19th International Public Relations Research Conference

The Public Relations of Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding

Holiday Inn University of Miami
Coral Gables, Florida

March 2 – March 5, 2016

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Crisis History Tellers Matter: The Effects of Crisis History and Crisis Information Source on Publics’ Cognitive and Affective Responses to Organizational Crisis

LaShonda L. Eaddy and Yan Jin, University of Georgia

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory suggests that crisis history can be an intensifier of publics’ attribution of crisis responsibility, depending on the nature of the crisis. The current study examines the effects of crisis history and information source on publics’ crisis emotions, crisis responsibility perception, personal control and organizational reputation.

Emerging Standards for Measuring Internal Communications

Michele Ewing, Kent State University, Julie O’Neil, Texas Christian University, Stacey Smith, Jackson, Jackson & Wagner and Sean Williams, Communication Ammo, Inc.

An international task force of public relations practitioners and academics launched a research study to define standards for internal communication measurement. Initial findings will be discussed and participants will be invited to share input about the next steps, which include testing and defining concepts using a Delphi panel, then a broad survey of the IC professionals to identify protocol.


César Garcia, Central Washington University

This article analyses how mass demonstrations can be used for nation building purposes. In particular, it shows how, in this digital era, the occupation of the streets by large numbers of people is still a powerful strategic communication tool with strong political implications. It reveals how traditional propaganda and mass media campaigns can effect political change.

Social Media Theories for CSR Communication: A Tale of US Companies

Lina M. Gómez and Ramón W. Borges Tavárez, Universidad del Este, Puerto Rico, and Jessica Covert, University at Buffalo, NY

This study seeks to analyze how the top companies in the United States utilize social media theories or features for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Specifically, it focuses on how the top 25 Fortune companies use social media features to inform, communicate, and engage stakeholders in CSR initiatives and messages.
Dissecting the Root of Vaccine Misinformation on Pinterest: Examining Anti-Vaccine Organizations’ Conflict Strategies and Risk Communication

*International ABERJE Award*

Jeanine Guidry and Caroline Orr, Virginia Commonwealth University, Sungsu Kim, Michael Cacciatore, and Yan Jin, University of Georgia, and Marcus Messner, Virginia Commonwealth University

A content analysis of 1,117 Pinterest posts by five anti-vaccine organizations found that fear images are present in many pins, as are discussions about the adverse effects of vaccines. As far as agitation strategies are concerned, anti-vaccine organizations almost exclusively use solidification and polarization, creating a strong “us-and-them” atmosphere.

Public Relations in Venezuela: An Analysis of the Country’s Context and How the Profession Could Help Build a Promising Future

Juliana Gutierrez, University of Oklahoma

This paper reviews the Latin American philosophy and analyzes Venezuela according to Hofstede’s six-dimensional model. The research also addresses Venezuela’s recent events and reviews how the Bolivarian revolution has shaped the country’s context. Finally, it proposes how the country could overcome its crisis with the help of public relations practitioners.

Public Relations as Public Diplomacy: From Propaganda and Promotion to Conversation and Collaboration

Roger Hayes, APCO Worldwide

The challenges for organisations have massively increased, requiring multi-disciplinary approaches involving leadership, sustainability, strategy, governance and collaboration. PR and Public Diplomacy should work together theoretically and practically to create a new cadre of corporate and public diplomats who can help organisations reshape the future with a new dialogic and diplomatic mindset.

The Effects of Corporate Social Responsibility and Creating Shared Value on Public Trust, and Public Supportive Behavior: A Comparison Study

Chun-Ju Flora Hung-Baesecke, Massey University, New Zealand, Don W. Stacks, University of Miami, W. Timothy Coombs, Texas A&M University, Yi-Ru Regina Chen, Hong Kong Baptist University, Ben Boyd, Edelman Public Relations

The purpose of this study is to, by utilizing the Edelman Trust Barometer® data, investigate the relationship among corporate social responsibility (CSR), stakeholders’ expectation on creating shared value (CSV), trust in business, and their resulting supportive behavior towards corporations in the U.S. and China. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.
Delivering Higher Value through Higher Performance: Insights on Performance Evaluation and Talent Management in Corporate Communication

Rajul Jain, DePaul University, and Mark Bain, Upper 90 Consulting

This study explores the current state of performance evaluation and talent management in corporate communication from the perspective of senior communication leaders including the members of the Arthur W. Page society. In addition to actionable insights, key trends and best practices in measuring communication effectiveness, the study also concludes with recommendations on developing high performing teams that also deliver higher value.

Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) in Recruitment and Retention of Public Relations Talent from Under-Represented Groups: A Study with the Arthur W. Page Society Members

Arthur W. Page Center Benchmarking Award
Institute for Public Relations Top Three Papers of Practical Significance Award
Hua Jiang, Rochelle L. Ford, and Peta Long, Syracuse University, and David W. Ballard, American Psychological Association

Based on an online survey and in-depth interviews, we examined how the Arthur W. Page Society members define D&I, their D&I management practices related to recruitment and retention of public relations talent from under-represented groups, how the members evaluate their D&I initiatives, and what makes those best practices work.

What Makes Social Media Endorsement Credible? The Effects of Expertise, Influence, and Transparency Cues on Blogger Credibility

Peter Debreceny Corporate Communication Award
Taeyoung Kim, Cheonsoo Kim, and Young Eun Park, Indiana University Bloomington

This experimental study explores the effects of different heuristic cues (i.e., expertise, influence, and transparency) on the perception of blogger credibility in the context of a cause-related marketing campaign on social media. Two significant interaction effects were found among cues: transparency and influence, expertise and influence. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

The Impact of Message Sidedness Depending on Performance History of Companies

Sining Kong, University of Florida

It is not known how different performance histories of a company impact the effectiveness of message sidedness. This study fills this void, and also guides the public relations practitioners on how to select message sidedness when crafting crisis messages following an accidental crisis, based on companies’ different previous performance histories.
Understanding the Politics of Your Public: The Political Views of Young Hispanics and Their 2016 Voting Intentions

María E. Len-Ríos, University of Georgia

This study reports the findings of a national nonprobability online survey conducted in July 2015 with young Latinos (N=434). The analysis examines how demographics, cultural variables and media use predict Latinos’ perceptions of the importance of immigration reform, political participation, and intention to vote in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election.

Unicorn Media Index™: Who Ranks Where Across News, Social and Search?

Tim Marklein and Inga Starrett, Big Valley Marketing

Synthesis is the new challenge for marketers and communicators. This session will share early results of a new Earned Media Index for evaluating performance across news, search, social and content channels. We will also share an industry benchmark analyzing cross-channel media performance for 140 “unicorns” (private companies valued at $1B+).

The Impact of Perceived Authenticity on Employees’ Empowerment and Communicative Behavior: An Integrated Model of Positive Megaphoning

Institute for Public Relations Top Three Papers of Practical Significance Award

Alessandra Mazzei, Università IULM, Yeunjae Lee, Purdue University, Gianluca Togna, Lfoundry, and Jeong-Nam Kim, Purdue University

This study develops an integrated model of employees’ megaphoning behavior, defined as employee’ voluntary information forwarding and sharing about their organizations strengths and weaknesses. By examining perceived authenticity of organizational behavior and employees’ empowerment as antecedents, this study compared employee’ positive megaphoning behavior during crisis and non-crisis situation.

Twibel Litigation: How U.S. and U.K. Social Media Defamation Laws Affect PR Practice

Cayce Myers, Virginia Tech University

This paper examines British and U.S. defamation laws as they apply to social media defamation cases. Comparisons are made between each system with particular focus toward social media content. Implications are discussed for British and American PR practitioners.
Brazilian narratives and public diplomacy: Identity and Diplomatic Discourse in Lula Administration

Paulo Nassar and Gustavo Carbonaro, University of São Paulo – Brazil

Our research proposes a reflection on how diplomatic discourse establishes a plot to national identity and contributes to build a narrative of country, having the Brazilian government of Lula as a great example. This narrative needs a strong public diplomacy and has much influence on PR inside and outside organizations.

How Changing Media Formats Impact Credibility and Drive Consumer Action

Jackson-Sharpe Award
Julie O’Neil, Texas Christian University, and Marianne Eisenmann, inVentiv Health Public Relations

This study examines source credibility and channel effectiveness in terms of moving consumers along the communication lifecycle model based upon exposure to information embedded in paid, earned, shared and owned media. An experimental design was conducted with 1,500 participants. Suggestions are offered for public relations practitioners on selecting sources to drive behavior.

Exploring Ethics and Client Work in Public Relations Education

Katie R. Place, Quinnipiac University

The qualitative study explored the role of ethics and client work in PR education. Participants perceived that client work prepared them to prioritize ethics in their work, align strategic work with a client’s mission and values, learn respect for fellow teammates and the client, and learn about separation of self and work.

Measuring Strategic Communications

Jeff Ranta, University of South Carolina

Strategic Communications coalesces PR, Ad and IMC. This silo disruption generates confusion among faculty in terms of curricula. "What is Strategic Communications?" is defined here by faculty using a pragmatic, Mean Value of Importance variable as a measurement scale across applied and specialty communications and skills/traits recommending key instruction topics.
The Post-Blackfish World: An Analysis of SeaWorld’s Strategic Communication Efforts

Leslie Rasmussen, Xavier University and Melody Fishe, Mississippi State University

The controversial documentary Blackfish explored SeaWorld’s treatment of orca whales, and tells the story of Tilikum, an orca who killed three people while captive. The documentary sent SeaWorld into a tailspin. The case dissects SeaWorld’s strategic communication efforts by applying public relations theories, and presents communication lessons for navigating crises.

Negotiating the National Brand: Social Media Power in a National Crisis

Brian G. Smith and Reham Al-Sinan, Purdue University

This study analyzes activist empowerment and social media engagement in a protest effort. In-depth interviews with Taksim Square activists show that social media empowerment is tied to social networks, rather than the global visibility of the social media sphere, making network power and communicative competence critical for social media power.

Conceptualizing and Measuring Relationship Quality as Public Diplomacy Outcomes: Application of the Relationship Assessment of Diplomatic Interaction Outcome (RADIO) Scale

Lisa Tam, La Trobe University, Australia, and Jeong-Nam Kim, Purdue University

The RADIO scale measures perceived relationship quality between a country and its foreign publics. Interactional bilateralism, power mutuality, trust and empathy are measured for both experiential and reputational relationships. Relational continuation and relational satisfaction are measured for experiential relationships. Relational attentiveness and relational curiosity are measured for reputational relationships.


Lisa Tam, La Trobe University, Australia, and Yeunjae Lee, Purdue University

This study examines how nationalism is sustained as a result of publics’ communicative behaviors about a hot international issue. Correlation was found between media coverage and frequency of online discussions. It introduces the concept of international problem personalization effects to portray individuals’ interpretation of the issue as affecting them personally.
The Concept of Online Representation of a Nation (ORN) – a New Model for Measurement, Evaluation and Ranking of Nation-Brands

Giorgi Topouria, University of Missouri

Paper explores Georgia’s internal and external public diplomacy efforts as it pursues its number one declared priority and longtime aspiration to become a member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European Union (EU).

Romanian Governmental Public Relations: Its Uses in Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding

Antoneta Vanc, Quinnipiac University

This paper explores branding as part of a transitional perspective on national reputation management. More specifically, this work explores the Romanian governmental public relations efforts as public diplomacy activities and how public diplomacy actions initiated by the Romanian government contribute to the development of the country brand.

An Examination of Nestle’ India’s Maggi Noodle Ban Crisis: A Study in Sentiment Analysis to Map Organizational Crisis Response

Tulika Varma and Stephynie C. Perkins, University of North Florida

This study examined the dominant sentiments expressed by the Indian public on Twitter when the sale of Maggi Noodles, an iconic Indian brand, was banned by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) on June 5, 2015.

Reputational Interdependence and Communication Strategies in a Spillover Crisis

Shari R. Veil, University of Kentucky, Lindsay Dillingham, Lipscomb University, and Alyssa G. Sloan, King University

This study identifies a distinct exigency—a spillover crisis—which occurs when events in an external organization create concern, uncertainty, or perceptions of harm for another organization. Through a case analysis, we demonstrate how outcomes of a spillover crisis can be actively managed.
A Systematic Review of 40 Years of Public Relations Evaluation and Measurement Research: Looking into the Past, the Present, and the Future

University of Miami School of Communication Top Student Paper Award
Sophia Charlotte Volk, University of Leipzig, Germany

This study explores the state of the art of evaluation and measurement research by systematically reviewing 324 scholarly contributions, published from 1975 to 2015 within the 12 most important journals. The review sculpts a better understanding of what has been researched, how the research is interrelated, and what still needs to be investigated.

Does the Social Media Engagement Era Render the Two-Way Symmetrical Communication Model as More Relevant than Ever?
Robert I. Wakefield and Christopher Wilson, Brigham Young University

The two-way symmetrical model stood unchallenged until scholars argued that large organizations would not abdicate their power. Ironically, social media have given power to publics, who now demand more symmetrical engagement. Fortunately, some organizations are discovering the benefit of relationships through social media. Because of this new environment, this paper is reexamining symmetry.

Placing Native Ads on Social Media: Examining the Relationship between Social Media Characteristics and Effectiveness of Native Advertising
Ruoxu Wang and Yan Huang, Penn State University

A survey (N = 320) was conducted to examine the relationship between social media characteristics and native ads effectiveness. Results revealed perceived intimacy, professionalism and anonymity positively predicted attitude toward native ads. Network size positively predicted trust toward company sponsor. Homophily, perceived intimacy, professionalism and anonymity positively predicted satisfaction toward company sponsor.

Impact of a Brand Crisis on Nation Branding: An Analysis of Tweets about VW’s Emissions Crisis
Kara J. Whytas and Kelli S. Burns, University of South Florida

This study examined the conversation on Twitter about Volkswagen’s emissions crisis and the German brand. During a 10-day timeframe with a sample of more than 40,000 English tweets related to VW, approximately 1,700 referenced Germany. This study also explored the content of the tweets, source, and geographic origin.
**A Tale of Two Sources in Native Advertising: Examining the Effects of Source Credibility and Priming on Content, Organizations, and Media Evaluations**

*Brigham Young University Top Ethics Paper Award*

Mu Wu, Yan Huang, Ruobing Li, Denise Bortree, Fan Yang, Anli Xiao, and Ruoxu Wang, Penn State University

The current study employed an experimental design to test how native advertising impacts the perceptions of brands as well as media outlets. In addition, it also explores whether education about native advertising increases ad recognition and improves the perception of media outlets, companies, and ad content.

**Communication Evaluation and Measurement: Skills, Practices and Utilization in European Organizations**

*Koichi Yamamura International Strategic Communication Award*

Institute for Public Relations Top Three Papers of Practical Significance Award

Ansgar Zerfass, University of Leipzig, Germany, and BI Norwegian Business School, Oslo, Norway. Dejan Verčič, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, and Sophia Charlotte Volk, University of Leipzig, Germany

This study explores the state-of-the-art of measurement and performance management in communication departments across Europe based on a survey. Research questions focus on three major challenges of reliable measurement: prerequisites (measurement skills of communication professionals), implementation (measurement practices implemented by communication departments) and utilization (exploitation of those insights for managing future activities).
Is the Medium The Message in Political Organization Public Relationships?

Kalyca Becktel
San Diego State University

Abstract
Examining McLuhan’s (1964) classic adage that the “medium is the message,” this experimental design presented participants with the three versions of the same message content. Manipulating medium as online press release, blog post, or online video, the research here found that medium does play a role in shaping the receivers perceived relationship with an organization.
Political campaigns are continuously searching for the most effective ways to message a vast number of voters. To do so, political public relations turned digital. In an attempt to reach new voters, digital political public relations campaigns use now using digital media outlets to deliver messages during crucial times through the race for office. In doing so, digital political public relations campaigns must assess how outlets are best used. In 1964, Marshall McLuhan coined the term “the medium is the message,” meaning that the form of a medium embeds itself in the message. Now more than half a century later, McLuhan’s message continues to be considered. The purpose of this study is to determine how McLuhan’s message is being used during the 2016 presidential election. By exposing first-time voters to one of three pieces of PR propaganda (campaign press release, campaign blog post, campaign video) with the same message, the test will determine which way a message is best perceived by a new generation of voters.

**Literature Review**

Ever since Marshall McLuhan’s (1964) groundbreaking work in medium theory, where he submitted that the *medium is the message*, the phrase has risen in popularity and resonated with professional communicators. By this, McLuhan simply meant that interpretations and perceptions of content can be influenced by the channel through which that content is communicated. Though not expressly or empirically analyzed in a great deal of public relations scholarship, the idea is at play daily in the actual practice of public relations. That is, public relations practitioners understand the importance for communicating messages through the right medium. As technology avails more communication channels for practitioners to employ, public relations professionals must become even more attuned to the subtleties each channel can potentially have on the publics’ decoding and interpretation of a message.

Taking this standard idea that the medium is message, this study applies the concept to a political public relations context to determine whether the exact same message has a different impact based on the channel through which it is delivered. Driven by political public-organization relationship theory (POPR), this study provides empirical data on the true impact of the medium conveying the message.

**Political Public Relations**

An emerging area in public relations scholarship is that of political public relations (Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011). Though defined in a number of different ways (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Carroll & McCombs, 2003; Nimmo & Combs, 1983), Sweetser, English, & Fernandes, 2015 submit that the common thread is using strategic communication practices in a political context. Trammell (2006) posited that political public relations combines traditional political communication with public relations theories. Indeed, political campaigns employ press conferences, news releases, messaging, and other tactics common to general public relations practice. As such, many researchers argue that just like corporate communication and nonprofit industries have a specialized line of public relation, so too does the industry of politics and government (Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011; Sweetser et al., 2015; Trammell, 2006).

Research in this area is split between the (1) political campaign (i.e., much like a corporate public relations campaign designed to build relationships or influence key stakeholders) and (2) government public affairs (Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011). While earlier research appeared to focus on public affairs in government communication contexts (e.g., city public affairs), an
increasing number of studies today examine traditional public relations activities occurring in a political campaign context.

Based on the Strömbäck & Kiousis (2011) definition of political public relations which emphasizes the importance of the relationship with the stakeholders, it follows that a large segment of political public relations research applies relationship theory.

**OPR and Political OPR**

Relationship theory, which focuses on the organization-public relationship (OPR), is among the most heuristic in public relations scholarship while still having a great deal of practical utility for public relations practitioners (Ferguson, 1984; Sallot et al., 2003). The nomenclature for the theory has been noted to reflect the very definition of public relations itself in that the industry focuses its attention on building relationships with its publics. Relationship theory offers an established framework for examining and measuring that relationship (Ferguson, 1984; Sallot et al., 2003). Whether treated as a dependent variable where relationship is impacted by specific actions or as an independent variable that uses differing levels of relationship to create other changes in the public-organization ecosystem, relationship theory has the ability to provide empirical illumination for scholars and a predictable path of understanding OPR.

As political public relations research grows, so too has the application of OPR in the political public relations context. Though Wise (2007) was the first formal study of relationship theory in political public relations, Seltzer and Zhang (2011) were the first to coin the term political organization-public relations (POPR). This move signaled the importance of both the scholarly context of political public relations and also the applicability of one of the field’s most heuristic theories.

Early POPR work focused on a qualitative approach to understanding relationship. Wise (2007) examined lobbying, a key political public relations function, though Wise (2007) noted it had all been previously ignored by scholars. Wise (2007) found that lobbyists cited relationship as one of the most important aspects of their jobs, and submitted that political science scholarship put too much of an issue-emphasis on the lobbyists’ work. Levenshus (2010) then examined those within the campaign to understand how campaigns reached voters through the Internet. As the first to quantitatively examine POPR, Seltzer and Zhang (2011) surveyed voters to understand antecedents to relationships formed with political parties. Related to that work, Sweetser (2015) surveyed first-time voters and measured POPR as a potential outcome of personality. Moving closer in on the political party and now focusing on the candidate him or herself, Sweetser and Tedesco (2013) were the first to empirically test the impact of message and candidate exposure on voters’ relationship with a particular candidate. This transition from the introspective work looking at public relations practitioners themselves in Wise’s (2007) focus on lobbyists and Levenshus’ (2010) work on campaign staffers to the more application-based work focused on the party and the candidate shows the progression POPR. Scholars are now tackling questions that help practitioners working in political public relations, in an effort to understand their field through empirical data.

**Digital Campaigning in Political Public Relations**

Digital campaigning in political public relations was introduced with the Clinton-Gore campaign in 1992, as the first presidential campaign to host a website (Tedesco, 2004). Since its introduction, each election cycle has brought new tools keeping in line with the trends in how people communicate (Sweetser, 2011). The characteristics that attract public relations to digital
communication are many, and researchers cite benefits such as bypassing the gatekeeping process going direct to their publics (White & Raman, 1999) as well as relationship-building (Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008; Sweetser et al., 2015).

Just as the use of digital tools has become ubiquitous, it follows that more voters are using digital tools to follow and connect with campaigns. According to Pew Research, leading up to the 2008 election 46% Americans used the web, email, or text messaging for news about the presidential campaign, to contribute to the debate, or to mobilize others (Rainie & Smith, 2008). At that same time, some 35% of Americans said they'd watched online political videos—three times as many as during the 2004 presidential election (Rainie & Smith, 2008). According to their data, roughly 10% said they'd logged on to social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace to engage in the election (Rainie & Smith, 2008). The most recent Pew report on social media and political engagement found that 39% of all American adults (and more than a majority of those who are using social media tools) have engaged in civic or political activities through social media (Rainie et al., 2012). Given that each Pew report historically charts an increase in digital use, it is expected the 2016 election will have an even greater adoption of digital tools for information seeking and engagement purposes and greater integration into the fabric of the political process.

Candidates in general have done well to keep up with technology preferences of their constituents. Though early indications were that campaigns were only going through the motions rather than truly engaging their publics with two-way communication (Stromer-Galley, 2000), some research has shown that the tide has turned.

Choosing the Channel

Given the diverse communication landscape available today, campaigns have more medium options. While relying on the mass media and the gatekeeping process has not been eliminated, campaigns can also mass communicate directly with constituents now. As such, many campaigns post their traditional public relations products --- such as press releases --- on their websites with an intended audience being the voter more than the media.

Knowing this, it is time to ask whether in this age of interactive and engaging digital media if the medium is the message.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

H1: Communication channel will impact the political organization-public relationship.

Method

This study employed a posttest-only experimental design with control group (N = 202) to test whether there was a difference in political organization-public relationship based on the channel through which the candidate communicated.

Primary Season for the 2016 Election

As modern presidential campaigns have become longer with candidates announcing their bid earlier each cycle (Sweetser et al., 2015) the 2016 presidential campaign proved no different. With no incumbent eligible for the 2016 election, 18 months before the election there were at least 14 campaigns who had announced their official candidacy, with even more seeming to test the waters (Keneally, 2015). The Republican party, who would be challenging the party currently sitting in the White House, had the most number of candidates, 10 to four, by June, 16, 2015.
The Democrats, while presently holding the office, were also looking for a new candidate to follow Obama as a two-term president.

The front-runner for the Democratic party appeared to be Hillary Clinton, given the media attention (Bradner, 2015) and the consistently strong polling results (Healy & Russonello, 2015). Indeed, Clinton had experience in the primary having unsuccessfully competing against Barack Obama in the 2008 primaries.

Given this history and additions to her political resume since 2008, few were surprised when Clinton announced her presidential bid on April 12, 2015 (Chozick, 2015). Interestingly, Clinton’s announcement skirted tradition, however, when she officially stated her intention to run for president during a 2:15 video featured on her YouTube channel (Calamur, 2015). After 90 seconds of stories from Americans who are starting a new chapter in their lives, Clinton states that she, too, is going to take on something new and that she is getting ready to run for president. While the video was posted only to her social media channel, it went viral with more than 5 million views due to publishing from outlets including ABC, The New York Times and C-SPAN (Yuhas, 2015).

Though many in the Democratic party expressed that being the party’s candidate was not a given, some wondered whether the media believed that when comparing the amount of media coverage she received compared to other Democratic contenders and the amount of time she spoke during the primary debates (Sprunt & Mutnick, 2015).

Due to familiarity with Clinton as a candidate and political persona and the large attention paid to her in the media, this experiment chose Clinton content to test whether the medium was the message and how that might have impacted the political organization-public relationship with prospective constituents.

**Measures and Data Analysis**

Political organization-public relationship was measured using the abbreviated relational maintenance scale developed by Sweetser and Kelleher, a reliable battery based on a well-established OPR maintenance scale (used in Kelleher, 2009; Kelleher & Miller, 2006; Sweetser, 2010, 2015; Sweetser et al., 2015; Sweetser & Metzger 2007; Sweetser & Tedesco, 2014, among others). As commonly done with this scale, the 11 items submitted to principal axis factoring with varimax rotation. While the standard factoring had previously yielded two factors, three reliable factors naturally emerged from this data explaining 70.32% of the variance. The factors were consistent with the previous testing of the OPR scale. Factor 1 contained 6 variables and is best described as *Communicated Relational Commitment* (Cronbach’s alpha = .88), Factor 2 as a 3-item factor called *Responsiveness* (Cronbach’s alpha = .779), and Factor 3 as a new 2-item factor called *Conversational Voice* (Cronbach’s alpha = .749). In previous uses of this scale Factors 2 and 3 were a single, combined factor; however, this analysis employed the natural grouping of these data which resulted in 3 separate factors. The standardized factor scores were used in the analysis.

**Participants**

This study focused on first-time voters, with participants being an average of 21 years old ($M = 21.83$ years, $SD = 5.03$ years). This group was most active in Internet use, self-reporting an average of 6.27 hours per day on the Internet ($SD = 4.48$ hours). The second-most used mass media tool was television ($M = 1.94$ hours, $SD = 2.54$ hours), followed by listening to the radio
(M = 1.50 hours, SD = 2.18 hours), reading newspapers (M = .38 hours, SD = .95 hours), and reading magazines (M = .26 hours, SD = .64 hours).

More than half of the participants indicated that they were registered to vote (n = 111), and nearly a quarter indicated that they were eligible but not yet registered (n = 45). For the remaining participants that indicated their voting registration status, some were simply not registered (n = 27) and others not eligible (n = 13). Of those who indicated their party affiliation, participants in this study were primarily Democrats (n = 105), followed by Independent (n = 40), “other” (n = 28), and Republican (n = 23).

The majority of the participants were female (n = 146), with a quarter being male (n = 48) and one self-identifying as transgender. Only 7 participants did not indicate gender.

**Stimulus**

This study manipulated the medium through which the candidate communicated. The experimental cells included a YouTube video (n = 48), a campaign blog post (n = 50), a campaign press release (n = 52), or control group (n = 52). In order to maximize external validity, the an organic (e.g., real) campaign ad used in the primaries for the 2016 presidential election was first selected. The ad focused on the issue of college affordability, given that it was relevant to first-time voters. A transcript was then created from the ad and turned into a blog post and a press release. The text for both the blog post and press release were the exact same with the only difference being the layout. The blog post cell presented the stimulus text in the look and feel of the candidates blog, appearing as a screenshot within the online experiment. The press release was similarly presented, again using the format employed by the campaign for their online press releases. The control group did not view any content, and just advanced to the posttest.

A manipulation check examined whether participants could accurately recall the experimental cell they were assigned. A chi square showed that the manipulation worked in that participants noticed and understood the medium stimulus used in the study $x^2 (12) = 446.89, p < .001$, as expected.

**Results**

This experimental posttest with control group (N = 202) sought to determine if medium theory is at play in political public relations and impacts political public-organization relationship.

Constituent relationship with the candidate, overall across all cells, was neutral though moving toward positive. Even the highest scoring relationship item, the candidate uses positive or optimistic tone, was technically still neutral at 3.73 (SD = .94) on a 5-point scale. The lowest scoring relationship item, the candidate would admit mistakes, was 2.82 (SD = 1.00) on a 5-point scale.

To test whether there was an impact on POPR based on channel, the 3 relationship maintenance strategies factor scores were compared across all the experimental cells using analysis of variance. The ANOVAS for both Communicated Relational Commitment and Responsiveness showed no main effects.

The Conversational Voice factor did result in main effects, $F(3, 194) = 7.21, p < .001$. A Tukey post-hoc test revealed two between-group differences for the control group, which received no campaign message and completed the posttest based on their baseline perceptions of the candidate. The control group reported statistically significantly higher Conversational Voice factor scores than those who saw the blog post ($M_{diff} = .60, p < .01$) and those who saw the
press release ($M_{diff} = .79, p \leq .001$). Taken together, this indicates that the text-based channels result in lower POPR for Conversational Voice.

Given these findings, H1 was partially supported for the Conversational Voice factor only. In an effort to further examine differences in relationship based on other variables in the study, a series of non-hypothesized associations. Looking at gender, independent samples t tests showed that women had statistically significantly higher POPR factor scores than men for Communicated Relational Commitment ($M_{diff} = .25, t(188) = 4.62, p < .01$) and Conversational Voice ($M_{diff} = .32, t(188) = 2.59 p \leq .005$).

Discussion

The study here sought to understand whether the adage “the medium is the message” remains relevant in the modern world digital political public relations. Taking the same exact message and presenting in three different media formats (blog, online press release, and online video), this study used medium as the independent variable and POPR as the independent variable.

These results indicate in some ways it indeed is the medium that message, but interestingly it appears it the traditional PR-type media that decrease POPR in most cases. For H1, the manifestation of traditional public relations tactics (e.g., blog post, press release online) reduced that relationship perception of the organization having a Conversational Voice. To put it another way, these two text presentations of the message lowered the sense that the organization was speaking in a genuine and human manner.

From a public relations perspective, these findings can be both good and bad. The findings are troublesome in that when participants were presented with cells that contained very traditional iterations of public relations type content (e.g., blog post, online press release) the value of a key relationship construct declined significantly. If voters are put off by traditional public relations products, public relations practitioners working in politics should be aware of this and alter their media choices.

Limitations

This study is not without limitations. First, this study focuses on the first-time voter, who may be different from older cohorts generationally or may evolve as their experiences in the political system accumulate. Second, the study focused on a single, well-known candidate. As such, familiarity with candidate, candidate message, and candidate materials have served as a confounding variable. Third, the participant pool was predominantly female, which may have resulted in skewed reaction to the candidate or candidate message.

Future Research

This research provides an exploratory look into the validity of McLuhan’s work in a fully digital age. As indicated here POPR is not influenced by medium. More research into the finer aspects of relationship should be examined. Questions such as whether the medium at issue was text versus video, or traditional public relations type message versus traditional broadcast should be further investigated. A nagging question is whether Sallot’s question as to whether public relations still has a public relations problem persists in cases such as these. Additionally, this research focused on the first-time voter and future studies would do well to include a wider range of voters to compare age cohorts in reviewing for effects.
References


Building Legitimacy through Video Sustainability Reports: Trends from 2010 to 2015

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Penn State University

Abstract
Companies are adopting new communication strategies to manage their reputation for sustainability. This study examined 200 corporate sustainability videos published between 2010 and 2014 to identify how content and framing has changed over time. Results suggest that companies use legitimacy strategies to build their reputation on a variety of sustainability topics.
Companies have begun to direct more attention and funding to their sustainability communication and reporting (Thurm, 2013). In spring 2013 the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) issued a new reporting structure (G4) that changed to the way companies should track and report their sustainability efforts (Ghuliani, 2013). Although changes in reporting are not technically required until the 2015 fiscal year, many companies have already adopted the reporting method (Margolis & Barnett, 2014), and some of the changes have issued in an era that focuses more on communication and stakeholder engagement, as well as a greater emphasis on social responsibility. Key stakeholders in this area would be investors, employees, business partners, supply chain, and activist/advocacy groups. This increased value of communication in sustainability for companies comes as a welcomed change as sustainability becomes a core business strategy (Comere, 2015).

Theoretical framework: To conduct business within a society, organizations need to gain the approval of key stakeholders in the social system (Boulding, 1979; Boyd, 2000; Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Legitimacy theory tells us that gaining this permission comes when organizations show both competence and community concern (Hearit, 1995). Competence is defined as the degree to which an organization’s business makes a quality product that meets the needs of society, and community concern is the degree to which it behaves responsibly toward society through its business. To build legitimacy in sustainability, companies need to address both their ability to make effective decisions related to sustainability and their concern for the impact of sustainability on society. A key way that companies do this is through their Sustainability and CSR reports.

Purpose: This study examines the content of corporate videos that promote corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainability, and corporate responsibility (CR) reports. As stakeholder engagement becomes a more critical aspect of sustainability and sustainability reporting, companies will likely reach out to key stakeholders through various communication channels to promote the value and content of their reports. This study identifies trends in CSR, Sustainability, and CR report videos from different regions of the world and examines how companies build legitimacy for their environmental and social accomplishments.

RQ1: What are the characteristics of CSR, sustainability, and CR report videos?
RQ2: How do companies build legitimacy for their CSR, sustainability, and CR reports?
RQ3: Are there differences in the way CSR, sustainability, and CR are presented by region?
RQ4: What trends have emerged in CSR, sustainability, and CR video reporting?
RQ5: What is the relationship between video content and a company’s sustainability ranking?

Method: 194 CSR, sustainability, or CR report videos were pulled from the YouTube for years 2012 – 2015. An earlier study had identified 2010-2011 videos (Bortree & Formentin, 2013) which were added to this study. Videos were screen to be sure they were related to the company’s reporting and not just general CSR or sustainability activities. Two coders conducted an intercoder reliability test. Results calculated with Krippendorff’s Alpha include report type (α = 1.0), region (α = 1.0), competence (α = .77), concern (α = .69) environmental (α = .85), and social (α = .71). They then coded the remainder of the sample. The process includes a detailed content analysis on 37 dimensions of the videos.
RQ1: What are the characteristics of CSR, sustainability, and CR report videos?
A careful search of YouTube found that most report videos are related to sustainability, followed by CSR and CR (Table 1).

Table 1: Frequency of Report Types Considered in this Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Report</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability Report</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Report</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Responsibility (CR) Report</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR &amp; Sustainability Report</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified in title</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most common topics found in the videos are environment, numbers and stats, employees and economics. Of the sustainability topics examined in this study, the ones that appear the least frequently were health, philanthropy, volunteerism, diversity, and food (Table 2).

Table 2: Presence of Topics in CSR/Sustainability/CR Videos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>Corporate leaders shown</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers and statistics</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>Show people who benefit</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>Natural setting</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics/Financial</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>Water</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company activities</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>Facility or location</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company product/service</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>Philanthropy</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific locations</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ2: How do companies build legitimacy for their CSR, sustainability, and CR reports?
Topics were divided into two dimensions of legitimacy – competence and concern – and two sustainability categories – environmental and social. The videos appear to have similar amounts of competence and concern mentions (Table 3), but they focused more heavily on environmental over social (Table 4). This could be due to the fact that more videos focused on sustainability than CSR and CR.

Table 3: Presence of Two Dimensions of Legitimacy in CSR/Sustainability/CR Videos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers and statistics</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics/Financial</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company activities</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chi-Square tests of the differences between CSR, sustainability, and CR reports yielded a number of significant findings (Table 5). First, a test of the expected vs. observed frequencies of community was significant, with more CSR and CR report videos mentioning community than expected and fewer sustainability report videos referencing community than expected. The topic of water also showed a significant difference, with sustainability videos referencing water more than expected and CSR and CR referencing it less. The same significant pattern emerged for two other social aspects, philanthropy and volunteerism. For diversity, a significant difference was found, but for this topic, CSR and sustainability videos referenced it less than expected, and CR report videos referenced it more. CSR and sustainability reports provided information about accessing the report more often than expected, and CR directed viewers to the report less than expected. The only other significant Chi-Square finding was for veterans, with CSR and CR including a reference more than expected and sustainability report videos referencing it less.

Four ANOVAs were run to identify significant differences between the three video types – CSR, sustainability, and CR – for legitimacy dimensions (competence and concern) and for social and environmental aspects. Results suggest that both environmental and social aspects appear at a significantly different rate in the three video types (Table 5). Post hoc tests suggested that the differences in environmental topics are significant between the sustainability videos and the CR videos. For social aspects, significant differences emerge between sustainability and CSR and between sustainability and CR. There were no significant differences for social aspects detected between CSR and CR. No significant differences emerged for the two dimensions of legitimacy.
Table 5: Significant Differences in Elements in Three Types of Videos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>CSR Video</th>
<th>Sustainability Video</th>
<th>CR Video</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legitimacy: Competence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers/Stats</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>79.8%</td>
<td>76.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company Activities</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
<td>76.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Company Product/Service</strong></td>
<td>70.0%</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>67.5%</td>
<td>76.1%</td>
<td>64.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legitimacy: Concern</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
<td>78.9%</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community</strong>*</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>76.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show people who benefit</td>
<td>65.0%</td>
<td>54.1%</td>
<td>56.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental Aspects</strong>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>85.4%</td>
<td>87.2%</td>
<td>72.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural setting</td>
<td>63.4%</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Energy</strong></td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
<td>56.0%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Water</strong>*</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Aspects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community*</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>76.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philanthropy*</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteerism***</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity*</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Elements</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer to report</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader shown</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>64.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to report*</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alternative Energy</strong></td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans*</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = p < .05, ** = p < .01, *** = p < .001, bold indicates significant or near significant

RQ3: Are there differences in way CSR, sustainability, and CR are presented by region?
Most of the videos located for this study originated with US-based companies; however, many were from UK and European-based companies, too. A few from other regions were also located (Table 6).
Table 6: Regional Differences in CSR/Sustainability/CR Videos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>North America</th>
<th>UK/Europe</th>
<th>South America</th>
<th>Asia</th>
<th>Africa</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSR</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR &amp; Sustainability</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corp Responsibility</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using only the videos from companies based in the US, UK, and European countries, t-tests were run to see whether differences could be detected for the use of different dimensions of legitimacy. Results suggest that US-based companies refer to social topics more often than UK/European-based company videos (Table 7). This could be in part due to the fact that most of the UK/European videos were sustainability focused, rather than CSR or CR focused.

Table 7: T-test of Legitimacy Variables Comparing UK and US Videos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>M diff</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>-0.73</td>
<td>156.00</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>156.00</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social*</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>156.00</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>156.00</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = p<.05

RQ 4: What trends emerge over the six years of CSR, sustainability, and CR video reporting (2010-2015)?

The number of sustainability report videos increases at a nearly significant rate year over year, while the others remained flat (Table 9).

Table 9: Number of CSR/Sustainability/CR Reports by Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report Type</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSR</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR &amp; Sustainability</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corp Responsibility</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The amount of competence and social topics that appear in sustainability report videos increased significantly from 2012 to 2014. This suggests that companies are trying to build their legitimacy through demonstration of competence in the sustainability space, and they are moving
to incorporate more social aspects into their videos (as is likely the case with the reports too).

Table 10: Trends in Legitimacy Building in CSR/Sustainability/CR Videos over Three Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability report videos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence*</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social aspects*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental aspects</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR report videos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social aspects</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental aspects</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR report videos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social aspects</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental aspects</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05, bolded items are significant or near significant

RQ5: What is the relationship between video content and a company’s sustainability ranking?

Correlations found few significant relationships between US Newsweek Green rankings and sustainability topics, with only Fortune 1000 position and storytelling showing significance. On the other hand, Newsweek’s World Green Rankings showed significant correlation with diversity, education, and storytelling. These topics correlated with a higher (lower number) ranking (Table 11). Two other sustainability topics were nearly significant – a higher amount of social topics and the presence of a female executive, who is the first executive to speak during the video. The study also examined the correlation with the Forbes World Sustainability rankings, but not enough companies on the ranking were present in the sample to find significance.
Table 11: Correlations between Rankings and Video Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newsweek Green Rankings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortune 1000 position</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling</td>
<td>-.40</td>
<td>.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsweek World Green Rankings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>-.41</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.43</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling</td>
<td>-.37</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social aspects</td>
<td>-.30</td>
<td>.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female exec speaks first</td>
<td>-.39</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key Findings:

- Differences emerge between CSR, Sustainability, and CR report videos. All three build legitimacy through competence and concern in a similar way, with the exception CSR and CR addressing community more often than sustainability videos.
- The videos differ along the lines of environmental and social aspects, with CSR and CR presenting more social issues and sustainability videos presenting more environmental issues.
- Internationally, UK and European-based companies tend to issue sustainability report videos more than CSR or CR videos, and US-based companies tend to address social issues in their videos more than UK/European-based companies.
- Sustainability report videos appear to be on the rise, and they are showing a significant increase in competence and in social aspects.
- Overall green rankings, specifically Newsweek’s World’s Green Rankings, correlate with diversity, education, storytelling, and nearly significantly correlate with presentation of social aspects and the inclusion of females as executives who speak first on the videos.
Moving Beyond Corporate Social Responsibility to Community and Citizenry: Galvanizing Social, Reputational and Sociotechnical Capital for Change

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Abstract
Using a tripartite lens of social, reputational, and sociotechnical capital, this presentation focuses on Unilever’s Project Sunlight to examine processes of creating shared stakeholder/organizational ventures that create ongoing, pro-social change, as well as the theoretical and applied implications of re-conceptualizing community, social capital, and citizenship in online and organizational contexts.
Organizational engagement in prosocial arenas has arguably become a standard in business ethics (Jackson, 2004). Business is undergoing a paradigm shift in values, which prioritizes principles and values such as human rights, responsible citizenship, corporate credibility, and character (Jackson, 2004). While both for-profit and non-profit organizations have been engaging in partnerships around such principles for years, there is a new transparency and authenticity to such efforts brought about by the involvement of stakeholders via social media. Chewning (2015a) conceptualizes these efforts in terms of the citizen-stakeholder model, which posits that for-profit organizations can work with nonprofit partners to harness the social capital shared with stakeholders to create communities of interest. These communities then generate and share both social and economic capital to galvanize social change (Figure 1). Using a tripartite lens of social capital, reputational capital, and sociotechnical capital, this study will focus on the organizational/stakeholder side of the model by examining the efforts of Unilver’s Bright Futures initiative to examine the communication processes of creating shared stakeholder/organizational ventures that create ongoing, pro-social change.

Figure 1
Citizen-Stakeholder Model

CSR, Corporate Citizenship, and Citizen-Stakeholders

An outgrowth of the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the Citizen-Stakeholder model conceptualizes organizational efforts in terms of the evolving role of the organization in society, coupled with the power of online communities as a way to organize people in terms of interest. The traditional focus of CSR has been on giving back to the communities that organizations impact through their operations, either as an ethical obligation of the organization (Bowen, 1953) or, as a way winning public favor (Marchand, 1998). As a practice, CSR has been through many iterations, and held many definitions, with most recent conceptualizations of CSR linked to a reinterpretation of collective ethos (McMillan, 2007), engagement (Taylor & Kent, 2014), and corporate citizenry (Chewning, 2015). Consistent with Bowen’s (1953) emphasis on societal values and objectives, shifting conceptualizations of CSR relate directly to societal changes, most recently, Globalization.

Globalization has altered the relative power of the government, social and corporate sectors throughout the world (Deetz, 1992). The corporate sector represents the “primary institution in modern society, overshadowing the state in controlling the direction of individual
lives and influencing social development” (Deetz, 1992, p. 17), with the global corporation being “the most powerful human organization yet designed for colonizing the future” (Barnet & Muller, 1974). As individuals are disembedded locally and reembedded in different forms of communities, institutional roles are shifting and the corporate sector is taking on a more powerful and influential role in social organization. With this shift, the term Corporate Citizenship (CC) has risen a way to describe the organization’s role in society, especially related to the environment in which it operates and its associated stakeholders. Like CSR, CC has been conceptualized in a variety of ways, from the organization being a citizen of the community (local or global) in which it operates, to administering citizenship to the individual (Marsden, 2000; Matten & Crane, 2005).

While the Citizen-Stakeholder model expands the paradigm of CSR by recasting the role of the organization from benefactor to initiator and organizer, many of the ideas upon which the model is based are not new. The idea that the organization has ethical and philanthropic responsibilities that the organization to society (Bowen, 1953), the importance of trust, commitment and satisfaction in organizational/stakeholder relationships (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2010), and the evolving idea of organizations as both citizens and grantors of citizenship (Marsden, 2000; Matten & Crane, 2005), are all ongoing lines of inquiry that are the cornerstone of both sociological and communicative inquiry into the social role of the organization. However, integrating these lines of inquiry and applying a socio-technical lens to the process, the Citizen-Stakeholder model shifts the paradigm of CSR to a more holistic focus on the integration of multiple parties in the process of generating and sharing capital. Similar to Visser’s (2011) conceptualization of responsibility as the ability to make the choice to respond in a way that is sensitive to how various segments of society are linked together, the citizen-stakeholder model recasts the sense of obligation associated with CSR and focuses on how enacting concepts of community and citizenry in organizational action and communication can lead to better outcomes for multiple segments of society.

Social capital is the embodiment of the benefits that come through social connection. Therefore, social capital provides a key theoretical base for understanding how connecting usually unconnected segments of society can be pivotal in creating positive change. Understanding how organizations, which are not in and of themselves sentient beings, can create social capital, requires stepping back and understanding how individuals connect to organizations, via reputation. Additionally, the key role of technology in linking parties far and wide must also be taken into account. Therefore, the following sections outline theories of reputational, social, and socio-technical capital as the mechanisms underlying citizen-stakeholders.

Social Capital

Social capital is the “resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized for purposive action” (Lin, 2001, p. 13). It is created, shared, and maintained through the connections that make up the social structures in which we are embedded. While Coleman (1988) positions of social capital in terms of the social structure and the actions that take place with this structure, Lin (2001b) argues that social capital lies in the resources that a social structure contains, and that the activation of such resources is the generation of social capital. Both conceptualizations rely on the idea of (inter)action and social structure in generating social capital. Indeed, social capital is not depleted through use, but is both produced and reproduced through interaction. Social capital has been premised as both a driver and a consequence of
almost all forms of social organizing, including collective action, community engagement, civic engagement, social support, and individual- and community-level health (Krishna, 2002; Putnam, 1993).

There are several types of social capital, including bridging, bonding, and linking. Each offers specific opportunities for both the individual network member, and the network as a whole. Bridging social capital is based on “brokerage opportunities,” (Burt, 2000) for parties that can fill missing or weak links in a network. It can lead to access of more diverse, non-redundant, more plentiful resources. Bonding social capital, as the name implies, is based in trust. It is often found in closed, cohesive networks where there are high levels of trust, but lower levels of diversity. Bonding social capital will likely facilitate coordinated action and sharing of financial or other resources (Putnam, 2000). Finally, linking social capital adapts the idea of bridging social capital specifically to vertical power differentials (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Social capital is important on three levels in the citizen-stakeholder model: between the organization and stakeholders, between stakeholders and their personal contacts, and among the organization, non-profit community partners and capital deficient communities (Chewning, 2015).

Reputational Capital

As previously stated, because organizations are not sentient beings with whom one can interact, conceptualizing an inherently social theory in terms of an organizational-stakeholder relationship could be problematic. However, organizations act and communicate in ways that characterize them and allow stakeholders to get to “know” them (McMillan & Hyde, 2000). These actions contribute to reputation, or the “aggregate evaluation constituents make about how well and organization is meeting constituent expectations based on its past behaviors” (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p. 168). When organizations act in accordance with positive stakeholder expectations, they generally develop a positive relationship with a stakeholder, which leads to a positive reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). This leads to reputational capital, or the goodwill that an organization accumulates through the maintenance of a good reputation. Through time and interaction, reputational capital can be translated into social capital.

This further embeds the parties in a loosely coupled network that includes “organizations, stakeholders, and publics, activists and stakeseekers” in which real dialogue leads to engagement, which can serve as a precursor to participation (Taylor & Kent, 2104, p. 395). Related to the Citizen-Stakeholder model, the shared values that engage organizations and stakeholders in the first place can also galvanize stakeholders to engage in organizational initiatives. The networks formed around these values become the driver of social capital. Because the primary mechanism for two-way communication between an organization and its stakeholder is online, via social media, the affordances of social media platforms, and the ability to create meaningful communication therein, become the conduit through which relationships are built and capital is shared.

Sociotechnical Capital

A third type of capital that comes into play in building citizen-stakeholder networks is sociotechnical capital. Sociotechnical capital is “a productive combination of social relations and Information & Communication technology (ICT)” (Resnick, 2001). A subset of Social Capital, sociotechnical capital influences the ability of people to act together. In terms of supporting social capital, online technology removes barriers to interaction (i.e. space and time), expands interaction networks (i.e. enables more connections, thus increasing the potential for both
incoming and outgoing information), restricts information flow (reduces communication cues, which can have both positive and negative effects on interaction), manages dependencies (creates a framework for communication), maintains history (creates repositories and easily accessible markers of a group/collective identity), and names (reifies roles and establishes identity) (Resnick, 2001). This, in turn, allows people a variety of ways to reconfigure social relation, share information, and build relationships with others based on shared need, rather than shared geography. As Wellman, Haase, Witte, and Hampton (2001) suggest, Internet based communication has led to “community becoming embedded in social networks rather than groups and a movement of community relationships from easily observed public spaces to less accessible private homes” (p. 437). Thus, online networks become communities through which individuals identify and engage.

This ability to build and extend communities is crucial to the idea of building citizen-stakeholders, and it allows for the creation of a “public commons” where content and connections can come together. Such a place would allow organizations to connect not only with stakeholders, but for stakeholders to engage with each other. Communicating about organizational efforts in a place “hosted” by the organization could serve to reinforce the importance and validity of organizational efforts in the minds of stakeholders, as well as engage stakeholders to share the messages with their own social networks. In terms of social capital, engagement in this space has the possibility of building bonding social capital among formerly unconnected stakeholders, which would in turn strengthen the social capital in the online community. Additionally, as stakeholders become more engaged and share organizational messages with their own social networks, they are using the bonding social capital that they share with members of their own network to build bridging social capital between these nets and the organization. The use of technological attributes such as hashtags, liking, sharing, and posting allows the commons to both be named and defined, as well as extended.

While such a commons could create and grow a community of citizen-stakeholders, research has also shown that stakeholders view a company’s online platforms as a place to vent, engage emotionally, or demand answers for organizational wrongdoing (Chewning, 2015b, 2016). While good content that is genuine and transparent, and addresses stakeholders as citizens (Wallack, 2001), is the most logical way that organizations can engage stakeholders positively on these platforms, stakeholders sometimes have their own agenda and post messages regardless of what the organization posts (Chewning, 2015b, 2016). Further, it has been argued that the Internet encourages slaktivism, or the ability to engage in superficial efforts at the expense of real, life-changing giving (Morozov, 2011). This could be true on the part of both stakeholders and the organization.

Thus, while the citizen-stakeholder model conceptualizes a process that could potentially benefit multiple parties, there is also the possibility that some of the mechanisms can’t, don’t, or won’t exist in actual organizational/stakeholder communication. If this is the case, one could wonder if there is any benefit to such initiatives, or if they are simply self-serving efforts through which the organization benefits, but real change is stifled. To further investigate how organizations and stakeholders are communicating online, and if and how they are generating capital and social change in the process, the following questions are used to guide this study:

RQ1: What elements of capital (social, reputational, sociotechnical) are present on the Unilver Bright Futures US Facebook page?

RQ2: How do Univer and stakeholders engage on the Unilver Bright Futures US Facebook page?
Methods

This study uses Internet observation and subsequent qualitative content analysis of five Unilever Facebook posts, ranging from December 2015-February 2016, and the accompanying interactions in the responses section (n=794). Additionally, any content that Unilever linked to in their original post was considered part of the rhetorical transaction, and therefore analyzed as part of the post. Coding was conducted for evidence of social, reputational, and sociotechnical capital in both the content of communication and the way communication was enacted.

Unilever, Ldt., is a British company that owns 17 brands worldwide, including Axe, Lipton, Knorr, Dove, Ben & Jerry’s, and Hellmanns. Unilever ranks 37th on Fortune’s Most Admired Companies list, and consistently wins awards for disclosure, transparency, and sustainable practices. Unilever, Ldt., launched Project Sunlight in 2013 with a focus on “motivating people to live more sustainably.” The project was renamed Unilever Bright Futures to in 2015, with an expanded focus on the environment. Highlights of the program to date include: helping 2 million children across the world through Unilever’s ongoing partnership with Save the Children, UNICEF and the World Food Programme, providing half a million meals in the UK in partnership with Oxfam through the campaign #ClearAPlate, and launching health and hygiene programs in India and Indonesia with the help of NGO partners, among many others (Unilever, Bright future inspiring action around the world, 2016). To date, Unilever has engaged over 292 million stakeholders to engage in an “Act of Sunlight,” which includes “exploring our website, see the possibilities and take action on the projects that inspire you” (Unilever Acts of Sunlight, 2016).

Findings

RQ1 asks What elements of capital (social, reputational, sociotechnical) are present on the Unilever Bright Futures US Facebook page? Findings are broken out in terms of capital-based mechanisms, described following.

Values

Content on the Unilever Facebook page reinforced reputational capital by emphasizing organizational values, behavior, and participation. Values fell into three categories: diversity, environmental preservation, and helping others. Two of the five posts focused on diversity, one of the five posts focused on environmental preservation, one post focused on an initiative using Vaseline to help refugees worldwide who are suffering from broken skin, and one, coincident with Christmas, focused on recipes for Christmas leftovers. Although family wasn’t specifically invoked, both of the photos that accompanied the diversity posts contained either photos of children, or a child’s drawing; and the images accompanying the Vaseline article (linkable through the Facebook post) contained two pictures of children with parents and/or medical professionals.

Behavior was represented through a focus on reporting the initiatives that Unilever was engaged in. Four of the five posts represented a social action or a cause either implicitly or explicitly tied to Unilever. By virtue of being reported on the Unilever Facebook page, it is implied that Unilever is in some way associated with the cause, either in belief, or action. Unilever explicitly tied itself to behavior related to each cause by using language such as “we honor,” and “amazing progress we’ve made.” Three of the five posts linked through to pages on the Bright Futures US website that detail initiatives that Unilever either hosts or is partnered in,
including a partnership with the Ad Council for the Love Has No Labels campaign, which addresses discrimination; a partnership with aid organization Direct Relief, which provides Vaseline and other assistance to refugees, and an initiative to protect one million trees via a partnership with WWF. Notably, in this content, while Unilever is the protagonist in action, content also emphasizes both the partners, and the populations being assisted.

Finally, stakeholder participation was represented implicitly by the two-way medium, and explicitly through frequent “calls to action” posted by Unilever. Content addressed stakeholders directly (e.g. How are you remembering Dr. King? Show your love for trees this season by helping to protect 1 million of them with WWF here: http://bit.ly/Protect1MilTree). In each of the posts, there was a mechanism through which stakeholders could get involved. Again, relative to the medium, stakeholders could, and did, get involved by commenting. There were also more direct ways that stakeholders were encouraged to get involved, for example, by signing a petition to save trees, or by donating to the Vaseline initiative.

**Trust & Norms**

Trust was difficult to code explicitly in Unilever content, other than that Unilever presented itself as taking action in alignment with normative pro-social values. However, there was evidence of both trust (e.g. YaY Unilever!! I will continue to support your products as long as you continue to have integrity and Thank you so much Unilever, as being a large company you are doing your part to save this planet by setting this ambitious goal.) and mistrust (e.g Greenwashing at it’s finest, and “Unilever still has a lot of work to do to regain our trust. The # of those boycotting your company is growing. https://community.sumofus.org/.../victory.../#Shameful”) in stakeholder comments. While some of the mistrust was aimed at Unilever, other mistrust was more generalized, such as “The trees wouldn’t need to be saved if all the evil corporations and the Gov’t would stop spraying chemtrails that cause the trees to die. Stop cutting trees down to grow GMO crops. No one wants to be poisoned by you and your corporate friends. Say no to GMO and buy organic products. All our lives depend on it.”

**Bridging, Bonding, and Linking Capital**

Both bonding and bridging social capital were evidenced in the data. First, bonding social capital was present, to some extent, in the dialogue among posters. Posters often addressed each other by name, and got into back and forth dialogue via the “reply” feature on Facebook. Sometimes it was about Unilever, or the specific post that they were replying on, but other times, stakeholders engaged in seemingly genuine back and forth about an issue. Bridging social capital was evidenced by the shares that a post received. The posts in this data set received between 352 and 2,959 shares. By choosing to share the content, stakeholders spreading Unilever’s message with their own. Although dialogue and sharing were evident, it was not always positive. Much of the intra-stakeholder dialogue was negative, and there is no way to determine if stakeholders added negative commentary when sharing Unilever’s posts. While both positive and negative dialogue indicates some level of engagement, the balance between positive and negative capital and how this affects the online community is less obvious.

Linking social capital, or capital built between the organization and the stakeholders, was evident in that, as previously discussed, there was trust and participation evident on the part of the stakeholders through their posts, as well as, evidence that Unilever addressed stakeholders directly in their call to action. However, it is notable that Unilever rarely replied to comment underneath posts, with the exception of a few positive comments about Vaseline and MLK day.
Sociotechnical Capital

All of the elements of sociotechnical capital (Resnick, 2001) were present in the form and content of Unilever’s Facebook page. They are broken down following by element.

- **Removes barriers to interaction** (i.e. space and time). This was evident in the asynchronous dialogue on the page, as well as the fresh interaction with static content via links to content on website via the through Unilever’s original Facebook post.

- **Expands interaction networks** (i.e. enables more connections, thus increasing the potential for both incoming and outgoing information). Inherent to the features of Facebook as a platform, users were able to connect with any other connected member by commenting once, or engaging in dialogue. Indeed, there was evidence that users. Based on the number of negative comments (directed at Unilever and other posters) it does not appear as if Unilever put any restrictions on posting, or edited/deleted posts in any way. Therefore, networks were able to be expanded organically on this site. Additionally, through hyperlinks, it served as a portal to both the Unilever website, as well as the websites of non-profit partners, therefore potentially expanding the networks of all three parties.

- **Restricts information flow** (reduces communication cues, which can have both positive and negative effects on interaction) Although posters were not entirely anonymous, in that they posted using names and profile pictures, as with all online communication, there is no guarantee that the names or pictures used were actually true to the user. Additionally, users could click through poster names to view their profiles, therefore gaining more information about them.

- **Manages dependencies** (creates a framework for communication). Facebook as a medium allows for the “owner” of the page to create an original post (thought/statement) and for others to comment on this post. This manages dependencies in two ways: first, it establishes Unilever as the “owner,” and therefore, implicitly grants privilege to what they are saying. Second, as the page owner, Unilever can set topic (i.e. the framework of that particular conversation) as well as the physical controls for communication. As noted earlier, it does not seem like Unilever set any restricitons via deletion or editing of posts, therefore they designated the page as a “place” for open discussion.

- **Maintains history** (creates repositories and easily accessible markers of a group/collective identity). The repository of Unilever posts makes it easy for new visitors to come and learn about the totality of Unilever’s efforts simply by scrolling and clicking through links. What is posted on the page reifies Unilever’s projected identity. Similarly, stakeholder comments were maintained in the same way, creating a

- **Names** (reifies roles and establishes identity) – This page serves as a platform for the larger Bright Futures campaign, and acts as a “place” that establishes Unilever’s identity as an organization working toward sustainability. Overtime, the history of content, as described previously, reifies this identity. Hashtags also served to name, as well as categorize, communication.

In turn, these sociotechnical elements both drive, and are driven by reputational and social capital, as they enable they reify reputational capital, and provide a “place” for interaction,
through which reputational capital can be transformed into social capital.

Engagement

RQ2 asks about engagement on Unilever’s Facebook page. Although all posts other than the “fun post” about leftover recipes had some evidence of trolls, or people making outlandish or purposefully disruptive comments, there was also evidence of real conversation and repeat posters. Overall, there were three different types of posts: posts that directly addressed the organization, posts that addressed other posters, and posts that simply made a statement, or addressed a “general audience.” Within these types of posts, there were positive (agreeing/praising), negative (mocking/calling out), and neutral (making a statement of fact/disagreeing civilly), and some off-topic posts (e.g. a 21 reply string that debated whether a child featured in the graphic looked like Carolann from Poltergeist).

Within this sample of five posts, it was evident that different topics led to different kinds and levels of engagement with stakeholders, both with other stakeholders and with the organization. The environmental post that asked users to take action had the most shares, comments, inter-stakeholder dialogue, and evidence of people taking action. Users came back to the post to state that they had taken action and signed the petition on Unilever’s site. Posters engaged in discussion about the issues with each other, for example:

Poster A: GMOs are not a tool that is used for good, Danny. GMOs are used for keeping the same old soil-abusive agriculture alive. The crops grown are used primarily to feed animals for human consumption, not for eliminating poverty.

Poster B: Actually, the scientific community is learning every day how to make GMO’s better.

The end goal us to produce GM crop seeds for the plants that will accompany our colonists onto mars and eventually further. In order to do this, we need to develop plans…

Although these posters disagreed, it was respectful and part of larger discussion among other users. Other posts, such as “I signed” and “I signed it” indicated that stakeholders read the Facebook post, clicked through to the static web content that housed the petition, signed the petition, and then came back to report their action on the Facebook page. This indicates both a commitment to the cause, and the communicating with the Unilever/the community. Although Unilever did not respond to posters often, the posts that they did engage with were always positive stakeholder posts, like these affirmations. Responding to someone who posted “I signed it,” Unilever responded: “Thanks for your support, Stakeholder! Together we can create a #brightFuture for all generations.” The stakeholder then took the time to respond to Unilever, and Unilever to her.

The diversity posts had positive responses related directly to Unilever’s original post, or the diversity issues in the post. For example, in the MLK day post, people responded directly to Unilever’s question “How are you remembering Dr. King?” with responses such as: “I’m remembering Dr. King as a civil rights movement leader. Dr. King had a strong faith in God and wanted all people to love ❤ one another because we were all created equal. No matter where we are in life.” The “Love Has No Labels” post had fewer on topic posts, and more posts that were off-topic, or posts that were negative comments on other areas of Unilever’s track record (e.g.,
“Why not love the animals that you abuse with your ingredients. Sick!!!!!!!!!!!”), although it is worth noting that these types of replies appeared on both of the diversity posts. Within these posts, there was also stakeholder debate, with individuals taking up both sides of the social issue.

The post about the Vaseline initiative generated responses about Vaseline, but users rarely addressed the initiative itself. Rather, there was a mix of positive and negative posts, primarily related to the product itself or the environmental impacts of harvesting the product. Positive product posts talking about the benefits of Vaseline received replies from Unilever, while negative related to the product (e.g., This is a petroleum based product which means it is toxic. There are plenty of natural non-toxic alternatives.) and Unilever’s associated practices (e.g., How about stop hacking down the rainforests in Borneo for Palm Oil and save us from pollution and the loss of millions of species?). Indeed, much of the posting and dialogue centered around the negative environmental impacts of petroleum jelly, with many posters sharing links to alternative products and recipes for homemade moisturizer.

Finally, the “fun post” about Christmas leftovers had the highest percentage of positive responses, but fewest number of overall posts, such as “Merry Christmas family,” “beautiful” and “nice photos.” There were a few negative comments, such as “Your ingredients include gmos, we're good” and other GMO comments. Notably, there was no dialogue among stakeholders, or between stakeholders and Unilever. Thus, while the tenor was positive, there was less evidence of engagement.

Discussion and Implications

This study represents an initial testing of the capital-related mechanisms present in the Citizen-Stakeholder model. Specifically, this study examined the communication enacted by both Unilever and stakeholders within the context of the technological capabilities of Unilever’s Facebook platform. The Citizen-Stakeholder model posits that through a combination of capital, engagement, and technology, organizations and stakeholders can evoke a “commons” through which issues can be debated and discussed, and action galvanized. Results indicate that such communities of engagement can exist, and that stakeholders are often engaged, but not always “on topic” or on Unilever’s terms, or with Unilever at all. Thus, this study offers preliminary support for idea that organizations can galvanize support and participation through online platforms, as well as evidence that stakeholders can also drive engagement for their own causes.

Arguably, reputational capital is what brought stakeholders to the site. Reputational capital, both positive and negative, drove participation, led to action. That is, while much of the content that stakeholders posted online was negative, it led to participation in the dialogue on the Facebook page. Although many of the posters had negative views of the organization (i.e., shared negative reputational capital with them), they were still driven by this “relationship” to come to the site and engage with what Unilever was posting. Although these users sometimes posted and left, other times they debated with users who were either pro-Unilever, or who simply identified differently with the cause being promoted by Unilever. There were also supporters of Unilever, who came to the site to declare their support for Unilever and their causes. These stakeholders often acted on the social initiatives, coming back to the Facebook page to declare that they had signed acted on behalf of Unilever (e.g. by stating that they signed the petition to save 1,000 trees). Thus, through dialogue and participation driven by reputational capital, there is at least some evidence that action was taken, indicating the presence of social capital gained through these online organizational/stakeholder networks.

This study also shows that stakeholders openly engaged with both the organization and
each other about social and environmental issues on the organization’s social media site. Sociotechnical capital creates an online “place,” enabling a Facebook page owned by a for-profit company can become a space for debate about public, societal issues independent of the company’s stance. This echoes previous research (Chewning, 2015b) that stakeholders have their own agenda, sometimes post on a company’s social media page as if it is a public bulletin board, rather than a site hosted by a private entity. Also notable in this interaction is that stakeholders will positively engage with the company, giving them credit for supporting an issue, even if not about issues organization has “expertise” in. Thus, it may be possible that organizations can adopt a “moral signature” (Jackson, 2004), even if it does not relate directly to their business practices.

Relevant to the question of whether or not organizational/stakeholder relationships can be discussed in terms of citizenry or citizenship, this study supports the ideas that stakeholders are enacting elements of citizenry through dialogue, sharing information, donating money, and signing petitions. While these are private, rather than governmental or civic initiatives, they are provoking the civic action that many suggest is lacking in contemporary society (Putnam, 2005, McMillan, 2007). Not only does this support the idea that principles of citizenship can be invoked in alternative contexts (e.g. between a for-profit organization and stakeholders), but also supports the idea of online contexts for creating and driving both social capital and change.

Limitations and Future Questions

Although this study provides new insight into the communicative and technological mechanisms behind online social capital, communities, and citizenry, it raises as many questions as it answers. Among the most salient questions are:

- What are the impact of shares? Although stakeholder sharing of content indicates that they are extending Unilever’s message to their own networks, it could not be ascertained from this data if or how Unilever contextualized stakeholder messages. It is possible that stakeholders were sharing these posts and adding either positive or negative commentary of their own. Additionally, if nobody in their network goes to Unilever’s site as a result, does sharing have an impact at all?
- What are most valuable posts? While data showed different overall reactions to different posts, it is unclear whether debate (both positive and negative) is more or less valuable than simple positive feedback to the organization (e.g. beautiful).
- Does interaction on the site build trust in Unilever? While data showed evidence of both trust and mistrust, it seems as if stakeholders came to the site already trusting or mistrusting Unilever. It is unclear if interaction, either with Unilever or other stakeholders, changes this disposition.
- How does this affect the bottom line? Does this matter? As organizations move toward a new ethos that characterizes true concern for all stakeholders, how is a focus on the bottom line balanced with altruism and social responsibility?

Future inquiry using an extended sample of Unilever’s online content, as well as first-person reports from Unilever and posters to their Facebook page, will be instrumental in answering the preceding questions, as well as building on the findings of this paper. Finally, future inquiry should investigate other elements of the Citizen-Stakeholder model, such as which communication mechanisms are used, and of those used, which are most successful at generating engagement, as well as, how the generated capital is spread to the non-profit and recipient side of the model.
This paper lays important groundwork for understanding how organizations and stakeholders can work together to create positive change. It shows that organizations and stakeholders can, and do, engage via social media to create communities where social causes, coincident with organizational initiatives, can be discussed, debated, and acted upon. In addition to uncovering some of the ways that social, reputational, and sociotechnical capital are jointly created and shared online, this study also provides insight into how different content can create different types and levels of stakeholder engagement. Better understanding these principles can pave the way for CSR to move from responsibility to respons-ability (McMillan, 2007).
References


Millennial Engagement in Online Activism: Theoretical and Practical Implications for Public Relations

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Abstract

Millennials are the world’s digital natives and its largest generation. A general perception of this generation is that they lack engagement in social-political issues. This study explores how Millennials are engaging in social media activism and whether online activism is driving offline activism behaviors. A quantitative survey of 306 participants was conducted to learn more about the gratifications Millennials obtain through social media and whether associations exist between their online and offline activism behaviors. The results showed that Millennials engage in online activism behaviors to a greater extent than offline activism behaviors. Millennials primarily gratify intrinsic needs for interaction and belonging by engaging in social media activism behaviors. So-called “slacktivism” behaviors were most common among Millennials engaging in online activism. Similarly, online activism behaviors that require greater investment from Millennials were a good predictor of activism behaviors that occur offline. Results also demonstrate that, at an individual identification level, Millennials self-perceptions as activists predicted engagement in both online and offline activism. Theoretical and practical implications for organizations and public relations practitioners are discussed.
Millennials – those born between 1982 and 2001 – are the largest generation in American history, surpassing their Baby Boomer parents by some 17 million. They are 95 million strong, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically diverse (Howe & Strauss, 2009). Millennials are defined by an Internet and media landscape that permeates nearly every facet of their daily lives. Millennials represent those who are most likely to use social media. This generation accesses their social media accounts multiple times throughout the day to share their stories, banish boredom, and learn about current affairs (Dua, 2014; Miller, 2013). Millennials are a generation that embraces diversity and are inclined to form active communities where they can participate in discussions and join cultural conversations (Williams, Crittenden, Keo, & McCarty, 2012). They actively seek out others who uphold the same morals and values that they do and form collective movements. In today’s information rich environment, Millennials are engaging in social-political challenges in new ways (Stein & Dawson-Tunik, 2004).

While it is commonly used for leisure, social media is also being utilized as a tool to drive change. Scholars argue that social media enables communal activity among Millennials and provides a platform for freedom of expression (Kanter & Fine, 2010). Through social media, Millennials are able to form collective societies and initiate organizational actions and policy changes. Millennials’ engagement in social media activism increasingly plays a role in bringing social-political issues to the forefront of public debate (Rigby, 2008). This generation is active and, given their interconnected nature, they can mobilize in online communities and prompt offline activism (Gagnier, 2008). Yet, others have argued that Millennial engagement in social media activism equates to “slacktivism” or “clicktavism”; that is, low-risk, low-investment activist behaviors (Harlow and Guo, 2014; Lee and Hsieh, 2013). Unlike their Baby Boomer parents and other prior generations, Millennials’ engagement in online activist behaviors may not provoke “real” social-political change.

There is a gap in the literature about the connection between Millennials’ online activist behaviors and offline activism that drives awareness, attitudes, and actions surrounding social-political change. In order to begin to address this gap, this study examined Millennials’ online activist behaviors through the lens of uses and gratifications theory. A measure of social media activism was created and tested. This study used a survey method to examine the ways in which Millennials are engaging in social media activism, and what gratifications they fulfill by engaging in social media activism. The study explores whether Millennials’ social media activism behaviors translate into offline activism and whether identification as an activist predicts online and offline activism.

By determining how and why Millennials use social media for online activism, activist groups and organizations may better mobilize them on social media platforms. This research sets the stage for future research that addresses communication strategies and messages that gratify Millennials to this extent. As a result of this research, organizations can determine which online activist behaviors prompt offline activist behaviors and develop strategies that lead to tangible social-political impact. Further, the implications for potential activist crises are realized in the connection between these online-offline behaviors. In today’s digital world, it is impendent upon public relations researchers to examine the theoretical and practical implications of online activism for organizational outcomes – both tangible and otherwise. These findings have significant ramifications for organizational communication and online/offline civic engagement surrounding social-political issues. This research represents an initial move toward this direction.
Literature Review

Millennials are a civic generation and advocates for change (Terrace, 2014). According to McCafferty (2011), new media technologies like social media have provided a modern platform for individuals to engage in activism because they can easily reach their social connections and make them aware of social-political issues. Marwell, Oliver, and Prahl (1988) contend that the centralization of network ties has a positive effect on collective action. However, social media can also lead to slacktivism where online activism occurs in a vacuum and does not translate to any offline actions (Bell, 2014). Millennials may perceive that they are actively making a difference by supporting a cause online, yet in reality their actions on social media are not prompting offline activism or affecting change.

Millennials and New Media

The introduction of the Internet, mobile technology and social networking sites occurred as Millennials were coming of age; therefore, this group includes some of the earliest digital natives (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008). Because Millennials never had to adapt to new media, they are its most avid users – 81 percent of Millennials are on Facebook (Pew Research Center, 2014) and 59 percent are on Twitter (Bennett, 2014). Millennials are also active users of Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat, which have risen in popularity among this generation as they prefer more visual content. Social media has opened the door to millions of Millennials across the globe to connect and interact with each other like never before. Geraci and Nagy (2004) write that Millennials were born in an era that puts them in “control of their media environment” (p. 17), and they thrive in this hyper-connected, fragmented media landscape. With the growth of smart phone use among Millennials, they are utilizing social media between 20-21 hours every month (Nielsen, 2014). While Millennials are adept at multitasking and are not committed to any single social media platform, Facebook remains the dominant network for this generation (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015; Miller, 2013).

Smith (2012) affirms that Millennials are constantly online for networking, news and entertainment purposes. Millennials essentially want to stay connected with others, keep abreast on current affairs, and also amuse themselves or moderate boredom. According to the Cassandra Report, where 3,044 Millennials were surveyed across 10 countries, 77 percent thought “it was important to be informed about current affairs and news”, and 60 percent said they relied on the social media platforms to be updated on the news (Dua, 2014). Social media is the local TV for Millennials and 57 percent report that they obtain news from Facebook at least once a day (Mitchell, Gottfried, & Matsa, 2015; American Press Institute, 2015). The implications of this for organizational communication and reputation are many. Longitudinal research by Wright and Hinson (2015) reinforces the importance of exploring Millennial use of social media for activism: “Results across all ten years of this study suggest that the development of various new and emerging technologies has significantly empowered a wide variety of strategic publics by giving them dynamic ways to communicate with a variety of internal and external audiences” (pp. 1-2).

Collective Action

Millennials are less divided on social issues, religion, and their views about the government than previous generations (Pew Research Center, 2011). They share interests and work together to achieve common goals, but it is difficult to do so efficiently according to Olson’s (1971) collective action theory. Activism behaviors among Millennials are spurred by
widespread awareness and interest in the collective good. According to Melucci (1996), collective action is not only a reaction to constraints of the environment, but it also creates symbolic meanings which the social ‘actors’ – the collective group – are able to recognize.

According to Kanter and Fine (2010), idealism combined with social media’s ease spurs Millennials’ zeal for causes. Collective action is largely taking place online rather than through traditional offline methods. According to Postmes and Brunsting (2002), collective action is possible online as individuals rely on group memberships and social identities. Because Millennials are such heavy social media users, these platforms are the easiest way for them to reach their cohorts. According to Marwell et al. (1988), social ties are imperative for collective action as participants are more likely to mobilize for a social movement if there is first a social link established. Yet, Harlow and Harp (2012) found that whether respondents’ activism occurred mostly offline, mostly online, or equally online and offline, they all participated equally in offline activism.

Millennials believe in equality and as such, they take on a collective identity for a common cause, work together to attain common goals, and retain freedom over their actions (Melucci, 1996). Norms of reciprocity suggest that if an individual took action toward a cause or social movement for another individual, that individual is likely to support them in the same way. Valenzuela, Park & Kee (2009) contend that social trust formed on Facebook may have a reciprocal relationship, and norms of reciprocity of trust can lead to collective action. For example, if an individual signed a petition on equal rights that one of their social connections posted on social media, that social connection will likely return the favor and support a cause the individual brought to their attention. Millennials are a powerful source of change known as free agents and take advantage of social media to organize, mobilize, and communicate (Kanter & Fine, 2010). Hence, social media is an essential tool Millennials are using to garner collective support from their mass network of social connections.

There is great value in social networks and the relations it creates among people to achieve goals. Social capital has numerous entities and functions best when there is trustworthiness, information channels, and reciprocity (Coleman, 1988). Millennials are open-minded and transparent online and trust their social connections on social media platforms (Raines, 2002). As these connections provide detailed information about themselves online, there is reduced uncertainty about these individuals and a form of trust is built (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). While these connections are an important source of information about current events and often share interesting facts and news, according to Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia (2014) there needs to be a strong triggering event that occurs in a social media context in order for individuals to have a sustained reaction.

Connections made within social networks can be weak and weak ties rarely lead to high-risk activism but social media can play a role as an organizing mechanism (Gladwell, 2010; Segerberg & Bennett, 2011). Individuals can have hundreds of Facebook ‘friends’ and Twitter ‘followers’ and they can be a source of new ideas, information, and action. However, while it is easier to mobilize Millennials through social media, these connections are inclined to take any action that does not require much from them, such as signing an online petition, but are not likely to engage in risky grassroots efforts, such as public protests. On the other hand, Abdulla (2011) contends that the Arab Spring uprisings proved that social media can reflect a larger offline movement. In 2011, the Arab world saw an awakening of freedom of expression and it was started purely online through social media platforms. Tunisian protesters organized on social media before taking to the streets of the nation to participate in demonstrations and sit-ins to
demand political changes (Cole, 2014). This Twitter revolution also paved the way and stirred protesters in other Arab nations including Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Yemen, prompting social unrest in these nations (Ghannam, 2011). A study by Tufekci and Wilson (2012) of participants of Egypt’s Tahrir Square protests found that social media use greatly increased the probability that an individual attended the protests on the first day. The Egyptian government was so threatened by social media that it blocked Internet access, but it was too late – Egyptians were already rallying large groups of supporters in protest (Abdulla, 2011). Arabs had the common goal of ousting their dictators and weak ties joined together to create offline action and affect change.

Social Media Activism

New media technologies have transcended the way Millennials engage in activism. Activism refers to the “practices of individuals challenging the status quo in order to bring about social, political or economic change” (Harlow & Guo, 2014, p. 465). Vegh (2003) defines online activism as a movement that is politically motivated and relies on the Internet. Online activism includes proactive actions to achieve a common goal or reactive actions against certain controls and the imposing authorities (McCaughey & Ayers, 2013). According to Lee and Hsieh (2013), online activism is similar to traditional offline activism behaviors because there are costs and risks imposed toward the individual to participate in such activities. Therefore, collective action is necessary because a single individual cannot obtain the goal alone, and there is a collective good at stake that will benefit everyone – even those who did not participate in the activism behavior.

According to McCaughey and Ayers, (2013) there are three types of Internet activism: (1) awareness/advocacy; (2) organization/mobilization; (3) action/reaction. Awareness is created when relevant information about a cause can be accessed, while advocacy occurs when actions for the movement are carried out. In online communities, it is easier to organize and mobilize groups as they may already have signed up to receive information as part of the awareness phase. Vegh (2003) discovered that the Internet is used for mobilization in three different ways: (1) to call for offline action, such as rallying a public demonstration by posting details online; (2) to call for an action that normally happens offline but can be done online, such as emailing your state representative; and (3) to call for an online action that can only be carried out online, such as a spamming campaign. Lastly, the action/reaction phase includes “hacktivism” where activists may hijack a trending hashtag or engage in online disobedience to support a cause. For example #WikiLeaks was a popular hashtag on Twitter used by hacktivists to counter privacy threats posed by the government (McDougall, 2012).

Social media activism has become a part of twenty-first century and the Internet has been used to garner support for numerous public stances ranging from boycotts to protests. Social media has played an important role in both political and social activism. Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-García (2014) developed a four-stage model to understand the maturity levels of protests utilizing social media: (1) triggering event, (2) media response, (3) viral organizations, and (4) physical response. A triggering event is an incremental event that causes a social reaction to it and may be the result of a murder, abuse of power, hostility or even distrust. A triggering event breaks the status quo of society, is autonomous, and citizens organize around it as a collective group (Olson, 2009; Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-García, 2014). With the advent of social media, the triggering event creates a traditional media and virtual media response through social media channels. Mass media aggregate the information about the triggering event while social media
presents the information in a disaggregated form so activists know the precise moment actions occurred (Kiss & Rosa-García, 2011). Once the triggering event leads to a collective group supporting a common interest, a viral organization that provokes change is formed. Simple, consistent and compelling messages are developed by activists and influences online and offline mobilization (Kanter & Fine, 2010; McCaughhey & Ayers, 2003). The physical response aims to take the protest from the virtual world and place it into the physical world to show its strength and power (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014). A single physical response may also be a catalyst to convert more individuals into activists and prompt duplication of the physical response in other areas or regions. Overall, as these events and actions may follow each other in an unpredictable way it is difficult to determine the single lynchpin that incites involvement in social media activism.

Due to the 24/7, real-time nature of social media, activists must work quickly to disseminate information to supporters (Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia, 2014). Online activism is a rapid movement since activities that translate from online to offline may result in civil infringements such as law enforcement disrupting a public protest because they were made aware of the details of the protest in advance. Lee and Hsieh (2013) contend that slacktivism, also known as low-cost, low-risk online activism, can affect other civic actions that occur offline. Slacktivism includes clicking “like” or “retweet” to show support for a cause, signing online petitions, sharing videos about an issue, and changing your profile picture to support a cause—but not engaging in offline activism.

In an experiment conducted to test whether signing or not signing a petition online would boost or reduce consequent charity contributions, Lee and Hsieh (2013) found that when participants signed an online petition, they were more likely to donate to a related charity. Conversely, if participants did not sign the petition, they were more likely to donate a significantly higher amount of money to an unrelated charity. Consistency and moral balancing effects have significant implications for Millennials as exposure to online activism affects ensuing offline actions. According to Lee and Hsieh (2013), individuals strive toward consistency in their actions in an attempt to avoid cognitive dissonance. However, moral balancing effects posit that performing a good deed frees an individual’s conscience to “slack off” on an impending good deed (p. 1). The moral licensing effect proposes that past good deeds allow bad future deeds while the moral cleansing effect proposes that past bad deeds permit more good deeds (Lee & Hsieh, 2013). As Millennials’ enthusiasm changes, often they support organizations at times when they are prompted to do so, but then just as easily go away; therefore, online participation is not sustained (Kanter & Fine, 2010). Millennials are engaging in short-term slacktivism behaviors that create a “feel good” spirit among these individuals who believe they have taken an online action of value when it is in fact an action that is rarely followed by real, offline change.

One form of slacktivism that Millennials engage in is clicktivism, which Bell (2014) contends is an inadequate form of activism but one that muddles the lines between the two (Harlow and Guo, 2014). Like slacktivism, clicktivism is a low-risk, low-cost activity conducted through social media that seeks to “raise awareness, produce change, or grant satisfaction to the person engaged in the activity” (Halupka, 2014, p. 117-118). Clicktivism is a reaction to content on social media and is not premeditated like other online social media activism behaviors such as clicking “like” or “share” on a post or signing an online petition (Halupka, 2014). For example, Change.org is a petition tool that allows someone to create an online petition and draws signatures from thousands of individuals every year; the petitions and campaigns often raise
awareness about cultural, social, and political issues. When Millennials sign an online petition, they are simply engaging in a short-term activity that was prompted by one of their social connections. This means that their likelihood of participating in an offline activity related to the petition they signed online is low. In order to conceptualize clicktivism as a legitimate political act, Halupka has developed seven key dimensions of clicktivism and they include: (1) situated online – occurs in a digital environment; (2) an impulsive gesture – it is a response that is highly spontaneous; (3) noncommittal – is disposable and requires no future action; (4) does not draw upon specialized knowledge – it is an extension of the user’s current knowledge about the digital environment; (5) easily replicated – must be simple enough to be reproduced by the public; (6) engages a political object – as a responsive act, clicktivism must engage a political object to differentiate from a cause; (7) an action performed – committed by the individual so is it is independent of the campaign. Halupka (2014) also identifies popular forms of clicktivism such as social buttons and creating memes online as part of activism behaviors. Clicktivism in essence is highly flexible and it is easy to be an active participant.

