone to make a decision (Biehal & Sheinin, 2007).

Applying the accessibility-diagnosticity framework to our context, we argue that corporate associations, as a knowledge base that a customer preserves in their mind with regard to a corporation (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Kim, 2011), is both accessible and diagnostic for the customer to make loyalty evaluations of the corporation and its brand. We also suggest that the accessibility of corporate associations remains stable, considering customers’ knowledge of a corporation can be easily and quickly accessed from their memory at any time; but the diagnosticity of corporate associations may vary across situations (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Suh & Yi, 2006).

Especially relevant to this study, research has shown that the variation of the diagnosticity of corporate associations can be explained by customers’ product involvement levels (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Suh & Yi, 2006). That is, under low involvement condition, customers become less active in seeking information about the product, and its brand and producer (Suh & Yi, 2006). As a result, their loyalty assessment is more likely based upon corporate associations, given that corporate associations are readily accessible and considered as diagnostic enough to make a valid evaluation under such circumstance (Suh & Yi, 2006). Conversely, when it comes to high product involvement condition, customers begin to engage in
an intense information-seeking process, where corporate associations, though readily accessible, will not be used alone to make loyalty evaluations (Suh & Yi, 2006). Instead, customers will combine corporate associations with other relevant information to reach a valid loyalty evaluation (Suh & Yi, 2006). In summation, we expect that as product involvement decreases, brand loyalty become more dependent on corporate associations; however, as product involvement increases, the reversed situation will occur.

Note that we take brand familiarity as a control in our study. This is because brand familiarity, accumulated through a customer’s direct and indirect experiences with a particular brand over time (Hoch & Deighton, 1989), has been positioned as a precondition for the customer to forge corporate associations and brand loyalty (Berens, van Riel, & van Bruggen, 2005). Since brand familiarity is not the focus of our study, we control its effects. Therefore, based on the reviewed literature and the purpose of our study, we posit:

**H1:** Corporate ability associations are positively related to brand loyalty.

**H2:** Corporate social responsibility associations are positively related to brand loyalty.

**H3:** Product involvement negatively moderates the relationship between corporate ability associations and brand loyalty.

**H4:** Product involvement negatively moderates the relationship between corporate social responsibility associations and brand loyalty.

**Method**

To test our hypotheses, we administrated an online survey to a convenient student sample using Qualtrics. The primary reason for using online survey was that it helps reduce research costs, speed up the data collection process, and increase response rates (Couper, 2000; de Gregorio & Sung, 2010).

**Preliminary Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of product involvement</th>
<th>Tested product categories</th>
<th>Tested corporate brands</th>
<th>Selected corporate brands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Soft drinks</td>
<td>Coca-Cola</td>
<td>Coca-Cola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PepsiCo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dr Pepper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Breakfast cereals</td>
<td>Kellogg's</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>General Mills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Post Cereals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>Apple</td>
<td>Apple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hewlett-Packard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dell</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cameras</td>
<td>Canon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nikon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sony</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. In this study, the product category - computers - includes laptops, desktops, and tablets.*

The first stage of our survey design involved: 1) identifying two product categories—one with high involvement and the other with low involvement, and 2) selecting one brand within each identified product category. After a close examination of advertising and consumer behavior literature (e.g., Drossos & Fouskas, 2010; Nkwocha, Bao, Johnson, & Brotpies, 2005;
Zaichkowsky, 1985), two high involvement product categories were proposed: computers and cameras. Meanwhile, two low involvement product categories were chosen: soft drinks and breakfast cereals. One criterion we used in including appropriate product categories was that these products had to be strongly relevant to the university students who would form the convenience sample in this study. In addition, within each product category, three reputable corporate brands were picked, based upon the premise that our respondents should have high familiarity with these brands and previous purchase experience with the products that fall under these brands (see Table 1).

A total of 27 female and eight male undergraduate and graduate students in mass communication at a large Southeastern university in the United States participated in the preliminary study. Upon agreement, they were invited to rate their level of familiarity with the three selected brands within each of the four product categories on a three-item, seven-point scale adopted from Kent and Allen (1994; Cronbach’s alpha was above .85). For example, “Regarding Coca-Cola soft drinks, are you: 1) very unfamiliar/very familiar; 2) very inexperienced/very experienced; and 3) not knowledgeable/very knowledgeable.” According to the results of their ratings, Apple computers ($M = 5.97$, $SD = 1.44$) and Coca-Cola soft drinks ($M = 6.59$, $SD = .91$) were selected to represent brands in the high and low product category, respectively.