Offline Activism

Hirsch (2014) believes that every generation reinvents social activism to meet impending needs of that time. Millennials engage in a number of online and offline activism activities. Often, these activities are brought to their attention through the social media platforms they utilize regularly, or simply because their social connections are also supporting (or not supporting) certain causes or organizations. Organized activists are commonly referred to as pressure groups, grassroots organizations or social movement organizations (Werder, 2006).

According to Jackson (1982), there are five communication tactics that activist groups employ to pursue their goals: (1) informational activities such as interviews and media relations; (2) symbolic activities such as boycotts; (3) organizing activities such as networking and conducting meetings; (4) legal activities such as petitioning and being involved in legislative activities; and (5) civil disobedience such as sit-ins and trespassing. Graeff, Stempeck, and Zuckerman (2014) found that while broadcast media serves as an amplifier and gatekeeper, media activists work to co-create the news and influence the framing of controversies.

Activist groups are organized to influence organizations for a cause and include pressure groups, special interest groups, grassroots opposition, social movements, or issues groups (Grunig, 1992). From an organizational perspective, these groups come together for different purposes and work to achieve a specific response from the organization, whether it is demanding that the organization not support a controversial cause or changes to the organization’s products and services that would make it safer for the general public. According to Rawlins (2006), dangerous stakeholders – those that become coercive to achieve their claims – have urgency and power and may use formal channels to affect change. This means that organizations should always be wary of these types of stakeholders as they can have a detrimental impact on organizational goals.

According to Werder (2006), one of the main purposes of activism is to influence organizational action. Social media activism is gradually playing a more important role in holding corporations accountable for taking a stance on these issues (Dodd & Supa, 2014; Dodd & Supa, 2015). A recent study by The Global Strategy Group (2014) found that 56 percent of participants thought corporations should take a stance on social-political issues and that Millennials became much more favorable toward companies that took stances on issues compared to other generations. The study recommends that corporations focus specifically on the
millennial audience as there are significant opportunities with this generation.

**Social Media Uses and Gratifications**

Millennials utilize social media to fulfill various intrinsic and extrinsic needs. While they use numerous communication tools, one social media platform does not replace another (Quan-Haase and Young, 2010). Instead, various platforms become integrated into the individual’s use of online forms of communication (Baym, Zhang, & Lin, 2004). The advent of new media technologies has revived uses and gratifications theory. According to Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973), uses and gratifications is used to explain how individuals use media to satisfy their needs, to understand motives for media behavior, and to identify the consequences that precede needs, motives and behaviors. Essentially, uses and gratifications theory uncovers media use motivations and can determine why Millennials utilize social media platforms (Sun, Rubin, & Haridakis, 2008; Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004).

According to Rubin (1993), at the core of uses and gratifications is the concept of audience activity. ‘Audience activity’ includes a range of meanings: (1) utility – motivations for communicating; (2) intentionality – purposive nature of communicating; (3) selectivity – communication choice based on prior interests’ and (4) imperviousness to influence – audiences are obstinate (Blumler, 1979). Therefore, all audience members are not equally active. This demonstrates why new media technologies may only initiate online actions for passive audiences, but drive active audiences to engage in offline actions. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) found distinctions between the instrumental and ritualized Internet use. Information-seeking was the most salient use of the Internet and has a purposive, satisfactory orientation while ritualized Internet use was linked to affinity and past actions. Millennials’ simultaneous uses of multiple social media platforms suggest that each fulfills a specific need (Quan-Haase and Young, 2010). For example, Facebook is used to manage acquaintances while Twitter allows individuals to follow and be followed by people they have never met before (Gladwell, 2010). Since Facebook is the most popular social media platform among Millennials, they are able to fulfill a variety of fundamental needs on this platform due to the ease of utility. Millennials are able to join groups and organizations, receive constant updates from these groups as well as their acquaintances, and become aware of and potentially participate in events as well. Twitter on the other hand is utilized for information access and participation in trending topics (that are often prompted by the latest news cycles). Other social media platforms like Instagram, Pinterest and Snapchat are used primarily for photo and video sharing and some of this content easily becomes viral. With blogs like Tumblr, users may choose to only read posts or engage further by clicking to view external links or commenting and this requires greater elaboration from the individual (Kaye, 2010).

Audiences may derive gratifications from three sources including media content, exposure to the media as such, and the social context that characterizes the situation of exposure to different media (Katz, et al., 1973). Social media easily meets all three criteria as it is a readily available form of media with a high exposure rate that can be accessed instantaneously. In a study of gratifications sought on social networks utilizing mobile devices, Cheng, Liang and Leung (2014) found that the technological convenience (accessibility), information exchange (cognition needs) and social interaction (recognition needs) predicted civic engagement offline. These findings suggest that civic attitudes on social networks accessed from mobile devices are positively related to civic offline activism.

In a study of 2,603 students, Valenzuela et al. (2009) found that greater use of Facebook
led to higher civic engagement and political participation. In another study, researchers found that there were four primary needs for participating in a Facebook group and they included socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). Findings of the study indicated that users who seek information were more likely to participate in civic activities like organizing support group meetings. On the other hand, users who seek entertainment and utilize the platform for recreation are likely to be involved with comfortable activities like an organization for hobbies the individual enjoys.

From the research it is evident that social media has a large impact on collective action which incites activism among Millennials. As Millennials take specific steps to engage in activism and social movements, these actions may be driven by a requirement to fulfill their intrinsic needs. Millennials are becoming increasingly involved in driving social media activism and garnering support from others within their social networks to participate in the collective good. Millennials utilize social media for a variety of purposes such as fulfilling social needs, information access, and entertainment (Smith, 2012). By determining the reasons why Millennials utilize social media, activist groups and organizations will be able to better mobilize them online and initiate their participation in offline actions.

The current study connects social media activism behaviors to the uses and gratifications achieved by Millennials who are heavy users of these online platforms. Moreover, this research seeks to identify whether millennial engagement in social media activism behaviors prompts offline activism. Connecting the reasons why Millennials participate in definitive social media activism behaviors and the potential relationship of these behaviors with offline activism provides a better understanding of motivations to engage in activism. Determining whether self-perceptions as an activist impacts engagement in both online and offline activism behaviors also have implications for activist causes. Thus, the following research questions were posed:

**RQ1:** In what ways are Millennials engaging in social media activism?

**RQ2:** Which gratifications do Millennials fulfill by engaging in social media activism?

**RQ3:** How are social media activism behaviors associated with Millennials’ engagement with offline activism behaviors?

**RQ4:** Does greater identification as an activist predict (a) online and (b) offline activism?

### Methodology

An online survey was administered to a sample of 343 Millennials utilizing uses and gratifications measures in combination with measures of online and offline activism.

### Participants

Participants in this study were a convenience sample of undergraduate and graduate students from a university in Florida. A total of 343 students were invited to participate and 306 students completed the survey. Of the convenience sample, 102 (33.3%) were men and 204 (66.7%) were women. Of the participants, 159 (52%) were White or Caucasian, 59 (19.3%) Hispanic/Latino, 43 (14.1%) Black, 31 (10.1%) Asian/Pacific Islander, 1 (.3%) was Native American, and 13 (4.2%) reported themselves as “Other.” The majority of the sample, 213 (69.6%) were 18–21 years old and 96 (31.4%) were juniors in college. In the survey, an initial filter question asked participants if they were born between the years 1982 – 2001.

### Measures

In order to measure the uses and gratifications Millennials experience when engaging on
social media platforms, previous work on Internet motives by Papacharissi and Rubin (2000), and Sun et al., (2008) was used. This work was linguistically adapted to fit this study in terms of uses and gratifications sought through social media. A modified version of the Internet motives scale from Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) and Sun et al. (2008) with an acceptable internal consistency that combines interpersonal, media, and Internet motivations was used in this study. The uses and gratifications items for this study comprised of 32 items regarding how Millennials use social media platforms for: interpersonal utility and social interaction (10 items), passing time (8 items), information seeking (6 items), convenience (3 items), entertainment (3 items), and control (2 items). Participants used a 7-point Likert scale that ranges from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7) to rate statements on the modified Internet motives scale. A high score indicates greater uses and increased gratifications from utilizing social media platforms, while a low score indicates less uses and diminished gratifications among participants.

To measure activism behaviors, statements based on activism research from McCaughey and Ayers, (2013), and Jackson (1982) on social media, Internet activism, and activist groups, and Valenzuela’s (2013) study on social media and protest behaviors were used. A measure of social media activism was developed and tested in this research. To measure participants’ activism behaviors, participants were asked to rate 44 statements. Participants first responded to 22 items about how they use social media for online activism behaviors. Statements included: “Used an activist hashtag in a social media post/tweet” and “Shared information about a protest or boycott surrounding a social-political issue on social media”. Participants then responded to 22 items about how they engage in offline activism behaviors. Statements included: “Participated in rally or march” or “Mobilized offline support for a social-political issue”. Four negatively-coded offline activism behavior statements were included. Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7).

Finally, since identity plays a key role in the likelihood to engage in activism (Langman, 2005), section three asked participants to evaluate 7 statements about the extent to which they identify with social-political issues. These items explored the relationship between self-perceptions and perceived reality. A modified version of the fan identification scale from Wann and Branscombe (1993) was used to develop these statements and a new scale with good internal consistency was created (Cronbach’s α ≥ .88).

**Results**

RQ1 sought to understand the ways Millennials are engaging in social media activism. To address this question, the mean scores and standard deviations for the online activism responses were analyzed on a 7-point scale. Table 1 displays these results.

Overall, participants somewhat disagreed to performance of the online activism behaviors ($M = 3.43, SD = 1.20$). On a 7-point scale, participants reported the strongest agreement to the item: “Liked or favorited a post about a social-political issue” ($M = 5.28, SD = 1.95$). Participants indicated the strongest disagreement to the item: “Contacted a political leader or decision maker through e-mail or social media” ($M = 2.10, SD = 1.52$).

In order to further understand the variability of these online activism behaviors, an exploratory principal components factor analysis was conducted on the set of 22 items about online activism behaviors. The factorability of the 22 online activism behaviors was examined. Most of the online activism behaviors were highly and significantly ($p < .05$) correlated with one another. Well-recognized criteria for the factorability of a correlation were used. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .91, above the recommended value of .60, and
Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 (231) = 3,685.58, p < .001$). A principal components analysis with orthogonal rotation was run in an effort to explore if the online activism behaviors comprised a smaller set of important independent composite variables. Factor loadings were suppressed at < .40 to ensure only strong loadings (~ .50) on each factor were analyzed (See Appendix C for full factor loadings). Four new factors were uncovered with eigenvalues greater than 1.0: nine “slacktivist behaviors,” five “mobilize others,” four “tangible online activism,” and four “negative perspectives.” Table 2 displays these results.

Table 1: Online Activism Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the past 6 months, I have:</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liked or favorited a post about a social-political issue</td>
<td>5.28</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared or retweeted a post about a social-political issue</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted a status/tweeted about a social-political issue</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generated awareness about a social-political issue using social media</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commented on a post about a social-political issue</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>2.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*I do not agree with many online views of those in my social network.</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signed an online petition</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*I do not like to voice my personal social-political beliefs on social media.</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfriended or unfollowed someone on social media because of their social-political posts/tweets</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*I do not use social media to engage in social-political issues.</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Generally speaking, I prefer not to engage in social-political issues online.</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>2.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friended or followed a political leader or decision maker on social media</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>2.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared socially- or politically-charged images or photos on social media</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used an activist hashtag in a social media post/tweet</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilized online support for a social-political issue</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared my experience about participating/supporting a social-political issue on social media</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>1.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompted social connections to sign an online petition for a social-political issue</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared information about a protest or boycott surrounding a social-political issue on social media</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed my social media profile picture surrounding a social-political issue</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donated money to a social-political issue that originated on social media</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted to raise money for a social-political issue using social media</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted a political leader or decision maker through e-mail or social media</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Reverse coded items
Table 2: Factor Analysis of Online Activism Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shared or retweeted a post about a social-political issue</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted a status/tweeted about a social-political issue</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liked or favorited a post about a social-political issue</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commented on a post about a social-political issue</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generated awareness about a social-political issue using social</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared socially- or politically-charged images or photos on social media</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used an activist hashtag in a social media post/tweet</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friended or followed a political leader or decision maker on social media</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfriended or unfollowed someone on social media because of their social-political posts/tweets</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompted social connections to sign an online petition for a social-political issue</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signed an online petition</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared information about a protest or boycott surrounding a social-political issue on social media</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilized online support for a social-political issue</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared my experience about participating/supporting a social-political issue on social media</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted to raise money for a social-political issue using social media</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donated money to a social-political issue that originated on social media</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted a political leader or decision maker through e-mail or social media</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed my social media profile picture surrounding a social-political issue</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally speaking, I prefer not to engage in social-political issues online.</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not like to voice my personal social-political beliefs on social media.</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not use social media to engage in social-political issues.</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not agree with many online views of those in my social network.</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Factor loadings < .40 are suppressed

Component 1 = Slacktivist Behaviors
Component 2 = Mobilize Others
Component 3 = Tangible Online Activism
Component 4 = Negative Perspectives
Nine items that relate to relatively easy and convenient engagement in online activism loaded onto *slacktivist behaviors* (eigenvalue = 4.97). This component explained 23% of the total variance in the items. The items that loaded on component one are indicative of online activism behaviors that require little time and energy to partake in. For example, clicking the “Like” button on Facebook requires a lower investment than signing an online petition with regard to social-political issue engagement. The slacktivist behaviors factor loads onto “posted a status,” “liked or favorited a post,” or “commented or shared a post about a social-political issue,” “used an activist hashtag,” “generated awareness about a social-political issue through social media,” “shared a socially- or politically-charged image on social media,” “friended or followed a political leader or decision maker,” and “unfriended or unfollowed someone because of their social-political posts/tweets.”

Five items that relate to engaging in collective action on social media loaded onto *mobilize others* (eigenvalue = 3.24) and explained 15% of the total variance in the items. The items that loaded on component two are related to engagement in online activism behaviors that have the explicit goal of mobilization of others with regard to social-political issues. Prompting others to sign a petition or sharing information about civic unrest like a protest may require a greater investment and higher elaboration and awareness from a Millennial. More central to this factor, these online activism behaviors are outward facing, aimed at mobilizing others in one’s network. This factor loads onto “signed an online petition,” “prompted social connections to sign a petition for a social-political issue,” “shared information about a protest or boycott related to a social-political issue,” “shared your experience about participating or supporting a social-political issue,” and “mobilized online support for a social-political issue.”

Four items that relate to online activism that results in offline activities loaded onto *tangible online activism* (eigenvalue = 3.09), which explained 14% of the total variance in the items. The items that loaded onto component three are related to activities that require substantial input and ownership from the individual. For example, changing a profile picture represents an outward representation of the self, and donating money to a cause is an invested and concrete way in which individuals can support social-political issues online. This factor loads onto “changed my social media profile picture surrounding a social-political issue,” “donated money to a social-political issue that originated on social media,” “attempted to raise money for a social-political issue using social media,” and “contacted a political leader or decision maker through e-mail or social media.”

Four items that relate to non-engagement in online activism loaded onto *negative perspectives* (eigenvalue = 2.80), which explained 13% of the total variance in the items. The items that loaded onto component four are related to non-engagement in online activism activities. For example, all four items were negatively-worded and seem to reflect a general negative outlook that millennial participants have toward engaging in online activism behaviors. This factor best reflects the negative perceptions Millennials have with regard to social media as a platform for the promotion of social-political agendas. For example, some may not believe Facebook is an appropriate channel for this type of discourse, which is likely reflected in this factor loading. This factor loaded onto statements such as “generally speaking, I prefer not to engage in social-political issues online,” “I do not like to voice my personal social-political beliefs on social media,” “I do not use social media to engage in social-political issues,” and “I do not agree with many online views of those in my social network.”

Next a reliability analysis was performed to examine the internal consistency of the four factors produced by the principal components analysis. The reliability analysis revealed that the
Slacktivist Behaviors formed a reliable scale with excellent internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha \geq .90$). The reliability analysis for Mobilize Others formed a reliable scale with good internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha \geq .86$). The reliability analysis for tangible online activism formed a reliable scale with acceptable internal consistency and would not improve with the removal of any items (Cronbach’s $\alpha \geq .79$). The reliability analysis for Negative Perspectives formed a reliable scale with good internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha \geq .84$).

Descriptive statistics for each of the four factors identified were generated. Overall, mean scores across these online activism behaviors demonstrated that Millennial participants engaged primarily in slacktivist behaviors ($M = 4.01, SD = 1.65$). As a seemingly valid point of comparison, tangible online activism behaviors received the lowest overall mean scores ($M = 2.23, SD = 1.26$). The negative perspectives of online activism and mobilize others were nearly equivalent with regard to average scores: ($M = 3.81, SD = 1.59$) and ($M = 3.12, SD = 1.65$), respectively.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant mean differences between the four new factors – slacktivist behaviors, mobilize others, tangible online activism, and negative perspectives. Five of the six pairs in the analysis produced a significant $t$ value: slacktivist behaviors and mobilize others ($t(299) = 11.67, p < .001$), slacktivist behaviors and tangible online activism ($t(299) = 19.85, p < .001$), mobilize others and tangible online activism ($t(302) = 11.60, p < .001$), mobilize others and negative perspectives ($t(302) = -5.63, p < .001$), and tangible online activism and negative perspectives ($t(299) = -13.73, p < .001$). There was no significant mean differences between slacktivist behaviors and negative perspectives ($t(297) = 1.71, p = .089$). This is a valid finding as Millennials who engage in slacktivism do not have negative opinions about online activism behaviors. Table 3 displays these results and descriptive statistics.

Table 3: Paired-Samples T-Test of Four Online Activism Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pairs</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slacktivist Behaviors-Mobilize Others</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>11.67</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slacktivist Behaviors-Tangible Online Activism</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>19.85</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilize Others-Tangible Online Activism</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>11.60</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilize Others-Negative Perspectives</td>
<td>-.67</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>-5.63</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangible Online Activism-Negative Perspectives</td>
<td>-1.57</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>-13.73</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slacktivist Behaviors-Negative Perspectives</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>.089</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An examination of the means indicated that the slacktivist behaviors-tangible online activism pair had the highest mean ($M = 1.74, SD = 1.51$) while the tangible online activism-negative perspectives pair had the lowest mean ($M = -1.57, SD = 1.98$). Descriptive statistics for the other pairs are as follows: slacktivist behaviors-mobilize others ($M = .87, SD = 1.29$), mobilize others-tangible online activism ($M = .86, SD = 1.29$), mobilize others-negative perspectives ($M = -.67, SD = 2.08$), and slacktivist behaviors-negative perspectives ($M = .20, SD = 2.02$).
Next, RQ2 sought to identify the motives for engagement in social media activism. To answer this question, the uses and gratifications responses were first used to determine how Millennials are utilizing social media for: interpersonal utility/social interaction; to pass time, information seeking; convenience; entertainment; and control. Interpersonal utility/social interaction consisted of 10 items (M = 5.02, SD = .82) including “To show others encouragement” and had good internal consistency (Cronbach’s α ≥ .80). Passing time consisted of 8 items (M = 5.12, SD = 1.05) including “Because it allows me to unwind” and had good internal consistency (Cronbach’s α ≥ .83). Information seeking consisted of 6 items (M = 5.92, SD = .92) including “To get information easier” and had good internal consistency (Cronbach’s α ≥ .89). Convenience consisted of 3 items (M = 5.65, SD = 1.04) including “Because it is cheaper” and had acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach’s α ≥ .69). Entertainment consisted of 3 items (M = 5.93, SD = .98) including “I just like to use it” and had good internal consistency (Cronbach’s α ≥ .91). Control consisted of 2 items (M = 2.72, SD = 1.31) including “I want someone to do something for me” and had good internal consistency (Cronbach’s α ≥ .81).

Mean scores across the six uses and gratifications scales demonstrated that participants utilize social media primarily for entertainment (M = 5.93, SD = .98) and information seeking (M = 5.92, SD = .92). Control received the overall lowest mean scores (M = 2.72, SD = 1.31) indicating that Millennials do not engage in social media to request their social connections to do something or tell them what to do. Millennials also utilize social media for convenience (M = 5.65, SD = 1.04), to pass time (M = 5.12, SD = 1.05) and for interpersonal utility/social interactions (M = 5.02, SD = .82).

Next, for RQ2, a backward stepwise multiple regression was conducted to examine the relationship between uses and gratifications with online activism behaviors. The six scales for uses and gratifications were simultaneously entered into the model as independent variables: interpersonal utility/social interaction, pass time, information seeking, convenience, entertainment and control. The dependent variable, online activism, was regressed on the independent variables to reveal which outcomes contributed to an overall significant model.

Using the principal of parsimony, an overall significant model was found: $F_{(294)} = 8.94, p < .001$. However, each of the independent uses and gratifications variables failed to reach significance as predictors of online activism in the model. Passing time and information seeking were removed at the third, and final, iteration of the model. Interpersonal utility/social interaction ($β = .241$) and control ($β = .126$) were significant predictors of online activism behaviors. Entertainment ($β = .114$) and convenience ($β = -.116$) neared significance ($p < .063$) in the
overall significant model. Interpersonal utility/social interaction, control and entertainment were positively associated with online activism behaviors while convenience was negatively associated with online activism. Together these four predictors accounted for 10% of the variance in online activism behaviors.

Thus, RQ2 finds that motives such as “get more points of view,” “tell others what to do,” “enjoyment,” and “communicate with friends and family” share a stronger association with social media activism than passing time and information seeking motives such as “occupy my time” and “get information easier” respectively.

RQ3 sought to understand how online and offline activist behaviors are related to one another. A backward stepwise regression was used to determine which online activism factors predict offline activism. The four scales for online activism were simultaneously entered into the model as independent variables: slacktivist behaviors, mobilize others, tangible online activism, and negative perspectives. The dependent variable, offline activism, was regressed on the independent variables to reveal which outcomes contributed most to an overall significant model.

All of these factors except for slacktivist behaviors were significant predictors of offline activism behaviors ($p < .001$) in an overall significant model $F(288) = 110.71, p < .001$. Slacktivist behaviors were removed at the second, and final, iteration of the overall significant model. Tangible online activism ($\beta = .446$), mobilize others ($\beta = .307$) and negative perceptions ($\beta = .211$) were positively and significantly associated with offline activism behaviors. Together these three predictors accounted for 53% of the variance in offline activism behaviors.

Thus, RQ3 finds that online behaviors such as “signing an online petition,” “donating money,” or “sharing my experience about participating/supporting a social-political issue on social media” share a stronger association with offline activist behaviors than do slacktivist behaviors such as “likes,” “comments,” “shares” and “using activist hashtags.”

RQ4 sought to understand whether greater identification as an activist predicts online and offline activism. To address this question, an activism identification scale was created using 7 items ($M = 3.12, SD = 1.26$). For example, “I see myself as a social-political activist.” The scale had good internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha \geq .88$).

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine the relationship between activism identification and both online and offline activism behaviors. First, activism identification was entered into the model as the independent variable. The dependent variable, the online activism scale, was regressed on the independent variable to reveal whether an overall significant model. A significant model was found ($F(293) = 210.85, p < .001$). Activism identification ($\beta = .648$) was a predictor of engagement in online activism and accounted for 42% of the variance in online activism.

Next, for RQ4, activism identification was entered into the model as the independent variable. The dependent variable, the offline activism scale, was regressed on the independent variable to determine whether a significant model existed. A significant model was found: $F(295) = 184.79, p < .001$. Activism identification ($\beta = .621$) was also a significant predictor of engagement in offline activism and was positively associated with the variable as well. Activism identification accounted for 38% of the variance in offline activism.

Discussion

This study examined how Millennials engaged in social media activism and the gratifications they fulfill by engaging in these online activities. It also examined how social media activism is associated with engagement in offline activism and whether identification as
an activist predicts online and offline activism among a sample of Millennials. Results
determined that overall, millennial respondents did not have a strong inclination to engage in
social media activism behaviors, but participated in these behaviors to a greater degree than in
offline activism. However, it was also found that millennial participants utilize various platforms
to fulfill intrinsic needs, such as information seeking and entertainment. The results from this
study also highlighted the relationship between online and offline activism behaviors. Further,
results indicated that identification as an activist predicted online and offline activism among
Millennials.

The most important finding in this study is that Millennials are primarily slacktivists
when it comes to engaging in social-political issues and some generally refrain from engaging in
these issues both online and offline. When Millennials do engage in social media activism they
are fulfilling interpersonal utility/social interaction gratifications of expression, belonging and
participation. This study found that the tangible online activism behaviors within online activism
are the best predictors of offline activism among Millennials as these activities are more difficult
to engage in than slacktivism behaviors. Millennials who identify themselves as activists are
more likely to engage in both online and offline activism behaviors. This research is valuable as
it points out that millennial engagement in online activism does not naturally translate to offline
activism which is a key concept as activists try to obtain support from this growing demographic.
This finding also has practical applications for organizations as they attempt to garner support
and engage Millennials through online mediums.

The first research question analyzed what ways Millennials engage in social media
activism and the results explained that generally, Millennials are not partaking in social media
activism behaviors to a high degree. Of the online activism behaviors that they are engaging in,
Millennials are primarily engaging in slacktivism. According to the results of this study
participants displayed slacktivism behaviors that were generally “clicktivism” which are
convenient to them such as liking, favoriting, sharing or retweeting a post about a social-political
issue. As a low-risk activity, clicktivism is an easy way for Millennials to participate online as it
requires little to no prior knowledge about an issue to react to it online. Halupka’s (2014)
dimensions for clicktivism highlights that these activities are impulsive gestures that are
spontaneous and noncommittal. That means that although a Millennial may show support for a
social-political issue online, this act is a one-time, isolated incident that may not necessarily
affect that individual’s future activity or partiality to show additional support for that issue. As
important social-political issues become salient to Millennials through social media, it is also
easy for them to replicate social support their social connections may have shown (Halupka,
2014). By posting a status or tweeting about a social-political issue – the third most common
online activism behavior Millennials in this study displayed – this generation is passive about
activism. Based on the online activist responses, Millennials responses loaded heaviest on the
slacktivism behavior items. According to Lee and Hsieh’s (2013) moral licensing effect,
Millennials may also refrain from engaging in social media activism if they have recently done
so and are content that they have participated in an activity of significance (in their mind). This
further emphasizes that while Millennials may care about social-political issues, they primarily
show support for these issues from behind their smartphone and laptop screens.

The second research question determined what gratifications Millennials fulfilled by
engaging in social media activism. Among Millennials, their gratifications for interpersonal
utility/social interaction were highly associated with their online activism behaviors which
parallel’s Smith’s (2012) finding that Millennials are constantly online for networking purposes.
Interpersonal utility/social interaction motives for utilizing social media platforms include “to participate in discussions,” “to belong to a group with the same interests as mine,” “to express myself freely,” and “to get more points of views.” These seemingly conventional gratifications can drive online activism as they satisfy basic needs of belonging and interacting with others. According to Papacharissi and Rubin (2000), interpersonal utility is a functional alternative use of the Internet that is reflective of motivations of individuals who interact less with others face to face. Therefore, as Millennials generally have greater access to their social media connections, they are more prone to engage in online activism behaviors. By fulfilling more interpersonal utility/social interaction motives with engagement in social media activism, an increased focus on these motives can lead to greater online and potentially offline activism among Millennials. This has great implications for organizations as interpersonal gratifications can be a viable solution for slacktivism behaviors which Millennials have increasingly adopted.

For the third research question, an association between online activism and offline activism was found. The tangible online activism factor was the greatest predictor of offline activism. These activities are active and high-energy requiring Millennials to further elaborate on them and commit to taking a stance on a social-political issue. In this study, three of the four behaviors for tangible online activism can be easily replicated offline. An individual can attempt to raise funds, donate money to a cause, or contact a political leader in an offline context as well. With norms of reciprocity, tangible online activism may be heightened among social connections (Valenzuela, et al., 2009). Millennials care about social perceptions and upholding ‘social’ beliefs. Therefore, if they changed their profile picture to support equal pay rights or raised money to support this issue, they feel a need to completely commit to it. They want to prove to others and themselves that they are passionate about a cause and some believe that partaking in a tangible online activism behavior means they’re committed to an issue beyond just online as well. Millennials rally to support shared causes and have a strong network of social connections to mobilize. According to Vegh (2003) one of the ways that the Internet is used for mobilization is to call for an online action that can only be carried out online. Millennials are inclined to engage in mobilization efforts online because they are able to create greater awareness on a much larger scale. For example, they may have a greater return on signatures for their online petition as geographical distance between them and their connections are not a hindrance to participation. Internet activism is driven by awareness/advocacy which Millennials achieve by sharing information about a protest or boycott, organization/mobilization which Millennials achieve by mobilizing online support for a social-political issue, and action/reaction which Millennials achieve by prompting their social connections to sign a petition (McCaughey & Ayers, 2013). However, consistent with the current study, some Millennials tend to refrain from engagement in social-political issues online and negative perceptions toward online activism predicted offline activism.

The fourth research question explored whether identification as an activist predicted activism online and offline. Activism identification predicted both online and offline activism behaviors among participants. This suggests that as online media platforms support social movements, activist identities have developed among Millennials (Langman, 2005). Millennials are more aware of issues because of social media and are acting on it; however their actions are primarily slacktivism behaviors. In other words, the results of this study indicate that slacktivists – by a large majority – may be claiming the ‘activist’ title. Millennials tend to have inflated views of themselves and may believe that their general slacktivist activities drive real-world change. Therefore, they are self-proclaimed activists because they tweeted using an activist
hashtag in the past or shared an article about a social issue.

This research has paved the way for further examination of the connection between online and offline activism behaviors, and as related to individual identification as an activist. As previous research on this topic has been partial, this study provides substantive results that highlight how to better engage Millennials in online and offline activism behaviors as a disconnect between engagement in online activism and offline activist behaviors exists. This disconnect is grounded in both gratifications achieved through online activist behavior and identification as an activist. By understanding which gratifications Millennials sought to achieve through the performance of specific independent components of online activism, this research sets the stage for targeting gratifications to encourage change. For example, the entertainment and convenience gratifications are important for Millennials with regard to online activism. Thus, social media activism campaigns should seek to entertain individuals and also be highly convenient in order for greater engagement. These are individual-level variables that can be further explored and accounted for in planning and creating awareness for activism campaigns. By understanding which gratifications Millennials seek to achieve through the performance of specific independent components of online activism, PR practitioners can target individual-level variables to encourage change. Garnering millennial support around social-political issues also has implications for the political future of the U.S. and beyond. Depending upon the support these important issues garner from grassroots movements that drive the public debate, this can result in changes to laws, rules and regulations that govern our democracy and create effective change.

Practical Implications

In order to garner increased support from this generation, activists need to develop entertaining visual content that create awareness and also provoke a reaction among Millennials on Instagram and Snapchat. As Millennials seek convenient gratifications for engaging in online activism behaviors, activists must also make the barrier to engagement easier for this demographic while remaining valuable i.e. prompting non-slacktivist actions. Organizations have the ability to specifically target Millennials based on the gratifications they respond best to in order to create affective action among this demographic.

Social media can be the driver of offline activism if so many offline behaviors that create ‘real’ change did not have to occur in a face-to-face environment. For example, in 2012, 7,000 websites including Wikipedia had a blackout, a website shutdown where no information on the site could be accessed, to protest the proposed Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and Protect IP Act (PIPA) in Congress (“Wikipedia Blackout: 11 Huge Sites Protest SOPA, PIPA on January 18,” 2012). Support for the bill eventually declined and it was not passed on through the judicial system. If activist campaigns can bring similar approaches to social media, Millennials may be more likely to engage in ‘protest’ and more civic activities.

As Millennials are narcissists and self-identifying as an activist predicted online and offline activism behaviors, it’s important that activist actions reinforce this belief for Millennials. For example when a donation is made online to a campaign, a simple ‘Thank you’ is common. However, Millennials require more to strengthen their self-perceptions as activists. Social media activist campaigns have to boost the egos of Millennials in order to get them rallied for action. Millennial engagement in social media activism is paramount for offline civic actions surrounding social-political issues so it’s important to garner their support and sustain it in the long term.
As public relations practitioners it is important that we recognize how to target the nation’s largest demographic and this study lays the foundation on how Millennials respond to online calls for actions. Organizations have the ability to now create social media campaigns that will enforce a response from stakeholders and public relations practitioners can incorporate the findings from this study to effectively utilize social media to appeal to this demographic.

**Limitations**

The current study had a few limitations as it relates to participants and explanation of research. A college student sample was used which is not representative of the millennial generation as a whole. Therefore, this data cannot be extrapolated to the general millennial population. As the majority of this sample was college undergraduates, they only represented the young millennial population as 70% of the participants were 18-21 years old. In general, young Millennials are becoming more self-aware and conscious of issues in the world, but they’re still learning and growing. At this age range, these young Millennials will be voting in the next general election for the first time in their lives and social-political issues are now beginning to impact them as they determine party affiliations and which candidates support the social-political issues that they believe are important. In the sample, the number of female participants was twice the size of male participants so the male gender was highly underrepresented in this study. Greater gender equality in the sample may have highlighted different online and offline activism behaviors.

**Future Research**

Gratifications that motivate Internet use can be further explored for this research. Within interpersonal utility/social interaction, there may be sub-factors that Millennials respond to greater than others. A better understanding of these key motives can allow PR practitioners to tailor social media campaigns to fulfill those motivations. While this study only looked at associations between uses and gratifications and online activism, future research can compare uses and gratifications with each of the four sub-components for online activism behaviors to determine whether any clear predictions exist between the variables.

Future research should consider whether online activism behaviors are influenced by which social media platforms Millennials utilize frequently. Does increased engagement on Facebook create more awareness and engagement in online activism behaviors? This can be taken a step further to analyze what social media platforms are conducive to activism. Facebook commonly adds a donation button to the home page of user’s profiles to allow them to support any disaster relief efforts and has seen great traction on this front. PR practitioners can utilize this platform and others for their efforts to garner millennial support around issues-related campaigns. Making activism involvement efforts more salient to individuals in a social media context may create greater mobilization and garner increased support. Additional studies on this topic has significant implications as PR practitioners engage the millennial audience and prompt action.
References


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Crisis History Tellers Matter: The Effects of Crisis History and Crisis Information Source on Publics’ Cognitive and Affective Responses to Organizational Crisis

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Abstract

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is a formative theory in crisis communications. SCCT, which has roots in Attribution Theory, posits that the public attributes more or less crisis responsibility depending on the nature of the crisis. Furthermore, the theory suggests that other factors such as performance history and crisis stability can intensify attribution of responsibility. (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Currently, there is a gap in crisis communication literature regarding the impact of performance history, which includes crisis history and relationship history. Crisis history refers to crises that organizations have experienced in the past. Relationship history is the track record that the organization has with its publics such as a history of poor rapport with its publics. There is also literature that suggests the source of information can impact how people accept the information and use it. A study by Hovland and Weiss (1951) showed that communication sources that were perceived as credible were more effective in changing respondents’ opinions. Additionally, Jin and Pang (2010) alluded to the fact that much of crisis communication scholarship has not widely explored how publics’ emotion experiences during crises impact how they process crisis information, behave and assess crisis communication effectiveness, which could be jointly affected by crisis history and crisis information source.

The present study used a 3 (crisis history: no mention vs. positive mention vs. negative mention) x 3 (information source: peer vs. media vs. organization) between-subjects experiment design to examine the effects of crisis history and information source on publics’ crisis emotions, their perception of crisis responsibility, personal control and organizational reputation. Participants in the study were 174 undergraduate students from a large Southeastern university, each randomly assigned to one of nine university crisis scenarios and then instructed to complete an online questionnaire. Key findings include: 1) Significant interaction effects of crisis history and information source on perceived personal control over the crisis, showing both a positive and negative mention of crisis history from the media led to the highest perceived personal control among participants; and 2) Significant interaction effects of crisis history and information source on anger toward the organization in crisis, showing negative crisis history mentioned by the media triggered the most angry feelings among participants toward the organization.

Our findings suggest that an organization’s crisis history (negative or positive) informed by the media can increase publics’ perceived personal control in a crisis situation. However, the negative crisis history told by the media can evoke more severe public anger in a crisis. Implications for crisis researchers and managers are discussed.
Introduction

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is a formative theory in crisis communications. SCCT, which has roots in Attribution Theory, posits that publics attribute more or less crisis responsibility depending on the nature of the crisis (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Furthermore, the theory suggests that other factors such as performance history and crisis stability can intensify attribution of responsibility (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). The SCCT prescribes crisis response strategies based on the crisis categorization and uses the additional factors to help strengthen the response strategy.

Currently, there is a gap in literature regarding the impact of performance history, which includes crisis history and relationship history. Crisis history refers to crises that organizations have experienced in the past, while relationship history is the track record that the organization has with its publics such as a history of poor rapport with its publics (Coombs, 2004). Coombs’ 2004 study demonstrated that a history of similar crises was an intensifier for reputational threat during a current crisis even when the organization was a victim or the crisis resulted from an accident. The study also showed that the reputational threat was primarily direct through perceived crisis responsibility.

The 21st century has ushered in a new media age where access to information is nearly limitless. The speed that information is relayed has also grown infinitely. Now the public has numerous ways to receive crisis information and can learn about the crisis from a variety of sources. Therefore, this study extends Coombs’ 2004 findings by incorporating the source of the crisis history information and crisis history valence to show how the public’s perceptions and emotions may change based on these components. These results can help crisis managers identify the best outlets to relay crisis responses and develop strategies to target key sources that might help or hinder attempts to maintain organizational reputation or manage the public’s emotions towards the organization experiencing a crisis.

The present study, using an online experiment, examined whether the presence and valence of crisis history might influence participants’ emotions towards the organization, perceptions of the organization’s responsibility, perceptions of the organization’s control and perceptions of the organization’s reputation. Additionally, the study examined whether participants’ perceptions of the organization as well as the appropriateness of certain reputation management strategies might differ based on the crisis information source, whether the crisis history was referred to by the organization, the media, or a peer. The findings provide insight for identifying the changes in publics’ emotions and perceptions as a function of the crisis information source and valence of crisis history reference.

Literature Review

Crisis History: How an Organization’s Past Influences Its Present

Crisis communication is an important part of communication scholarship and has been defined in a variety of ways. According to Seeger et al., an organizational crisis is an unexpected, non-routine organizationally based event that results in uncertainty, threat or perceived threat to an organization’s high priority goals (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003). The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) provides systematic recommendations to organizations that are experiencing crises based on the type of crisis that is occurring (Coombs, 2004). The theory also posits that organizations’ stability can be judged based on past crises and patterns in behavior (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Events that occur frequently and in patterns are considered as stable events. Instability refers to crises that happen infrequently and are considered to be
anomalies. SCCT suggests that the public is more forgiving of unstable crises because the organizations are not seen as "repeat offenders," while stable crises are judged more harshly because they expose underlying issues that cause problems to recur.

According to SCCT, the severity of the crisis and performance history of the organization in crisis intensifies crises and increases attribution of responsibility. Severity refers to the resulting damage of the crisis such as financial damage, environmental damage, and damage to human life. Performance history refers to organizations’ responses during past crises, past actions, and the relationships that the organization has had with stakeholders in the past. According to Coombs and Holladay (2002), “As severity increases or performance history worsens publics will attribute greater crisis responsibility to the organization” (p. 169). In Sheldon and Sallot’s (2009) experiment, the effects of performance history, in conjunction with crisis communication strategy, were studied in relation to a politician’s racial faux pas. Their findings showed that performance history did not always result in favorable evaluations regarding politicians experiencing faux pas.

As Coombs (2004) posited, “SCCT argues that information about past crises is a significant factor that can affect perceptions of a more recent crisis.” (pg. 266) However, few studies have examined the crisis history aspect of performance history in depth. Coombs (2004) conducted an experiment to test the SCCT proposition that having a history of similar crises increases the reputational threat posed by a current crisis resulting from victimization or an accident, not just by organizational misdeeds. In Coombs’ (2004) study, crisis history was manipulated and incorporated in crisis scenarios that were based on real events regarding five organizations, which were presented to college students and community participants. One of the criteria for the organizations to be chosen was based on their crises occurring more than five years prior to the experiment, which helped ensure that participants would not have positive or negative feelings associated with them. The key findings were that crisis history increased the reputational threat even when the organization experiencing the crisis was the victim or the crisis resulted from an accident in addition to intentional acts. The results also showed that reputational threat was primarily through perceived crisis responsibility. Lastly, organizational crisis responsibility was negatively correlated with perceived reputational impact.

**Effects of crisis history on perceived control.** Grounded in Attribution Theory, SCCT posits that people look for underlying explanations for occurring events so that they can maintain control of their lives (Coombs, 1995; Dean, 2004). The basis of SCCT is receivers and their perceptions of crisis and attribution of responsibility to organizations that are experiencing crises. Originally, SCCT outlined the following crisis categorizations: natural disaster, rumors, workplace violence, product tampering/malevolence, challenges, technical error accidents, technical error recalls, human error accidents, human error recalls, and organizational misdeeds.

In later studies, the scholars reduced the categories into three clusters: victim, accidental and preventable crises. The victim cluster refers to crises in which organizations and stakeholders are victims; that is, neither group is responsible in any way for the crisis. The accident cluster includes unintentional crises where the organization experienced mechanical failure, technical breakdown or produced a faulty product. The preventable cluster involves organizational misdeeds where organizations intentionally put stakeholders at risk through immoral or illegal activities. Crises that occur because of human error are also considered to be preventable because the prevailing assumption is that the crisis could have been prevented with more appropriate training. Each category is differentiated based on the amount of control that the
organization has over the crisis. Coombs and Holladay’s (1996) results suggested that attribution of responsibility increased progressively from victim, accidental, to preventable. The amount of control that the organization had over the crisis is directly related to the amount of responsibility that the public attributes to the organization.

According to Dean 2004, the discounting principle suggests that causal inferences will be discounted when plausible explanations exist. Coombs and Holladay (1996) suggested that, “The more publics attribute crisis responsibility to an organization, the stronger the likelihood is of publics developing and acting upon negative images of the organization” (p. 282). The crisis history reference, whether an organization experienced a similar crisis before and if so, how an organization handles it, can be used as important information for publics to assess how much control an organization seems to have. Therefore, the following research question is proposed:

*RQ1.1:* How, if any, does crisis history reference (positive, negative, or no reference) affect publics’ perception of the organization’s control over the crisis?

**Effects of crisis history on reputation and crisis responsibility.** Coombs and Holladay expand on the work of Rindova and Fombrun (1999) and Wartick (1992), by defining reputations as “the aggregate evaluation constituents make about how well an organization is meeting constituent expectations based on its past behaviors” (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, pp. 168-169). Maintaining a good corporate reputation is integral to the success of an organization (Gray & Balmer, 1998). Organizations must consider maintaining their reputation especially in the face of crises that could potentially cause irreparable damage. Research suggests that companies with existing good reputations have more at stake than those who have bad reputations. When negative publicity aligns with consumers’ pre-existing views of organizations, then the combination of the two determines the impact to brand and reputation (Pullig, Netemeyer, & Biswas, 2006). This notion also applies to organizations with good reputations that receive negative publicity. There are some instances where these ideas may not hold true such as crises within organizations with good reputations that become repeat offenders.

The history of how an organization communicated with its stakeholders in prior crisis situations as well as existing relationship quality can both indicate the valence or nature of an organization’s crisis history in its stakeholders’ eyes. Research has shown that establishing strong communication and positive relationships with stakeholders before crises erupt is crucial to surviving crises with organizational reputation intact (Ulmer, 2001). This is sometimes referred to as a halo effect. There are two dynamics to the halo effect: 1) halo acting as a shield during crisis 2) halo creating benefit of the doubt during crisis. Although the halo effect can help protect organizational reputation, a favorable prior reputation has little difference than a neutral prior reputation, but there was harm from an unfavorable prior reputation. Coombs and Holladay (2002) referred to this phenomenon as the velcro effect. Coombs and Holladay also confirmed that the halo effect operated in limited capacity, primarily in the shield dynamic (Coombs & Holladay, 2006). This unpredictability and varying results are characteristic of communications in general, and especially inherent in crisis communications.

The results of Coombs’ 2004 study showed that the SCCT claim of a relationship between crisis responsibility and organizational reputation held true in both the victim and accidental crisis clusters. There was a negative relationship between crisis responsibility and organizational reputation for all of the SCCT clusters. The study also found that crisis history
had an indirect and direct effect on organizational reputation. Thus crises that are considered a mild threat to reputation can become moderate threats, and crises originally considered to be moderate threats can become severe threats when the organizations involved have crisis history. Crisis history has been shown to intensify reputational threats. Crisis communication literature would benefit from further exploration into the impact that negative and positive crisis history references. With consideration of current literature and the aforementioned gaps, the following research questions are proposed:

**RQ1.2:** How, if any, does crisis history reference (positive, negative, or no reference) affect publics' perception of the reputation of the organization experiencing the crisis?

**RQ1.3:** How, if any, does crisis history reference (positive, negative, or no reference) affect publics’ perception of the organization’s crisis responsibility?

**Effects of crisis history on crisis emotions.** Crisis researchers have recently studied and identified publics’ emotions in crisis situations. Jin and colleagues posit that anger, fright, anxiety and sadness are dominant emotions that publics experience during crises while guilt and shame are secondary (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007). Choi and Lin (2009) conducted a content analysis of consumer response to a Mattel product recall that were posted in online bulletin boards. The results showed that crisis responsibility was a significant predictor of anger, fear, surprise, worry, contempt, and relief. The study also found a significant negative relationship between alert, anger and organizational reputation.

Kim and Cameron (2011) discovered that news frames could impact emotional responses to crises. Additionally, their study’s results showed that emotions induced by the news frames impacted the processing of information and evaluation of the company. Studies have also shown that publics are more likely to experience more anger when a crisis is controllable and predictable (Jin & Liu, 2010). Based on the emerging body of work studying crisis emotions, there is much room to investigate the nuances of crisis situations such as crisis history and relationship history in relation to emotion. Given that the presence of crisis history and an organization’s prior crisis handling experience might reduce perceived controllability, the following research question is proposed:

**RQ1.4:** How, if any, does crisis history reference (positive, negative, or no reference) affect publics’ crisis emotions?

**Effects of Crisis Information Source: The Role of Crisis History Tellers**

Oftentimes, publics learn of organizational crises via the media and other sources. Therefore, organizations experiencing crises must be concerned with media depictions. Much of crisis communications scholarship has focused on the impact of traditional media and offered insight for public relations practitioners to shape strategy and messaging based on them. Communication scholarship has also explored whether or not the message source impacts reputation and attitudinal change. Studies have shown that organizations experiencing crises may fare better when they are the first source of crisis information (Arpan & Pompper, 2003; Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005). Spence and colleagues’ study posited that organizations should inform stakeholders first instead of another source such as the media or citizen journalists (Spence, Lachlan, Omilton-Hodges, & Goddard, 2014). Audiences had the highest perception of organizational reputation when they received the information directly from the organization.
Additionally, the findings showed that audiences had a less positive opinion of the organization experiencing the crisis when they received the initial crisis information from the media source instead of the organization.

Considering the various effects that research has shown media to have on public perception, organizations must be aware and responsive to such reports because of the implications that they can have to the success or failure of the organization. According to Bond and Kirshenbaum (1998), the public generally assigns greater credibility to news reports and other publicity than with company-controlled communication. Company-controlled media (also referred to as paid media) include advertising, news releases, commercials, brochures, and internal communications. Uncontrolled media are generated by third parties and external organizations such as television, print, radio, or online publications (Owen, 1991). Consumers weigh negative reports from uncontrolled media more heavily than positive reports (Mizerski, 1982). Research shows that media outlets prefer to report negative information rather than positive (Dennis & Merrill, 1996). Therefore, organizations must consider the power of media and negative reports as they devise strategies to maintain their reputations amidst crises.

Message source is one independent variable that scholars have utilized to help explain how publics process and perceive information and assess organizational reputation. Additionally, research has shown that the publics’ emotions can impact their perceptions of crisis response strategies (Coombs & Holladay, 2005). The source of information is an important variable to examine because new media provides the environment for the public to learn about information from a variety of sources. Jin, Liu and their colleagues’ Social Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) model examines the interaction between organizations in crises and social media content generators who also consume information at all phases of the crises (Jin, 2010; Jin & Liu, 2010). The model also describes indirect and direct ways that social media relays information.

Audiences use social media during crises to check on family and friends as well as for insider information, while they use traditional media for educational purposes (Austin, Fisher Liu, & Jin, 2012). Additionally, the study showed that third-party influencers are important for crisis communication and both social and traditional media can be useful for crisis response. Another study suggests that the medium matters more than the messages (Schultz, Utz, & Göritz, 2011). Both studies posited that the medium may have a greater role in crisis communication.

Grounded in crisis literature on crisis control, reputation, responsibility and crisis emotions, as discussed regarding the effects of crisis history, we propose the following set of research questions about the effects of crisis information source, via which different valence of crisis history is relayed:

**RQ2.1**: How, if any, does crisis information source (organization, media, or peer) affect publics’ perception of the organization’s control over the crisis?

**RQ2.2**: How, if any, does crisis information source (organization, media, or peer) affect publics’ perception of the reputation of the organization experiencing the crisis?

**RQ2.3**: How, if any, does crisis information source (organization, media, or peer) affect publics’ perception of the organization’s crisis responsibility?

**RQ2.4**: How, if any, does crisis information source (organization, media, or peer) affect publics’ crisis emotions?

Lastly, we propose the following set of interaction effects of crisis history and crisis
information source:

**RQ3.1:** How, if any, do crisis information source (organization, media, or peer) and crisis history reference (positive, negative, or no reference) jointly affect publics’ perception of the organization’s control over the crisis?

**RQ3.2:** How, if any, do crisis information source (organization, media, or peer) and crisis history reference (positive, negative, or no reference) jointly affect publics’ perception of the reputation of the organization experiencing the crisis?

**RQ3.3:** How, if any, do crisis information source (organization, media, or peer) and crisis history reference (positive, negative, or no reference) jointly affect publics’ perception of the organization’s crisis responsibility?

**RQ3.4:** How, if any, do crisis information source (organization, media, or peer) and crisis history reference (positive, negative, or no reference) jointly affect publics’ crisis emotions?

**Method**

The present study used a 3 (crisis history: no mention vs. positive mention vs. negative mention) x 3 (information source: peer vs. media vs. organization) between-subjects experiment design to examine the effects of crisis history and information source on publics’ crisis emotions, their perception of crisis responsibility, crisis control, and organizational reputation. Following the reading of the crisis scenario, participants completed dependent measures assessing crisis emotion, crisis responsibility, crisis control and organizational reputation.

The 174 participants for this study were undergraduate students from the Southeastern United States. The undergraduate students were enrolled in communication courses and recruited from a university research pool. Each participant received a 1-hour research credit towards a course research requirement for participating in the experiment.

**Stimulus Materials**

The stimulus materials consisted of nine versions of a crisis scenario involving the university where the study was conducted. The crisis scenario was developed based on the type of crisis that was of utmost concern for college students, which was determined via a poll of a large communications course. The organization was the university, which was held consistent across all scenarios. Each scenario used the same storyline, but altered the source of crisis history information as well as the actual mention of crisis history (see below).
Independent Variables

Crisis history. The positive crisis history condition included reference to a similar past crisis that the organization has experienced with a positive response or outcome. The negative crisis history condition included a reference to a similar past crisis that the organization has experienced with a negative response or outcome. The no-mention condition did not refer to any past crises.

Information source. The peer source condition identified a peer as the source of the crisis information. The news media source condition included a sportscaster as the source of the crisis information. The organizational source condition included a text message from the university as the source of the crisis information.

Dependent Measures

Crisis emotions. Four crisis emotions were measured according to Jin’s (2010) study, after each participant reading the assigned crisis scenario. The questionnaire asked participants to rate how likely what happened in the story made them feel. The selections were: 1) angry, irritated, annoyed; 2) sad, downhearted, unhappy; 3) scared, fearful, afraid; 4) nervous, anxious, worried. The scale items ranged from 1 (very unlikely) to 7 (very likely).

Crisis control. Coombs and Holladay’s (2002) personal control scale was used to measure the degree that participants believed that the university was in control of the crisis. The question asked participants to rate their level of agreement with statements such as: “The cause of the crisis was something {the university} could control”, “The cause of the crisis is something over which {the university} had no power”, “The cause of the crisis is something that was manageable by {the university}”, and “The cause of the crisis is something over which {the university} had power”. The scale items ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The personal control scale in the present study had a Cronbach’s alpha of .744.

Crisis responsibility. Crisis responsibility was measured using the scale from Coombs’
and Holladay’s (2002) study. The measure asked participants to rate their level of agreement with the following statements: “Circumstances, not {the university}, are responsible for the crisis”, “The blame for the crisis lies with {the university}”, “The blame for the crisis lies in the circumstances, not {the university}”. The scale items ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The crisis responsibility scale in the present study had a Cronbach’s alpha of .766.

Organizational reputation. Organizational reputation was measured using Turk et al.’s (2012) scale. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statements: “{The university} puts student care as the top priority”, “{The university} looks like a university with strong prospects for future growth”, “{The university} is well-managed”, “{The university} is socially responsible”, and “{The university} is financially sound”. The scale items ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Participants completed this measure before and after reading the crisis scenario. The organizational reputation scale in the present study had a Cronbach’s alpha of .821.

Coombs and Holladay’s (2002) organizational reputation measure was used also. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statements: “{The university} is concerned with the well-being of its publics (students, fans, and community)”, “{The university} is basically DISHONEST”, “I do NOT trust {The university} to tell the truth about the incident”, “Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what the {The university} says”, and “{The university} is NOT concerned with the well-being of its publics (students, fans, and community)”. The scale items ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The organizational reputation scale in the present study had a Cronbach’s alpha of .750.

Results
Main Effects of Crisis History Reference
RQ1.1, 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4 investigated the main effects of crisis history valence (i.e., no crisis history, positive crisis history, and negative crisis history) on participants’ perception of the organization’s control over the crisis, reputation, crisis responsibility, and their crisis emotions, respectively. Significant main effects of crisis history on participants’ perceived organizational control over the crisis were evident ($F[2,164] = 3.203, p < .05, \text{par.}\eta^2 = .038$): Participants were more likely to perceive the organization as having more control over the crisis if there was a positive crisis history mention ($M = 14.535, SE = .309$), negative crisis history mention ($M = 14.413, SE = .304$) versus no crisis history mention ($M = 13.523, SE = .310$).

Main Effects of Crisis Information Source
RQ2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4 investigated the main effects of crisis information source (i.e., no organization, media and peer) on participants’ perception of the organization’s control over the crisis, reputation, crisis responsibility, and their crisis emotions, respectively. First, significant effects of the source of crisis information on participants’ perceptions of the organization’s control over crisis were found ($F[2,164] = 3.420, p < .05, \text{par.}\eta^2 = .040$): Participants were more likely to perceive the organization as having more control over the crisis if the source was the media ($M = 14.731, SE = .312$) or organization ($M = 13.593, SE = .304$) versus peer ($M = 14.146, SE = .306$).

Second, significant effects of the source of crisis information on anger were found
(F[2,173] = 9.947, p < .001): When the media (M = 6.33, SE = .266) was the source of the information (F[2,165] = 3.255, p < .05, par.\(\eta^2 = .038\)) participants felt more anger than when the source was organization (M = 4.691, SE = .261) or peer (M = 5.327, SE = .263).

**Interaction Effects**

RQ3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4 examined any interaction effects of crisis history and crisis information source on dependent measures. First, significant interaction effects of crisis history and source were evident in participants’ perceptions of organizational control over crisis (F[8,164] = 2.014, p < .05, par.\(\eta^2 = .089\)): A negative mention of the university’s crisis history (M = 15.3, SE = .521) by the media led to the highest perceived organizational control among participants (see Figure 1).

Second, significant interaction effects of crisis history and source were evident in readers’ self-reported anger (F = 3.461, p < .01, par.\(\eta^2 = .144\)): Participants tended to feel the most anger if there was a negative crisis history reference from the media (M = 7.250, SE = .448) (see Figure 2).

**Discussion**

This study examined the effects of crisis history source and crisis history valence on crisis emotion, perceived organizational crisis control, crisis responsibility, and organizational reputation. The results of this study illuminate the publics’ perspectives when receiving crisis history information (or not) from different information sources.

**Crisis History Impacts**

The inclusion of crisis history information clearly impacts the public’s perceptions of the organization’s control over the crisis. This finding partially supports Coombs’ (2004) results suggesting that crisis history increased reputational threat in all crisis types. However, Coombs’ (2004) study suggested that the reputational threat was primarily through perceived crisis responsibility, while the results of the current study suggest that the significant difference was through organizational crisis control as perceived by publics.

**Crisis History Information Source**

The source of crisis history information was shown to significantly impact the perceived organizational control and participants’ anger. Participants perceived higher organizational control when the source was the media or the organization versus a peer. Additionally, participants felt more anger when the media was the source of the crisis history information versus the organization or a peer.

**Implications**

The crisis history valence and crisis history information source have been underutilized in crisis communication literature. The current study demonstrates the continued impact that crisis history valence has despite the ever-changing media landscape. With this consideration, the source has been shown to impact participants’ perceived organizational crisis control and anger. These findings provide useful information for crisis communications strategies.

Organizations in crisis that have experienced similar crises in the past must be prepared to employ crisis response strategies that relate to organizational control regardless of the crisis history valence. Counter-intuitively, organizations with a positive crisis history do not
necessarily benefit from a halo effect, but must also be prepared to respond to higher perceptions of organizational control in spite of handling similar past crises well.

Crisis communicators who are concerned with the public anger towards their organizations are posed with two options: 1) Focus heavily on the media strategy since they are most likely to illicit anger among the public. 2) Forgo traditional media relations and focus more on new media to reach other gatekeepers who can relay information.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

The current study focused on a university crisis and how college students, one of the primary university stakeholders, respond to different crisis information embedded with crisis history information (or not) via different information sources. Future studies should look into how the nature of crisis history and who tells an organization’s crisis history impact publics’ crisis perceptions and responses in other industries and sectors.

The current study focused on non-victim publics and used crisis scenarios as the stimuli. The results would be strengthened by examining the responses of real victims. Future research can keep track of real-time organizational crises with different types of crisis history (an organization’s crisis history as well as an industry or sector’s collective crisis history due to the nature of the industry and common issues) and gauge publics’ perceptions, emotions, and response tendencies to different crisis situations, using survey, interviews, or focus groups.

Content analyses on whether and how crisis history has been used in framing crisis stories will also provide insights on how crisis history and crisis history tellers are portrayed in crisis coverage, as well as on possible associations of crisis history references and publics’ crisis responses as evidenced in media content.

Last but not least, for future experimental design exploring crisis history and other key crisis variables, several crisis types can be used in the scenarios to see whether or not the type of crisis has an impact on participants’ anger and perception of control. It would also be beneficial to gauge participants’ information seeking intentions in response to the crisis history valence and crisis history source to further assist in crisis communications strategy development and refinement.
References


Figure 1. Interaction Effects of Crisis History and Source on Organizational Control

![Graph showing estimated marginal means of personal control with different sources and crisis histories.]

Figure 2. Interaction Effects of Crisis History and Source on Anger

![Graph showing estimated marginal means of anger with different sources and crisis histories. The scale is from 1 to 7, with 7 being the highest.]

On a scale of 1-7, with 7 being the highest, please respond to the following statement: How angry, irritated, or annoyed did you feel?
Emerging Standards for Measuring Internal Communications

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Abstract
An international task force of public relations practitioners and academics launched a research study to define standards for internal communication measurement. Initial findings will be discussed and participants will be invited to share input about the next steps, which include testing and defining concepts using a Delphi panel, then a broad survey of the IC professionals to identify protocol.
Internal communication practitioners are under increasing pressure to measure results of their efforts effectively. Current measurement tends to be output-focused, echoing a similar situation in external communications. External communications colleagues, however, have the Barcelona Principles and emerging standards as a guide for measuring traditional and now, social media (standards for which are in final draft form now.) Before the onset of this research project, no similar effort was under way for internal communications.

Ruck and Welch (2011) performed a meta-analysis of academic and professional studies and determined that assessments of internal communication are focused too much on process, volume, and channels and not enough on content, understanding, dialogue, or organizational engagement. Professional (Grossman, n.d.; Towers Watson, 2014) and academic studies (Dortok, 2006; Meng & Berger, 2012) have linked effective communication to financial outcomes. Towers Watson’s 2013-2014 Change and Communication ROI Study confirmed organizations that communicate and manage change effectively substantially outperform those that do not. However, Meng and Berger (2012) found that most organizations do not evaluate the business results of their communications and cited “having trouble determining a specific cause-and-effect relationship between communication initiatives and business results” among the top three reasons organizations did not measure results. O’Neil and Williams (2008) sought to expand and extrapolate output measures to deeper outcomes with variable conclusions.

This research involves an international task force, comprised of ten academics and practitioners, establishing measurement standards for internal communication. The process has included gathering academic and practitioner knowledge on the subject of IC measurement, compilation of the various metrics used in the practice, and a review of the models and structures of internal communication in diverse types of organizations. Initial findings show that organizations should measure which communications channels employees prefer and which they are most likely to use as a starting point. Engagement, a frequent topic in current research, needs to be measured in the context of behavior and attitudes—factors that impact actual performance. Further, communicators need to measure outcomes (business results) that result from differential performance. This study will explain the output, outcome & business result measures under review by the task force for each type of internal communication and the method of measurement recommended for each.

The goal of the project overall is to create definitive measurement standards that IC professionals can use to create more effective communication plans and measure the value effective communications bring to their organizations. These concepts will be tested and defined using a Delphi panel, then a broad survey of the IC professionals to identify standard measurement language and protocol. The study will inform both academics and practitioners how measurement can affect communication strategy development, adding depth and business value to communication planning and execution so that internal communications wins and keeps its seat at the management table.

For more information, please visit: http://bit.ly/ICMeasurementStds-IPRRC.
Using street protests and national commemorations for nation building purposes: The campaign for the independence of Catalonia (2012-2014)

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Abstract
This article analyses how mass demonstrations can be used for nation building purposes. In particular, it shows how, in this digital and discorporate era, the occupation of the streets by large numbers of people is still a powerful strategic communication tool with strong political implications. It reveals how traditional propaganda, mass media campaigns and grassroots lobbying organizations can work together with great effectiveness to effect political change. The Catalan case, which concerns the claim by the regional Catalan government of a referendum for independence, shows how the occupation of the streets by citizens can still be highly relevant for political change.
Introduction

There was a before and after in the recent history of Catalan nationalism. The success of a street demonstration on September 11, 2012 -- a day also known as the Diada, or Catalonia’s national day -- changed the perception that Madrid politicians and Spanish citizens in general had held, as illustrated in polls, of Catalan separatism (different from Catalanismo, or Catalan nationalism) as a relatively minority phenomenon.

The 2012 demonstration was the lead story on newscasts across Spain and monopolized newspaper cover pages. *El País*, regarded by many as the most influential and prestigious newspaper in the country, described what took place in Barcelona as “an exhibition of independence without precedents, peaceful and without a single incident... a secessionist explosion, in which people of all ages and social extraction participated, [that] went across the center of Barcelona claiming independence” (Piñol, 2012). Influential foreign media, such as *BBC News* and *The New York Times*, also covered the street demonstration, describing it respectively as a “huge turnout for Catalan independence rally” (BBC, 2012) and “huge separatist rally” (Minder, 2012, Para. 1).

There was the usual disagreement regarding the number of protesters: two million according to the organizers, a civic and pro-independence organization called ANC, or Assemblea Nacional de Catalunya; one and a half million according to the local police; and 600,000 according to *El País* newspaper. Despite this, there was widespread agreement about the fact that Artur Mas, the Catalan regional President, had accumulated an important “political capital” (Piñols, 2012) to negotiate with Mariano Rajoy, President of Spain’s government, ten days later regarding the request of a fiscal pact that would reduce the contribution of the Catalan region to the rest of the country.

The capacity of mobilization has always been a huge achievement of Catalan nationalism that has maintained its status of “determinant minority” (Castro, 2014) over the last 40 years. This mobilization has been seen in elections as well as in the streets.

For example, in the last 2012 regional elections, the region’s three pro-independence parties (CiU, ERC and CUP) reached an absolute majority in the Catalan congress, with 1.781 million votes or approximately 33 percent of the total Catalan census (there was a 34 percent abstention rate). A similar number of pro-independence citizens, 1.861 million voted for independence in the ‘participation process,’ as the Government of Catalonia rebranded it after the prohibition of the Constitutional Court. The rate of abstention in this poll was approximately 63 percent.

On June 27, 2012, 34 percent of Catalans supported the creation of an independent state from Spain (CEO, 2012a). On November 8, 2012, 44.3 percent supported an independent Catalonia (CEO, 2012b). Although the results of the Centre D’Estudis D’Opinió, a sociological research center funded by the regional Catalan government, are often accused of over-representing Catalan nationalist voter responses in its polls (Roger, 2013), there is evidence that Catalan separatism has strengthened in recent times after massive Diada demonstrations and other public events. For example, a Cadena Ser survey conducted by the largest radio station in Spain, concluded that 52 percent of Catalans would vote for independence in a hypothetical referendum (Roger, 2013).

At the same time, Artur Mas, President of the Catalan government and leader of the independence movement, recognized in a recent interview with Christiane Amanpour of CNN that less than half of Catalan population wanted to separate from Spain (2014).

While there are different decisive factors that explain the strength of Catalan separatism,
such as the economic crisis (Catalan unemployment is around 20 percent), the author of this paper argues that massive and organized street protests, particularly the 2012, 2013 and 2014 Diada demonstrations, were successfully used as a strategic communication tool to set the independence of Catalonia into the political agenda of Catalan citizens and politicians as well as the rest of the world, and have forced the Spanish government to adopt a defensive position on this topic.

**Theoretical framework**

The concept of strategic communication has been defined as “the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission” (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, Van Ruler, Verčič, & Sriramesh, 2007, p. 3).

However, not much has changed since 2007 in terms of the definition of strategic communication (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014). Despite that, in their latest definition of strategic communication, Holtzhausen and Zerfass acknowledged that “strategic communication is the practice of deliberate and purposive communication that a communication agent enacts in the public sphere on behalf of a communicative entity to reach set goals” (2013, p. 74).

This new definition, although not radically different, takes into consideration the impact that communication strategies of any communicative entity, covering the full spectrum of economic and social sectors (Holtzhausen, 2008), have in the public sphere. This is a Habermasian concept of that intermediate space where “the sphere of private people come together as a public” (Habermas, 1991 [1962], p. 28), a sort of middle space between the private domain and the sphere of public authority where public opinion is created.

Taylor and Kent (2006) have emphasized the importance of strategic communication efforts to enhance national identity and nurture nation building. If there is something characteristic of “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983) or “stateless nations” (Conversi, 1997; Keating, 1997) trying to become political entities, it is the deliberate and organized effort of their organizations to occupy the public sphere. In the Catalan case, political organizations like the Catalan government itself; sport organizations such as the Barcelona Football Club; cultural organizations like Omnium Cultural; media conglomerates such as la Corporació Catalana de Mitjans Audiovisuals (CCMA); and civic organizations such as Assemblea Nacional Catalana (ANC) all act as a coordinated and synergic source of events, symbols and narratives that support the existence of a Catalan nation (García, 2010; 2013).

These organizations use soft power methods to attract Catalan citizens to the cause of nation building. They organize attractive, festive, emotional events that bring people together, appealing to their “share[d] values about the justness of contributing to those shared values and purposes” (Nye, 2004, p. 7), such as independence or the desire for a referendum. Nobody commands or forces a Barcelona citizen to join other hundreds of thousands of people in the Diada demonstration or to help form a mosaic of the Catalan flag in the Camp Nou soccer stadium before a match, but these are collective events that inspire dreams and a common aspiration.

A number of these events that enable experiencing national sentiment, such as demonstrations, street protests or pro-independence rallies, are rituals and performances (Woods & Tsang, 2014). Both concepts are a central aspect of communication and can be seen as tools used to facilitate the communication of meaning and social relations (Douglas, 2002). But, more importantly, rituals and performances play a central role in the forging and re-forging of national communities (Smith, 2014). Their main difference is “whereas ritual referred to symbolic action,
performance referred to theatre” (Woods & Tsang, 2014, p. 5).

Smith observes (2014) that these rituals and performances are celebratory or commemorative. The first type includes, for example, celebrations by members of the foundation of the nation, important wars and/or the giving of its constitution. Typically flags will be flown, anthems sung, parades and processions held, with schools closed and holidays given for all citizens. This is the case of the Diada, for example.

In the second type, which also includes flags, anthems and processions, members commemorate the sacrifice of those who fell in battles fought on behalf of the national community. An example of that would be the match between Barcelona Football Club and Real Madrid, where Barcelona supporters were scheduled to shout ‘independence’ 17 minutes and 14 seconds after the game was initiated (La Vanguardia, 2012). This symbolic gesture referred, according to one of the foundational myths of Catalan nationalism, to September 11, 1714, a day in which the troops of Philip V took Barcelona, abolished Catalan institutions and imposed the use of Castilian Spanish. Hobsbawn (1991) even argues that sporting events can be more effective than national commemorations to capture the (national) imagination and inspire the (national) passions of the masses.

Smith (2014) argues that most of these rituals tend to be state-sponsored or organized by civil organizations. They are initiated, for the most part, by groups with particular interest in the ideals that are enacted, whether these be politicians, ideologues or leaders of veteran associations. This factor has led a number of scholars to present an alternative ‘view from below’ linked to the study of ‘everyday nationhood’ which portrays a lack of popular participation or interest in national rituals (Elgenius, 2011; Fox, 2014). Nonetheless, this is not the case of national commemorative rites, such as the Diada, when they are conceived as remembrance days commemorating a large number of nationals that have been killed defending their countries (Smith, 2014).

According to Smith (2014), there are a number of reasons for the persistence and role of national rites of celebration and commemoration that make them ideal to bring publics together in nation-building processes. First, they can be iterated. The consistent repetition is part of their appeal thanks to a “fixed ritual activity that remains part of the national landscape of expectations and serves as a taken-for-granted anchor for sacred national values and traditions” (p. 33). Second, they provide some narrative drama, sometimes epic, for the citizens of the national community. Third, the rehearsal of rituals allows to see the nation through the use of iconic images.

The Diada meets all these standards. It is celebrated every September 11, it commemorates a defeat against the enemy, the Borbon troops, after 14 months of siege, and few can deny the powerful effect of hundreds of thousands of citizens building a giant V with the colors of the Catalan flag as a way to ask for a referendum of independence (Noguer & Ríos, 2014). Renan (1939) argues that in general, griefs are of more value than triumphs when we talk about nation building (p. 31).

After their investigation of the impact of the Tea Party movement protests in the United States on policymaking and citizen political behavior on Tax Day, April 15, 2009, Madestan, Shoag, Veuger and Yanagizawa (2013) demonstrated empirically -- through participation in Tea Party Online social networks, the number of protesters at subsequent protests, and survey measures of local political beliefs -- that protests can cause political change, and that they do so by influencing political views rather than solely through the revelation of existing political preferences. These authors estimated a 0.1 percentage-point increase in the share of the
population protesting that corresponds to a 1.9 percentage-point increase in the share of Republican votes.

Skocpol and Williamson (2012) argued the importance of media support (CNBC, Fox News, conservative bloggers and talk shows) to attract people to the protests as well as to energize the movement. Likewise, Eisensee and Stromberg (2007) acknowledge that news coverage of political rallies get the attention of the general population and policy-makers, who are known to respond strongly to news coverage. Skocpol and Williamson (2012) documented qualitatively how Tax Day 2009 protests led to more grassroots organizing, to larger subsequent protests and monetary contributions, and to stronger conservative beliefs.

The mobilizations in favor of an independence referendum campaign in Catalonia between 2012 and 2014 describe a similar scenario. They involved political rallies, human chains as well as sporting events that raised and consolidated the support from independence in a frame that oscillated between 10 and 18 percentage points between 2012 and 2015 (CEO, 2012a, 2012b; Cadena Ser, 2013; Ríos, 2013), increased the membership of its main civil organization, ANC, from 17,000 to 80,000 members from its foundation in March of 2012 to 2015 (Zarzalejos, 2015). Likewise, prominent members of the Madrid-based central government, such as the Minister of Foreign Affairs Jose Manuel García-Margallo, said of one of the Diada demonstrations that it had been “a success of convocation, organization, logistics and communication” and invited other members of the government “to listen to the street” (González, 2013). Similar statements have been frequent among leaders of different political parties.

This paper uses the Catalan independence campaign that took place between 2012 and 2014 as a case study to prove the importance of street protests, rallies and mass events as strategic communication tools in nation building processes.

Method

The author uses a historical-critical method to investigate the connection between the celebration of national commemorations, mainly the celebration of three “Diadas” as well as other events, and the attitudes of the Catalan population towards independence, as well as the growth of grassroots organizing, larger subsequent protests and monetary contributions of independence supporters. These data has been collected using press sources (mainly the two main Spain’s newspaper, El País and El Mundo as well as the main Catalan newspapers, La Vanguardia and El Periódico) because, due to the relatively newness of the events, the information has not been included or analyzed in other historical sources.

The author has made use of the two main sociological statistical surveys implemented in Catalonia – that of the CIS (Center for Sociological Research), Spain’s government-backed national public opinion institute, and the Centre d’Estudis D’Opinió (Center of Opinion Studies), an opinion institute led by the Catalan regional government.

Data analysis, however, has its limitations. It does not establish an empirical correlation between rallies and street protests and the changing of perceptions, but it does signal trends. There are other environmental factors that can be considered relevant, mainly political and economic. First, the limitations placed on the third statute of autonomy by the Spanish Constitutional Court in 2010. Second, the fact that the unemployment rate in Catalonia was 23.8 percent in the fourth quarter of 2012 (Idescat, 2012) when massive rallies started. However, these data do not explain per se the increase of 10 percent of independence supporters in a single month. If anything, they explain the success of the Diada demonstrations that capitalized quickly on the dissatisfaction of
the population in favor of independence support.

Analysis of results

This article analyzes the organization and repercussions of the three Diada commemorations celebrated in 2012, 2013 and 2014 as well as the ‘participation process’ on November 9, 2014. It describes the organization as well as the impact these celebrations had on political attitudes of voters, politicians as well as grassroots organizing and even fundraising for the independence movement. It delves into the role of each of the organizations (mainly the Catalan regional government, Assemblea Nacional Catalana, Omnium Cultural and Barcelona Football Club) that participated actively in these events and organized other events that amplified their impact.

Diada 2012

This event was the most important commemoration of the three, because it created a snowball effect that was reflected in the political attitudes of citizens as well as political leaders. This attitudinal change had to do with the perceived amount of protesters, which seems to be more important than the actual numbers especially considering there is still not a method to empirically measure the number of demonstrators.

For example, in this case there was a war of numbers. The organizers argued 2 million protesters, the local police calculated 1.5 million and newspapers such as Barcelona’s La Vanguardia, a supporter of the referendum campaign, or Madrid’s based El País, estimated 600,000 people (Badiella, 2012; García de Blas, 2012). To be sure, only the two newspapers explained their methodology based on a measurement of the surface taken by the protesters and assuming that 0.5 protesters fit per square meter when the demonstration is in full swing (Badiella, 2012).

The 2012 commemoration of the national day of Catalonia started like every year. The President of the Catalan regional government, Artur Mas, offered a wreath at the monument of Rafael Casanova, icon of Catalanism, in presence of other Catalan political leaders with the music of the Catalan anthem “Els segadors” in the background. Political parties, associations and sports organizations such as Barcelona Football Club brought flowers to the monument (El Periódico, 2012).

The demonstration was scheduled for 6 p.m. The motto of this demonstration was “Catalunya, nou estat d’Europa” (“Catalonia, a new European state”). The demonstration was organized by Assemblea Nacional Catalana (ANC), a pro independence citizens organization, with the indirect endorsement of the Catalan government. At least 5 prominent members of the Catalan government and the Vice President of the regional parliament, among others, were in visible positions at the demonstration (Pi, 2012). By comparison with the Tax Day demonstrations that had a capillary character and took place in hundreds of American communities (Skocpol & Williamson, 2012), diluting its impact, the Diada demonstration only took place in Barcelona to amplify its public opinion impact. In terms of street protests, size matters because it allows the visualization of the nation (Smith, 2014). For that purpose, organizers preferred to focus on one place, specifically the global icon that is the city of Barcelona, rather than a number of small communities. More than a thousand buses came from all over Catalonia that day transporting participants to the demonstration (Pi, 2012).

This Diada rally was not limited to the usual shouts and songs in favor of Catalan independence. There were public speeches targeting the international community, arguing
Catalonia should become a new state by providing examples of independence declarations in other countries (Pi, 2012). There were also Catalan celebrities such as the worldwide famous former coach of Barcelona Football Club, Josep Guardiola, who sent a video supporting the Catalan independence, “from New York, here you have another vote” (Ara.cat, 2012).

The role of Catalan media can at least partially explain the success of the Diada in 2012. Prior to the event, the main Catalan newspapers, such as La Vanguardia and Ara, offered a positive perspective of an eventual independence of Catalonia, such as a better economic quality of life for Catalans. They also echoed international media in search of testimonies to prove independence would be possible (Alonso, 2014). It must be emphasized that unlike other newspaper industries, Catalan newspapers receive public funds via direct subsidies, for example in 2012 the main Catalan newspapers receive 10 million euros from the Catalan government (Tercero, 2011; 2012).

The main public TV stations, TV3 and TVE Catalonia, also gave ample coverage in their newscasts during the second semester of 2012 to the Diada celebration, more than 4 hours, and to discussion about the relationships between Catalonia and the rest of Spain, with 15 hours of their programming, clearly more than one hour and 47 minutes dedicated to the economic crisis (Consell de l’Audiovisual de Catalunya, 2014, p. 191). Both public channels allocated about 52 percent of their time to members of the Catalan government, all of them pro-referendum and pro-independence, and 47 percent to the rest of the political parties (p. 193). Even representatives of the Audiovisual Council of Catalonia, housed in the Catalan government, admitted that critical opinions with the street protests had a minor role in the Catalan public media (Consell de l’Audiovisual de Catalunya, 2012).

The impact of the Diada 2012 demonstration on the attitude of Catalan voters was substantial. The support for independence moved from 34 percent in June 2012 (CEO, 2012a) to 44.3 percent in October 2012 (CEO, 2012b).

The attitude of Spanish politicians also changed. Catalan President Artur Mas accentuated his pro-independence message, arguing that the Diada outcry would push the Catalan government to use its energy to provide “state structures” for Catalonia. “Everything is possible if there is a will, great majorities and capacity to resist,” (Rico, 2012) he said in a press conference after the street protests. On September 25, 2 weeks after the demonstration, Artur Mas convened elections, trying to capitalize on the support for independence. Although, the national government responded defensively that “in a country with 5 million unemployed, the government has a clear priority” (El Mundo, 2012), the political environment certainly had changed when even the main national Socialist Party representative, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, urged the Spanish president “to grab the bull by the horns” and “to face the problems that are deep and complex” and reflect that the “political, economic and affective” (La Vanguardia, 2012) relationships between Catalonia and the rest of Spain were very deteriorated.

ANC went from zero members to reach the number of 17,000 members in June 2013, 10,000 sympathizers and 1,500 collaborators (ECD, 2014). In a press release, ANC claimed an exponential growth of members due to the success of the Diada demonstration. These numbers are spectacular in a country like Spain where the number of citizens who belong to associations is inferior to 30 percent (Fundación BBVA, 2010).

**Diada 2013**

The Diada 2013 street protest was again organized by ANC with the support of the Catalan government. It was comprised of a 250-mile human chain that went from the French border to
the border between Catalonia and the Valencia region. It went through Barcelona, where it was centralized, with a slogan of "Catalan route for independence" ("Via Catalana per la independencia"). According to ANC, 400,000 people participated in the human chain, whose members joined their hands at the symbolic time of 17:14 (5:14 p.m.). Regarding the Diada demonstration in Barcelona, the numbers oscillated between 1.6 million, according to the Catalan government, to 500,000 people according to the Barcelona local police (Noguer, 2013).

A reporter from the Barcelona newspaper La Vanguardia enthusiastically described an event portrayed by the aerial images from TV3 (the main regional public TV channel) as “a yellow chain in the most neuralgic points of the territory… such as La Sagrada Familia, Barcelona beach, Camp Nou, Girona’s Cathedral, Dalí’s Museum in Figueres,” and mentioning how even in the province of Lleida, the only Catalan province without the human chain, “the bells of the Cathedral were singing and marked the beginning of the Via as a compensation for not being part of it” (Pi, 2013).

The Diada 2013 staging also included a number of symbolic gestures and performances in Barcelona, in the central Plaza Catalunya. After joining their hands in Plaza Catalunya, they heard the famous words that violoncellist Pau Casals pronounced in the United Nations headquarters in 1971 proclaiming that Catalonia was the major nation of the world” (Pi, 2013). After that there was a performance by the Catalan Choral Society of the 9th Symphony of Beethoven, the anthem of the European Union, and a symbolic flag-raising chant El cant de la senyera, followed by some statements by a philosopher, an actress and the leader of ANC that ended with all the crowd singing the Catalan anthem.

A major difference between the Diada in 2012 and that of 2013 was that in the second one the participants in the demonstration called for a referendum about independence that should take place within a year and with a “clear question” (Noguer, 2013). The organizers not only tried to put pressure on the Spanish government but also on the leader of the Catalan government who had suggested the possibility of postponing the referendum until 2016 after a meeting with Spain’s Prime Minister.

The political attitudes of Catalan voters changed before and after the 2013 protest. In the previous days, surveys acknowledged 52 percent of Catalans would vote in favor of independence in a hypothetical referendum (Cadena Ser, 2013). After the Diada 2013, 48.5 percent of Catalans responded Catalonia should be an independent state and another 54.7 percent said they would vote in favor of independence if there were a referendum (CEO, 2013).

After the 2013 Diada and Via Catalana, Artur Mas demanded from Mariano Rajoy’s Spanish government “to listen to the voices from Catalonia and respect its right to become a nation state” (El Mundo, 2013). Carme Forcadell, President of ANC, urged the governments of Spain and Catalonia to “organize a referendum in 2014, with a single and unique question” (2013). Jose Manuel García-Margallo, Spain’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, admitted the Diada and Via Catalana street protests had been “a success of convocation, organization, logistics and communication” (González, 2013).

ANC increased its membership substantially after the 2013 Diada demonstration. It raised its membership from 17,000 members in July 2013 to 37,000 members at the beginning of April 2014, or 20,000 members in 9 months who together provided 2 million euros (ECD, 2014). Including other volunteers and/or collaborators, which participate in the organization of events but do not pay the monthly dues, the number of supporters of ANC reached 55,000 people.

Diada 2014
The main political message of the participants in the 2014 Diada, beyond the traditional vindication of Catalan identity, was to support the November 9 ‘participation process’ organized by the Catalan government. The slogan was *On November 9, we will vote and we will win*. The main organizers of this demonstration were ANC and Omnium Cultural, an organization that supports Catalan language and culture.

The Diada 2014 required again a high organizational level as well as the active collaboration of dozens of thousands of people wearing yellow and red t-shirts on two main Barcelona streets to create a giant V at 17:14. The V covered 11 kilometers with an estimate of 1.8 million demonstrators, according to the local Barcelona police and around 500,000 according to the delegation of the central government (Noguer & Ríos, 2014), a number much more in alignment with the estimates of newspapers such as *El País* or *La Vanguardia*.