Questionnaire Design

The second stage of our study focused on composing an online questionnaire to measure the three constructs of interest: corporate associations, product involvement, and brand loyalty. To construct the questionnaire, we used existing multi-item scales which included both seven-point Likert scales anchored by 1 as “strongly disagree” and 7 as “strongly agree”, and a five-point semantic differential scale (see Appendix). The employment of multi-item measures was to “assist in capturing the full theoretical meaning underlying the constructs and reduces measurement error” (Bennett, Härtel, McColl-Kennedya, 2005, p. 101-102). All scales adopted were found to have sufficient reliability in the original literature cited: Cronbach’s alphas ranged from .825 to .940 (see Appendix).

Independent measures. Our independent construct is corporate associations, which consists of CA and CSR associations. To measure CA and CSR associations, we adopted Kim’s (2011) 12-item, seven-point Likert scale. The first six items in her scale were designed to distinguish six dimensions of CA associations: “I associate this company with 1) innovative products, 2) market leaderships, 3) good quality products, 4) efficient manufacturing facilities, 5) expertise in the manufacturing of products, and 6) global success” (i.e., Cronbach’s alpha was .859). The next six items were developed to capture six dimensions of CSR associations: “I associate this company with 1) environmental responsibility, 2) philanthropic giving, 3) social diversity, 4) a great care for communities, 5) a commitment to education, and 6) a commitment to public health” (i.e., Cronbach’s alpha was .825). The overall CA associations score was computed by averaging the scores of all the first six items in the scale, whereas the overall CSR associations score was derived by averaging the scores of all the next six items in the scale.

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5 In this study, “Apple computers” included Apple laptops, desktops, and tablets.

6 In addition to the three constructs, we used brand familiarity as our control variable. It was measured by one item: “very unfamiliar/very familiar” on a seven-point scale.
Moderator measure. The measure of product involvement was adopted from Bennett, Härtel, and McColl-Kennedy’s (2005) study, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .940. Their measure, developed from Zaichkowsky’s (1985) Personal Involvement Inventory, encompassed 10 bipolar items on a five-point semantic differential scale: 1) unimportant/important, 2) boring/interesting, 3) irrelevant/relevant, 4) unexciting/exciting, 5) means nothing to me/means a lot to me, 6) unappealing/appealing, 7) mundane/fascinating, 8) worthless/valuable, 9) uninvolving/involving, and 10) not needed/needed. The overall product involvement score was obtained by averaging the scores of all the ten items in the scale.

Dependent measures. We took the position that our dependent construct—brand loyalty—is comprised of two key variables: attitudinal loyalty and purchase loyalty in that these two variables reflect both attitudinal and behavioral aspects of brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Following Chaudhuri and Holbrook’s (2001) work, we used a two-item, seven-point Likert scale to operationalize attitudinal loyalty (i.e., Cronbach’s alpha was .830). These two items were: 1) “I am committed to this brand,” and 2) “I would be willing to pay a higher price for this brand over other brands.” Meanwhile, we adopted Chaudhuri and Holbrook’s (2001) purchase loyalty measure (i.e., Cronbach’s alpha was .900), which included two items on a seven-point Likert scale: 1) “I will buy this brand the next time I buy [product category name],” and 2) “I intend to keep purchasing this brand.” The overall brand loyalty score was calculated by averaging the scores of all the aforementioned four items.

Pre-test

At the third stage of this study, we pre-tested the composed questionnaire among another 23 female and seven male undergraduate and graduate students in mass communication at the university where we conducted our preliminary study. Respondents’ feedback was then integrated in crafting the final questionnaire. The final questionnaire contained a total of 20 items. Duplicated scales were applied to both brands—Apple and Coca-cola so that comparisons could be made between brands with two levels of product involvement: high versus low.

Sampling Procedure

The final questionnaire was administered to 192 graduate and 1,098 undergraduate students at the university mentioned above. These students had educational background in four major mass communication areas: advertising, public relations, telecommunication, and journalism. Their ages ranged from 17 to 50. A majority of them were white female students. Note that all 65 respondents who participated in the preliminary study and pre-test were excluded from the final sample.