As in former Diadas, this demonstration was indirectly supported by the Catalan government. First, it was Artur Mas who had established a date for the celebration of the ‘participation process’ on November 9; second, the main pieces of the public Catalan media apparatus, Catalunya Ràdio and especially Televisió de Catalunya (TVC), programmed 15 special shows in one week as well as a 15-hour monographic program on September 11 covering the demonstration and including the use of a helicopter (Gubern, 2014). The independence theme permeated all the contents of TV3, including fiction and documentaries. For example two days before the Diada celebration, TV3 played “John Adams,” a serie about the American process of independence. A few days before, there was a documentary on the Scottish independence campaign and on the day prior to the demonstration, TV3 broadcast a documentary about the Catalan volunteers who fought with France in the First World War to gain the acknowledgement of their separatist vindications as well as another documentary that explained the origin of the Catalan anthem. During the Diada day, TV3 played in prime time “The case of Catalans” about the succession war between the Borbons and Austrias that gave an origin to the Diada commemoration (Gubern, 2014).

Indeed, the high level of support of the Catalan public media was denounced by the Catalan Union of Journalists because of the lack of impartiality that should be expected from a public media apparatus. The union was particularly concerned about the organizer role of the public media outlets providing information about “how to arrive to the demonstration” or “the parts that needed to be filled,” something that fit their criteria as a “clear call for participation” (Sindicat de Periodistes de Catalunya, 2014).

The President of the Catalan government, Artur Mas, capitalized again on the success of the demonstration, calling it “a demonstration of civic attitude, tolerance and good manners” that conveyed “a very powerful message from Catalonia to Europe and the rest of the world” (Ruiz Valdivia, 2014). Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría, Vice President of Spain’s national government, stated that just as “the government respects the right of demonstration, Artur Mas has to respect the Spanish Constitution” and not celebrate the ‘participation process’ on November 9 (El Periódico, 2014). Likewise, the former Socialist President of Spain’s government, Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, emphasized the need “to listen and open a process of intense dialogue and negotiation between the two governments” (El Huffington Post, 2014).

After the attendance success of the 2014 Diada, the political attitudes of Catalans did not change substantially. If anything, they consolidated the new cycle initiated in 2012. The Barometer of Political Opinion showed a slight decrease in support for independence, approximately 45.3 percent (CEO, 2014). This fact could have been caused by a number of modifications included in the new questionnaire such as the elimination and incorporation of
new questions as well as the change of scale and order in the new formulation, but the gap of three points can also be explained by the possibility of a real referendum for independence. In any case, the support for independence was still substantially higher than before September 2012 when mobilizations started.

ANC continued increasing its member base, although more moderately this time, reaching 40,000 paid members and 40,000 collaborators at the beginning of 2015 (ANC, 2015). The sale of merchandising (T-shirts, shoes, bras and Catalan flags, among other items [de la Fuente & Medina, 2014]) during the Diada 2014 reached 1.1 million euros, an amount superior to 657,000 Euros from members but inferior to 1.7 million raised from private donations (Fernández-Miranda, 2014).

‘Participation process’ 9N

The Diada 2014 demonstration had its continuation in the organization of a ‘symbolic’ and ‘illegal’ participation process two months later, on November 9, 2014. The consultation, in response to the Spanish Constitutional Court decision that proclaimed the referendum ‘unconstitutional’, asked the Catalans two questions. The first question was "Do you want Catalonia to be a state?" And those who answered affirmatively had to answer a second question, "Do you want this state to be independent?"

Some 37 percent of Catalans in the census voted in the ‘participation process’, with 80.76 percent of them, or 1,876,753 people, voting affirmatively on both questions. In other words, 30 percent of Catalans voted in favor of independence, a similar number of Catalans who voted for Catalan nationalist parties in the last 2012 elections (40 percent of Catalans tend to abstain in the regional elections) (Pérez & Ríos, 2014). Although these results can be considered moderately disappointing for pro-independence supporters, almost two million people is still a significant segment of the population and, from a strategic communication approach, allowed Artur Mas, in the words of El País’ political commentator Lluis Bassets, to show the whole world “photos of huge lines in front of the electoral colleges” which is “the picture he wanted… a very plastic expression of the desire of Catalans to vote and decide their future” (El País, 2014).

In sum, Catalan crowd protests in the successive celebrations of Diadas and the final ‘participation process” have not led to any political change about the status of Catalonia within Spain. After all, “policy changes require not only that a majority ‘like’ the new policy combination but specifically a majority likes it better than the status quo” (Bueno de Mesquita, 2014, p. 123). This is not the case in the Catalan campaign for independence. However, at least from a perceptual viewpoint, the crowd protests have perhaps initiated a process of political change within a determinant minority that considers Catalonia as their primary community of reference and have become highly mobilized. The reaction of the foreign press and Spanish political leaders, defensive in the case of Spain’s government, demonstrate that, if not independence, the Catalan government is gaining some political outcomes.

Discussion

Historically, there has not been a lack of criticism regarding the social role of crowd protests. A number of intellectuals have highlighted in the past their physicality and excess of emotion in detriment of rationality. Gustave Le Bon wrote about a contagious disease that provoked “the disappearance of brain activity and the predominance of medullar activity” ([1895] 2002, p. 1) of the individual. Gabriel Tarde described how, when in crowds, ideas quickly turn “into passion and belief, hate and fanaticism, in the fermentable mass where such
germ is brought” (1901, pp. 165-166). More recently, the historian Eric Hobsbawn (2002), who describes his experiences in demonstrations as if being “in a trance” and “mass ecstasy” (p. 74), used an ironic tone comparing street protests to sex with the only difference that the street protests “can be prolonged for hours” (p.73).

These former criticisms circumvent a key fact. These days even the most purposeful political protests, such as Diada, have a festive dimension. In fact, Diada celebrations are examples of soft power, peaceful and friendly days, conceived as family and inter-generational events where relatives and friends gather and there is “the presence of a great number of children as well as elderlies” (Baquero & Márquez, 2012). It should not be considered an accident that one of the most popular tweets of the day on September 11, 2014 was a picture of Gerard Piqué, an FCB Barcelona player, with his one-year-old son in the Diada commemoration (Sport, 2014).

Furthermore, crowds still carry much weight in the public sphere, as demonstrated in recent protests in Iceland, Tunisia, Egypt, Spain, the United States and a number of other countries (Castells, 2012). Local physical occupations and protest activities, in which core participants show unity for a cause, still attract significant media attention and generate adherents through the dissemination of images, videos, websites and other media artifacts despite differences in time, place or culture (Bennett, Segerberg & Walker, 2014).

Most recent articles focus on the role played by social media in the configuration of connective networks that transcend the role of traditional parties and organizations, which become marginalized and perceived as politically incompatible with the ethos of the crowd. Such is the case of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Egyptian protests in 2011 (Kirkpatrick, 2011) as well as the labor unions and left-wing parties in the 15-M or indignados in Spain 2011 protests (Anduiza, Cristancho & Sabucedo, 2013).

But not all crowds are comparable in terms of organization, relevance or reluctance to associate with more traditional entities (Borch, 2012). The Catalan case can indeed be considered a mixed model where an, at least in theory, independent grassroots organization such as ANC are somewhat supportive or at least work in agreement with a number of bureaucratic and traditional organizations such as the Catalan government itself, and the Catalan nationalist parties such as Convergencia I Unió (CiU) or Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC).

If it is true that ANC, and other civic organizations such as Omnium Cultural, organized the street protests in the Diadas and coordinated the participation of volunteers in the ‘participation process’, national commemorations have very different characteristics than the, even if not spontaneous, new peer-production large-scale networked protests. Protests in Egypt, Spain or even the Tea Party protests were relatively capillary and punctual events (without a unique leader and a certitude of continuity in future years) and did not have a particularly symbolic date or symbolic place to take place (for example the indignados and Tea Party demonstrations happened in a number of cities). Furthermore, their ultimate purposes to fight the status quo could be considered as vague to a certain extent. The Egyptian protesters demonstrated against the lack of freedom of opportunities in Egyptian society; the indignados protested against the privileges of the casta (Spanish bipartisan political establishment); and the Tea Party supporters demonstrated against a perceived intromission of the U.S. government in the lives of American citizens.

On the other side, national commemorations such as Diada are centralized events. Although there are other Catalan cities that celebrate the Diada, all eyes are on the Barcelona celebration, where buses from across Catalonia transport Catalan citizens in order to make the nation more visual. Diadas are always commemorated on September 11 and are ultimately
institutional events, serialized, carefully planned once a year, with a component of tradition, and usually include a heavy support by public media, as well as the logistical and financial support of governments whose leaders, at least in theory, incarnate a symbolic representation of the nation.

The last three Diada celebrations had a very specific purpose: to ask for a referendum that could be the gateway to independence for Catalonia, the creation of a nation state. They all had a leader, Artur Mas, who even if he did not attend the demonstration was the real interlocutor with the government of Spain. Indeed, the autonomy from the Catalan government of some of the cultural and civic organizations that worked with ANC in the organization of the three Diadas is questionable. A number of them have traditionally depended directly or indirectly on monetary support from the Catalan government (McRoberts, 2001). While the main promoter of these street protests was ANC, which does not receive any public subsidy, most civic organizations that work with ANC do receive public money. Such is the case of Omnium Cultural, also an organizer of the human chain and the Via Catalana (El País, 2013; El Periódico, 2014), which receives close to 1.5 million Euros per year from the Catalan government (La Vanguardia, 2012).

Nonetheless, the success of the last three Diadas demonstrate that national commemorations seem to be an effective strategic communication tool even in pluralistic societies such as the Catalan society, where traditionally only one third of the population supported independence. National commemorations are not only a good occasion to show people’s affection for their homeland, but also to agglutinate discontent with, for example, the economic crisis, and even to be part of a relevant and memorable event comparable to a Guinness’ Record, such as the human chain across Catalonia or a giant V of Victory in the middle of Barcelona.

National commemorations promote social integration (Smith, 2014). It should not be forgotten that Catalonia has traditionally been a place of immigration: more than 18 percent of current Catalans were born elsewhere in Spain (Idescat, 2007); in 1970, one million Andalusians emigrated to Catalonia (Marín, 2010). Catalan nationalism has always encouraged the population from other regions of Spain to identify with its culture and icons such as BFC (García, 2012).

The celebration of the Diada is part of that identification process. The existence of a determinant minority, more than 30 percent of the Catalan population, that is highly mobilized can, with “energy, enthusiasm” or “willingness to express and display their convictions” (Noelle-Neumann, 1993, p. 4), create a spiral of silence regarding certain themes such as the existence of a Catalan nation differentiated from Spain and the importance of a referendum where Catalans can express their will. Furthermore, this determinant minority mutually reinforces itself with an institutional apparatus to insure a sufficient level of consensus on which actions and decisions may be based. The inclusive ethos of the Diadas, conceived as soft power tactics, where everybody can participate in a friendly environment, dissipates any potential view to see these events as coercive phenomena for social control as Noelle-Neumann suggested in her book. Instead, a number of society members join these celebrations and become independence fans for reasons of identity or just because of opportunistic calculus (Pérez-Oliva, 2012).

In sum, as happened with the 2009 Tax Day Tea Party protests that helped advance the political and policy agenda of the movement (Madedstam, Shoag, Veuger & Yanagizawa-Drott, 2013), the conception of the Diada national commemorations as political protests has strengthened the political attitudes of Catalans in favor of independence, increasing from one third to 50 percent of the electorate. It has, as well, increased the number of participants in grassroots organizing, monetary contributions to ANC and stronger nationalist beliefs.
Conclusions

The Catalan case illustrates the power of national commemoration days and street protests to gather citizen support for independence and generate political attitudinal change. Unlike the new peer-produced large-scale networked protests, national commemoration days allow a harmonic division of roles between civil and political entities. While the government organizes the logistics of rituals and ceremonies and provides adequate resources for media coverage, civic organizations and citizens are the *vox populi* who protest in the streets.

Although there is still a lot of debate about the role of social media in the creation of these networked protests, the Catalan case shows that what is truly important and has a political impact is the visualization of the nation (Smith, 2014). There is evidence of the growing role of social platforms in the organization of the protests: the number of tweets with tags about the Diada more than doubled, for example, from 2012 to 2013 (García, 2013) and the geo-located tweets sent from Barcelona in the Diada 2014 allowed researchers to draw a protest that anticipated the V shape (Domínguez, 2014). But the behavior of participants, the public and politicians has still been impacted by the corporal aspect of this type of events and not by the numbers in the internet sphere.

This case also emphasizes the role of governments of regions with a high degree of autonomy, such as Catalonia with the Diada and the Basque Country with the Aberri Eguna (“the day of the Basque homeland”), to set up alternative rituals and commemorations of the nation-states. Even in pluralistic societies, these official holidays are perceived as their own by the non-nationalist segments of society and tend to obscure the national commemorations of the nation-state governments that usually do not include any political vindication (for example, Spain’s national day, Día de la Hispanidad, does not congregate more than 40,000 people in Barcelona [20 minutos, 2014]). In a region, like Catalonia, with a strong sense of identity and despite a high percentage of the population having been born in other parts of Spain, the association of the Día de la Hispanidad with the Franco dictatorship-inspired “Día de la Raza” (Day of the Race) does not help.

The Catalan experience also demonstrates that as nation building methods and in terms of perception, national commemorations are much more successful when the main actors come from the civil society, such as ANC, and there is less involvement of governments. When people are involved in festive and inclusive events, even if there is a political vindication, they tend to be perceived as expressions of soft power. Even if one of the consequences of the protest is a higher degree of financial autonomy or independence that would mean a lack of funds for the poorer Southern regions of the country, the Diada would be perceived by a large segment of the Catalan and international public opinion as a positive statement for the protection of Catalan identity. Indeed, even a number of immigrants from Andalusia and other Spanish regions in Catalonia supported the Diada vindications of a different fiscal treatment for Catalonia even if that decision could damage life conditions in their places of origin (Pérez-Oliva, 2012).

The use of street protests and national commemorations as strategic communication tools for nation building does have limitations. The relatively low level of participation and support of the ‘participation process’, about one third of Catalans, showed street protests and more radical political attitudes do not translate automatically into political change unless the latter is perceived as a real possibility. The sustainability of the attitudinal change is also under question considering that in February 2015, 42 percent of Catalans were pro-independence against 54 percent who thought Catalonia should be a part of Spain (CEO, 2015). The relative decline after the Diada 2014 of support for independence (from 55 percent in October 2013 to 39 percent in
2015) shows that the effect of crowd-based political protests also has its momentum, a duration for a limited amount of time.

Aware of that, the incumbent Catalan government has convened the next Catalan elections with a plebiscite character for independence on September 27 (La Vanguardia, 2015), which means the electoral campaign starts on September 11 or Diada day. This same day, ANC is planning another massive protest in one of the main arteries of Barcelona along its 5 miles of length to revamp the pro-independence attitudes (Roger, 2015). It will be a good test to prove the bandwagon effect of national commemorations to generate political change.

The question is how long this segment of the population can be mobilized and if their political attitudes will change. So far, the support for independence for Catalonia in a hypothetical referendum seems to have stabilized at 42 percent, or at least 8 points more than when Diada political protests started more than 3 years ago. There are examples indicating that street protests can change political attitudes over a long-term period. The support for the Tea Party still holds 24 percent in 2015 (Newport, 2014), 6 points below 2010 but 3 points more than 2011. The support for Scottish independence after the referendum was higher than when the referendum campaign started, reaching 52 percent of support according to a YouGov poll for The Times (Herald Scotland, 2015).

In conclusion, and despite exceptions, this confirms the continued importance of street protests in strategic communication for nation building purposes, and seems of relevance not only in the context of nation building but also of any political change.


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Social media theories for CSR communication: A tale of US companies

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Abstract

The purpose of our work is to analyze how the top companies in the United States utilize social media theories or features for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Specifically we are interested in how these top companies use social media features to inform, communicate, and engage stakeholders in CSR initiatives and messages. For example, dialogue and engagement, is one key feature for constructing CSR communication processes through social media, which helps to build and maintain stakeholder relations. Other fundamental theories of interest are transparency, authenticity, influence, and mobilization.

Previous research suggests that organizations are increasingly employing social media for CSR communication. However, questions arise regarding the efficacy of using social media platforms for CSR efforts due to the constant monitoring, critiquing, and skepticism of stakeholders regarding organizations’ CSR initiatives. Further, when not used correctly, social media may negatively influence corporate image, reputation, trust, and branding (Schlinke & Crain, 2013, as cited by, Stohl et al., 2015). Kent (2015) specifically states that issues arise when “social media are naively used as marketing and promotional tools” (p. 7), but when used properly it offers great advantages for relationship building, awareness, knowledge sharing, and the discussion of social responsibility topics (Capriotti, 2011).

This study seeks to identify how the top 25 Fortune companies by revenue in the U.S. use social media, specifically Twitter for CSR. A random sample of 2,000 tweets (from 2014 and 2015) that contained CSR related concepts (CSR, sustainability, citizenship, society, environment) were collected for a quantitative content analysis. Additionally, we are interested in how CSR core areas (environment, community, labor practices, etc) influence in the inclusion of social media theories and the development of message strategy (informational, response, and involvement strategy).

Results will help organizations and public relations practitioners to effectively design CSR messages that contain social media features for promoting proactive stakeholder engagement and participation in social platforms. There is a potential niche in social media channels for engaging audiences in the contribution and commitment of responsible practices. We propose that the use of social media theories for CSR communication can positively affect the creation of effective CSR messages and thus, enhance stakeholder relationships. This impact can benefit the long-run of CSR activities and company branding. Therefore, we will provide organizations, practitioners, and educators with new directions and practical insights on the importance of social media theories for CSR online communication.
Introduction

Social media is one of the greatest inventions of the XXI century which have transformed how we live; from changing the way we receive information to how we communicate and interact with others. Twitter, specifically, has become the scenario for breaking news at such high speed that when stories reach the mainstream media, they are already trending on Twitter (Oh, Hazel Kwon & Rao, 2010). Social media platforms are being employed by corporations to market their products and services, to inform and communicate about company products/services/issues, and also to engage stakeholders in conversations. Data from 2015 (Barnes, Lescault & Holmes, 2015) pointed out that 74% of Fortune companies have a presence on Facebook and 78% of them on Twitter. The favorite social platform in 2015 among Fortune companies was LinkedIn (93%) while the least favorite was Foursquare (8%).

There are considerable studies that have focused on the study of social media for public relations and marketing, however literature in CSR social media communication is scarce. These few studies have pointed out that companies are increasing social media usage for CSR communication (Capriotti, 2011; Etter, 2013) but further studies, especially empirical, are needed to support this hypothesis. Literature in CSR online communication have centered mostly in the analysis of corporate websites, especially in United States and Europe. Studies have come to the conclusion that companies are using a one-way communication approach in the communication of CSR practices through corporate websites (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007; Basil & Erlandson, 2008; Gomez & Chalmeta, 2011). However, is the same scenario of unidirectional messages presented on social media as well? Previous studies (especially in the US nonprofit sector) have found that organizations’ overall use of social media platforms are focused on one-way communication strategies (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, Lucas, 2009; Waters & Jamal; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Are therefore Fortune companies also following this pattern of CSR information on social media as well?

The purpose of our pilot study is to determine and analyze what theories or aspects of social media platforms are utilized by Fortune companies in order to inform, communicate, and mobilize stakeholders regarding CSR. Social media has innate features that promote interactivity between organizations and stakeholders such as dialogue and engagement, transparency, authenticity, influence (McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014) and mobilization (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). We therefore propose, that CSR core areas or topics, such as environment and society, influence in the usage of social media theories and the development of message strategies (informational, response, and involvement). Our theory also argues that messages that use higher levels of social media features could achieve greater resonance with stakeholders, in other words, social media theories could be an indication of audience engagement.

The following research questions will guide our study:

RQ1: How top Fortune companies are using social media for CSR communication?
RQ2: Are Fortune companies using social media for information, communication, and mobilization?
RQ3: What social media features or theories are being employed by Fortune companies for CSR communication?

In the next section, we developed the theoretical background of this study supported by recent research regarding CSR and social media and the explanation and discussion of social
The theoretical background

Social media theories for promoting stakeholder interactivity and engagement

Social media are formalized social networks based in communication (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Communication not only promotes information, but also interactivity, knowledge sharing, collaboration, user generated content, and participation (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media then, is dialogic and interactive, which are the main difference between traditional media (Schultz, Castelló, & Morsing, 2013).

Information is the basic function of any social media platform (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). It includes spreading information and it is primarily a one-way interaction. Communication encloses messages that foster relationships and build communities through the promotion of dialogues and interactions. Due to its inherent interactivity feature, social media is uncontrollable. The information flow through social media is multidirectional, interconnected, and sometimes difficult-to-predict (Friedman 2005 as cited by Lee et al, 2013).

Before explaining the different social media theories, it is important to notice that public reaction indicators on social media platforms are an important resource to promote message resonance with audiences. Indicators such as liking, sharing/retweeting, replying/commenting, and the use of supportive features like photos, videos, gifs, memes, hashtags, user mentions/tagging, and hyperlinks play a key role. For example, liking a post on Facebook or a tweet (heart) show general approval of a message and replying and commenting on messages demonstrate dialogic communication and engagement (Cha, Haddadi, Benevenuto, & Gummadi, 2010; Saxton & Waters, 2014). On the other hand, sharing and retweeting indicates that the recipient believes the message contains information that is valuable to the recipient’s network of followers. In fact, the number of retweets denote the ability of a user to generate valuable content that resonates with others, while the number of mentions (reply and mention) illustrate the potential to engage others in conversations (Cha et al., 2010).

Social media is used for many purposes. Each social media user has a particular motive to use a specific platform (no matter if it is a big company, a small company, public relations professional, a teacher or a teenager). In the interdependent and interconnected world of today, one of the most important social media uses is for promoting stakeholder dialogue and engagement (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to Heath et al (2006), we are living in an age of negotiation, rather than information, which is surrounded by dialogue and engagement.

Dialogue and engagement are one of the most important social media theories in the construction of an effective CSR communication process using social media channels. “Through dialogue, companies learn which issues are important, how to attach meanings to them, and how to integrate them successfully into corporate social responsibility strategy” (Golob & Podnar, 2011, p. 232). However, through engagement or specifically stakeholder engagement, a form of dialogue communication, stakeholders are co-constructing messages with the purpose of reaching a mutual understanding between organizations and stakeholders (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). Therefore, the ultimate goal of engagement is to build and maintain relationships (McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014).

Another social media theory explained by McCorkindale & DiStaso (2014) is transparency which includes openness and honesty, transparent reporting (disclosing the good and the bad) and providing information on time. Literally, transparency involves the process of
looking within (Coombs & Holladay, 2013). However, transparency is mostly seen as simple disclosure of information to passive receivers (Coombs & Holladay, 2013). Stakeholders must empower themselves to determine whether or not the information is relevant to them (Coombs & Holladay, 2013). Therefore, social media is an excellent platform for companies to disclose and engage in transparency with their publics (McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014) and at the same time, it is a powerful platform for stakeholders to pressure companies regarding transparency. Being transparent can inhibit stakeholder’s skepticism and the acceptance of CSR reporting (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Coombs & Holladay, 2013).

Authenticity is another social media theory that includes sincerity, originality, and reality (McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014). In the social media world, authenticity means to present messages with a sincere and human voice in contrast to faceless/institutional voice (McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014). According to Etter and Fieseler (2010), authenticity is seen as an important factor in CSR social media communication, where “lies or wrong communication are discovered very fast.” (p.178). Therefore, it is necessary that people in charge of social media accounts promote authenticity as a requirement for promoting dialogues and building relationships with stakeholders.

Influence, according to McCorkindale and DiStaso (2014), is another social media theory to take into consideration. Influencers are important actors in CSR communication, because they help to spread the message (both positively and negatively) and mobilize stakeholders. Mobilization encloses messages that encourage and engage users to do something in favor of someone (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Companies also mobilize and empower customers and fans to do something for them, for example, share information; attend an event, buy a product, donate, etc. This social media theory is very powerful because it can help the organization to fulfill its mission and strategic goals (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012).

The importance of CSR social media communication

Today, consumers have a new understanding of what they can do to make the world a better place (Patel, 2015). Most consumers present two roles, one as a consumer and one as employees or shareholders. As consumers, they will spend their earned money on companies that support their beliefs. As employees, they will like organizations that support their beliefs and promote their values. Corporate Social Responsibility or CSR, therefore, is more relevant than ever in today’s networked societies. CSR is in fact, a “communicate event”, communicatively constructed in dynamic interactions (Schultz, Castelló & Morsing, 2013). These authors define CSR as “communication and as a forum for debates over social norms and expectations attached to corporate responsibilities” (p.2) where different actors (corporations, government, media, consumers) dialogue and negotiate about CSR issues. CSR, then, makes and gives sense as actors produce, translate, and integrate CSR into their personal and specific realities (Schultz & Wehmeier 2010 as cited by Schultz, Castelló & Morsing, 2013).

On May 2015, Cone Communications released the results for their 2015 Cone Communications Global CSR Study. This study is a consumer survey of attitudes, perceptions and behaviors focused around CSR in nine countries: Canada, United States, Brazil, Great Britain, Germany, France, India, China and Japan. Key findings of this study showcase that consumers would like to believe that companies act responsibly, but 52% said that they need proof of CSR initiatives. Out of the 10,000 surveyed, 90% indicated that they would switch brands if they supported responsible causes, and 71% would agree to pay a higher price for products and services from socially responsible companies. The study also reveals that
consumers use varied methods to obtain CSR information. 43% prefer a brief written summary, 34% using interactive websites, 31% via videos and 25% via info graphics, among others. Another key discovery is that a well-run CSR program can lead to donations, volunteers, and many different ways to get involved. CSR when used effectively, can help a brand obtain better reputation and affinity (Patel, 2015). This growing consumer knowledge puts pressure on the companies to come up with better and more engaging CSR programs. Consumers will not hesitate to call out companies that do not go above and beyond on their CSR commitments, especially in the social media age we are living today.

According to Alton (2015), CSR and social media go hand in hand with each other, but not all companies have learned this. An effective use of social media can maximize CSR efforts. Something as simple as engaging with your customers can go a long way and show that the company not only listens and responds, but care about the same issues that their customers have. CSR efforts hence, are ways for companies to open up with their customers, and as social media keeps growing, more and more CSR programs will be shared on more social platforms. Pfau et al. (2008) as cited by Haigh and Brubaker (2013) found that disclosing CSR activities in traditional media strengthened individuals’ perceptions of an organization’s reputation, image, and credibility. Hence, CSR disclosing through social media can help to promote also engagement, credibility, authenticity, transparency, and mobilization, bolstering users’ perceptions of the organization that translates in improving corporate reputation, image, and competitive advantage.

With the continuing growth and usage of social media, companies will keep communicating CSR efforts on their social sites. Kent and Taylor (2015) believe that the full potential of social media has not yet been realized and CSR activities are being communicated unidirectional, as previous studies have addressed specially in CSR communication through corporate websites (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007; Gomez & Chalmeta, 2011). Kent and Taylor’s study presents several alternatives for communicating CSR efforts on social media which will help companies to build ethical relationships between them and consumers.

Empirical studies show that, even when engaging in dialogues, communication in social media is still conceived as another information channel for marketing purposes (Colleoni, 2013). In fact, according to Colleoni’s (2013) findings, the most relevant topics for the audiences are related to information seeking regarding specific topics related to CSR. This means that companies are not engaging and promoting conversations regarding CSR. However, Colleoni (2013) also found that taking an interactive and engaging approach is not enough to align stakeholders’ social expectations regarding CSR. This lack of alignment is due to the current state of corporations’ communications practices which includes traditional marketing and advertising strategies.

Gomez-Vasquez (2013) is one of the first studies to analyze the frequency, content, and feedback of CSR messages presented on social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter) by top Fortune companies. Only 25% of the companies engage in CSR information on Facebook and 20% on Twitter. The most recurrent CSR topics were the ones related to society, product responsibility, and environment. Feedback and the promotion of dialogues was nonexistent. Lee, Oh, and Kim (2013) is another of the first studies that discuss the importance of using social media for CSR. According to these authors “being socially responsible makes more practical sense for firms with the rise of social media” (p.791). Their findings indicate that messages from socially responsible companies are more likely to go viral, accelerating social transmission,
In other words, social media rewards socially responsible companies but it can also punish the irresponsible ones.

In fact, social media can make or break a company and its CSR initiatives. According to Dann (2015), CSR campaigns can change brand consumer perspectives. Social media is also compatible with gaming and even more ways are created to engage customers. But in social media there is no place to hide and consumers have learned to voice their opinion and create global debates. Social media therefore seem to have created a more interactive environment where anyone can debate, denigrate, deny, and dialogue about CSR core issues. With 1.23 billion users on Facebook, 296 million on LinkedIn, and 236 million on Twitter (Statista, 2015), social media are the perfect platform to reach and engage active citizens, professionals, and actors in CSR communication process that can include information, emotions, sentiments, insults, compliments or opinions in the form video, audio or text formats. Therefore, these social platforms promote a pluralization of voices through the discussion of an infinite array of CSR topics, issues, and more opinions and arguments are potentially heard (Castelló, Morsing & Schultz, 2013).

Imran, Jiménez-Zarco and Bicho (2015) conduct a study to examine the role of social media for designing effective CSR strategies for modern business. Among their findings, respondents think that social media is a very important and trustworthy tool to communicate CSR efforts and engage stakeholders. Respondents believe that communicating CSR efforts over social media, will positively influence the way consumers purchase products or services. The study concludes that corporations should pay more focus on social media as an effective tool of CSR communication. In the same line, Etter and Fieseler (2010) asseverate that CSR communication through social media can promote trust between stakeholders and organizations only if they follow certain rules. These rules include the dialogical functions and possibilities that offer social media platforms as valuable prepositions for building trust. Therefore, we propose that CSR communication must include the employment of social media theories (such as dialogue/engagement, authenticity, transparency, influence, and mobilization) in order to be effective in the communication and build stakeholder relationships in the long term. If relationships are built in high trust, people are willing to engage and be cooperative, engaging in social exchange (Etter & Fieseler, 2010).

We cannot deny that social media is an important communication tool, in fact, results from an Emarketer study (2010), as cited by Haigh and Brubaker (2013), indicate that one of the reasons a user follows an organization on social media is to find about its CSR efforts. However, there is a scarce of empirical research that analyzes how the employment of social media theories and different communication strategies will impact stakeholders (Haigh & Brubaker 2013). Our study will shed light in the use of social media theories for effective CSR online communication.

**Methodology**

For our sampling frame we look at the top 25 largest firms in the 2015 Fortune 500 index. All 25 companies maintained at least one Twitter account. We take into account Twitter official corporate profiles of these companies. In order to do the coding and the quantitative content analysis, a Python code was used to access the Twitter application programming interface (API) and download all tweets sent through these accounts over 2014 and 2015. Through the 25 active Twitter accounts, the organizations sent 65,770 tweets (around 3,000 tweets per each company) over the course of these years.
We conducted initial analysis in the full sample of tweets (65,770 tweets). However, for the quantitative content analysis, we required more in-depth analysis of the tweets and we selected a random sample of 2000 tweets (out of the 65,770 tweets) that contained hashtags or words regarding to CSR related concepts (CSR, sustainability, citizenship, society, environment, triple bottom line, create shared value, etc) for additional hand coding. The sample chosen passes statistical sampling standards set for content analysis (Krippendorf, 2004).

To address the question of how companies are using social media theories for CSR communication, we performed a quantitative content analysis of tweets. We developed a codebook that included specific variables for the analysis. First, the variable “topic of the tweet”, refers to the subject or matter of the message. Tweets were coded according to the seven core subjects of the ISO 26000 in Social Responsibility (Organization Governance, Human Rights, Labor practices, Environment, Fair Operating Practices, Consumers Issues, and Community Involvement and Development) and other topics such as the presence of annual reports, acknowledgements, accomplishments, partnerships, chats, and others (such as broader areas of CSR and sustainability).

Another variable taken into account, “purpose of the tweet”, refers to the main objective or strategy of the message. Three strategies were chosen for analysis: One-way communication (informational strategy): A message that has the only purpose of disseminating information regarding CSR. Two-way asymmetrical communication (response strategy): A message that encourages fans to give feedback or suggestions regarding CSR (the company has the only purpose of using this feedback for its improvement and it is more an informational approach). Messages in this category can include replies (@) and/or use questions. Two-way symmetrical communication (involvement strategy): A message that promotes a desire to build mutual relationships between companies and stakeholders. It can include messages that engage casual conversations, advices, and problem resolving. Messages in this category can include replies (@), use questions, and/or hashtags.

Variables regarding social media theories were included in the analysis and they refer to the different features that social media has for CSR communication. 1. Dialogue and engagement: It encourages fans/customers to participate in conversations and are engaged to do so. Messages that promote dialogue and engagement are design to create fruitful discussions that could lead to stakeholder relationship building in the long term. Messages can include tagging, replies, retweets, shares, hashtags, use of questions, etc. Example: Tell us how you fight hunger: #WeSparkChange. @justinflom shares how you can help spark change. http://bit.ly/1NRHGo4 (2) Transparency: It discloses useful information so fans/customers can make important decisions. It also includes messages that resolve stakeholder issues or problems. Example: #Chevron CEO Watson: The world is going to need lots of energy...to meet the needs that are out there. Watch: http://spr.ly/6013B6SmW (3) Authenticity: Refers to messages that poses a human and sincere tone (“human voice”). Example: @niaparker32If you find a current lower online price on an identical in-stock product, tell us & we'll match it at the register. – Berta (4) Influence: A message is influential if it is a retweet or a reply sent by the company from an influencer (e.g. media, NGOs, universities, consultants, bloggers, journalists, etc). Influence messages are also coded if they are:

- Positive: Messages are related to achievements, acknowledgements, relevant projects or initiatives, and overall they have a positive tone and the use of words denote positivism. Example: RT @PBT_Justine The @CarnegieSciCtr is getting a Fab Lab thanks to financial support from @Chevron: http://bizj.us/1i3o2y
• Negative: It includes messages that have a negative tone and the choice of words denote negativism. It can enclose messages regarding bad news and poor service. Example: The Amazon Post @AmazonPost  Learn The Facts behind the Fraudulent Lawsuit Against #Chevron in #Ecuador: http://theamazonpost.com/fact-sheets/facts-behind-the-environmental-claims-against-chevron-in-ecuador/ ...

• Neutral: It includes messages that are not neither positive nor negative. These messages present information regarding news or other neutral information. Example: ENGINEERINGcom @ENGINEERINGcom V ID: Is getting into the real world the right choice

Finally, mobilization refers to messages that empowers or encourages fans, customers or stakeholders to do something in favor of the company. If a message encouraged mobilization, it was coded in one of these subcategories:
• Share or retweet information: Example: RT @ICE_engineers: 60% of girls put off STEM by lack of female role models. #WomeninSTEM share your stories, show what’s possible! #NWED ht ...
• Learn about something (read information, watch a video or visit a website, blog): Example: Read our #2014CCR to learn more about our approach to sustainability, safety, the environment and worldwide giving http://exxonmobil.co/IFKDGC9 • Comment or participate: Example: @ENERGY recommends avoiding speeding & hard braking. It lowers gas mileage by ~5% while city driving, what are your thoughts on this? • Attend or participate in an event: Example: Join us for our next #chat regarding sustainable energy and consumption • Awareness/prevention: Example: Are you traveling this #MemorialDay? Don’t forget to check your tire pressure to increase your car’s fuel efficiency

In addition, messages were categorized for the inclusion of interactive resources such as photos, videos, hashtags, hyperlinks, retweets, and user replies/tagging.

Inter-coder reliability tests were conducted to check the validity of the manual coding schemes. Specifically, two of the co-authors independently coded 100 tweets, The inter-coder reliability tests conducted on each variable indicated scores ranging from 92 to 95% agreement, indicating a high level of inter-coder reliability. The remaining tweets were divided between two coders and coded independently.

**Results and discussions**

We collected 65,770 tweets sent from the top 25 Fortune companies of 2015 over the calendar years of 2014 and 2015 (resulting of approximately 3000 tweets per company). Initial analysis found a total of 45,030 messages with retweets, 33442 hyperlinks, 33062 hashtags, 822 videos, 201 photos, and 47655 mentions. Figure 1 shows a word cloud of the bio description of the 25 companies, indicating that they are focused on people, health, news, communities and innovation. The companies had an average of 256,534 followers and 26,404 statutes since the creation of each Twitter profile.
Figure 1. Bio description world cloud of the top 25 Fortune companies

For doing a deeper analysis we chose a sample of 2,000 tweets, however at the end we analyzed 1,991 because there were tweets that were spam or were repeated. Findings indicate that CSR-related messages included 608 retweets, where 1178 tweets were favorited, 1254 presented hyperlinks, 1434 hashtags, and 427 contained photos, and only 26 included links with videos as seen on Table 1.

Table 1. Use of interactive features by Top Fortune companies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total tweets: 1991</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>USE OF INTERACTIVE FEATURES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retweets</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorites</td>
<td>1178</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URLs</td>
<td>1254</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hashtags</td>
<td>1434</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results therefore indicate that Fortune companies are using social media interactive resources such as hashtags and hyperlinks to support CSR messages. As shown in Figure 2, hashtags were an indication of what kind of CSR core areas of topics companies were most concerned. Most of the hashtags were related to education (education, STEM, BeAnEngineer) while others also focused on sustainability and environment (EarthDay, energy).
Two of the hashtags most used was sustainability and CSR. This is consistent with our results of the tweet topic variable due to most of the tweets were about a CSR/sustainability broad topic as shown in figure 3. Community (44% of the messages) and environment (11%) are the most communicated CSR core areas. However, 26% of the messages did not include a particular core CSR area. Table 2 presents data results for each CSR core area analyzed, including examples.

Results are consistent with other studies which have found that most of the tweet topics discussed by companies are the ones related to community and environment. However, our study also includes another categorization (CSR or sustainability broad topic) which was the most found. This points out that CSR is disclosed as a broad or general initiative or message which means that companies are doing overall CSR initiatives and they are not focused on particular areas at least at the moment of communicating via social media.
Most of the CSR and Sustainability broad topic messages were about acknowledgments\(^1\) (8\%), accomplishments\(^2\) (4\%), and partnerships\(^3\) (4\%). However, 79\% of them were about others. This means that tweets were related to CSR but were too difficult to categorize, for example: @MissManUnited Given the right environment, an idea can transform into something beautiful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TWEET TOPICS</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>872</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>#Citi and @Liifund just funded 13 local leaders who are transforming their communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>#Boeing is reducing its environmental footprint as its business grows. Learn more in its new environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer issues</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>By 2022, #social technology will enable four out of every five customer transactions. More on the future of #socbiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor practices</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>RT @daviditulauskas: Next up @GreenBiz Forum: Jim DeLuca shares how @GM engages employees in sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational governance</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>Thanks to all panelists at our #Women'sday event for a lively discussion on using corporate skills for social change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>#eforeducation supports @EMpowerweb &amp; its mission to enrich lives of risk youth in Mexico and around the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair operating practices</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>How are you adapting your #supplychain in today's healthcare environment? Learn about our solutions at booth 4 &amp; 5 #LogimedUSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR broad topic</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>@PG_CSDW honored to present @AmeriCares w/ our 2014 Social Sustainability Partnership Award at @ClintonGlobal!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For answering our second research question, we coded tweets if they presented informational, response, or involvement strategies, in other words what was the purpose behind posting content on Twitter related to CSR. Seventy seven percent of the tweets presented informational strategies (one-way communication) while 14\% developed response strategies (two-way asymmetrical communication) and 10\% of them involvement strategies (two-way symmetrical communication) as shown in figure 4.

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1 RT @TheHOPEProgram: Learning about @DWCweb's inspirational work with LA's homeless women. Thanks @BofA_Community #FightingPoverty
2 Honored to be recognized for shaping sustainability with social media. @HPLivingProg http://t.co/BDxUIC68 http://t.co/aXS4rHZ51E
3 VIDEO: Our Social Finance group values #ImpInv & making a difference. See how we partnered w/ @LeapFrogInvest: http://t.co/BxSrLcsVJ
These results are consistent with previous studies in the analysis of CSR communication through corporate websites (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007; Gomez & Chalmeta, 2011). In addition, these findings are also consistent with Colleoni’s (2013) findings. According to Colleoni, audiences are most concerned about information seeking regarding CSR than engaging in dialogues with companies. Therefore, this can indicate why companies are not engaging and promoting conversations with stakeholders regarding CSR issues. Perhaps is because companies are still using social media as a unidirectional tool and they have not seen the enormous capabilities it has for building relationships as expressed by Kent and Taylor (2015). Results are also in line with Golob and Podnar (2014) which found that dialogue and engagement is are more tended to be asymmetrical, information giving, and gathering where a particular user is the stronger party.

In fact, this pattern of unidirectional communication, it is also reflected in the results of social media theories. Thirty-eight percent of the messages are enclosed as transparency. This means that companies are disclosing relevant and valuable information (that includes hyperlinks) so stakeholders can make great decisions and choices. However, disclosing only relevant information and not using other social media theories that promote two-way communication, is an indication that social media is still used by Fortune companies as a unidirectional channel for CSR communication. However, 23% of the messages did not include any theories at all as seen on Figure 5. Another social media theory used was mobilization (17% of the messages). Most of the tweets that encourage mobilization were for learning something (65%), for example, visit a page, read some information, it was primarily a sender oriented mobilization approach. Few of the messages promoted more involvement and interactivity such as attend/participate in an event (10%), and comment/participate in conversations (18%).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure5.png}
\caption{Use of social media theories by top Fortune companies}
\end{figure}

Ten percent of the messages were influential, which 84% of them were positive and 16% neutral, none of them were negative. Table 3 shows an example for each social media theory and complete results.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Tweet topic discussed by Top Fortune companies}
\end{table}
Our pilot study proposes that CSR core areas or topics, such as environment and society, can impact in the use of social media theories and the development of message strategies (informational, response, and involvement). In other words, we want to draw if there is a correlation or relation between CSR topic, social media theory, and message strategy. These results will help organizations and public relations professionals to design effectively CSR content (by topic) that includes social media theories and strategies that appeal to different groups of stakeholders. We also propose that content that use higher levels of social media features will achieve greater resonance with stakeholders, in other words, social media theories are an indication of audience engagement. Because this is an ongoing research project, we will disclose these results in future avenues.

These results are consistent with Etter (2013) which also found that corporations are hesitant to engage stakeholders regarding CSR on Twitter. However, Etter (2013) points out that the solution relies in the specialization, in other words, to create specific accounts regarding to CSR/Sustainability. These types of accounts have a significantly higher level of interactivity because it disseminates content to targeted members and companies show commitment in responding to their stakeholders (Etter, 2013). Specialization is the key in social media for engaging and promoting interaction with stakeholders. However, future work will shed light on how the higher use of social media theories (influence, dialogue/engagement, authenticity, transparency, and mobilization), no matter if it is a corporate official social media account or a specific CSR or Sustainability focused account, can influence stakeholders resonance to messages and thus, promoting effective relationships in the long run.

CSR should be viewed as a communicative process and event (Schultz, Castelló & Morsing, 2013) that is based in social media theories and features such as dialogue, engagement, transparency, influence, authenticity, and mobilization. Effective use of social media theories and features for CSR communication could positively influence and nurture stakeholder relationships based on trust and trustworthiness. In this sense, CSR online communication presents a key role in the evolution of what organizations do and what different groups of stakeholders construct about the meaning and practice of CSR (Ihlen, Bartlett & May, 2011).

**Conclusion**

Our study concludes that Fortune companies are using social media channels as another informational platform to disclose relevant and transparent content to stakeholders. Transparency is fundamental and necessary element for communication, and these results show that companies are conveying trust, respect, and fairness. However, they are not creating stakeholder involvement and engagement and using other social media theories such as dialogue,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIAL MEDIA THEORIES</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>757</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>#Citi Community Development supports @StreetWise_MBA @Columbia to empower Harlem entrepreneurs to scale businesses: <a href="http://t.co/1lbPRCOFj">http://t.co/1lbPRCOFj</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilization</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>RT @MLSWORKS: Make sure you stop by the 2014 @MLS All-Star Community Day pres. by @WellsFargo today from 10-4 at Montavilla Park!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>RT @kimmilyln: Great day at Safeco Park w/ our Seattle @BoFa_Community Student Leaders! @Mariners #workforcedevelopment #education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>@brandeestilwell We hope you were inspired, Brandee. Even the scariest ideas can transform in the right environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue/engagement</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>RT @CDC_Loans: We can't wait to help more #Smallbiz in CA! Thanks to @BoFa_Community for making this possible with a $15,000 grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>$JPM's Lake: &quot;Economic empowerment and access to education is very important for all.&quot; #HeForShe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
authenticity, and influence for CSR communication. Each social media theory is fundamental at the moment of crafting messages so it can promote audience resonance, engagement, and participation.

This study has highlighted the importance of using social media theories or features for CSR communication. Although results of this study are mostly descriptive, due to this is a research-in-progress study, more research is needed to validate some of the propositions presented in this study. Future avenues and work will fill this gap. Further studies can also include other social media platforms (such as Instagram and Facebook) for analyzing social media theories and their relation with CSR topic and strategy.

Content in social media should be design and communicate so it can promote “pass-along value”. CSR messages impact stakeholders in social media not because just random luck, they resonate with them because messages contain certain elements (i.e. social media theories and supportive features) to make content more likely to be seen, shared, and commented. Today, content posted by corporations on social media is lacking of key features and elements. Therefore, social media theories and supportive features (such as hashtags and videos) can encourage content to be positively contagious for transmission, opinion formation, and mobilization regarding CSR.
References


Dissecting the Root of Vaccine Misinformation on Pinterest: Examining Anti-Vaccine Organizations’ Conflict Strategies and Risk Communication

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Caroline Orr  
Virginia Commonwealth University

Sungsu Kim  
Michael Cacciatore  
Yan Jin  
University of Georgia

Marcus Messner  
Virginia Commonwealth University

Abstract

Vaccination is an effective public health tool for reducing morbidity and mortality caused by infectious diseases. However, increasing numbers of parents question the safety of vaccines or refuse to vaccinate their children outright. The Internet plays a significant role in the growing voice of the anti-vaccination movement as a growing number of people use the Internet to obtain health information, including information about vaccines. Given the role the Internet plays in communicating anti-vaccine sentiments, coupled with limited research in this area, this study focused on the social media platform Pinterest, analyzing 1,117 vaccine-related pins posted by five anti-vaccine organizations through a quantitative content analysis. Findings include that anti-vaccine organizations primarily posted about the flu, MMR, and HPV vaccines, and the anti-MMR vaccine posts elicited significantly more engagement. In addition, fear images are present in many pins, as are discussions about the adverse effects of vaccines. As far as agitation strategies are concerned, anti-vaccine organizations almost exclusively use solidification and polarization, creating a strong “us-and-them” atmosphere. Surprisingly, thematic framing is used more frequently than episodic framing. Health educators and public health organizations should be aware of these dynamics, since these findings can be used to craft more effective vaccine uptake campaigns.
Introduction/Background

Two hundred years after Edward Jenner developed the vaccine that eradicated smallpox, immunizations are widely considered to be one of the greatest achievements in the history of public health (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1999; Ehreth, 2003; van Panhuys et al., 2013). Despite the remarkable success of global vaccination programs, there has been a concerning increase in anti-vaccination sentiment and vaccine refusals over the past few decades, resulting in pockets of underimmunization where vaccine coverage was once high (Kata, 2012). The consequences of the rise in under-immunized and unimmunized individuals can be seen in the resurgence of vaccine-preventable diseases across the industrialized world, indicating that herd immunity has been compromised. Researchers estimate that the rise in measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine refusals contributed to 26,000 cases of measles in Europe in 2011 (Love, Himelboim, Holton, & Stewart, 2013), while declining vaccination coverage in certain areas of the United States is cited as the primary driver of the re-emergence of measles after its elimination from the country in 2000 (Kata, 2012).

The advent of the Internet and social media have allowed anti-vaccine beliefs to proliferate more rapidly and widely than ever before by giving anti-vaccination activists a platform to easily communicate and coordinate their messages (Gregory A Poland & Jacobson, 2001). The Internet has also provided anti-vaccination activists with unprecedented opportunities to disseminate their messages to a wide and receptive audience. Research indicates that the Internet is a common source of health-related information and guidance, and it often plays an important role in medical decision-making (Kata, 2012). An estimated 80% of Internet users report searching for health-related information online (Pew Research Center, 2011) and 16% report searching specifically for information about vaccination (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2000).

Reasons for objecting to vaccines include lack of confidence in their effectiveness and fears about whether or not they are safe (Kata, 2012). Other common reasons for vaccine hesitance and refusal include the beliefs that children receive too many vaccines at once (Paulussen, Hoekstra, Lanting, Buijs, & Hirasing, 2006), that natural immunity is superior to immunity conferred from vaccines, and that mandatory vaccination infringes on civil liberties and parental rights (Kata, 2010; Madden, Nan, Briones, & Waks, 2012). Many people also erroneously believe that vaccine-preventable diseases no longer present a serious health risk because they lack firsthand experience with diseases such as polio, whooping cough, and measles (Kitta, 2012, pp. 2-3; Sugerman et al., 2010). Though these beliefs are inconsistent with the scientific evidence, they are widespread on anti-vaccination websites.

Finally, Betsch et al. (2015) state that vaccine hesitancy can result from four reasons: complacency, convenience, lack confidence in vaccines, and calculation of pros and cons. Those with lack of confidence in vaccines are least likely to be convinced of vaccine safety, while those on the fence because of one of the other three reasons are more likely to be engaged and convinced.

This study analyzed vaccine-related pins posted by leading anti-vaccine organizations on the social media platform “Pinterest,” which allowed for an examination of active female social media users, including moms who are often responsible for family health care decisions. These vaccine opponents are particularly active and organized and have done an effective job leveraging social media to voice their concerns to large audiences (Fernández-Luque & Bau, 2015). The results of this study can inform the conflict resolution tactics of government agencies, such as the CDC, under the rationale that in order to deal with anti-vaccine advocacy groups it is
first necessary to understand how these groups are communicating and galvanizing support among lay audiences.

**Anti-Vaccination Movement on the Internet**

As more and more people turn to the Internet for health-related information and guidance, there is a need to understand what type of information is available online and how this may differ from information found elsewhere (Kata, 2012). Past studies indicate that anti-vaccination messages are more common on the Internet than in print or broadcast media (Kata, 2012). Internet searches for vaccine-related information are equally likely to lead to anti-vaccine websites as public health websites (C. Betsch, Brewer, et al., 2012; G. A. Poland, Jacobson, & Ovsyannikova, 2009), but anti-vaccination websites tend to be more common in the top Google search results (Davies, Chapman, & Leask, 2002), resulting in widespread exposure to anti-vaccination sentiment and a greater potential for individuals to be influenced by such messaging. Additionally, those who search for vaccine-related information online may be more susceptible to anti-vaccination information (C. Betsch, Reyna, et al., 2012; Schwartz, 2012) due to pre-existing experiences or beliefs. Viewing an anti-vaccine website for just 5-10 minutes has been shown to increase perceptions of vaccination risks and decrease perceptions of the risks of vaccine refusal, which resulted in decreased intentions to vaccinate (Cornelia Betsch, Frank Renkewitz, Tilmann Betsch, & Corina Ulshöfer, 2010). Ultimately, negative sentiments about vaccines resulting from exposure to anti-vaccination websites were found to influence parents’ decisions about vaccinating their children, translating to significant reductions in vaccination coverage (Cornelia Betsch et al., 2010).

To date, most of the research examining anti-vaccination messages on the Internet has focused on traditional websites. These studies have found that the websites of anti-vaccination organizations tend to share a number of common features, such as presenting themselves as legitimate authorities with scientific or medical credibility, presenting references to self-published works and non-scholarly articles to support the validity of their claims, giving disproportionate weight to the opinions of individual medical doctors who speak out against vaccines, and drawing inappropriate conclusions from studies published in legitimate medical journals (C. Betsch, Reyna, et al., 2012; Davies et al., 2002). Additionally, most anti-vaccination websites feature a variety of emotive appeals, including personal narratives and photographs of children said to be irreparably harmed or killed by vaccines (Davies et al., 2002). The use of conspiratorial and polarizing messages is also common, with many anti-vaccine organizations promoting beliefs that pit parents and anti-vaccine activists against a ubiquitous “them” representing the pharmaceutical industry, doctors and other providers, scientists, governments, and the media (Kata, 2012). Conspiratorial claims are also common, as are personal accounts of children said to be irreparably harmed or killed by vaccines (C. Betsch, F. Renkewitz, T. Betsch, & C. Ulshöfer, 2010).

**Vaccine-related information on social media**

There remains a paucity of research, however, on the portrayal of vaccines on various social media channels, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest. According to the latest estimates from the Pew Research Center, more than 60% of the entire adult population in the U.S. uses at least one of these social media platforms, and that number continues to grow (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015).
Based on the characteristics of Pinterest and its users, this platform may represent a particularly salient channel for vaccine-related information, including anti-vaccine messaging. Pinterest was designed to allow users to collect ideas, information, and inspiration for a variety of projects and interests. Users can file ideas, articles, photos, and quotes using visual bookmarks ("pins") to create virtual collections ("boards"), which can then be viewed and shared by other users. Research indicates that Pinterest users spend significantly more time per visit on Pinterest (14.2 minutes) than on most other social media platforms, increasing the potential for exposure to and engagement with a variety of content. Additionally, 80% of all Pinterest users are women, and moms are particularly active users of the platform, sharing three times more content than the average user (Smith, 2014). As of 2013, a third of online women in the US reported using Pinterest (Smith, 2014), representing a huge target audience for anti-vaccine organizations that use the platform to spread anti-vaccination messages.

Given that Pinterest is a visual platform, anti-vaccination organizations may have an opportunity to use more persuasive forms of communication to convey their messages. Across issues, visual communication tends to be more salient than text-based communication (Lipkus & Hollands, 1999). Visuals may be used for a variety of purposes, depending on their content. For example, graphs and charts with clear labels can be used to help readers understand complex topics, while visuals featuring symbolic images can be used to convey a narrative even without accompanying text (Lester, 2013). In this way, the use of symbolic images facilitates the communication of shared beliefs and opinions about vaccines without the need for explanation, justification, or medical knowledge (C. Betsch, Ulshofer, Renkewitz, & Betsch, 2011; Wolfe, Sharp, & Lipsky, 2002). Understanding how anti-vaccination organizations communicate information through visual channels could yield important insight to guide the development of counter-messages.

Another important feature of anti-vaccination communication is the specificity of the messaging. While anti-vaccination sentiment is often generalized (not limited to a specific vaccine), certain vaccines have been singled out and featured prominently in anti-vaccination campaigns. For example, the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine was thrust into the spotlight in the 1990’s with the publication of a now-retracted study that fraudulently linked the vaccine to a heightened risk of autism (Elliman & Bedford, 2001; Wakefield et al., 1998). To date, health agencies across the world have spent millions of dollars and countless hours studying the topic and disproving evidence of a vaccine-autism link, yet the fallout continues in the form of mistrust, unfounded fears, general anti-vaccination sentiment, and increasing numbers of MMR-vaccine refusals (Gardner, Davies, McAteer, & Michie, 2010; Petts & Niemeyer, 2004). Further research demonstrates that geographic trends in the uptake of certain vaccines and the burden of diseases can be traced to patterns of exposure to negative campaigns targeting specific vaccines (Gangarosa et al., 1998; Mason & Donnelly, 2000). Therefore, we propose:

**RQ1** How do anti-vaccine organizations communicate about vaccines on Pinterest - in general, by vaccine type, and by visual type?

**User-generated content about vaccinations**

One of the unique characteristics of the modern social media environment is the interactive element that allows users to connect with other individuals and groups who share a common perspective on a topic such as vaccination. The ability to access and share user-generated content is another way that social media promotes public engagement, including the
sharing of information, thoughts, beliefs, and opinions between and among users (Pi, Chou, & Liao, 2013). However, this environment has also allowed for the promulgation of misinformation about vaccinations without any opportunity for refutation or deliberation. To effectively counter these messages, the public health community must first understand how and why certain anti-vaccine communication elicits more responsiveness from the public.

While there is limited research in this area, evidence from studies of vaccine-related communication via social media indicates that negative messaging tends to elicit more responses from the public than positive or neutral messaging. For example, Briones, Nan, Madden, and Waks (2012) found that HPV-vaccine-related videos on YouTube received more ‘likes’ from viewers if they were negative in tone than if they were positive or neutral in tone. In a similar study focused on general vaccination-themed videos on YouTube, Keelan and colleagues (2007) found that negative videos received more ratings and likes than either positive or ambiguous videos, even though negative videos were outnumbered by positive videos, negative videos received more ratings and likes than either positive or ambiguous videos. The same phenomenon has also been documented on the social networking site MySpace, such that negative posts were shared with a larger network than positive posts (Keelan, Pavri, Balakrishnan, & Wilson, 2010). Exposure to negative vaccination-related information also appears to increase the degree of negativity in subsequent engagement. In a study of Twitter users, Dunn and colleagues (2015) found that recent exposure to negative tweets about vaccines was associated with an increased likelihood of posting similar negative opinions. This is particularly concerning given that negative vaccine-related communication on social media is highly likely to contain misinformation and unsubstantiated claims (Keelan et al., 2007).

Therefore, we propose:

**RQ2** How do publics respond to anti-vaccine organization communications on Pinterest— in general, by vaccine type, and by visual type?

**Conflict strategies on social media**

Another key element of vaccine-related communication is the use of conflict strategies in anti-vaccination messages. Guerrero and La Valley (2006) summarized the main conflict strategies as: 1) Avoidance, including counterpersuasion (talks with the public in an attempt to convince them they are wrong), evasion (“buckpassing” or “runaround”), postponement as a method of deferring decision making; secrecy with a rationale (declining to respond to a request for change by appealing to a higher principles), and denial of means (preventing the public from having the physical means to carry on their cause); 2) Suppression, including the use of harassment, banishment, and purgation; 3) Adjustment, including sacrificing personnel, changing the name of the regulatory agency, incorporation of some of the personnel of the public, and incorporation of parts of the dissident ideology; and 4) Total defeat. It is important to apply this conflict communicative framework to the vaccine communication context, as it is an arena where pro- and anti-vaccination organizations fight hard to sway the opinions of the public who are ambiguous about vaccination or who are hesitating in taking vaccines as preventive measures for themselves and/or family members.

Further on, Bowers et al. (2009) identified following agitation strategies often employed in conflict communication: 1) Petitioning: phone calls or meetings with management, aiming at problem solving; 2) Promulgation: informational picketing or press releases/press conferences, in order to win social support; 3) Solidification: use songs, slogans, rallies, symbols, in-group publications, buttons, bumper stickers, which takes place within the group to reinforce
cohesiveness among members; 4) Polarization: the use of flag issues and flag individuals for exploitive purposes, derogatory jargon, with the assumption that anyone who isn’t for us must be for the other side; 5) Nonviolent resistance: rent strikes, hunger strikes, sit-ins, and boycotts; 6) Escalation/confrontation: Threatened disruption, nonverbal offensive, dressing strangely, expressing sentiments offensive to the organization, verbal obscene deprecation, non-negotiable demands, nonverbal obscenity, and token violence; and 7) Gandhi & guerrilla: presenting two groups of agitators: some committed to nonviolent resistance and some committed to destruction of the organization.

Therefore, focusing on how anti-vaccination organizations use different conflict strategies to agitate public discourse and mobilize communities around their anti-vaccine narratives and arguments, we propose: 

**RQ3** What agitation strategies are used by anti-vaccine organizations to communicate about vaccines on Pinterest and how do these affect the public’s engagement with these pins?

*Risk communication on social media*

As the widespread use of vaccines has greatly diminished the risk of certain infectious diseases, individual’s perception of the value of those vaccines and their tolerance for any potential risks or side-effects decreases because they no longer are confronted with the disease and/or its immediate aftermath.

Risk communication is a closely related field to public relations, providing principles and tools for communicating effectively in high-concern situations (Covello, Peters, Wojtecki, & Hyde, 2001). The successful resolution of any type of health crisis depends at least in part on effective communication about health risks to the public, and effective response to health risk-related concerns. At the same time, these types of situations are often accompanied by strong negative emotions such as fear, distrust and anger, which in turn form considerable barriers to effective communication (Covello et al., 2001). Risk communication is based on several different models: The risk perception model focuses on how risks are perceived; for example, risks that evoke fear, terror or anxiety will be perceived as greater than risks that do not; risks associated with institutions or organizations that are lacking in credibility and trustworthiness are perceived as greater than risks associated with trustworthy entities; and risks that produce fatalities or have irreversible, catastrophic consequences are perceived as greater than risks that do not carry a strong potential for fatalities (Covello et al., 2001). When serious risks are perceived in a crisis situation, people are less able to process (often much needed) information, and when people are deeply concerned about an issue this may interfere with their ability to engage in rational discourse (Cairns, de Andrade, & MacDonald, 2013). Finally, according to the negative dominance model, negative information will be assigned significantly greater weight in people’s perceptions (Covello et al., 2001).

Considering the fact that negative misinformation about vaccines, their safety, and their effectiveness can spread quickly online and make it more difficult for people to receive and process corrected information, it is important to determine the presence of risk perception factors in anti-vaccine organization’s social media posts. Therefore, this study’s fourth research questions is: 

**RQ4** What type of risk perception factors do anti-vaccine organizations use to communicate on Pinterest and how do these affect the public’s engagement with these pins?

Frames of vaccine-related communication
Hallahan (1999) identified seven modes of framing crisis situations, crisis attributes, organizational choices, organizational actions, crisis issues, crisis responsibilities, and crisis news, which can be applied in understanding communications centering on conflict issues with conflicting voices such as communications about vaccines initiated by anti-vaccination organizations. One of the organizational actions taken is to frame issues of conflict. Media professionals are always consciously or unconsciously engaged in a framing process in which they selectively highlight certain aspects of issues, making those “framed” aspects more salient than others (Entman, 2004). Various framing tendencies have been found in news coverage (Iyengar, 1994; Kim & Anne Willis, 2007; Kim, Carvalho, & Davis, 2010), many of which have been empirically shown to influence audience perceptions, attitudes and opinions (Coleman, Thorson, & Wilkins, 2011; Gross, 2008; Major, 2009).

In terms of framing and vaccine communication, scholars have studied how different types of frames have been used in communicating different types of vaccines, including valence framing (support vs. oppose) of the issue of HPV vaccination (Gesser-Edelsburg, Walter, Shir-Raz, & Green, 2015), the interaction effect of message framing (gain vs. loss) and perceived susceptibility on African American parents’ intentions to vaccinate their children against HPV (Nan et al., 2015), the relative effectiveness of using gain- versus loss-framed messages to promote H1N1 vaccination among older adults (Nan, Xie, & Madden, 2012), and the blame frame in terms of media attribution of culpability about the MMR-autism vaccination scare (Holton, Weberling, Clarke, & Smith, 2012).

One of the frequently documented news framing devices involves episodic vs. thematic framing (Mastin, Choi, Barboza, & Post, 2007; Myrick, Major, & Jankowski, 2014), which has also been found in depression related news coverage (Zhang, Jin, & Tang, 2015). Although framing has been studied in the context of vaccine communication, the use of episodic vs. thematic framing in communicating about vaccine remain an area not fully explored yet.

Thematically framed stories portray and present issues through information about their systemic causes, trends and consequences. In contrast, episodically framed coverage portrays and presents issues through either a specific event serving as an anecdotal exemplification of the issue or a personal story attaching a human face to the issue (Iyengar, 1994). Despite advocacy efforts and calls for more thematic framing in news coverage of social issues due to its emphasis on the systemic and societal dimensions of issue characteristics and responsibilities, episodic framing has been found to dominate coverage of a variety of issues such as foreign affairs, violence and abuse (Dorfman, Woodruff, Chavez, & Wallack, 1997; Hook & Pu, 2006; Mastin et al., 2007). Besides the influence of individualistic cultural values that tend to emphasize the personal aspects of larger issues, professional journalistic routines and organizational pressures stemming from news media’s commercial interests are some of the other factors that have been identified as contributors to the prevalence of episodic news framing (Iyengar, 1994; Kim et al., 2010; Zillmann, 2002). For example, in order to cut the time spent on background research needed for in-depth, contextualized reporting and to meet tight deadlines and accelerated news cycles, reporters often rely on isolated event coverage which provides narrative storytelling in a linear format (Iyengar, 1991). Similarly, news organizations’ commercial interests to attract audience attention often compel reporters to focus on individuals affected by the issue on hand, in an effort to personify and exemplify the significance and impact of the issue (Zillmann, 2002). In other words, telling stories with average citizens helps the news audience relate to those individuals (Bird, 1998) and better understand complex issues from a personal angle, potentially becoming more involved and interested (Macdonald, 1998). In that sense, episodic
framing may have an advantage over thematic framing in not only attracting audience attention, but also potentially triggering more affective responses, which could lead to more cognitive processing of information. Indeed, research has shown that episodically framed news stories using personal storytelling as exemplars can influence audience’ perception of social issues, attracting more attention and generating more comprehension and accessibility when making judgments (Brosius & Bathelt, 1994).

Therefore, in order to explore how anti-vaccination organizations used episodic or thematic framing in communicating about vaccine, we propose:

**RQ5** How do anti-vaccination organizations frame issues of vaccination (episodic vs. thematic framing) in their communication on Pinterest, and how do these affect the public’s engagement with these pins?

**Method**

This study analyzed anti-vaccination organization posts on social media platform Pinterest. Based on two previous studies on vaccine-themed conversations on Pinterest (Guidry, Carlyle, Messner, & Jin, 2015; Guidry & Messner, Under revision), five prolific anti-vaccine communicators were identified: GreenMedInfo, Dr. Chris Niedzinski, NaturalNews, Health Impact News, and Dr. Mercola. All pins relating to vaccines and vaccinations by these five accounts over the lifetime of their accounts were collected on December 18, 2015 for a total of 1,119 unique pins in the sample.

Coding protocols for pins were developed, tested and implemented for the coding process. Pins were coded for engagement variables (repins, likes, and comments), website connection, agitation strategies, risk perception factors, framing variables, visual type, and vaccine type. Four.

Three coders were trained to establish intercoder reliability. All three coders coded 10% of the posts (n = 119). Of the remaining posts, the first coder coded 800 posts, the second coder coded 219 posts, and the third coder coded 100 posts for the study variables. After pre-testing and subsequent changes to the coding protocol, the intercoder reliability test with the ReCal statistical program showed *Scott’s Pi* (Scott, 1955) was on average .80. The individual coefficients were all considered to be reliable, with the lowest coefficient at .70.

**Results**

The data collected through content analyses of 1,117 Pinterest pins was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.

*Research question 1* asked how anti-vaccine organizations communicate about vaccines on Pinterest - in general, by vaccine type, and by visual type. The vast majority of the pins (94.2%; n = 1,052) in this sample linked to another website. Of those, 63.7% (n = 670) linked to a website belonging to their own organization. The majority of the pins linking to another website linked to a health-focused website (75.2%; n = 792), while 15.2% (n = 160) linked to a blog (see Table 1 for a complete list). Of the visuals included in the pins, 66.2% (n = 740) consisted of primarily image, 6.4% (n = 71) consisted of primarily text, and 21.5% (n = 240) consisted of a mix of image and text (see Table 1 for a complete list). Finally, 44.4% (n = 496) of all pins mentioned a specific type of vaccine, while the rest discussed vaccines more generally. The flu vaccine, the

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4 A complete list of variables and their operationalizations and a detailed breakdown of risk perception factors are available upon request from the authors.
HPV vaccine (see Figure 2), and the MMR vaccine (see Figure 1) were the most common types of vaccines mentioned, with 70.4% (n=350) of vaccine-specific pins referring to one of these three vaccines. Specifically, 29.8% (n=148) of the vaccine-specific pins referred to some type of flu vaccine, 27.4% (n=136) referred to the HPV vaccine, and 13.3% (n=66) referred to the MMR vaccine. Due to the small number of pins referring to other types of vaccines, we have focused our comparisons by vaccine type on the three most commonly mentioned vaccines (flu, HPV, and MMR).

Research question 2 asked how the public responds to anti-vaccine organization communications on Pinterest—in general, by vaccine type, and by visual type. Repinning was the most popular type of engagement: 92.0% (n=1028) of pins were repinned at least once (M = 7.89, SD = 12.003, R = 0.00-148.00). In contrast, 50.3% (n=562) of pins received at least one like (M = 1.10, SD = 2.212, R = 0.00-33.00) and 5.0% (n=56) of all pins received at least one comment (M = 0.16, SD = 1.507, R = 0.00-39.00). The mean for total engagement, as measured by summing the frequencies of repins, likes, and comments, was 9.15 (SD=14.736), with a range of 0-207.

A set of t-tests determined there were no significant differences in the number of repins, likes, comments, or total engagement between pins that mentioned a specific vaccine and pins that did not. However, among the pins that did mention a specific type of vaccine, significant differences in engagement were detected according to vaccine type for three of the four types of engagement: repins, comments, and total engagement. Specifically, the results of the ANOVA revealed a significant effect of the type of vaccine mentioned (MMR, HPV, flu) on repin frequency [F (2, 347) = 5.537, p = .004]. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated the mean number of repins was significantly higher for MMR-specific vaccine pins at the (M=12.17, SD=25.461) than for HPV-specific vaccine pins (M = 5.10, SD = 5.855). However, the mean number of repins for flu-specific vaccine pins (M = 8.43, SD=13.162) did not significantly differ from the mean number of repins for MMR-specific or HPV-specific vaccine pins.

In addition, there was a significant effect of the type of vaccine (flu, HPV, MMR) on the number of comments [F (2, 347) = 3.702, p = .026]. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated the mean number of comments was higher for pins that mentioned the MMR vaccine (M=1.02, SD=5.436) than for pins that mentioned the HPV vaccine (M=.01, SD=.121). However, the mean number of comments for pins that mentioned the flu vaccine (M=.19, SD=1.316) did not significantly differ from pins that mentioned the MMR vaccine or the HPV vaccine.

There also was a significant effect of the type of vaccine (flu, HPV, MMR) on total engagement [F (2, 347) = 5.243, p = .006]. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated the mean total engagement score was higher for the MMR vaccine pins (M = 14.83, SD = 34.606) than for the HPV vaccine pins (M = 5.77, SD = 6.515). However, the mean total engagement score for pins mentioning the flu vaccine (M = 9.78, SD = 16.545) did not significantly differ from the MMR and HPV vaccines.

The results of the ANOVA assessing differences in engagement by type of visual (primarily image, primarily text, mix of image and text, and video) revealed significant effects for three of the four engagement variables: repins, likes, and total engagement. Specifically, there was a significant effect of the type of visual on the mean number of repins [F (3,1086)=20.126, p<.0001]. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated the mean number of repins was higher for the primarily text pins (M=11.00, SD=20.389) than for the
primarily image pins (M=6.14, SD=8.883). In addition, the mean number of repins was higher for the image-text mixed pins (M=12.64, SD=16.060) than for the primarily image pins (M=6.14, SD=8.883), and the mean number of repins was higher for the image-text mixed pins (M=12.64, SD=16.060) than for the video pins (M=7.36, SD=6.972). However, there were no significant differences in the mean number of repins between the primarily image pins and the video pins, nor between the video and the image-text mix pins.

The results also revealed a significant effect of type of visual on the number of likes at the p<.05 level [F (3,1086)=11.976, p<.0001]. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated the mean score of likes was higher for the primarily text pins (M=1.69, SD=3.857) than for the primarily image pins (M=.85, SD=1.568), as well as higher for the image-text mix pins (M=1.76, SD=3.129) than for the primarily image pins. However, the mean likes score for the video pins (M=1.08, SD=1.201) did not significantly differ from the image, text, and mixed pins.

Lastly, there was a significant effect of the type of visual on the total engagement at the p<.05 level [F (3,1086)=17.762, p<.0001]. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated the mean score of total engagement was higher for the image text mix pins (M=14.58, SD=18.980) than for the primarily image pins (M=7.12, SD=11.197), and the mean score of total engagement was higher for the primarily text pins (M=13.15, SD=26.230) than for the primarily image pins. However, the mean repin score for the video pins (M=8.49, SD=8.120) did not significantly differ from the image, text, and mixed pins.

Research question 3 asked what agitation strategies are used by anti-vaccine organizations to communicate about vaccines on Pinterest and how these affect the public’s engagement with these pins. Of the six agitation strategies, only solidification and polarization were present in more than just a few pins. Almost all pins, 99.8% (n=1,115), used a solidification strategy (specifically, using Pinterest as an in-group publication), and 39.6% (n=447) used a polarization strategy. Petitioning, promulgation, nonviolent resistance, and Guerilla strategies were not or barely present. A set of t-tests showed there were no significant differences in engagement (repins, likes, comments, and total engagement) between pins that used polarization and pins that did not.

Research question four asked what type of risk perception factors anti-vaccine organizations use to communicate on Pinterest and how these affect the public’s engagement with these pins. Risk perception factors were represented by the following ten variables: Fear image, voluntariness, government conspiracy, medical professional conspiracy, pharmaceutical company conspiracy, composite conspiracy, identifiable victim, vaccines are deadly, and adverse effects of vaccines. Of the pins in the sample, 47.8% (n=534) contained a fear image (see Figure 1), 44.3% (n=495) contained a reference to adverse effects of vaccines (see Figure 2), and 30.8% (n=344) referred to a form of conspiracy.

A set of t-tests revealed several significant differences in engagement by risk perception factor. First, the perception of no voluntariness appeared to increase certain forms of engagement with the pins, as indicated by the significant difference in the mean number of repins for pins expressing voluntariness (M=4.88, SD=5.055) compared to those expressing no voluntariness (M=8.19, SD=12.451); t(252.367)=5.206, p<.0001. There also was a significant difference in the mean score of total engagement for voluntariness (M=5.75, SD=5.845) and no voluntariness (M=9.49, SD=15.307); t(275.169)=4.968, p<.0001. There were no significant differences in the mean score of likes and the mean score of comments for the presence of voluntariness.

In addition, there was a significant difference in the mean score of repins for adverse effects (M=8.80, SD=13.916) and no adverse effects (M=7.16, SD=10.182); t(877.846)=-2.207,
There was a significant difference in the mean score of total engagement for adverse effects (M=10.28, SD=17.706) and no adverse effects (M=8.25, SD=11.791); t(822.693)=-2.197, p=.028. There were no significant differences in the mean score of likes and the mean score of comments for the presence of adverse effects of vaccines.

Finally, there was a significant difference in the mean score of repins for government conspiracy (M=5.40, SD=7.296) and no government conspiracy (M=8.57, SD=12.927); t(696.360)=4.941, p<.0001. There were no significant differences in the mean score of likes and the mean score of comments for the presence of government conspiracy. There were no significant differences in any level of engagement for fear image, vaccines are deadly, medical professional conspiracy, pharmaceutical company conspiracy, composite conspiracy, and identifiable victim.

Research question 5 asked how anti-vaccination organizations frame issues of vaccination (episodic vs. thematic framing) in their communication on Pinterest, and how these affect the public’s engagement with these pins. Three quarters of the pins, 74.5% (n=832), uses thematic framing (see Figure 1), 17.1% (n=191) uses episodic framing (see Figure 2), 3.2% (n=36) uses both, and 5.2% (n=58) uses both.

There was a significant effect of the type of framing on the number of repins at the p<.05 level [F (3,1113)=3.391 p=.017]. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated the mean score of repins was higher for pins that used neither episodic nor thematic framing (M=12.02, SD=13.130) than for pins that use thematic framing (M=7.33, SD=11.742).

In addition, there was a significant effect of the type of framing on the total engagement at the p<.05 level [F (3,1113)=3.054, p=.028]. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated the mean score of total engagement was higher for pins that used neither episodic nor thematic framing (M=14.05, SD=15.521) than for pins that use thematic framing (M=8.52, SD=14.206). There were no further significant effects for the types of framing on pin engagement.

Discussion

This study analyzed the Pinterest activity of five anti-vaccine organizations in order to gain an understanding of their communication strategies on this visual social media platform. In order to deal effectively with anti-vaccine advocacy groups, and to counter their messages with the general public, it is first necessary to understand how these groups are communicating and galvanizing support among lay audiences. The results of the study provide important new insight into the messaging strategies employed by anti-vaccination groups on Pinterest, as well as the responses they elicit.

Pinterest as a Tool for Anti-vaccine Organizations to Spread their Message

Results from the content analysis of 1,117 pins showed that the majority (94.2%) of pins linked to a website external to Pinterest, which provides the pinner the opportunity to disseminate more detailed information than is usually possible within the confines of the visual and caption of a pin. The majority of these pins (63.7%) linked to a website belonging their own organization, which is consistent with previous studies examining anti-vaccination websites (Wolfe, Sharp, & Lipsky, 2002). Almost half the pins mentioned a specific vaccine, with the flu, MMR, and HPV vaccines comprising 70% of all vaccine-specific pins. Notably, these three
vaccines are quite different in nature: the flu vaccine is an annual vaccination focused on the 
majority of the population, the MMR vaccine is among the most well-known children's vaccines, 
and the HPV vaccine is one of the newer immunizations, primarily focused on teens and young 
adults, and often advertised as a cancer vaccine.

Different Levels of Pinterest Engagement

Engagement levels in the study sample were similar to the other two Pinterest vaccine 
studies (Guidry et al., 2015; Guidry & Messner, Under revision), which indicates a level of 
consistency in engagement with anti-vaccine themed pins, whether they are posted by 
organizations or by individuals. Interestingly, while Pinterest is a visual social media platform, 
text-based pins and image/text mixed pins both elicited more engagement than image-only-based 
pins. This may indicate that Pinterest users who engage with anti-vaccine pins are seeking more 
information or explanation than can be delivered through an image alone. In addition, image-
only pins receive significantly more engagement than video-based pins.

When considering specific vaccine types, pins that focus on the MMR vaccine are more 
frequently engaged with than pins that focus on the HPV vaccine. This could be an indication 
that those Pinterest users most interested in the MMR vaccine (likely mothers with children in 
the age range to get the MMR vaccine) are more on board with anti-vaccine rhetoric and less 
likely to be receptive to communication on the safety of vaccines.

Agitation and Conflict Communication Strategies

Almost all pins use solidification as a strategy, since Pinterest can be regarded as an in-
group publication. A significant portion also uses polarization, while other agitation strategies 
are barely or not used. Polarization will create an “us-and-them” atmosphere, further deepening 
the divide between those who trust vaccines and those who are convinced of the perceived 
damages they do.

Framing of Pinterest Messages

Somewhat surprisingly, the clear majority of the pins use thematic framing, while anti-
vaccine social media posts in other recent studies primarily use episodic framing through 
narratives of people who experienced perceived vaccine damage (Briones et al., 2012; Guidry et 
éli, 2015). This provides an opportunity for health communication professionals to focus more on 
narratives and episodic framing when discussing vaccines and vaccinations on Pinterest.

Risk Perception Factors

As far as risk perception factors are concerned, almost half the pins included a fear image – 
an image portraying a syringe/needle, or a menacing medical figure. A similar percentage 
included a mention of (perceived) adverse effects of vaccines. These pins, according to Risk 
Perception Theory, will likely lead to a greater perception of risk than pins that do not refer to 
either of these factors. Adverse effects pins are more likely to produce engagement than pins that 
do not mention adverse vaccine effects. Through their use of fear-based imagery, anti-
vaccination organizations seek to increase polarization. As public health professionals, our 
efforts should stay away from the extremes and focus on creating bridges between individuals 
and the health care community.

Surprisingly, if a pin refers to voluntarism (mandatory vaccines and such), it is less likely 
to elicit engagement than if it does not, and if a pin mentions government conspiracy related to
vaccines it is less likely to produce engagement than if it does not. This may be a topic too confrontational to elicit much response, but one that should be addressed by public health professionals nonetheless.

**Implications for Practitioners**

The results of the study provide valuable insights that health communication practitioners can use to counter the anti-vaccine movement and to increase vaccinations among at-risk populations. Any strategy should focus on those social media users that have not solidified their intentions towards vaccines yet and are not vaccinating due to issues of complacency, convenience, and calculation. Engagement with this audience needs to counter the polarization and solidification of the anti-vaccine movement.

Specifically, health communicators should borrow successful features from the anti-vaccine movements successful engagement strategies. Text-based pins and image/text mixed pins will elicit more engagement from this audience. Video in this context can be neglected, as its triggered engagement is lower.

It is also essential for practitioners to develop strategies for specific issues, such as the flu, MMR, and HPV vaccines, which are addressed by discussed by different target groups on different social media. For Pinterest, as this study shows, communication practitioners should consider focusing on vaccines other than the MMR vaccine, since the level of engagement with anti-MMR vaccine pins indicates that those pinners may be more strongly convinced of the vaccine’s supposed harmful effects and may not be as easily convinced of its safety.

Finally, health communicators should consider utilizing episodic framing and involve powerful narratives in their Pinterest communications, especially since the anti-vaccine organizations in this study primarily used thematic framing and narratives have proven to be effective when used in vaccine-focused communications.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

As with all research, this work is not without limitations. First, our analysis, while thorough, is limited to a single social media platform: Pinterest. Anti-vaccination rhetoric is, of course, not limited to Pinterest, and Pinterest is not the most widely used social media platform. Nevertheless, given the strong female presence on the platform, including among mothers who are often tasked with making family health decisions, Pinterest appears to be a particularly relevant social media channel to explore around this issue.

Similarly, our analysis was limited to anti-vaccination groups, without equal attention paid to those on the other side of the issue. However, it is important to note that this approach was necessitated by the lack of presence of pro-vaccination groups. Our preliminary analysis suggests that groups like the CDC have failed to establish a strong presence in social media conversations on platforms like Pinterest, posting quality content but not responding to questions of concern posted outside of its own profiles, which has implications for the types of content users are likely to find when visiting the platform. Related to this point, we also restricted our analysis to five anti-vaccine communicators. Once again, this decision was not made haphazardly as our five groups were chosen given their prominence around the issue of vaccines and our need to limit the data collection to a manageable number of pins for coding. Future research should expand the scope of the content analysis outlined here to include a greater diversity of voices across more social media channels.
Last but not least, visual communications and visual social media platforms like Pinterest will continue to play a significant role in health communication and health public relations. Future research should delve deeper into the visual aspects of anti-vaccine communication, what differentiates the different types of visuals, and what types of visuals are most effective in vaccine and anti-vaccine communications.
References


Table 1
*Visual type, vaccine type, and website type*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visual type (N=1,117)</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
<th>Vaccine type (N=496)</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
<th>Website type (n=1,052)</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primarily image</td>
<td>66.2% (n=740)</td>
<td>Flu</td>
<td>29.8% (n=148)</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>75.2% (n=792)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primarily text</td>
<td>6.4% (n=71)</td>
<td>HPV</td>
<td>27.4% (n=136)</td>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>15.2% (n=160)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mix of image and text</td>
<td>21.5% (n=240)</td>
<td>MMR</td>
<td>13.3% (n=66)</td>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>3.4% (n=36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>3.5% (n=39)</td>
<td>DTP/TDaP</td>
<td>4.2% (n=21)</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>.3% (n=3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing</td>
<td>.8% (n=9)</td>
<td>Hepatitis</td>
<td>2.2% (n=11)</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>.2% (n=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infographic</td>
<td>.2% (n=2)</td>
<td>Tetanus</td>
<td>1.2% (n=6)</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.6% (n=59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (graph, map)</td>
<td>1.4% (n=16)</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>18.3% (n=91)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>3.4% (n=17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
*Risk perception factors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk perception factor</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear image</td>
<td>47.8% (n=534)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverse effects of vaccines</td>
<td>44.3% (n=495)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government conspiracy</td>
<td>21.7% (n=242)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical professional conspiracy</td>
<td>4.6% (n=51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmaceutical company conspiracy</td>
<td>9.5% (n=106)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conspiracy composite</td>
<td>30.8% (n=344)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntariness</td>
<td>9.1% (n=102)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifiable victim</td>
<td>8.1% (n=91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaccines are deadly</td>
<td>11.5% (n=129)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1
Example of fear image and thematic framing

Figure 2
Example of HPV vaccine (Gardasil) pin, episodic framing, adverse effects
Public relations in Venezuela: An analysis of the country’s context and how the profession could help build a promising future

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Abstract
This paper reviews the Latin American philosophy and analyzes Venezuela according to Hofstede’s six-dimensional model. The research also addresses Venezuela’s recent events and reviews how the Bolivarian revolution has shaped the country’s context. Finally, it proposes how the country could overcome its crisis with the help of public relations practitioners.
Public relations in Latin America have had a complex development that has been entangled with the history and context of the region (Freitag & Quesinberry, 2009). It is significantly important to understand the culture on these countries to better apply strategic campaigns in the field of public relations. Freitag and Quesinberry (2009) noted, that Walter Lemmon in 1959 warned that campaigns executed in Latin America would not be effective unless they were adapted to that culture. In the field of strategic communication, a common philosophy on what is expected from companies and public relations practitioners is applicable, in general, to the region. However, each country’s social and political context, culture, and history are different and unique.