The first survey invitation was sent to all the 1,290 students by e-mail on February 16, 2012. 590 of them then completed the survey. One week later, a follow-up e-mail was distributed among these 1,290 students, which yielded an additional 179 completed surveys. On February 27, 2012, which was five days before the online survey was closed, a third follow-up e-mail was delivered to them. After the two-wave follow-ups, we arrived at a sample size of 882 respondents, which represents a response rate of approximately 68%.

Although we received 882 completed questionnaires, only 559 of them were included in the subsequent analysis. The remaining 323 questionnaires were excluded from the analysis because they came from respondents 1) who did not have any purchase experience of Coca-Cola soft drinks and/or Apple computers; or 2) who were affiliated with Coca-Cola and/or Apple in a
certain way\textsuperscript{7}. Since these 323 questionnaires did not serve the purpose of our study, we focused on the 559 qualified responses, which represented the final sample of our study.

\textit{Statistical Analysis}

Before testing the hypotheses, we compiled two different data sets based on our final sample. The first data sets, denoted as “Coca-Cola”, covered the 559 respondents’ responses on the brand: Coca-Cola. The second data sets, called “Apple”, included these 559 respondents’ feedback on the brand: Apple. We then performed statistical analysis in a similar fashion on each of the two data sets. The obtained results were then compared across data sets to identify whether our hypotheses were supported.

To test our first two hypotheses (H1 and H2), we conducted stepwise regression analysis among the two data sets via SPSS 20.0. In stepwise regression, all entered variables (i.e., four variables: CA associations, CSR associations, product involvement, and brand familiarity) were tested against the criterion that they must contribute to the explanation of variability in our dependent variable (i.e., brand loyalty). If their contributions were not significant, they were removed from the regression equations, whereas the remaining variables were entered for subsequent test with the same criterion applied (Trasorras, Weinstein & Abratt, 2009). According to Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010), stepwise regression is a powerful variable selection approach that has been widely adopted by marketing scholars. This is because it evaluates the explanation power of each independent variable and attains the independent variables that best explain the dependent variable in the overall regression model.

To examine our last two hypothesis (H3 and H4), we performed hierarchical regression analysis on the Coca-Cola and Apple data sets separately using SPSS 20.0. First, we mean-centered four continuous variables (i.e., CA associations, CSR associations, product involvement, and brand familiarity) before computing two interaction items (i.e., the interaction between product involvement and CA associations, between product involvement and CSR associations). By mean-centering these continuous variables initially, we could better interpret the main contributions of our independent variables to our dependent variable in the presence of the two interaction items (Berens, van Riel, & van Bruggen, 2005). The main contributions of our independent variables herein could be thought as conditional contributions, or contributions “that hold when the other continuous variables in the model are at their means (i.e., zero)” (p. 42). They were different from the unconditional (i.e., “real”) main contributions of our independent variables which we obtained in our stepwise estimation for H1 and H2.

To proceed with our hierarchical regression analysis, we entered the four mean-centered continuous variables into our regression equation (i.e., stepwise estimation was chosen). We then added the aforementioned two interaction items into the equation. The moderating effects of product involvement were indicated by the statistical significance of the two interaction items.

Note that a few caveats are necessary for this research. In spite of numerous advantages of the online survey method (e.g., decrease research costs, increase data collection speed, and improve response rates), it might introduce some control and representativeness issues which were likely to jeopardize the reliability and validity of our results (Couper, 2000; Gregorio & Sung, 2010). Furthermore, representativeness problems might also arise from our use of a student convenience sample, the characteristics of which might not reflect the characteristics of the population of interest: the college-student customer group of products with low versus high

\textsuperscript{7} These respondents were affiliated with Coca-Cola and/or Apple in the way that they or their family members were employed by or working in an area related to Coca-Cola soft drinks and/or Apple computers.
involvement (i.e., Coca-Cola versus Apple). For example, all respondents in our sample were educated in four areas of mass communication. Their educational background might sensitize them to the topic of our survey. In addition, a majority of our respondents were white female students. It is also admitted that only one brand was selected per product category (i.e., product category with low versus high level of involvement). The characteristics of the selected brand might not represent the characteristics of all brands in the corresponding product category. Moreover, the use of a single brand per product category might introduce brand-specific confounds into the results of our study, which might not be captured in the data analysis detailed in the following section.

Results

Profile of Respondents

Table 2
Respondent profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic characteristics</th>
<th>Subgroups</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>% of N (N = 559)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>17-19</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20-22</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23-30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31-50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate student</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian/Asian American</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Both the mean and median of respondents’ ages were 20. The standard deviation of their ages was 2.43.

Among the 559 respondents who constituted our final sample, 408 (73%) were females and 151 (27%) were males. 187 (33%) were sophomores, 168 (30%) were juniors, 97 (17%) were freshmen, 90 (16%) were seniors, and 17 (3%) were graduate students. Approximately 57% of the respondents were ages 20–22, followed by ages 17–19 (37%), ages 23–30 (6%), and ages 31–50 (1%). Caucasians comprised 67% of the final sample, followed by Hispanics (18%), African Americans (7%), Asian/Asian Americans (6%), and multiracial (2%). Additional demographic information of the 559 respondents was presented in Table 2.
Preliminary Data Analysis

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations among the Studied Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Coca-Cola (N = 559)</th>
<th>Apple (N = 559)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 = Brand loyalty</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 = CA associations</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 = CSR associations</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 = Product involvement</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 = Brand familiarity</td>
<td>6.57</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; *** p < .001, * p < .05.

Initially, we checked the reliability of each measurement scale. Cronbach’s alphas ranged from .844 to .939, which indicated good reliabilities of all the scales (see Appendix). We also computed descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among the studied variables (see Table 3). The variable means ranged from 2.77 to 6.69. Noticeably, the mean of product involvement was lower for Coca-Cola (M = 2.77, SD = .94) than for Apple (M = 4.49, SD = .59). The standard deviations of these variables ranged from .59 to 1.87. All the correlation coefficients fell within the range of .09 to .66. Furthermore, we addressed the multicollinearity issue by checking the correlation matrix and variance inflation factors (VIFs) of the regression model on each of our two data sets. The results showed that multicollinearity was not a great concern. That is, all VIFs were smaller than 2.45 (i.e., VIFs larger than 10 indicate multicollinearity).
### Table 4
**Results of Stepwise Regression and Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Brand Loyalty**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coca-Cola Model 1</th>
<th>Coca-Cola Model 2</th>
<th>Apple Model 1</th>
<th>Apple Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$t$</td>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand familiarity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA associations</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR associations</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product involvement</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA associations $\times$ product involvement</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>12.44</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR associations $\times$ product involvement</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-2.61</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Adjusted $R^2$**     | .483   | .487 | .419 | .452  |
| **$R^2$**              | .486   | .493 | .423 | .458  |
| **$F$**                | 131.145 | 89.327 | 101.739 | 77.804 |
| **df**                 | 4, 554 | 6, 552 | 4, 554 | 6, 552 |
| **$p$**                | < .001 | < .001 | < .001 | < .001 |

### Table 5
**Hypotheses Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Coca-Cola</th>
<th>Apple</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1: CA associations are positively related to brand loyalty.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2: CSR associations are positively related to brand loyalty.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3: Product involvement negatively moderates the relationship between CA associations and brand loyalty.</td>
<td>Not supported</td>
<td>Not supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4: Product involvement negatively moderates the relationship between CSR associations and brand loyalty.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Hypotheses Testing: Coca-Cola versus Apple**

After conducting preliminary data analysis, we proceeded to test if our hypotheses were supported for both Coca-Cola and Apple. Stepwise regression was performed in a similar way on these two sets of data. Its results were reported in Table 4 and Table 5. For Coca-Cola, all four variables entered were found to be good predictors of brand loyalty. They accounted for a total of 48.6% of the variability in brand loyalty ($R^2 = .486, F (4, 554) = 131.145, p < .001$). We ranked these four variables in terms of their explanation power from high to low: 1) product involvement ($R^2 = .413, p < .001$); 2) CA associations ($R^2 = .476, p < .001$); 3) brand familiarity (i.e., the control variable; $R^2 = .481, p < .001$); and 4) CSR associations ($R^2 = .486, p < .001$).

Interestingly, we observed that the results from Apple were highly similar to those from Coca-Cola. That is, when it came to Apple, the four variables mentioned above were also detected as significant predictors of brand loyalty. They accounted for a total of 42.3% of the variability in brand loyalty ($R^2 = .423, F (4, 554) = 101.739, p < .001$). We also ranked these four variables in terms of their explanation power from high to low: 1) product involvement ($R^2 = .330, p < .001$); 2) CA associations ($R^2 = .411, p < .001$); 3) brand familiarity (i.e., the variable controlled; $R^2 = .418, p < .001$); and 4) CSR associations ($R^2 = .423, p < .001$).