With this awareness in mind, the aforementioned authors explained that public relations professionals have adapted their practices and, as a result, the profession has flourished in most of the region. In recent years, factors such as increasing freedom of expression, types and number of media, privatization of industries, higher exports and foreign investment have contributed to making the profession a more vibrant one in Latin America (Freitag & Quesinberry, 2009). However, the region is still struggling with problems such as drug cartels, poverty, corruption and social inequality.

The aforementioned promising scenario is far from being the case of one specific country: Venezuela. The nation with the greatest oil reserves in the world has been struggling with a severe crisis over the past years—a situation that not only affects Venezuelans but also local and international companies and ultimately, the way public relations is applied in the country (Molleda, 2007).

In an effort to further comprehend the commonalities of the public relations field in Latin America and the unique and challenging context that Venezuela presents, the present paper will expand on the Latin American Philosophy, explain the Venezuelan context during the so-called Bolivarian revolution and theories that could shine a promising light on how the South American country could eventually overcome its difficulties with the help of public relations experts.

I. Latin American commonalities in public relations

Economic reform and social concerns are the pillars that sustain public relations in Latin America (Freitag & Quesinberry, 2009). Six different approaches take place within the Latino context of the profession: (1) a specialization of journalism, (2) selling products and services, (3) to legitimize an organization through ethics, (4) boosting organizational morale, (5) networking with politicians, and (6) planning cultural events (Simoes, 1992). These six approaches often intertwine within the field of work and are rarely seen in their pure form (Freitag & Quesinberry, 2009).

In 1960 the region established the Inter-American Federation of Public Relations (FIARP), which in 1985 changed its name into Confederation of Public Relations (CONFIARP). This institution was created with the main objectives of promoting and sharing ideas, experiences, and investigations; interpreting the concept, function, and role of the profession; establishing and strengthening codes of ethics, and initiating the presence of CONFIARP in multilateral organizations (CONFIARP, 2012).

According to Molleda (2000), public relations practitioners in Latin America are seen as an agent of the conscience of the organization. The author further explained that the Latin school of thought in the profession “reflects a more active society that is experiencing political and economic transformation in the area of privatization, deregulation, increased social inequalities
and market integration” (Molleda, 2000, p. 513). In short, two of the most important roles of public relations professionals in Latin America are to labor in pro of organizations’ social responsibility and involvement with the well-being of communities (Molleda & Ferguson, 2004). In fact, Latinos expect companies to exercise social responsibility and engage in cleaner production techniques (Freitag & Quesinberry, 2009).

Freitag & Quesinberry (2009) gave several explanations and examples on how public relations professionals can better perform their work in Latin America. The first suggestion is that it is necessary for the firm to have physical presence in the country and serve as the eyes and ears for clients. Second, professionals should acknowledge the Latinos work on a more relaxed context where being on time is not imperative. Third, local talents should have the opportunity to take part in events and initiatives. Additionally, it is advisable to create alliances with public opinion leaders to help create brand awareness among publics. The authors further added that understanding how the media works and the role it has in the society is also crucial. Paid for coverage or un-coverage has diminished in the region as reporters embrace responsibility and codes of ethics. In Latin America, public relations is also used as a way to build international alliances, strengthen existing diplomatic relations and shape a country’s outside image with, usually, a more positive light.

All of the aforementioned functions and characteristics are, in general, applicable to the Latin American region. However, these guidelines are not enough to effectively understand the context of each individual country and excel in the practice of public relations. Like a living organism that changes and grows, the context of each Latin American country is constantly changing and presenting new scenarios for public relations professionals. For instance, Colombia started a peace process with the FARC (Colombianpeace.org, 2014) and the US has started to open its relations with Cuba (Baker, 2014).

Because of the closeness and similarities that Latin American countries have, tendencies and decisions in one country can at times affect other nations. An example to illustrate this situation can be observed on how the Castro’s regime and repression against its people has been followed by former Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez and now by his successor, Nicolas Maduro (The Washington Post’s Editorial Board, 2015). This South American country presents a completely different setting from the flourishing economies of Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica and Mexico. To further comprehend the Venezuelan scenario, the present paper will discuss where the public relations profession stands in the country and how the present context can affect the practice. Finally, the paper will address how some theoretical frameworks could ease the struggles faced by Venezuelans with the help of effective public relations.

II. Public relations in Venezuela

Global Alliance Public Relations executed a country landscape report in 2006 to analyze the profession in Venezuela. According to this report, the profession emerged in the 1940’s with the rise of oil corporations. However, the term public relation is rarely used in organizations due its the negative connotation it has. Corporate communications or public affairs are the designed names for this department in most organizations.

The profession can be learned in eleven institutions and universities around the country that offer bachelors degree or associates degree (Global Alliance, 2006). Nevertheless, the major is rarely studied in its pure form and more often than not public relations degree is combined with advertising (Global Alliance, 2006). Professionals are grouped in guilds and an association for associate’s degree professionals in public relations (AVTESURP), but due the profession’s
closeness to journalism, some public relations practitioners prefer to group in the national school of journalists (CNP).

Some of the challenges that trouble public relations in the country are (1) few specialized publications in Spanish, (2) the profession is seen as a mere function for event planning, (3) limited formal research, (4) lack of clear policies regarding corporate social responsibility to be implemented by transnational oil corporations (Global Alliance, 2006). Positive aspects have also benefitted the profession: (1) communication units in every local, regional and state government, (2) advancement in journalistic education, and (3) public relations services offered by advertising agencies help to create employment and increase competition.

Although the aforementioned scenario gives a clearer image of how public relations function in Venezuela, the country’s context also affects how the profession is executed. The next section will describe Venezuela using Hofstede’s six dimensional model, thus visualizing he culture and idiosyncrasy of the South American country.

III. What is Venezuela like?

To understand what Venezuela is like, Hofstede’s six dimensional model and overview of the country can be a very accurate and effective tool (Hofstede Centre, n.d.). According to this analysis, Venezuela stands at 81/100 in the power distance category, which means that inequalities among Venezuelans are seen as natural. Business, union and political leaders tend to have a lot of concentrated power.

Venezuela is also a collectivist society with a score of 12/100 in this category. Belonging to a group with similarities is very important in the country. Combined with the dimension of power distance, these results show that groups are generally divided in social classes. Loyalty is expected from members of the group, as relationships within it are more important than any given task.

The third dimension according to the Hofstede Centre is masculinity-femininity. With a score of 73, Venezuela is a masculine society that is highly success oriented. Competitive and status oriented, Venezuelans do not fit under the stereotype of ‘Latinos are lazy workers.’

The uncertainty avoidance dimension for Venezuela stands at 76/100. This reflects that people in the country need to have rules for many things as means to avoid ambiguity. However, rules are only followed if the in-group feels that they are applicable to them. Likewise, although work might be carefully calculated, the plans might not be necessarily followed in practice. Combined with the other three dimensions, the result is that it is difficult to change the status quo in the country unless having a leader who is capable of creating change in the society.

The country scores 16/100 in the long-term orientation dimension. Venezuelans strongly follow traditions and have a normative way of thinking. They like to obtain quick results and do not tend to save money for the future but live in the moment.

The last dimension is indulgence. In this category Venezuela has the highest possible score, 100/100. This result reflects how Venezuelans tend to be impulsive in realizing their desires, wanting to enjoy life and have a good time above all things. Having leisure time is extremely important and so is spending money as they wish to. Indulgent societies like Venezuela tend to be optimistic regardless of the hard times and struggles.

Hofstede’s six dimensions make a clearer scenario of what Venezuela is like and what public relations practitioners have to consider when working in this country. Sriramesh and Vercic (2003) developed a theoretical framework explaining that that a country’s infrastructure, societal culture and media environment are three variables that are closely related with
international public relations. An example to further illustrate this point can be taken from the political system in a country’s infrastructure. Countries whose political ideologies do not care for public opinion tend to have propagandistic public relations (Sriramesh & Verčič, The global public relations handbook: Theory, research and practice, 2003). The authors explained, “identifying the impact of environmental variables on public relations practice helps increase our ability to predict which strategies and techniques are better suited to a particular organizational environment” (p.3).

Taking into consideration the three dimensions proposed by Sriramesh & Vercic (2003), the aspects that mostly affect the Venezuelan context nowadays will be discussed to illustrate some of the challenges the country presents for public relations practitioners.

IV. Current context of the country

a) Guided by propaganda: the “I am Chavez” campaign

On December 2012, after Chavez had been battling with cancer for several months, he gave an announcement on national television that would change the history of Venezuela. Speaking directly into the camera, Hugo Chavez said to the country:

If something was to happen and I were not capable to continue in the presidency of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela [...] it is my firm opinion, clear as a full moon, irrevocable, absolute and total that [...] you elect Nicolas Maduro as the next president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. This is what I ask of you from the bottom of my heart (Chavez, 2012).

Shortly after, in March 2013, it was announced on national television that Hugo Chavez had lost his battle against cancer. Yet, Chavismo was far from ending after the president’s physical departure. Backed up with a giant image of Chavez and his voice singing the national anthem over loud speakers, former bus driver and Chavez’s preferred successor, Nicolas Maduro, filed the required papers to run for president (Shoichet, 2013). “I am not Chavez,” Maduro said, “but I am his son. And all of us, together, we are Chavez.”

These words “I am Chavez” were the slogan for a powerful presidential campaign that was carefully designed to emotionally appeal government supporters during the presidential elections of 2012, when Chavez won against opposition leader Henrique Capriles. Once again, Maduro would use the unifying slogan “I am Chavez” to consolidate his campaign.

A second slogan was created for this campaign: “Chavez, I swear to you, my vote is for Maduro.” The message was clear: voting against ‘Chavez’s son’ would be like voting against Chavez himself (Metz, 2013). From nationwide text messages that reminded people to vote for Maduro, street art, shirts, churches for ‘saint’ Chavez, souvenirs and enormous posters hanging from tall buildings, every Venezuelan was reminded on a daily basis on who they needed to vote for (Jones, 2013).

This campaign clearly illustrates how effective public relations are when it comes to benefiting the government of Venezuela. Indeed, government related agencies have become the biggest employers of public relations practitioners (Molleda, 2007). By designing a campaign with an emotional appeal that was backed up by the images of Chavez, Maduro won the elections. Ultimately the campaign’s purpose of maintaining Chavez alive after his death was even taken to an international level when big advertisements with images of Chavez’s legacy and Maduro were published in major print and online newspapers like The New York Times, USA; Il Corriere Della Sera, from Italy; and Canadian newspaper The Globe and Mail (Corbetta, 2015).

b) Political division and lack of separation of powers
Ever since Chavez took power back in 1999 and even after his death in 2013, an extreme political division has existed in Venezuela. Political views are mainly divided in two groups in the South American country: the left wing followers, who support the government and identify themselves as ‘Chavistas;’ and the right wing, those who oppose it and are known as ‘the opposition.’ However, supporters of the government have always been in a more favorable position due to Chavez’s policies and sanctions against the opposition.

In Venezuela, the separation of powers has been openly rejected and all public institutions and ministries have pledged loyalty to Chavez’s government. In 2009, Chavez publicly convicted lower-court judge Maria Lourdes Afiuni to 30 years of jail for granting conditional liberty to a government critic. This is only one of many cases where Venezuela’s government has repressed the opposition (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

In May 2013, opposition leader Maria Corina Machado was physically attacked and hit on her face at the congress by Chavez’s supportive lawmakers (Mogollon & Kraul, 2014). After organizing peaceful protests against the government, in March 2014 Machado was expelled from congress for allegedly conspiring against the government by organizing a plot to assassinate President Nicolas Maduro.

Machado has not been the only one who has paid the consequences for her opposing point of view. Leopoldo Lopez has been in jail for over a year, also for leading anti-government protests across the country. Caraca’s mayor Antonio Ledezma was sent to prison last on February 2015 on charges of conspiracy against Maduro (Cawthorne, Reuters, 2015).

It is under this extreme political division that company, employees and public relations practitioners have to work on a daily basis. Such extreme division has caused companies to be shut down by the government and public relations professionals to be tremendously cautious of every decision they make in their work field. The extreme division has caused Venezuelans to “have great distrust in institutions and even in each other” (Molleda, 2007, p. 60). This political division and lack of separation of powers is contrary to the Western definition of the profession, which assumes that political structures are based on democracies, seeking the use of public opinion and elections. Yet, this scenario is not true in many parts of the world, like Venezuela (Sriramesh & Verčič, The global public relations handbook: Theory, research and practice, 2003).

c) Violence

The profound division is not only present among politicians but also among Venezuelans. During his 13 years in power, Chavez constantly offended in public and on national television those who opposed him, calling them imperialists, bourgeois, fascists and parasites. With food shortages, social inequalities, lack of medical supplies and the implanted hatred against different political parties, Venezuelans live in a very violent society.

Angered by the economic and social crisis, in early 2014, college students, housewives and workers gathered in massive protests across the country. The protests, however, ended up in a guerilla-style war where students exploded Molotov cocktails, tear gas was thrown at protesters and masked young people blocked the roads with barricades and burning trash (Cawthorne, Reuters, 2015). Ultimately, it was the protesters who succumbed after more than 40 students were killed in the protests and many were sent to jail.

Although Venezuela is the nation with the second highest crime rate in the world, it is rare for criminals to be caught or sentenced to jail. According to the NGO Venezuelan Violence Observatory, only in 2014 around 24,980 people were assassinated in the country (Planas, 2014).
Needless to say, public relations practitioners face the challenge of trying to stay away from danger. Violent protests affect the practice in Venezuela, as sometimes due to the high upheavals, companies need to stay closed for several days. Because of the volatile context, public relations professionals are forced to constantly forecast the future and visualize possible scenarios and solutions (Molleda, 2007). To avoid confrontations in the workplace, public relations practitioners censor themselves and avoid speaking about politics (Molleda, 2007).

d) Economy and currency control

Although Venezuela has the world’s largest oil reserves (O’Brien, 2015), according to CNN, the country might also have the world’s worst economy (Gillespie, 2015). After sixteen years under the Chavista regime, the South American country is now in crisis. With oil prices falling, an ineffective currency control system, and the government’s high expenditures, more than ever Venezuelans are facing a future of uncertainty (Coppola, 2015).

The self-inflicted turmoil started in 2003, when then President Hugo Chavez decided to implement a complicated system of currency control to ease inflation (Toro & Kronick, 2015). Three different official prices per dollar were imposed, plus the unofficial black market price.

Ricardo Hausmann, professor at Harvard University, expressed that “[Venezuela] has the most ridiculous exchange rate differential ever in the history of mankind,” (as cited by Toro & Kronick, 2015).

This system, in addition to the numerous companies expropriated over the years, has disincentivized both foreign and national investment (O’Brien, 2015). Price controls have also propelled smugglers to acquire products in Venezuela and sell them for higher costs in Colombia, obtaining a profitable business of the currency control (BBC, 2014).

While the country has abundance of oil, the benefits obtained from it are nowadays lesser as the government sends it for free or as way of payment to allies like Cuba and China (O’Brien, 2015). By the end of 2015 inflation rates were as high as 141 percent, one of the highest in the world (Telesur, 2016). The macroeconomics research company Capital Economics has predicted that an eventual default is likely to occur (Capital Economics, 2015). According to the Index of Economic Freedom, Venezuela ranked 176/178 in 2015, landing in the category of countries with repressed economies. In spite of the financial difficulties Venezuela is facing, the government is far from accepting blame. In fact, Maduro has frequently blamed political opponents’ protests, smugglers and even the United States for damaging the economy (Cawthorne & Ore, Reuters, 2014). On the other hand, opponents argue that Venezuela’s financial crisis is the result from 15 years of the socialist revolutionary regime and its ineffective policies.

The level of economic development “directly affects variables such as poverty and illiteracy. These two variables have a direct impact on the strategies and techniques that public relations professionals may use in a country” (Sriramesh & Verčič, The global public relations handbook: Theory, research and practice, 2003, p. 6). As a result of the low level of economic development, public relations need to be socially oriented to communicate with impoverished and poorly educated individuals (Molleda & Moreno, 2006). However, promoting philanthropy in Venezuela has become arduous because of the closing of private companies and the minimal donations and sponsorships (Molleda, 2007).

e) Companies close and shortages in food, goods and services increase
The shortages in food, goods and services have resulted in hours long lines outside of supermarkets and stores to buy products such as milk, flour, sugar, toilet paper, medical supplies and car batteries, to mention a few (Gillespie, CNN, 2015). The country, which is already one of the most violent in the world, has increased its unease with the shortages, making Venezuelans angry and ready to fight for a frozen chicken (Coppola, 2015).

Despite the state of urge and necessities of the population, a skeptical government official said in public that the lines at the supermarket were proof that there is plenty of food in the country (El Universal, 2015). In fact, when Maduro has acknowledged the existing shortages, he has blamed smugglers, hoarders, panic shoppers, speculation, political opposition and even companies for not refusing to produce enough food (Fox News Latino, 2015). The government has taken several measures to try to control the shortages situation. At supermarkets, militaries try to keep order in the empty stores on a daily basis (Coppola, 2015). Another measure has been to ration the quantity of products allowed to buy. The most recent solution in the eyes of the socialist government has been to implement finger scanners at the entries of supermarket to keep better control of shoppers and their assigned day to acquire food (Fox News Latino, 2015).

Venezuelans are not the only ones suffering from shortages and an ineffective economy. International businesses in the country have faced many profit loss in the past years. According to CNN, Coca Cola lost more than $600 million in the country (Gillespie, CNN Money, 2015). Drug maker Merck & Co Inc, Pepsi, General Motors, Clorox and Kimberly-Clark Corp are a few of the companies whose loses in Venezuela range between the millions to billions of dollars (McLaughlin, 2015).

Shortages exist even when planning a trip. Airlines have been greatly affected by the currency control since the companies have difficulties converting bolivars—Venezuela’s currency—into U.S. dollars (Kurmaev & Jenkins, 2013). According to the Wall Street Journal, as of August 2014 the government was still holding back on releasing $3.8 billion in revenues to the airlines (Vyas, 2014). These circumstances have led companies such as American Airlines, Delta Airlines, Avianca, Lufthansa and Aeromexico to drastically cut tickets sales to avoid losing more money. Others, like Air Canada, have stopped completely their services to and from Venezuela (Vyas, 2014).

With this situation, planning family trips, visiting relatives, traveling for business and even trying to leave the country is now more complicated than ever (Kurmaev & Jenkins, 2013). This situation affects public relations practitioners who need to either visit the country or fly out of it. Companies leaving the country and being expropriated by the government are synonyms of less employment for public relations practitioners.

\textit{f) Media control}

Frightened of being sanctioned or expropriated, television channels try to keep their critical statements against the government to a minimum, even if that means not speaking about certain topics at all (Duarte, 2014). Thus, opposition protests and messages from the anti-Chavez leaders are rarely covered by the media. In fact, during 2014s massive opposition protests, Venezuelans could only obtain information about them through social media and CNN.

The repression against media after a failed coup in 2002 promoted by four opposition TV channels; Globovision, Venevisión, Televen and RCTV—to which Chavez referred as the four horsemen of the Apocalypse (Fossett, 2014). Through these channels Venezuelans were incentivized to participate in a coup and end the Bolivarian regime. The position of the media was controversial during this period: it is no secret that the owners of these major media were
prominent elite individuals whose purpose was to topple Chavez. After these events television stations were nationalized and others were not allowed to renew their broadcasting licenses (Walter, 2015). As of today, the government directly controls 14 TV channels, a global satellite network, five newspapers and numerous radio stations (Scharfenberg, 2014).

Later on, restrictions were further implemented with the Law on Social Responsibility in Radio and Television, which has the purpose of “promoting social justice and further the development of the citizenry, democracy, peace, human rights, education, culture, public health, and the nation’s social and economic development” (Fossett, 2014). In 2011, the law was extended to include social media and the Internet. Those who fail to follow the law can be fined with up to 10 percent of the annual year’s income, or even suspension of the medium. Criticism of the government is often catalogued as conspiracy against the state. As consequence, media in Venezuela are often self-censored, and those who do not follow the rules of the Bolivarian government are sometimes even threat with death.

Newspapers have been one of the last media from where Venezuelans can access information regarding the opposition. However, this has also started to change due to shortages of paper and lack of access to US currency to import the paper (Walter, 2015). Reporters Without Borders has calculated that over 40 newspapers are suffering from paper shortages (Reporters Without Borders, 2014).

As results from the government’s propaganda, sanctions, threats, censorship and restrictions with media press, freedom in Venezuela has declined 24 spots from its 2008 rank, when it stood at 113/180. The 2015 World Press Freedom Index indicated that Venezuela currently stands at 137/180 (Reporters Without Borders, 2015). Symbiotic and sometimes contentious, the relationship between mass media and public relations is essential to shape public opinion, for publicity purposes and providing information subsidies (Sriramesh & Verčič, The global public relations handbook: Theory, research and practice, 2003). Thus, the existing media environment in Venezuela also affects the field of public relations. On one hand, public relations professionals and organizational managers are forced to politically self-censor themselves and try to focus on the values, mission and strategies to maintain the harmony in the organization (Molleda, 2007). On the other hand, practitioners who work for governmental institutions feel obligated to support the government and publicly express it (Molleda, 2007). Likewise, public relations practitioners need to be extremely aware of the media control before designing key messages that could potentially be categorized as a threat against the government.

V. What the future holds

Public relations, like other professions in Venezuela, cannot escape the socioeconomic and political pressures of the country (Molleda, 2007). Public relations professionals cannot overlook the imperative differences that make each country a scenario to apply unique strategies and tactics in accordance to the nation’s characteristics.

Certainly, Venezuela is going through a difficult transition that brings new challenges for public relations practitioners and questions the application of Western concepts of the profession into the South American country. As Molleda (2007) explained, “coercive isomorphic pressures force organizations and their various units, including public relations, to change their orientation and strategies for survival permanence” (p.66). The author further added that public relations practitioners in Venezuela still have to demonstrate how the profession can potentially provide solutions to the country’s challenges and help ease social tension. As Molleda (2007) asserted, there is still hope that the situation in the country will eventually change for the better. When that
day comes, the transition from a communist ideology—which is disguised as socialist-democracy—will be harsh on the Venezuelan society. After years of repression and creating a deity of former president Chavez, public relations practitioners will have a critical role to recreate the harmonious country it used to be and build trust among the population, the government and organizations.

In public relations, researchers have developed approaches that, in their views will make a difference and set a trend for the future development and application of the profession. In the case of Venezuela, the Transitional Approach, by Ryszard Lawniczak (2004), could be significantly helpful to go through an eventual transition. Lawniczak (2004) based his approach on the changes former Soviet Union countries have had to undergo after the communist country was disintegrated. After years of constrictions, the process to ultimately close the Soviet Union chapter and truly enter an era of change was “difficult, long, and painful” (p. 217). Nevertheless, Lawniczak asserted that public relations, its strategies, policies and instruments could be applied to assist in the peaceful transition from one system to the other. In his words, former Soviet Union citizens were affected by the role of education, social security, the structure of the economy, the role of the public sector, monopolies, weak investment incentives and government-owned companies. Like in Venezuela, propaganda was omnipresent during the Soviet Union era.

After the Soviet Union’s disintegration, public relations was non-existent in these countries thus, their government hired Western public relations companies to serve as local consultants. As a result, after 1998, the setting in Eastern Europe changed and burgeoned for public relations (Freitag & Quesinberry, 2009). Eastern European countries in the old continent became part of the European Union and changed their views on public relations—they perceived the profession in a more positive way as it is still helping the nations to develop. Lawniczak explained that public relations played an important role in this transitional era by (1) reversing the fear and prejudice against a ‘ruthless capitalism,’ (2) expanding awareness of other alternatives of market-economy models, (3) promoting entrepreneurship, (4) promoting and assisting the privatization transition, (5) attracting foreign investment and (6) enabling local enterprises to participate in the creation of a market economy.

Like former Soviet Union, Venezuela is currently in a crucial point of its history. Lawniczak’s approach has already been proven to be beneficial and effective in nations that are going through historically transitional moments. In the future, when the Bolivarian revolution will hopefully end, Lawniczak’s understanding of public relations could play a major role in Venezuela. Public relations practitioners could help to (1) build trust among citizens, governmental institutions and organizations, (2) decrease violence and hatred among political parties, (3) educate the population by increasing human values, ethics and morale, (4) create awareness of different models where free economy exists, (5) incentivizing local and foreign investment, (6) increasing awareness of the harms that come with censored media. Through this approach, public relations practitioners would not only ease this difficult transition, but would ultimately contribute to Venezuelan society’s well-being and the reestablishment of human rights after more than fifteen years of repression and constraint. It is time we “ensure that public relations practice contributes even more toward the development of the world” (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2007, p. 358).
References


Public Relations as Public Diplomacy: From Propaganda and Promotion to Conversation and Collaboration

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Abstract
The challenges for organisations have massively increased, requiring multi-disciplinary approaches involving leadership, sustainability, strategy, governance and collaboration. PR and Public Diplomacy should work together theoretically and practically to create a new cadre of corporate and public diplomats who can help organisations reshape the future with a new dialogic and diplomatic mindset.
Introduction

For the past 30 years this practitioner, author and researcher has been working with senior leaders and their organizations - corporations, governments and other, such as universities, think-tanks and trade associations throughout the world to address the many challenges they face. Yet while the challenges have massively increased, indeed the future cannot be determined based on recent past experience, requiring a multi-disciplinary approach, significant disciplines such as leadership, strategy, governance and sustainability remain unintegrated in their silos.

This is particularly the case for communications, the environment for which is characterized by change, culture, connectivity and collaboration. Such complexity requires the application of social psychology, business management, diplomacy, international relations marketing and public relations thinking in a more joined-up way than hitherto. Because senior management and policy-makers are concerned more with strategic actions and long-term delivery than mere process. In emerging countries in particular, where PR, Public affairs, Corporate Responsibility and Branding are in exponential demand, the offerings are largely compartmentalized and tactical, unsupported by academic rigor and applied research. This is made worse by the imposition of ethnocentric, Western imposed methodologies on often diverse, sometimes high context local cultures, (Hayes & Watts, 2015). As a result of this perspective and the shortfall between reality and aspiration, there is some public relations research reviewing public diplomacy to see if it can shed light on how the discipline can become more globally professional by drawing on the strengths of both. This should make public relations more strategically relevant and credible in more parts of the world and to a whole variety of institutions, public and private, commercial and not-for-profit (Hayes, 2012, MacNamara, 2011).

Field of Research

The Founding Fathers of the international public relations industry had the highest ideals. They wanted nothing less than to use the discipline to help the world unite following World War II. The guiding principles were truth, dialogue and the public interest. Indeed the International Code of Athens (devised by the early pioneers) focused on the fault-line in the evolving profession between persuasion and manipulation on the one hand and a more dialogic approach on the other, balancing organizational with societal interest, underpinned by values. Indeed this remains an intense discussion around the convergence, in practice if not in theory of public relations and public diplomacy, particularly distinguishing PR from propaganda. James Grunig, whose Excellence Theory forms the building blocks of most subsequent academic thinking in PR, argued that “Public Relations must identify its core values if it is to become a respected profession rather than a reviled and suspicious occupation. To do so, I believe public relations must rise above pure advocacy to value a symmetrical form of PR in which collaboration becomes the major idea and skill that we offer organizations to help them rise above the wrangle in the marketplace” (Grunig, 2000).

More recently to reflect the growing internationalization of the discipline, it has been described as: “The strategic communication that different types of organization use for establishing and maintaining symbiotic relationships with relevant publics, many of whom are increasingly becoming culturally diverse” (Sriramesh, 2010). Nowadays culture is defined more broadly to include these elements, as well as the degree of activism and media landscape, but it is the importance of culture that led to public relations taking an interest in the separate discipline of public diplomacy. However while there has been tremendous growth in international public relations in recent years, not least in emerging countries, public relations research and theory
have been slow to keep abreast of international developments, failing to understand it needs to learn from other disciplines (Hayes, 2012, Tench & Yeomans, 2009).

The growth of Internet access, the speed and democratization of news and information, as well as the sans-frontiers thinking of modern activism, are creating a new global culture of awareness and empowerment (Morley, 2009). The boundaries between countries and organizations having been eroded, suggests working with the patterns and relationships as they emerge, while also exploring new links. The state is becoming a strategic enabler, needing to trust business and civil society more. In this context collaboration has been built into the concept of engagement (Hudson, 2009). Linking the concept of collaboration with diplomacy, the IPRA President 2008 Robert Grupp talked of corporate diplomacy, a relatively underutilized term even today, coining the phrase ‘collaborative diplomacy’. This occurs when a corporate embeds the value of collaboration deeply into its culture, thereby extending the reach of its relationships (a concept linking the two disciplines) to include a wider eco-system of stakeholders that could ultimately affect the sustainability of the business and society (Grupp, 2008).

Until recently foreign policy, business and social issues have occupied an overlapping, if distinct space, which has been replaced by a converged space, based on dialogue, public-private partnerships and platforms for engagement. Alongside this greater access to information leading to an end to push communications, public opinion is increasingly feeling a change in the balance of power between government, business and society.

But where does this leave public relations, which is a limited concept in many emerging countries and with new media tending to be quite tactical in its application? Researchers and practitioners are thus challenged to understand what can move its study, teaching and practice. The reputation of public relations as ‘spin’ does not help, which does not mean that just calling public relations public diplomacy will enhance its strategic nature and credibility. (This calls for a separate discussion outside the scope of this paper.) So long as PR scholarship proceeds to look beyond its original theory and limited scope of the PR literature, there is hope that the rapid internationalization of the practice will lead to new cultural, political and social insights that by broadening and deepening the body of knowledge could make the profession more credible and strategically relevant. It is early days, but public diplomacy is perhaps the point of departure to link more closely to business strategy, leadership development, governance and sustainability, key areas of concern to business leaders and policy makers (Hayes, 2012, Hayes & Watts, 2015).

Public Diplomacy Evolution and Symbiosis

When this writer studied international relations at Masters level at U.S.C. in the 1980s, public diplomacy was not an established field of study as an extension of traditional diplomacy. Now it hosts a Center for Public Diplomacy. Tufts University hosts another and the British Foreign Office has a Head of Public Diplomacy, and some Embassies now call Press Officers Public Diplomats. Although the term remains relatively new outside a small body of scholarly work. Whereas traditional diplomacy emphasizes the art of conducting negotiations between States, public diplomacy seeks to influence the behavior of foreign governments via influencing their citizens—i.e. shaping public opinion, which is similar to public relations. Indeed public diplomacy has been defined as a communication process that “Is practiced less as an art than an applied social science of human endeavor. It is the practice of propaganda in the earliest sense of the term, but enlightened by half a century of empirical research into human motivation and behavior” (Manheim, 1994).
In the age of Khrushchev and Kennedy, the term public diplomacy became an alternative to propaganda, according to Cull (2009). The reasons for the term gaining resonance in the 1960s was a need for the then US Information Agency to be described differently, so as to more broadly embrace cultural and exchange functions, as well as (and this is a critical point) to distance it from the realm of public relations. This industry was held in low esteem by the then public policy establishment, perhaps due to its commercial advertising antecedents. However Nancy Snow (2009) believes that the tender minded or soft school of public diplomacy, involving longer term cultural objectives owes a lot to public relations, despite the ‘persuasion industries’ being blamed for ‘the mess public diplomacy is in’. She suggested that relationships might be the best predictor of actual future behavior, shifting the focus from a reactive to a proactive and more dialogic stance, (less pressure, more conciliation) which parallels some thinking in the PR Academy.

Melissen (2005) and Cull (2008) referred to the ‘new’ public diplomacy, drawing attention to the changing context and practice of public diplomacy with the end of the Cold War. This included a broader array of international actors, the advent of digital technologies and the growing assimilation of new techniques drawn from marketing, such as branding and product public relations. It is certainly the case that the practices of public relations can be deployed for governments, such as trade or tourism and nation branding. Above all the new public diplomacy that is being described refers to a new environment where there is no longer a neat international map consisting of a few identifiable players. It now requires transparency and transnational collaboration in a multi-stakeholder, multi-issue, multi-media landscape. It is certainly the case that large and small supra-national and sub-national players develop public diplomacy policies and campaigns of their own, all needing to learn from each other. These range from MNCs and NGOs to the EU and the UN. It is no longer confined to messaging or promotional campaigns, but changing behavior and influencing outcomes. It is also about building relationships and facilitating networks (Hocking, 2005; Melissen, 2005). This trend has accelerated as more informal institutions become involved (Riordan, 2005).

The intensification of global social networks, cyber diplomacy, the active role of pressure groups and the CNN or Al Jazeera effect and even terrorism has led to the emergence of a network model of diplomacy (Riordan, 2005). Governments are deficient in terms of their scope, speed and range in relation to a complex, multi-faceted agenda. The network model with horizontal, multi-directional flows will require increasing adaptation and training. This change is happening to such an extent that the diplomat is transitioning from gatekeeper to facilitator (Hocking, 2005), requiring ‘contextual intelligence’ (Nye, 2008). This is a direct parallel with public relations.

MacNamara (2011) conducted a comparative analysis of the concepts and principles of public diplomacy and public relations as described in PR’s original Excellence Theory. Similarities as well as differences were observed between these fields of practice. In the analysis the author examined how these differences can significantly inform public relations theory and practice. Several concepts of diplomacy were identified to improve public relations. “Corporate diplomacy would require corporations to engage in on-going dialogue with publics guided by specific principles and with mechanisms in place to balance power, amortise conflicts, facilitate negotiation and maintain relationships even in the face of outright disagreement” (MacNamara, 2011).

**Business (or Corporate) Diplomacy**
Another term business or corporate diplomacy entered the lexicon and was deemed to occupy the space beyond public relations into public affairs (Kraus, 2006), although it remains a relatively underutilized term even now, surprising when the relationship between corporations, government and civil society is a central theme of the Davos World Economic Forum 2016.

Kraus explained that when MNCs begin to play a role beyond just goods and services and in emerging countries leverage economic development, their power and scale is such that they need a diplomatic corps of their own to open the right doors, say the right things, interpret local culture, as well as the economic and political context. Given the extent of geo-political risk and opportunities, business leaders need both the skills of business strategy and the ability to conduct business diplomacy, which may or may not require just hiring former diplomats! “It’s thinking ahead...combined with astute networking and relationship building” (Kraus, 2006).

“Corporations serve a diplomatic function because of their political and cultural, as well as their technical and economic clout”, according to a paper delivered at the PR World Congress in Beijing (Grupp & Hayes, 2008).

For instance the foreign policy of a small country such as Singapore is based not just on the realm of diplomacy and security, but chiefly economics. The world has moved from bilateral relations to the WTO and onto more regional, multilateral free-trade agreements. These are negotiated via ASEAN and the EU, recognizing the important role of business and civil society (Koh and Chang, 2005). The UN and business now negotiate issues of transparency and sustainability, involving both debate in the media and pressure from civil society.

Multinational corporations experienced golden days during the 1990s and in the 2000s they expanded globally. CEOs of international businesses are welcomed by heads of state as their counterparts, indeed are invited by governments to help solve global problems such as climate change and poverty. They face dilemmas comparable to those of other actors. Equally they are facing challenges of legitimacy whether it’s suspected tax avoidance, violating human rights, abusing consumer data or exploiting natural resources to the detriment of local communities. Partly due to the economic recession and the significance of sustainability, brought to the fore by greater transparency, there is no place to hide and scrutiny of corporations has intensified (Ruel, 2013).

Globalisation has changed the roles and relationships between MNCs, governments, NGOs, local pressure groups and society. To survive in today’s international business landscape, MNCs need to create legitimacy by interacting and building on positive relationships with all stakeholders (Ruel, 2013). MNCs should therefore engage in business or corporate diplomacy. As Ruel describes it, business diplomacy is different from lobbying or strategic political activity (public affairs). It implies a holistic approach by an international company to cope in the international diplomatic arena. Representation, communication and negotiation are key in such an approach. As such it is important, particularly given the growing complexities and interdependence between economics, politics and society at an international level that companies develop their own business diplomacy competencies. As such it is important to assess where these skills can add value to public relations and related skills, such as CR and public affairs, reputation and branding. Firms that are involved in business diplomacy have chosen to satisfy a social not just a market expectation and are committed to dealing with a wider eco-system of stakeholders than the norm, anticipating the future beyond the next quarterly earnings. Companies such as Unilever argue that it is important for them to build the expectations of stakeholders into their culture and strategies in order to obtain a license to operate. Yet in the international management literature the term business diplomacy is not widely recognized and
has received limited scholarly attention. International programs like the political/military approach to strategic communications adopted by NATO have created a new model of convergence, but have not been subject to much critical analysis in public relations (L’Etang, 2009; Van Dyke and Vercic, 2009). These authors suggest a link with the Excellence Theory of PR, a coordinated and synchronized process, involving analysis, planning, execution and assessment. They stress that a paucity of scholarly research in strategic communication, especially in the PR body of knowledge makes it difficult to locate in theory this international concept of strategic communications. More case histories are needed from countries outside the UK, US and to some extent Western Europe. It is high time the two academies, plus perhaps the business/management scholars, came close together to work on the mix of skills needed.

Skills

To be effective the public diplomat needs values, lifelong learning, historical knowledge, and cultural understanding, listening and communication skills. Also needed are a mastery of the new technologies, an ability to assess both public opinion and the political environment, to research and analyse, to frame and position the players and situate them strategically (Copeland, 2008). But he added that foreign services were designed for a world that no longer exists, with implications for structure, culture, recruitment and training.

With the rise of inexpensive personal communications technology, vast changes in the mainstream media and an evolution in how stakeholders interact with corporations and their brands, many principles of public diplomacy apply. Command and control has been replaced by conversations and collaboration. Corporate public diplomacy now actively shapes the environment, what Microsoft calls ‘innovative social engagement’. Thus studying purely technology, business, journalism or marketing does not provide the necessary holistic or multi-dimensional approach. A corporate diplomat needs to be an outside-insider (Drapeau, 2010).

This researcher found from researches in eight countries among diplomats and senior PR practitioners in companies and consultancies that what are needed are navigation, negotiation, networking and narrative development skills, but that above all if public relations is to become more globally professional it will need to undertake more applied research, as well as create closer links with public diplomacy (Hayes, 2012).

Public relations education and training requires broader than media relations skills—more rigorous, more strategic business, cultural and contextual interpretation on complex issues, with a special need in emerging countries where the demand for skills is greatest, but the offering least available. It is not sustainable for experienced practitioners to be posted for long from New York, Paris or London to Dubai, Lagos or Jakarta, where more nuanced diplomatic skills are required to deal both with convergence of economics, politics and social issues as well as the fast pace of development (Hayes, 2012).

“The new normal must be navigated, negotiated, networked and a narrative built around it. Narrow self-interest is no longer a sustainable basis for corporations needing to deliver economic plus social value. Collaborative Leadership is the most appropriate response to today’s wicked global problems” (Hayes & Watts, 2015).

In a nutshell combining the two disciplines means a symbiosis between stagecraft on the one hand and statecraft on the other to transform statesmanship. The emphasis should be more on listening, conversation, collaboration, dialogue and diplomacy, a more conciliatory approach to stakeholder engagement than would traditionally be the case— with lobbying for instance. The virtual world has intensified this trend, although ironically there is a risk that PR’s emphasis on
digital media tends to move it down into tactics, rather than what is needed, namely a move up into strategy. This researcher in his capacity of DG of the British Nuclear Forum in the 1990s described himself as a corporate diplomat. “There is a qualitative difference between a spin doctor and a corporate diplomat” (L’Etang, 1996).

New York columnist Tom Friedman recently made the point that in this environment you have to have a two-way conversation that connects deeply with your citizens or customers or employees. Senior teams now need to embrace social programs as much as promoting products, develop broader, compelling narratives and provide thought-leadership (the refugee crisis in Europe and Asia), as well as communicating authentically, aligning vision with values. Relationships will be the major source of strategic distinction in the 21st century. As we see with climate change, there will be much greater collaboration between government, business and civil society on sustainability issues. Back in 2003, R.E. Freeman, the father of stakeholder theory argued that reconciling CSR, sustainable development and a stakeholder approach in a networked world, would require navigational tools for a win-win for shareholders and stakeholders alike, (Freeman, 2003).

Authentic communications will break through the wall of mistrust, just as community based programs will continue to resonate well. Consumers now view a business’s social purpose as a major source of differentiation. This needs to involve employees, who are crucial to this.’ Humble’ CEOs demonstrate shared values, collaboration, transparency and good listening skills (Holmes Report, 2016).

“Companies are increasingly viewed as a major cause of social, environmental and community problems. Companies must take the lead in bringing business and society back together. Leaders and managers will require new skills and knowledge” (Porter and Kramer, 2011).

Indeed corporations with a soft diplomatic approach are better able to manage external pressures and obtain a ‘licence to operate’ than those with hard combative attitudes, according to recent Dutch research (Ruel, 2013).

Public Diplomacy relies heavily on the ‘personal influence’ and ‘relationship’ models of PR, which are receiving increased focus in the field following a long preoccupation with mass media communications. In addition, in vulnerable industries, such as mining, multi-stakeholder dialogues are very much in the field of diplomacy. So PR now has an opportunity to engage in the development of public diplomacy as well as learn from it to transform PR’s global professionalism. The convergence of the two fields, at least in practice, if not in theory, given their interdisciplinary nature will inevitably lead to closer links to leadership, sustainability, psychology, governance and strategy, as well as culture, among others. This is the hope anyway.

Conclusion

This paper has not reviewed nation building or branding in any detail. But just as there is greater convergence of corporate branding and reputation (PR?), requiring more research and nation building/branding is a whole area in itself, especially given the growth of international governmental PR, it is vital that public, especially business diplomacy scholars and PR academics and practitioners work together to build a body of knowledge that links closely with other disciplines. This will provide heads of organisations and their advisers with the right tools and approaches going forward.

Despite great strides made by some corporations in terms of building social value and adopting greater integrated reporting in pursuit of transparency, there is a dire need for more
dialogic and diplomatic approaches to stakeholder engagement, involving a relational approach. (Hayes & Watts, 2015). The fundamental task of management is to prove the organization worthy of trust, relying less on information and control, more on dialogue and diplomacy. Board compositions should more accurately reflect the growing complexity of the environment and expectations of stakeholders, balancing the emphasis on finance, law and regulation with negotiation skills and authentic communication. To the economic dimension should be added an ethical dimension to establish a ‘licence to grow’.

Reshaping the future requires a broader leadership on the part of business, sensitive to a broader eco-system of relationships, but needs to be empowered to provide personal stewardship and longer-term thinking. It will be important to build into the organisational knowledge management system inputs and influences from not just economic and market analysis, but those of a cultural, psychological and relational nature. This has implications for corporate cultures and recruitment/training/research.

A new mind-set is required that joins the dots, uses right and left brain and acquires new soft skills involving people and communication. (Hayes and Watts, 2015).

The question was asked, how should public relations as a discipline evolve, bearing in mind the cross-frontier impact of new and traditional media and the impact of globalization, with corporations expected to do more and governments able to do less due to resource and power diffusion. Public relations theory is overly ethnocentric, despite dramatic changes in the social, political and economic landscape with a need to embrace adjacent disciplines such as public diplomacy, if it is to become more credible and strategically relevant.

However, despite growing opportunities for PR as result of new media, advising governments and public sector organisations, a broader role for business, complex issues requiring reframing the narrative and engaging with a broader eco-system of stakeholders, there remain challenges. The picture is uneven, but PR has a poor reputation, is largely seen as tactical and superficial and there exists a skills deficit, particularly in relation to linked disciplines.

Doing the right thing is complicated in today’s market place. Relationships with stakeholders operating across countries, especially in high context societal cultures, remain a challenge. Unfortunately there are far more questions than answers concerning culturally contingent aspects. Sometimes it seems as if business exists purely to enrich the small elite, yet with its resources and expertise it can enrich the world. According to the Champion Brand Index (APCOWORLDWIDE, 2015), 94 pc of those surveyed agree that companies are able to shape a better society. But how to fuse economic and social value and with whom should they collaborate?

PR advisers need to coach and consult their CEOs not only to adapt but also to anticipate change, realizing that nothing less than a multi-disciplinary mindset is needed. Law and economics need to embrace ethics and responsibility. Reputation building simply for the purpose of securing higher brand value could threaten the values and therefore the culture of the organization. As risk becomes more complex, transparency more radical and reputation more costly, the mission of corporate diplomats becomes more relevant. The task of organisations, whether corporations, NGOs or governments is to reframe the narrative, raise the bar higher, anticipate the future and create it in a new spirit. But it will require leading for stakeholder value. So as we look ahead the world is crying out for a new cadre of corporate and public diplomats (APCOWORLDWIDE/HAYES, 2015).
Reference

APCOWORLDWIDE (2015), CHAMPION BRAND INDEX, www.apcoworldwide.com
The Effects of Corporate Social Responsibility and Creating Shared Value on Public Trust, and Public Supportive Behavior: A Comparison Study

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Abstract
The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship among corporate social responsibility (CSR), stakeholders’ expectation on creating shared value (CSV), trust in business, and their resulting supportive behavior towards corporations in the U.S. and China. 2015 Edelman Trust Barometer® data were utilized for exploring the effects of CSR and publics’ CSV expectation on trust and supportive behaviour. The research showed that CSR was the only predictor of trust in business in the U.S., while in China, both CSR and CSV expectation affected the level of trust. Moreover, Chinese stakeholders’ expectation on corporate CSV performance played a role in how trust can be enhanced by corporate CSR behaviors. As for the factors contributing to supportive behavior, corporations’ CSR behaviors, stakeholders’ CSV expectation, and trust in business significantly affected the supportive behaviors of stakeholders in both countries. The data further showed that, when Chinese stakeholders believe corporations can take actions solving social and economic issues and increase profits at the same time, their evaluated trust in business and perceived CSR performance drive their supportive behaviors towards a trusted corporation to a higher level. From the ethical perspective, this study sheds light on how corporations can cooperate with stakeholders in defining their CSR objectives and initiatives to co-create values acceptable to both sides, and contributing to the triple bottom-lines. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.
Introduction

Corporations are under increasing pressure to instigate corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives to fulfill economic, social, and environmental duties to their stakeholders so as to ensure sustainable development (Benn, Todd & Rendleton, 2010; Smith, 2003). CSR has been regarded as a significant corporate practice (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006; Bortree, 2004; Chahal & Sharma, 2006; Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). Research has showed that CSR initiatives can enhance business legitimacy (Ringov & Zollo, 2007), brand equity (Lai, Chiu, Yang, & Pai, 2010), employee recruitment and retention (Y-K. Lee, Y. Kim, K. Lee & D-X. Li, 2012; E. Lee, Park, & H. Lee, 2013), and organization-public relationships (Hall, 2006). All conducive to enhancing corporations’ competitive advantage (Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Braig, 2004), product purchase intention (Wigley, 2008), and ultimately profits (Joyner & Payne, 2002).

Given the numerous positive effects of CSR, related research has flourished in the disciplines of public relations, business ethics, corporate sustainability, leadership, and so forth. At the same time, however, CSR research has revealed several points of criticism. For example, May (2008) contended that the general public will not believe in the genuine intention of CSR initiatives if the company cannot give its operation an ethical alignment in the first place. Similar views were expressed by Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen (2010), who posited that stakeholders usually view the motives of corporate CSR initiatives to be either intrinsic (corporations having genuine concern for social issues), or extrinsic (corporations having a profit-seeking motive in instigating CSR initiatives). Moreover, some scholars have argued that CSR initiatives fail to achieve corporate missions when the corporations focus on short-term profits while ignoring actual consumer needs. As long ago as 1994, Fein and Hilton challenged the motives of corporate CSR initiatives and contended that stakeholders would not draw positive inferences about corporations when they believe that these corporations only have self-serving motives for such initiatives. Hence, the imperative goal for CSR communication was to eliminate the skepticism among stakeholders (Du et al., 2010).

Some industry findings revealed the characteristics of public expectations towards corporate behaviors, and suggested possible directions of new development for corporate CSR initiatives. The Cone research (2015) found that 90% of American consumers are likely to switch to brands associated with a good cause, an increase from 87% in 2007 (Cone, 2007). Similarly, 31% of consumers reward a corporation for operating responsibly by either purchasing its products or speaking positively about the company (Cone, 2015). With the current state of consumers’ expectations of corporations operating responsibly, the recent Edelman Trust Barometer® study revealed a significant drop of trust in business in most countries (Edelman, 2015). At the same time, over 80% of participating study stakeholders believed that corporations are able to take actions towards increasing profits while at the same time improving economic and social conditions of the markets (i.e., creating shared value or CSV). These results support the argument put forward by Porter and Kramer (2011) and Coombs and Holladay (2012): corporations can use CSR to differentiate themselves from others, and to achieve economic competitiveness. Likewise, corporations should align social interests with corporate missions, and make meaningful contributions to the former.

Recently, Porter and Kramer (2011) called for a transformation from CSR practices to creating shared value (CSV). CSV requires corporations to reconnect with society by creating values shared by them and by society. When stakeholders perceive that their needs are being addressed by such corporate practices, they tend to support the respective corporations. We
believe that, when corporations perform CSR, they foster the development of trust which, in turn, further contributes to a positive perception toward the corporations’ CSV practice and its outcome.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between CSR, public trust, CSV, and the resulting supportive behavior of publics towards corporations. We proposed to study the U.S. and China because they are the two largest markets worldwide yet different from one another in the aforementioned conditions. Also, the two countries demonstrate different levels of market development (developed versus emerging). A cross-national study is of value to CSR/CSV research because such practices are subject to the local market’s conditions (e.g., economic needs, social needs, cultural system, political system, and the relationship among the government, business, and civil society) (Bortree, 2014; Porter & Kramer, 2006).

This study advances the modern understanding of CSR and CSV in terms of their impacts on stakeholder trust in and engagement with the corporation. More importantly, it provides insights into the corporate CSV practices from the stakeholder perspective. Corporations operate in an ever more complex environment, and the need for corporate behaviors to satisfy the interests of multiple stakeholders has become important (Freeman, 1984; Joyner & Payne, 2002). Freeman and Gilbert (1988) contended that ethics are the foundation of what is right and fair behavior. Ethical behaviors can be enhanced when corporations embrace values beyond only serving shareholders’ interests, and strategically integrate non-economic objectives into their present and prospective business operations. The study sheds light on how corporations can enhance their competitive advantages by cooperating with stakeholders in defining their CSR objectives and initiatives so as to co-create values acceptable to both sides, and contributing to the triple bottom-lines.

**Literature Review**

**Corporate Social Responsibility**

The concept of CSR has been debated for several decades. The early, ecological focus (Shrivastava, 1995) gave way to sustainability taking center stage (Brundtland, 1987; Sharma & Henriques, 2005). Carroll’s (1999) definition, “the social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time” (cited in Montiel, 2008, p. 500), has been most widely cited. In general terms, CSR refers to corporations’ striving to create a beneficial impact on society at large by pursuing what has been termed “a balanced three-bottom line” (Elkington, 2004), comprising economic, environmental, and social sustainability (Bansal, 2005; Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001). It is implied that both social and environmental initiatives depend on long-term economic growth.

**Three dimensions of CSR.** As per Dyllick and Hockerts (2002), economic sustainability refers to a corporation’s ability to maintain sufficient liquidity “while producing a persistent above average return to its stakeholders” (p. 133). Various types of capital assets, including financial capital (i.e., equity, debt), tangible capital (i.e., land, stocks, machinery), and intangible capital (i.e., innovation, know-how, organizational governance) must be managed by a corporation to achieve economic sustainability. The expectation is that corporations shed the mindset of short-term profit-seeking and strive to achieve long-term economic performance (Bansal, 2005; Willard, 2005). Development of safe, good quality products and improvement of production efficiency are among the behaviors associated with long-term economic contributions (Torugsa et al., 2013).
The environmental sustainability dimension of CSR comprises eco-friendliness, the reduction or prevention of pollution, and environmental leadership (Torugsa et al., 2013). Corporations seeking to minimize their environmental impact while maximizing economic success should adopt the regulations of international environmental management, and closely monitor any environmental damage and negative societal impact caused by product manufacturing processes (Buysse & Verbeke, 2003). As suggested by Sharma and Vredenburg (1998), corporations can improve their capabilities across various value chains which make up their operation processes in order to enhance environmental awareness among management and employees alike.

Torugsa et al. (2013) identified the workplace and the community as the main foci of social sustainability. A corporation wishing to be proactive towards social sustainability can do so by maintaining “the health, safety and general well-being of employees,” motivating “the workforce by offering training and development opportunities,” and by acting “as good citizens in the local community” (European Commission, 2003, p. 5). Similarly, as suggested by Bansal (2005), organizations should engage in formal dialogues with different stakeholders and involve them in the decision-making process on social and ethical issues relevant to stakeholders.

Importance of Trust

Organizations of all sectors count trust as one of their most valuable assets. Trust is an important factor in cultivating long-term, positive relationships between an organization and its strategic stakeholders, as demonstrated by Ki & Hon (2007). Trust has also been shown to improve corporate reputation (Walsh, Mitchell, Jackson, & Beatty, 2009), to enhance customer loyalty (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002), to lead to positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003), and to increase purchase intention (Walsh, et al., 2009). Trust aids in achieving positive crisis management outcomes (Coombs & Holladay, 2002), and is the key factor in persuasive storytelling and organization communication engagement (Flynn, 2015). Given the importance of trust, there have been surprisingly few studies on the relationship between trust and CSR in the field of public relations (Park et al, 2014).

Mayer et al. (1995) proposed three dimensions of trust: integrity, expertise, and social benevolence. These dimensions could also be applied to interpersonal, intergroup or interorganizational levels of trust (Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007). In the field of public relations, trust is often defined as “one party’s level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party” (Hon & J. Grunig, 1999, p. 3), and considered an important outcome of organization-public relationships. Hon & J. Grunig (1999) reviewed theories from various disciplines, and identified three dimensions of trust: integrity, dependability, and competence. These have been widely adopted in public relations research.

CSR and Trust

Trust’s antecedents are relevant in the CSR context, so it is important to explore the role of CSR in establishing trust. Saat and Selamat (2014) demonstrated that rich CSR information increases stakeholder trust perception toward an organization by significantly affecting perceived organizational competence and integrity (but not the perceived benevolence). The limited existing research indicates a link between CSR and perception of trust (usually of consumers), with a few proposed explanations as to its mechanism. Martinez and Rodriguez del Bosque (2013) examined CSR in the context of hospitality companies, and identified a significant
The influence of CSR on customer loyalty. Trust was found to be a mediating factor. Brown and Dacin (1997) discussed the function of CSR in shaping trust. They found that a corporation’s CSR performance explicitly reflects its characters and values. CSR performance also instils trust in a corporation among people who share the same characters or values (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The incorporation of ethical and responsible principles into the corporate strategic decision-making process also helps to improve trust among all stakeholders (Hosmer, 1994). When stakeholders perceive an organization as ethical and responsible, they are likely to establish a relationship with that organization. Trust serves as a foundation of this type of relationship, and common belief is that behaviors of each party to the relationship are reliable beyond what is required by law (Martinez & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2013).

The discussions on CSR and trust, therefore, have led to the following research question and hypothesis:

**RQ1:** How does CSR affect public trust in the U.S. and China?

**H1:** The more a corporation practices CSR, the higher the level of public trust in the corporation.

*Creating Shared Values*  
Porter and Kramer (2006, 2011) argued that CSR initiatives fail to achieve corporate missions when the corporation’s focus is on short-term profits while ignoring consumer needs. This argument was echoed by Bortree (2014) who stated that corporations should communicate to track and share the value of their CSR programs for the stakeholders they serve and the ecological settings in which they do business, rather than focus on publicizing the organizational gains brought by the programs (p. 3). Acknowledging the mutual dependence between corporations and society, Porter and Kramer (2011) proposed the concept of CSV, “policies or practices that enhance the business competitiveness of a company while simultaneously advancing social and economic conditions in a community where it operates” (p.66). CSV requires corporations to reconnect with society by creating values shared by both. When stakeholders perceive that their needs have been addressed by corporate practice, they tend to support that corporation (e.g. purchasing the company’s products and defending the company when it faces difficult times).

**Business and society.** A shared-value corporation operates profitable business that solves social problems (Porter & Kramer, 2011). It also gains a competitive advantage by its creative business practice. This view may be criticized as “strategic CSR” where corporations adopting this practice have narrow CSR definitions and their purpose is to enhance profits (Banerjee, 2008) while stakeholders may only have limited interest and are skeptical of what the corporation can actually contribute (Steger, 2008). However, Szmigin and Rutherford (2013) contended that the CSV approach was developed from a value-principle perspective of enhancing corporate competitiveness via advancing social conditions. To reach that end, corporations should work with various stakeholders in the process. For example, corporations re-examine stakeholder needs using two-way, dialogical communication, and develop new profitable businesses that were previously ignored. Corporations can identify the social issues/dimensions associated with their value chains and come up with innovative approaches to address them, or they can work with the government or civil society to change social conditions. Visser (2010) contended that the goal of value creation should be jointly achieved by corporations and stakeholders. As noted by Szmigin and Rutherford (2013), stakeholders are
important and should be identified, consulted, and understood in order for management to make impartial decisions.

In addition, following acknowledgement of the mutual dependence between corporations and society, both business decisions and social policies should be made with the principle of creating shared values that benefit both sides (Michelini & Fiorentino, 2011). With this view, Jamali (2010) and Michelini and Fiorentino (2011) considered shared value to have a more powerful effect when corporations enter developing countries. Such countries provide attractive business opportunities with low labor and resource costs for corporations, which inevitably create social problems when profit-seeking. In such circumstances corporations should develop CSR strategies that incorporate social values in their business development so as to bring benefits to society.

Studies on Creating Shared Value. The concept of CSV is a recent one; hence, no study of it has yet been conducted in corporate communication. However, some studies from the management literature provide insights for public relations and corporate communication research. For example, Szmigin and Rutherford (2013) developed the Impartial Spectator Test (IST) after discussing the problem of CSR from business and societal perspectives and reviewing Adam Smith’s Impartial Spectator (Smith, 1759, cited in Szmigin & Rutherford, 2013). The IST consists of the idea that corporations stand back to view a situation and make the right ethical decision that creates values both for corporations and stakeholders. Therefore, the IST is an open engagement process in which stakeholders can be consulted and their views and values can be included so that “the community is embedded in the firm’s DNA and accountability structure” (p. 179).

Lee, Moon, Cho, Kang, and Jeong (2014) took a relationship approach and identified the various organizational components of CSV and CSR in explaining how CSR could be transformed to CSV. They employed Blackler’s (1995) activity theory that depicts the components of an activity and the relationship among these components. Also, the triple-helix theory explains that industry, academia, and government can work together in creating new roles and organizations (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000). Lee et al. (2014) examined the relationship between corporations and suppliers in the bakery industry, using these two theories. The outcomes of an organization’s transforming its approach from CSR to CSV included a mutual firm foundation that creates values for corporations and the society, so as to achieve regional development and long-term contracts between a corporation and its suppliers.

Adopting a similar approach to Lee et al. (2014), Ghasemi, Nazemi, and Hajirahimian (2014) studied the transformation process from CSR to CSV of a steel company in Iran. They concluded that CEOs and corporate leaders should be open-minded and work with the community and society in identifying issues affecting all parties. In addition, corporations should be active in communicating CSR initiatives and engaging stakeholders so as to strengthen the trust between the company and the stakeholders.

Trust, CSR, and perceived CSV. CSR-engaging corporations can gain stakeholder trust (Pivato, Misani, & Tencati, 2008), especially those with the same characters or beliefs as the corporations (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). However, Park et al. (2014) noted the scarcity of research examining the relationship between CSR and stakeholder trust in business. In addition, the literature suggests that trust serves as a mediator between CSR initiatives and organizational gains, including competitive advantage (Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Braig, 2004), purchase
intention (Wigley, 2008), consumer loyalty (Martinez & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2013), brand equity (Lai, Chiu, Yang, & Pai, 2010), revenue (Joyner & Payne, 2002), organizational legitimacy (Ringov & Zollo, 2007), employee recruitment and retention (E. Lee, Park, & H. Lee, 2013), and organization-community relationship quality (Hall, 2006). We argue that CSV can play a role further strengthening stakeholders’ trust toward a corporation and its outcome. As suggested by this, corporations need to communicate and collaborate with various stakeholders to develop a successful CSV practice. Obtaining trust from the stakeholders is key to the effectiveness of their communication and collaboration and significantly affects the practice’s success.

The research questions and hypothesis, as a result, are as follows:

RQ2: What is the role of CSV in shaping public trust in business?

H2: CSV expectation on business and trust in business are associated.

RQ3: How do CSR and CSV affect trust in business?

Public Support as Outcomes of CSR, CSV, and Trust

As discussed, extensive research has proven the contribution of CSR initiatives to stakeholder support for an organization (e.g., doing business with the organization, being its employees, perceiving it highly) even if the initiatives are also self-serving (Kim & Lee, 2012). Corporate performance of CSV, similar to CSR but further creatively solving community economic or social problems, should also trigger stakeholder support for the organization. However, empirical research examining the effect of that expectation of corporate CSV behaviors on corporate supportive behavior, especially research conducted in a non-Western context, is limited, since this concept was only recently developed.

As noted, Lee et al.’s (2014) study on transforming a corporation’s CSR approach to CSV resulted in the positive outcomes of developing a mutual firm foundation with the suppliers and securing long-term contracts between a corporation and its suppliers. However, the outcomes that provide communication insights in CSV have not been explored. As a result, we focus on the discussions on the outcomes of CSR communication and provide the rationale for what CSV can contribute for a corporation.

Stanaland, Lwin, and Murphy (2011) explored the effects of CSR initiatives and CSR communication from the consumer stakeholder perspective. They found that consumer’s evaluations of a corporation’s CSR behavior were positively related to financial and non-financial outcomes; for example, perceived financial performance, consumer trust, and loyalty. In addition, when consumers evaluated a corporation’s CSR behavior positively, they perceived low risk on the corporate performance and products. In addition, as with Maignan and Ferrell’s (2004) findings, their study highlighted the multi-faceted concept of CSR: winning consumer loyalty and gaining a favorable reputation were the pragmatic motivations of corporations practicing CSR.

Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen’s (2007) further highlighted the outcomes of customers turning into corporation/brand ambassadors, bringing positive word-of-mouth and being willing to pay premium prices for the company products as positive pragmatic effects of CSR and CSR communication. More positive behavior changes were revealed in Sen, Bhattacharya, and Korschun’s (2006) stakeholder study: consumers who had favorable perceptions on corporations’ CSR initiatives would not only be willing to purchase products at premium prices but also to seek employment opportunities to join the company. To build a comprehensive picture of CSR and CSR communication outcomes, Du et al. (2010) provided a framework for
CSR communication. The positive CSR communication outcomes include corporations building trust and gaining positive attributions; investors being willing to commit more investment capital; employees becoming more productive and cultivating citizenship behaviors and advocating for the company; and consumers being willing to purchase the company products and being loyal advocates for the company.

This discussion on CSR, trust, CSV, and outcomes of corporate social responsible behaviors lead to the following research questions and hypotheses:

RQ4: What factors affect the public’s supportive behavior to a trusted corporation?

H3: Trust and supportive behavior are positively associated.

H4: CSR leads to supportive behavior.

H5: CSV expectation and supportive behavior are positively associated.

H6: The effect of trust on supportive behavior is moderated by CSV expectation.

H7: The effect of CSR on supportive behavior is moderated by CSV expectation.

As we chose the United States (a developed market) and China (an emerging market) in this study, in the following paragraphs we discuss the CSR and CSV practices and communication in these two markets to better understand their current development differences.

**CSR and CSV communication in the U.S. and China**

The effect of CSR and CSV initiatives depends on how corporations use communication along with their practices, for what purposes, and to what level of effectiveness. This is because the public tends to lack direct experience with the initiatives and therefore relies on the message from corporations to form perceptions. As suggested by CSR communication research, a message’s content, source, and channel of distribution all affect how the audience evaluates the information (Bortree, 2014; Kim & Ferguson, 2014). For example, U.S. consumers prefer to receive CSR messages in the channels of a company’s owned media (e.g., local retailer stores, websites, and social media platforms) and with the source of “the company in general” rather than from employees, CEOs, spokespersons, activists, and other stakeholders (Kim & Ferguson, 2014). Exploring the best communication for CSV in certain cultural contexts contributes to the applications of CSV.

**CSR communication differences in the U.S. and in China.** Tang, Gallagher, and Bie (2015) pointed out the scarcity of research systematically exploring differences in CSR communication and practices in the U.S. and in China. CSR practices in the U.S. started in the 1960s when corporations faced great social expectations that corporate practices should go beyond profit seeking (Chu & Lin, 2013). For China’s CSR practices, because of corporate globalization and China’s market changes, CSR was only introduced in recent years (Zu & Song, 2009). As a result, Tang and Li (2009) considered China’s CSR practices the continuous negotiation between corporations and the unique contexts of social, economic, and cultural settings.

Burton et al. (2000) showed that stakeholders in the U.S. and Hong Kong have different expectations on corporate CSR approaches; U.S. participants tended to focus on the non-economic approach of CSR, while Hong Kong participants preferred the economic CSR practices. A view similar to the one held in Hong Kong among Chinese stakeholders on their expectations for organizations’ CSR practices was found by Wang and Chaudhri’s (2007). In terms of CSR Communication, Tang et al.’s (2015) study comparing the CSR approaches portrayed on U.S. and Chinese corporation’s websites illustrated significant differences: the
ethical rationale was the most cited one for corporate CSR engagement, followed in descending order by the discretionary rationale, legal rationale, and economic rationale. Employees and community were the most important stakeholders in CSR communication among the U.S. corporations. For Chinese corporations, however, CSR was considered as ad hoc philanthropy (discretionary), strategic philanthropy (CSR activities focused on the segments of the community related to the corporate core business), and ethical business conduct (ethicality of the business practices, such as employee treatment, product safety, and so forth.). Conversely, employees were less emphasized in the Chinese corporate CSR initiatives.

**CSR communication outcomes in the U.S. and in China.** Ramasamy and Yeung (2009) compared consumer stakeholders in the U.S. and China from the perspective of consumer willingness to reward or punish corporations for their CSR behaviors. Chinese consumers, coming from a more collectivist society, tend to be more supportive of corporations than U.S. consumers engaging in more socially responsible behaviors. In investigating the different behaviors of consumers in the U.S. and in China, Chu and Lin (2013) also took the same approach on rewarding and punishing corporations to inform how well the companies performed their CSR initiatives. They found that, compared with U.S. consumers, Chinese consumers were more likely to reward socially responsible companies and punish those with poor CSR performance records. Furthermore, Chinese consumers exhibited a higher level of expectations on corporate CSR behaviors than American consumers.

We believe that these different approaches to CSR communication and practices affect how public trust is established, perceptions of CSV, and public support.

**Methods**

**Data**

This study utilized the data of the 2015 Edelman Trust Barometer® that randomly surveyed 2,000 general population respondents aged 18 and above from the U.S. (n = 1,000) and China (n = 1,000) online. The survey contained six sections of questions that took approximately 20 minutes to complete. The 2015 data collection was conducted between October 13 and November 24, 2014.

**Measures**

**Trust in business** was assessed by a single item asking the participants to rate their level of trust in “business in general in their country to do what is right,” using a 9-point scale (1 = “Do not trust them at all” to 9 = “Trust them a great deal”). The **environmental sustainability** dimension of CSR, referring to environmentally-friendly practices, was assessed by a single item asking how well the business in general “works to protect and improve the environment.” The **economic sustainability** dimension, defined as long-term profit growth, was assessed by three items asking how well the business “is an innovator of new products, services or ideas,” “offers high quality products or services,” and “delivers consistent financial returns to investors” (α= .90 in the U.S. and α = .90 in China). Seven items were used to assess the **social sustainability** dimension, defined as the corporate commitment to long-lasting societal well-being by responding to its stakeholders’ evolving needs. The items asked how effectively the business “has transparent and open business practices,” “has ethical business practices,” “treats employees well,” “creates programs that positively impact the local community in which the company operates,” “partners with NGOs, government and third parties to address societal issues,” “takes responsible actions to address an issue or a crisis,” and “addresses society’s needs in its
everyday business” (α = .97 in the U.S. and α = .96 in China). The participants rated all the question items on a 9-point scale where 1 = “performing extremely poorly” to 9 = “performing extremely well.”

The overall CSR performance was calculated by averaging the means of the three CSR dimensions.

Expectation of corporate shared value was assessed by asking participant degree of agreement with each of two statements: (1) A company can take specific actions that both increase profits and improve the economic and social conditions in the communities where it operates; (2) A company can be more profitable by finding ways to solve social and community problems (1 = “Strongly disagree” to 9 = “Strongly agree”) (α = .82 in the U.S. and α = .79 in China). Supportive behavior to a trusted company was measured by whether, in the preceding 12 months, the participant had performed any of the six actions in relation to the trusted companies, using a dichotomous measure where 1 = yes and 0 = no: product/service purchase, brand recommendation to others, positive online word-of-mouth, stock purchase, and defending the company. The six binary responses were then combined to form a cumulative index of supportive behavior (ranging from 0 to 6).

Results

Sample Characteristics

Slightly over 52% of the U.S. participants were female (n = 521) while there were more males among the Chinese participants (n = 531). Most participants in the U.S. were aged 60 or above (n = 236), followed by those aged 31-39 (n = 211), 51-59 (n = 206), 41-49 (n = 160), 21-29 (n = 149) and 18-20 (n = 40). The Chinese participants were much younger with the majority in the age cohort of 31-39 and 41-49 (n = 228), followed by those aged 21-29 (n = 203), 51-59 (n = 165), 60 or above (n = 134) and 18-20 (n = 41). Most participants were employed part-time or full-time (n_{U.S.} = 594, n_{CH} = 764) with a bachelor degree or above (n_{U.S.} = 545, n_{CH} = 440).

The Positive Impact of CSR on Trust in Business

Descriptive statistics and correlations of the study variables are summarized in Table 1. The data suggested a slightly above medium level of public trust in business in the U.S. (M = 5.50, SD = 1.96) and China (M = 5.77, SD = 1.70). Business operating in China in general was perceived as more trustworthy by the Chinese participants than their U.S. counterparts in the minds of the U.S. public (t = -3.24, p < .05). Linear regression analyses were conducted to address RQ1 and H1 (see Table 2). A preliminary analysis indicated that multicollinearity for all sets independent variables in both regression models was low (variance inflation factor (VIF) ranged from 3.74 to 9.90). The result revealed that the three CSR dimensions together explained more than 20% of the variance in trust in business in the two nations (U.S.: $R^2 = .22$; $F(3, 864) = 81.11, p < .001$; China: $R^2 = .21$; $F(3, 92) = 81.05, p < .001$). Among the CSR dimensions, only economic sustainability and social sustainability significantly predicted the level of trust in business in general perceived by the public in both countries. In the U.S., economic sustainability ($\beta = .22, t = 3.75, p < .001$) was a more influential factor and explained 11.3% of the variance in trust in business than social sustainability ($\beta = .20, t = 2.44, p < .05, \text{Part} = .073$). However, social sustainability ($\beta = .35, t = 3.78, p < .001, \text{Part} = .11$) was a more powerful factor than economic sustainability in China ($\beta = .17, t = 2.38, p < .05, \text{Part} = .070$). Thus, H1 was partially supported.

[Table 1 & Table 2 here]
The Relationship between Trust, CSR, and CSV

H2 posited that CSV expectation and trust in business are associated. The result of the correlation analysis supported H2: CSV expectation and trust had a positive association in both countries (U.S.: \( \alpha = 0.13, p < 0.001 \); China: \( \alpha = 0.37, p < 0.001 \)). To further examine the role of CSR performance and CSV expectation in shaping trust in business (RQ3), linear regression analyses were performed where the CSR variable was computed as a cumulative index (i.e., the overall CSR performance). Table 3 shows the results of the analyses. The proposed model explained 21.3% and 24.9% of the variance in trust in business in the U.S. and China respectively (\( F_{\text{U.S.}}(3, 851) = 77.96, p < 0.001 \); \( F_{\text{CH}}(3, 918) = 102.63, p < 0.001 \)). In particular, a company’s overall CSR performance (\( \beta = 0.46, t = 14.14, p < 0.001, \text{Part} = 0.43 \)) was the only significant predictor of its trust perceived by the public in the U.S.; while in China, trust was affected by the two variables (CSR: \( \beta = 0.34, t = 10.87, p < 0.001, \text{Part} = 0.31 \); CSV: \( \beta = 0.27, t = 8.18, p < 0.001, \text{Part} = 0.23 \)). Moreover, the interaction term (CSR x CSV) was significant and positive (\( \beta = 0.09, t = 3.01, p < 0.005, \text{Part} = 0.09 \)) in China, suggesting that the relationship between trust and CSR performance is strengthened by the Chinese individual’s agreement level with CSV.

Factors Affecting the Public’s Supportive Behavior to a Trusted Corporation

Our last research question asked the factors that affect individuals’ actual supportive behavior toward a corporation they trust. Linear regression analyses were conducted. As Table 4 shows, the basic model (Model 1) significantly predicted the supportive behavior of the individuals toward their trusted companies in the past 12 months (U.S.: \( R^2 = 0.08 \); \( F(3, 842) = 26.27, p < 0.001 \); China: \( R^2 = 0.11 \); \( F(3, 907) = 38.75, p < 0.001 \)). Trust, CSR, and CSV exhibited a significantly positive relationship with supportive behavior for the U.S. and Chinese participants (see Table 4). Therefore, H3-H5 were supported.

Based on the assumptions of CSV, H6 and H7 proposed that the effect of trust and CSR performance on supportive behavior would be greater for those who agree with CSV at a stronger level. The interaction model (Model 2) significantly predicted supportive behavior in the two countries (U.S.: \( R^2 = 0.08 \); \( F(5, 840) = 15.97, p < 0.001 \); China: \( R^2 = 0.13 \); \( F(5, 905) = 27.18, p < 0.001 \)). Yet, the betas for the two interaction terms were not significant in the U.S., indicating no indirect effect of CSV expectation on supportive behavior. The interaction model in China explained an extra 10.5% of the variance compared to the basic model. Moreover, the two interaction terms were significant (Trust x CSV: \( \beta = 0.07, t = 2.21, p < 0.05, \text{Part} = 0.07 \); CSR x CSV: \( \beta = 0.09, t = 2.56, p < 0.05, \text{Part} = 0.080 \)), suggesting that CSV expectation moderates the effect of trust and CSR on supportive behavior. As a result, H6 and H7 were partially supported.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to explore the relationships between Corporate Social Responsibility, Creating Shared Value, trust, and stakeholder supportive behaviors by utilizing the data from the 2015 Edelman Trust Barometer® study. We chose one major developed market (the U.S.) and one major emerging market (China) for the research foci. All the hypotheses were supported except for H6 and H7, which were partially supported. However, the partially supported hypotheses brought insights on public expectations on how corporations should practice CSR, and the effect of CSV expectation in emerging markets.
Summary of Findings

Our results demonstrated that CSR indeed affects stakeholder trust in the U.S. and China. However, among the three dimensions of CSR – social, economic, and environmental – the latter did not significantly affect trust in business. As for the relationship between CSV and trust, the findings from the U.S. and China data were positive. Interestingly, the finding showed that Chinese expectations on corporate CSV performance play a role in how trust can be enhanced by corporate CSR behaviors. Specifically, when Chinese stakeholders believe that corporations can turn a profit while at the same time bringing contributions to society, the CSR initiatives of these corporations are recognized more by and they form a higher level of trust in the business.

Regarding the factors contributing to public’s supportive behavior, corporations’ CSR, stakeholder CSV expectation and trust in business indeed affected the supportive behaviors in both countries. The data further showed that, when Chinese stakeholders believe corporations can take actions solving social and economic issues and increase profits at the same time, their perceived trust in business and CSR performance drive their supportive behaviors toward a trusted corporation to a higher level. Some results are further discussed below.

Different Levels of Trust in Business in the U.S. and China

Trust in business in general was significantly higher in China than in the U.S., even though the difference was not large. A possible explanation might be the overall economic performance of businesses in the two markets in recent years. After economic reform, China has maintained a two digit GDP for the past ten years. On the other hand, the U.S. economy declined in 2008 as a result of the housing financial crisis and has since struggled to bounce back to its previous status. Even though there have been corporate scandals in both countries, Chinese stakeholders gave a bit more credit to businesses operating in their nation for the overall economic growth than did their U.S. counterparts.

Different Effects of CSR and CSV Expectation on Trust in the U.S. and China

The literature suggests that corporate CSR behavior enhances public trust in companies (e.g., Brown & Dacin, 1997; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Our study supports the findings of previous research. Trust in business in both countries was significantly affected by CSR performance, especially regarding economic and social sustainability. In contrast to Burton et al.’s (2000) finding that Americans focused more on the non-economic aspect of CSR performances, our research found that economic sustainability is a more powerful predictor of public trust in business in the U.S. than social sustainability, suggesting that 15 years after Burton et al.’s study Americans now most expect businesses to fulfill their economic goal.

On the other hand, social sustainability was more essential than economic sustainability in forming trust in business in China. This implies that while the economic performance of the business is overall satisfactory (as a positive outcome of operating in a developing market with a large, young population), Chinese stakeholders paid more attention to corporate efforts in improving the social problems of the local communities when trusting the corporation. Moreover, CSV expectations of the Chinese participants enhanced the relationship between CSR performance and public trust in business.

Another possible reason for this difference between the U.S. and China may be explained by China’s situation as an emerging market. Even though China has recently become the world’s largest economy, the economic reforms only started in the early 1980s with different levels of economic developments in different parts of this large country. In rural areas requiring more
financial support for local development, investments by corporations help enhance employment opportunities and economic conditions and also help in resolving societal issues. This may be why the Chinese stakeholders perceive that corporations can achieve economic gains while at the same time contributing to the community and the society.

Different Effects of CSR, CSV Expectation, and Trust in Business on Public Support in the U.S. and China

Our research found that CSV moderates the effect of trust and CSR on public supportive behavior in China but not in the U.S. Ramasamy and Yeung’s (2009) study provides a possible explanation: from a cultural perspective, compared to the U.S., China is a more collective society, where social harmony and relationships are more emphasized. Kim and Moon (2015) also found that in Asia, community and philanthropy are a focus of corporate CSR initiatives. Furthermore, unlike the U.S., China is an emerging market and has undergone a series of reforms in various aspects (e.g., in politics, economy, law, public health, and social welfare) to adapt to the emerging challenges. Corporations, with their economic power and know-how, are expected to assist the society in going through this process by contributing to the solutions of societal problems. Therefore, Chinese corporate operations are expected to demonstrate how the business outcomes benefit community and society.

Following from this discussion on how stakeholders view corporations’ increasing profit while performing CSR initiatives, it is inevitable that corporations have their own interests in mind when planning CSR programs. However, if the outcomes of CSR performance benefit the community and society at the same time, stakeholders may be more willing to reward these trusted corporations by trying their products, spreading positive word-of-mouth endorsements, seeking employment opportunities, and being loyal customers.

Theoretical Implications: Positive Outcomes of CSV as Strategic CSR

In this study, we did not expressly explore the differences between altruistic CSR and strategic CSR. However, our research findings empirically explored the outcomes of CSV (i.e., strategic CSR) and shed light on how corporations formulate their CSR strategies so as to benefit both themselves and society.

Altruistic CSR, according to Lantos (2001), is when corporations genuinely care about the society when developing their CSR initiatives; strategic CSR is about strategic philanthropy that focuses on achieving corporate strategic goals, and promoting social welfare at the same time. Du, et al. (2010) termed genuine CSR as intrinsic CSR, and strategic CSR as extrinsic CSR. Forehand and Grier (2003) and Yoon, Gurhan-Canli, and Schwarz (2006) contended that intrinsic CSR has positive attributions and shows the genuine character of corporations. It can therefore lead to more favorable attitudes among publics. Conversely, with extrinsic CSR, stakeholders usually have less favorable attitudes toward the corporations because this kind of CSR involves corporations putting their own interests first.

A point of skepticism related to strategic CSR has been that corporations’ CSR initiatives cannot really benefit society, and the outcomes of strategic philanthropy are financial gains, increasing market shares, product purchase, and customer loyalty. This can be true in many cases. Yet, Crane, Palazzo, Spence, and Matten (2014) contended that the concept of CSV as developed by Porter and Kramer (2010) was a positive response to those claims that corporate decision making was only made through “the lens of corporate interests, neglecting the common good perspective” (p. 133). In addition, although the concept of CSV could be a strategy for
corporations to differentiate themselves from their competitors, the idea of engaging with stakeholders and developing strategies that incorporate social, economic, and environmental issues into corporate decision making can help develop “conscious capitalism” (Crane, et al., 2014, p. 133). From this perspective, strategic CSR can be an effective win-win solution for corporations to maintain their competitiveness, and resolve or prevent social problems arising from their business operations.

Our study supports this argument with empirical evidence indicating that the stakeholders who believe in CSV (i.e., strategic CSR) in the U.S. and China are more likely to support trusted corporations by doing business with them (even at a higher price), recommending them to others via positive word-of-mouth, and defending them against criticism than those who do not share the belief. Moreover, for people in China, their CSV belief even strengthens the positive effect of trust in business and corporate CSR performance on generating their supportive behavior toward trusted corporations.

Furthermore, our finding highlights the positive effect of public CSV expectation on trust and consumer positive behaviour towards corporations, which may provide practical implications on communicating with skeptical consumers. Obermiller and Spangenberg (2001) and Pirsch, Gupta, and Grau (2006) considered skepticism to be a tendency towards disbelief. Bae and Cameron (2006) found that the consumers’ initial responses on corporations communicating their CSR initiatives was likely to be suspicious, especially when the real motives are not clear (Szykman, Bloom, & Blazing, 2004). Moreover, Bae and Cameron (2006) and Elving (2010) contended that consumers would be more suspicious when there are contrary motives, and the real motive of the CSR initiatives were difficult to identify. Consumer skepticism on corporate CSR motives was found to have negative effects on consumers’ attitudes towards the company and consumer purchase intention (Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006; Elving, 2010).

However, Elving’s study (2010) provided the insight that when there is a high level of fit of corporate CSR initiatives with the company practices, there would be less skepticism which in turn led to more positive attitudes toward the company and a higher consumer purchase intention. In addition, Ellen, et al. (2006) explored how consumers view corporations’ practicing CSR. Their research findings showed that consumers accepted when corporations had mixed motives for their CSR initiatives. However, consumers would respond negatively when corporations practiced CSR solely because of stakeholder or societal pressure. This result fits with the CSV idea by which consumers are willing to accept organizations’ simultaneously pursuing bottom line concerns and societal concerns in their CSR practices.