Our H1, which predicted a positive relationship between CA associations and brand loyalty, was supported for both Coca-Cola and Apple. That is, stronger CA associations (Coca-Cola: $\beta = .23, p < .001$; Apple: $\beta = .27, p < .001$) came along with stronger brand loyalty. Furthermore, we found that this positive relationship might apply to Apple better, given that the regression coefficient ($\beta$) of CA associations was slightly larger for Apple than for Coca-Cola.

Our H2, which expected that a positive relationship between CSR associations and brand loyalty, was also supported for both Coca-Cola and Apple. That is, when our respondents associated these two brands with CSR initiatives (Coca-Cola: $\beta = .10, p < .001$; Apple: $\beta = .08, p < .001$), their brand loyalty became strong. In addition, we noted the regression coefficient ($\beta$) of CSR associations was slightly higher for Coca-Cola than for Apple. Thus, we postulated that the positive CSR-loyalty linkage might be slightly more applicable to Coca-Cola than to Apple.

In addition to the first two hypotheses, we suggested in our H3 that product involvement negatively moderated the relationship between CA associations and brand loyalty. Hierarchical regression results showed that H3 was not supported among the two sets of data. Contrary to our expectation, the moderating effect of product involvement was found to be non-significant for Coca-Cola ($\beta = .09, p = .064$) and Apple ($\beta = -.04, p = .363$).

Our last hypothesis (H4) presumed that product involvement negatively moderated the relationship between CSR associations and brand loyalty. This hypothesis was supported among both data sets. Therefore, for both Coca-Cola and Apple, when product involvement increased, the positive relationship between CSR associations and brand loyalty became less strong (Coca-Cola: $\beta = -.12, p = .009$; Apple: $\beta = -.18, p < .001$). Moreover, the negative moderation effect of product involvement appeared to be slightly stronger for Apple than for Coca-Cola.

In summation, we found that H1, H2, and H4 were supported among both the Coca-Cola and the Apple data sets; H3 was not supported among the two data sets. Note that in our regression model, product involvement (Coca-Cola: $\beta = .46, p < .001$; Apple: $\beta = -.42, p < .001$) was the strongest variable explaining brand loyalty and it had a significant positive relationship with brand loyalty. This applies to both Coca-Cola and Apple (i.e., Coca-Cola in particular).
Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of our study was to examine how two streams of corporate associations—CA and CSR associations—are related to brand loyalty. Additionally, our study sought to determine how these relationships vary by customers’ product involvement. Our results significantly contribute to current scholarship regarding corporate associations and customer-brand relationships. Furthermore, corporate communicators will find use in our results when crafting communication strategies to build strong corporate associations and customer-brand relationships.

Corporate Associations and Brand Loyalty

Our study found that both CA associations and CSR associations contribute to brand loyalty. In other words, when customers perceive a corporation as an expert in quality products/services creation, they tend to be more loyalty to the corporation and its brand. Meanwhile, when customers rate a corporation high in its socially responsible initiatives, they are also likely to exhibit long-lasting attitudinal and behavioral preference over the corporation and its brand. Our findings are in line with the results of previous studies (e.g., Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Caruana & Ewing, 2010; de los Salmones, Crespo, & del Bosque; 2005). The consistency of findings among studies is a strong indication that corporate associations (e.g., corporate image and reputation) play a significant role in sustaining customers’ brand loyalty.

Identifying the indispensability of CA and CSR associations to brand loyalty cultivation has important practical implications. Previous studies (e.g., Kim & Rader, 2010) have observed that corporations, especially those on the Fortune 500 list, predominantly chose to focus their communication efforts on CA associations building rather than CSR associations development. However, according to our results, both CA and CSR associations beg attention from corporations and their communication practitioners. This is because both streams of associations may have the potential to help secure one of the most valuable intangibles that a corporation can possess—brand loyalty. If corporations underestimate the necessity of communicating their CSR commitments and performance, they may miss a great opportunity to establish competitive edges and a sustainable customer base for future development (Luan & Ailawadi, 2011).