When corporations communicate with skeptical publics, it is essential to build trust, or at least, remove the suspicion these publics have. As the data in our study showed, even though people might be suspicious about the CSR actions of corporations, such actions still do cultivate a level of trust in the U.S. and China. Corporations should constantly communicate honestly the corporate purposes behind their CSR initiatives, and engage different stakeholders in discussing how to develop win-win CSR programs that fit the corporate practices and solve social and community issues at the same time. Inviting NGOs, community and opinion leaders, and consumer association representatives to serve on the board as Lerbinger (2012) suggested can help enhance the communication, listening, dialogue, and collaborations with the society when developing corporate operational directions. In addition, the best approach in persuading skeptical publics and building trust among them is for corporations to provide evidence of their
long-term CSR initiatives results – corporations’ profit increases as well as the community and the society benefits from the corporate CSR performances.

Practical Implications: CSR and CSV Communication

To generate supportive behavior of individuals as the tangible reward of being a trusted corporation, it is crucial in practice to first educate the top management about CSV as a powerful driver so that management can better strategize the corporation’s CSV performance with limited resources. Second, public relations managers can instill in top management the concept that CSV as creates shared value, which can only happen when corporations work closely with society as partners via two-way communication and mutual understanding of the problem that needs to be solved. Third, corporations should effectively communicate with stakeholders to form CSV expectations – corporations can find profitable ways to solve economic and social problems in the community. This means that CSV communication via various means (e.g., press releases, promotional videos, annual reports, or internal newsletters) should not only convey the charitable or philanthropic activities done by the corporations, it should showcase, if not at a larger level, corporations partnering with NGOs, government, and third parties to co-create values and solutions to particular economic or social problems. This is also what an ethical corporation should achieve.

Even though there has as yet been no research on the effects of CSV communication on stakeholder behaviors and corporate business outcomes, Porter and Kramer’s (2010) idea of CSV has a demonstrated positive effect of developing a mutual firm foundation, and securing long-term contracts with suppliers (e.g. Lee et al., 2014; Ghasemi, et al., 2014). However, Crane et al. (2014) raised concerns about the CSV weakness, for example, possible tensions between social and economic goals when “worldviews, identities, interests, and values collide” (p. 136). From the communication viewpoint, we agree with Ghasemi et al.’s emphasis on the importance of corporations’ being open-minded, and engaging with stakeholders in identifying issues affecting all parties.

The Excellence Study (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002) demonstrated the win-win outcome of symmetrical communication. Symmetrical communication refers to organizations’ engaging in dialogues with stakeholders, and discussing the concerns and issues stakeholders have, so as to reach a win-win solution. Thus, when corporations are planning their CSR programs, it is essential for them to practice continual environmental scanning to identify the concerns and issues that impact community and society, and to listen to the views of stakeholders so that effective CSR programs which benefit society and corporations can be implemented.

From the perspective of communication channels, Kim and Ferguson’s (2014) research showed that U.S. stakeholders preferred to receive corporate CSR messages via the company’s own media, such as corporate websites, social media platforms, and so forth. Edelman 2015 Trust Barometer® data showed that traditional media and social media platforms were the preferred communication channels for Chinese stakeholders to receive corporate messages (Edelman, 2015). Corporations in the U.S. and China can utilize these communication channels to effectively provide information and messages on their economic and social contributions to society. In addition, with the dialogic, two-way, and interactive features of social media, corporations can engage with stakeholders and society to exchange views on various social and economic issues, co-create agreeable values, and brainstorm effective solutions for those issues.

Limitations and Future Research Directions
Although this study utilized large random samples and robust analytical methods, it has some limitations. The primary limitation is the use of secondary data analyses for this study, which meant we were unable to change the design of the survey questions. Because of that, there were uneven numbers of question items for each of the three CSR dimensions. Also, there were no questions to provide insights into situational or cultural contexts that might explain the mechanism by which particular CSR dimensions and CSV expectations produce trust building and public support in the U.S. or China. Similarly, there were no questions on corporations’ CSV efforts, which resulted in limited understanding on how CSV can enhance public trust, and positive publics’ rewarding corporations’ good deeds. Finally, use of single-item measures does not provide reliability data; hence results while significant may be an artifact of some other function than intended.

Future research with qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews with corporations and stakeholders, and observation is needed to provide in-depth information that helps in interpreting results and generates further insights. Another limitation is the lack of generality of the findings caused by the fact that each country has its unique political, economic, cultural, and societal contexts. The results are, however, informative, and it is worth conducting longitudinal research in these markets to validate them.

From a public relations perspective, another limitation of this study lies in the fact that the question of how corporations communicate their CSR and CSV efforts was not incorporated. In future research it would be worth exploring how corporations utilize different communication channels (owned, earned, hybrid and paid media), in communicating and engaging in dialogues with the community and publics for CSR and CSV efforts.

Lastly, as scholars from the management, psychology, and public relations disciplines have contended, trust has multiple dimensions (Barber, 1983; Hon & J. Grunig, 1999; Kingshott, 2006; Schoorman et al, 2007). In this study, trust was measured by a single-item question; future research can test trust as a multidimensional construct, as Hon and J. Grunig (1999) and Mayer et al. (1995) suggested, exploring the impact(s) of each CSR dimension and CSV on particular trust aspects and the resulting public behaviors across cultural settings.
References


Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of the Study Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>U.S. M (SD)</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
<th>(6)</th>
<th>(7)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supportive behavior</td>
<td>2.82 (1.78)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.205**</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.19**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust in business</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
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<td>.42**</td>
<td>.451**</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>.13**</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.76**</td>
<td>.856**</td>
<td>.92**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.95**</td>
<td>.24**</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Overall CSR</td>
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<td>.30**</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CSV</td>
<td>6.76 (1.66)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
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<td>.23**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Overall CSR</td>
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*Note.** p < .01
Table 2
*The Relationship between CSR Dimensions and Trust in Business*

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Part</td>
<td>VIF</td>
<td>β</td>
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<td>.35***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.22***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.21***</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note. All betas are standardized coefficients. *** p < .001, ** p < .005, * p < .05.*

Table 3
*Predictors of Trust in Business*

<table>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>β</td>
<td>Part</td>
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<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.21***</td>
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<td>.25***</td>
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*Note. All betas are standardized coefficients. *** p < .001, ** p < .005, * p < .05.*

Table 4
*Predictors of Supportive Behavior*

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<tr>
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<th>U.S. (n = 846)</th>
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<th>China (n = 911)</th>
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<td>Part</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>Part</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td>.11</td>
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<td>.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSR</td>
<td>.13**</td>
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<td>.13**</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSV</td>
<td>.14***</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.15***</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust x CSV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSR x CSV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.08***</td>
<td></td>
<td>.08***</td>
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*Note. All betas are standardized coefficients. *** p < .001, ** p < .005, * p < .05. VIF of independent variables ranged from 1.11 to 1.52.*
Delivering higher value through higher performance: Insights on performance evaluation and talent management in corporate communication

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DePaul University

Mark Bain  
Upper 90 Consulting

Abstract
This study explored the current state of performance evaluation and talent management in corporate communication from the perspective of senior communication leaders including the members of the Arthur W. Page society. The findings of a national survey underscore several opportunities for communication leaders to elevate performance and importance of their function. In addition to actionable insights, key trends and best practices in measuring communication effectiveness, the study also concludes with recommendations on developing high performing teams that also deliver higher value.
Introduction

Public relations and corporate communication leaders are increasingly concerned with evaluating effectiveness of their work. Previous research has identified a wide range of measures and metrics that are being used to assess the impact of communication activities (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011; Wright, Leggetter, & Zerfass, 2009). These studies have independently concluded that performance evaluation in our field is marked with inconsistencies and ad hoc measures that fail to capture the full spectrum of contributions that communication efforts make towards organizational excellence.

This study extends this line of research by reporting on the findings of a national survey of senior corporate communication leaders (e.g. CCOs, VPs, and Directors of communication) to unveil the key trends in performance evaluation and best practices in managing communication functions. After all, high performing teams are a prerequisite to delivering higher value to organizations. Aligned closely with the annual Generally Accepted Practices (GAP) survey (2014), this study collected responses from senior corporate communication leaders including the members of the Arthur W. Page Society on the following research questions:

RQ1. According to communication leaders, how important is their work to overall organizational success from their perspective as well as from the perspective of others (e.g. peers, organizational leaders, etc.)?

RQ2. What key measures do communication leaders currently use to evaluate success and how well their teams are performing against these measures?

RQ3. What is the current state of talent and professional development in corporate communication teams?

RQ4. How do communication leaders currently manage staff training and development?

RQ5. What do communication leaders consider important for talent management in the future?

Method

A total of 358 senior leaders in communication were invited via email to participate in a self-administered, online survey during January-March, 2015. Participants were selected from Arthur W. Page Society’s mailing list by screening for members who specifically work in corporate communication roles. This professional organization was selected to gain access to senior public relations and corporate communication executives including chief communication officers of Fortune 500 corporations. In addition, participants were recruited through personal contacts.

The survey questionnaire comprised of four sections with 26 questions. The first section consisted of a series of contextual questions about enterprise role, primary responsibilities, and performance of the communications function, along with current talent management and professional development practices that participants use. The second section carried questions about operating expenditures, including staff training and development. In the third section, participants answered questions about talent management in the future, including skill sets, performance drivers, and functional direction. The survey concluded with questions about participant’s current titles, years of experience, and the nature of their current organization.

A total of 83 (23%) respondents participated, with some questions receiving more responses than others. The questionnaire was tested in advance with about 10% of participants. The response rate and total number of respondents is fairly consistent with other studies involving top-level communications leaders, who often are too busy to respond to all the survey requests they typically receive (Ragas, Uysal, & Culp, 2015).
A majority of the respondents have worked in communication for over 20 years, and 84% hold the Vice President, Senior Vice President, Executive Vice President, or Chief Communications Officer (CCOs) title. Most (63%) of the participants represent publicly owned companies and a comparable number (60%) work at a global organization. About half of the participants (44%) work at an organization with over $10 billion in annual revenues. In terms of current scope of responsibility, most common areas of focus are external communication including media relations (100%), reputation management (96%), executive communication (96%), and internal communication/employee engagement (93%).

Findings

RQ1. Results show that participants place high importance on the value of communication ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.65$) and also believe that their immediate manager or supervisor ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.58$), their direct reports ($M = 4.6$, $SD = 0.52$), and other team members ($M = 4.4$, $SD = 0.59$) agree with this view. However, senior communication leaders acknowledged that while their CEOs perceive communication as an important organizational function ($M = 4.1$, $SD = 0.76$), their board members ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.65$) and functional peers ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.41$) do not completely share this assessment.

RQ2. The measures that senior communication leaders most commonly use to evaluate performance are achieving communication goals and objectives related to awareness, attitudes, and behaviors ($n = 48$, 91%), effective issues and crisis management ($n = 47$, 89%), and reputation management ($n = 45$, 85%). Surprisingly, effectively measuring and reporting the impact and value of department work ($n = 20$, 38%) as well as encouraging sustainable and socially responsible corporate practices and activities ($n = 17$, 32%) are among the least monitored outcomes of communication performance.

Participants believe their teams are performing especially well on internal client service ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.33$) and issues/crisis management ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.46$). However, see room for improvement with hiring/retaining high-performing talent ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.67$), achieving enterprise goals ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.4$), promoting corporate culture ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.93$), and creating innovative new communications tools ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.84$). Areas of concern included increasing employee engagement ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.53$) and engaging stakeholders via social/digital media ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 0.75$).

RQ3. Reflecting on the current talent in their departments, about a quarter of the participants said they have the right people in the right roles, and a third would like to have a few more people to fill existing, open positions. Nearly one in 10 participants wants to dramatically redesign her/his team, bringing in people with very different skill sets. About a third of the participants expect their department’s operating budget to increase in the next fiscal year, and half think budgets will stay the same. A high number (44%) of the participants expect the staffing (salaries, wages and benefits) component of their operating budgets to increase and half expect those budgets to stay the same.

RQ4. After staffing costs (salaries, wages and benefits) have been covered, participants spend 26-50% or more of their remaining budgets on implementing programs. Spend on agency/consultant fees (often for program implementation) takes the next largest chunk of remaining budget – from 11-25% on average. This leaves less than 25% of the remaining, non-staffing costs for staff training and even less for program measurement.

Staff training and development budgets appear to be spread wide and thin. External training/development programs get the most funding (about 6-15%), closely followed by
memberships in professional organizations (about 5-6%) and internal training (about 5-6%). Less is spent on coaching/mentoring and magazines, books and other publications.

Overall, senior communication leaders are unhappy with the quality of current staff training and development programs/activities available to them – and more than 70% are not planning to invest more in this area during the next fiscal year. Nearly half (49%) said they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the quality of training and development programs available inside and outside their organizations.

RQ5. Communications skills (e.g., writing, presenting, social media, design, etc.) remain important foundations (M = 4.79, SD = 0.17), but senior communication leaders rated leadership and interpersonal skills as equally desirable for future communication professionals. Examples of management/leadership skills included process management, running effective teams, hiring, and adapting to change (M = 4.21, SD = 0.6). Examples of interpersonal skills included listening, perseverance, collaboration, and organizational savvy (M = 4.53, SD = 0.4). Overall, international skills (e.g., global knowledge, cross-cultural sensitivity, humility, international resourcefulness, etc.) were seen as valuable but secondary to the other skill sets (M = 3.51, SD = 1.11).

Participants agreed on three items as having the most potential to drive high performance on their teams: recognition for performance (67%), written department strategy goals and priorities (63%), and communications about department priorities/performance (49%). CCOs cited membership/participation in professional and business organizations (14%), overseas work assignments (9%), and flexible work hours and work-from-home policies (9%) as less important drivers of higher performance.

Discussion and conclusion

This exploratory study examined the current and emerging trends in communication talent and performance management. Previous research has revealed inconsistency in evaluating communication effectiveness and the limited nature of assessment measures (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011; Wright, Leggetter, & Zerfass, 2009). To further corroborate these findings, this study conducted a national survey to gather empirical insights from senior leaders on how they manage communication function to deliver higher value to their organizations.

The findings of a national survey of senior communication leaders underscore several opportunities for CCOs to elevate the performance and importance of their function. First, communication leaders must define value – then deliver, measure, and prove it. It’s important for communication leaders to build an agreed definition of value for their function, then to make sure their teams consistently deliver against it. Second, given the impact of new tools and skills, communication leaders must drive the change they wish to see by looking over the horizon and taking immediate, deliberate, and thoughtful steps to identify, attract, and integrate new types of talent on their teams.

Third, talent and performance should become a top priority and not an after thought. Past approaches to developing communications talent – a conference here, some internal training there, provided there’s some budget left over – won’t elevate team performance quickly enough. In addition to helping new types of talent fit into the team, communication leaders must look for smarter/better ways to “upskill” existing team members who already bring institutional knowledge and culture fit to the table. And finally, much as Ragas, Uysal and Culp (2015) emphasized there is dire need to develop business leaders, not just communicators. Financial
acumen, operational insight, and management/leadership skills are just a few of the critical competencies that now distinguish good communicators from trusted business advisors.
References


Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) in Recruitment and Retention of Public Relations Talent from Under-Represented Groups: A Study with the Arthur W. Page Society Members

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Peta Long
Syracuse University

David W. Ballard
American Psychological Association

Abstract

Based on an online survey (n=82) and 17 in-depth interviews, the authors examined how the Arthur W. Page Society members define diversity and inclusion, their best diversity and inclusion management practices, in particular, the practices related to recruitment and retention of public relations talent from under-represented groups, how they evaluate their D&I initiatives, and what makes those best practices work. Implications for leadership and industrial practices were generated. Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research were also discussed.
Introduction

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 36.5% of the U.S. population by 2020 will be comprised of Hispanics, African Americans, Asians and Native Americans (Hayes, 2013). Hispanics, African Americans, foreign-born individuals and people with disabilities also make up the four fastest growing groups in the U.S. workforce (Madera, 2013; Wyatt-Nichol & Antwi-Boasiako, 2012). To address the important issue of diversity and inclusion (D&I), Affirmative Action (AA) and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) programs are generally in place in diverse organizations (Cox 2011; Jayne & Dipboye, 2004; Madera, 2013). Yet, scholars and professionals have called for more studies to examine real progress in cultivating a culture or climate of D&I for recruitment and retention of talent from under-represented groups (McKay & Avery, 2005). Moreover, diversity needs to be examined in a broader sense and beyond gender, race and ethnicity (Hazleton & Sha, 2012; Sha & Ford, 2007). More studies are needed to examine how organizations define D&I in recruitment and retention of talent, what diversity and inclusion goals they have set and how the goals and related activities or practices fit into the visions/missions of the organizations, what practices organizations implement to enhance D&I, and what makes best practices work.

This study engages some of these questions, looking at members of the Arthur W. Page Society, the authors conducted a quantitative survey with participating member’s public relations leader, Chief Communication Officer (CCO) or Chief Diversity Officer (CDO), if it has one. Follow-up qualitative in-depth interviews were also conducted with selected Page members who have been effectively implementing their “best practices” activities/actions for D&I (i.e., their PR leaders, CCOs or CDOs).

Literature Review

Defining Diversity and Inclusion in the Workforce

The workforce in the 21st century is characterized by an increasing number of employees of women, minorities, different ethnic backgrounds and lifestyles (Langdon, McMenamin, & Krolik, 2002; Roberson, 2006). The majority of Fortune 1000 companies have implemented their workplace diversity initiatives and realized to what extent they can manage the diverse workforce effectively and efficiently is closely related to business outcomes that they can achieve (Daniels, 2001; Harvey, 1999; Kuczynski, 1999). Despite the different approaches organizations adopt to diversity management, many organizations focus on inclusion in their diversity programs, which is intended to remove barriers, motivate all employees to develop and use a full range of skills and competencies, encourage employee participation, boost employee morale, and facilitate community building within organizations (Mehta, 2000; Roberson, 2006; Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 2000).

Organizational Vision: Recruitment and Retention of Talent from Under-Represented Groups

To ensure recruitment and retention of talent from under-represented groups, an organization must link D&I to its strategic plan (Brown, 2014; Chrobot-Mason & Aramovich, 2013; Poster, 2008; Wyatt-Nichol & Antwi-Boasiako, 2012). Many organizations have incorporated those initiatives into its long-term vision through (a) establishing recruitment and retention goals, (b) tracking workplace characteristics, (c) linking diversity to goals and objectives of its strategic plan (the eradication of discrimination, promotion of diversity at all levels, and opportunities for participation), (d) developing action plans, and (e) integrating diversity in leadership training programs (Wyatt-Nichol & Antwi-Boasiako, 2012, p. 754). It is
pivotal for organizations to maintain an organizational environment or climate characterized by responsiveness to diverse voices of employees and inclusiveness of individual differences (Chrobot-Mason & Aramovich, 2013; Poster, 2008). Institutionalizing D&I in recruitment and retention helps organizations gain competitive advantage (Lobel, 1999).

**Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives and Programs: Best Practices**

Given an increasing number of Hispanics, Blacks, foreign-born individuals, people with disabilities, and other under-represented groups in the U.S. workforce, organizations have adopted numerous best practices for D&I management (Madera, 2013). Diversity management programs mainly focus on recruiting and developing/retaining diverse employees (McKay, Avery, & Morris, 2008, 2009). Based on previous literature (Bielby, Krysan, & Herring, 2013, Dobbin, Kim & Kalev, 2011; Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012; Kulik & Roberson, 2008; McKay & Avery, 2005; Pendry, Driscoll, & Field, 2007; Richard, 2000; Soldan & Nankervis, 2014; Williams, Kilanski, & Muller, 2014; Wyatt-Nichol & Antwi-Boasiako, 2012), the key D&I management practices targeted at recruitment and retention included:

1. Affirmative Action (AA) and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) programs in place, administered by leadership and focused on increasing diversity in all ranks of employment;
2. Using minority publications and websites for employee recruitment;
3. Other sources of recruitment include predominantly minority colleges and universities, regional or national meetings of minority professional organizations, and professional and popular media outlets that target to minority populations;
4. Using minority recruiters and recruitment materials that include diverse individuals;
5. Communicating the importance and value of diversity to all job applicants to cultivate a strong diversity climate among new hires;
6. Mentoring programs focused on developing women, ethnic minorities, and other under-represented employee groups;
7. Networking/affinity programs that connect employees who share a similar identity or cultural background, such as discussions and meetings to share information, and seek support and career advice;
8. Establishing a system (on-line, off-line, or both) that allows the management to assess employee knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA), and track employee development to ensure that job training has met development goals;
9. Educating and training employees regarding diversity; diversity training to implement and maintain a culture of D&I; examples include online modules, classroom-based training, videos, discussions, role-plays, simulations, and exercises; and training is necessary to raise awareness and develop their skills to work with diverse employees internally and diverse stakeholders externally;
10. Commitment from leadership to enforce diversity and inclusion policies; to provide supportive resources to increase the visibility of D&I initiatives in and outside of the organization, to include formal statements of diversity and inclusion in meetings, newsletters, and traditional and social media publications;
11. Dedicating a special council or committee to identify and remove barriers to diversity in both recruitment and retention;
12. Having a succession plan to ensure a qualified and diverse pool of executive candidates for the D&I office or committee;
13. Executive training for managers to administer a diversity program that minimizes discrimination in hiring and promotion;
14. Employee participation in diversity task forces and diversity boards to identify issues for both recruitment and retention and develop initiatives.

**Evaluation of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives and Programs: What Works?**

D&I management is never an easy job. Even well-meaning and well-functioning organizations have had difficulties making it work (Soldan & Nankervis, 2014; McKay & Avery, 2005; Wyatt-Nichol & Antwi-Boasiako, 2012). Previous literature has suggested three important criteria for evaluation: (1) level of minority hiring rate, (2) retention, and (3) whether an organization remains an employer of choice for prospective job applicants (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000; McKay & Avery, 2005; Robinson & Dechant, 1997). The success of diversity recruitment initiatives is based on the recruitment and retention of qualified minority applicants and the organization’s reputation among students and young professionals on the job market (McKay & Avery, 2005).

Successful diversity and inclusion management programs should allow all employees to develop their full career potential by providing effective training and mentoring opportunities, social and professional support, continued education and advancement opportunities, and fair and supportive workplace policies that minimize any forms of discrimination and conflict (Cox, 2011; Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000; Jayne & Dipboye, 2004; Robinson & Dechant, 1997).

It is in light of studying the literature on D&I that the authors seek to engage the following:

**Research Questions**

Based on the above literature review, the authors propose the following research questions (RQs):

- **RQ1:** How do the Page Society members define diversity and inclusion within their units?
- **RQ2:** What diversity and inclusion goals have the members set for their units?
- **RQ3:** How do these goals and activities fit into the vision/mission of the wider organization?
- **RQ4:** What actions are the Page Society members implementing to enhance D&I within their organizations, particularly in relationship to recruitment and retention of talent from under-represented groups?
- **RQ5:** What resources are being dedicated to these activities?
- **RQ6:** How are these activities being measured/evaluated for effectiveness?
- **RQ7:** How effective have these activities been?
- **RQ8:** What makes most effective activities work?

**Methods**

A quantitative survey is appropriate to document and benchmark the Page members’ perceptions of D&I in relationship to recruitment and retention of under-represented public

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5 The authors developed an organized list of D&I management practices (for recruitment, retention, or both) with representative examples selected from the literature.
relations workforce in the U.S. (Dobbin et al., 2011). The survey focused on non-administrative staff/team members, which exclude individuals working as administrative assistants or other non-PR professional oriented positions. The goal of the survey was to understand diversity within the public relations/communications practitioners in the participant’s organization/unit. The questionnaire included the following sections including (a) the explanations of key terminologies (i.e., inclusiveness, LGBTQ, ethnic and racial minorities, under-represented groups), (b) demographics of unit & organization, especially the specific categories of “diversity and inclusion” activities/actions that members are currently regarding implementing, (c) measures of organizational diversity (definition of diversity in recruitment and retention of talent, importance of diversity in recruitment and retention of talent, diversity outcomes, diversity goals, tactics, initiatives, and strategies to achieve formal or informal diversity goals, and (d) measures of organizational inclusion. A qualitative method was also used for this study. In-depth interviews helped the research team to collect nuanced, detailed and descriptive data about the “best practices” activities/actions, understand how each member’s senior management team (e.g., CEOs, executive suite and business unit heads, the Board of Directors, etc.) integrates D&I for recruitment and retention of talent into their business strategy, how they evaluate the outcomes of their “best practices” activities/actions, and how they work to make those activities/actions most effective (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lindlof, 1991; Patton, 1990).

Sampling and Data Collection
The Arthur W. Page Society members representing large U.S. corporations or major public relations agencies (approximately 400) were invited to participate in the survey launched after the Page Society’s spring conference. Data were collected between June and September 2015. The research team accomplished a final sample of 82 Page member organizations, achieving a response rate of approximately 20%. However, participants were given the option of skipping questions; therefore, some questions have fewer than 82 responses. One representative (public relations leader, CCO, or CDO) from each participating organization took part in an online survey. From this survey, qualitative interviews were conducted with organizations that reported being satisfied with their diversity and inclusion progress and initiatives in order to better understand their approach that reflects best practices and lessons for improving the status of D&I in the public relations industry. In total, the authors interviewed 17 selected members between August and November 2015. All participating members were recruited through a solicitation e-mail that explained the purpose of the research, the confidentiality measures that the study took, and the benefits and risks of their participation in the study. All interviews were recorded digitally and verbatim transcribed with the permission granted by the participants.

Participant Profiles of Quantitative and Qualitative Research
The 82 survey participating organizations consisted of 14 (17.7%) agencies or communications firms within a holding or parent company, and 7 (8.9%) independently-owned

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6. “Inclusiveness is defined as an environment where all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully, have equal access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute fully to the organization’s success.”

7. “LGBTQ refers to individuals who consider themselves to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer.”

8. “Ethnic and racial minorities refer to racial and ethnic minorities in the US (African American/Black, Native American, Asian American, Pacific Islanders, Native Alaskan, and Latino/Hispanic).”

9. “Under-represented groups are defined by those demographics under-represented in each participating member organization as compared to the population of the communities where it operates.”

10. The Arthur W. Page society has a total of 578 members (9% outside of the US; 10% retirees; 10% educators; duplicate companies)
agencies or communications firms (not part of a holding company), 1 construction company (1.3%), 7 finance/finance services (8.9%), 3 technology companies (3.8%), 9 manufacturing (durable goods and non-durable goods) companies (11.4%), 2 media, newspaper, publishing, broadcasting or related services (2.5%), 1 insurance company (1.3%), 1 telecommunications company (1.3%), 1 mining, oil or gas company (1.3%), 2 government organizations (2.5%), 6 health organizations (7.6%), 1 transportation company (1.3%), 1 utilities company (1.3%), 5 wholesale/retail trade companies (6.3%), 18 others (22.8%), with 3 member organizations failing to report the genre of their main business. In the follow-up qualitative research, top public relations or communications leaders from 4 agencies within a holding or parent company, 1 independently-owned agency, and 12 US-based corporations participated in the in-depth interviews.

On average, there are 14,231 US-based employees in each member organization (SD = 52,869.45). The mean percentages of diverse groups on US communication non-administrative teams are as follows: males (29%), females (59%), US citizens (80%), non-US citizens (10%), Black/African Americans (5%), Asian/Pacific Islanders (6%), Native Americans/Alaskans/Hawaiians (.13%), White (68%), mixed race (3%), Latino (8%), non-Latino (62%), LGBTQ (4%), disabled .3%, over 55 years-old (8%), and veterans (2%). In FY14, 82.3% of the participating member organizations had searches for non-administrative employees. In total, 61 organizations (93.8%) had candidates from racial and/or ethnic minority groups in their candidate pool(s). Among them, 48 organizations (73.8%) hired a racial and/or ethnic minority for any of those positions in their unit.

A total of 80 organizations reported their satisfaction level with diversity: satisfied (n=11, 13.8%), somewhat satisfied (n=17, 21.3%), neutral/neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (n=8, 10.0%), somewhat dissatisfied (n=29, 36.3%), and dissatisfied (n=15, 18.8%). As for satisfaction with level of inclusivity, 77 organizations reported to be satisfied (n=30, 39.0%), somewhat satisfied (n=24, 31.2%), neutral/neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (n=18, 23.4%), somewhat dissatisfied (n=4, 5.2%), and dissatisfied (n=1, 1.3%).

Data Analysis

Data from the online survey were analyzed by using SPSS. Each interview transcript was analyzed using the thematic analysis method (Boyatzis, 1998). The research team read the full verbatim transcripts and developed a coding sheet representing the themes and patterns that emerged from the collected data. Each theme and pattern and its representative quotes were further analyzed to answer the research questions.

Results

Definitions of Diversity and Inclusion

Participating organizations do define diversity from a broad perspective: race (n=74, 9.2%), ethnicity (n=72, 87.8%), gender (n=72, 87.8%), disability (n=57, 69.5%), age (n=55, 67.1%), sexual orientation (n=52; 63.4%), veteran status (n=43, 52.4%), language (n=29, 35.4%) and religion (n=26, 31.7%), among others 11. At the same time, the organizations regarded those aspects of diversity as important to them in recruiting and retaining talent: gender (n=64, 90.1%), race (n=63, 90%), ethnicity (n=58, 84.1%), language (n=55, 79.7%), age (n=54, 79.4%), veteran

11 Other definitions that participants shared include viewpoints, values, personalities, experiences, skill levels, perspectives, affinities, family statuses, geographical locations, socio/economic backgrounds, education and functional expertise, and different thinking.
status (n=50, 73.5%), disability (n=43, 63.2%), sexual orientation (n=43, 63.2%), and religion (n=20, 29.4%). Participants also reported the following important outcomes of D&I practices to their business: Recruit the best talent at all levels (n=79, 100.0%); retain the best talent at all levels (n=79, 100.0%); increase diversity of thought and decision-making in the organization (n=79, 100.0%); enhance employee relations (n=79, 100.0%); enhance employee development (n=78, 98.7%); address shifting demographics (n=77, 98.7%); demonstrate appreciation for culture and value differences (n=76, 97.4%); improve the corporate environment (n=76, 97.4%); increased organizational competitiveness (n=74, 96.1%); act as an element of differentiation from competitors (n=73, 93.6%); create new business opportunities (n=73, 92.4%); enhance customer relations (n=72, 92.3%); enhance reputation and brand image (n=72, 92.3%); improved employee opinion surveys/diversity audits results (n=72, 91.1%); reduced costs associated with turnover, absenteeism and low productivity (n=72, 91.1%); improved financial bottom line (profits) (n=70, 90.9%); diversify client/customer base (n=69, 89.6%); enhance government relations (n=68, 87.2%); enhance community relations (n=67, 85.9%); enhance supplier relations (n=67, 85.9%); improved public image of the organization (n=67, 85.9%); increase sales/billings (n=67, 84.8%); and decrease in complaints and litigation (n=59, 75.6%).

Diversity and Inclusion Goals

Among the 78 participants who responded, 62.8% (n=49) reported that they have D&I goals. Examples include:

1. “Strive for a workforce that reflects the population of our home market as a minimum - and ultimately, reflects the population of our client base, which is national.”

2. “40% of job applicants interviewed must be diverse above the manager level.”

3. “Make sure final slates have at least two diverse candidates; improve diversity among management level employees; and achieve top scores for inclusion and diversity in employee engagement survey.”

4. “Drive employee engagement through improved Employee Network effectiveness; Elevate diversity brand awareness; Attract, develop and retain diverse talent; Enhance diversity training.”

5. “Our diversity mission: To champion an inclusive culture that embraces individual differences and unique needs while driving innovation; To leverage the diverse talent of our workforce to enhance business growth; To ensure our workforce is reflective of the global marketplace and the divergent populations we serve; To cultivate relationships with strategic business partners that will ensure our ability to access, attract, and retain a diverse workforce.”

6. “[Our agency’s] mission requires us to ensure we have a culture that enables us to create and sustain a new kind of network that mirrors and understands diverse communities and helps our clients communicate in more targeted ways. We must attract and retain a multicultural workforce and support new kinds of affiliations and alliances. Our goals are: Raising Awareness & Levels of Respect: internal and external efforts and behaviors that support creating, maintaining and celebrating a climate of inclusion. Effective Talent Management: strategic and targeted efforts to engage, attract, secure and retain the best most diverse talent in the marketplace.”

12 Ranging from “slightly important” to “very important”.
across all levels. This applies to recruitment, talent development and training, and mentoring at all levels. Community Engagement: increased partnership and support of professional organizations, support for our employees’ interests and causes, and external efforts that support the communities in which we do business.”

Participants also rated the importance of key D&I tactics or initiatives to achieving their formal or informal diversity and inclusion goals (see Table 1):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>D&amp;I Tactics or Initiatives</th>
<th>Slightly Important to Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affirmative Action (AA) and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) programs in place</td>
<td>56 (74.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting at predominantly minority colleges and universities</td>
<td>59 (80.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using minority recruiters</td>
<td>59 (80.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for managers to minimize discrimination in hiring</td>
<td>68 (90.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing funding support or time off with compensation for employees to participate in external networking / affinity / resource programs that connect professionals who share a similar identity or cultural background, so they can share information, seek support and get career advice</td>
<td>59 (78.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining diverse suppliers / vendors from under-represented groups</td>
<td>65 (85.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training designed to promote and support a culture of diversity and inclusion (examples include on-line modules, classroom-based training, videos, discussions, role-plays, simulations, exercises, etc.)</td>
<td>75 (96.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training to affect employee attitudes toward women</td>
<td>69 (89.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training to affect employee attitudes toward people from other under-represented groups</td>
<td>67 (87.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior leaders committed to enforcing diversity and inclusion policies</td>
<td>75 (98.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal statements of diversity and inclusion included in meetings, newsletters, and traditional and social media publications</td>
<td>71 (93.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices administered by leadership and focused on increasing and maintaining diversity in all ranks of employment</td>
<td>69 (90.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting at regional and national meetings of minority professional organizations</td>
<td>62 (83.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including minority individuals in photos, videos, or graphics in recruitment materials</td>
<td>64 (86.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising entry level salaries for talent recruited from under-represented groups</td>
<td>32 (44.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing a system (on-line, off-line, or both) that allows management to assess employee knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA),</td>
<td>63 (84.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and track employee development to ensure that job training has met development goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedicating a special council or committee to identify and remove barriers to diversity in retention and advancement</td>
<td>61 (80.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training to raise awareness about diversity issues and help employees work with others who are different from themselves</td>
<td>74 (96.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training to affect employee attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals</td>
<td>66 (85.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee participation in task forces, work groups or boards to identify diversity and inclusion issues and develop initiatives</td>
<td>70 (92.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders visibly involved with diversity-related activities</td>
<td>73 (97.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using minority publications and websites for employee recruitment</td>
<td>57 (77.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using professional and general market media outlets that target to minority job applicants</td>
<td>62 (84.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating the importance and value of diversity and inclusion to all job applicants</td>
<td>69 (93.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking /affinity/resource programs that connect employees who share a similar identity or cultural background, so they can share information, seek support and get career advice</td>
<td>70 (91.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring programs focused on developing women, ethnic minorities, and employees from other underrepresented groups</td>
<td>73 (96.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a succession plan to ensure a diverse pool of qualified candidates for executive positions</td>
<td>74 (97.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training to affect employee attitudes towards ethnic or racial minorities</td>
<td>72 (93.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training to affect employee attitudes toward individuals with disabilities</td>
<td>69 (89.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for management to minimize discrimination in promotion</td>
<td>71 (94.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive resources provided to increase the visibility of diversity and inclusion initiatives inside and outside the organization</td>
<td>73 (96.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Mission Vision Character & Diversity and Inclusion Goal and Activities**

Among the participants who responded to the questions on D&I goals, measurement, and accountability, 74.4% (n=58) indicated that D&I goals and objectives fit very well or completely into their company’s overall vision/mission; 79.2% (n=61) reported that D&I goals and objectives fit very well or completely into the character of their company; 39.7% (n=31) claimed that they have integrated a comprehensive D&I strategy very well or completely well into their overall business strategy; 57.7% (n=45) said their senior leadership team placed a very high level of importance on D&I; 63.9% (n=46) reported that their CEO and other members of the C-suite placed a very high level of importance on diversity and inclusion. Nevertheless, 72.2% (n=52) do not have D&I goal achievements tied to their executive compensation; 85.5% (n=65) do not have D&I goal achievements tied to their leadership team’s compensation either.

**Diversity and Inclusion Actions, Tactics, Strategies, and Initiatives**

The survey participants also indicated whether they have implemented or are considering key diversity-related efforts. For more detailed information, see Table 2.

Table 2. Diversity and Inclusion Actions, Tactics, Strategies, and Initiatives
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diversity Activities</th>
<th>Implemented and satisfied with results</th>
<th>Implemented with unsatisfactory results or needs refinement</th>
<th>Currently planning</th>
<th>Unsure how to address</th>
<th>Not feasible</th>
<th>No interest</th>
<th>Woul'd like assistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mission/vision statement</td>
<td>38 (46.3%)</td>
<td>2 (2.4%)</td>
<td>10 (12.2%)</td>
<td>3 (3.7%)</td>
<td>2 (2.4%)</td>
<td>5 (6.1%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>council or management team</td>
<td>35 (42.7%)</td>
<td>5 (6.1%)</td>
<td>8 (9.8%)</td>
<td>4 (4.9%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>10 (12.2%)</td>
<td>1 (1.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurable initiative</td>
<td>25 (30.5%)</td>
<td>8 (9.8%)</td>
<td>15 (18.3%)</td>
<td>6 (7.3%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>7 (8.5%)</td>
<td>1 (1.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget for initiative</td>
<td>25 (30.5%)</td>
<td>7 (8.5%)</td>
<td>11 (13.4%)</td>
<td>4 (4.9%)</td>
<td>2 (2.4%)</td>
<td>11 (13.4%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D&amp;I director/champion</td>
<td>39 (47.6%)</td>
<td>2 (2.4%)</td>
<td>8 (9.8%)</td>
<td>1 (1.2%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>11 (13.4%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D&amp;I support staff</td>
<td>33 (40.2%)</td>
<td>5 (6.1%)</td>
<td>5 (6.1%)</td>
<td>3 (3.7%)</td>
<td>3 (3.7%)</td>
<td>11 (13.4%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D&amp;I audit/assessment</td>
<td>28 (34.1%)</td>
<td>2 (2.4%)</td>
<td>11 (13.4%)</td>
<td>8 (9.8%)</td>
<td>2 (2.4%)</td>
<td>8 (9.8%)</td>
<td>2 (2.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reporting strategy/system</td>
<td>25 (30.5%)</td>
<td>7 (8.5%)</td>
<td>10 (12.2%)</td>
<td>6 (7.3%)</td>
<td>1 (1.2%)</td>
<td>8 (9.8%)</td>
<td>2 (2.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority university partnerships</td>
<td>25 (30.5%)</td>
<td>8 (9.8%)</td>
<td>9 (11.0%)</td>
<td>6 (7.3%)</td>
<td>2 (2.4%)</td>
<td>6 (7.3%)</td>
<td>2 (2.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring program</td>
<td>32 (39.0%)</td>
<td>6 (7.3%)</td>
<td>10 (12.2%)</td>
<td>5 (6.1%)</td>
<td>1 (1.2%)</td>
<td>4 (4.9%)</td>
<td>2 (2.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal minority networks/affinity groups</td>
<td>32 (39.0%)</td>
<td>9 (11.0%)</td>
<td>7 (8.5%)</td>
<td>6 (7.3%)</td>
<td>1 (1.2%)</td>
<td>5 (6.1%)</td>
<td>1 (1.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional minority association partnerships</td>
<td>26 (31.7%)</td>
<td>8 (9.8%)</td>
<td>9 (11.0%)</td>
<td>7 (8.5%)</td>
<td>1 (1.2%)</td>
<td>9 (11.0%)</td>
<td>3 (3.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority executive training program</td>
<td>10 (12.2%)</td>
<td>2 (2.4%)</td>
<td>12 (14.6%)</td>
<td>14 (17.1%)</td>
<td>5 (6.1%)</td>
<td>11 (13.4%)</td>
<td>3 (3.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee diversity</td>
<td>28 (34.1%)</td>
<td>6 (7.3%)</td>
<td>9 (11.0%)</td>
<td>6 (7.3%)</td>
<td>1 (1.2%)</td>
<td>7 (8.5%)</td>
<td>3 (3.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants also listed key initiatives that make their most effective diversity-related activities work: “Active seeking of feedback from employees from under-represented groups about their experience here;” “reinforce our vision, mission and values;” “annual conference attended by CEO and top team;” “diversity council;” “periodic company newsletter article focused on topics of diversity and inclusion;” “giving diverse teams the processes and time to hit their stride;” “develop and maintain a diverse professional network, and let the network know when jobs become open;” “networking with influencers that can introduce us to qualified candidates;” “on an ongoing basis, overtly communicate the importance of D&I to culture of the team and the company;” “marketing strategy and approaches to incorporate various focus of diversity, including disability, age, family status, etc., in addition to the traditional race and gender focus;” among others.

**Resources Dedicated to Such D&I Efforts**

When asked about resources dedicated to their D&I efforts, our survey participants provided the following information:

**Table 3a. Resources Dedicated to Such D&I Efforts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>D&amp;I Efforts</th>
<th>No resources</th>
<th>Budget (resources)</th>
<th>Dedicated Professional (resources)</th>
<th>Support/ Administrative Staff (resources)</th>
<th>Training Time (resources)</th>
<th>Other resources (resources)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attracting/recruiting talent</td>
<td>7 (8.5%)</td>
<td>25 (30.5%)</td>
<td>31 (37.8%)</td>
<td>15 (18.3%)</td>
<td>15 (18.3%)</td>
<td>12 (14.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Completely insufficient</td>
<td>Somewhat insufficient</td>
<td>Minimally sufficient</td>
<td>Moderately sufficient</td>
<td>Completely sufficient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>7 (11.5%)</td>
<td>6 (9.8%)</td>
<td>19 (31.1%)</td>
<td>18 (29.5%)</td>
<td>11 (18.0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training time</td>
<td>4 (6.8%)</td>
<td>12 (20.3%)</td>
<td>13 (22.0%)</td>
<td>21 (35.6%)</td>
<td>9 (15.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated professional</td>
<td>8 (13.3%)</td>
<td>7 (11.7%)</td>
<td>15 (25.0%)</td>
<td>14 (23.3%)</td>
<td>16 (26.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff support</td>
<td>6 (10.5%)</td>
<td>7 (12.3%)</td>
<td>16 (28.1%)</td>
<td>14 (24.6%)</td>
<td>14 (24.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Measurement of Effectiveness of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives**

About 47% of our participants (n=37) do not have a method for measuring the impact of diversity practices. In total, 65.8% (n=52) of the respondents do not conduct analysis to determine its return on investment for diversity practices. Approximately, 86.1% of the respondents (n=68) said that their diversity practices are slight or moderately effective in achieving results; only 7.6% (n=6) said their practices were very effective in achieving their D&I goals. In response to some statements racial and ethnic minorities say decrease their satisfaction with careers in public relations, our survey participants rated to what extent they believe the statements reflect what people feel and/or experiences at their company:

**Table 4. Measures of Organizational Inclusion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racial/ethnic minorities are just as likely to be given mainstream/general market projects as they are to work on</td>
<td>4 (6.5%)</td>
<td>5 (8.1%)</td>
<td>9 (14.5%)</td>
<td>10 (16.1%)</td>
<td>34 (54.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>projects related to their personal racial/ethnic market/media.</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(58.1%)</td>
<td>(16.1%)</td>
<td>(11.3%)</td>
<td>(11.3%)</td>
<td>(3.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minorities have to work harder than non-minority employees to advance.</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(85.5%)</td>
<td>(6.5%)</td>
<td>(3.2%)</td>
<td>(4.8%)</td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial/ethnic minorities are put on slow moving tracks in their jobs.</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(85.5%)</td>
<td>(4.8%)</td>
<td>(8.1%)</td>
<td>(1.6%)</td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial/ethnic minorities are relegated to more superficial tasks.</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(75.8%)</td>
<td>(12.9%)</td>
<td>(3.2%)</td>
<td>(8.1%)</td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial/ethnic minorities are often overlooked for promotion.</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(87.1%)</td>
<td>(6.5%)</td>
<td>(4.8%)</td>
<td>(1.6%)</td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial/ethnic minorities are not treated with genuine respect by their colleagues.</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(58.1%)</td>
<td>(22.6%)</td>
<td>(9.7%)</td>
<td>(9.7%)</td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social isolation is common among minorities.</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(78.7%)</td>
<td>(14.8%)</td>
<td>(6.6%)</td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial/ethnic minorities are not able to influence decisions.</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(87.1%)</td>
<td>(8.1%)</td>
<td>(4.8%)</td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial/ethnic minorities are usually among the last to know about important changes.</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(85.5%)</td>
<td>(4.8%)</td>
<td>(8.1%)</td>
<td>(1.6%)</td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial/ethnic minorities are not usually invited to important meetings.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(21.0%)</td>
<td>(6.5%)</td>
<td>(22.6%)</td>
<td>(16.1%)</td>
<td>(33.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What Makes Page Members’ Most Effective D&I-Related Activities Work?

Our survey respondents identified two key factors that contribute to their most effective D&I-related activities: (1) leadership support and commitment and (2) dedicated effort focused on employee engagement. Senior leadership support is key to D&I success. When they have commitment from the top and at the senior leader level, they accomplish effective D&I-related initiatives. Additionally, ongoing, sustained, and dedicated communications initiatives to engage employees and eternal affiliates are critical too. Our respondents suggested that Page member organizations need to make sure that their employees “feel accepted for their talents, and not for their ‘diverse-ness’.” They need to be put on projects that have nothing to do with ethnicity. In many organizations, a D&I Council often plays an important role in communicating with and educating employees about D&I as part of their corporate culture and business imperative. It is also paramount for Page members to work with experts to identify the needs of the marketplace and address the challenges in finding, recruiting, developing, and retaining diverse talent for the public relations industry.

Findings from In-Depth Interviews

Based on the proposed research questions, the authors sought to garner an understanding for the reported survey responses, through in-depth interviews. This section focuses on the findings following conversations from 17 survey participants. The selection was based on their

| invited to participate in meetings with management higher than their direct supervisors. | 44 (69.8%) | 10 (15.9%) | 4 (6.7%) | 2 (3.2%) | 3 (4.8%) |
| Employees from underrepresented groups are not often invited to contribute their opinions during meetings with management higher than their direct supervisors. | 51 (82.3%) | 7 (11.3%) | 3 (4.8%) | 1 (1.6%) | 0 (0.0%) |
| Racial/ethnic minorities frequently do not receive communications (e.g., memos, emails) from management higher than their direct supervisors. | 51 (82.3%) | 7 (11.3%) | 3 (4.8%) | 1 (1.6%) | 0 (0.0%) |
demonstrations of good/excellent practices noted for (1) measuring the impact of diversity and inclusion practices, (2) analysis of the ROI, and (3) having predetermined diversity and inclusion goals and objectives. The findings are summarized under four main themes: diversity mandate; recruitment through institutional partnership; retention through reaffirmation and affinity group support; and assessment.

**Diversity Mandate**

A diversity mandate is defined as having an objective to reach a desired goal in regards to the workforce that supports and sustains one organization. Throughout our interviews, participants expressed that a quota did not define diversity, however conversations consistently illustrated that where there was no quota there was a problem with a constructive definition. More often than not, the term ‘people of color’ was used as a population of reference; whereas gender and LGBTQ resources were discussed to a lesser extent. People with disability proved a difficult population to conceptualize, for some, beyond the physical constraints of a job. Additionally, LGBTQ persons and persons with a non-physical disability would have to self-identify in order for the company to track that population. However, in defining diversity the traditional categories were consistently referenced. Several interviewees noted the relevance of diverse talent as a point of alignment for the organization noting that “if [our organizations] expect to be an engaged enterprise, to be successful with all stakeholders, or at least have relationships with all stakeholders, we have to look like the world that we operate in.”

Similarly, thinking about the population of an organization was likened to mirroring the population of the community. Several participants reaffirmed their organization’s population reflecting the world in some cases, or a defined industry population, or other identified surveyed population. In one case, a participant noted that because of the broad scope of diversity, it was important to speak to targets. She noted that diversity being a broad spectrum, requires a narrowed approach to get traction, and results in building one area of diversity, as opposed to engaging the whole spectrum. Overall, each responded discussed their primary position and focuses with regards to engaging in a proactive sense diversity. Many of our respondents were in a position to talk not just about their department, but the company at large. Moreover, a personal engagement and mission was also articulated, with participants eager to discuss what they say, and what they acted on for the advancement of diversity and inclusion within their ability.

**Recruitment Practices through Institutional Partnership**

In a bid to change the population landscape, recruitment practices are a priority focus. The issue, as articulated to us, is where to find talent. Senior level communication management depends heavily on recruiters to source a diverse talent pool, while some take matters into their own hands, establishing personal connections with different groups. One participant noted that where the need aroused and time was sensitive, they would provide talent acquisition and recruitment with internal support and direction for the recruitment of multi-culture candidates. Responses to recruitment vary, due to the nature and size of the organization as well as the position for which talent was being recruited. As the slate of interviewees was from various companies, some participants noted the difference between recruitment for the organization and for the communications department. However, talent acquisition was a challenge that some confronted through training. In one company, the change in dealing with recruiters, moving to quarterly meetings, conference calls, and webinars that highlight the importance of a diverse talent pool for their hiring process.
There are some specific targets that were highlighted as sources for talent. The authors note these institutional partnerships that enable organizations access to different potential candidates. At the entry level as well as for internships, several universities were mentioned, as well as the LAGRANT Foundation, and Black Millennials, as organizational sources for diverse talent at the entry level. For mid-level careers the following professional organizations were mentioned: the National Association of Black Journalists, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, Public Relations Society of America, the Association of Latino Professionals for America, the Black Public Relations Society, and Color Comm. Whereas for senior-level manages, the Public Relations Society of America and the Arthur Page Society were the only two named.

Recruitment requires an expansion of an insular network. Companies meet the target of a diverse pool through connecting in multifaceted ways. One participant explained connecting with sororities and fraternities as “you have some connection with a network of high performing, diverse candidates.”

Retention through Reaffirmation and Affinity Groups Support

For some organizations, inclusion is set as a core value, thus ensuring support for minority and under-represented employees. As an organizational goal, diversity and inclusion must be supported through internal initiatives, and reaffirmation of these goals can be exercised from a top-down model. One organization’s CEO reaffirmed his commitment to conversation and access through emails he calls “post-cards.” He noted that he continuously brings up diversity and inclusions issues. Generally internal communication channels like the post-cards have been recurring tools. Additionally, one senior level manager shared the goal of inclusion of people of color in management, noting that “every leader has a goal,” and her personal efforts of serving as a mentor/coach to individuals is about guidance for internal promotions. While some senior-level managers take on personal engagements, others champion organizational programs, groups, and initiatives. Employee resource groups enable internal connection and support for minority employees. They are “open and vital communication environment” which in some cases are “formal mechanisms … [that] strengthen an employee’s experience within the company.” Senior-level managers also view this a strong “retention mechanism” as well as a way of reaffirming a diverse culture within the organization.

There are, however, some organizations that do not have formalized resource groups. Participants, who noted this, articulated a kind of grass-roots effort where employees organize affinity groups. In that organization, the support for these groups from higher-level management was noted as essential to the survival. Fundamental to success of reaffirmation and retention efforts is employee engagement and buy-in, into these initiatives.

In tandem with resources, training was highlighted as a relevant method of engagement. Participants hailed the relevance of discussion on inclusion, such as unconscious bias, seeing it “as a way of helping people see blind spots so they can broaden their perspectives.” Several organizations mentioned relationships with institutions contracted to “expose (the employees) to different types of diversity and inclusion training.” Training in this regard encompasses all levels of management, but their occurrences varied, with some being mandatory, others voluntary, and some occurring in-person, verses online. Training programs were also noted resources for internal growth and transition. One organization used external minority leadership programs, as well as women leadership programs, sponsoring women of color within their organization to get leadership and management training for potential advancement.
Assessment

Evaluation enables an organization to garner the effectiveness and success of initiatives. Several organizations, primarily the large corporations, were able to speak to assessment. One CCO noted that diversity is included in their annual reports, and this fell under the portfolio of the diversity leader of the company. While evaluation methodologies varied, the driving force included feedback, compliance and change. One such noted methodology was “exit interviews” as a basis for evaluation.

In contrast, organizational surveys and climate surveys were done to provide information about the diversity and inclusion within an organization. One organization, who used Gallup for logistics notes an annual accountability component from the reporting, which puts the evaluation into an action plan. This is an ongoing process, with surveying, in this case, conducted every two years. Another respondent said that it was difficult to assess effectiveness of some initiatives like training, as such they used participation as a measurement.

Evaluation also considers reporting as a method of garnering progress and feedback. Some organizations go as far as rewarding leadership and other employees. For leadership, added compensation may be attributed to diversity and inclusion progress within their function or department; whereas for employees, awards may be used as incentives.

Discussion

Consistent with previous literature (Hazleton & Sha, 2012; Jamieson & O’Mara, 1991; Sha & Ford, 2007; C. Thomas, 1994; R. Thomas, 1991, 1996), our participating Page member organizations define diversity in a broad sense, covering a wide range of aspects in diversity issues including race, ethnicity, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, veteran status, language, religion, viewpoint, value, personality, experience, skill level, perspective, affinity, family status, geographical location, socio/economic background, education and functional expertise, and different thinking. Nevertheless, as evident in both quantitative and qualitative data, the organizations talk more about race and ethnicity than gender, LGBTQ issues, disability, and other aspects of diversity and inclusion. They admit that diversity and inclusion in recruitment and retention of talent is critical at all organizational levels and report to have a considerable number of senior management who are US ethnic or racial minorities, managerial employees who are US ethnic or racial minorities, non-managerial non-administrative professional staff who are US ethnic or racial minorities, support/administrative staff who are US ethnic or racial minorities, female senior management, female managerial employees, female non-managerial non-administrative professional staff, and female support/administrative staff. They affirm in both survey and interviews that their organization’s population need to reflect the world, a defined industry population, or other identified surveyed population who is the target audience of their main business. Moreover, they have well acknowledged the close connection between their business success and the aspects of diversity as important to recruitment and retention of talent from under-represented groups. Although they all stress the importance of D&I management within their company, less than 40% of the member organizations are satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their level of diversity in recruitment and retention of public relations talent and approximately 70% of the respondents feel satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their level of inclusivity.

Almost 63% of the participating member organizations have established their D&I goals. As discussed in previous literature, our respondents highly value the D&I tactics or initiatives that previous literature (e.g., Bielby et al., 2013; Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012; Madera, 2013;
Soldan & Nankervis, 2014; Williams et al., 2014; Wyatt-Nichol & Antwi-Boasiako, 2012) proposed and evaluated, and associate the successful implementation of the D&I tactics and initiatives with the achievement of D&I goals closely. The authors yielded similar findings in the in-depth interviews. Institutional partnership and affinity groups support in and outside of organizations have significantly contributed to their recruitment and retention of public relations talent from under-represented groups. In consistency with previous literature (Brown, 2014; Chrobot-Mason & Aramovich, 2013; Herdman & McMillan-Capehart, 2010; Joshi & Roh, 2013; Wyatt-Nichol & Antwi-Boasiako, 2012), many organizations believe that their D&I goals and objectives fit very well or completely into their company’s overall vision/mission and the character of their company, and that they have integrated a comprehensive D&I strategy very well or completely well into their overall business strategy. As revealed in the interviewing data, this is a critical step toward organizations’ effective D&I management. Based on both quantitative and qualitative data, the authors conclude that CEOs and other members of the C-suites placed highly value D&I management. Nevertheless, many of them do not have D&I goal achievements tied to their leadership team’s compensation. Several “best practices” organizations share in the interviews that they accomplish a lot in their D&I initiatives once they build such ties, which sets a great example for our industry to follow. Budge, dedicated professionals, and support/administrative staff are three major sources of support/resources that the Page member organizations devote in their D&I effort. Most of them are satisfied with the amount of resources they have for now, but hope to receive more from their senior management. Leadership support and champion as well as employee engagement are two primary factors that make their most effective D&I activities work. Finally, as researchers and practitioners (e.g., Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000; McKay & Avery, 2005) suggested, assessment is the key. Not many member organizations conduct formal or informal evaluation of their D&I initiatives, but the “best practices” assessment methods shared in the interviews (e.g., feedback, compliance, change, exit interviews, etc.) are great exemplars for the industry to follow.

The authors conducted a case study with the Arthur W. Page Society. The authors hope they can continue their research endeavor with other professional associations in public relations industry to achieve a bigger sample size for both quantitative and qualitative research as well as a broader scope of our study. Despite the limitations of the study, the authors hope the findings provide the industry with some initial thinking materials to start with. The industrial implications of the study for leadership and for recruitment and retention of public relations talent need to be further tested and refined in future research:

1. Define D&I in a broader sense and actually implement your D&I mandate in recruitment and retention practices.
2. Integrate D&I into your corporate strategic thinking and planning.
3. Leadership support and engagement is the KEY to success.
4. Acquire, retain, and develop D&I initiatives, tactics, and resources.
5. Strong enforcement: Tie D&I accomplishments with compensation for both leadership and rank-and-file employees.
6. Listen to employees’ opinions. Think of the other side of the coin.
References


What makes social media endorsement credible?
The effects of expertise, influence, and transparency cues on blogger credibility

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Indiana University Bloomington

Abstract
This study investigates the effects of different cues of blogger characteristics on the perception of source credibility. The findings showed that transparency is a critical antecedent of blogger credibility. It suggests, in most cases, transparency (i.e., revealing whether the blogger has any connection to certain brands) may be helpful in gaining credibility from publics. However, we should note the findings that indicate, among highly influential bloggers, having no disclosure of sponsorship can be rather regarded as being more credible. This counterintuitive result may come from the violation of public expectations about the influencers’ professional ethics: they would provide objective opinions about social causes to better serve public interests. This suggests a challenge to PR practitioners who prefer highly influential bloggers as third-party endorsers because the influencers’ disclosure of sponsorship may be detrimental to the public perceptions of credibility. Therefore, the strategy concerning how to deal with the dilemma between transparency and influence becomes critical: transparency enhances the perception of blogger credibility in general, but this may not be the case for influential bloggers who are generally preferred by PR campaigns.
Introduction

The flourishing of social media has increasingly led organizations to employ a new kind of endorser: bloggers. In order for social media endorsements to be effective, bloggers should be seen as reliable sources in the blogosphere, in which operant gatekeepers do not exist. In this circumstance, public relations professionals should understand what characteristics of a blogger influence the perception of credibility of the blogger for successful social media campaigns. Previous studies have provided evidence for the effect of blogger credibility on attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Chu & Kamal, 2008; Yang, Kang, & Johnson, 2010; Hsu, Lin, & Chiang, 2013). However, although blogger characteristics may work as important antecedents of the perception of blogger credibility (Metzger, Flanagin, & Medders, 2010; Sundar, 2008), they did not isolate blogger characteristics from blogger credibility.

The goal of the study is to examine the effects of blogger characteristics, as heuristic cues, on the perception of blogger credibility. This study also estimates the mediating roles played by perceived blogger credibility in generating peoples’ attitudes and behaviors toward the brand endorsed by the blogger. To this goal, this study conducts an experiment where blogger-related heuristic cues (i.e., expertise, social media influence, and transparency) are manipulated. Findings from this study provide clarified insights into antecedents of perceived blogger credibility and useful implications for strategies for effective social media endorsements.

Literature review

Blogger credibility and heuristic cues

The conception of blogger credibility originates from the source credibility. Blogger credibility refers to how a blogger is perceived as a reliable information source by its audiences (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013). If audiences (e.g., blog readers) assess a certain information source (e.g., blogger) as credible, they are more likely to be persuaded as well as to have positive attitudes and behavioral compliances (Chu & Kamal, 2008). While a vast amount of research have been conducted on the impact of source credibility, relatively fewer studies have been undertaken focusing on cues that may determine the credibility of bloggers.

Cues are the pieces of information embedded in the structure of online settings (Sundar, 2008). Since online environment is much more complex than previous media contexts, simple cues noticeable on blogs may play important roles in perceiving the credibility of bloggers (Sundar, 2008). Scholars have argued that the assessment of credibility about online information is affected by several heuristic cues (Metzger & Flanagin 2013; Sundar, 2008) Sundar (2008) suggests the variety of heuristic cues that may influence the perception of credibility in online, such as a type of content (e.g., text, aural, audiovisual), identity of the information source (e.g., self, authority, other users), and interactivity (e.g. interface options). Based on this approach, this study pay particular attention to three cues of bloggers: Expertise, social media influence, and transparency.

Special vs. general expertise

Perceived credibility of a specialist blogger may be higher than that of a generalist blogger. While a specialist is a person who concentrates on a restricted field, a generalist is a person who is competent in several different fields. Because a specialist devotes more time and efforts to a particular issue than does a generalist, the former has more chance of carefully considering various aspects of a single issue than does the latter. As a result, all other things being equal, the information of a specialist about a particular issue is more likely to be
comprehensive than that of a generalist, which leads to a greater perception of credibility of a specialist source (Koh & Sundar, 2010). Hence, this study expects that blog readers will be likely to perceive a blog that is cued as specialized in a particular topic to be more credible.

H1: Exposure to a post created by a blogger with **special expertise** in the topic will lead to a greater perception of blogger credibility.

**Social media influence**

The extent to which a blogger is influential on social media may affect blog readers’ evaluations of blogger credibility. When determining credibility of information, people tend to rely on others (Sundar & Nass, 1996). In other words, individuals are more likely to believe information when others do so (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013). Blogs have several metrics telling how many others like or agree with a blogger (e.g., the number of followers). The number of others who follow a blogger works as a heuristic cue because it may indicate the size of collective endorsement the blogger receives (Sundar, 2008). This study expects that the greater the number of followers is, the greater individuals’ perception of blogger credibility will be.

H2: Exposure to a post created by a blogger with **greater social media influence** will lead to a greater perception of blogger credibility.

**Transparency: Disclosure vs. non-disclosure of sponsorship**

The effect of transparency cues on individuals’ perceptions of blogger credibility may be twofold. Transparency refers to the degree to which a person or an organization shares information that seems to be essential but not usually shared with others. Being transparent has been considered as beneficial to both parties who are interrelated to each other (Eggert & Helm, 2003; Hultman & Axelsson, 2006). Transparency in blogging is particularly critical, given that many of influential bloggers are currently recruited and sponsored by organizations for the purpose of endorsements. Transparent manners in blogging may lead to a greater perception of credibility (Scoble & Israel, 2006). However, disclosing sponsorship may lead people to perceive a blogger as being commercially oriented. Individuals see commercial messages as less credible, because they can immediately sense persuasive intent or ulterior motive of organization that sponsor the messages (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000). Thus, two competing expectations are made: revealing sponsorship will increase blogger’s transparency, leading to a greater perception of blogger credibility; if not, disclosing sponsorship will negatively affect people’s determinations of blogger credibility, because sponsored posts will be regarded as commercials. Thus, this study poses the following research question.

RQ1: Will exposure to a post created by a blogger with **higher transparency** lead to a greater or a lower perception of blogger credibility?

**Interactions among expertise, influence, and transparency**

The three heuristic cues may also interact with one another, generating varied levels of perceived blogger credibility (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013). People will be more likely to trust bloggers with expertise specific in a restricted issue than those with general knowledge in several different issues (Koh & Sundar, 2010). Furthermore, it is likely that perceived credibility of a specialist blogger will be even greater when the blogger has many followers, because the presence of many others may imply collective endorsement of the blogger (Sundar, 2008). Thus, this study tests the following interaction hypothesis.
H3: Exposure to a post created by a blogger with special expertise in the topic and greater social media influence will lead to a greater perception of blogger credibility.

Organizations have employed a specialist blogger for social media campaigns because a specialist as an endorser is more influential than a generalist (Koh & Sundar, 2010). However, it is not certain whether revealing sponsorship will lead to an increase or a decrease in individuals’ perceptions of blogger credibility. Thus, this study poses a research question about the interaction between expertise and transparency cues.

RQ2: Will exposure to a post created by a blogger with specific expertise in the topic and transparency lead to a greater or a lower perception of blogger credibility?

Organizations have preferred bloggers with many followers over those with a few followers, not only because they can maximize the exposure of their intended messages, but also because a blogger with many followers is perceived as more credible than those with a few (Sundar, 2008). As discussed, however, we cannot expect whether the effects of transparency cues on the perception of blogger credibility will be positive or negative. This study proposes a question about the interaction between influence and transparency cues.

RQ3: Will exposure to a post created by a blogger with greater social media influence and transparency lead to a greater or a lower perception of blogger credibility?

Blogger credibility as a mediator

Source credibility affects attitude and behavior. Information from a source of high credibility is more persuasive than that from a source of low-credibility (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Information from a credible source is more likely to encourage individuals to make a high level of message elaboration (Chu & Kamal, 2008; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Highly elaborated information processing helps not only enhance the level of appreciation of the message but also shorten the psychological distances between audiences and the object the message advocates, which in turn leads to change or reinforcement in attitudes and behaviors toward the object. Indeed, previous studies have shown that source credibility positively affects attitudes and behaviors toward brands, products, and companies (e.g., Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999; Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Newell, 2002; Yoon, Kim, & Kim, 1998). Drawing on the discussion, this study tests following hypotheses:

H4: Attitude toward the brand will be positively affected by perceived blogger credibility.

H5: Purchase intention will be positively affected by perceived blogger credibility.

Method

Participants

A total of 240 participants were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk. A larger percentage of the participants were males (65.8%, n = 158) than females (34.2%, n = 82). 22.1% (n = 53) of participants were in the 18–25 age bracket; 50% (n = 120) in the 26–34 bracket; 21.3% (n = 51) in the 35–54; 5.8% (n = 14) in the 55–64; and 0.8% (n = 2) in the 64 or over bracket. With regard to education levels, 11.7% (n = 28) reported a high school; 24.6% (n = 59) were some college; 10.4% (n = 25) indicated 2-year college; 39.2% (n = 94) indicated 4-year college; and 14.1% (n = 34) indicated higher education. Participants were paid fifty cents for the completion of the questionnaire.
Procedure and Design

This study used a 2 (expertise: specific/general) × 2 (influence: high/low) × 2 (transparency: high/low) between subjects design. Participants were first asked to read the an introductory description of a real company (Next Plc.) that is based in the United Kingdom and then informed of a fictitious brand (Amis Sole) and the company’s cause-related marketing (CRM) campaign. Participants were told “Amis Sole” is a shoe brand that donates shoes to children in poverty in Africa. Once participants completed reading the background information, they were randomly assigned to one of eight posts regarding the brand’s CRM activity. Each post has the same description of the company’s CRM campaign except for the manipulated cues.

Material development

Experimental stimuli were developed via multiple pilot tests. Expertise cues were differentiated based on whether the blogger has special expertise in the topic of the cause. In the specialist condition, the blogger was described as an African development enthusiast whose writings mainly focus on issues in Africa. In the generalist condition, the blogger was depicted as a technology enthusiast who updates posts regarding a wide array of topics from politics to culture. The number of the blogger’s Twitter followers was used to manipulate influence cues. In the high influence condition, 1.8 million followers were shown and 52 followers were presented in the low influence condition. Transparency cues were manipulated by inserting statements that reveals whether the blogger received sponsorship from the company at the bottom of a post. In the disclosure condition, “Disclosure of Material Connection” was included and anything about sponsorship was not included in the no-disclosure condition.

Measure

Blogger credibility. Blogger credibility was assessed with five items adopted from Kang (2010). Participants were asked to indicate how they think the blogger on 7-point semantic differential scale: (1) unknowledgeable/knowledgeable, (2) uninfluential/influential, (3) unpassionate/passionate, (4) non-transparent/transparent, and (5) unreliable/reliable. An index was created by averaging the five items (\(M = 5.02, SD = .96, \text{Cronbach’s } \alpha = .82\)).

Attitude. Attitude toward the brand (Amis Sole) was measured with three 7-point semantic differential items: (1) dislike/like, (2) unfavorable/favorable, and (3) negative/positive. To build an index, the three items were averaged (\(M = 5.68, SD = 1.18, \text{Cronbach’s } \alpha = .96\)).

Purchase intention. Participants were asked to indicate their intention to purchase the product of the company on three 7-point semantic differential items: (1) very unlikely/very likely, (2) definitely not/definitely, (3) not very probable/very probable. An index was made by averaging the three items (\(M = 4.77, SD = 1.18, \text{Cronbach’s } \alpha = .97\)).

Manipulation check. Each manipulation has been checked using following 7-point Likert scales (strongly disagree/strongly agree). For expertise manipulation check, “The blogger has expertise specifically in the issues of poverty in Africa”; for influence manipulation check, “The blogger has many followers on Twitter”; for transparency check, “The blogger has sound principles about revealing sponsorship related to blog posts.”

Results

Manipulation check

Three t-tests revealed that our experimental stimuli had intended effects across all three factors. People in the specialist condition (\(M = 4.08\)) felt the blogger has special expertise in the
issue of poverty in Africa than those in the generalist condition ($M = 3.46$) [$t (235) = -3.15$, $p < .01$]. Individuals assigned to the high influence condition ($M = 5.19$) believed the blogger has more followers than those in the low influence condition ($M = 3.75$) [$t (229.82) = -7.85$, $p < .001$]. Those in the high transparency condition ($M = 5.25$) perceived the blogger has sound principles about revealing sponsorship related to a post than those in the low transparency condition ($M = 4.66$) [$t (236) = -3.16$, $p < .01$].

Main effects of heuristic cues on blogger credibility

To test H1 to H3 and address RQ1 to RQ3, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed. H1 predicted a positive effect of a blogger’s specific expertise in the topic on blogger credibility. There was no significant effect of expertise cues [$F (1, 233) = .36$, $p = .55$]. H1 was not supported. H2 expected that perceived credibility of a blogger with a greater number of followers would be higher. There was a significant effect of influence cues [$F (1, 233) = 6.95$, $p < .01$ $\eta^2 = .03$]. Participants in the high influence condition ($M = 5.16$) perceived greater blogger credibility than those in the low influence condition ($M = 4.83$). H2 was supported. RQ1 asked whether exposure to a post with sponsorship information would lead to a greater perception of blogger credibility. The effect was marginally significant [$F (1, 233) = 3.85$, $p = .05$ $\eta^2 = .02$]. Blogger credibility perceived by participants in the high transparency condition ($M = 5.12$) was significantly, but marginally, greater than in the low transparency condition ($M = 4.87$).

Interaction effects of heuristic cues on blogger credibility

H3 predicted that expertise cues and influence cues would interact, generating a greater perception of blogger credibility. There was a significant interaction [$F (1, 233) = 5.82$, $p < .05$ $\eta^2 = .02$]. The effect of expertise cues was stronger for the post created by a blogger who has many followers (Figure 1), as evidenced by a bigger mean difference between the specialist condition ($M = 5.35$) and the generalist condition ($M = 4.97$) for the blogger followed by many fans than for the blogger with a few ($M = 4.94$ for the generalist condition; $M = 4.71$ for the specialist condition). H3 was supported. RQ2 asked whether exposure to a post created by a blogger with expertise specifically in the issue of poverty in Africa and transparency would lead to a greater perception of blogger credibility. There was no significant interaction between expertise and transparency cues [$F (1, 233) = 2.08$, $p = .15$]. RQ3 addressed question about the interaction effect of influence cues and transparency cues on blogger credibility. There was a significant interaction [$F (1, 233) = 10.34$, $p < .01$ $\eta^2 = .04$]. Figure 2 shows that perceived credibility of a blogger followed by many was higher in the disclosure condition ($M = 5.24$) than in the no disclosure condition ($M = 5.08$). In contrast, for a blogger with a few fans, perceived credibility was higher when the blogger discloses sponsorship ($M = 5.15$) than when the blogger does not disclose sponsorship ($M = 4.50$).

Mediation of blogger credibility

A path analysis was performed to estimate the mediating role of blogger credibility between heuristic cues and attitude toward the brand and purchase intention. The maximum likelihood method was employed. The path model was evaluated to have good model fits (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Figure 3 shows, blogger credibility mediated the effects of some heuristic cues on attitude toward the brand and purchase intention: a) transparency cues $\rightarrow$ blogger credibility $\rightarrow$ attitude toward the brand and purchase intention, b) an interaction between expertise and
influence cues → blogger credibility → attitude toward the brand and purchase intention, and c) an interaction between influence and transparency cues → blogger credibility → attitude toward the brand and purchase intention. Exposure to a blog post with sponsorship information (β = .83, p < .001), created by a blogger having a larger number of fans and special expertise in the issues of poverty in Africa (β = .57, p < .05), and created by a blogger who has a greater number of followers but does not disclose sponsorship information (β = −.80, p < .01) significantly affected participants’ perceptions of blogger credibility. In turn, perceived blogger credibility had positive effects on attitude toward the brand (β = .66, p < .001) and purchase intention (β = .38, p < .001). H4 and H5 were supported.

Discussion
The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of heuristic cues for blogger characteristics on the perception of blogger credibility and its subsequent effects on individuals’ attitudes and behaviors toward the brand the blogger advocates in a post. This study found that participants perceived a blogger with many followers and a blogger who discloses sponsorship as more credible. The findings also showed a specialist blogger with many followers was perceived as more credible than others. Interestingly, however, a blogger with many followers was perceived as less credible when the blogger discloses sponsorship, whereas a blogger with a few followers was perceived as more credible when the blogger discloses sponsorship.

One of the important findings of the study is the effect of transparency on the perception of blogger credibility that differed by social media influence of a blogger. The findings showed that disclosing sponsorship may lead to a greater perception of blogger credibility in general, but it was detrimental to credibility judgment for the blogger with many fans. These findings suggest that people may perceive an influencer in the blogosphere to be credible due to their belief that the influencer is not commercially oriented. Thus, the sponsorship the influencer receives from an organization in return for endorsements may harm his/her credibility, even if he/she discloses sponsorship in a post as guided (Free Trade Commission, 2015). In terms of sponsorship, being transparent in blogging may not lead to a greater perception of blogger credibility, because disclosing sponsorship violates people’s expectation of the integrity of a high influential blogger. In short, disclosing sponsorship information may increase the level of transparency, but it may not lead to a greater perception of blogger credibility.

This suggests a dilemma in social media campaigns, because while PR managers seek to employ high influencers for social media endorsements, bloggers should disclose sponsorship information (FTC, 2015). To resolve this dilemma, organizations need to empower influential bloggers to share sponsorship with their fans by providing more financial or material rewards. In other words, if a blogger must disclose sponsorship, sharing the sponsorship with followers will be the best way to meet their expectations of the blogger’s integrity.

In contrast, the effect of revealing sponsorship was significantly positive for the blogger with a few followers. This suggests that, with a fine transparency guide regarding disclosure of material relationship, PR practitioners are able to increase campaign outcomes by recruiting non-influential bloggers who are more available than social media influencers. PR practitioners in the lack of time and money may not get disadvantages by recruiting non-influencer in social media.

Limitations and Future Research Directions
The current research has few limitations. First, results cannot be generalized into other contexts. We tested the effects of three heuristic cues on the blogger credibility and its subsequent relationships on brand attitude and behavior intention on the CRM context. Blog endorsement on simple marketing purpose of the products or service may generate different findings from the current study. In our study, CRM context may activate higher ethical standard among consumers due to its advocacy of doing good for society and may affect their information process. Future research can be done on regular product promotions may generate different results. Also, there are many types of social media and our research could be replicated in different types of social media including video sharing platform (e.g., YouTube), image sharing sites (e.g., Instagram) and more. Blog contains more texts and involves more effort than image/video based platforms; therefore future study could replicate our study in different social media settings.
References


Figure 1. An interaction effect between expertise cues and influence cues on blogger credibility.

Figure 2. An interaction effect between transparency cues and influence cues on blogger credibility.
Figure 3. Results of path analysis. For the sake of brevity and clarity, only statistically significant paths are drawn. Coefficients are standardized regression weights. $\chi^2(12) = 16.07, p = .19, \chi^2/df = 1.34, \text{SRMR} = .03, \text{RMSEA} = .04$ (90% confidence interval: .00 – .08), TLI = .99, GFI = .99.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. 
The Impact of Message Sidedness Depending On Performance History of Companies

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Abstract
Following an accidental crisis, a company’s past performance research shows history affects stakeholders’ attitude and reaction to the current crisis, and will determine how to most effectively respond. A different perception of the organization prior to the crisis can result in a different attitude to the company’s response to the crisis, but it is not known how different performance histories impact the effectiveness of message sidedness. This study fills the void of previous literature in this respect, and also guides the public relations practitioners on how to select message sidedness when crafting crisis messages following an accidental crisis, based on companies’ different previous performance histories. An experiment investigates how different performance histories, and one- and two- sided messages plus the interaction between performance history and message sidedness affect the attribution of crisis responsibility, the company’s reputation and consumers’ supportive behavior. The empirical results conclude that (a) a good performance history is more effective than a bad performance history in reducing negative crisis attribution, and in improving a company’s reputation and increasing consumers’ supportive behavior; (b) there is no difference between the choice of one- or two- sided messages in improving company reputation and consumers’ supportive behavior, but importantly one-sided messages are more effective than two-sided messages in reducing the attribution of crisis responsibility; while (c) there is no interaction effect between performance history and message sidedness. Therefore, in an accidental crisis, the element that affects people’s subsequent perception of the company is performance history rather than message sidedness, but message sidedness affects crisis attribution. Practical implications for public relations practitioners are provided.
**Introduction**

Crisis response centers on what an organization says and does after a crisis. In view of the nature of the crisis and the consequences generated by it, when a crisis occurs, what an organization says and does will affect the repair of its reputation. Crisis response content can be divided into instructing information (focus on telling stakeholders what to do to protect themselves physically in the crisis), adjusting information (focus on telling stakeholders what to do to protect themselves psychologically in a crisis), and reputation management. “Reputations are threatened during any crisis” (Coombs, 2007, p. 137).

Reputation management in a crisis situation has been tested in previous studies (Benoit, 1997; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Those previous studies indicated that organizations tend to favor making reputation-repair a priority of crisis responses (Kim, Avery, & Lariscy, 2011). While reputation-repair is important to an organization’s recovery from the crisis, unfortunately this emphasis can result in an imbalance of message dissemination. This indicates that organizations in crises tend to focus on positive information with mainly reputation management purposes while neglecting negative information sharing such as detailed crisis information or how the crisis will affect publics’ daily life. Previous research has suggested that when stakeholders are already exposed to negative information about the organization (this is the case for most organizations in crises), two-sided messages including both positive and negative information tend to be more effective in mitigating negative impact of crisis (e.g., Kim & Sung, 2013).

However, previous studies on message-sidedness in a crisis situation have not incorporated different crisis type and performance history (Kim & Sung, 2013). Therefore, this study attempts to fill this void by exploring the effectiveness of message-sidedness in accidental crisis and determining how different crisis performance histories (whether an organization had a similar crisis or not; whether an organization had a good relationship with its stakeholders or not) affects the effectiveness of messages sidedness in crises. In the academic arena, this study will contribute to the extant literature of message sidedness depending on accidental crisis with different performance histories. For practitioners, this study will help practitioners select message sidedness when drafting crisis messages in terms of accidental crisis and previous performance history.

**Literature Review**

In crisis response, organization should also consider stakeholders’ prior attitude, because the prior attitude can affect people’s perception of the current crisis (Coombs, 2007). Whether an organization has had a similar crisis in the past or an organization has a good relationship with stakeholders can affect stakeholders’ prior perception to the organization. Meanwhile, the prior attitude is also a moderator of message sidedness (Crowley & Hoyer, 1994). Hovland, Lumsdaine, and Sheffield (1949) asserted the advantage of one-sided messages when receivers initially have a good attitude, while Kamins and Assael (1987) found that two-sided messages were superior when receivers initially have a negative attitude.

**Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)**

The essence of SCCT is to match different crisis responses to different types of crisis (Coombs, 2007). That matching process is determined by attribution theory (Coombs, 1995). Attribution theory asserts that people tend to seek the cause of an event, particularly unexpected events with unfavorable outcomes (Weiner, 1985). With low probability, high consequence and
their threat to the fundamental goals of an organization (Weick, 1988), crises correspond to the events that are likely to evoke attributions. When a crisis occurs, people want to attribute responsibility to the organization — whether the organization can actually control the crisis or not — because control indicates responsibility (Coombs, 2004; Weiner, 1995). In terms of attribution of crisis responsibility, SCCT assigns crisis response strategies based on different crisis types because different crisis types can generate different levels of responsibility for the organization.

**Crisis Types**

SCCT crystallized 10 crisis types into three clusters (victim, accidental and preventable) by different magnitudes of crisis responsibility attached in crisis (Coombs, 2004; Coombs, 2007). The first type of crisis cluster is victim cluster, which contains natural disasters, rumors, workplace violence and malevolence. In victim crisis, stakeholders ascribe very little attribution of crisis responsibility. The second one is accidental crisis cluster. It includes challenges, technical-error accidents and technical-error product harm. In accidental crisis, low attribution of crisis responsibility is ascribed to the organization. The third one is preventable crisis cluster, which has human-error accidents, human-error product harm and organizational misdeeds. In preventable crisis, people are inclined to ascribe strong attributions of crisis responsibility to the organization. Identifying crisis types is the first step of crisis evaluation, because it determines the initial selection of crisis response strategies.

**Performance History**

The second step to assess the reputational threat is to modify the initial assessment on crisis history and prior reputation (Coombs, 2007). Crisis history and prior reputation can be categorized as performance history; according to Coombs (2004), performance history consists of crisis history and relationship history. Stakeholders will attribute more attributions of crisis responsibility when there is either an unfavorable crisis history or negative relationship history (Coombs, 2004). Therefore, different performance histories will have different impacts on an organization’s reputation. Whether an organization has a past crisis or not can alter perceptions of crisis responsibility that can affect the organization’s reputation (Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2001). A similar crisis history implies that a crisis is stable. A stable crisis indicates that an organization is always having problems and stakeholders will attribute more responsibility to the organization (Coombs, 2004; Coombs, 2006).

Relationship history regards how well or poorly an organization has treated stakeholders in other circumstances (Coombs, 2006). Crisis scholars have asserted that a positive pre-crisis stakeholder relationship is vital in coping with crisis (Birch, 1994). Because relationship history correlates with organizational reputation, a positive organizational reputation is indicated by a favorable relationship between stakeholders and the organization. The organization-stakeholder relationship is the kernel of public relations (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997). Therefore, a bad relationship history implies bad public relations, which will result in more attribution of crisis responsibility to the organization and sabotage organizational reputation.

Therefore, performance history plays a role as an intensifier in the crisis response process. A negative performance history will strengthen the attribution of crisis responsibility, whereas a positive performance history will lessen the severity of the attribution (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). Thus, performance history acts as a modifier in crisis response strategies. When an organization drafts a response message, they should not only take crisis type into account but
also pay attention to the performance history, which will modify the initial selection of crisis response.

Crisis Response Strategies in SCCT

The crisis response strategies organized by SCCT depend on whether the strategy can alter stakeholders’ perception of the crisis or of the organization in crisis (Coombs, 2007). SCCT categorized crisis response strategies into four postures. The denial posture, which consists of attacking the accuser, denial, and scapegoating, aims to separate an organization from the crisis if the organization is not involved in or responsible for the crisis. In view of attribution theory, denial posture can be implemented in a victim crisis. The diminishment posture is comprised of excusing and justification. It attempts to mitigate attribution of responsibility to the organization and to reduce the negative effects of the crisis. With attribution theory, diminishment posture can be applied in an accidental crisis. The rebuilding posture includes compensation and apology. It tries to bring benefit to stakeholders to counteract the negative effects of the crisis and repair the organization’s reputation. In the attribution theory framework, the rebuilding posture fits the preventable crisis. The last posture is bolstering posture. It includes reminding, ingratitude and victimage. The bolstering posture is supplemental to other three postures; therefore, it can be utilized as an auxiliary part along with other strategies. These crisis response strategies attempt to repair the organization’s image and its reputation. Therefore, they belong to reputation management response strategies.

Halo and Velcro Effects in Crisis Communication

A favorable reputation serves as a “halo” that protects an organization from damage in a crisis (Ulmer, 2001). Coombs and Holladay (2001) put forth the “halo effect,” which asserts that a positive relationship between stakeholders and the organization and a favorable crisis history protect the organization from reputational damage in a crisis. A favorable performance history acts as a buffer against crisis damage.

As for halo as shield, it can be categorized with the larger psychological phenomenon of expectancy confirmation. Scholars assert that people are less likely to change initial expectations even when they encounter clearly inconsistent information (Traut-Mattausch et al., 2004). Therefore, when there is a favorable performance history, stakeholders tend to ignore the negative information on the organization and focus on its positive aspects instead.

However, an unfavorable relationship history and crisis history might aggravate the negatives generated by the crisis and lead to more damage to the organization (Coombs, 2001; Coombs, 2004). Therefore, a negative performance history is like Velcro, which harms an organization during a crisis and attracts additional reputational damage. In terms of that, Coombs and Holladay (2002) found that under an unfavorable prior reputation condition, an organization was rated lower than either favorable or neutral condition. This result was named the Velcro effect by Coombs and Holladay (2002). Therefore, in a crisis situation, when an organization has a negative performance history, stakeholders tend to be affected by the Velcro effect and view the organization more negatively.

Hypothesis 1: Good performance history will be more effective in H1a reducing attribution of crisis responsibility, H1b improving company’s reputation, and H1c increasing consumers’ supportive behavior than bad performance history.
Message Sidedness

One-sided and Two-sided Messages

According to Allen (1991), a one-sided message is defined as a message that disseminates only positive information of an organization. A two-sided message disseminates both positive and negative information of an organization. Some studies have further divided the two-sided message. Golden and Alpert (1987) and Allen (1991) categorized two-sided messages into two groups: refutational and nonrefutational. Refutational two-sided messages present positive and negative information simultaneously and then refute the negative information to strengthen the receivers’ attitude to the counterarguments that followed (Eisend, 2007). Nonrefutational two-sided messages are like refutational two-sided messages but without discrediting the negative information.

Theoretical Framework of Message Sidedness

The effectiveness of message sidedness has been tested by many studies. These studies have covered many fields and topics including political propaganda (Sandomirsky, 1954), the psychological aspect (McGuire, 1961), marketing (Bither, Dolich & Nell, 1971), advertising brand introduction (Etgar & Goodwin, 1982), issue/advocacy advertising campaigns (Burgoon, Pfau & Birk 1995), user-generated online setting (Winter & Kramer, 2012), crisis situations (Kim & Sung, 2013), and the latest adolescents’ binge-drinking issues (Cornelis, Cauberghe & Pelsmacker, 2013). To further understand the effectiveness of message sidedness, particularly the effect of two-sided messages, this study included reviews of the following relevant theories.

Inoculation Theory

McGuire (1961) drew the inoculation concept from social psychology and used a physiological analogy to explain it. People are often injected with a mild form of a disease to build resistance to it (Etgar & Goodwin, 1982) because such immunization enhance people’s ability to withstand attack from the stronger form of the germs. Likewise, people can be inoculated against negative messages. In inoculation theory, there are two components that contribute to resistance: threat and refutational preemption (Pfau & Szabo, 2001). Threat contains information warning people that their existing attitude is going to be challenged. To make threat work, on one hand the challenges should be sufficiently powerful to make people realize that their existing attitudes are vulnerable; on the other hand, the challenges cannot be too strong and overcome people’s acceptance ability. Most of previous studies confirmed that attitudes elicited by two-sided messages may be more resistant to change when people are confronted with counterarguments. Therefore, the advantage of two-sided messages is salient among people who initially have a negative attitude toward the advertised brand (Sawyer, 1973).

Attribution Theory

Attribution theory served as a guide in extended two-sided message studies. Copious research that has empirically tested the effectiveness of message sidedness in various scenarios found that two-sided message increases source credibility (Golden & Alpert 1987; Kamins 1989). Additionally, Trifts and Haubl (2003) found that two-sided messages can effectively promote communicators’ believability. Therefore, when communicators present negative messages to the public, from the receivers’ perspective, the message is more credible and trustworthy. In crisis situation, publics are already exposed to a negative publicity of an organization, and the unfavorable attitude from the public is prevalent. Therefore, two-sided
messages will be more effective to reduce the attribution and increase organization’s credibility.

*Hypothesis 2:* Two-sided messages will be more effective in H2a reducing attribution of crisis responsibility, H2b improving company’s reputation, and H2c increasing consumers’ supportive behavior than one-sided messages.

**Prior attitude: The Moderator of One-and Two-Sided Messages**

All aforementioned theories of message sidedness implied that two-sided messages are more recommendable in situations of a prior negative attitude. This prior attitude serves as a precondition for selecting one-and two-sided messages. Crowley and Hoyer (1994) claimed that a receiver’s prior attitude plays an important role in assessing the effectiveness of message sidedness. A plethora of studies have also found a correlation between the effectiveness of message sidedness and prior attitude. Alba and Marmorstein (1987) asserted that if a brand already emerged in a favorable environment, consumers are more likely to maintain such positive attitudes, which echoed Hovland’s (1953) study. Hovland posited that one-sided messages are more effective than two-sided messages when the receiver already has a positive attitude toward the disseminator.

Therefore, when an organization drafts a message, it is critical to identify receivers’ initial attitude. Identifying the prior attitude of stakeholders can help organizations specify the level of attribution ascribed to the organization. In a crisis situation, if an organization had a positive relationship history and favorable crisis history, halo effect will be formed (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). In other words, a positive performance history will form a positive prior attitude in stakeholders’ mind. Conversely, a negative relationship history and unfavorable crisis history will form a Velcro effect, which will not only shape negative prior attitude to the organization, but also exacerbate the current crisis.

Therefore, an organization’s performance history is the main factor in the prior attitude of stakeholders towards an organization. Referring to the previous literature review of crisis types, in victim, accidental and preventable crises, stakeholders ascribe minimal, little, and great attribution to the organization. If stakeholders already have a good perception of the organization — in other words, when the organization has a good performance history — according to the halo effect, less reputational damage will be attracted to the organization, because the halo will let stakeholders “focus on the positive aspects of the organization and ignore the negative information created by the crisis” (Coombs & Holladay, 2006, p. 125).

However, if an organization had a negative performance history, according to SCCT, the seriousness of the current crisis will be escalated to the next higher level (Coombs, 2007). Thus under a bad performance history, a victim crisis will escalate to an accidental crisis. As for an accidental crisis, it will transcend to a preventable crisis, which elicits strong attribution of responsibility to the organization. And people will ascribe more attribution of crisis responsibility to the organization with a bad performance history in a preventable crisis. Such negative performance history will lead to the Velcro effect, which elicits unfavorable prior attitude to the organization.

This experiment has two independent variables: performance history and message sidedness. Since the effect of the message sidedness differs depending on the different performance history, an interaction effect between performance history and message-sidedness is proposed. The proposed interaction direction is as follows:
Hypothesis 3: There will be interaction effects between performance history and message sidedness: 1) When an organization had a good performance history prior to a crisis, one-sided messages will be more effective than two-sided messages in terms of H3(1)a reducing attribution of crisis responsibility, H3(1)b improving reputation, and H3(1)c improving consumers’ supportive behavior intention, whereas 2) when an organization had a bad performance history prior to a crisis, two-sided messages are more effective than one-sided messages in terms of H3(2)a reducing attribution of crisis responsibility, H3(2)b improving reputation, and H3(2)c improving consumers supportive behavior intention.

Methodology

Design

A 2 X 2 between-subjects experimental design was used in this study: two-performance histories (good vs. bad) with two types of message sidedness (one-sided vs. two-sided messages) in addition to two control groups. The participants were randomly assigned to one of 6 groups. To test the different effectiveness of message sidedness under different performance history, the study had four treatment groups, which was exposed to two performance histories (good vs. bad) and two message sidedness (one-and two-sided crisis response messages). In addition, two control groups, which would not be exposed to message sidedness but only to the crisis situation and the company’s performance history. The use of two control groups helped to determine the impact of message sidedness.

This study operationalized one-sided messages as a bolstering crisis response strategy, containing only positive information of an organization by bolstering past good deeds of the organization. On the other hand, two-sided messages were operationalized as refutational two-sided messages. In refutational two-sided messages, the organization in a crisis first presented negative, and then positive information, and then provided refutational information to the negative information. It is because in two-sided communications, recipients expect communicators to put the most important information favoring their own organization at the end (Krosnick et al., 1990). Each condition had at least 25 respondents, which corresponds to the requirement of analysis of variance (ANOVA) that requires at least 15 participants in each condition (Morgan & Griego, 1998, cited in Coombs & Holladay, 2001).

To reduce confounding factors, this study kept the severity of the crisis consistent. Dependent variables are (a) the participants’ evaluation of the attribution of crisis responsibility to the company; (b) the company’s reputation; and (c) the supportive behavior intentions to the company. Manipulation checks of performance history and message sidedness were incorporated to ensure the successful manipulation of the independent variables. Statistical significance was tested using two-way analysis of variance.

Participants

A convenience sampling of students at the University of Florida was used for this experiment, and participants were rewarded with a small gift in appreciation for their participation. Convenience sampling was used because it is often impractical to use probability sampling methods to recruit experimental research participants (Austin & Pinkleton, 2006), and “in reality, the samples used in experiments are so small that they would not be highly representative even if probability sampling were used” (p. 181). Therefore, as long as researchers randomly assign participants to ensure the characteristics of participants are equal in each
condition, convenience sampling is appropriate in experiments. A total of 173 students at the University of Florida participated in the study, which resulted in 150 valid questionnaires. The average age for the valid sample was 20.69 (SD= 2.12).

The respondents were nonvictims of the crisis, because although nonvictims are not directly injured by a crisis, they are likely to be affected by the news of the crisis, learning of it from media, and it may affect the way they interact in the future with the organization (Coombs, 2004). Therefore, the manner in which the organization deals with the crisis may affect nonvictims’ future interactions with the organization and shape stakeholders’ perceptions of the organization (Newsom, VanSlyke Turk, & Kruckenberg, 2000, as cited in Coombs, 2004).

In this study, a fictitious energy drink company was used to manipulate responses to crisis information, in a situation where the majority of energy drinkers are teenagers and young adults 18 to 34 years old (Lal, 2007). College students typically fall under this age group, and although they are not current victims, they probably will interact with this type of product in the future. Of the 150 valid participants in this study, 105 (70%) were female and 45 (30%) were male. Ninety-nine (66%) were Caucasian, twenty-seven (18%) were Hispanic/ Latino, seven (4.7%) were African American/ Black, one (.07) was Native American/ American Indian, eleven (7.3) were Asian/ Pacific Islanders and five (3.3%) belonged to other ethnicities. Among all participants, twenty-eight (18.7%) were freshmen, twenty-six (17.3%) were sophomores, fifty-five (36.7%) were juniors, twenty-nine (19.3%) were seniors, and twelve (8%) were graduate students.

Stimuli

This study chose an excessive caffeine intake-related crisis as an accidental crisis type because it has been the most common crisis suffered by the energy-drink industry and has led to a number of injury and wrongful-death lawsuits (Meier, 2012). Selecting an accident as the crisis type is based on the practical consideration that the crisis can be realistically described (Claeys, Cauberghe, & Vyncke, 2010). Message sidedness was manipulated in the company’s crisis response messages as a form of press release. The one-sided message focused on conveying only positive information about the organization. The one-sided response message was operationalized as a bolstering strategy in this study since it aims to remind stakeholders of an organization’s past good works. In the two-sided messages condition, the company presented the current situation of the crisis: “a 14-year old girl, who died from consuming two cans of Vigor Energy drink in 24 hours,” which is negative information about the company. Following that, the corporate messages included corrective actions of this crisis: “Vigor Energy will investigate the side effects of its energy drinks. Vigor Energy recommends on product labels and on the Vigor Energy website, that individuals consume no more than two cans of Vigor Energy drink per day, spaced several hours apart.” At the same time, positive information of the company was incorporated into response messages: “Vigor Energy has been dedicated to meeting and exceeding consumers’ expectations, boosting employees’ morale, and being a good corporate citizen”.

Procedure

Randomly assigned respondents were asked to read one-sided or two-sided messages after being presented with a different performance history for each group. Respondents in control groups were exposed to only news articles about the crisis and performance history (i.e., no exposure to message sidedness: company’s crisis-response messages). After exposure crisis news and the company’s crisis response messages, respondents were asked to fill out survey questions
related to attribution-of-crisis responsibility, the company’s reputation, the consumers’ supportive behavior intentions and manipulation checks. The survey took about 15 minutes to complete.

**Pretest**

A pretest on testing the writing quality of crisis news and corporate responses was conducted. The aim of the pretest is to ensure that quality of writing is consistent across different conditions. This is to ensure that the different responses are the result of a reaction to the different performance histories and the different message sidedness being tested, and not to the differing quality of the writing presenting the stimuli.

Two questions were incorporated into the pretest aiming to test the writing strength: 1) the message flows well, 2) the message reads well. In the pre-test results, there were no statistical differences between good ($M=5.63$, $SD=1.71$) and bad ($M=5.57$, $SD=.83$) performance histories in terms of writing strength ($t (30) = .18, p =.86$). There were also no statistical differences between one-sided ($M=5.37$, $SD=1.13$) and two-sided messages ($M=5.13$, $SD=1.14$) in terms of writing strength ($t (30) = .56, p =.58$). Comparing the writing strength of good performance history and one-sided messages ($t (30) = .64, p =.53$), it indicated no statistically significant difference between good performance history and one-sided messages in terms of writing strength. A comparison of the writing strength of bad performance history and one-sided messages ($t (30) = -.54, p =.59$), indicated no statistically significant difference between bad performance history and one-sided messages in terms of writing strength. A comparison of the writing strength of good performance history and two-sided messages ($t (30) = 1.18, p =.25$) indicated no statistically significant difference between good performance history and two-sided messages in terms of writing strength. A comparison of the writing strength of bad performance history and two-sided messages ($t (30) = -1.17, p=.25$) indicated no statistically significant difference between bad performance history and two-sided messages in terms of writing strength. To sum up, the writing strength was consistent among the four groups.

**Measure**

To measure the public’s attribution of crisis responsibility to the organization, this study used Kim and Sung’s (2013) four-item scale. The four items are: (a) the organization is highly responsible for the crisis; (b) the organization should be held accountable for the crisis; (c) the crisis is the fault of the organization; (d) I blame the organization for the crisis.

The company’s reputation was measured using five items adapted from Kim (2011). The five items are: (a) I think this company is attractive, (b) This company is reliable, (c) I think this company is trustworthy, (d) I like the company, (e) The company’s reputation is favorable.

The supportive-behavior intention used five items from Kim and Sung (2013), which was adapted from previous studies (Coombs, 1998, Kim & Lee, 2011, as cited in Kim & Sung, 2013). The five items will include that I would (a) “Say nice things about the company to others”; (b) “Sign a petition in support of the company”; (c) “Contact a government official in support of the company”; (d) “Engage in actions to support”; and (e) “Recommend the company to my friends as their future employer.” All of these measure scales will use a seven-point Likert scale anchored by 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree).

**Reliabilities**
A reliability analysis to test the internal consistency of the items being measured, produced an internal consistency of .922 (Cronbach’s alpha) for crisis responsibility, .902 (Cronbach’s alpha) for the company’s reputation scale and .911 (Cronbach’s alpha) for the supportive behavior of the company. George and Mallory (2003) provide the following rules of thumb: “_ > .9 - Excellent, _ > .8 - Good, _ > .7 - Acceptable, _ > .6 - Questionable, _ > .5 - Poor, and _ < .5 - Unacceptable” (p. 231, as cited in Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Therefore, all reliability scores fell within the acceptable range and the internal consistency of the items in the scale were excellent.

**Manipulation Checks**

Manipulation checks were successful. There was a statistically significant difference between good and bad performance history conditions, in terms of relationship history (t (150) = 17.64, p < .0005). Participants who saw that a company had a good performance history (M = 6.01, SD = 1.03) considered the company had a good relationship with stakeholders than did participants who were exposed to a company with a bad performance history (M = 2.41, SD = 1.43). As to crisis history, there was also a statistically significant difference between good and bad performance histories (t (150) = 19.02, p < .0005). Participants who saw a good performance history (M = 6.03, SD = 1.44) were more likely to think the company had no crises in the past than participants who saw a bad performance history (M = 1.91, SD = 1.20). As for message sidedness, there was a statistically significant difference between one- and two-sided messages in terms of containing only positive information (t (100) = 4.11, p < .0005). Participants who saw the one-sided messages from the company (M = 6.36, SD = 1.06) considered the company’s response contained only positive information than those who saw the two-sided messages from the company (M = 5.22, SD = 1.65). There was also a statistically significant difference between one- and two-sided messages in terms of containing both positive and negative information (t (100) = -13.15, p < .0005). Participants who saw one-sided messages were less likely to think the company’s response contained both positive and negative information (M = 1.84, SD = .97) than did the participants who saw the two-sided messages (M = 5.04, SD = 1.43).

**Test of Hypotheses**

H1a proposed that good performance history will be more effective than bad performance history in reducing attribution of crisis responsibility. The result of ANOVA suggested that there was a significant difference between good and bad performance histories in the attribution of crisis responsibility (F (1, 144) = 8.60, p = .004, η²p = .06) (Table 4-1). When comparing mean scores, participants ascribed lower attributions of crisis responsibility when the company had a good performance history (M = 3.71, SD = 1.31) than when the company had a bad performance history (M = 4.32, SD = 1.26) (Table 4-2). Therefore, H1a was supported.

H1b assumed that good performance history will be more effective than bad performance history in improving a company’s reputation. The result of ANOVA showed that there was a significant difference between good and bad performance histories in corporate reputation (F (1, 144) = 114.73, p < .0005, η²p = .44) (Table 4-1). Participants considered the company had a higher reputation score (M = 3.99, SD = 1.00) when the company had a good performance history, than when the company had a bad performance history (M = 2.33, SD = .96) (Table 4-2). Therefore, H1b was supported.

H1c posited that good performance history will be more effective than bad performance history in improving consumers’ supportive behavior. The result of ANOVA indicated that there
was a significant difference between good and bad performance histories in consumers’ supportive behavior \((F (1, 144) = 15.32, p<.0005, \eta^2_p = .10)\) (Table 4-1). Participants showed higher supportive behavioral intentions \((M= 2.25, SD= 1.19)\) when a company had a good performance history than when it had a bad performance history \((M= 1.59, SD= .83)\) (Table 4-2). Therefore, H1c was supported.

H2a posited that two-sided messages will be more effective than one-sided messages in reducing attributions of crisis responsibility. The results of ANOVA suggested that there was a significant difference among the three message sidedness conditions (one-sided, two-sided, and no message) in terms of attribution of crisis responsibility \((F (2, 144) = 3.08, p=.049, \eta^2_p = .041)\) (Table 4-3). The Tukey HSD post-hoc test revealed that there was a statistical difference between one- and two-sided messages \((p=.049)\) in terms of attribution of crisis responsibility. Regardless of performance history, two-sided messages \((M= 4.37, SD= 1.10)\) generated more attributions than one-sided messages \((M= 3.76, SD= 1.29)\), which is different from the proposed hypothesis (H2a). In addition, there was no statistical difference between one-sided messages and no message response \((p=.81)\), and two-sided messages and no message response \((p=.18)\) (see Table 4-4). Therefore, H2a was not supported.

H2b hypothesized that two-sided messages will be more effective than one-sided messages in improving a company’s reputation. The results of ANOVA showed that there was a significant difference in message sidedness for company’s reputation \((F (2, 144) = 4.40, p=.014, \eta^2_p = .058)\) (Table 4-3). When comparing mean scores, participants revealed a higher corporate reputation \((M= 3.39, SD= 1.17)\) when two-sided messages were used than when one-sided messages were used \((M= 3.23, SD= 1.31)\) (Table 4-4). However, the Tukey HSD Post hoc tests showed that there was no statistical difference \((p=.68)\) between one-and two-sided messages. There was also no statistical difference between one-sided messages and no message response \((p=.11)\), but a statistical difference was found only between two-sided messages and no message response \((p=.012)\) in terms of a company’s reputation. Thus, the results suggested that two sided messages were more effective than no messages regardless of performance history, but two sided messages were not more effective than one-sided messages. Therefore, H2b was not supported.

H2c posited that two-sided messages will be more effective than one-sided messages in improving consumers’ supportive behavior. Participants presented a slightly higher level of supportive behavior in two-sided messages \((M= 2.06, SD= 1.16)\) than in one-sided messages \((M= 2.00, SD= 1.02)\) (Table 4-4). However, the results of ANOVA revealed that there was no significant difference among the three message conditions in consumers’ supportive behavior \((F (2, 144) = 1.71, p=.19, \eta^2_p = .02)\) (Table 4-3). Tukey HSD post-hoc tests also revealed no statistical differences between one-sided messages and two sided messages \((p =.95)\), between one-sided messages and no message conditions \((p=.33)\), and between two-sided messages and no message conditions \((p=.20)\) for consumers’ supportive behavior. Therefore, H2c was not supported.

H3 (1) and (2) proposed that there will be interaction effects between performance history and message sidedness: H3-1) When an organization had a good performance history prior to a crisis, one-sided messages will be more effective than two-sided messages in terms of (a) reducing attribution of crisis responsibility, (b) improving reputation, and (c) improving consumers’ supportive behavior intention, whereas H3-2) when an organization had a bad performance history prior to a crisis, two-sided messages are more effective than one-sided messages in terms of (a) reducing attribution of crisis responsibility, (b) improving reputation, and (c) improving consumers supportive behavior intention. ANOVA results revealed that the
interaction effect between performance history and message sidedness only existed for the reputation variable \( (F(2, 144) = 3.15, p=.046, \eta^2_p = .04) \) (Table 4-5) among the three dependent variables. For crisis responsibility attribution and supportive behavior dependent variables, there were no significant interaction effects between performance history and message sidedness. Although the mean score of attribution of crisis responsibility was lower \( (M= 3.58, SD= 1.50) \) when one-sided messages were used in good performance history than two-sided messages \( (M= 4.17, SD=.93) \), there was no significant interaction effect between performance history and message sidedness in attribution of crisis responsibility \( (F(2, 144) = 1.26, p=.29, \eta^2_p = .02) \) (Table 4-5). In addition, for the bad performance history, the mean score of attribution of crisis responsibility is higher \( (M= 4.56, SD= 1.24) \) when a company used two-sided messages than when using one-sided messages \( (M= 3.94, SD= 1.04) \). There was also no statistically significant interaction effect between performance history and message sidedness in consumers’ supportive behavior \( (F(2, 144) = 1.26, p=.29, \eta^2_p = .02) \) (Table 4-5). Even the mean score of consumers’ supportive behavior was higher \( (M= 2.36, SD= 1.30) \) when two-sided messages were used in good performance history than in one-sided messages \( (M= 2.23, SD=1.16) \), whereas in bad performance history, there was no difference between one-sided \( (M= 1.77, SD=.83) \) and two-sided messages \( (M= 1.76, SD=.93) \) for consumers’ supportive behavior (Table 6 for descriptive statistics). Thus, H3s related to crisis responsibility attribution and supportive behavior (H3-1(a), H3-2(a), H3-1(c), and H3-2(c)) were not supported.

Since there was a significant interaction effect only for the corporate reputation variable (H3-1(b) and H3-2(b)), a pairwise comparison between performance history and message sidedness was conducted to further analyze if the interaction effects were in the same direction as H3 anticipated. Even though participants in a good performance history condition considered the company had a higher reputation \( (M= 4.05, SD= 1.10) \) when the company used one-sided messages than when the company used two-sided messages \( (M= 3.99, SD= .93) \) as H3 (1b) anticipated (Table 4-6), there was no statistical difference between one-and two-sided messages for reputation \( (p=.84) \) in a good performance history. In addition, there were no statistical difference between one-sided message and no message conditions \( (p=.63) \) and between two-sided messages and no message conditions \( (p=.79) \) (Table 4-6).

In a bad performance history, although participants thought that two-sided messages generated more positive reputation \( (M= 2.79, SD= .87) \) than one-sided messages \( (M=2.42, SD=.94) \) as anticipated by H3 (2b), results suggested no statistical difference between one-and two-sided messages \( (p=.16) \) (Table 4-7). However, there were statistical differences between one-sided messages and no message \( (p=.02) \), and between two-sided messages and no message \( (p<.0005) \). Thus, as seen in Figure 1, the significant interaction effect between performance history and message sidedness found for corporate reputation variable did not come from the difference between one-sided and two-sided messages as this study hypothesized. The interaction effects were found because both one-sided and two-sided messages were more effective than no messages in the bad performance history, whereas no significant differences existed among the three message conditions in the good performance history. Therefore, H3s related to the interaction effects between performance history and message sidedness were not supported.

Table 4-1. ANOV test of performance history by dependent variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
<th>Observed Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crisis responsibility attribution</td>
<td>8.60</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Good performance history</td>
<td>Bad performance history</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis responsibility</td>
<td>3.71(1.31)</td>
<td>4.32(1.26)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company reputation</td>
<td>3.99(1.00)</td>
<td>2.33(0.96)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive behavior</td>
<td>2.25(1.19)</td>
<td>1.59(0.83)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4-3. ANOVA test of message sidedness by dependent variables.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
<th>Observed Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crisis responsibility</td>
<td>3.078</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company reputation</td>
<td>4.401</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive behavior</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>.185</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4-4. Mean and Standard Deviation of dependent variables for message sidedness and no message response in crisis.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Crisis Responsibility</th>
<th>Company Reputation</th>
<th>Supportive behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One-sided messages</td>
<td>3.76(1.29)</td>
<td>3.23(1.31)</td>
<td>2.00(1.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-sided messages</td>
<td>4.37(1.10)</td>
<td>3.39(1.17)</td>
<td>2.06(1.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No message response</td>
<td>3.92(1.49)</td>
<td>2.84(1.35)</td>
<td>1.71(1.03)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4-5. Interaction effects between performance history and message sidedness for all dependent variables.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance history X Message sidedness</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
<th>Observed Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attribution of crisis responsibility</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company reputation</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive behavior</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4-6. Means and Standard Deviations of dependent variables for performance history and message sidedness.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>History message</th>
<th>Crisis Responsibility</th>
<th>Company Reputation</th>
<th>Supportive behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good message</td>
<td>One sided message</td>
<td>3.58(1.50)</td>
<td>4.05(1.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two sided message</td>
<td>4.17(0.93)</td>
<td>3.99(1.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No message</td>
<td>3.38(1.37)</td>
<td>3.92(0.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad message</td>
<td>One sided message</td>
<td>3.94(1.04)</td>
<td>2.42(0.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two sided message</td>
<td>4.56(1.43)</td>
<td>2.79(0.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No message</td>
<td>4.45(1.43)</td>
<td>1.77(0.80)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4-7. Pairwise comparisons between performance history and message sidedness for corporate reputation variable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good history</th>
<th>One-sided messages</th>
<th>Two-sided messages</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good history One-sided messages</td>
<td>Two-sided messages</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good history No messages</td>
<td>Two-sided messages</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good history Two-sided messages</td>
<td>One-sided messages</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good history No messages</td>
<td>Two-sided messages</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad history One-sided messages</td>
<td>Two-sided messages</td>
<td>-.38</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad history No messages</td>
<td>Two-sided messages</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad history Two-sided messages</td>
<td>One-sided messages</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad history No messages</td>
<td>Two-sided messages</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4-1. Interaction effect between performance history and message sidedness for corporate reputation

Discussion

These findings provided valuable insights on (a) the impact of performance history, (b) the effectiveness of message sidedness, and (c) the interaction between performance history and message sidedness, in reducing public’s attribution of crisis responsibility, improving company’s reputation and increasing consumers’ supportive behavior.

The Impact of Performance History

This study found that a good performance history generated a more favorable perception of the company than did a bad performance history. This finding can be explained by halo and velcro effects. The halo effect permits an organization to reduce crisis attribution and maintain its reputation following an accident, whereas the velcro effect intensifies the negative effect of an accident by generating greater attribution of crisis responsibility to the organization and doing greater reputational damage to the organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2006).

The Effectiveness of Message Sidedness

This study found that regardless of performance history, one-sided messages were more effective than two-sided messages in reducing attribution of crisis responsibility, but there were no significant differences found between the use of one- and two-sided messages in improving a company’s reputation and increasing consumer supportive behaviors.
Although this finding contradicts with previous studies, the finding can be explained by consumers’ perceived risk to the organization. Perceived risk is composed of two dimensions: “perception of the uncertainty and the seriousness of adverse consequences” (e.g., Dowling & Staelin, 1994; Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1986; Zaltman & Wallendorf, 1979, as cited in Pennings, Wasink, & Meulenberg, 2002, p. 92). The uncertainty can be considered perception of risk, reflecting consumers’ perception of the uncertainty inherent in a particular situation. The seriousness of possible adverse consequences can be categorized as risk attitude, which also implies the extent to which consumers hold a negative attitude of the risk. Both risk perception and risk attitude could affect consumers’ behavior.

To reduce the risk attitude (adverse consequences), Arrow (1971) and Pratt (1964) suggested that in cases of extreme risk aversion behavior, eliminating the risk was the key to changing consumers’ behavior. In the present study, the one-sided messages did not include any information related to resolving the current crisis. Although the two-sided messages included corrective actions, such as instructions for people on how to safely consume energy drinks, the risk perception and attitude were not reduced. As long as people consumed an energy drink, they were exposed to the risk of being uncomfortable, and according to the two-sided messages, such risk was not eliminated. Therefore, there was no significant difference between one- and two-sided messages in increasing consumers’ supportive behavior.

The Interaction between Performance History and Message Sidedness

An interaction effect found for corporate reputation in this study indicates that there are no significant differences among the messages in a good performance history, whereas one-sided and two-sided messages are more effective than no messages in a bad performance history. This can be explained by the characteristic of bad performance history and the importance of presenting a crisis response message. A bad performance history implies a negative reputation for the company. In a crisis situation, “most people are quick to believe the worst about organization, a favorable reputation can lead stakeholders to believe the best” (Coombs, 2007, p. 147). However, an unfavorable reputation also may lead to a burgeoning of negative speculation about the organization. An information void is formed by a crisis. If an organization does not respond to the crisis, the information void will be filled with rumor and speculation (Caruba, 1994, as cited in Coombs, 2007). Therefore, no matter what kind of messages are implemented as crisis response, the response messages will convey an ability to control the crisis situation and be more effective in preserving the company’s reputation than not presenting any message as a response.

Implications for Public Relations Practitioners

First, this study suggested that following a crisis, a good performance history is more effective than a bad performance history in reducing crisis attribution and improving public’s perception of the company. The findings also implied that the decisive element in people’s evaluation is performance history rather than certain crisis strategies, because no matter whether in good or bad performance history, there were no significant differences in the effectiveness of one- and two-sided messages. It indicated the importance of relationship management in public relations. Therefore, to help an organization recover from a crisis quickly and to protect the organization from additional reputational damage, it is recommended that public relations practitioners in advance maintain a good relationship between the organization and public and keep a safe record of crisis history.
Second, regardless of performance history, when a public relations practitioner deals with a challenge crisis from an accidental crisis cluster, the use of one-sided messages which incorporate positive CSR programs, will reduce crisis attribution and improve the organization’s reputation. To increase consumers’ supportive behavior toward the organization, the public relations practitioner should include messages that reduce stakeholders’ uncertainty concerning the crisis. The corrective information should deal not only with the current crisis but also should include information to assist in preventing a similar crisis in the future, as both risk perception (uncertainty) and risk attitude (adverse consequence) affect consumers’ supportive behavior toward the product (Pennings, Wasink & Meulenberg, 2002). Thus, to protect the organization from additional crisis attribution and reputational damage that may occur in a crisis situation, practitioners should develop long-term positive CSR programs in advance. Then, to assure stakeholders that the current crisis has been well dealt with by the company and that such a crisis is unlikely to occur in the future, it is recommended that public relations practitioners provide the public with crisis elimination messages.

Third, in terms of a company’s reputation, an interaction effect has been found between performance history and message sidedness, but this interaction effect is found only in the presence of a bad performance history, not a good performance history. In good performance history, among one-sided messages, two-sided messages and no message response no differences were found affecting the company’s reputation. Thus for public relations practitioners, in good performance history, no matter which kind of messages are conveyed, the public’s evaluation is not affected because as stated above, a good performance history determines public’s perception of the organization. Public relations practitioners could choose to keep silent or reiterate the past good works done by the organization in the response messages, because good performance history acts as a halo effect to reduce the crisis attribution and additional reputational damage, and helps stakeholders maintain their positive attitude towards the organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2006).

However, in bad performance history, an interaction effect lies in the significant difference between crisis response and no crisis response. While the use of one-sided and two-sided messages is more effective than no message response, there was no significant difference in impact between one- and two-sided messages. Thus, for public relations practitioners, if an organization has an unfavorable relationship with stakeholders and a past crisis history, a crisis response is critical in maintaining the company’s reputation. When a company is struck by a crisis, public relations practitioners should respond promptly to the crisis. The crisis response indicates that the company has taken control of the crisis situation, which is more effective than no response in preserving the company’s reputation. Therefore, there is a difference in the impact of the use of messages (keeping silent or reiterating the organization’s past good works) in the presence of a good performance history than is the impact in the use of messages in a bad performance history. In the case of a bad performance history, the public relations practitioners are recommended to use either one-sided or two-sided messages to respond to the crisis and within the response messages, to highlight that the organization is in control of the crisis.

**Limitation and Future Research**

Although this study provides meaningful implications for existing literature and public relations practitioners, it is still limited by several factors. First, this study tested only the effectiveness of message sidedness according to different performance histories in an accidental crisis cluster. It did not include other crisis clusters, such as the victim and preventable crisis
cluster. Therefore, in future research, researchers should take other crisis clusters into consideration when testing the effectiveness of message sidedness by company’s different performance history.

Second, the statistical power of this study is not high; only performance history generated a statistical power higher than .8 in terms of attribution of crisis responsibility, company reputation and consumers’ supportive behavior. As for message sidedness and the interaction effect between performance history and message sidedness, the statistical power is lower than .8 for attribution of crisis responsibility, company reputation and consumers’ supportive behavior. According to Lenth (2012), the statistical power should be .8, when the significance level is .05. No significant differences can be explained by the low statistical power in this study. However, the statistical power can be increased by increasing sample size (Cohen, 1988; Smith, 2004; Patton, 1990). Therefore, in future study, the use of a larger sample size is recommended, which may result in reinterpreting the effectiveness of message sidedness and the interaction effect between performance history and message sidedness.
Reference


Understanding the Politics of Your Public: 
The Political Views of Young Hispanics and Their 2016 Voting Intentions

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Abstract
Latinos are the largest minority group within the United States and are poised to play an increasingly important role in the U.S. society. Public relations practitioners who work in politics should be interested in what motivates young Latinos to participate in politics. This study reports the findings of a national nonprobability survey with young Latinos (N=434). Specifically, the analysis explores how individual variables, sociocultural variables and media use predict intention to vote in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, perceptions of the importance of immigration reform, and political participation. Findings show that acculturation is only a predictor of perceptions of the importance of immigration reform. The effect of ideology and media variables is discussed.
Hispanics comprise more than 55 million Americans and are considered an increasingly critical public to U.S. presidential election campaigns. Hispanics, or Latinos, are a diverse group, and are increasingly acculturating into U.S. society. A 2013 Pew Research report shows that 68% of Hispanics, ages 5 or older, speak only English at home (Krogstad, Lopez, & Rohal, 2015). The conventional wisdom that campaigns must primarily use Spanish to reach U.S. Hispanics is outdated, as the growth in the U.S. Hispanic population is no longer from immigration but from U.S. births. According to Advertising Age’s Hispanic Fact Pack 2015, fully 52% of Latinos are younger than 30. In combination, these data reveal a shift in demographics and suggest that campaign managers may need to (1) focus on mobilizing younger and more acculturated Latinos, and (2) use different strategies than they have used in the past.

The purpose of this research is to examine how political interest, media use, religiosity, ideology, level of acculturation, and demographics influence young Hispanics’ political participation, perceptions of the importance of immigration reform, and intentions to vote in the 2016 presidential campaign. These data should be of interest to public relations practitioners interested in building relationships with this public and engaging them in political activities.

**Theory: Social Identity Theory**

Public relations publics can be categorized in many ways and when it comes to politics, it is no exception. Public relations practitioners engage in segmentation of publics (Kim & Krishna, 2013). In politics, segmentation of publics would be to identify potential voters and categorize them by common interests or identity. While discussions of publics often pertain to how publics define a problem, when applied to politics, the question at hand is: Whom should I vote for?

When examining Latino voters, social identity theory explains why Latinos may engage in voting or hold specific beliefs about the issue of immigration reform. Social identity theory refers to how individuals choose to categorize themselves among groups in society to gain a sense of self, become part of a group, or to enhance their identity (Capooza & Brown, 2000; Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). This, of course, includes the issue of identity abandonment as well. Social identity theory aims to explain how social categorization has implications for intergroup behavior (Capooza & Brown, 2000), therefore the relationship for how Latinos identify as less or more acculturated in U.S. society may affect how they feel about politics. Thus, for public relations professionals, it is important for us to understand how level of acculturation is related to other individual level identity factors and how this is associated with political attitudes and behaviors. What follows is an overview of select factors that may influence how Latinos vote.

**Latinos and Politics**

*Political Interest and Political Participation*

According to a Pew Research Center analysis of data from the 2013 American Community Survey, about three-quarters of Latinos are U.S. citizens, with the highest percentage of U.S. citizens being Puerto Rican, Spanish, Cuban and Mexican (López & Patten, 2015). While the news media and political strategists have talked about the influence of the “Latino Vote,” the power of the Latino vote has not been realized as strongly as observers might expect. Some researchers have attributed this lack of influence to the geographic concentration of Latinos in communities in states that tend to vote Democratic, such as California and New York, and, therefore, their impact is not as notable, except in battleground states like Florida (Cave, 2016). Furthermore, Latinos that reside in places like the Midwest, or more rural areas, where there is
comparatively less concentration of Latinos, may lack access to news media that would provide information encouraging Latinos to get politically involved (Fowler, Hale, & Olsen, 2009). Moreover, researchers have found that news media in communities with a larger proportion of illegal immigrants were less likely address Latino political interests. Thus, political participation by Latinos may be tempered by their lack of access to political information, and perhaps, living in communities where they feel less welcome to participate in community life. Others have reasoned that a lower participation among Latinos is due to their younger age. Similarly, as across other racial and ethnic groups, young people are less likely to vote compared to other age groups. For instance, data from the 2012 Current Population Survey shows that Latinos 18 to 29 years old were among the least likely to vote, with a reported 36.9% turnout rate (Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2013). That is lower than the overall 48% of eligible Latinos who voted in 2012 and 66% of African Americans. Latinos who are college graduates and are of Cuban origin are most likely to vote (Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2013).

Political participation has often been associated with additional factors such as level of acculturation, which is closely tied in the literature to language use. Less acculturated Latinos identify as using Spanish more than English, and prefer Spanish-language media (Salzman, 2014).

In sum, we would expect that geographic region may affect the likelihood of Latinos to vote. Although our study examines young voters, we will still expect that the younger the voter, the less likely Latinos will say they intend to vote. Lastly, the more acculturated Latinos are in U.S. society, the more likely we believe they are to vote because they may feel a stronger sense of belonging.

Latinos and Ideology

Studies suggest that Latinos are more likely to back Democratic candidates though research shows that the Latino vote can also depend on the individual candidate. For instance, in 2012, data reported that 71% of Latinos backed candidate Barack Obama for president versus Mitt Romney (Lopez & Taylor, 2012), yet the gap is not always so large. In 2004, 40% of Latinos voted for George W. Bush while 58% supported John Kerry. Thus, Latinos may vote more for the candidate than for the party. Survey research by Connaughton (2004) revealed that young Texan Latinos found that the pull of ethnic identification and country of origin were stronger than that of party affiliation. However, when young Latinos were asked to identify their party, they were more likely to identify with the Democratic party or as an Independent, and this party identification was stronger for older than younger Latinos.

Marketing research demonstrates that recently immigrated Latinos differ in values and ideologies when compared to Latinos born and raised in the U.S. or Latinos who are several generations away from immigration. Latinos who consume Spanish-language media and identify more highly with the Hispanic identity have tended to distrust business and trust government more than Latinos who did not (Deshpande, Hoyer, & Donthu, 1986). Latinos who consume Spanish-language media and identify as Latinos are also more likely to hold liberal views on immigration, believe discrimination is a big problem, and feel immigrants help the U.S. economy, but are less likely to support social issues like abortion (Kerevel, 2011). Further, research has shown a connection between Latinos’ level of religiosity and opposition to same-sex marriage and abortion. Latinos that rely on English-language media are less supportive of helping undocumented immigrants (Kerevel, 2011). In fact, when it comes to immigration, Lopez and Taylor (2012) reported that 2012 exit polls showed that when asked about whether
unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. should be offered the opportunity to apply for citizen or be deported, 18% of Latinos polled said undocumented immigrants should be deported compared to 28% of all Americans polled.

In addition, research on advertising created for Latino consumers, which is meant to target consumer preferences, shows that Spanish-language television portrays Latinos in more traditional gender roles, where the wife is a homemaker and the father is a business professional (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2000). Because gender roles in Latin American countries have been found to be more conservative, we might expect gender differences on issues. However, recent analysis of the attitudes of Latino men and women and U.S. men and women shows that attitudes toward gendered roles have changed substantially over time. Whereas in 1995, Latinos, both men and women, felt that if a job were between a man and a woman, the man should get it, that was no longer the case in 2005, with Latinas and American women being most liberal. Interestingly, by 2005, women and men of both groups felt that women should be political leaders. Taken together, these data suggest that Latinos may have differing views on immigration and economic issues when compared to other social issues, and that perceived gendered differences between Latinos and Americans may be closing.

Socioeconomic status among Latinos is related to consumption of Spanish-language media and strength of ethnic identity. In examining middle-school adolescents, Portes and MacLeod (1996) found that young Latinos who speak English are less likely to identify as Hispanic. Spanish-speakers were more likely to be of lower socioeconomic status, possess lower self-esteem, and were more likely to self-identify as Latino or of Latino origin. Taken together, these studies show that recent immigrants tend to speak Spanish more often than later generations of Latinos, report watching more Spanish-language media, perceive discrimination as a problem, hold more liberal views on issues of immigration, and yet be more conservative on social issues than Latinos who are more acculturated and of higher socioeconomic status. We would then expect that level of acculturation and political ideology will affect how Latinos feel about the issue of immigration.

Latinos and Information Sources

Researchers have associated the political participation of Latinos to the information sources Latinos use to get their information. Overall, as may be expected, Latinos who prefer Spanish-language sources get more Latino-oriented information than those who read only English-language news. For instance Fowler, Hale and Olsen (2009) studied the content of local and national Spanish-language and English-language TV news. They found that nearly one-third of stories in Spanish-language broadcast news contained stories related to Latino political interests, while only 2 percent of stories in English-language TV did.

Spanish-language news media provide Latinos more news, catering to their interests. As a result, research shows that consumers of Spanish-language media believe that retaining their culture is important and that they identify more strongly with Latino culture (Ríos & Gaines, 1998). Spanish-language news consumers also have a more positive view of immigrants than do Latinos who get their news from English-language sources (Kerevel, 2011). Use of Spanish-language media and age is also associated, as research finds that young Latinos are more easily reached through bilingual materials than are Spanish-only Latinos (Valdes, 2000).

While Spanish-language media do contain more Latino-oriented news items than do English-language media, the nature of that news may not provide Latinos a way to participate in the U.S. political system or provide strong community-level information (Vargas & dePyssler,
For instance, researchers have found that in some Spanish-language media, the political information has to do with international politics rather than local politics (Fernandes & Shumow, 2014; Fowler, Hale, & Olsen, 2009), and that there are differences between local and national Spanish-language TV news programs (Hale, Olsen, & Fowler, 2008). An analysis of four Spanish-language tabloid newspapers in Miami (Fernandes & Shumow, 2014) revealed that overall 83% of news stories focused on international stories, and that when it came to election coverage, 64% of newspaper stories were about “home country” elections. While the Spanish-language news media certainly provide more comprehensive international news of Latin America than do English-language media, it appears that they might not do as well in presenting information about U.S. national or local political issues relevant to Latinos. Research has found that Spanish-language national and local TV news provide little coverage related to voting issues and even less attention to local elections (Hale, Olsen, & Fowler, 2008).

Johnson (2000) has argued that the goal of Spanish-language media in the U.S., particularly consumer media, is to use identity to sell goods to Latino audiences through advertising rather than to elicit political participation from Latino groups. Thus, she argues that Latino media may do more to help Latinos instill pride in and preserve their cultural identities through shared consumerism, rather than serve as a means to achieve political participation or social power. Other researchers have similarly suggested that some Latino media serve middle class audiences (Rodriguez, 1999) and in developing a panethnic identity of what it means to be “Hispanic” or “Latino” in the U.S. (Martínez, 2004). Thus, an important goal of Spanish-language or ethnic media is to create news audiences with a need for information that supports their interests and ethnic identities rather than encourage collective civic action.

As is true with English-language media, not all Spanish-language media are the same. Researchers have pointed out that the Spanish-language news outlets differ in their quality, focus and approach to presenting news. Researchers examining network political coverage in Spanish-language TV found that the type of coverage depended partly on the population density of Latinos from a specific ethnic group, so that media in Los Angeles reported stories on Mexican Americans while New York offered viewers stories about Puerto Ricans and Dominicans (Fowler, Hale, & Olsen, 2009). This country-of-origin focus has also been identified in Spanish-language newspapers (Fernandes & Shumow, 2014). This means that the region of the country from where Latinos get their news coverage may have an effect on their views.

In summary, Spanish-language news media do provide Latinos more news content relevant to Latino issues. This news media may also help Latinos retain their culture and ties to their home country. Whether Spanish-language media provide Latinos with the information to become important political actors in North American culture is uncertain, and may differ widely by news outlet and region of the country.

Less information is available specifically about how Latino issues are covered in English-language news media, or in how Latinos use English-language news media. One study examining the content of five daily newspapers in cities with large Latino populations found that references to Latinos and politics rarely appeared in the newspapers’ headlines and such stories were rarely placed on the front page (Subervi-Vélez & Lozano, 2008). Of course just like all Spanish-language media are not the same, there has been burgeoning research in the realm of political news that has shown that Americans self-select their choices for political news based on their political ideology and party affiliation. In a nationally representative sample of Americans, Iyegar and Hahn (2009) exposed participants to news stories with news brand labels (CNN, NPR or FOX News) or no labels, and even though the
stories were exactly the same, self-identified conservatives were more likely to choose stories from FOX News, while liberals and Democrats were more likely to choose stories from CNN or NPR. The authors found conservatives’ preferences for FOX News stories were stronger for political news compared with other news topics (i.e., travel).

Partisanship and selective exposure to Fox News has also been found to be associated with a strong feeling that there is a liberal media bias (Hoffner & Rehkoff, 2011), and the perception that mainstream media are unfair to Republican candidates. Therefore, based on previous research, we might expect Latinos who watch Spanish-language news to self-categorize themselves as “Latino” and adopt a group identity that is communicated through the news content and be more likely to perceive immigration as an important issue. On the other hand, Latinos who watch Fox News will identify more with the conservative ideology that is conveyed through the news content and be less likely to perceive immigration as an important issue. Previous research has also found that those who watch CNN news may be more liberal, which may suggest support for immigration as an important issue. However, we do not know how media consumption may affect voting intentions or political participation.

Method

To provide this analysis, I conducted a national online survey of U.S. Latinos (N=434) ages 18 to 85 (M_age=31, 73% female). An online consumer panel company fielded the survey from June 23 to June 30, 2015. The completion rate was 49.6%. Participants represent 35 of the 50 states and nearly 85% were born in the U.S. Of participants, 51% identified as Mexican American, 15% as Puerto Rican, 6% as multiethnic Hispanic, 6% as Cuban American, 3.5% Dominican, 3% Colombian, and the rest were divided among other Central, South American and Spanish ethnicities.

Independent Variables

Media use measures. For this study, we adapted Pea, Nass, Meheula et al.’s (2012) measures of media use. We asked participants “How much time on a typical weekday (work day) do you spend with the following media?” Media measured were (a) watching local TV news (13.8% never watched local TV news), (b) reading the newspaper (45.4% never read a newspaper), (c) watching FOX TV cable news (36.9% never watched Fox News), (d) watching CNN TV cable news (40% never watched CNN), (e) watching Spanish-language TV (35.3% never watched Spanish TV), and (f) reading a Spanish-language newspaper (58.8% never read a Spanish-language newspaper). Responses were recorded on a scale of 1 (never), 2 (less than 1 hour), 3 (between 1-2 hours), 4 (between 2-3 hours), 5 (between 3-4 hours) and 6 (more than 4 hours).

Political ideology. For this analysis, we employed Feldman and Johnston’s (2014) measure of political ideology, a more complex measure than simply asking participants where they fall along a range of liberalism to conservatism. They identify ideological differences along social and economic lines. An exploratory factor analysis, using varimax rotation, of the six items related to core ideological issues showed that they loaded on two distinct factors with social issue items loading on one factor and economic issues loading on one factor, offering validation of the measures. Items were then used to create summative scales. Items representing the ideology of economic issues included questions about government spending, who should pay for medical insurance, and federal assistance to the poor. Questions related to social issues, pertained to abortion law, gay adoption and women’s roles in the workplace.
Acculturation. A 10-item scale was used to measure acculturation and contained items from Cuéllar, Arnold, & Maldonado’s (1995) Acculturation Scale for Mexican-American-Ii. Responses were recorded on a scale from 1(not at all) to 5(almost always). An example items included: “I think in English,” and “I enjoy Spanish TV.” The reliability for the scale was α = .83.

Religiosity. Three items were used to measure religiosity. The questions pertained to how much respondents said religion guided their everyday life, how often they prayed, and how often they read the bible. The scale had an acceptable Cronbach’s alpha of .74.

Political interest. A single-item was used to measure political interest. We asked participants, “How interested are you in politics.” Participants responded selecting one of the following on a 5-point scale: not at all interested, a little interested, somewhat interested, definitely interested, and extremely interested.

In addition to conceptual variables, we also asked respondents demographic questions. They were asked to identify their age, gender, level of education, and the state where they currently reside. Based on U.S. Census regions, participants were categorized as living in the South, Northeast, Midwest or West.

Dependent Variables

The main dependent variables in this study were vote likelihood, importance of immigration, and political participation.

Vote likelihood. A single-item measured this variable, which asked, “How likely is it that you will vote in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election?” Respondents answered on a 7-point scale, from 1(very unlikely) to 7(very likely). The mean = 5.39 (SD=1.92).

Importance of immigration. A single-item measured this variable, which asked, “How important of an issue do you think immigration reform is?” Respondents answered on a 7-point scale, from 0(not at all important) to 7(very important). The mean = 4.32 (SD=1.35). Because this variable was negatively skewed, a reflected log10 transformation was used so the variable would meet the requirement of normality in multiple regression.

Political participation. This item asked participants if they had engaged in 10 political activities within the last 12 months. Activities included “subscribing to a candidate’s social media feed or blog” to “written or sent an email to a politician.” Respondents were given one point for each activity he or she engaged in. The mean was 1.10 (SD=1.22). Because this variable was positively skewed, a log10 transformation was used so the variable would meet the requirement of normality in multiple regression.

Findings

Analysis of the main dependent variables shows that 73.5% of our participants said that they were registered to vote, and 52% said that they were definitely or extremely interested in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. However, only 26.8% said they were interested in politics. When it comes to political participation, nearly one in five young Latinos said they have interacted with a campaign via social media, but fewer reported they had donated to a campaign. One in 10 reported that they had sent an email to a politician. Correlational analysis shows that those who are more acculturated have less interest in politics than those who are less acculturated (r=−.17, p=.001, n=433). Additional analysis of demographics shows that men were more interested in politics (r=−.13, p=.01, n=428), as were those with a higher level of education (r=.21, p<.001, n=430).
Further analysis using hierarchical multiple regression was used to tease out the relative influence of these variables with others, such as ideology and religiosity, identified by researchers as influencing voting intentions to determine the relative influence of acculturation and use of Spanish-language and English-language media.

First, I look at how our independent variables predict our vote likelihood. The results are presented in Table 1. The analysis shows that after entering demographics and sociocultural variables, none of the media variables predict vote likelihood. The strongest demographic predictor of young Latinos voting is possessing a higher level of education ($\beta = .13, p < .01$). Region of the country and level of acculturation were not associated with vote likelihood. The two largest predictors of vote likelihood in terms of variance explained were political interest ($\beta = .39, p < .001$) and having a higher social conservatism ($\beta = .20, p < .001$). The variables explained 29% of the variance in voting intention.

The second analysis looks at the effect of the same variables on the second demographic variable perceptions of the importance of immigration (see Table 2). None of the demographic factors were important predictors. Among the sociocultural variables, acculturation was predictive of believing immigration reform is important. Specifically, less acculturated Latinos perceived immigration reform as important issue. Along with acculturation, those who were less economically conservative ($\beta = -.13, p < .01$), yet more socially conservative ($\beta = .13, p < .05$) believed immigration reform was important. Being interested in politics was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .25, p < .001$). Lastly, in the media use block, we found that reading the English-language newspaper ($\beta = -.15, p < .05$) and watching Fox cable news ($\beta = -.16, p < .05$) was associated with less support for the idea that immigration reform was important. The variables explained 18% of the variance in perceiving immigration reform as an important issue.

Our final analysis examines the effect of the same 17 variables on political participation (see Table 3). We found that being male ($\beta = -.15, p < .001$) was associated with participating in a greater number of political activities. Also, political interest ($\beta = .25, p < .001$) and English-language newspaper reading ($\beta = .15, p < .05$) also predicted increased political participation. The variables explained 19% of the variance in political participation.

**Discussion**

The findings here demonstrate that individual and sociocultural variables influence Latinos’ voting intentions, perceptions of the importance of immigration reform and political participation. First, when it comes to voting intentions, our findings confirm previous research (Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2013) that shows older Latinos are more likely to vote than younger Latinos. While political interest was the strongest predictor of intentions to vote, the role of being socially conservative was also predictive. This means that Latino voters who show less support for women’s issues, abortion, and gay adoption are more likely to intend to vote, and this is after the variance attributed to acculturation was removed from the equation. It is notable that this variable is stronger than religiosity, which was not a significant predictor.

Secondly, when examining the predictors of believing the issue of immigration reform is important, perhaps it is not too surprising that the data show that those who are less acculturated believe that immigration reform is of greater importance than those who are more acculturated. Furthermore, those who are politically interested are associated with believing in the importance of immigration reform. We also find that economic conservatism, i.e., those who are less likely to support federal assistance for the poor and believe the government should pay for health insurance, are less likely to believe immigration reform is important. Social conservatives are
also less likely to believe in the importance of immigration reform. Unexpectedly, the use of Spanish-language news did not predict support for the importance of immigration. It may be that level of acculturation accounted for that variance. Interestingly, after the variance for economic conservatism and social conservatism were removed, watching Fox cable TV news still appears to predict lack of support for immigration reform. This suggests that because conservative attitudes already predict perceptions of immigration reform, that there is something in the content of the news that influences that attitudes of Latinos who watch Fox News. This is similarly true of those who read English-language newspapers. Of course, there are a wide number of U.S. newspapers, and we did not ask about different U.S. newspapers so we do not know if any one newspaper influenced this effect.

Lastly, we turn to examining predictors of political participation. We should note that on average, our respondents participated in one political activity. Additionally, the kind of political activities they participated in most required the little effort (e.g., follow a politicians social media account). Even so, males were more likely to report greater political participation. Additionally those with greater political interest and read English-language newspapers more often were more likely to be politically active. This matches previous research of the general population that shows that newspaper readers tend to be more politically active and they also tend to be male. It would appear this is the same for Latinos as well.

Our findings have several implications for public relations practitioners who work in the arena of politics. First, the Latino publics in our sample mirrored the general population in several respects—those who are more highly educated, have a greater political interest, and are conservative on hot-button social issues are more likely to vote. However, when it comes to the issue of the importance of immigration reform, we see that Latinos who support immigration reform identify as socially conservative, but economically liberal. Hence, in segmenting Latinos it is important to note these ideological differences. Also, it is on the issue of immigration reform where self-identity through acculturation has an effect. In other words, the issue of immigration appears to trigger the Latino self-concept.

The current study offers political communicators insights on how individual level variables, sociocultural variables, and media variables do or do not affect political attitudes and the political participation of Latinos. While our sample was a cross-sectional national online sample of Latinos, our sample was not representative of the U.S. Latino population. However the findings focus on the relationships among variables rather than generalizing attitudes or behaviors to the larger population, therefore it is a suitable sample. Likewise, the analysis is limited to the questions we asked. Asking about different forms of media use might generate different relationships.

Further research should examine the factors that would motivate young Latinos to increase their voting participation rate. Perhaps Latinos have not found candidates that they feel speak to the importance of issues that face them in their everyday lives. The role of Spanish-language media did not play the role as expected, and it may be a result of the fact that one-third to two-thirds of our participants did not regularly engage with Spanish-language media. It also may support the previous literature that suggests that Spanish-language media do not report on local U.S. elections (Fowler, Hale, & Olsen, 2009). Future research should explore the additional avenues best used to reach younger Latino voters and determine which issues would motivate them to go to the voting booth.
References


Table 1. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Vote Likelihood

<table>
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<th>Model 2 Sociocultural and Political Interest</th>
<th>Model 3 Media Variables Added</th>
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</table>

\[
R^2 \quad .08 \quad .27 \quad .29
\]

Note: †p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
Table 2. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Importance of Immigration

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<td>CNN cable TV news</td>
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\[ R^2 \quad .03 \quad .15 \quad .18 \]

Note: †p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
Table 3. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Political Participation

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\[ R^2 \quad .06 \quad .15 \quad .19 \]

Note: †p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p ≤ .001.
Unicorn Media Index™: Who Ranks Where Across News, Social and Search?

Tim Marklein
Inga Starrett
Big Valley Marketing

Abstract

The explosion of media formats and channels available to today’s communicator creates endless opportunities to engage stakeholders, but also endless data streams. Synthesis is the new challenge for marketers and communicators; they don’t need more data, they need more insights.

To address this challenge, we created a simple yet descriptive and repeatable Earned Media Index score designed as a foundational benchmarking tool for evaluating the presence and performance of an entity across communications channels.

Channels are classified into three categories where an organization can earn visibility and engagement: news, social and search. The Earned Media Index provides an easy-to-understand multi-channel score that shows earned brand visibility and trajectory over time compared to peers and competitors.

To test the methodology outside of a client environment, and to show how it performs across companies and sectors, we built out a data set using “unicorn” companies ($1B+ private valuations). Because the unicorn list is constantly evolving, we focused our data gathering on the top 75 companies (as of Nov’15). When a company goes public, it is removed after a three-month period (to evaluate post IPO effect).

This study analyzes how these 75 companies compare based on Earned Media Index looking at overall score, industry comparisons and channel dynamics. From a public relations research standpoint, we had three conclusions:

- Earned Media Index works as designed – a simple, repeatable benchmark of earned media performance across channels over time against peers and/or competitors;
- Earned Media Index is also effective for comparing categories and tracking macro trends across earned channels; and
- As expected, valuation and market share don’t dictate earned media performance – category and audience matter a lot, as do other communication factors.
Unicorns are a phenomenon. Over the past 18 months, they have gone from mythical creature to tech meme—spawning greed and envy for global entrepreneurs, investors and recruiters, while feeding the tech media engine with endless news stories, leaderboards and Fortune cover stories.

The “unicorn” concept was coined in Nov’13 by venture capitalist Aileen Lee, and refers to privately held start-up companies with valuations exceeding $1 billion. What started out as a rare breed grew to 146 companies by April 2016, according to Dow Jones VentureSource.

The chase for unicorn status has abated somewhat as startup valuations moderate in early 2016. However, the class continues to expand and contract almost weekly—providing a valuable microcosm to understand today’s tech trends and startup dynamics.

To that end, we studied 75 top unicorns to benchmark their visibility and momentum across news, social and search channels. This is relevant because many founders believe unicorn status provides advantages for recruiting top talent, and demonstrates a startup’s viability for customers and prospects.

We ultimately conclude that unicorn status and valuation alone do not dictate media performance. We learn a lot about category performance, company success factors, IPO impact and channel dynamics. The study also showcases a new Earned Media Index™ for benchmarking earned media performance—often the most impactful but least-invested, under-measured part of the marketing and communications mix. Here are some of our key findings:

**Snapchat Is #1, Followed by Pinterest, Spotify and Dropbox**

Snapchat (#1 earned media, #6 valuation) was the fast mover with pronounced growth trajectory from 41.02 to 71.22, outpacing all others after Jul’15 based on platform success. Pinterest (#2 earned media, #10 valuation) was more constant, averaging 44 points/month. No. 3 Spotify was much more erratic with pronounced peaks and valleys, year-end growth. Dropbox (#4), Flipkart (#5) and Uber (#6) are the next band with Square (#11) spiking on IPO, and Xiaomi (#7) steadily declining over the year.

**Valuation Influences Media, Doesn’t Dictate Performance**

We categorized the final list into 11 “media megastars” who had an average monthly index above 10.0 throughout 2015, while 17 other “media superstars” averaged above 1.0. The remaining 47 unicorns indexed below 1.0, reinforcing that unicorn status and valuation alone do not determine earned media performance. Category strength, audience enthusiasm and executive profile matter a lot, as do other communication factors.

**Consumer Brands Suck Oxygen from Other Companies**

Not surprisingly, consumer tech and Internet unicorns were typically more visible than B2B-oriented unicorns. Specifically, social media platforms and on-demand services dominated valuations and earned media throughout 2015. The top B2B players landed outside the top 10, including GitHub (#12), SpaceX (#14), Slack (#17), Pure Storage (#21) and MongoDB (#22). GitHub and MongoDB out-performed thanks to vocal developer and open source fans, while Slack become its own phenomenon throughout 2015—and SpaceX benefited from its megastar CEO.
Looking at other categories, software was steady but unspectacular—despite having a large class of 19 unicorns out of the 75 we analyzed. Hardware stood out with negative linear trends for four of the five companies. Healthcare under-performed as all six companies averaged less than 1.0 point per month. And looking internationally, Flipkart (#5) and Xiaomi (#7) were standouts despite limited availability.

**Controversy and IPO Windows Drive Major Spikes**

Controversy obviously fuels news media and social media, and the unicorn data for 2015 reflects it. Theranos in particular spiked 11X from ~0.25 to ~2.75 in Earned Media Index scores during Oct’15 and Nov’15 due to its media firestorm. Uber dominated news (#1) rankings due to a series of controversies globally, but lagged in social (#3) and search (#9) despite being #1 in valuation.

Meanwhile, Square spiked to #5 for Sept’15-Nov’15 based on its IPO window, but is trending down from that peak as we move into 2016. Square and others will be worth watching to see if they can sustain media visibility beyond the IPO window—especially as many unicorn founders and investors debate the benefits of going public versus staying private.

**So What? Now What?**

In conclusion, we offer up three key insights and recommendations for unicorn companies—and other technology marketers and communicators who can learn from this class:

1. Unicorn status and valuation influence earned media—especially news and social—but they don’t dictate media performance. Companies need to cultivate category (not just company) interest, build their vocal audience base and develop executive thought leadership.

2. Company performance varies widely across news, social and search channels, reflecting a lack of leverage across media. Companies should bust marketing silos to get more integrated, while investing more in owned and earned media, and use analytics and planning to drive leverage.

3. Consumer categories dominated earned media in 2015; software was steady but unspectacular; fintech is rising and hardware is declining. We should continue to track the Unicorn Media Index to learn more about category dynamics, post-IPO drop-off and “unicorn fatigue” throughout 2016.

To the last point, Big Valley will continue to study this important class—and apply our Earned Media Index to other categories—in future posts. We look forward to your feedback…
Unicorns are a phenomenon. Over the past 18 months, they have gone from mythical creature to tech meme—spawning greed and envy for global entrepreneurs, investors and recruiters, while feeding the tech media engine with endless news stories, leader boards and Fortune cover stories.

The “unicorn” concept was coined in Nov/13 by venture capitalist Aileen Lee, and refers to privately held start-up companies with valuations exceeding $1 billion. What started out as a rare breed grew to 146 companies by April 2016, according to Dow Jones VentureSource.

The chase for unicorn status has abated somewhat as startup valuations moderate in early 2016. However, the class continues to expand and contract almost weekly—providing a valuable microcosm to understand today’s tech trends and startup dynamics.

To that end, this report analyzes 75 top unicorns to benchmark their visibility and momentum across news, social and search channels. This is relevant because many founders believe unicorn status provides advantages for recruiting top talent, and demonstrates a startup’s viability for customers and prospects.

This study also showcases a new Earned Media Index™ for benchmarking earned media performance — often the most impactful but least-invested, under-measured part of the marketing and communications mix.

We conclude that unicorn status and valuation alone do not dictate media performance. We also learn a lot about category performance, company success factors, IPO impact and channel dynamics.

We look forward to your feedback as we continue to study this important class of startups.
UNICORN MEDIA INDEX: KEY FINDINGS

Snapchat tops the rankings, followed by Pinterest, Spotify and Dropbox
- Snapchat (#1 earned media, #6 valuation) was the fast mover with pronounced growth trajectory from 41.02 to 71.22, outpacing all others after Jul 15 based on platform success
- Pinterest (#2 earned media, #10 valuation) was more constant, averaging 44 points/month
- No. 3 Spotify was much more erratic with pronounced peaks and valleys, year-end growth
- Dropbox (#4), Flipkart (#5) and Uber (#6) are the next band w/ Square (#11) spiking on IPO

Valuation influences earned media, but doesn't dictate performance
- 11 “media megastars” indexed >10.0, while 17 other “media superstars” averaged >1.0
- Category, audience and executive profile matter a lot, as do other communication factors
UNICORN MEDIA INDEX: KEY FINDINGS

Consumer tech and Internet suck up oxygen from other companies
- Social media platforms and on-demand services dominated valuations and earned media
- Top B2B = GitHub (#12), SpaceX (#14), Slack (#17), Pure Storage (#21), MongoDB (#22)
- Hardware stood out with negative linear trends for four of the five companies
- Healthcare under-performs: All six companies averaged >1 point per month
- Flipkart (#5) and Xiaomi (#7) were international standouts despite limited availability

Controversy and IPO windows drive major spikes
- Theranos spiked 11X from ~0.25 to ~2.75 in Oct’15 and Nov’15 due to media firestorm
- Uber dominates valuation (#1) and news (#1), but lags in social (#3) and search (#9)
- Square spiked to #5 for Sept’15-Nov’15 based on IPO window, but trending down into 2016

UNICORNS ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL

<table>
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<tr>
<th>MEDIA MEGASTARS (Earned Media Index &gt; 10.00)</th>
<th>MEDIA SUPERSTARS (Earned Media Index &gt; 1.00)</th>
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<td>Pinterest</td>
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<td>Spotify</td>
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<td>Uber</td>
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<td>Xiaomi</td>
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<td>Square</td>
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Source: Big Valley analysis of monthly News, Social and Search volumes, indexed to 100 based on highest Jan’15 channel scores, then aggregated into a composite Earned Media Index, Datafrom T Database, Synametrics and Google Alphabank.
**EARNED MEDIA INDEX VS. VALUATION**

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<td>Grabana</td>
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<td>GrubHib</td>
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</table>

**Source:** Big Valley analysis of monthly news, social and search volumes, indexed to 100 based on highest 160 channel scores, then aggregated into a composite Earned Media Index. Data from T Database, Suroverse and Google AlphaHub.

---

**INSIGHTS + RECOMMENDATIONS**

### So What?
- Unicorn status and valuation influence earned media – esp. news and social – but they don’t dictate media performance
- Company performance varies widely across news, social and search channels, reflecting lack of leverage across media
- Consumer categories dominate earned media; software steady but unspectacular; fintech rising and hardware declining

### Now What?
- Companies need to cultivate category (not just company) interest, plus vocal audience base and executive thought leadership
- Companies should bust marketing silos, invest more in owned and earned media, use analytics and planning to drive leverage
- Continue to track Unicorn Media Index to learn from the class: category dynamics, post-IPO drop-off, “unicorn fatigue”, etc.

**Source:** Big Valley analysis of monthly news, social and search volumes, indexed to 100 based on highest 160 channel scores, then aggregated into a composite Earned Media Index. Data from T Database, Suroverse and Google AlphaHub.
## Unicorn Media Index Ranking: Top 20

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<th>Rank</th>
<th>Company</th>
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<th>News/Search/Social Volume</th>
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<td>Spotify</td>
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<td>Dropbox</td>
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<td>Hipster</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Uber</td>
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<td>15.75</td>
<td>4,772,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Square</td>
<td>14.47</td>
<td>1,281,757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>GitLab</td>
<td>9.46</td>
<td>1,151,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Credit Karma</td>
<td>6.37</td>
<td>3,658,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SpaceX</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>404,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Lyft</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>299,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Jawbone</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>365,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Slack</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>283,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Garena</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>5,276,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>DJI</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>113,648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>FanDuel</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>1,128,092</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Big Valley analysis of monthly news, social, and search volumes, indexed to 100 based on highest Jan/15 channel scores, then aggregated into a composite Earned Media Index. Data from: T Database, Sysmmex and Google AdWords.
## UNICORN MEDIA INDEX RANKING: 21-40

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Index</th>
<th>News/Search/Social Volume</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Pure Storage</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>MongoDB</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Cloudera</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Fast.ai</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Y Combinator</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Stripe</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Niantic</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Ola Cabs</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Warby Parker</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Didi Kuadi</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Big Valley analysis of monthly News, Social and Search volumes, indexed to 100 based on highest in 21-25 channel scores, then aggregated into a composite Earned Media Index, sourced from T Database, Soomo and Google's Notions.

## UNICORN MEDIA INDEX RANKING: 41-60

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Index</th>
<th>News/Search/Social Volume</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Legendary Ent.</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>AppNexus</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>YelWork</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Theranos</td>
<td>0.57</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Klarna</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>One57</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>ZeeDoc</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>MuleSoft</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>The Honest Co.</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Tanium</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Big Valley analysis of monthly News, Social and Search volumes, indexed to 100 based on highest in 31-35 channel scores, then aggregated into a composite Earned Media Index, sourced from T Database, Soomo and Google’s Notions.
### UNICORN MEDIA INDEX RANKING: 61-75

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Index</th>
<th>News/Search/Social Volume</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Zhang An</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Prosper Marketplace</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Social Finance</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Intratext</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Global Fashion Group</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Oscar Health</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>Instacib</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Lufax</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Lazelle Group</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Jasper Tech</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### UNICORN MEDIA INDEX SCORES: 1-25

Source: Big Valley analysis of monthly news, social and search volumes, indexed to 100 based on highest Jan’15 channel scores, then aggregated into a composite Earned Media Index. Data from T Database, Sysomos and Google Alerts.
UNICORN MEDIA INDEX SCORES: 26-50

Source: Big Valley analysis of monthly News, Social, and Search volumes, indexed to 100 based on highest Jan’17 channel scores, then aggregated into a composite Earned Media Index. Data from G2 Database, Systrom, and Google AdWords.

UNICORN MEDIA INDEX SCORES: 51-75

Source: Big Valley analysis of monthly News, Social, and Search volumes, indexed to 100 based on highest Jan’17 channel scores, then aggregated into a composite Earned Media Index. Data from G2 Database, Systrom, and Google AdWords.
CATEGORY ANALYSIS: TOP 10 UNICORNS

- Snapchat (#1 earned media, #6 valuation) is the big mover with search and social growth in late 2015, suggesting audience momentum.
- Spotify is biggest outperformer (#3 earned media, #15 valuation) including Jun’15 spike due to Apple, Amazon, Google competition.
- Uber is #1 in valuation and funding, but only #6 in earned media – strong news and social presence (#1 and #3) but lags in search (#9).
- Xiaomi (#7 earned media, #2 valuation) is the only company with a negative linear trend, fueled by sharply lower news and social.

Source: Big Valley analysis of monthly News, Social and Search volumes, indexed to 100 based on highest Jan’15 channel scores, then aggregated into a composite Earned Media Index. Data from T Database, Systems and Google Analytics.
### CATEGORY ANALYSIS: HARDWARE

- Hardware stood out with negative linear trends for four of the five companies.
- Chinese mobile phone maker Xiaomi (#7 earned media, #2 valuation) lost ground from early high point spiked by Apple market battle.
- Jawbone (#16 earned media, #70 valuation) showed steady declines from 5+ to <3.
- Drone maker DJI (#19 earned media) was strong through Q3 2015, but lost ground after “drone for beginners” launch Aug’15.
- Magic Leap (#31 earned media) spiked on Mar’15 (demo) and Oct’15 (funding) news.
- Only storage provider Infinidat (#64) bucked trend with but steadily increasing visibility.

**Source:** Big Valley analysis of monthly news, social and search volumes, indexed to 100 based on highest Jan’15 earned scores, then aggregated into a composite Earned Media index. Data from T Database, Swayenos and Google AlMonk.

### CATEGORY ANALYSIS: CONSUMER INTERNET

- Social media platforms (Snapchat, Pinterest, Spotify, Houzz) and on-demand services (Uber, Airbnb, Lyft, Instacart) dominated both valuations and earned media through 2015.
- Uber’s valuation and visibility (#6 earned media) drove impressive category pull-through for Lyft (#15), Ola (#28), Didi Kuaidi (#30) and Grabtaxi (#36).
- Airbnb (#9) showed steady growth from ~13 to ~20, fueled largely via search and social.
- Spotify (#3) also showed solid upward trend from ~30 to ~40, fueled by social and search.
- Most companies in this group posted upward linear trends—will they drop in 2016?

**Source:** Big Valley analysis of monthly news, social and search volumes, indexed to 100 based on highest Jan’15 earned scores, then aggregated into a composite Earned Media index. Data from T Database, Swayenos and Google AlMonk.
**CATEGORY ANALYSIS: SOFTWARE**

- This was the largest group, with 19 brands.
- Only two – Dropbox (#4) and GitHub (#12) – indexed above 5. Five more indexed above 1: Slack (#17), Pure Storage (#21), MongoDB (#22), Cloudera (#23) and Nutanix (#27).
- Dropbox showed slight negative linear trend, while GitHub and Slack showed steady gains.
- In middle tier, Pure Storage had exponential visibility gains around sub-par IPO in Oct’15, while open source players MongoDB and Cloudera trended downward over 2015.
- Among the others, Nutanix (#30), AppNexus (#45) and Tanium (#54) benefited from strong funding and product news spikes.

**CATEGORY ANALYSIS: E-COMMERCE**

- Second largest group with 16 brands.
- Only two – Flipkart (#5) and Snapdeal (#9) – indexed above 5; all others averaged > 1.
- Didi Kuaidi trended upward throughout the year, fueled by on-demand transportation growth in China and media interest in Uber competition and valuation news.
- Among others, Warby Parker (#29, avg=0.98), Blue Apron (#32, avg=0.89), and Fanatics (#34, avg=0.83) were among the rising stars.
- Jessica Alba’s The Honest Co (#49) showed an average of just 0.27 points per month.
**CATEGORY ANALYSIS: FINANCIAL SERVICES**

- Only three players posted average media index scores above 1.0: Square (14.47), Credit Karma (6.37) and Stripe (1.39).
- Square had huge jump in visibility leading up to Nov’15 IPO; IPO price was lower than last private valuation ($6B); can it sustain in 2016?
- Credit Karma (#13) was relatively stable through Aug’15, dipped in Sept’15-Nov’15 and rebounded in Dec’15.
- Fintech gained momentum through 2015, fueling late surge for 6 of 11 players – Credit Karma, Klarna, One97, Adyen, Powa, Prosper Marketplace, Social Finance and Lufax.

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**CATEGORY ANALYSIS: HEALTHCARE**

- Healthcare had weakest media performance; all six companies indexed <1 per month.
- Theranos (#44) spiked in Oct’15 and Nov’15 due to media firestorm fueled by WSJ and FDA reports questioning technology accuracy, business governance and partner progress.
- ZocDoc (#47) surged Aug’15 on new funding round that resulted in unicorn status.
- Oscar Health (#66) showed reactionary profile without sustained earned media base; spiked to funding news and industry stories.
- Intarcia (#67) and StemcentRx (#72) spiked around funding and valuation news.
**COMPANY ANALYSIS: SNAPCHAT**

- #1 Earned Media Index (49.55)
- #6 in valuation ($16.0B) with $1.3B in total funding
- Led Unicorn Media Index by an average 5-point margin over #2 Pinterest
- Most visible growth in search volume; up significantly in second half of year
- Social volumes spike in July (locks out "jailbreakers"); September (Burberry debuts London’s Fashion Week)
- News was comparably steady (new initiatives, partnerships)

![Graph](image1)

Source: Big Valley analysis of monthly News, Social and Search volumes; indexed to 100 based on highest Jan’15 channel scores; then aggregated into a composite Earned Media Index, Data from: T Database, Synovio and Google AdWords.

**COMPANY ANALYSIS: AIRBNB**

- #9 Earned Media Index (18.77)
- #3 in valuation ($25.5B) with $2.3B in total funding
- Airbnb showed steady growth from ~13 to ~20, fueled largely via search and social
- Strong seasonal growth during summer and holiday months – with 13.6M average monthly searches Jun’15-Aug’15
- News and social trended up in summer, leveled in fall but grew again Nov’15 on funding news and "voting cartel" plans

![Graph](image2)

Source: Big Valley analysis of monthly News, Social and Search volumes; indexed to 100 based on highest Jan’15 channel scores; then aggregated into a composite Earned Media Index, Data from: T Database, Synovio and Google AdWords.
COMPANY ANALYSIS: GITHUB

- #12 Earned Media Index (9.46)
- #57 in valuation ($2.08) with $350M in total funding
- GitHub was highest-scoring B2B player, powered by active and vocal developer audience
- News and search trends tracked more closely together than for consumer brands – 739 stories + 85K social posts + 1.2M searches per month
- News spiked March as Git-Hub was hit by its biggest DDoS attack ever, Oct’15 on Google AMP project

Source: Big Valley analysis of month-by-month social and search volumes, indexed to 100 based on highest Jan’15 channel scores, then aggregated into a composite Earned Media Index. Datamonitor, T-Database, Syneresys, and Google AdWords.

Unicorn Media Index™: Methodology
April 13, 2016
“UNICORN” CLASS OF $1B+ PRIVATE COMPANIES

The Billion Dollar Startup Club

The Wall Street Journal and Dow Jones VentureSource are tracking venture-backed private companies valued at $1 billion or more. See how the club has expanded and select companies to learn more about each.

By Scott Austin, Chris Canipe and Sarah Slobin
Published Feb. 18, 2015

Companies valued at $1 billion or more by venture-capital firms

146 COMPANIES

Valuations as of April 2016

Select companies from the chart or table for more detail.

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EARNED MEDIA INDEX™

Key Questions

- How do brands (or other entities) perform across earned media relative to peers and competitors?
- How does performance correlate across news, social and search channels?
- What can brands learn from other brands to improve their earned media performance?

Goals

- Benchmark earned media performance for my brand, product or idea, over time and against other entities
- Understand which channel types best drive earned media impact for my brand and category
- Plan future communication strategies, campaigns and channel mix to optimize performance

Approach

- Analyze earned media visibility and trajectory across channels, including relevant data for news, social and search. Capture channel data monthly and aggregate it into a composite index for easy comparison over time and against others:
  - **News:** Keyword search for number of news citations for the entity in IT Database, a well-canned online database of technology, business and vertical news outlets.
  - **Social:** Keyword search for number of social citations for the entity name or handle using Synovus, a broad social media aggregator that captures social content (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, blogs, forums, video and images).
  - **Search:** Average monthly searches for the entity name via search engines as tracked via Google AdWords, reflecting organic brand search behavior by month.

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BIG VALLEY

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BIG VALLEY

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METHODOLOGY NOTES

- This study applies the Earned Media Index to analyze earned media performance, visibility patterns and channel dynamics for a distinct class of companies.
- Big Valley analysts conducted this analysis between Dec’15 and Feb’16, capturing data for each company across news, social and search channels.
- The full study captures monthly channel data for each company from Jan’15 through Dec’15. Each brand’s channel score is indexed to 100, based on the leader for that channel as of Jan’15. The channel scores are then aggregated into a composite Earned Media Index score.
- Because the unicorn list is constantly evolving, we focused our data gathering on the top 75 companies based on Nov’15 valuations tracked by Dow Jones VentureSource. When a company goes public, it is removed after a three-month period (though we continue to track it separately to evaluate post-IPO effects on earned media performance).
- Financial valuations and industry classifications were leveraged from Dow Jones VentureSource. Valuation levels and rankings are based on Mar’16 data.
The Impact of Perceived Authenticity and Employees’ Empowerment on Communicative Behavior: An Integrated Model of Positive Megaphoning

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Università IULM (Italy)

Yeunjae Lee
Purdue University

Gianluca Togna
LFoundry

Jeong-Nam Kim
Purdue University

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to (1) develop an integrated model of employees’ megaphoning behavior, (2) examine how perceived authenticity of organizational behavior and employees’ empowerment affect their communicative behaviors, and (3) compare employees’ positive megaphoning behavior during crisis and non-crisis situation. A web-based survey of 306 current employees who are working full-time in a semi-conductor company in Italy explored the antecedents of a newly introduced employees’ communicative behavior, megaphoning. It refers to the likelihood of employees’ voluntary information forwarding or sharing about organizational strengths or weaknesses. Results suggest that both organizations’ authentic behavior and employees’ empowerment are positively related to their positive megaphoning behavior, mediated by organization-employee relationship and intrinsic motivation, respectively. Moreover, it revealed that perceived authenticity of organizational behavior was more effective than employees’ intrinsic motivation to lead their positive megaphoning behavior during crisis situation. Theoretical and practical implications for future research are discussed.
**Introduction**

As an increasing amount of attention has been paid to employees’ communicative behaviors (ECB), a newly introduced concept, megaphoning, has been examined in public relations literature. Considering the strategic value of employees’ communicative behaviors on organizational performance and reputation, megaphoning is defined as the likelihood of employees’ voluntary information forwarding or sharing organizational strengths (accomplishments) or weaknesses (problems) (Kim & Rhee, 2011). The concept of megaphoning has gained its theoretical power in the field of public relations as various scholars have studied its antecedents such as symmetrical communication, organization-public relationship (OPR), and perceived authenticity. Kim and Rhee (2011) emphasized symmetrical communication strategies for organizations to build long-term relationships with their employees, and develop their communicative actions. Shen and Kim (2012) found significant relationships among perceived authenticity of organizational behavior, organization-public relationship (OPR) quality, and positive megaphoning. Similarly, Men and Tsai (2014) argued that organizational authenticity demonstrates strong positive effects on OPR and employee engagement. More important, positive megaphoning behaviors of employees during crisis were viewed as critical factors for an organization to overcome crisis (Mazzei, Kim, & Dell’oro, 2012).