The Moderating Effect of Product Involvement

The results of our study suggested that product involvement is unlikely to moderate the relationship between CA associations and brand loyalty. That is, regardless of how involved customers are with a corporation’s product, their knowledge of the corporation’s performance in the product/service domain is linked to their loyalty evaluations of the corporation. Therefore, when customers are making purchase decisions, they may constantly use corporate hard-core competencies such as making and marketing quality products/services as a criterion. More importantly, this criterion can be applied to the buying of high-cost products like automobiles and personal computers. Additionally, it can apply to low-cost consumer goods like breakfast cereals and soft drinks. It should be noted that our results are different from past findings (e.g., Suh & Yi, 2006). This divergence may be explained by the understanding that many customers prefer to purchase/repurchase products and services from market leaders (i.e., corporations which excel at producing good quality products and services). The fame of these market leaders can serve as a guarantee of satisfactory purchasing and consumption experience, which in turn may elicit trust and loyalty from the customers (Berens & van Riel, 2004). Future research should explore additional reasons that may cast insight on why the difference among findings occurred.
In addition, we observed that product involvement does have a negative moderating effect on the relationship between CSR associations and brand loyalty. This means, when customers consider a product (e.g., automobiles, cameras, and computers) as highly relevant and actively seek information about the product, their knowledge of whether the producer/marketer of the product is socially responsible becomes less important for their purchase decisions. However, the opposite situation may occur when customers are buying a product (e.g., breakfast cereals and soft drinks) of less interest to them, and requires less thinking from them. At this time, CSR initiatives of the product’s producer/marketer can become an important element for consideration in customer decision-making process. Our findings are consistent with previous studies on the moderating role of product involvement (e.g., Celsi & Olson, 1988; Knox & Walker, 2003; Suh & Yi, 2006).

Also, our results provide corporate communicators with useful insights on how to design effective communication strategies for corporations in different industries. For instance, corporate communicators working in the food or household goods industry can invest in implementing and communicating CSR programs to establish strong CSR associations that may help reinforce customers’ attachment to the corporation/brand and promote repurchase. However, corporate communicators working for electronic or automobile corporations should take caution when delivering stories about CSR commitments of their corporations, because they are less likely to reach their goal of retaining a sustainable customer base.

In conclusion, despite some limitations (see page 19), we believe our research offers promise to corporate communication scholars and practitioners interested in cultivating customers’ corporate associations and brand loyalty. We hope that our research will be refined in and applied to future research and practice.
## Appendix

### Measurement Scales for Major Constructs Tested

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Construct components</th>
<th>Measurement scales</th>
<th>Scale types</th>
<th>Scale sources</th>
<th>Scale reliability in cited sources</th>
<th>Scale reliability for the Coca-Cola/Apple data sets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corporate associations</strong></td>
<td>Corporate ability (CA) associations</td>
<td>I associate this company with innovative products.</td>
<td>Seven-point Likert scale</td>
<td>Kim (2011)</td>
<td>$\alpha = .859$</td>
<td>$\alpha = .844/.846$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I associate this company with market leaderships.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I associate this company with good quality products.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I associate this company with efficient manufacturing facilities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I associate this company with expertise in the manufacturing of products.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I associate this company with global success.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corporate social responsibility (CSR) associations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>I associate this company with environmental responsibility.</td>
<td>Seven-point Likert scale</td>
<td>Kim (2011)</td>
<td>$\alpha = .825$</td>
<td>$\alpha = .895/.900$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I associate this company with philanthropic giving.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I associate this company with social diversity.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I associate this company with a great care for communities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I associate this company with a commitment to education.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I associate this company with a commitment to public health.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Measurement Scales for Major Constructs Tested

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
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<th>Scale reliability for the Coca-Cola/Apple data sets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product Involvement</td>
<td>unimportant/important</td>
<td>Five-point semantic differential scale</td>
<td>Bennett, Härtel, &amp; McColl-Kennedy (2005)</td>
<td>α = .940</td>
<td>α = .939/.924</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>boring/interesting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>irrelevant/relevant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unexciting/exciting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>means nothing to me/means a lot to me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unappealing/appealing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mundane/fascinating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>worthless/valuable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>uninvolving/involving</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>not needed/needed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand loyalty</td>
<td>Attitudinal loyalty</td>
<td>I am committed to this brand.</td>
<td>Seven-point Likert scale</td>
<td>Chaudhuri &amp; Holbrook (2001)</td>
<td>α = .830</td>
<td>α = .871/.881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I would be willing to pay a higher price for this brand over other brands.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase loyalty</td>
<td>I will buy this brand the next time I buy [product category name].</td>
<td>Seven-point Likert scale</td>
<td>Chaudhuri &amp; Holbrook (2001)</td>
<td>α = .900</td>
<td>α = .881/.933</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I intend to keep purchasing this brand.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