However, extant studies have only focused on behaviors of the organization from the perspective of the organization and how it affects employees’ behaviors. Little research has provided any comprehensive approach to understanding employees’ communicative behaviors by considering both internal and external factors. In building a model linking internal factors and employees’ communicative actions, megaphoning, the present study draws upon psychological empowerment and intrinsic motivation. Based on empirical research suggesting that psychological empowerment affects an employees’ intrinsic motivation in the workplace (Amabile, 1996; Spreitzer, 1995), the researchers posit that these internal variables may lead to positive megaphoning behavior for their organization. Moreover, realizing the importance of employees’ positive megaphoning behaviors for organizations both in crisis and non-crisis situation (Mazzei et al., 2012), the study aims to develop a new model of employees’ positive communicative behaviors and test its utility. To do this, the study examined internal and external factors that affect positive megaphoning behaviors including perceived authenticity, organization-public relationships (OPR), employees’ empowerment, and intrinsic motivation. The study attempts to investigate the effect of organizations’ efforts and employees’ individual characteristics, and examines if those effects also occur during organizational turbulence.

**Literature Review**

*Megaphoning*

As many researchers from diverse disciplines have emphasized the importance of employee communication behaviors (ECB), recently public relations scholars also have begun to explore employee communication behaviors (ECB) that affect public relations outcomes. Kim and Rhee (2011) introduced megaphoning, defined as “the likelihood of employees’ voluntary information forwarding or information sharing about organizational strengths (accomplishments) or weaknesses (problems)”. By adopting information forwarding and sharing variables from the situational theory of problem solving (STOPS: Kim & Grunig, 2011), Kim and Rhee (2011) captured both employees’ positive and negative external communication behaviors. They also indicated that developing a good relationship with employees is a key factor that determines the direction of voluntary information behaviors. In other words, employees can act as either
organizational advocates or adversaries through positive or negative megaphoning, depending on their perceived quality of the relationship with the organization. Such behavior is especially important in that it carries not only strategic opportunities for organizations, but it also creates opportunities to minimize organizational threats (Kim & Rhee, 2011). With the concept of megaphoning, several scholars have identified its importance as an outcome of public relations. Men and Stacks (2013) argued that leadership style and employee empowerment behavior generate positive megaphoning, shaping a favorable perception of organizational reputation. In a study comparing internal communication strategies in American and Italian companies (Mazzei, 2012), economic performance was considered as one of the most important outcomes of employees’ communicative actions.

More important, employees’ communicative behaviors have played a critical role as advocates of their organization during organizational crisis (Coombs, 2000; Rhee, 2008; Mazzei, et al., 2012). Mazzei, et al. (2012) examined how continuous managerial efforts and internal communication to secure employee safety cultivate quality of relationships between a company and its employees and further influence employee communicative actions in crisis situations. Furthermore, Mazzei and Ravazzani (2013) emphasized that rather than relying on evasive or defensive responses, companies need to build trust relationships with employees with factual communication strategies that signal a company’s commitment. They added that companies’ continuous and consistent managerial efforts are necessary to prevent employees’ negative megaphoning.

**Perceived Authenticity and Organization-Public Relationship (OPR)**

Since the introduction of megaphoning in public relations literature, several scholars have explored diverse antecedents to understand employees’ motivation to communicate. In the original literature, Kim and Rhee (2011) proposed symmetrical internal communication and perceived quality of the relationship as antecedents. In particular, among various communication trends in the 21st century, several scholars have noted the role of authenticity as an essential factor for successful organization-public relationships (Arther W. Page Society, 2007; Shen & Kim, 2012; Men & Tsai, 2014). For example, in an empirical study, Shen and Kim (2012) determined that perceived authenticity of organizational behavior affects employees’ megaphoning behavior mediated by the perceived quality of the relationship with the organization. Similarly, Men and Tsai (2014) also contended that publics in a positive relationship with an organization with perceived authenticity and transparency are likely to become corporate advocates.

Highlighting the behaviors of organization to be perceived as authentic company, Shen and Kim (2012) identified three components of authenticity—truthfulness, transparency, and consistency. *Truthfulness* means that an organization should true to themselves, and it includes an organization’s efforts to discover what public wants, give information continuously to publics, accept feedback, and make public involved in organizational decision making process. Secondly, *transparency* indicates an organization’s behavior of admitting, accepting, and learning from their own mistakes objectively, and it is facilitated by symmetrical communication strategy in organization. The last component of the authentic organizational behavior is *consistency*. This indicates that the value, belief, and rhetoric of an organization should be in accordance with its behaviors. Based on prior literatures, this study focuses on an organization’s authentic behavior as an organizational factor that may lead employees’ positive information behaviors directly. Moreover, the researchers intend to test whether perceived corporate authenticity also increases
positive megaphoning directly during organizational crisis. The following hypothesis thus is suggested:

Hypothesis 1. Perceived authenticity of organizational behavior is positively related to employees’ positive megaphoning behavior in (a) non-crisis and (b) crisis situation.

Expanding prior studies, this study also aims to discover whether perceived authenticity of an organization leads to employees’ positive megaphoning behaviors mediated by organization-public relationship (OPR) both in crisis and non-crisis situation. To measure the relationship between the organization and employees, this study adopted the scale of organization-public relationship (OPR), which have been extensively tested in public relations literatures (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Four indicators of relational outcome—control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, and commitment—were used to measure organization-employee relationship. The first indicator, trust, refers to an employee’s level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the company. There are three dimensions to trust: integrity, the belief that an organization is fair and just; dependability, the belief that an organization will do what it says it will do; and competence, the belief that an organization has the ability to do what it says it will do. Second, control mutuality is the degree to which employees agree on the company and themselves has the rightful power to influence one another. The third one is commitment, and it is the extent to which an employee believes and feels that the relationship is worth spending energy to maintain and promote. Two dimensions of commitment are continuance commitment, which is a certain line of action, and affective commitment, which is an emotional orientation. The last factor, satisfaction, is the extent to which an employee feels favorably toward the company because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced. Based on prior research, the current study proposes the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 2. Perceived authenticity of organizational behavior is positively related with the perceived quality of relationship with organization.

Hypothesis 3. Employees who evaluate the relationship with their organization positively are more likely to engage in positive megaphoning behavior in (a) non-crisis and (b) crisis situation.

Psychological Empowerment and Intrinsic Motivation

While public relations researchers have attempted to understand employee communication from the perspective of an organization’s behavior, several business and psychology researchers have noted individuals’ characteristics in the workplace. In particular, creativity scholars have closely examined psychological factors, such as individuals’ intrinsic motivation or empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995; Amabile, 1985; Tierney, Farmer, and Graen, 1999), in order to identify antecedents of employees’ creativity.

Spreitzer (1995) defined psychological empowerment as a process or psychological state manifested in four cognitions—meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Meaning refers to a sense of feeling that one’s work is personally important. Competence indicates self-efficacy or belief in one’s ability to successfully perform tasks. Self-determination refers to perceptions of freedom to choose how to initiate and carry out tasks. Impact represents the degree to which one views his behaviors as making a difference in work outcomes (Spreitzer, 1995). Those four indicators have been regarded as an enabling process that makes an employee
initiate task and persist (Conger & Kanungo, 1988).

Psychological empowerment has been extensively examined in various contexts, especially as a mediating role. It has shown to mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment (Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004) as well as the association between job characteristics and employees’ work satisfaction (Liden, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2000). Safari, Haghigi, Rastegar, & Jamshidi (2011) also determined that psychological empowerment may predict employees’ organizational learning. In a study of hotel employees, Chiang and Hsieh (2012) also contended that hotel employees’ psychological empowerment affected organizational citizenship behavior and job performance.

However, little empirical research has attempted to link employees’ psychological empowerment with their actual communicative actions in the extant literature. Thus, the present researchers theorize that psychological empowerment may have important influence on employees’ willingness to engage in communication behaviors both in and out of the workplace. When employees perceive their jobs are personally important and meaningful, they may forward or share positive information to others about their organization. In addition, employees who believe that their behaviors can make a difference are more likely to spend time and energy advocating for their company and their own work during organizational crisis. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that individuals’ psychological empowerment may directly affect their megaphoning behavior. The following hypothesis thus is proposed.

Hypothesis 4 Employees’ psychological empowerment is positively related to employees’ positive megaphoning behavior in (a) non-crisis and (b) crisis situation.

Regarding employees’ individual characteristics, previous studies have demonstrated links between psychological empowerment and intrinsic motivation in the context of employee creativity (Spreitzer, 1995; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Thus, we posit that intrinsic motivation is a second mediating element linking psychological empowerment and employees’ communicative behavior. Intrinsic motivation refers to the extent to which an individual is inner-directed, is interested in or fascinated with a task, and engages in it for the sake of the task itself (Utman, 1997). According to Amabile (1983, 1985), intrinsic motivation is one of the most important and powerful influences on employee creativity. It plays an important role in determining their behaviors. Amabile (1988) also noted that individuals’ orientation or level of enthusiasm for the activity is a critical component of intrinsic motivation; it enables employees to initiate and sustain their creative efforts. This motivational orientation is a stable, trait-like nature (Amabile, Hill, Hennessey, & Tighe, 1994).

Although intrinsic motivation has been positioned as an important role in employee creativity, it has not been tested in the context of employees’ communication behavior (ECB). When individuals are intrinsically involved in their work, they are more likely to devote all of their attention to the problems (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Consequently, their motivation affects the extent to which individuals will communicate with others about their organization’s strengths or weaknesses. Regarding intrinsic motivation as an individual factor, the present researchers hypothesize a direct impact of intrinsic motivation on employees’ communication behavior. Thus, the following hypotheses are suggested:

Hypothesis 5 Employees’ psychological empowerment is positively related with their intrinsic motivation.
Hypothesis 6. Employees who are motivated intrinsically are more likely to engage in positive megaphoning behavior in (a) non-crisis and (b) crisis situation.

One important purpose of the study is to examine employees’ megaphoning behavior from various perspectives. By combining organizational factors—perceived authenticity and the organization-public relationship (OPR)—and individual factors—psychological empowerment and intrinsic motivation, we want to determine whether those two different factors are interrelated in order to understand diverse routes that lead employees’ voluntary behavior comprehensively. For example, individuals’ motivational orientation can be partially shaped by the environment (Amabile, 1983), which can be connected with an organization’s behavior. In addition, individuals who feel empowered can more easily build trust and respect in their workplace easier than those who do not feel empowered (Laschinger & Finegan, 2005). This can be explained by the employees’ perceived organization-public relationship (OPR). The ideas bring the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 7. Perceived authentic organizational behavior is positively related to employees’ intrinsic motivation.

Hypothesis 8. Employees’ psychological empowerment is positively related to employees’ perceived organization-employee relationship.

Hypothesis 9. Employees who evaluate the relationship with their organization positively feel motivated intrinsically.

The hypotheses are summarized in Figure 1.

Methods

Participants
By using a web-based survey tool to collect the data, employees who are currently working full-time in a semi-conductor company in Italy were invited. The final number of sample was 306, consisting of 15.7% females (n=48) and 84.3% of males (n=293). Among the respondents, 18% (n=54) were managers, and 82% (n=252) were non-managers. In terms of years of work, 78% (n=237) of the respondents have worked in this company more than 10 years and 22% (n=69) of them have worked 6-9 years. Age level of 40-59 comprised 41% (n=126) of the sample, followed by 30-39 (37%, n=113), 50-59 (19%, n=58), and 20-29 (2%, n=6).

The survey included 60 question items. Of them, 9 items asked for information related to demographics, (i.e., gender, age, education level), and organization (i.e., employment level, work year). For the 51 question items related to variables in this study, 5-point Likert scales were used for all items, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability of each variables and questions are summarized in Table 1.

Measures
As a behavioral outcome, employees’ positive megaphonning was measured with 7 items ($\alpha$=0.852), and 5 items ($\alpha$=0.831) were used to measure advocate behavior during crisis, adopted from Kim and Rhee (2011). At the time the participants conducted the survey, the company had been going through a crisis: the company had been sold to a new industrial group and a surplus of workable hours was declared, and consequently, some negative media coverage generated.
13 items from Spreitzer (1995) were used for measuring psychological empowerment ($\alpha=0.834$). For measuring perceived authenticity of organizational behavior, this study adopted 7 items ($\alpha=0.899$) from Shen and Kim (2012), including truthfulness, transparency, and consistency. 3 items ($\alpha=0.878$) were used for measuring employees’ intrinsic motivation (Amabile, 1985; Tierney, Farmer, & Graen, 1999). To measure organization-employee relationships, a total of 16 items ($\alpha=0.932$) from Grunig and Huang (2000) were used— commitment (3 items), trust (5 items), control-mutuality (4 items), and satisfaction (4 items).

**Analysis**

The hypotheses were tested with structural equation modeling (SEM) (Byrne, 1994; Kline, 2005) using Mplus program. Multiple criteria were used to evaluate the goodness-of-model fit, including the comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) indexes, which are a minimal set of fit indexes that should be reported and interpreted when reporting the results of SEM analyses (Kline, 2005). Interpretation of the hypotheses and research questions was made by a most conservative joint-criteria by Hu and Bentler (1999). According to Hu and Bentler, a model is considered tenable when it achieves a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) $\geq .96$ and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) $\leq .10$, or root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) $\leq .06$.

**Results**

**Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing**

Since both structural models in Figure demonstrated satisfactory fit to the data, we interpreted the model parameter estimates to test the hypotheses. The first model specified the direct paths from perceived authenticity and psychological empowerment to positive megaphoning behaviors. The second model proposed the mediated effects of organizational and individual factors on positive megaphoning both in crisis and non-crisis situation through OPR and intrinsic motivation. The final result is summarized in Figure 2.

Hypotheses 1 through 3 posited that organizations’ authentic behaviors influence employees’ perceived organization-public relationship (OPR) and communicative behaviors. In hypothesis 1a and 1b, this study first aimed to discover the direct relationship between perceived authentic organizational behavior and employees’ positive megaphoning behavior. We found positive paths in both hypotheses: $H1a (\beta = .464, p < .001)$ $H1b (\beta = .422, p < .001)$, which indicates that employees who perceive an organization’s authentic behavior are likely to share and forward positive information about the organization both in crisis and non-crisis situation. Next, hypothesis 2 and 3 tested the mediated effects of perceived authenticity on employees’ communicative actions via organization-public relationships (OPR). As shown in Figure 2, the result indicates significantly positive path for all hypotheses: $H2 (\beta = .695, p < .001)$, $H3a (\beta = .518, p < .001)$, $H3b (\beta = .460, p < .001)$.

From hypothesis 4 to 6, we predicted individual characteristic affects employees’ communicative behavior. In hypothesis 4a and 4b, we tested whether employees’ psychological empowerment is associated with positive megaphoning directly. Results showed positive paths for both hypotheses: $H4a (\beta = .222, p < .001)$ and $H4b (\beta = .208, p < .001)$. It means that employees who believe their work is meaningful and recognize their influence on organizations may engage in positive information behaviors about their organization. Hypothesis 5 and 6 also tested mediated effects of psychological empowerment on employees’ positive megaphoning
behavior through their intrinsic motivation. The results provided support for hypothesis 5 ($\beta = .237, p < .001$), and hypothesis 6b ($\beta = .123, p < .05$), but failed to support hypothesis 6a ($\beta = .083, p > .05$). To be specific, employees’ psychological empowerment is positively related to their intrinsic motivation, whereas intrinsic motivation is not significantly related to positive megaphoning behaviors. But interestingly, the path from intrinsic motivation to megaphoning during crisis (H6b) was significant.

Finally, the relationships between individual factors and organizational factors were tested in hypothesis 7 through 9. The path from perceived authentic organizational behavior to intrinsic motivation was insignificant ($\beta = .015, p > .05$), and H7 was not supported. H8 postulated a positive link between psychological empowerment and organization-employee relationship, and the path also significant ($\beta = .144, p < .001$). Lastly, H9 predicted that the quality of relationship between organization and employee leads to employees’ intrinsic motivation. The path was also positive ($\beta = .405, p < .001$), thus this hypothesis was also supported.

Regarding indirect effects among variables, table 2 reports the results of indirect effects in the hypothesized structural equation model. As shown in table 2, we found out that perceived authenticity is significantly related to megaphoning behavior both in crisis (.320) and non-crisis (.360), mediated by organization-public relations (OPR), and psychological empowerment was also positively related with megaphoning in crisis (.066) and non-crisis (.075). On the other hand, the mediating effects of intrinsic motivation were not significant, although it was slightly significant when it mediates the effect of psychological empowerment on megaphoning in crisis (.029). Interestingly, when both OPR and intrinsic motivation mediate the effect of perceived authenticity on employees’ megaphoning behavior in crisis, the path was somewhat significant (.034).

**Discussion**

The purpose of the present study is to develop an integrated model of employees’ communicative behaviors: megaphoning. The study considers both organizations’ efforts and employees’ intrinsic motivation. Specifically, we investigated whether an organization’s authentic behavior is associated with the quality of the organization-employee relationship, and employees’ communication behaviors both in crisis and non-crisis situations. Furthermore, the study examines how employees’ psychological empowerment and intrinsic motivation are related to their positive communicative actions.

One important contribution of the study is to strengthen the theoretical power for the concept of megaphoning. While existing studies have explored organizational factors such as symmetrical communication and the organization-public relationship (OPR) as antecedents to predict employees’ communication behavior (Kim & Rhee, 2011; Shen & Kim, 2012), this study attempts to combine both individual and organizational factors. Understanding complicated motivation of employees’ voluntary behavior with only organizational factors has its limitations. Thus, individuals’ characteristics that may predict information behaviors need to be combined. As the situational theory of problem solving (STOP: Kim & Grunig, 2011), which is a theory that Kim and Rhee (2011) adopted when they conceptualized megaphoning, also indicated that individuals’ situational motivation is a critical factor that determines information behaviors. Similarly, the study found that individuals’ psychological empowerment in the workplace is positively related to positive megaphoning behavior. Moreover, we could see that how organizational factors—perceived authenticity of organizational behavior or organization-public relationship (OPR)—are also inter-related with individual factors. Therefore, by considering both
critical elements, the study attempts to understand the concept of megaphoning by tracking various routes in a more comprehensive way.

In addition, the findings of the study are especially meaningful because of the characteristic of data collected. Rather than recruiting current employees from various organizations that previous studies have conducted (Kim & Rhee, 2011; Park, Kim, & Krishna, 2014), participants in present study were invited from a specific organization in Italy. Thus, we could see whether employees who share the same corporate culture or organizational environment have different motivations to forward or share positive information about their organization. Since earlier studies mainly aimed to examine how an employee engages in megaphoning behavior depending on the perceived relationship with his organization, the studies have individuals currently working for any type of organization. However, by collecting the sample from one company, the present study firstly demonstrates that different motivations of communicating among individuals who work in a same company exist. In addition to the perceived relationship with an organization, individuals’ motivation or psychological factors may also lead them to engage in positive megaphoning behavior. Also, a difference between individuals was shown more clearly when they experience an organizational turbulence.

Another major implication of the study is that it provides an important framework for public relations practitioners and organizations to develop useful communication strategies for organizational crisis. As many previous studies have already indicated, employee communication behaviors (ECB) play a critical role in advocating organizations in crisis (Mazzei, et al, 2012; Rhee, 2008). The study further discovered that both organizations’ efforts and individuals’ motivation affect positive megaphoning behaviors during crisis. An interesting finding was that while intrinsic motivation is not significantly related with positive megaphoning, it is positively related with megaphoning during crisis. Individuals are more likely to feel motivated to forward or share positive information with others voluntarily to protect or advocate their organizations when the organization is in crisis. Furthermore, those employees who perceive a good relationship with the organization also engage in positive megaphoning behaviors as shown in the results. However, it is notable that perceived authenticity is also positively related with megaphoning in crisis mediated by organization-public relationship (OPR) and intrinsic motivation, yet psychological empowerment is not significantly related with positive megaphoning in crisis mediated by those two same factors. Such a finding shows that during organizational turbulence, organizations’ authentic behavior can be more effective to make employees engage in positive communication behavior than their intrinsic motivation. This is similar to previous studies that emphasize organizations’ efforts to build long-term relationship with their employees to minimize threats during organizational crisis (Kim & Rhee, 2011; Mazzei et al., 2012). Above all, the findings from the present study serve as the most crucial elements for the behavioral, strategic management paradigm that many public relations scholars and communication management theorists have argued (Kim, Hung-Baesecke, Yang, & Grunig, 2013; Kim, Bach, & Clelland, 2007; Grunig & Kim, 2011). Considering the strategic role of public relations as the bridge connecting the organization and the public, they have argued that the core of authenticity in organizational behavior relies on “action speaks louder than words” (Grunig & Kim, 2011). Especially in a crisis situation, organizations’ authentic actions are likely to be more powerful than their words, or even individuals’ intrinsic motivation, as demonstrated in the study.

The study also has a limitation that needs to be addressed. Although not tested, the present researchers believe that the antecedents suggested—perceived authenticity, OPR,
psychological empowerment, and intrinsic motivation—also can affect employees’ negative megaphoning behavior. Negative information created by employees of an organization can be detrimental for the organization to overcome crisis, and survive (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2013). Thus, future research may need to investigate what motivates employees to forward negative information to others.

**Conclusion**

Despite its limitation, the present study serves as one of the first to explore the antecedents of employees’ communication behavior in the context of public relations. By considering not only organizational efforts to increase positive megaphoning of employees, but also their individual characteristics, the study attempts to understand what affects employees’ communicative actions. Although feeling empowered and motivated intrinsically enables an employee to engage in forwarding and sharing positive information about the organization, organizational efforts and authentic behavior can be stronger predictors of employees’ behaviors, especially during crisis. We expect this study provides an important framework to understand employees’ motivations to communicate and the role of organizations, and helps PR practitioners to develop communication strategies for crisis.
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Kim, J.-N., & Rhee, Y. (2011). Strategic thinking about employee communication behavior (ECB) in public relations: Testing the models of megaphoning and scouting effects in


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[FIGURE 1] Conceptual Model

A Mediation Model

[FIGURE 2] Results of SEM Analysis

All path coefficients are standardized. p<.001***
**A Mediation Model**

![Diagram of a mediation model with arrows indicating relationships between variables such as Perceived Authenticity, Organizational- Employee Relations, Positive Megaphoning, and Intrinsic Motivation.](image)

All path coefficients are standardized. \(p<.001***, p<.01**, \(p<.05*\)

Dotted lines indicate insignificant paths.

### An Integrated Model of Megaphoning
(N=306)

\[ \chi^2_{df(4)} = 35.576 \]
RMSEA: .161 (.115, .211)
CFI: .955
SRMR: .056

---


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latent variables and measurement items</th>
<th>(\alpha)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Megaphoning</td>
<td>.852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I praise my company and management to friends and people I know.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I talk to neighbors and friends about how my company does better than other companies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel motivated to regularly promote my company and business to people I meet.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have made efforts to persuade angry publics in favor of my company.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the recent past, I have argued against any vicious rumors or prejudices that I have heard against my company.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past, I fought for my company against people who attacked my company.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I cannot but speak up when I see ignorant but biased views about my company.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Megaphoning during Crisis</td>
<td>.831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spent much time to explain to publics and others about what happened and how our company was working to improve the situation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was advocating for my company's position actively.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tried everything I could to improve my company's situation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was proactive and aggressive in defending my company during the crisis.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was upset when I met people who spoke of my company negatively.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Psychological Empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The work I do is very important to me.</td>
<td>.834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My work activities are personally meaningful to me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The work I do is meaningful to me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident about my ability to do my jobs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am self-assured about my capabilities to perform my work activities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have mastered the skills necessary for my job.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My impact on what happens in my department is large.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have significant influence over what happens in my department.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having certain degree of power and discretion is an important part of my identity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Organizational Public Relationship (OPR)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>.932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whenever this company makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This company can be relied on keep its promises.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that this company takes my opinions into account when making decisions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel very confident about this company's skills.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This company does not have the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control mutuality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This company and I are attentive to what the other says.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This company believes my opinions are legitimate.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In dealing with me, this company has a tendency to throw its weight around.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This company really listens to what I have to say.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that this company is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can see that this company wants to maintain a relationship with me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is no long-lasting bond between this company and me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am happy with this company.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both this company and I benefit from the relationship.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not happy in my interactions with this company.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship this company has established with me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Authenticity</td>
<td>.899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This company always tells the truth.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that this company's actions are genuine.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that this company is willing to admit to mistakes when they are made.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that this company accepts and learns from mistakes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that this company's behavior matches its core values.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This company matches what it says it is as a company.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think this company matches the rhetoric with its action.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic Motivation</td>
<td>.878</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I enjoy finding solutions to complex problems.
I enjoy creating new procedures for work tasks.
I enjoy improving existing processes or products.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediated Paths</th>
<th>Parameter Estimates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Authenticity ($\rightarrow$ OPR)$^a$ $\rightarrow$ Megaphoning</td>
<td>0.360***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Authenticity ($\rightarrow$ OPR)$^a$ $\rightarrow$ Megaphoning in Crisis</td>
<td>0.320***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Empowerment ($\rightarrow$ OPR)$^a$ $\rightarrow$ Megaphoning</td>
<td>0.075***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Empowerment ($\rightarrow$ OPR)$^a$ $\rightarrow$ Megaphoning in Crisis</td>
<td>0.066***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Authenticity ($\rightarrow$ Intrinsic Motivation)$^a$ $\rightarrow$ Megaphoning in Crisis</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Empowerment ($\rightarrow$ Intrinsic Motivation)$^a$ $\rightarrow$ Megaphoning</td>
<td>0.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Empowerment ($\rightarrow$ Intrinsic Motivation)$^a$ $\rightarrow$ Megaphoning in Crisis</td>
<td>0.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Authenticity ($\rightarrow$ OPR)$^a$ ($\rightarrow$Intrinsic Motivation)$^a$ $\rightarrow$ Megaphoning in Crisis</td>
<td>0.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Authenticity ($\rightarrow$ OPR)$^a$ ($\rightarrow$Intrinsic Motivation)$^a$ $\rightarrow$ Megaphoning</td>
<td>0.034*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Empowerment ($\rightarrow$ OPR)$^a$ ($\rightarrow$Intrinsic Motivation)$^a$ $\rightarrow$ Megaphoning in Crisis</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Empowerment ($\rightarrow$ OPR)$^a$ ($\rightarrow$Intrinsic Motivation)$^a$ $\rightarrow$ Megaphoning</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Empowerment ($\rightarrow$ OPR)$^a$ ($\rightarrow$Intrinsic Motivation)$^a$ $\rightarrow$ Megaphoning in Crisis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$Mediating path(s).
$p < .001^{***}$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .05^*$
Twibel Litigation: How U.S. and U.K. Social Media Defamation Laws Affect PR Practice

Cayce Myers
Virginia Tech

Abstract
This paper examines U.K. and U.S. defamation laws as they apply to social media defamation cases. Comparisons are made between each system with particular focus toward social media content. This study shows that Twibel litigation has increasingly been used as a method for online image management. Implications are discussed for British and American PR practitioners. This study shows Twibel litigation potentially erodes organizational credibility and reputation.
This study examines the growing area of social media defamation in the U.S. and U.K., commonly referred to as Twibel (a term combining tweet and libel). Twibel has come to international attention because celebrities and political figures use lawsuits to manage their online reputations. These Twibel suits force courts to examine who is a public figure on social media, whether there is a different type of public concern on the Internet, and how damages can be determined for comments posted in the fleeting, fast-paced world of social media. Compounding this issue of Twibel is the sharing aspect of social media. Re-tweets and sharing can constitute re-publication of defamatory content, which is also legally actionable.

Social media has caused problems with traditional understanding of defamation. In the past defendants in large defamation cases, in Britain or the U.S., were frequently wealthy media outlets. Similarly in defamation cases prior to social media it was almost a given that suits would involve mass publication seen or heard by large audiences. Social media changes this because a publisher on a site may be an un-wealthy individual. Individual users taken in aggregate may make a post go viral causing great harm to a claimant. However, these users in aggregate may only be individuals, not corporations, which makes judgments difficult to collect. Compounding this problem, especially in American courts, is determining who is a public figure on social media. Would a user who has thousands of followers constitute a limited purpose public figure on a platform like Twitter? Moreover, social media postings, defamatory or not, are fleeting, which causes there to be a serious question over how damaging these posts can really be? Lastly, social media platforms are organized in a way that encourages unfiltered, unedited, and unverified exchange. It seems like a place that almost encourages defamation, however small.

For British and American PR practitioners social media defamation is extremely important to understand and avoid. Defamation suits can be brought on behalf of organizations, private persons, and even products and services. PR practitioners need to know how to both manage social media sites to reduce inadvertent defamation and also recognize and remedy possible defamation. Knowing the contours of these laws place practitioners in a strong position with their clients’ reputation, image, and relationship management. Given the importance of this issue this study seeks to answer how does Twibel litigation work in the U.K. and U.S. and how organization use defamation lawsuits to maintain online reputation.

**Defamation Laws in Britain and the United States**

Anglo-American jurisprudence has a close relationship, especially in the development of defamation and speech rights. However, the United States’ First Amendment and twentieth century U.S. Supreme Court decisions have made the two nations’ defamation laws quite distinct. This distinction is not merely academic. British defamation law, although somewhat reformed in 2013, is a highly pro-claimant system in which media defendants are routinely slapped with huge judgments. Essentially the difference between the two systems is one of perspective. British law requires a defendant, the person being sued for defamation, to prove their statements are in fact true. In the United States the law requires the plaintiff, the person bringing the suit, to show that the defendant made the statements with the required degree of fault. In effect, this requires the plaintiff to show that the statements are untrue. This creates a

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13 The person bringing a lawsuit in England and Wales is called the claimant. In the U.S. the person bringing a lawsuit is called the plaintiff. In this paper claimant is used when referring to the British legal system and plaintiff is used when referring to American legal system.
clash of priorities. British law keeps out defamatory speech at the expense excluding some protected speech, and America protects regular speech at the expense of letting in some defamatory speech.

Overview of British Defamation Law
Modern British defamation law is influenced by Star Chamber legal traditions, Victorian values, mass media, and the power of celebrity. These unusual historical influences on British defamation law created a manifold system whose legal caveats and permutations make it widely criticized by the United States and European Union. However, at its core British defamation law protects an individual or organization’s reputation. The basic tenet of these laws is found in Lord Aitken’s famous description in *Sim v. Stretch* (1936). He said defamation is found in “words as those ‘which tend to lower the person in the estimation of right-thinking people’” (Nicholson, 2000, pp. 31-32). However, this simple statement concerning British defamation belies a complex system that tries to reconcile old concepts of reputational honor with the modern reality of mass communication.

Almost anyone or any organization can bring a defamation suit under British law. There are a few notable exceptions. A person bringing a suit must be alive. Organizations may bring defamation suits the same as individuals. This is based on the idea that loss of reputation is equivalent to loss of “‘goodwill’ asset[s]” (Robertson & Nicol, 2007 p. 115). However, there are some limitations on organizations bringing defamation suits. Municipal governments, state-run businesses, political parties, and trade unions cannot sue for defamation under British law (Robertson & Nicol, 2007).

Lord Aitken’s twentieth century definition of defamation reflects the core values of British defamation law. Created during the medieval era, defamation laws were an instrument of the state to protect nobility from damaging personal assaults and therefore reduce the potential political uprisings. During this time slander and libel were criminal, not civil, offenses punishable by imprisonment, branding, or cutting off one’s ears. However, during the infamous Star Chamber, a Westminster based English court created for the purpose of holding nobility legally accountable, defamation became a civil law. This meant that instead of criminal prosecution those who believed their reputations were harmed by words could sue the speaker for money damages.

This historical backdrop of British defamation law had a profound influence on how it developed into the twenty-first century. Civil cases on defamation have always favored the claimant. This is largely the byproduct of the British defamation system being set up to serve the interests of noblemen trying to preserve personal honor, an idea that would only become more important in the Victorian era. This law, commonly referred to as Fox’s Libel Act of 1792, was expanded into include civil libel claims. By the nineteenth century a civil claim for libel had more developed legal standards. Because defamation law was rooted in a history that held

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14 In this paper the term defamation is used for both slander and libel. In American courts the terms have almost lost all legal distinction. In British courts a distinction between the two terms does exist because libel has presumed damages (meaning damages are assumed) while slander requires a claimant to prove damages in his or her pleadings. However, certain types of slander were exempt from proving damages. These categories of speech, now considered class defamation, were: unchastity, allegation of a crime, attack of professional abilities, and accusations that a person had a loathsome disease (Robertson & Nicol, 2008).
an individual’s reputation in high regard a legal presumption emerged that placed the burden of proof on defendants to prove that their statements were, in fact, true (Robertson & Nicol, 2008; Green, 1985).

This burden created the modern reality of the pro-claimant British defamation law. A claimant need to only prove he or she was identified by the defendant, and that the defendant’s statement “tends to” expose them to “lower the person in the estimation of right-thinking members of society generally” (Hanna & Dodd, 2012, pp. 238-239). A judge, not a jury, makes the initial determination of whether words can be defamatory. Under Practice Direction 53 Part 4.1, a judge has the ability to determine “whether the statement is capable of bearing any other meaning defamatory of the claimant.” Equally important is the ability of a publisher to engage in “bane and antidote,” which can neutralize the effect of defamatory content. This principle introduced in the 1835 case Chalmers v. Payne holds that if a libelous statement is made then it can be cured by a conclusion that shows that the defamation is untrue. While the courts have recognized that this approach assumes, somewhat wrongly, the reader reads the entire work in order to read both the bane and antidote, it is an approach that has repeatedly been used in libel actions (Charmin v. Orion Publishing Group Ltd., 2005; Charleston v. News Group Newspapers, 1995). Once the judge determines that the statements or writings in question are potentially defamatory a claimant must prove he or she is identified.15

Implications of British Defamation Law on the Press

The structure of British defamation law and the burden of proof required of defendants created an extremely cautious press. Because the ability to legally prove truth of a statement is extremely difficult defamation claimants have won against defendants for what is later discovered to be true. For much of the 20th century media outlets did not enjoy any privilege against libel laws even if their stories were written with good faith and were newsworthy. This does not mean truth can never be established (David Irving v. Penguin Books and Deborah Lipstadt, 2000). However, truth is frequently difficult to prove, and even if possible presents an expensive option for defendants.

Until the 1980s only reference letters from employers was immune from defamation suits (Toogood v. Spyring, 1843). Media defendants could only assert a privilege against defamation suits when reporting on emergency information, and even then the privilege was not absolute (Blackshaw v. Lord, 1983). The issue of press privilege emerged again in the 2000s when the Albert Reynolds, former Prime Minister (Taoiseach) of Ireland, sued the Times Newspapers for an article in the Sunday Times that claimed he lied to the Irish Parliament. The House of Lords found that privilege of the media did exist in this case and that in certain circumstances it is the press’ responsibility to report on information that may turn out to be false. In his opinion Lord Nicholls held that certain situations public interest demands that privilege should exist. The Law Lords reasoned that because Reynolds was a public figure in Ireland and his resignation had been the subject of much political interest the report on his behavior in the Irish Parliament warranted attention (Reynolds v. Times Newspapers Ltd., 2006).16

15 Once this prima facie case has been made then the burden is then placed on the defendant to show the truth of the statements in question. Identification of the claimant does not have to be direct (Yousoupoﬀ v. MGM Pictures Ltd., 1934).

16 However, motive of the speaker is also important. Citing Horrocks v. Lowe (1975), a case which stands for the principle that privilege is lost when the privilege is misused, Lord Nicholls wrote that
Cost as a Chilling Factor in British Libel

One reason British defamation suits are so well known in the international legal community is their cost. Hanna and Dodd (2012) cite that judgments and legal fees both account for the large sums associated with British defamation suits. In one case Mirror Group Newspapers paid a judgment of £15,000 only to have £382,000 in legal fees. The BBC had to pay £1.5 million in fees in a case where they claimed Halcion, an insomnia medication, had adverse side effects. The damages paid to Halcion were only £15,000. Part of the reason for these large fees is the structure of British libel law. The loser in a libel case must pay 75 percent of the winner’s fees in addition to any judgment. This has the effect of producing wealthier claimants and defendants (Hanna & Dodd, 2012; Robertson & Nicol, 2007).

One famous example of a defendant of few means being sued for defamation occurred in 1997 in McDonald’s Corporation v. Steele & Morris, commonly referred to as the McLibel case. That case involved protestors of London Greenpeace who distributed pamphlets criticizing McDonald’s restaurants for a variety of misdeeds including economic imperialism, unhealthy food, and exploitative working conditions. McDonald’s sued the group for libel and won a judgment £60,000 after a 313 day trial in which the defendants represented themselves. The defendants in the case were unemployed, and were pro se because Britain does not give court appointed counsel in libel cases. By the time the House of Lords refused to hear the final appeal the case had lasted for nine years and six months. This case received widespread condemnation especially by the European Court of Human Rights (Case of Steele & Morris v. The United Kingdom, 2005). In a judgment that had no legal impact on the McLibel defendants, the European Court of Human Rights held that the case violated the defendant’s right to a fair trial and right to free expression under the European Convention on Human Rights. The European Court of Human Rights specifically mentioned that the denial of the defendants to legal counsel, and that the defendants’ right to free expression was limited by the nature of British defamation laws (Robertson & Nicol, 2008; Nicolson, 2000).

The pro-claimant stance of British defamation law has made British courts attractive to out-of-country claimants both from the continent and the United States. While British courts do allow non-British claimants to sue non-British defendants there are some restrictions. In Spiliada Maritime Corporation v. Cansulex Ltd. (1987) the Law Lords outlined a robust forum non conveniens doctrine that has been applied to defamation cases. In that case Lord Goff held that if there was a more appropriate forum to bring a lawsuit outside of Britain then suit should be heard there. The forum non conveniens doctrine has done well to eliminate forum shopping, frequently called libel tourism, and the overuse of British defamation law for competitive gain among claimants. However, there is also a movement outside Britain to limit the effects of British defamation law. In the United States the 2010 SPEECH Act found in 28 U.S.C. §§ 4101-4105 disallows the enforcement of foreign judgments concerning speech when the judgments are from countries that provide less speech protection than the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. As expected, British defamation judgments are considered to be part of system that provides less protection than the First Amendment. Because of this, British defamation judgments are currently unenforceable in the United States.

17 Interestingly Halcion is now banned in the U.K. because of its side effects.
There has been longstanding criticism of the draconian and convoluted system of British libel law by both the United States and European Union. In 1990s, well before the SPEECH Act, the United States refused to enforce British defamation claims in the U.S. (Bachan v. India Abroad Publishers, 1992). In the infamous McLibel case the European Court of Justice heavily criticized the British defamation law and its civil trial system (Case of Steele & Morris v. The United Kingdom, 2005). Additionally, foreign claimants targeted British courts in order to take advantage of their pro-claimant laws even when a more proper forum would be outside of the U.K. Because of this Parliament passed the Defamation Act of 2013, which curtailed many of the excesses of older British defamation laws.

The Defamation Act of 2013 provided for more specificity of defamatory damages and privileges. Under old British defamation law libel had presumed damages meaning that claimants did not have to prove any demonstrable harm. The Defamation Act of 2013 requires all legitimate defamation suits must have “serious harm to the reputation of the claimant.” In terms of businesses, this serious harm is “serious financial loss.” The new law includes specific defenses for truth, honest opinion, and publication of matters of public interest. Websites now have defense if it was not the poster of the defamatory content. Academic literature is protected from defamation if the content was part of peer review. Older concepts of presumed damages in slander, specifically statements concerning un-chastity, were repealed. The 2013 Act also sought to stop libel tourism in Britain by statutorily enshrining a forum non conviens doctrine. However, this Act is not an abolition of the older complexities of British libel law. The 2013 Act does not apply to Northern Ireland, and pre-2013 defamation cases are still governed by the older defamation laws.

**Defamation Law in the United States**

*Background on U.S. defamation law*

In the United States there has been a tradition of defamation law inherited from Great Britain. In fact, American defamation law was nearly identical to British libel law until 1964 (Nicolson, 2000). U.S. defamation law differs from Britain in one major way; the burden of proving the prima facie case is entirely on the plaintiff. Although truth is a defense to a defamation claim there is no legal requirement that a defendant prove it in order to prevail at trial. The Second Restatement of Torts §559 defines defamation as:

A communication is defamatory if it tends so to harm the reputation of another as to lower him in the estimation of the community or to deter third persons from associating or dealing with him.

To prove a case in defamation a plaintiff must show the following:

1. the offending defamatory statements have been made;
2. the offending statements have been published to at least one third party by the defendant
3. the plaintiff has been identified in the statements;
4. the actions of the defendant are the true cause of the actual harm suffered by the plaintiff
5. the plaintiff is entitled to be compensated by money damages for that harm
6. the defamatory statements appeared because the defendant has done all of this with the required degree of fault (Moore et al., 2011, p. 88).

It is this last element that distinguishes U.S. defamation law from that of Britain. Until 1964 defamation law required that plaintiffs need only prove that the statement was made. However, the United States Supreme Court changed that standard in *New York Times v. Sullivan*...
In that case a unanimous Supreme Court held that plaintiffs who are public officials must prove that the defendant made the defamatory statements with actual malice. This is a very high threshold for plaintiffs. It means a plaintiff must show that a defendant made the defamatory statement with “knowledge that it was false or with reckless disregard of whether it was false or not” (p. 280). This recklessness is not that of an ordinary person, but instead must rise to the level of having “serious doubts as to the truth” of the publication (St. Amant v. Thompson, 1968, p. 731). If a publisher merely fails to use due diligence in verifying a story he or she is acting negligently, but not to the level of actual malice (Moss v. Stockard, 1990). However, the actual malice standard, though difficult, should not be interpreted as a complete obstacle to success in a defamation case (Solano v. Playgirl Inc., 2002).

The U.S. Supreme Court’s rationale for creating an actual malice standard lay in the fact that public officials allow themselves to be scrutinized by the media because of their position. The effect was very few public official plaintiffs were ever going to win defamation cases. The U.S. Supreme Court applies the actual malice standard to also include plaintiffs who were public figures and limited purpose public figures (Curtis Publishing v. Butts, 1967). The U.S. Supreme Court further explained the actual malice standard in Gertz v. Welch (1973). In that case the Court held that public figures and public figures self-select to be in the eye of the media. The court recognized that it was theoretically possible to be a public figure accidentally, but concluded such instances were “exceedingly rare” (Gertz v. Welch, 1973, p. 345). It is important to note that all defamation defendants, regardless of the plaintiff’s status, are afforded the opportunity to affirmative defenses of truth, privilege, and fair comment. However, these defenses may be raised at the defendant’s discretion. A plaintiff may still lose a defamation case if he or she does not prove their case. A defendant in American courts is not required to prove anything.

Determining the difference between public and private figures

The issue in public figure and public official defamation cases is determining when is a person technically a public figure. It is important to note that in American law this determination of if a person is a person is public or private is a matter of law that only judges may decide. Justice Powell recognized this distinction between all-purpose and limited purpose public figures in Gertz v. Welch (1974). He wrote that an all purpose public figure was someone who had “persuasive power and influence that they are deemed public figures for all purposes” (p. 344). However, Justice Powell recognized this was the exception. He wrote that more often a person becomes a public figure when he or she “thrust[es] themselves to the forefront of particular public controversies in order to influence the resolution of the issues involved. In either event, they invite attention and comment” (Gertz v. Welch, 1973, p. 344). However the court provided no test for determining when a person crosses the boundary between private and public. Because of that courts grapple with this definition. Two federal appellate circuits, the Fifth Circuit and D.C. Circuit, have developed an approach that has objective criteria (Trotter v. Jack Anderson Enterprises, 1987; Waldbaum v. Fairchild Publishing, Inc., 1980).

Compared to British defamation law this meant the plaintiff, not the defendant, was charged with the burden of proof. In fact, the House of Lord expressly rejected this standard for defamation claims by public officials; rather local public officials cannot bring defamation claims at all (Derbyshire County Council v. Times Newspapers, 1993).
The approach developed by the Courts of Appeal for the Fifth and D.C. Circuits takes into account three criteria for determining when a person is a public figure. They are:

1. The controversy at issue must be public both in the sense that people are discussing it and people other than the immediate participants in the controversy are likely to feel the impact of its resolution;
2. The plaintiff must have more than a trivial or tangential role in the controversy; and
3. The alleged defamation must be germane to the plaintiff’s participation in the controversy (Trotter, 1987, pp. 433-434).

Even in jurisdictions that do not adopt this approach, this approach shows that limited purpose public figures can come in many forms. However, the point that a person ceases to be private and become public is one that is decided by individual judges based on the facts of a case. For instance, the New York Court of Appeals held that Samantha James, a well-known belly dancer in Rochester, New York, was a limited purpose public figure because her show was well known in the area (James v. Gannett Co., 1976). Similarly the Georgia Court of Appeals found that Richard Jewell, a former security guard who was once a prime suspect in the 1996 Olympic Park bombing, was a limited purpose public figure because he gave media interviews after the bombing (Atlanta Journal-Constitution et al. v. Jewell, 2002). Even people who are not well known in popular circles can be limited purpose public figures. The federal trial court for the District of Columbia found that a retired major general, not well known outside military circles was a public figure because he held posts in the Pentagon (Secord v. Cockburn, 1990).

However, there are limits to when a person can be public figure. The U.S. Supreme Court held that merely because a person is a member of a prominent family he or she is not necessarily a public figure (Time Inc. v. Firestone, 1976).

**Actual Malice Standard for Organizational Defendants**

As in Britain, American courts do recognize the ability of organizations to bring defamation suits. However, unlike Britain, these organizational entities may be required to prove their case using the actual malice standard. Various circumstances affect if an organization is public for defamation purposes. These factors mainly have to do with an organization’s size, media presence, and ownership. The larger an organization the more likely it is going to be considered public by courts (Jadwin v. Minneapolis Star and Tribune Company, 1985; Martin Marietta Corporation v. Evening Star Newspaper, 1976). If a company involves itself in a public controversy by a media campaign the organization may be considered a public figure (Steaks Unlimited v. Deaner, 1980). However, according to the Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit merely maintaining a media presence for promotion is not enough for a company to qualify as a public figure. (Golden Bear Distributing System v. Chase Revel, Inc., 1983).\(^\text{19}\)

\(^{19}\) Compounding the issue of whether an organization qualifies as a public figure are other laws that prohibit product disparagement and trade libel. Product disparagement, a cousin of defamation, has existed for centuries. It specifically addresses untrue statements about the nature of quality of a product. It differs from defamation in that it does not address reputation. Rather, it focuses on the physical properties of a product (Moore et al., 2011; Reinhard, 1987). Similarly trade libel is an area of law that punishes speakers for untrue comments that cause pecuniary harm to a product or service. However, unlike defamation the plaintiff in trade libel must prove that the statements were false, and then also must prove special damages (Lepis, 1961).
Defamation on Social Media: The Rise of Twibel

British Twibel

Britain’s first Twibel case that resulted in damages occurred in 2009 in a town council election in Caerphilly in south Wales. During the Election Day, County Councilor Colin Elsbury tweeted that his opponent Eddit Talbot had been arrested at a polling station. The tweet turned out to be false. The High Court heard the libel charge and awarded Talbot £3,000 in compensatory damages. Elsbury’s defense that he was mistaken as to the identity of the person arrested at the polling station was irrelevant to the suit. Under British libel law Elsbury, who ended up winning the narrow election, had to prove truth, which he could not, in order to avoid a penalty (Twitter Libel, 2011).

However, the largest and most publicized Twibel case in Britain came in 2013 when Lord McAlpine, a former Conservative Party Treasurer and Conservative peer, brought a libel action against Sally Bercow, the wife of the Speaker of the House of Commons John Bercow. In that suit Lord McAlpine claimed Bercow libeled him in a tweet that accused him of being a paedophile. The background of the case began when the BBC ran a story on Newsnight about a middle-aged man who claimed to be molested in the 1970s and 1980s by a high ranking Conservative Party member. It was later discovered the man was mistaken about the identity of the abuser. However, because Newsnight did not have enough evidence to specifically name the abuser the program only alluded to his identity. Newsnight stated the abuser was a Conservative Party member who was prominent in the Thatcher government.

The day after the Newsnight broadcast British press widely reported the allegations made against a Conservative Party member, but made no specific mention to Lord McAlpine. Two days after the Newsnight program Bercow, who at the time had 56,000 Twitter followers tweeted, “Why is Lord McAlpine trending? *Innocent face*” (McAlpine v. Bercow, 2013, p. 2). Bercow claimed her tweet was not libelous, and meaning was inferred where there was none. She stated her tweet was more to do with the trending status of McAlpine rather than any allegations of paedophilia. The judge in the case analyzed the statements based on the principle that words can have both natural and ordinary meaning and innuendo meaning. As the name implies natural and ordinary meaning is the concept in British law that words have meaning that is evident on their face (Jones v. Skelton, 1963). However, innuendo meaning states that words have more than a surface meaning if the audience knows “extrinsic facts” about the statement. In this case the question turned on whether Bercow’s followers knew extrinsic facts about the paedophile accusation made on Newsnight. If the court found that the followers would have generally known the context of the Newsnight program then McAlpine’s suit would be easier to prove. If the information on Newsnight was extrinsic facts then McAlpine would have to prove that Bercow’s followers were the type of people who would know this specific set of facts made on the BBC.

Mr. Justice Tugendhat held that Bercow’s tweet was defamatory both in its natural and innuendo meaning. Specifically he pointed to the words “innocent face” to underscore the irony of that statement. He also stated that when faced with two possible interpretations, one scandalous and one not, it is “naive” to think readers will always prefer the non-scandalous interpretation and vice versa (McAlpine v. Bercow, 2013, p. 13). The judge also stated that the use of the title Lord in front of McAlpine’s name suggested to readers that he had a political past of some level of prominence. The use of Lord with the recent allegations of a Conservative Party member’s paedophilia, and the fact that the tweet was asking why McAlpine was trending
gave the impression that the tweet meant McAlpine was potentially guilty. Bercow was required to pay damages estimated at £50,000, legal costs of £100,000, and issue an apology in open court. (McAlpine v. Bercow, 2013; Humiliation for Sally Bercow, 2013).

**American Twibel**

In American First Amendment jurisprudence there is recognition that technology alone does not change the nature of the First Amendment (U.S. v. Cassidy, 2011). However, this does not mean that American defamation law has not responded to the technological realities of the digital age. One large concession to the technological revolution of the twenty-first century is the Communications Decency Act (1998), which prohibits Internet Service Providers from being sued for defamatory comments posted by third parties.

Although there has been no U.S. Supreme Court decision concerning American Twibel there are several lawsuits that give insight into these new types of defamation. These lawsuits revolve around two major issues. First, is whether Anti-SLAPP, which stands for strategic law against public participation, prohibits defamation suits when the speech in question is posted on social media. These Anti-SLAPP statutes prevent aggressive plaintiffs from bringing meritless cases meant to silence defendants’ speech. Second, these cases evaluate when an actual malice standard should be applied to plaintiffs. Of particular concern is whether a online speaker who has a large social media following can be a limited purpose public figure.

In 2009 one of the first well-known Twibel suits gained media attention when actress and singer Courtney Love was sued for Twibel by fashion designer Dawn Simorangkir, who sold clothing online under the name Boudoir Queen (Simorangkir v. Love, 2009). In that suit Love had repeatedly harassed Simorangkir in person and “through marathon rants in multiple public forums” (Simorangkir v. Love, 2009, p. 2). Love accused Simorangkir of being a drug dealer, child abuser, prostitute, embezzler, cocaine addict, and a fugitive. These postings were carried out on multiple social media platforms including MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, and on Simorangkir’s Etsy page. An example of this occurred on Twitter when Love wrote:

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Scorched earth ignore and blacklist, few people ever deserve our toal [sic] ignoring butthis [sic] thief and burglar does, austin [sic] police loathher! orange (Simorangkir v. Love, 2009a, p. 6
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Love not only attacked Simorangkir’s but also her professional abilities as seen in this Etsy feedback post:

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the nastiest lying worst person I have ever known, a thief a liar and needs to be remved [sic] from this site immediately and my lawyers are working on this, today, evil incarnate vile horrible lying bitch (Simorangkir v. Love, 2009a, p. 7).
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Simorangkir sued Love for defamation, false light, interference with economic advantage, intentional infliction of emotional distress, and two allegations of breach of contract. Love’s attorney moved to strike this complaint arguing that Love’s comments on social media were protected under California an Anti-SLAPP statute. Specifically the statute allows:

A cause of action against a person arising from any act of that person in furtherance of the person's right of petition or free speech under the United States Constitution or the California Constitution in connection with a public issue shall be subject to a special motion to strike, unless the court determines that the plaintiff has established that there is a probability that the plaintiff will prevail on the claim (C.C.P. 425.16(b)(1)).

Love’s attorney argued that under the California Anti-SLAPP statute Love’s speech was made in a public forum and was in the furtherance of a public interest issue. Specifically he argued that
because Simorangkir was selling clothes online she was engaged in an activity that was a public issue. Love’s social media comments were discussing serious issues that could affect online customers and related her personal experiences with Skimorangkir’s business. Love’s attorney argued that the criminal allegations against Simorangkir made by Love were also protected under Anti-SLAPP because they were “hyperbole” and did not constitute an actionable claim (Simorangkir v. Love, 2009b, p. 9). The motion was denied, and eventually the case was settled out of court for $430,000 (Courtney Love Settles Twitter Defamation, 2011).

This case illustrates some of the complexities of Twibel suits. However, as Love’s lawsuit illustrates public commentary, even if based on personal experiences, does not immunize against a defamation suit. The California Superior Court did not agree with Love that Simorangkir’s lawsuit was filed to prevent legitimate public discussion. Angelotti (2013) agrees stating that perhaps the most important thing to come from this suit is the principle that social media platforms do not automatically equate with “public interest” (p. 472). However, Love’s case is unsatisfactory for legal and public relations scholars because it ended with an out of court settlement. Of interest would be if Simorangkir would qualify as a public figure because she had social media presence and an Etsy business. As an independent designer who is not a household name she would probably not qualify as a public figure in the complete sense. Her status would hinge upon whether someone who is well known in specific social media platforms, such as Etsy, would qualify her as a limited purpose public figure for that context.

Other less public Twibel lawsuits have been filed in the United States. Frequently these lawsuits involve organizations, particularly for-profit businesses that claim that their reputations have been defamed because of Twibel. One case in Illinois involved a Tweet that claimed an apartment had a mold problem. It read, “Who said sleeping in a moldy apartment was bad for you? Horizon reality thinks its’ okay” (Horizon Group Management. v. Bonnen, 2009, p. 1). Another case from Massachusetts involved a man’s tweets that his sister was fired from a local Nissan dealership because she had brain cancer. This allegation was false, but the tweets were used in an effort to create a successful grassroots boycott of the Nissan dealership. The dealership ultimately sued and the Massachusetts Superior Court denied a motion to dismiss based on Massachusetts’ Anti-SLAPP statute. The court reasoned that coordinating a protest over social media was not, in and of itself, actionable. However, the Anti-SLAPP laws in Massachusetts are designed to protect speech that seeks to influence government. Here the social media postings were orchestrated to influence a boycott of the dealership for economic purposes. Although boycotts are constitutionally protected an online defamation suit will not be dismissed, at least in Massachusetts, because of Anti-SLAPP laws or because the potential defamation is couched in constitutionally protected protest (Clay Corporation v. Colter, 2012).

A Twibel claim arose from a public relations “name and shame” campaign conducted by the United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI), an American based organization committed to stopping Iran from developing nuclear weapons (Restis v. UANI, 2014, p. 710). In a series of social media posts UANI made allegations that Victor Restis, a Greek citizen who owner of a shipping conglomerate, was involved in exporting Iranian oil. In this campaign UANI posted content to their website and Facebook page to publically ridicule Restis. This Facebook post garnered 33 comments some of which contained “insulting and threatening messages” (Restis v. UANI, 2014 p. 712). Other social media posts used graphics using Restis’s image with an Iranian oil tanker and Ayatollah Khamenei. All of this was done at the same time UANI attempted to cure misperceptions of Restis by sending out press releases stating that he was not confirmed to be doing business with Iran.
However, these press releases were outnumbered by other press releases that claimed Restis was heavily involved with Iranian exports, violated sanctions, and tweeted that Restis attempted to bribe UANI to stop their exposé. Restis sued UANI in federal court in the Southern District of New York. UANI filed a motion stating that their postings were protected under the First Amendment because their comments were opinions, not facts. Under New York law opinions are fully protected under the state constitution, and therefore no defamation suit can be legally brought. The UANI also held that a public relations campaign that constituted “calls to action” by the government is immune from defamation suits the trial court disagreed on both accounts. The trial held that statements that have a mixture of truth and opinion are actionable under defamation law. Similarly there is no law that prohibits “calls to action” campaign from being subject to defamation suit under federal or state law (Restis v. UANI, 2014, p. 722). The court also noted that the words used on the press releases and social media posts did save the defendants from a defamation suit. Qualifiers or “contextual signals” will not absolve a defendant from a libel claim even when the qualifier is “in my opinion” (Restis v. UANI, 2014, p. 723).

A Texas Court of Appeal case Cummins v. Bat World Sanctuary (2015) provides some insight into what defamation standard is used on a Twibel case. In that case an intern at a bat sanctuary wrote critical comments on social media about the sanctuary’s owner. Among these comments included statements about the owner’s lack of education, the unsanitary conditions of the sanctuary, and the owner’s violation of animal laws. Additionally the intern also wrote critical comments about the owner’s attorney accusing him of ethics violations, perjury, and legal malpractice. The sanctuary owner sued the intern for defamation and won at a bench trial. The Court of Appeals for Texas analyzed the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in Gertz (1973) stating that the rationale that public figure plaintiffs were fundamentally different than private citizens because public figures had greater media access. The court found that with social media and the Internet this fact was no longer true. Although the court stopped short of saying public and private citizens had equal media access, the court found that private citizens had greater access to the media because of social networking sites and the Internet.

The court decided that the owner was not a limited purpose public figure under Texas law because she had not injected herself into the controversy. In fact, the court held that no public controversy existed in the case. Merely because the defamation occurred online did not mean there was a public interest. Additionally the court found that the intern’s speech were opinions, not facts. This was an important issue during the trial because the intern claimed that the statements were supported by government complaints she filed. The court noted that nowhere in the social media comments was there any reference to government complaints, and that no hyperlinks to those complaints were embedded in any Internet posts (Cummins v. Bat World Sanctuary, 2015).

Twibel has also become part of contract lawsuits as well. In the U.S. organizations’ use of non-disparagement clauses in contracts essentially mandates customers to not post any negative commentary online about their experience with an organization. These non-disparagement clauses are part of the contract that prohibits signers from making any derogatory comment, no matter how valid. This can take the form of written contracts or online contracts where users merely check the “I accept” button (FreeLife Intern., Inc. v. American Educational Music Publications, Inc., 2009). Litigation arising from non-disparagement suits has received a hostile reception in some American courts. In Virginia the verdict from non-disparagement trial was overturned by the Virginia Supreme Court because the justices believed there was not
enough evidence to warrant a judgment. That case involved a retired park director who alleged that a County Board of Supervisors member defamed him during a television interview. Although the board member never identified the retired park director by name, the lawsuit was brought because the board implied the former park director was negligent in preparing for a flood. Part of the lawsuit stemmed from a non-disparagement clause the park director had in his severance agreement with the county. The trial court agreed with the park director, and a jury awarded the park director $45,000 in compensatory damages for the breach of contract claim, $50,000 in compensatory damages for the defamation claim, and $100,000 in punitive damages. The Virginia Supreme Court reversed the judgment stating that the park director could not legally prove any of his damages and therefore was not entitled to any judgment (Isle of Wight v. Nogiec, 2011).

In federal court in Utah an online company sued two customers after they wrote a negative review of a desk ornament ordered online. The company sued the couple for $3,500 for a negative review written on a third party website. The company issued a demand letter for the negative review to be removed. The lawsuit lasted for three years culminating with the Utah court awarding the couple $306,750 in damages plus attorney’s fees (Order Awarding Damages Upon Default Judgment, 2014).

These types of suits have gained the attention of legislatures. In California non-disparagement clauses are banned under the California Civil Code. Under this statute a company using non-disparagement clauses can be fined for $2,500 for its first violation, $5,000 for its second and subsequent violations as well as a civil penalty of up to $10,000 (Cal. Civ. Code § 1670.8). The U.S. Congress has followed this lead and in 2015 a bipartisan bill called the Consumer Review Freedom Act of 2015 was introduced and passed in the U.S. Senate. The bill gives the Federal Trade Commission the authority to regulate. At the time of this article the bill is in the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade (S. 2044, 2015).

**Implications for Public Relations Practitioners**

Online defamation is particularly important to public relations practitioners. This is especially true because practitioners are tasked with preserving online identity and using social media to facilitate dialog. Given the British and American approaches to Twibel litigation there are five things practitioners needs to keep in mind when managing images and speaking online.

Recent Twibel cases show that words matter. This may be an axiom well known in PR circles, but as British and American cases show words can make all the difference between a successful and unsuccessful defamation claim. As McAlpine v. Bercow (2013) shows the nature of a tweet, especially in British courts, can have multiple interpretations. Cryptic comments sometimes can be interpreted as defamation. Because of this it is important to craft social media messages carefully. However, in America a writer does not have carte blanche to write a social media litany of insults and hide behind the First Amendment. As Simorangkir v. Love (2009) shows, even if a speaker has a legitimate gripe with an individual a person cannot take to social media to air grievances. It is important to note that had Love expressed her dissatisfaction to Simorangkir privately, even with her allegations, her speech would not have been subject to a defamation suit.

Social media followers matter. This is especially true for British Twibel cases. Because British law recognizes a natural and innuendo meanings the audience of the message is important. It is worth noting that even if specialized knowledge is required to understand the context of a comment a claimant can still win if he or she can prove the audience had that
knowledge. With specialized groups and interest groups using social media as a forum for particularized conversation it is even easier for a claimant to successfully argue innuendo meaning.

Friends cannot save someone from a defamation suit. Private social media accounts will not save a person from a defamation suit. Twitter follower and Facebook friends are methods to limit message exposure. Social media accounts have a variety of privacy capabilities that can limit exposure. However, both British and American defamation law requires claimants or plaintiffs to prove publication to only one person. That means regardless of how restricted a platform is defamation law always applies. Similarly using another’s words does not protect a speaker from defamation. Both British and American law recognizes the right of a claimant or plaintiff to sue both the first publisher of defamation as well as re-publishers. A share, re-tweet, or comment can create an entirely new lawsuit.

Defamation can be made by intentionally, unintentionally, or spur of the moment. One problem facing users of social media is that the platforms encourage a free flow exchange. Twitter’s character limitation limits the content to very short sentences. This creates the false impression that social media’s informality inoculates users from serious legal consequences. Practitioners using social media know that there is skill in effectively managing a social media campaign. However, even in personal social media use practitioners should be aware of the legal limits of social media. It is a powerful tool, and one that can be effectively used to create change. However, as Cumming v. Bat World Sanctuary (2015) shows verification of content accuracy is supremely important—even if it undermines a successful PR campaign.

Lastly practitioners engaged in reputation and image management should know the limits of these defamation suits. Non-disparagement clauses do not have widespread support by courts or from legislatures. As evidenced by the California legislature and Congress there is a move to outlaw their use altogether. Social media content is fleeting. Even viral content ends. Because of that using legal means to combat online defamation should be used with caution. As practitioners it is well-known that the best way to combat negative content is with more positive content. Twibel litigation should be used sparingly. It has the potential to increase negative attention for clients because the media reproduces the content well after it would have been forgotten.

**Conclusion**

This study is the first step in analyzing what will definitely be a long evolving legal reality. Twibel will only become more prominent in British and American courts the longer social media continues as a platform. What is evident from these cases is that despite the differences in American and British defamation law practitioners should be aware that Twibel suits’ success largely depends on interpretation. As wordsmiths PR practitioners are tasked with maintaining online reputations and relationships by choosing the right words. Sometimes this also means neutralizing negative content. However, what is most important for practitioners is to recognize that as social media develops communication laws are increasingly applying old legal standards to new technology. Even though defamation has its roots in the thirteenth century its principle of regulating reputation is still relevant. This creates new opportunities for practitioners. Their skills are crafting, maintaining, and even regulating reputation will be even more sought after in this world of fleeting content.
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Brazilian narratives and public diplomacy: Identity and diplomatic discourse in Lula administration

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Abstract

Our research proposes a reflection on how diplomatic discourse establishes a plot to national identity and contributes to build a narrative of country, having the Brazilian government of Lula as a great example. This narrative needs a strong public diplomacy and has much influence on PR inside and outside organizations.
Our research proposes a reflection on how the diplomatic discourse establishes a plot to national identity and contributes do build a narrative of country, influencing much of the PR work inside and outside organizations. Faced with an increasingly interdependent and connected world, the narrative of country needs a strong public diplomacy and the support of an autonomous, creative and pragmatic international insertion to establish itself. In this context, Brazilian government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2010) repositioned Brazil internationally and put foreign policy at the service of its national project.

The strategy adopted by the government was to enhance self-esteem, strengthened by the idea of the emerging Brazil, the Latin American solidarity, and the rapprochement with Africa to change some narrative figures of the symbolic network of national identity, and try to overcome its many contradictions. From the analysis of 24 discourses of Brazilian diplomacy\(^{20}\), it was settled an interdisciplinary theoretical path to demonstrate the interrelationships between narrative of country, diplomatic discourse, and national identity, revealing the structure of the Brazilian national myth.

The government of President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2010) deliberately used national foreign policy to reshape Brazil’s metanarrative\(^ {21}\), the image that Brazilians have of themselves. "Foreign policy helps to reflect our image, but not only that image that we have, but the image of Brazil that we want", as defined by Celso Amorim\(^ {22}\), Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lula’s government. During this period, it was determined that foreign policy would be one of the pillars of government, acting as "a mirror that reflects the image and self-esteem of a country" in the words of the President Lula\(^ {23}\). From the beginning, the government took the decision to use foreign policy to rebuild Brazil’s narrative in the world, with intent to also modify our self-image of the country.

Aware of the potential foreign policy to act on national self-esteem, which did not happen in the following government, Dilma Rousseff’s, Lula has positioned Brazil in an overcoming logic of division between developed and under development countries, strengthening the Brazilian identity, in particular, and of the South countries, in general, to modify the structures of global governance. Through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also known as Itamaraty, the government implemented a diversification policy of partnerships, strengthened South-South relations and positioned the country as the leader of a possible change to the undeveloped countries.

This strategy was established in a context of intensification of global interdependence process in an already digital world and marked by uncertainties of War on Terror\(^ {24}\).

\(^{20}\) All the speeches presented in this paper were written in Portuguese and translated freely by the two authors of the paper.

\(^{21}\) We will use in this paper the term metanarrative as a great abstract conceptual scheme (BENDASSOLLI, 2007) which adds throughout it, many small reports that are represented by it. It would be like metareport, in the sense given to it by Lyotard (1991), a central and aggregator report on a particular topic (NASSAR, 2013th), a narrative of the narrative (GENETTE, 1996).

\(^{22}\) Graduation discourse of Formation Course of Instituto Rio Branco in 2004, pronounced by the Minister Celso Amorim.

\(^{23}\) Graduation discourse of Formation Course of Instituto Rio Branco in 2004, pronounced by former president Lula.

\(^{24}\) Counter-terrorism strategy implemented by the United States after the attacks of September 11, 2001.
international agenda had been expanded and the interrelations between internal and external issues in national societies and media spaces, accentuated. "Ladies and gentlemen", said the President in 2004, "we now live under the sign of an unstable and uncertain globalization". Given this scenario, understanding what message the foreign policy strategy wants to convey to Brazil and the world, in terms of identity, is essential so that we can reflect on the construction of the metanarrative of country.

The world lives a moment in which "the old identities, which for so long have stabilized the social world, are in decline", as states Stuart Hall (2011, p.7), and national boundaries are just "one of the dimensions in which power and counter power operate" (CASTELLS, 2009, p.43). A brief analysis of the society demonstrates that there has been, in recent decades, a shift of part of the power relations of nationalized spaces, isolated by boundary lines, for the global society. This movement, made possible by "new engineering systems" as described by Milton Santos (2008, p. 81), is part of the debate that Castells brings in his book Comunicación y Poder (2009) when he says that relations can exist in "concrete social structures that form from spatiotemporal formations" and that these formations, in the contemporary world, "no longer are located primarily at national level, but they are local and global at the same time" (p. 43).

These circumstances, where the State does not cease to exist or lost its functions, but starts to share with the globalized space the administration of which Castells calls power and counter power, the questions focused on foreign policy and its influence on national metanarrative start to have even more importance. "Today", reported Lula in 2003, "the Brazilians realize that most of the issues on the international agenda have a direct impact on their lives". There is an interplay between narratives constructed in the international scope, announced through social representations and mediatization, and the narratives that form the national character, both with influence over the construction of Brazilian metanarrative.

The narrowing of this relationship extends the space of debate between the State – active agent of international relations – and its citizens – who suffer the consequences of the way the

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6 Graduation discourse of Formation Course of Instituto Rio Branco in 2004, pronounced by the President Lula.

26 Castells (2009) calls power, the power relations already established and counter power, the ability of stakeholders to challenge and transform power relations established.

27 Milton Santos uses the term engineering systems as a synonym for a set of working tools and productive forces in general (including man) - the fixed ones - which are increasingly interconnected and interdependent, which would make the division of labor geographically extended and complex, providing the basis for flows increasingly globalized.

28 Graduation discourse of Formation Course of Instituto Rio Branco in 2003, pronounced by former president Lula.

29 The effect of mediatization used in this work is the mediatization as the institutionalization of social logics (HJARVARD, 2012), such as personalization of social representations in a discourse.

30 The national character would be inherent in the Brazilian quality, which sets them apart from national character of other countries.
country is internationally inserted, participating only indirectly in this process\textsuperscript{31}. Foreign policy, thus, becomes an important instrument to help "the Brazilian nation, the Brazilian people, to make a picture of themselves and a picture of their place in the world".\textsuperscript{32} The international insertion strategies of the country and the identity projects related to them become increasingly the object of constant dispute between the political forces of the State and society, with the official narrative constantly being questioned by multiple counter narratives.

It is necessary, therefore, a reflection on how the narratives that make up the Brazilian diplomatic discourse establish a storyline about national identity. In a government that sees foreign policy as part of a national project, the diplomatic discourse becomes a manifestation privileged space of the national culture as the country's position in the international community and, in parallel, before its own citizens. It is, through the relationship between identity and diplomacy, the role of foreign policy in the nation project intended by the government.

In Brazil since the mid-1990s, but especially in the first decade of this century, the debate on foreign policy has been expanded and occupied prominent spaces in the media, the academy, in relevant groups of Brazilian society and even in everyday conversations. "The greatest international challenge that Brazil faces today is to manage its own ascension", wrote Matias Spektor (2012) in Folha de S.Paulo newspaper column. Spektor (2012) further added: "The emergence of the country as an actor that matters for the maintenance of order in the world, is new. Only 15 years ago, the weakness and dependence were its trademarks".

Itamaraty was not alien to this debate. In a discourse to the graduates of Instituto Rio Branco, in his first year in office, Lula stressed that "the discussion forums on diplomacy and foreign policy are multiplied"\textsuperscript{33}. The following year, the President again pointed out that "foreign policy is increasingly gaining ground in the minds of Brazilian citizens. The diplomacy of democratic Brazil should mirror the reality of our society, with its demands and possibilities, with its wealth and deficiencies"\textsuperscript{34}. Unlike most of the reflections on foreign policy in this work, the democratization of the debate is something that also lingers in the government of Dilma Rousseff, albeit timidly. In his opening discourse of the event "Dialogues on foreign policy"\textsuperscript{35} in 2014, Ambassador Luiz Alberto Figueiredo Machado, then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brazil,\textsuperscript{36} recognized the growing importance of the issue for society: "the foreign policy issues have

\textsuperscript{31} Individuals have an action increasingly recognized internationally, with active role even in international courts of justice, but their role is not yet consolidated, especially on issues related to the development of standards and rules met by the states.

\textsuperscript{32} Graduation discourse of Formation Course of Instituto Rio Branco in 2006, pronounced by the Minister Celso Amorim.

\textsuperscript{33} Graduation discourse of Formation Course of Instituto Rio Branco in 2003, pronounced by former president Lula.

\textsuperscript{34} Graduation discourse of Formation Course of Instituto Rio Branco in 2004, pronounced by former president Lula.

\textsuperscript{35} The event "Dialogue on Foreign Policy" was organized between February 26 and April 2 by Itamaraty as part of the effort of the Ministry to give greater transparency to their activities and increase the space for dialogue with society.

\textsuperscript{36} Luiz Alberto Figueiredo was the foreign minister of Dilma’s government between August 2013 and December 2014.
mobilized more and more interest and attention within the country. (...) The diplomatic dialogue is today also a dialogue inside the country.37 In modern democracies, as stated by the former minister, the interaction between the external and local environment is essential for the development of the country's narrative, which makes diplomacy also back up to its internal audiences. This connection, which becomes increasingly intimate, leads to a relationship between the state bureaucracy, which historically has difficulty communicating, and people, highlighting the importance of including in the development of the country's narrative, the identity narratives daily produced by the society it represents.

If it is politics that organizes the polis, as Aristotle says in his classic Politics (2006), it is the foreign policy that organizes the narrative of the State - herein understood as polis expanded. This narrative organization, currently goes through multidirectional communication flows, including those that ascend from the social base to the Itamaraty, body which is responsible for assisting in the development, implementation and promotion of national metanarrative, representing and negotiating on behalf of Brazil.

The development of the country's narrative focused on foreign relations - core of the problem analyzed in this work - is related to the construction of a worldview that expresses, at least in a utopian vein, the global set of interests of a society. To ensure its legitimacy, the foreign policy of a State must assimilate subjective elements that make it possible for citizens to identify with the institutional discourse. Such elements have been defined historically by nationalism (developed in opposition to other nations and outside the scope of this work) and by national identity, which shows the interrelationship between society and the metanarratives within the nation-state. The concepts that define the Brazilian foreign policy are no exception, and as part of the narrative that places Brazil in the world and opposite Brazilians, also assimilated national identity traits.

The role of narrative in the construction of diplomatic discourse, which is the discursive manifestation of foreign policy, and its relationship to national identity is, still, unexplored territory by the Academy. Some Brazilian works that permeate the theme, as the book of former Foreign Minister Celso Lafer (2001) and the paper of Ambassador Luiz Felipe de Seixas Correa (2000), are much focused on building an image for those who sees Brazil from outside, what could be called as an international country's identity. Other works, such as Marcela Vecchine Gonçalves (2005), dealing with the exclusion of ethnic minorities in the foreign policy narrative, while authors such as Maria Regina Soares de Lima (1990), José María Arilla (2000) and Letícia Pinheiro (2000) address the issue only marginally, not making the relationship between diplomacy and identity their central point. It may be noted, by the existing works, that the interrelation between diplomatic discourse and national identity is not very common in Brazil.

In the same way that foreign policy scholars do not usually look at its object of the narrative perspective, narrative theories are not usually used for the study of diplomatic discourses. Focus of most authors, as Todorov (2006), Propp (2014), Derrida (2008), Genette (1996), Barthes (2010) and many others who are dedicated to the theme, is almost exclusively based on the literary analysis. The same can be said of studies about identity that despite being sociological analysis closer to the proposed herein, do not directly address the relationship made in this work.

37 Discourse given by the then Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Luiz Alberto Figueiredo Machado, at the opening session of the "Dialogue on Foreign Policy", on February 26, 2014, at the Itamaraty Palace in Brasília.
Even from the perspective of communication sciences and Public Relations, there is a shortage of works within the inter-relationships proposed in this study. There are undoubtedly many theses, dissertations and articles involving identity and media, but they are generally focused on how this identity - often elaborated as the projection of a country’s image - is transmitted in the very media platforms, whether from journalism or advertising and propaganda.

The lack of work with the interdisciplinary approach, which relates the theories of identity and foreign policy of the narrative point of view is precisely what prompted the production of this work. A theoretical course was proposed, which flirts with diverse areas of knowledge to answer the central question of this study: how Brazilian diplomatic discourse relates to the national identity and contributes to the definition of a country’s narrative. For the study of Brazilian identity, alerts Eneus Trindade (2012), "communication issues depart from an interdisciplinary understanding" (p. 23), with interfaces in political science, social sciences, international relations and social psychology, to try to understand the design of the study object - the diplomatic discourses.

The cohesive element used, which connects the various fields, is the narrative, which, as communication object, establishes bridges between the signs of national culture and the Brazilian diplomatic discourse to demonstrate, in reverse, how this diplomatic discourse becomes a privileged space for the construction of national identity. Thus, "by the possibility of open relationships in the dialogue between the various disciplines, we believe we are facing a development that can be tailored to the requirements of an interdisciplinary work", as taught by Trindade (2012 p. 24).

The period selected for analysis, the two terms of government Lula (2003-2010), is quite fertile on the bridges built between diplomatic discourse, public diplomacy and national identity. There is a perception, in the formulators of Brazilian foreign policy, that the lack of tact for international relations of the current government Dilma, is putting into question the legacy of the previous government in foreign policy, although there is international political capital for Brazil to remain relevant (even if in decline) for some time. The foreign policy of Lula, in addition to its increased productivity on the international stage, was able to identify possibilities of contribution of the diplomatic discourse for its identity project in a clear and consistent manner, while also contributing to national development.

To check the proposed relations, 24 diplomatic discourses made during the Lula administration (2003-2010), which had Ambassador Celso Amorim as Minister of Foreign Affairs, were analyzed. Four main themes were chosen for the categorization and analysis of the content of discourses: Latin America, Self-esteem, African Brazil and Emerging Brazil. Each of these themes has contributed, in some way, to the construction of the country narrative desired by the Brazilian government, and to verify this connection, these themes were studied from reflections on the national identity and the Brazilian foreign policy history. Although the sample includes the eight years of government, it is still limited and, therefore, it does not allow generalizations that go beyond the period studied.

There was, at the outset of the work, several possible categories to be analyzed. The selected ones are, however, those that most say something about a national project that tries to change the symbolic perception of whom are Brazilians. The Emerging Brazil arises as valuation factor of Self-esteem of the Brazilian, complemented by assigning greater importance to identities

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38 Trindade (2012) refers to the study of Brazilian identity in television advertising, but we believe that the inference to our study is legitimate and consistent with the author's goals.
that relate to the accumulated history of the country, *Latin America* and the *African Brazil*. "The foreign policy of my Government mirrors and will increasingly mirror, the confident and supportive Brazil we want to build. It is up to the diplomat to being the interpreter of this desire for change and renewal", Lula said at the graduation discourse of Formation Course of diplomats at Instituto Rio Branco, 2004.

Without having a theory previously chosen to perform the analyzes, it was decided for the theoretical construction from empirical evidence, which approximates this work to the *grounded theory*, as explained by authors such as Glaser and Strauss (1967). To identify and analyze the relationships between identity and diplomatic discourse in shaping a country's narrative, a qualitative research was carried out, based on content analysis, inspired by the theories developed by the French researcher Laurence Bardin (2011). From the selected discourses, a categorization was made within the four proposed themes, with the help of the research support software NVivo39, which is only a facilitator of the process and, therefore, does not eliminate a thorough analysis to reach final categorizations that were analyzed at work in light of the theories proposed.

As object of analysis in this dissertation - the diplomatic discourse - tends to be politically oriented, there were views that diverge from the official, called in this work counter narratives. It is not intended to make comparisons and questions about the narrative strategies of Lula government's foreign policy or its counter narrative. It is sought, indeed, to demonstrate that the identity spaces related to the Brazilian diplomatic discourse are in constant dispute in society, especially after the foreign policy has entered the Brazilian political debate with major role.

In the period analyzed, which highlights the identity relationship between Brazil and Latin America; the idea of a country coming from the periphery, but emerging, BRICS40 member and protagonist of a new multipolar world order; of a solitary country aware of its historical debt to the African Brazil; and the idea of national self-esteem being worked on constantly by Itamaraty’s discourse, there was, simultaneously and systematically, a production of a narrative contrary to that presented by the government, although leaving from the same point of origin: the tradition of Brazilian foreign policy. The main critics of the Lula government’s foreign policy were Celso Lafer, Luiz Felipe Lampreia, Rubens Ricupero, Paulo Roberto de Almeida and Rubens Barbosa41 (JAKOBSSEN, 2013, p. 275), in addition to the former Brazilian president himself Fernando Henrique Cardoso, whose identity project is the inspiring source of most counter narrators herein.

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39 NVivo 10 is a QSR International software that supports qualitative and mixed research methods. It lets you gather, organize and analyze content interviews, group discussions, surveys, audio, social media and web pages.

40 The term BRICS has its origin in 2001 when the British economist Jim O’Neal pointed Brazil, Russia, India and China as the four countries that emerge in the near future as good investment opportunities. In 2006, the countries indicated by O’Neal were articulated to formalize the BRIC acronym, so far without South Africa to improve the links between emerging countries. South Africa joins the group in 2011, forming the acronym BRIC, which is now used.

41 Celso Lafer was Minister of Foreign Affairs of Fernando Collor de Mello (1992) and Fernando Henrique Cardoso (2001-2002); Rubens Ricupero was Minister of Environment (1993-1994) and Minister of Finance of Itamar Franco (March to September 1994) and UNCTAD Secretary General (1995-2004); Luiz Felipe Lampreia was Foreign Minister of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2001); Rubens Barbosa was a career diplomat and the last position he held was of Ambassador to the USA (1999-2004); and Paulo Roberto de Almeida is a career diplomat and a university professor (JAKOBSSEN, 2013, p. 275).
Understanding the alternative identity proposal proposed by the counter narrative, albeit superficially, represents an important step in the understanding of the very identity project that we analyze in this work.

The main criticisms identified in these authors begin with the existence of a foreign policy "ideologized and partisan" (JAKOBSEN, 2013, p. 276), which would have contaminated all the government's actions in international relations. There are exceptions made to most of the positions taken by Itamaraty over the two terms of President Lula, as the search for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, the priority given to MERCOSUR, the exacerbation of presidential diplomacy, "unnecessary" opening of embassies in countries with little international expression and Brazilian applications to international bodies (JAKOBSEN, 2013, p. 276). Celso Lafer, former Foreign Minister, accused the Lula government of misrepresenting the Brazilian foreign policy, applying a policy that would be a government policy, which would move away from national interests de facto. "The foreign policy tends to be in Brazil and other nations, a State policy, and not a government or party policy - as it has occurring in the Presidency [of] Lula" (LAFER, 2009), he said. This change, also for Lafer (2009), with respect to identity "that historically guides Brazilian foreign policy", would go against "the elements of continuity" of Itamaraty (JAKOBSEN, 2013, p. 284). Another common criticism, highlighted by Rubens Ricupero, is the excessive role of the President and the leading role of Marco Aurélio Garcia, special advisor to the President of the Republic for international affairs of Lula, in the national foreign policy. To Paulo Roberto de Almeida, "there were a lot more moves than achievements, or according to the well-known phrase, much more perspiration than inspiration. (...) A rotund diplomacy in gestures, but less grand in facts "(2011, p. 106-107). The basis for these criticisms, according to Jakobsen (2013, p. 293), is in a different systemic analysis of the official, especially the role that Brazil, as average power, should take on the international stage.

The intent of this study is to propose a theoretical path that is coherent and consistent to support the empirical analysis of identity traits that make up the Brazilian diplomatic discourse, regardless of their political or ideological orientation. Identity manifestations in discourse are articulated, according to Trindade (2012), in his interdiscursivity, "the text analysis perspective in its structure, its aspects of internal coercion", and in his interdiscursivity, "which refers to the subjective aspect and historical context of discourse" (p. 27-28). We take, as a starting point, an analysis of narrative theory and then progress to the relationship between the four proposed themes - Latin America, Self-esteem, African Brazil and Emerging Brazil - in interdiscursivity of diplomatic discourse of government Lula, through narratives figures of Gérard Genette (1972). Such figures, as constraints of narrative setting that produces the country metanarratives, are in constant political tension and are part of different social interests, which leads us to observe them from the point of view of discursive formations of Foucault (2008), in order to understand the conflicts that surround them, including (though not limited to them) the counter narratives, within what Trindade (2012) referred to as interdiscursivity.

This confrontation around the country’s narrative also generates a social representation system, a mental model, as presented to us by the theories of social psychology Serge Moscovici (2010). This mental representation is embodied as a discursive symbol of a country’s metanarrative through the construction of a myth (BARTHES, 2010): the national myth.

From this perspective, one can say that there is, in the narrative structure formed by the associative mechanism of the nation's social representations, the formation of the national myth in a space that Barthes (2010) called "second semiotic system" (p. 205). There is the appropriation
of a symbol (the community), consisting of a signifier and signified\(^42\) that already exist in an earlier semiologic chain\(^43\), and impression of a new meaning (the idea of the nation state) to form another symbol (one domestic community) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*The Formation of Barthes Myth in His Second Semiologic System*

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<td>Second semiological system</td>
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* Table based on Barthes model (2010, p. 137)

The creation of the national community symbol, in Barthes second semiologic system, allows us to define the set of social representations linked to that imagined community as part of the narrative path for the formation of national myth. This allows us to analyze how the symbolic network\(^44\) of national identity is formed. We try to discuss how this theoretical scenario presented manifests itself in the reality of the country, especially on the issue of Brazilian foreign policy, and how it is indicative of a state project to build a narrative for the Brazilian national identity.

This work also intends to place the foreign policy studies, in relation to identity, from the perspective of building a mediated narrative, which again brings us to Communication and Public Relations. Mediatization herein is understood as the institutionalization of social logics (HJARVARD, 2012), such as personalization of social representations in a discourse. When Itamaraty, as Brazilian institutional entity builds a determined discourse, it mediates - directly or indirectly - a whole segment of devices of the government and society, which may or may not join the mediated logic by it.

All the theoretical framework presented was the basis for the analysis of 24 pre-selected diplomatic discourses: 8 statements made by Brazil in the annual sessions of the General Assembly of United Nations in New York, between 2003 and 2010, traditionally opened by a representative of the Brazilian\(^45\); and the 16 discourses made by the then Foreign Minister Celso Amorim (8) and

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\(^42\) The signifier is the acoustic image, a phoneme sequence which refer to the signified, which is the concept or idea of something (SAUSSURE, 1993, p. 80).

\(^43\) Barthes (2010) refers to the first semiological system as "linguistic system, the language (or modes of representation that are compared with)", which he called "object language", as "it is the language that the myth makes use to build its own system", which would be the second semiological system (p. 206).

\(^44\) French philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis, in his book *The imaginary institution of society* (1991), argues that the world is "inextricably intertwined with the symbolic". Not that everything is directly a sign, as he warns, but many of the "material products without which no society could live" are impossible outside of a symbolic network, which is found primarily in the language, but also, "in another degree and in another way", in the institutions (CASTORIADIS, 1991, p. 142).

\(^45\) There is, in the General Assembly of United Nations (UN), an unwritten tradition that a Brazilian state representative performs the opening discourse of the annual session of the Assembly. Although there is no consensus of dates nor reasons for the tradition, the fact is that since the 1940s, Brazilian representatives are responsible for the opening discourse of the annual debate of the General Assembly of United Nations.
by President Lula (8) at the graduation of Formation Course of Instituto Rio Branco\textsuperscript{46}. By the relevance of the selected authors and by the synthesizer potential of selected discourses, it is believed that the selected sample has been sufficiently relevant to disclose the image that Itamaraty wanted to project in the studied period, allowing inferences presented in this paper.

In analyzing the texts, *Emerging Brazil* arises as valuation factor of Self-esteem of the Brazilian, complemented by assigning greater importance to identities that relate to the accumulated history of the country, *Latin America* and the *African Brazil*. "The foreign policy of my Government mirrors and will increasingly mirror, the confident and supportive Brazil we want to build. It is up to the diplomat to being the interpreter of this desire for change and renewal", stated at the graduation discourse of Formation Course of diplomats at Instituto Rio Branco, in 2004.

Table 2 shows that there is a certain pattern in the demonstrations in each category. The changes, however, are very noticeable, especially by comparing the discourses over the years and those that were made by the same person.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author and location</th>
<th>Latin America</th>
<th>Self-esteem</th>
<th>African Brazil</th>
<th>Emerging Brazil</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Lula 58th session of General Assembly of United Nations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Celso Amorim Graduation of Instituto Rio Branco</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Lula Graduation of Instituto Rio Branco</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Lula 59th session of General Assembly of United Nations</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Celso Amorim Graduation of Instituto Rio Branco</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Lula Graduation of Instituto Rio Branco</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Celso Amorim 60th session of General Assembly of United Nations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{46} Those approved in the diplomatic career entrance exam (CACD) are sworn as diplomats and automatically enter at the Formation Course of Instituto Rio Branco.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Lula</td>
<td>61st session of General Assembly of United Nations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Celso Amorim</td>
<td>Graduation of Instituto Rio Branco</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lula</td>
<td>Graduation of Instituto Rio Branco</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Lula</td>
<td>62nd session of General Assembly of United Nations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Celso Amorim</td>
<td>Graduation of Instituto Rio Branco</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lula</td>
<td>Graduation of Instituto Rio Branco</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lula</td>
<td>Graduation of Instituto Rio Branco</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Lula</td>
<td>63rd session of General Assembly of United Nations</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Celso Amorim</td>
<td>Graduation of Instituto Rio Branco</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lula</td>
<td>Graduation of Instituto Rio Branco</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Lula</td>
<td>64th session of General Assembly of United Nations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Celso Amorim</td>
<td>Graduation of Instituto Rio Branco</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lula</td>
<td>Graduation of Instituto Rio Branco</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Final Remarks

If we live in an increasingly fluid environment (BAUMAN, 2003), complex (MORIN, 2005) and globalized, understanding the relationships between identity and foreign policy - from the narrative point of view - not only helps to revel the role and legitimacy of country narrative in contemporary times, but also contributes to broaden the research scope of the Communication and its interrelations with other important sciences for understanding the social environment, including Public Diplomacy. Only an interdisciplinary approach enables us to an understanding of the world we live in for a transforming action, albeit within an object of study designed for specific disciplines such as Communication, Public Relations, Narratology and Public Diplomacy.

What we see in the discourses and we prove in numbers found in the analysis is a willingness to establish, through diplomatic discourse, a narrative of national identity. It is noteworthy that the applied strategy is not based, as one might suppose at first, on the stereotypes to project Brazil onto the world, however much they also serve the central idea. What was sought was a change in the self-perception of Brazilian and in the image that the foreigner had of the country with a foreign policy that, regardless of the rights and wrongs, repositioned the country in the world and contributed to the construction of a new Brazil, both for abroad and for the own Brazilian people.

The four selected categories - Self-esteem, Latin America, African Brazil and Emerging Brazil - are a clear scenario for the reconfiguration of some social representations that make up the figurative core of national identity. Perhaps this is the real contribution of Lula government’s foreign policy narrative for the Brazilian identity. Could this also be the root of great dissatisfaction with the international performance of Brazil in government Dilma that did not know to continue the process of identification between global action and local self-esteem.

What was observed was a confluence between a good historical moment and decisions that sought to take maximum advantage of that moment, in terms of development or self-esteem. The world tended toward multipolarity, with the legitimacy crisis experienced by the United States after the attacks of September 11, 2001\textsuperscript{47}, Europe’s option for the enlargement of the European Union, the rise of China etc. In Brazil, the election of a former trade union leader, who has his life

\textsuperscript{47} At first, the post-September 11 attacks world seemed headed for a restriction on multipolarity, with the invasion of Iraq without UN authorization and the War on Terror. What we saw, however, was a weakening of the great powers, despite the continued taking unilateral decisions, they had always their legitimacy questioned. That did not mean, however, a strengthening of UN, but paved the way for strengthening the soft power of emerging countries.
story almost based on the plot of the trajectory of the hero, and the return of a more robust economic growth stimulated the confidence of the Brazilian. Lula's government knew how to take advantage of the situation and, with consistency and a conscious and pragmatic strategy, implemented its identity project systematically, with foreign policy as one of its main lines of action. "Without that opportunity their powers of mind would have been wasted, and without those powers the opportunity would have come in vain", wrote Machiavelli (2000) in immortalized stretch in policy analysis worldwide.

It is noteworthy that Lula's project for domestic policy would be difficult to sustain for long, with the attempt of mass inclusion of the excluded in the consumer market, without touching the privileges of elite, as stated Eliane Brum in an article published in the newspaper El País. "This was a powerful spell that worked while Brazil grew, but, whatever the performance of the economy was, could only work for a limited time in a country with historical arrangements to be made, and an abysmal inequality", said the journalist (BRUM, 2015). Although in the case of foreign policy, the room for maneuver was greater, the occasion should continue contributing so that the result of the choices would also work.

The strategy of Lula's foreign policy is evident in the analysis of diplomatic discourses of the period. The main objective was to promote Brazil's repositioning in the collective symbolic network, internally and externally, through the enhancement of self-esteem. As demonstrated in the analysis of this category, all the other three subjects were used to strengthen national self-esteem: the Emerging Brazil had, as its objective, to occupy a privileged place in the international arena and to promote local development by means of international relations; Latin America showed the Brazilian that, from the local reality, one could build legitimate and interesting policies for the country; and the theme African Brazil showed a historical and disinterested solidarity, which favorably filled the space between the first and second semiologic system of national myth in relation to its African roots. Technical cooperation with these two regions was also an important element for the psychological valuation of the country, historically recognized as a technology importer, led Brazilian science and knowledge to different countries, helping the local development and strengthening of Brazil's soft power through science.

The leading category in the international integration developed in Lula government is therefore Self-Esteem. All other actions seem to serve the purpose of valuing the Brazilian national self-esteem, changing the discursive formations that contribute to anchor the idea of country in the collective imagination.

Emerging Brazil brings the development vector towards the center of the Brazilian foreign policy thinking, especially for the search of a pragmatic multilateralism. The diversification of partnerships served the interests of the country over the years analyzed, with a significant increase in international trade with both countries of North and South, which helped to strengthen the discourse of self-esteem. Counter narrative, in this case, accused the government of idealizing foreign policy, applying a "third worldism" in the fashion of 1970s and distancing Brazil from its western roots. The most curious of counter narrative strategies of the period is that in many cases, the government was accused of being tied to ideologies of the Cold War, but the same ideology was much appreciated on the western side.

This criticism was also made to approach with Latin America and Africa, two pillars of Brazilian foreign policy, but in an adapted form. With regard to our region, the main criticism ranges from closer ties with the Bolivarian and subordination to them. In the case of African Brazil, there is a misunderstanding of the reasons of such attention to countries that would be insignificant for the international integration of the country. The impression one gets from the counter narrative
is that we will finally succumb to the "disease of Nabucco", as the Brazilian famous writer Mário de Andrade would say. Both categories, however, attach great contribution to enhance the self-esteem and national identity: the idea that the autonomous projection from the periphery is possible. Both work thus as a remedy to combat the "disease of Nabucco", not its opposite.

Working together to reframe the symbolic network of Brazilian national identity, the four categories contributed to an identity project that sought to break some historical features of the national character. Some of these base characteristics, such as "bovarism" of which Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (2009), mentions, the "tragedy of Nabucco", Drummond (SANTIAGO, 2003) or the complex of mutts of Nelson Rodrigues are all in one way or another, related to low self-esteem of the Brazilian people. Not that foreign policy has completely alienated people, so that they lose the ballast with reality and we were forced to accept reality without question. There was a match in various economic and social indicators that supported the identity project of the government and fed back the same over the two terms of President Lula.

Thus, an optimistic country narrative was created, a hope that the country's future, as desired by Zweig (2006), or that paradise imagined by the first inhabitants of these lands (HOLANDA, 1998) were finally in the near horizon. We would, therefore, overcome several structural deficiencies that accompany us from the colony (PRADO JUNIOR, 2010), through a strong and active state, as proposed by Celso Furtado (2003), contributing to modify some narrative figures that make up the national myth.

Overcoming our fundamental contradiction between local reality and the Universalist pretensions, finds in foreign policy, a way forward. Historically, Brazilian diplomacy has always positioned itself in defense of universalism and multilateralism as a way of development of the countries and a balanced global governance. This attitude is even expressed in the Brazilian Constitution, as one of the constitutional principles governing international relations of the country which establishes "cooperation among peoples for the progress of humanity" as one of its pillars.

It shall be added to this performance on the international scenario, elements that contribute to strengthen local elements of Brazil, advancing on a necessary balance of national wills in their insertion in the world.

The diplomatic discourse would thus be an important manifestation space of identity traits and would collaborate to overcome national contradictions. In addition to the struggle for strengthening the local element, with categories Latin America and African Brazil, we have a counterbalancing by strengthening the insertion of local in universal, with Emerging Brazil. After all, if we are "emerging" is because we are moving to occupy a place of which is already on the surface, the developed countries.

In overcoming national antagonisms, a new contradiction within the country's narrative that is intended to build through the diplomatic discourse. Dichotomy between developed and under development countries is fought to overcome a mental block that it is possible to move forward without the rich countries, but at the same time, it is characterized as a country that is moving to occupy a place in the "club" of the favored ones. Celso Amorim would defend himself, probably, saying that Brazil's commitment to multilateralism and change in global governance would not make us an arrogant and judgmental power, like most of today's developed countries, but this would not eliminate the contradiction of discourse.

If, in a globalized world, there is an undeniable universalizing cultural pattern, it does not act necessarily against the existence of national cultural centers. The confrontation between the particular and the universal is not a destructive movement at its core. On the contrary, the liquid world opens space for the organization and the structuring of a diverse cultural narrative that, in
the strategies of Lula’s government, was sought by the enhancement of self-esteem. The country’s narrative is not necessarily in opposition to the cosmopolitan one, as was believed in the debates of some Brazilian Interpreters. There is, as proposed by the Brazilian Anthropophagic Movement, assimilation moments of "foreign" and reject moments of external influence, in a dialectical movement that will eventually enter the Brazilian narrative in the harmony of civilization.

The data collected and presented were essential so to have security to state these findings. The category with the highest number of references, Emerging Brazil, formed the basis for the enhancement of Self-Esteem, the second with more quotes. African Brazil and Latin America are inserted into the logic of Emerging Brazil - with its specificities, of course - and also worked to give due emphasis on Self-Esteem.

In an increasingly interdependent and connected world, metanarrative of country needs the support of an autonomous international position and an active public diplomacy, creative and pragmatic to continue to outperform its many contradictions. The reporting period, related to the eight years of Lula’s government, was enough to start a process that is long and painful, as it is not easy to overcome contradictions that are part of the national myth and of a whole set of social representations, reproduced in time by discursive formations. To pursue this goal, foreign policy must reflect not only the country’s image today, but also the image we want for Brazil tomorrow.

There is no doubt of the contribution that diplomatic discourse can give to the country’s narrative and its identity project, enhanced by the performance of Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy. It must, however, be at the service of a well-defined strategy, which builds narrative figures able to influence the figurative core of national identity. The choice of Lula’s government, analyzed herein, was to value the Brazilian self-esteem with a focus on overcoming an inferiority complex that accompanies us since the independence of Brazil and, thus, altering not only the narrative of Brazil, a point which was attempted to be emphasized in this work, but in a way, the entire system of global governance.


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How Changing Media Formats Impact Credibility and Drive Consumer Action

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Abstract
This research revisits source credibility based upon the popular PESO (Paid, Earned, Shared and Owned) source classification. More specific, this study examines source credibility and channel effectiveness in terms of moving consumers along the communication lifecycle model based upon their exposure to information embedded in paid (traditional advertising and native advertising), earned (traditional news story), shared (independent blogger) and owned (company blog) media. One thousand, five hundred respondents recruited from a consumer panel participated in this 2 (level of involvement) x 5 (source) experimental design study. When respondents were asked to self-report on their levels of trust with various sources, they indicated the highest level of trust with consumer reviews and earned media and the lowest level of trust with native advertising. The experimental design study yielded no major differences among the sources for the communication lifecycle variables. Native advertising was viewed as less credible than traditional advertising in the experimental design. There were no differences in perceived credibility based upon exposure to traditional advertising versus a news story, confirming prior academic research. Suggestions are offered for public relations practitioners on selecting sources for messaging to drive behavior.
Introduction

Contemporary conventional wisdom indicates that publicity—earned media—has greater credibility than a paid advertisement. Consider the following excerpts from a 2014 Forbes article: “Advertising is paid media, public relations is earned media. This means you convince reporters or editors to write a positive story...It appears in the editorial section... rather than the ‘paid media’ section where advertising messages appear. So your story has more credibility because it was independently verified by a trusted third party, rather than purchased.” The Forbes story quotes Michael Levine, publicist and author of Guerilla PR, as saying “depending on how you measure and monitor an article it is between 10 times and 100 times more valuable than an advertisement. The idea is the believability of an article versus an advertisement.” Steve Cody (2012) a contributor to Inc Magazine writes, “Countless studies report that, next to word-of-mouth advice from friends and family, editorial commentary (usually generated by your friendly, behind-the-scenes PR practitioner) carries far more weight than advertising.”

In addition to this professional commentary, a 2014 Nielsen Study titled “The Role of Content in the Consumer-Decision Making Process” suggested that expert content provided by third-party articles and blogs elicits more consumer trust than branded content and user reviews. Nielsen’s study conducted with 900 consumers indicates that expert content is more effective in terms of increasing consumers’ familiarity, affinity, and purchase intent in comparison to branded content and user reviews.

Public relations academic research does not support the claim that publicity outperforms traditional advertising in terms of engendering greater credibility (Hallahan, 2009a; Howes & Sallot, 2013; Jo, 2004; Stacks & Michaelson, 2009; Verčič, Verčič, & Laco, 2008). Most of this research, however, has limited its examination to a comparison between earned media stories and traditional advertising only. Given today’s evolving media landscape, public relations practitioners now use an assortment of sources—indeed independent bloggers, company owned material, earned media, paid advertising, and native advertising—to message and to promote their brands and clients (Wright & Hinson, 2014). Moreover, consumers are increasingly consulting a number of sources to help them make product purchase decisions (Nielsen, 2014). This study revisits source credibility based upon the popular PESO—Paid, Earned, Shared and Owned—source classification. More specifically, this study examines source credibility and effectiveness in terms of moving consumers along the communication lifecycle model (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011) based upon their exposure to information embedded in paid (traditional advertising and native advertising), earned (traditional news story), shared (independent blogger) and owned (company blog) media.

Literature Review

In today’s world, media is everywhere. An expanding array of social media networks and digital channels, the transformation of traditional media and the infiltration of channel-savvy advertising throughout, means that consumers are searching for information in a new way. They are choosing their channels and news feeds to meet their personal preferences. Rather than relying on one or two news sources, consumers use a wide variety of both traditional and online sources depending on what kind of information they are seeking (Miller, Raine, Purcell, Michelle, & Rosenstiel, 2012). Facebook is the social media news powerhouse with 30% of US adults getting news there (Holcomb, Gottfried, & Mitchell, 2013), yet those same consumers still get news from a variety of other sources including radio, print and broadcast (Media Insight Project, 2014). When consumers make purchase decisions, blogs are the third most influential digital resource behind
the “owned” retail and brand websites (Technorati Media, 2013). Advertising is integrated into all these channels further diversifying the composition of the consumer’s media ecosystem.

To better understand the credibility and effectiveness of the channels in this media ecosystem and how they impact the product purchase decision process of consumers, three streams of research are reviewed next: blog credibility, native advertising credibility, and advertising versus public relations.

**Blog Credibility**

By definition, blogs are the posting of “one’s own ideas, opinions, Internet links (including those for other blogs), and so on about things on one’s own website, which is called a “web log” (Smudde, 2005, p. 34). Public relations practitioners consider blogs to be central to their strategic communication planning and execution (Wright & Hinson, 2014). Some public relations practitioners enlist the support of their employees or leaders to write their own blogs to represent their organizations. Other public relations practitioners actively pitch their ideas to influential bloggers, in the hopes that they will write positively about a company’s product or services.

Interviews conducted with public relations practitioners indicated that practitioners actively work with bloggers to secure favorable product reviews, earn publicity, increase brand awareness, amplify message reach and build credibility (Smith, 2011). In the words of one respondent who was interviewed, “Clients all want their marketing-speak reprinted in someone else’s tone because that person gives them authenticity,” (Smith, p. 6).

Because people will typically only read a blogger that they find credible (Kaye & Johnson, 2011), a fair amount of academic research has examined blog credibility. Blogs are typically viewed as credible sources of information (Hayes & Carr, 2015), and some blog users have rated blogs as more credible than traditional media, although blog users also find traditional media to be credible (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). Blog users particularly assign high marks to blogs for the depth of information provided (Johnson & Kaye).

Credibility of a blog can be assessed in multiple ways, including by level of author, message, site sponsor and the medium (Flanagin & Metzger, 2007). McLuhan’s (1964) famous phrase that the medium is the message implies that academic focus should be placed on the effects of the medium, and not the message (Cosenza, Solomon, & Kwon, 2015). Recent public relations research has found that valence of the message (whether the organization is described positively or negatively) affects perceived credibility of the blog (Kim, Kiousis, & Mollenda, 2015). However, other research indicates that of all the factors—author, message, site sponsor, and medium—the author of the blog is most important to people’s perception of credibility (Cosenza et al.). Credibility of the individual blogger has been shown to predict relational trust in the blog itself (Sung-Un & Joon Soo, 2009) and brand attitudes and purchase intention (Hayes & Carr, 2015). Finally, blog credibility can vary depending on type of blog. For example, corporate blogs are not viewed as credible sources of information (Johnson & Kaye, in press), due to their commercial intent.

**Native Advertising Credibility**

Native advertising is content designed to look similar to the editorial content where it is placed (Howe & Teufel, 2014). The premise is that the advertisement will be more effective if it looks and feels native to the platform (Benton, 2014). Public relations pundit Shel Holtz opines that native advertising offers tremendous potential to public relations practitioners. Holtz (2013) quotes Phil Johnson, who wrote in *AdAge*, “The concept of native advertising...is conceptually the
same as placing press releases that look like independent journalism. It’s a natural fit for public-relations firms” (as cited in Holtz, 2013, p. 15).

In a convenience survey conducted with 112 public relations practitioners (Weinand, LaNicca, & Flynn, 2015), 25% of respondents indicated that they had used native advertising. Roughly 75% of respondents said they like native advertising due to the involvement of journalists who provide credibility, source expertise and the ability to create content that doesn’t look like an ad. Respondents also identified many positive attributes of using native advertising, including expanded messaging across platforms, increased targeting opportunities, greater collaboration with advertising partners and guaranteed placement. Forty-eight percent of public relations practitioners surveyed do not believe people trust native advertising.

Scant academic research has empirically investigated native advertising. Advertising research suggests that consumers find native advertising less annoying and more informative and amusing than banner ads (Tutaj & Van Reijmersdal, 2012). Consumers rate websites with native advertisements as more responsive to consumers compared to websites with banner ads (Becker-Olsen, 2003). Whether an online news site contains a banner ad or native advertisement does not impact people’s perception of credibility toward the online news site (Howe & Teufel, 2014).

**Advertising Versus Public Relations**

The assumption that earned media is more credible than advertising stems from journalists’ gatekeeper role (Grunig, & Grunig, 2000). When journalists choose to write about a product or service it implies that they endorse the product or service. When a journalist writes favorably about a product or an individual, the product gains public support from the third-party endorsement for the message. The endorsement from a journalist is more credible than a paid ad because the journalist is objective.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1996) is a useful framework for conceptualizing the different effects based upon exposure to advertising and earned media. The ELM model posits that individuals use varying levels of effort to process information. Individuals with high motivation and ability tend to focus systematically on information. When individuals focus intently on the information at hand, they are on the central route of processing. Individuals with less motivation and ability find it sufficient to rely on peripheral cues, such as testimonial or quotes, the media source, the quality of the message or the humor of the advertisement, among other cues. Individuals on this track are on a peripheral route of information processing.

According to the ELM, low- and high-involvement situations impact the persuasiveness of a message (Petty & Cacioppo 1996). Petty and Cacioppo define involvement as “intrinsic importance, personal meaning, and consequences” (pp. 82 – 83). In high-involvement situations, a person is likely to focus more intently on the message rather than peripheral cues, such as the expertise or attractiveness of a message source (Chaiken, 1980; Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981). If this argument is extended to the comparison between public relations and advertising, one might assume that a person in the market for a low-involvement product would be more inclined to process a message on a peripheral route, thereby paying more attention to cues such as the credibility of the source (i.e. an earned media story) when making judgments about likelihood to recommend or buy. Conversely, when people are in the market for a high-involvement product, they may be more likely to process information intently, thereby focusing less on the credibility of the source and more on the quality of the information.

A fair number of research studies (Cameron, 1994; Hallahan, 1999a; Jo, 2004; Howes & Sallot, 2013; Michaelson & Stacks, 2009; Supa & Dodd, 2015; Verčič, Verčič, & Laco, 2008)
have tested for differences between exposure to advertising and earned media, in terms of both credibility and effectiveness, typically measured by positive attitudes, word-of-mouth and behavioral intent. Although each study has differed somewhat in its perspective and model components tested, the results have indicated that earned media is not viewed as more credible or effective than advertising.

Hallahan’s (1999a) comprehensive experimental design conducted with students examined for possible interaction effects among source (advertising versus news editorial), involvement and argument quality on the dependent variables of credibility, attitudes and purchase intent. Although news editorial was rated higher than advertising on believability, there were no substantial differences between the advertising and news editorial on the dependent variables.

Jo (2004) compared and contrasted earned media versus advertising based upon their interaction with argument quality, strong and weak. Her experimental design research found no differences in perceived credibility between the two sources. However, she did find an interaction effect between message quality and content type (advertising versus earned media). There were no differences in credibility between news editorial and advertising in conditions of strong argument quality. However, when a weak argument was present in the context of an advertisement rather than earned media story, participants rated the message more favorably. Jo explained the results by noting that in the context of a weak argument, the advertisement may serve as a peripheral cue that prompts people to process more on the cues than the message.

Vercic, Vercic and Laco (2008) tested for differences between an advertisement and a news story based not upon a consumer product, but a social advocacy issue, namely drug users and their reintegration into society. Their experimental design research found no differences in respondents’ attitude or behavioral intent based upon exposure to a news story versus advertisement. They did find some differences, however, based upon exposure to a television versus print message, with television outperforming print in terms of engendering a stronger attitude and behavioral intent.

Michaelson and Stacks (2009) tested for differences between advertising, editorial only, and advertising plus editorial based upon an experimental design using a fictitious zip chip, a low-involvement product. They found no differences between editorial and advertising in terms of measures of awareness, information retained, intent to purchase, and product credibility. However, people reading the editorial, with or without exposure to the advertising, saw the product more closely related to their lifestyle than those reading the advertising, and this appeared to be related to higher levels of overall knowledge about the product from exposure to the editorial.

Howes and Sallot (2013) conducted an experimental design with university business students to test for differences in exposure to a customer testimonial compared to a company spokesperson in different types of business communication channels. Their research found that using a customer testimonial is viewed as more credible than a corporate spokesperson when viewed through media credibility. More specific, the presence of a customer testimonial in the presence of a business article enhanced credibility.

Supa and Dodd (2015) tested for differences between editorial and advertisements in the context of corporate social responsibility messaging. Overall, their experimental design research found that type of messaging (controversial versus traditional) was more important than source in its effects. Respondents, however, rated editorial content slightly more credible than advertising, and that editorial content was associated with greater intent to engage with positive word of mouth.

In summary, the research described casts doubt on the veracity of the claim that earned media is more credible and effective than advertising. However, with the exception of the Howes and Sallot (2013) study, this research has limited its examination to a comparison of advertising versus
earned media only. This research expands our understanding of communication effectiveness and credibility by focusing on a myriad of sources—paid (traditional advertising and native advertising), earned (traditional news story), shared (an independent blogger) and owned (company blog). This study will also shed light on perceptions related to blog credibility and native advertising, a new channel of growing importance to public relations practitioners. The following research questions are thus forwarded based upon the conceptual model provided in Figure 1:

**RQ1:** What sources—paid, earned, shared and owned—do consumers consult prior to making a consumer purchase? Do these differ for low- and high-involvement products?

**RQ2:** How much trust do consumers have in sources to provide accurate and unbiased product information? Is there a difference between low- and high-involvement products?

**RQ3:** What impact do the five sources—traditional advertisement, native advertisement, earned media story, company blog and independent blog—have in terms of creating (a) awareness, (b) knowledge, (c) interest, (d) purchase intent and (e) word of mouth?

**RQ4:** What impact do the five sources—traditional advertisement, native advertisement, earned media story, company blog and independent blog—have on credibility?

**RQ5:** Is there a difference in impact on credibility for low- and high-involvement products?

### Methodology

#### Experimental Design

This research used a 5 (source: traditional news story, independent blog, company blog, traditional advertisement and native advertisement) x 2 (involvement: high-involvement product and low-involvement product) between subjects experimental design to test for effects on awareness, interest, knowledge, purchase intent, word of mouth, and credibility.

#### Stimuli and Procedures

A professional communication agency created ten stimuli. All articles and advertisements appearing in the ten stimuli were identical with the exception of the presence of the traditional advertisement, native advertisement or story about either the low-involvement product or high-involvement product. Key points were taken from the news story and shortened as bullet points for inclusion in the advertisements. All product inventions, product names, company names, and blogger and journalist names were fictitious, to minimize bias.

#### Independent Variables

**Level of involvement**

Level of involvement was conceptualized as the degree of importance and concern with the outcome regarding a product purchase decision (Mittal, 1989). This study conceptualized involvement as either low- or high-level. The fictitious product created as low-involvement was a compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulb with built-in surge protector that retails for $7. The fictitious product created as a high-involvement product decision was a shatterproof, no-glare Commando smartphone with extended battery life that retails for $399.

Pretesting ensured that participants viewed the two products as low- and high-involvement. A sample of public relations practitioners and undergraduate students (n=100) viewed the traditional advertisement versions for the two products and rated them on a 7-point scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) composed of five questions. Participants rated the light bulb a mean score of 11.89 (SD=5.3) and the smartphone a mean score of 22.03 (SD=2.43), indicating they perceive them as significantly different in terms of involvement.
Source

Six stimuli included a four-color spread of the reputable technology page of *The New York Times* (*NYT*) (See Figure 2). The credentials of the *NYT* technology journalist, Ray Fleming, were listed at the top of the page: technology columnist for *The New York Times*, correspondent for CNN and MSNBC, commentator for HGTV, and author of *Technology in Your Home* and *Techie*. The six *NYT* stimuli were identical with the exception of the presence of a traditional advertisement, native advertisement or news story about either the CFL or smartphone (see Figure 3).

Two other stimuli included a professional independent blogger also named Ray Fleming (see Figure 4). Ray was described as a blogger who regularly shares news, information, and product reviews about the latest advances in personal technology products, that he can be seen on CNN and MSNBC and as a commentator on HGTV, and that he is the author of *Technology for Home* and *Techie* and a monthly column in *Wired Magazine*. These two stimuli contained a blog post about either the CFL or smartphone.

The last two stimuli included a blog produced by a fictitious company called Surge Pro, a leader in home electronics (see Figure 5). This descriptor was placed at the top of the company blog: “Welcome to Surge Pro’s Personal Tech blog about innovations in technology products, which can enhance your lifestyle. We regularly share news, information and product reviews about the latest advances in personal technology products.” The two company stimuli contained a blog post about either the CFL or smartphone.

A pretest of the experimental design was conducted with 125 public relations practitioners, students and academics. Numerous public relations practitioners and academics also evaluated the stimuli stories and advertisements for believability and accuracy. In response to this feedback, the authors made multiple revisions to the stimuli and questionnaire items.

Sampling

A sample of 1,500 people participated in the experimental design in September 2015. Participants who were at least 18 years old and living in the United States were recruited and reimbursed for their participation by a consumer panel company.

The experimental design included a diverse sample. Females comprised 50% (n=769) of the sample and males 50% (n = 766). The sample was varied in terms of age: 18-25 (13%, n = 193), 26-35 (21%, n = 315), 36-45 (14%, n = 218), 46-55 (15%, n= 236), 56-65 (17%, n = 261) and 66 or older (20%, n = 312). Participants were primarily Caucasian (83%, n = 1283), followed by African American (6%, n = 87), Hispanic/Latina (5%, n = 72), Asian (3%, n = 49), other (2%, n = 30) and American Indian (1%, n = 14). Participants indicated the following level of education: 1% some high school (1%, n = 15), high school (16%, n = 240), some college (22%, n = 333), associate’s degree (10%, n = 149), bachelor’s degree (25%, n = 392), some graduate work (5%, n = 76), and a graduate degree (21%, n = 330). Participants reported the following income ranges: less than $20,000 (14%, n = 216), $20,000 to $39,999 (21%, n = 316), $40,000 to $59,999 (16%, n = 252), $60,000 to $79,999 (14%, n = 221), $80,000 to $99,999 (13%, n = 195), $100,000 or higher (18%, n = 275) and prefer not to answer (4%, n = 60).

Procedure

After participants elected to participate and read the consent form, they were directed to read the material of their assigned stimuli (150 per stimulus/cell). Participants were prompted
which source—NYT, independent blog, or company blog—they were about to read. Participants were instructed that they had a minimum of three minutes and a maximum of seven minutes to read every story and every advertisement in the stimulus. After reading all the material in the stimulus, participants completed a questionnaire about the overall content in the stimulus. Toward the end of the survey, participants were presented with a close-up of the advertisement, news story, blog post or native advertisement about the smartphone or CFL, which appeared in their original assigned stimuli, and asked to respond to additional questions about credibility.

Dependent Variables

Awareness
Participants were directed to think back to what they had just read and to place a check in the box by any of the products they remembered reading about, whether in an advertisement or a story (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). Eight answers were provided, of which five were correct and three were incorrect. A score was calculated based upon the percentage of statements participants answered correctly.

Knowledge
Basic facts about the featured product served as the baseline of knowledge (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). Participants indicated level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale with five statements about the content that they had read in the stimulus. Three of the statements were correct, and two were incorrect.

Interest
Interest in the featured product (either the smartphone or CFL) was measured by a 5-point scale ranging from one (very uninterested) to five (very interested) (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011).

Purchase intent
Three, 5-point Likert-type statements were used to assess the likelihood of participants buying the product featured if they were in the market for such a product (Lepkowska-White, Brashear, & Weinberger, 2003). Scale items were stated hypothetically. For example, one statement included, “If I were looking for this type of product my likelihood of purchasing the product in (ad/story/blog) would be high.” Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was .95.

Word of mouth
Word of mouth intention was measured through a 3-statement, 5-point Likert scale (Yang & Kang, 2009). Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .92.

Credibility
Credibility of the sources was measured based upon a credibility scale developed by Meyer (1988) and used by others (Jo, 2004). Respondents were asked to complete a 7-point semantic differential scale that included the following items: Not believable/believable; Not accurate/accurate; Not trustworthy/trustworthy; Not biased/biased; Not complete/complete. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .76.

Other variables measured
A series of ordinal-level questions were also asked to determine which sources people most frequently use for new product information for both low- and high-involvement decisions. Finally, participants were asked to indicate how much trust they have in paid, earned, shared and owned media to provide fair and unbiased information.

**Findings**

The first research question investigated what sources do consumers consult prior to making a consumer purchase, and whether they differ for low- and high-involvement products. As indicated by Table 1, when making a routine product decision for an item such as a light bulb or hair dryer, consumers most frequently consult online product reviews written by other consumers, as indicated by the fact that 16% of participants said that they consult online sources “all the time.” Consumers spend roughly the same amount of time consulting traditional advertising and news stories. Native advertising and blogs by independent bloggers are consulted the least often, with close to 45% of participants saying they “never” use native advertising and 42% saying they “never” consult independent bloggers for routine product purchase decisions.

When making an important product purchase decision, such as a smartphone or computer, participants indicated that they consult all sources more frequently compared to routine product purchase decisions (see Table 1). However, other than this difference, the results of the important product purchase decisions mirror those of the routine product purchase decisions. In particular, consumers spend the most time consulting online product reviews written by other consumers, followed by viewing information on a company website, newsletter or blog. Forty-three percent of respondents said they never consult a native advertisement for an important product decision. Participants appear to spend roughly the same amount of time consulting advertisements and news stories for important product purchase decisions.

Research question two examined how much trust consumers have in sources to provide accurate and unbiased product information, and whether there was a difference in trust in sources between low- and high-involvement products. As indicated by Table 2, for a routine product purchase decision, an online product review written by another consumer was rated the most trustworthy \((M = 3.20; SD = .64)\), followed by a story in a newspaper or magazine written by a staff reporter \((M = 3.07; SD = .60)\). A native advertisement was rated the lowest \((M = 2.91; SD = .78)\) followed by advertisements \((M = 2.93; SD = .73)\). However, other than these minor differences, Table 2 suggests that there were not that many differences in levels of trust for the various sources.

When preparing to make an important product purchase decision, the amount of trust decreased slightly for every source when comparing the results of trust between routine and important product decisions (see Table 2). Online product reviews were rated the highest \((M = 3.03; SD = .78)\), followed by the story in a newspaper or magazine written by a staff reporter \((M = 2.86; SD = .74)\). Native advertisements were rated as the least trustworthy \((M = 2.50; SD = .90)\).

Research question three examined what impact the five sources—traditional advertisement, native advertisement, earned media story, company blog and independent blog—have in terms of creating (a) awareness, (b) knowledge, (c) interest, (d) purchase intent and (e) word of mouth.

There were minimal differences in awareness based upon source. There was only a statistically significant difference between the news story and advertisement for the CFL \((t(305) = 1.60, p = .05)\) For the CLF, respondents exposed to the traditional news story reported greater awareness \((M = 7)\) compared to the traditional advertisement \((M = 6.13)\).
When measuring knowledge about the CFL based upon the five statements, results indicated that there was only a statistically significant difference based upon one statement \((F(4, 760) = 2.81, p = .025)\). A post hoc Tukey test indicated that knowledge levels were slightly lower only for native advertising \((M = 3.52; SD = .93)\) compared to traditional advertising \((M = 3.82; SD = 3.82; .90)\). There was also one statistically significant difference in one statement for the smartphone \((F(4, 765) = 2.61, p = .035)\). A post hoc Tukey test showed that knowledge levels were slightly lower for the corporate blog compared to independent blog.

Interest in both CFL and smartphone was moderate regardless of source, with scores ranging from a low of 3.04 (smartphone company blog) to a high of 3.57 (CFL traditional ad). There were no statistically significant differences in product interest based upon exposure to source for either the CFL \((F(4, 760) = 1.67, p = .154)\) or the smartphone \((F = (4, 765) = .518, p = .723)\).

Product purchase intent scores hovered around a mean score of 10 (scale ranged from 3 to 15) for all sources for both the CFL and smartphone, suggesting that participants had moderate interest in both products. There were no statistically significant differences in purchase intent based upon source for either the CFL \((F(4, 760) = 1.49, p = .20)\) or smartphone \((F = (4, 765) = 1.00, p = .406)\).

Word of mouth intention scores also settled around mean scores of 10 (scale ranged from 3-15), indicative that participants are likely to recommend both the CFL and smartphone to friends and family and say positive things. There were no statistically significant differences in purchase intent based upon source for either the CFL \((F(4, 760) = 1.74, p = .138)\) or smartphone \((F = (4, 765) = .383, p = .501)\).

Research question four examined the impact of the five sources on perceived credibility. Descriptive and inferential results for the credibility scale and individual items for both the CFL and smartphone are provided in Table 3. As indicated by the descriptive statistics, the mean scores for all sources were relatively the same. For the CFL, there was a statistically significant difference for the credibility scale \((F(4, 760) = 3.80, p = .005)\) and the individual items that measured believability \((F(4, 760) = 2.96, p = .02)\), trustworthiness \((F(4, 760) = 3.17, p = .013)\) and accuracy \((F(4, 760) = 3.75, p = .005)\) Post hoc Tukey tests indicated that the differences were between traditional advertising and native advertising. Traditional advertising was rated more believable and trustworthy. Interestingly, native advertising was rated as more accurate than traditional advertising.

There were no differences for credibility based upon exposure to source for the smartphone \((F(4, 765) = 1.777; p = .132)\). For one of the credibility items, trustworthiness, there was a statistically significant difference \((F(4, 765) = 3.05, p = .017)\). Post hoc Tukey tests indicated that an independent blog post \((M = 5.68, SD = 1.26)\) was rated more trustworthy than a company blog or website \((M = 5.16; SD = 1.47)\).

Research question five asked if there are differences in credibility for low- and high-involvement products. An independent t-Test indicated that there was no difference in credibility for low- and high-involvement products \((t(1533) = .106, p = .915)\) nor was there an interaction effect between product type and source on perceived credibility \((F(765, 770) = .105, p = .746)\).

**Discussion**

This study provides insight into how often people consult sources to make product purchase decisions and the trust that they have in those sources in terms of providing accurate and unbiased information. This research also contributes to our understanding of how news stories compare to company generated blogs, independent blogs, traditional advertising and native advertising on
measures of communication lifestyle effectiveness dimensions, credibility perceptions and behavioral intentions.

The number one source of information for both routine and important product decisions consumers is online product reviews written by other consumers. Consumers consult native advertising the least often for routine and important product purchase decisions. This finding is not surprising given that native advertising is so new, and that native advertising content often features a human interest story, and not product information. As is also to be expected, this research indicates that people spend more time consulting a myriad of sources when making an important product purchase decision. Independent bloggers and news stories written by a journalist are not consulted as frequently as online consumer reviews, company blogs, and advertisements.

In terms of the amount of trust in sources, consumers have the greatest amount of trust in online product reviews. This finding coincides with the 2015 Edelman Trust Barometer research that shows that a person’s family and friends are the most trusted. Among the five sources, a news story written by reporter was rated the second most trustworthy. This descriptive survey finding contradicts the findings of the experimental design portion of the project that found there were no significant differences in credibility among the sources. Yet, the fact that when asked, participants reported a higher level of trust in the media compared to advertising coincides with the survey research of Hallahan (1999b). Hallahan found that university students rated news as more trustworthy, believable and accurate in comparison to advertising. Hallahan explained the contradiction in findings of extant experimental research and his survey research by hypothesizing that people may be “more positively predisposed to processing information in the form of news compared to advertising. Stated another way, audiences might be less negatively predisposed toward news than advertising” (p. 345). Hallahan explains that in certain situations, that predisposition may give the edge in credibility to news media. Hallahan’s explanation is certainly one possibility for the confounding results.

Consumers’ level of trust in sources is greater for a low-involvement product compared to the high-involvement product, thereby supporting persuasion theory and research (Chaiken, 1980; Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981). This finding indicates that when people are making an important product decision, they are more likely to focus intently on the message and less on peripheral cues such as the source.

Native advertising was rated lower than traditional advertising on measures of credibility for the CFL, the low-involvement product. Although the difference in credibility was relatively small and that there were no differences in credibility among traditional advertising and native advertising for the smartphone, these findings nonetheless suggest that public relations practitioners may want to carefully consider placing product messaging in native advertisements. Future research will also want to more thoroughly explore people’s perceptions of and acceptance of native advertising.

The results that an earned media story is neither more effective nor credible when compared to traditional advertising coincides with past research (Cameron, 1994; Jo, 2004; Hallahan, 2009; Jo, 2004; Vercic, Vercic & Laco, 2008). Indeed, this study is among the ninth empirical research study to cast doubt on the supposed superiority of public relations to paid advertising. Perhaps more importantly, this research extends our understanding of how public relations compares to independent blogs, company-generated material and native advertising. While it may be evident that public relations is not more effective than the other sources in terms of engendering credibility and a call to action, it is important to note that it operates on an equal footing. Not only is public relations as effective and credible as the sources, it’s typically more cost-effective.
As indicated by the descriptive statistical results of this project, consumers are consulting a number of sources for product information. The results of the experimental design indicate that all sources in the PESO model are an important part of the communication lifecycle process in terms of engendering awareness, knowledge, interest, product intent and word of mouth and should be included in communications planning. Given the changes in the media landscape, the lines between sources are blurring. People may not even readily process from where they are receiving information. As long as there is value in the information presented, people likely care less about the source and more about the quality of the message and/or information that they need to solve their problem. Perhaps public relations practitioners should focus less on source placement and more on providing messages and quality information that provides value to target audiences.
References


Nielsen. The role of content in the consumer decision making process (2014, March).


Figure 1
Conceptual Model of Source, Level of Involvement, Communication Lifecycle and Credibility.
350

Figure 2


By ROY FUSCO

Samsung’s New Smartwatch Lets You Make Calls from Your Wrist

The smartphone native ad, CFL news story and CFL native ad rotated

A Television Designed for the Outdoors

By ROY FUSCO

The Smartphone and CFL traditional ads rotated into this space

The Leash Camera Strap

By ROY FUSCO

Polaroid Develops a New Instant Camera

By ROY FUSCO

Shatterproof, No-Glare Commando

Smartphone with Extended Battery Life

By ROY FUSCO

Tagg Pet Tracker

By ROY FUSCO

Powerbeats2

BLACKBERRY PASSPORT
GETS WORK DONE

By ROY FUSCO

11:55

The Smartphone and CFL traditional ads rotated into this space
Figure 3

*News Stories, Native Advertisements, and Traditional Advertisements.*

**Smartphone News Story**

**Shatterproof, No-Glare Commando Smartphone with Extended Battery Life**

By RAY FLEMING

The buzz being generated by newly released smartphones has manufacturers pulling out all the stops to prove they know what it takes to hang with the big boys. But even busy newcomers haven’t been able to solve the most common smartphone problems as reported in a February 2015 *Wired Magazine* reader survey.

The number one problem identified in the study is battery life. Internet connections, apps, and status bar-to-sell software keep smartphones buzzing, batteries drained and users frustrated. Problem number two is a cracked or scratched screen. While smashable smartphones can often continue to function, readers left that manufacturers should be addressed this common issue by now. Readers left the same about the third most common problem cited: screen glare from sun or lights. Non-glare screen protectors can be purchased and installed separately, but they can result in air bubbles or hinder touch screen performance.

**CFL News Story**

**Built-In Surge Protector Prevents CFL Failure**

By RAY FLEMING

The incandescent light bulb has been around since the late 1800s, but the technology’s dominance is dimming. Due to a law passed by Congress in 2007, tungsten-filament 60- and 60-watt incandescent light bulbs, representing more than 50 percent of the consumer lighting market, can no longer be manufactured in the U.S. Until the supplies run out, the old bulbs will be available on store shelves, but consumers are already moving to the new technologies, such as compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) that use far less electricity and last longer. CFLs use one-fifth to one-third the electric power and last eight to 15 times longer. Switching one bulb can save more than five times its purchase price in electricity costs over the bulb’s lifetime. But not all the reviews are glowing.

CFL bulbs are 4-5 times more expensive than traditional incandescent bulbs, but the price has been dropping. Given that lighting your home accounts for about one-quarter of your electric bill, the energy savings outweigh the higher cost over time. Initial complaints about CFLs slow starts to full brightness and incompatibility with dimmers have been addressed and the light quality is now more like that generated by incandescent bulbs. One persistent problem is CFL failure, with bulbs burning out way too soon or even, alarmingly, expoding. This is due to power surges, a frequent but often unnoticed occurrence in your home’s electricity flow.

A CFL bulb is now available with a built-in surge protector that will eliminate this annoying problem and protect your investment in energy efficient lighting. The cost is about $7. So, now there is no excuse for avoiding the transition from incandescent bulbs.
COMMANDO SMARTPHONE SOLVES PROBLEMS

Extended Battery Life
Shatter – Proof
No-Glare

Features:
- Extended battery life - more than ten hours longer than any smartphone currently available.
- Shatter and scratch resistant touch screen made of synthetic sapphire, one of the hardest minerals on earth.
- Advanced fail for easy reading in sunlight - incorporates anti-reflective technology that kills glare.
- Car Tracker built-in feature dedicated to supporting you behind the wheel with parking, navigation and communications.

Starting at $399

Improved CFL
with Power Surge Protection

Save on electricity with efficient, long-lasting, compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) - now with built-in surge protector to prevent bulb failure.

Also features:
- Superior compatibility
- Instant energy savings
- Inconspicuous (like light quality)

Cost is only $7
Available everywhere lighting is sold.
Figure 4.
Independent Blog Stimulus.
Samsung's New Smartwatch Lets You Make Calls From Your Wrist

Samsung has added a new entry to its growing catalog of smartwatches with the debut of its Gear S. Unlike its previous smartwatches, however, this one lacks its own 3G data connection, which means it doesn't have to be tied to your smartphone at all times. That's a big deal for smartwatches.

Sporting a curved 1.3-inch display that wraps around your wrist, the Gear S looks more comfortable to wear — and more capable — than Samsung's previous watches. Still, with a larger display area than its predecessors, the Gear S is fairly bulky. The Gear S is thicker and wider than the other Samsung smartwatches, which are already fairly thick and tall.

The big innovation here, though, is that you'll be able to use the Gear S independently of your smartphone. You can send messages and receive and reply to notifications from your social networks and other apps via the watch's Wi-Fi control or its onboard keyboard.

What's more, you can make and receive calls from the watch. If you don't want to use the watch's 3G connection, you can pair it with your smartphone via Bluetooth or jump on an available WiFi connection.

The Gear S includes turn-by-turn pedestrian navigation, news updates, a heart-rate monitor and Nike+ Running app integration.

Samsung hasn't announced pricing for the Gear S yet, but company CEO said it will begin shipping the watch soon.

A Television Designed for the Outdoors

Outdoor spaces typically suffer — or benefit — from the lack of television. Outdoor TVs are designed to work outside.

Television sets do not normally do well in extreme heat, cold or the type of moisture and humidity that is present in most outdoor conditions. But Outdoor TV's are adapted from the industrial displays the company builds for use in places like backyard concession stands.

Its consumer TVs, the Signature series, are available in four sizes, from 32 inches to 65 inches, priced from $1,500 to $7,000. They borrow technology from the industrial sets to withstand the elements — for the minimum of a two-year warranty — and 50% chance of survival at 47°C.

The company said that sets were made of moisture-resistant parts, primarily from Asia, and assembled in the United States. The television is encased in a weather-resistant plastic case with four multidimensional fans to cool the inside in hot weather. The case is ventilated to allow air to pass through it and not block it. It also provides barrier to spiders, which like to nest in warm, protected places.

The Signature Series uses a less reflective screen than that of an indoor set, and the LCD screen is 20 percent brighter than the standard screen.

The owner of the set said he thought the picture was excellent, though the brightness varied, as it was most noticeable in the evenings. Even at night, he said, the TV's brightness did not attract bugs, although it did attract neighbors.

The Leash Camera Strap

Kickstarter.com, as almost everyone knows by now, is a website where inventors present their brainstorms to the public in hopes of raising enough money to move forward with production. Sometimes great new products are born. Sometimes they flop.

The Leash is in the first category. It's exactly the sort of thing Kickstarter projects are so good at funding: revolutionizing some mundane object in our lives that hasn't been rethought since 1973.

In this case, it's the camera strap.

A single sensor reflects beautiful photos, but you pay the price in weight, bulk and awkwardness. The Leash ($40) is designed to help.

The first thing it does is spare you the nightmare of attaching a camera strap — usually a 30-minute procedure involving shoulder straps and running glasses. Instead, you fasten the Leash to your black plastic anchors to your camera's camera-strap loops.

Then there's the nylon strap itself, which looks onto these anchors quickly and simply and holds 20 pounds. It starts out as a regular mesh strap, but it can expand to twice its original length when you want to use it as a sling strap, where the camera hangs at your hip instead of your sternum.

In another configuration, you can clip an anchor to your belt, turning the Leash into a handy improvement prop. You pull it tight against the strap the tension helps keep it steady.
Figure 5. Company Blog Stimulus.
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Sporting a curved 3-inch display that wraps around your wrist, the Gear S’s design is more comfortable to wear — and more svelte — than Samsung’s rectangular watches. Still, with a larger display comes a bulkier form factor. The Gear S is fairly bulky. The Gear S is thinner and lighter than other Samsung smartwatches, which are already fairly thin and light.

The big innovation here, though, is that you'll be able to use the Gear S independently of your smartphone. You can send messages and receive and reply to notifications from your social networks and other apps on the watch’s onscreen controls or on its touchscreen keyboard.

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Television sets do not normally do well in extreme heat, cold or the typical outdoor elements. But SunBriteTV are adapted from the industrial displays the company builds for use in places like boatyards, restaurants, and ranches.

Its consumer TV, the Signature series, are available in four sizes, from 32 inches to 65 inches, priced from $1,999 to $7,999. They use U-Bolt technology from the industrial sets to withstand the elements (for a minimum of a year-round warranty) and as the season changes they turn off.

The company said the sets were made of moisture-resistant parts primarily from the UK, and assembled in the US. The television is encased in a weather-resistant plastic case with four multi-speed fans so cool the inside in hot weather. The case is vented with filter-free enough to pass air but not dust. It also provides a barrier to spiders, which like to nest in warm, protected places.

The SunBrite screen has a matte finish that is reflective, unlike the one of an indoor set and the LED screen is 30 percent brighter than the standard screen.

An owner of these said she thought the picture was weather-proofed, which she watched mostly in the evening. Even at night, the owner said the TV's brightness did not attract any bugs, although it did attract neighbors.

This was fine, she said because they brought their own wine.

The Leash Camera Strap

Apple as everyone knows by now, is a website where one can purchase their bestselling products in the public in hopes of raising enough money to move forward with production. Sometimes truly great new products are born. Sometimes they fail.

The leash is the first category in the site of all Kickstarter projects are so great at updating or refining some mundane object in our lives that aren't been redesigned since 1723.

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A simple-dose reflex is a can of beautiful photos, but you pay the price in weight, bulk and awkwardness. The Leash (SMR) is designed to help.

The first thing it does is spank you the nightmares of attaching a camera strap — usually a 20-minute procedure involving crutches, needles and sewing pins. Instead, you slip on the Leash’s own black plastic anchor to your camera’s connexions loops.

Then there’s the nylon strap itself, which hooks into these anchors quickly and simply and comfortably. 500 pounds. It starts out as a regular neck strap but it is expandable to twice its original length. If you want to extend it as a dog lead, where the camera hangs at your hip instead of your sternum.

In another configuration, you can clip an anchor to your belt, turning the leash into a hands-free improvised tripod. You pull tight upon the strap, the tension helps keep it steady.
Table 1
Sources Consulted for Product Purchase Decisions.

When preparing to make a routine product purchase decision, such as a light bulb or hair dryer, how often do you use following sources for product information?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Never % (N)</th>
<th>25% of the time % (N)</th>
<th>Half of the time % (N)</th>
<th>75% of the time % (N)</th>
<th>All of the time % (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Story written by a journalist</td>
<td>38.2 (586)</td>
<td>24.8 (380)</td>
<td>18.4 (283)</td>
<td>10.5 (161)</td>
<td>8.1 (125)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog post from an independent blogger</td>
<td>42.3 (650)</td>
<td>20.5 (314)</td>
<td>17.9 (274)</td>
<td>12.4 (191)</td>
<td>6.9 (106)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company website, newsletter, blog or catalog</td>
<td>30.3 (465)</td>
<td>24.6 (377)</td>
<td>22.2 (341)</td>
<td>14.0 (215)</td>
<td>8.9 (137)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online product reviews by other consumers</td>
<td>16.9 (259)</td>
<td>19.2 (295)</td>
<td>23.4 (359)</td>
<td>24.6 (377)</td>
<td>16.0 (245)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td>31.3 (480)</td>
<td>25.9 (398)</td>
<td>22.0 (337)</td>
<td>12.3 (189)</td>
<td>8.5 (131)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native advertisement</td>
<td>44.6 (684)</td>
<td>18.1 (278)</td>
<td>17.7 (272)</td>
<td>11.6 (178)</td>
<td>8.0 (123)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When preparing to make an important product purchase decision, such as a smartphone or laptop computer, how often you use following sources for product information?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Never % (N)</th>
<th>25% of the time % (N)</th>
<th>Half of the time % (N)</th>
<th>75% of the time % (N)</th>
<th>All of the time % (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Story written by a journalist</td>
<td>33.6 (515)</td>
<td>28.5 (437)</td>
<td>17.7 (272)</td>
<td>10.9 (167)</td>
<td>9.4 (144)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog post from an independent blogger</td>
<td>38.6 (593)</td>
<td>22.1 (339)</td>
<td>18.8 (288)</td>
<td>12.2 (187)</td>
<td>8.3 (128)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company website, newsletter, blog or catalog</td>
<td>23.5 (360)</td>
<td>26.3 (403)</td>
<td>22.5 (346)</td>
<td>15.6 (240)</td>
<td>12.1 (186)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online product reviews by other consumers</td>
<td>13.3 (204)</td>
<td>17.5 (268)</td>
<td>25.0 (384)</td>
<td>24.5 (376)</td>
<td>19.7 (303)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td>30.6 (469)</td>
<td>26.4 (406)</td>
<td>21.5 (330)</td>
<td>12.6 (193)</td>
<td>8.9 (137)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native advertisement</td>
<td>42.9 (659)</td>
<td>19.2 (295)</td>
<td>17.6 (270)</td>
<td>11.7 (179)</td>
<td>8.6 (132)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2
Trust in Sources for Product Information.

When preparing to make a routine product purchase decision, such as a light bulb or hair dryer, how much do you trust the following sources to provide accurate and unbiased information?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Trust Completely % (N)</th>
<th>Trust Somewhat % (N)</th>
<th>Distrust Somewhat % (N)</th>
<th>Distrust Completely % (N)</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Story written by a journalist</td>
<td>16.9 (260)</td>
<td>63.4 (973)</td>
<td>14.9 (229)</td>
<td>4.8 (73)</td>
<td>3.07 (.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog post from independent blogger</td>
<td>15.4 (236)</td>
<td>51.8 (795)</td>
<td>25.6 (393)</td>
<td>7.2 (111)</td>
<td>2.97 (.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company website, newsletter, blog or catalog</td>
<td>18.3 (281)</td>
<td>50.0 (767)</td>
<td>26.3 (403)</td>
<td>5.5 (84)</td>
<td>2.98 (.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online product reviews written by consumers</td>
<td>28.3 (434)</td>
<td>55.2 (848)</td>
<td>12.4 (191)</td>
<td>4.0 (62)</td>
<td>3.20 (.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td>15.0 (231)</td>
<td>45.8 (703)</td>
<td>30.4 (467)</td>
<td>8.7 (134)</td>
<td>2.93 (.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native advertisement</td>
<td>12.8 (197)</td>
<td>37.9 (581)</td>
<td>35.5 (545)</td>
<td>13.8 (212)</td>
<td>2.91 (.78)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When preparing to make an important product purchase decision, such as a smartphone or computer, how much do you trust the following sources to provide accurate and unbiased information?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Trust Completely % (N)</th>
<th>Trust Somewhat % (N)</th>
<th>Distrust Somewhat % (N)</th>
<th>Distrust Completely % (N)</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Story written by a journalist</td>
<td>15.4 (236)</td>
<td>61.0 (937)</td>
<td>17.5 (268)</td>
<td>6.1 (94)</td>
<td>2.86 (.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog post from an independent blogger</td>
<td>14.6 (224)</td>
<td>53.2 (817)</td>
<td>24.0 (368)</td>
<td>8.2 (126)</td>
<td>2.74 (.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company website, newsletter, blog or catalog</td>
<td>18.4 (282)</td>
<td>48.9 (750)</td>
<td>25.4 (390)</td>
<td>7.4 (113)</td>
<td>2.78 (.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online product reviews by other consumers</td>
<td>26.6 (409)</td>
<td>55.2 (848)</td>
<td>12.9 (198)</td>
<td>5.2 (80)</td>
<td>3.03 (.78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td>13.0 (199)</td>
<td>48.5 (744)</td>
<td>29.6 (455)</td>
<td>8.9 (137)</td>
<td>2.65 (.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native advertisement</td>
<td>12.8 (196)</td>
<td>39.4 (605)</td>
<td>32.8 (503)</td>
<td>15.0 (231)</td>
<td>2.50 (.90)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3

*Perceived Credibility of Source.*

#### Credibility Based Upon CLF Stimulus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>News Story</th>
<th>Company Blog</th>
<th>Independent Blog</th>
<th>Native Ad</th>
<th>Traditional Ad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Believability *</td>
<td>5.66 (1.30)</td>
<td>5.64 (1.23)</td>
<td>5.62 (1.23)</td>
<td>4.46 (1.80)</td>
<td>5.24 (1.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust *</td>
<td>5.45 (1.34)</td>
<td>5.39 (1.30)</td>
<td>5.44 (1.3)</td>
<td>5.19 (1.42)</td>
<td>5.73 (1.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy *</td>
<td>5.55 (1.3)</td>
<td>5.51 (1.3)</td>
<td>5.44 (1.26)</td>
<td>5.78 (1.16)</td>
<td>5.51 (1.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-bias</td>
<td>4.46 (1.8)</td>
<td>4.17 (1.8)</td>
<td>4.55 (1.8)</td>
<td>4.73 (1.9)</td>
<td>4.45 (1.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completeness</td>
<td>5.24 (1.5)</td>
<td>5.3 (1.31)</td>
<td>5.31 (1.4)</td>
<td>5.16 (1.4)</td>
<td>5.52 (1.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale*</td>
<td>26.36 (5.4)</td>
<td>26 (5.33)</td>
<td>26.36 (5.39)</td>
<td>25.41 (5.51)</td>
<td>27.71 (5.09)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Statistically significant at .05 level

#### Credibility Based upon Smartphone Stimulus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>News Story</th>
<th>Company Blog</th>
<th>Independent Blog</th>
<th>Native Ad</th>
<th>Traditional Ad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Believability</td>
<td>5.72 (1.22)</td>
<td>5.49 (1.40)</td>
<td>5.73 (1.19)</td>
<td>5.62 (1.33)</td>
<td>5.59 (1.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust *</td>
<td>5.44 (1.22)</td>
<td>5.16 (1.47)</td>
<td>5.68 (1.26)</td>
<td>5.36 (1.44)</td>
<td>5.26 (1.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>5.56 (1.15)</td>
<td>5.47 (1.27)</td>
<td>5.75 (1.14)</td>
<td>5.44 (1.32)</td>
<td>5.44 (1.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-bias</td>
<td>4.52 (1.78)</td>
<td>4.40 (1.99)</td>
<td>4.57 (1.73)</td>
<td>4.71 (1.9)</td>
<td>4.37 (1.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completeness</td>
<td>5.34 (1.37)</td>
<td>5.33 (1.41)</td>
<td>5.58 (1.23)</td>
<td>5.20 (1.52)</td>
<td>5.32 (1.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>26.57 (5.32)</td>
<td>25.85 (5.4)</td>
<td>27.31 (4.8)</td>
<td>26.33 (5.67)</td>
<td>25.97 (5.66)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Statistically significant at .05 level
Exploring Ethics and Client Work in Public Relations Education

Katie R. Place
Quinnipiac University

Abstract
The qualitative study explored the role of ethics and client work in PR education. Participants perceived that client work prepared them to prioritize ethics in their work, align strategic work with a client’s mission and values, learn respect for fellow teammates and the client, and learn about separation of self and work.
Introduction

Among the personality traits and key competencies expected of entry-level public relations professionals, ethics and integrity, strategic planning, and “knowing how the world works and connects to their clients” are especially necessary (CPRE Summary Report, 2015, p. 7). Service-learning or client work has been cited as especially beneficial for preparing students for the profession, because it exposes them to real-world contexts and helps students develop client and personal interaction skills (Muturi, An & Mwangi, 2013). Such hands-on learning has also been found to improve students’ moral development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) and more sophisticated ethical awareness and thinking (Canary, 2007; Gale & Bunton, 2005; Waters & Burton, 2008). Currently, a dearth of research exists that addresses the connection between public relations client work and professional competencies, such as ethics. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to further explore the role of client work in public relations education, specifically in terms of how it prepares students to face the ethical challenges of today’s public relations workplace.

Literature Review

Ethics in Public Relations Education

Ethics are the study of what is defined morally good or bad by a society. They should not be confused with industry practices, understanding “what you can get away with,” or simply following the law (Parsons, 2008, p. 8). Unfortunately, public relations students and educators alike often grapple with the industry’s reputation as unethical (Fullerton, McKinnon & Kendrick, 2012; Martinson, 2004) and students’ naïve or basic interpretation of ethical concepts (Martinson, p. 2). Integrating ethics education into public relations course content thus plays an important role of increasing students’ awareness of ethical issues (Conway & Groshek, 2008), remediating students’ simple, relativistic, or idealistic ethical thinking (Plaisance, 2006) and shaping future public relations professionals’ ethical leadership ability (Gale & Bunton, 2005).

Indeed, practitioners and educators identified ethics as one of the five most essential areas of public relations curriculum (DiStaso, Stacks & Botan, 2009). Scholarship has recommend that ethics not only exist as a stand-alone course, but also be integrated into all public relations course content (CPRE Summary Report, 2015; Erzikova, 2009; Harrison, 1990). Ethics skills training and discussion in course content plays an especially key role in teaching professional ethics, helping students learn how to resolve moral conflicts (CPRE, 2006; Erzikova, 2009), and guiding ethical behavior as public relations professionals take on more strategic workplace roles (DiStaso, Stacks & Botan, 2009). Ethics training should draw upon a variety of disciplinary approaches, consider various cultural contexts, offer a balance between theory and practice, and integrate professional or “real-world” scenarios (Austin & Toth, 2011, pp. 509, 512). In turn, increasing students’ awareness and facility with ethics may increase students’ personal, moral, and professional development (Eschenfelder, 2011, p. 455).

Scholars have identified various techniques for teaching ethics throughout the public relations curriculum, including case studies (Cabot, 2005; Canary, 2007; Christians, 2008; Erzikova, 2009; Fullerton, McKinnon & Kendrick, 2012; Pauly & Hutchison, 2001), narrative inquiry (Eschenfelder, 2011), service learning or hands on experience (Motley & Sturgill, 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Waters & Burton, 2008), internships (Conway & Groshek, 2008), and class lectures or discussions (Conway & Groshek, 2008; Hutchison, 2002; Plaisance, 2006). Case studies have been cited as most effective means of teaching ethics and improving students’ moral reasoning, especially when they offer ethical dilemmas with which students can relate.
(Canary, 2007). However, Eschenfelder (2011) suggested that narrative inquiry (via a professional interview project) transcends case studies by offering students richer opportunities for lived experience, personal interaction, and personal reflection. Still, as educators strive to further bridge the gap between theory and practice, service learning techniques demonstrate considerable merit. Applying Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development, Waters and Burton (2008), for example, found that service learning coursework advanced students’ moral development from a personal interest schema (lowest stage of moral reasoning) to a postconventional schema (highest stage of moral reasoning) (p. 22). Similarly, Motley and Sturgill (2013) found that students enrolled in a service-learning course honed their understandings of diverse publics and their ethical responsibilities as communicators (p. 175).

Service Learning in Public Relations

Service learning is an extension of experiential learning that stresses an understanding of one’s civic responsibility and community needs (Motley & Sturgill, 2013). According to the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, service learning is a process that utilizes service work to promote self-reflection and the acquisition of values and skills (“What is Service-Learning, p. 1). Such an approach to learning hold several benefits for students including a stronger knowledge of the community, increased engagement with course content, active engagement as citizens, developing networking contacts and partnerships, and exploring career options (Waters & Burton, 2008, p. 10). Applied to public relations curriculum, service-learning may take the form of students performing communications-based work for a client or organization (Texter & Smith, 1999). Clients are often included in class meetings, sharing of information, and the final grading process (Benigni, Cheng, & Cameron, 2004, p. 269).

Whereas scholars have cited case studies and narrative inquiry as effective methods for bridging the gap between theory and practice of public relations ethics (Eschenfelder, 2011; Fullerton, McKinnon & Kendrick, 2012), little research has been conducted on how service learning or client work opportunities fill that gap. Of the research that has been conducted at the intersection of service-learning and ethics, findings suggest that service learning improves students’ ability to engage in moral reasoning (Waters & Burton, 2008). More research is necessary in order to understand service learning’s role in improving students’ moral and professional development. Waters and Burton (2008) suggest that mentoring of students by moral non-profit clients may be an important factor (p. 25).

The purpose of this paper was to further explore the role of client work in public relations education, specifically in terms of how it prepares students to face the ethical challenges of the public relations workplace. Informed by the literature regarding public relations education, service-learning, and ethics, two research questions guided this exploratory qualitative study: RQ1: How do public relations students define ethics in the context of client work? and RQ2: How do students perceive client work to prepare them to be ethical practitioners in the public relations workplace?

Method

A qualitative method was chosen for this exploratory study of students’ meaning making of public relations client work and ethics. It is especially appropriate for generating in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Potter, 1996) and learning how meanings are attached to social experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Sample
Twenty public relations students at two mid-sized private universities (one in the Northeast and one in the Midwest) who had completed a public relations campaigns course during the 2014 or 2015 fall or spring semesters were interviewed between December 2014 and December 2015. Students were recruited using a purposive method via an e-mail recruitment letter.

Six males and fourteen females, 17 of whom were Caucasian American, two of whom were African American, one of whom was Asian American formed the resulting sample. The majority of the students were undergraduate students between 21 to 23 years of age; however, four graduate students who had taken the campaigns course also participated. They ranged in age from late twenties to early fifties. All participants were assigned a pseudonym.

Procedure

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted by the researcher using an interview protocol featuring rapport-building, open-ended, and specific questions in a pre-determined order (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 13). Interviews, ranging from 30 to 90 minutes, were conducted face-to-face and via telephone. Students were acquainted to the interview process with rapport-building questions, such as "What did you like best about the public relations client work you did?" Next, open-ended questions, such as "Tell me about the types of ethical decisions you made while working for our client," "How did your own notion of ethics factor into the client work you did?" and "How has this client work prepared you to enter the public relations industry?" were used to explore students meaning-making of public relations client work and ethics. Probes and follow-up questions, such as "Why?" “Can you expand on that?” or "Can you please give me an example of..." were sometimes used to elicit additional description or context from students’ responses to questions.

Data Analysis

The author applied a thematic analysis method to analyze each fully transcribed interview for patterns and themes (Boyatzis, 1998). Transcripts were read line-by-line several times to create a list of themes that emerged organically and inductively during the review process. Themes were then assigned corresponding codes that applied to each research question. Additionally, the researcher wrote observer comments during the transcript typing and coding process, and engaged in reflexive dialogue with other scholars to critically explore her personal biases and interpretations of the data.

Results

This exploratory qualitative study of 20 public relations campaigns students sought to understand how students defined ethics in the context of client work and how students perceived client work to prepare them to be ethical professionals in the public relations workplace. Four strong themes arose regarding how students defined ethics. Ethics in the context of client work were described as a) benefiting everyone equally, b) being honest, c) following one’s personal moral beliefs and interestingly, and lastly d) bracketing or “sweeping aside” one’s personal opinions or values. Students perceived client work to prepare them to a) prioritize ethics in their work, b) learn respect for fellow teammates, the professor, and the client, c) learn separation of self and work (professionalism as a form of ethics, and d) learn that being ethical relies on coaching and mentoring. Themes regarding each research question are explored in depth below.

Ethics as benefiting everyone equally – Given the client work environment in which students were constantly weighing the ethics of communicating on behalf of a client to many
Being honest and transparent - Many students described ethics as a function of honesty and transparency. Combining these two elements, Mary said, “ethics means being completely transparent. Basically just being honest every step of the way. Making yourself available to communicate. I think you have to be honest.” Alexandra also defined ethics as being honest. She drew upon her knowledge of the Volvo crisis, in which Volvo manipulated and concealed emissions test data, sharing, “I think of Volvo. You have to make sure your client is ethical, honest, and in a positive relationship with your outside publics.”

When probed further about what “honesty” meant, some students offered interpretations that discussed avoiding lying or misrepresenting the work they do. For example, Caroline shared that client work in the campaigns class was similar to working in a public relations agency. Just as agency professionals are honest and accountable for their work, she explained that it was important to remain honest about the work she was conducting for the client. “The biggest application of ethics that you could apply to this client work is if you say you are putting in the time and then you are putting in the time,” she stated. With a more literal interpretation of honesty as “not lying” Catherine shared her viewpoint: I think ethics is just being honest and open and truthful with your client. You can’t obviously lie about what you are doing. Or, if they ask you to do something you don’t think is appropriate or going against PRSA guidelines or values, then you have to have open two-way communication with your client or anyone on the campaign to make sure that you are being truthful, loyal and honest throughout the entire process to make sure no laws are being broken and guidelines are being followed properly.

Following one’s personal moral beliefs – For some students, ethics was a deeply tied to students’ personal convictions, how they were raised, or beliefs structures. Thus, a strong theme emerged regarding ethics as a direct extension of one’s own moral beliefs. Alexandra, explained, for example that, “Ethics are your own beliefs about what is right and what is wrong. You have to do what you believe is right for yourself – and not just everybody else. You want to always do the right thing! Stay true to your own beliefs, because it’s better for yourself in the long run. And it’s good for a company, too.” Using a moral compass metaphor, Kent stated, “I think ethics is pretty much an adherence to a moral compass. I think that as a public relations professional – often times the work that you are doing may conflict with what you deem to be moral or ethical.”

Like Kent, some participants brought up situations in which a client’s mission or background could challenge their personal beliefs. Jack elaborated on this by sharing his opposition of the tobacco industry, but noting that professionals at times will be called to advocate on behalf of a client without abandoning your core ethical beliefs. He shared, “I refuse to work on tobacco! So there are certain industries I won’t touch because I hate tobacco and I won’t pitch to that industry. But as a PR pro, you are forced to sell stories that aren’t necessarily newsworthy and you will be fired or the agency will be fired. It’s your own self… You need to be ethical within yourself.”

Bracketing or “sweeping aside” one’s personal opinions or values - Conversely, some participants defined ethics in the context of client work as “sweeping aside” one’s personal
opinions or values. This was especially prominent among students whose political, social, or religious ideologies differed from the non-profit clients we supported. One student shared her admiration of a teammate who “bracketed” her opposing political viewpoints in order to advocate effectively on behalf of the client. Sari shared, “I loved her professional approach... she just went to work and that’s the bottom line. She approached the political difference in the most professional manner possible. You have to sweep aside your own values when it gets into issues like welfare.” Similarly, Allison explained her perspective that ethics meant not giving up and putting her personal ethics aside:

I had to promote something that I didn’t believe in. I was biting my tongue a lot because I was communicating about something I didn’t believe in and that was really difficult... I didn’t want to be unethical and give up because I don’t believe in it, but at the same time I said, ‘this is a job.’ Your personal ethics have to come out of that in that kind of situation.

Only one student associated the bracketing of personal ethics with the concept of advocacy. Elizabeth, like many students, shared her personal opposition to the client’s mission, yet she explained how ethics in the context of client work often means advocating for a client and their needs. She said, “The biggest thing about ethics that I got out of this course is realizing just how different everyone is and realizing that my idea of advocating for someone is so different from what they want. I had to listen to [the client] and realize that advocating for them is what they need. Advocating for them is what I need to do.”

Participant responses regarding the second research question were much more varied. However, themes arose depicting client work as preparing students to prioritize ethics, respect teammates, the client and the professor, learn separation of the self from client work, and rely on the support of mentors and coaches.

Prioritizing ethics – For some, a client work environment in campaigns class offered the first instance where ethics were a core component of their work. Ethics factored in to how the students’ campaign plan was implemented and evaluated by the client. Caroline described the serious nature of the client work in which ethics were on the line:

I think [client work] was one of the biggest things that helped me learn to be ethical in a professional setting. Even if it was a mock class where we were making up a campaign, it would have been a different experience. You don’t have a real-world client where you could have gotten into a legal problem with the work you do for a client. You had to think about ethics and keep it in the forefront of our mind. We had to always make sure we put our best foot forward, consider the client’s reputation, and help them succeed.

A student working for a different client during a subsequent semester reflected the same perspective. Landon explained that his team “agonized” over the ethicality and accountability of their campaign plan sharing, “We have a responsibility to make sure we are accountable to deliver what our client needs to be better. That was the longest portion of the meetings to help the client know... How can we recruit people and reach people. That was our main goal. And I think that’s the ethical side of it.”

Learn respect for fellow teammates, the professor, and the client – Client work also prepared gave students an opportunity to work ethically not only with fellow classmates, but also with the professor, the client, and potentially vendors or campaign publics. Emily shared, for example, “With a client, you learn how people could have completely different perspectives, but you have to create a unified document or strategy. You learn how to work together.” Felicia explained more fully how the client work environment changed her level of respect for her client, professor, and people in general. She stated,
I think that students have a certain amount of respect for clients when they are working with them at the collegiate level. With professors, you respect them more and see them as a human… Working with a client in school can really set the stage for how you’ll work with a client in a professional setting. At [school] we were taught you need to be - you were conditioned to view people as humane individuals.

Learn separation of self and work - Students shared how client work helped them learn to separate themselves and their personal interests from their work. Participants often described professionalism as a form of ethics. On this, Allison said, I think in general having that kind of experience with something you don’t believe in expands your horizon and opens your eyes… You say, ‘This is my job and this is what I do and I need to help them.’ So, you have to separate yourself from your job. It’s important and something you learn in doing client work. Separation of self and work.” Similarly, Michael explained how client work gave him a stronger respect for his non-profit client and the hard work they were doing to incite societal change. Therefore, the separation of personal feelings or wants were put aside for the greater benefit of the client: “Our client was too busy passing bills or asking people to sign a petition. I feel like for them it was all about making a change and helping a cause that they believed in, and that’s why everyone put their feelings aside and worked for them, even though it was hard.”

Learn that being ethical relies on coaching and mentoring – Lastly, students learned, through client work, that ethicality meant relaying on those with more experience than you – such as the professor or client. Students often reflected a gratefulness of having a professor to guide them through the process of working for a client before they entered the public relations workplace. Alexandra, for example, said, “By working with a client now, we are dealing with it with your help, and you can let us know how to deal with it… Now, it’s just a learning experience and we’re getting guidance. In the real-world, you could get fired. We are learning how to deal with ethics and we don’t take a full public relations ethics class here, so this class is a great ethics lesson for us to learn.” Similarly, Haddie explained how her classmates and professor helped her grow professionally in the context of a “real” client work situation: You are working with a client and you are giving them your very best, but you have your classmates and your professor who is there to help you learn. You can learn about ethics, or the right or wrong things to do before you get into the real world and you are on your own. The classroom helps you make mistakes and learn and grow. If we were working for a pretend client, it would have been hard to stimulate the realism that goes along with working for a real client.

Discussion

Results imply that client work offers an important practical, yet low-risk environment in which students can explore their ethical identities and apply personal and professional ethical competencies to public relations work. Client work offer a structured opportunity for PR students to apply ethical values to client work and the strategic process. Coaching (by professor and among students) was essential to navigating the tricky professional and ethical dilemmas and ethical decisions can be made even stronger by consulting with others, incorporating codes of ethics, or other ethical tools. Students’ meaning-making of ethics reflect many deontological notions of autonomy, rationality, respect and duty, and the Categorical Imperative – much like the “Golden Rule.” Meaning-making of ethics and client work also reflect PRSA values of honesty, advocacy, independence, and loyalty. In a client work environment, students dealt with or stumbled with “independence” for the first time.
Especially interesting was the contradiction involving students’ definitions of ethics as following one’s personal, moral compass versus definitions of ethics as not following – but bracketing one’s own values in order to do what’s best for a client. Students struggled to find an accurate way to describe the concept of “advocacy” or “role differentiation” (Martinson, 2004) and thus felt compelled to interpret phenomenon as “sweeping aside” personal ethics. Campaigns class and client work is one of the only instances where students will understand and apply the concept of ethical advocacy. Students must understand that it is acceptable and ethical for a public relations professional to be partial to and advocate on behalf of a client. The nature of the public relations profession – and the “role defined position” of the public relations professional allows for such advocacy and partiality (Martinson, 2004, pp. 2-3).

Students acknowledged that the mentoring process was a core component regarding how public relations students became prepared to tackle ethical decisions in the public relations workplace. This finding complements previous research, which found that mentoring in service learning contexts contributes students more sophisticated moral reasoning (Waters & Burton, 2008). In order to further encourage students’ moral development in service learning and client work contexts, it is especially important to offer students a time and space to reflect on ethics before, after, and during client work. Incorporating ethics components into the student evaluations, client progress reports, and final campaign reflection assignments are key.

Ultimately, this exploratory qualitative study regarding client work and ethics in public relations contributed to the dearth of research regarding how hands-on service-learning experiences can develop students’ understandings of ethics and how ethical practices (honored during client work opportunities) fits into the public relations profession.
References


Measuring Strategic Communications

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Abstract

Converging communication disciplines pose a challenge to educators. Traditional distinctions of mass communications are becoming blurred through social media and advanced analytics. The advent of strategic communications is the newest iteration of this coalescence. Seeking to impact methods of instruction, this research compares strategic communications to three other disciplines: (public relations, advertising and integrated communications) using a quantitative methodology and a series of dependent variables called Mean Values of Importance (MVOI).
Introduction

Strategic communications is considered a highly attractive solution for the future of mass communications practice. Its popularity is strong in both instruction and application. The results of this survey help educators discern what preparations are needed to train students for understanding and, ultimately, practicing strategic communications.

For this effort, strategic communications is defined by a purposive sampling of faculty across three dimensions: applied communications, specialty communications, and communication skills and traits. Further insight is obtained via a research instrument, which compares and contrasts strategic communications with contemporary communications disciplines: integrated communications, public relations, and advertising.

Original research includes a mixed method approach with a faculty focus group and a quantitative survey of faculty via an online quantitative e-mail survey. The inquiry yielded 212 faculty respondents from a purposive sample pool of 580 selected faculty who taught in one or more of the associated four disciplines: strategic communications, integrated communications, public relations and advertising.

Findings indicate unique differentiators and surprising similarities between the four disciplines across three dimensions of communication: applied, specialty, and skills and traits. Operationalization of the strategic communications definition is accomplished via a Mean Value of Importance: (MVOI) using a four point forced likert scale. A formulative focus group was also conducted using faculty to help inform the process.

Background: What is strategic communications?

A fairly recent innovation in the teaching of undergraduate mass communications: strategic communications combines the teaching of business principles alongside campaign theory and the older, more established discipline of integrated marketing communications (IMC) to achieve a prepared student (Hallahan, K., Holtzhausen, D., van Ruler, B., Vercic, D., & Sriramesh, K., 2007). The comprehensive strategic communications approach brings, among other advantages, knowledge, credibility, and self-efficacy to the communications classroom (Ragas & Culp, 2014). The teaching of strategic communications draws from other traditional mass communications disciplines: public relations, integrated communications and advertising.

Why is This Study Important?

This inquiry is important because it addresses a path of instruction for strategic communications at the undergraduate level. It attempts to identify a distinguishing differentiator of strategic communications from other mass communications disciplines (integrated communications, public relations, and advertising) currently practiced, and provides recommendations as to how other programs can adopt a strategic communications outlook.

Moreover, distinctions of strategic communications may be moot if they are not taught in an environment where they can be applied and their value(s) reinforced. Pragmatically, in terms of employment and future opportunity for college students, experience has become as important, and in some cases more important, than academic performance (Thompson, 2014). In other words: “Experience has become the new GPA.” From teaching hospital models, to externships, internships, and practicums, a contemporary onus of higher education is to provide immersive opportunities to students as part of their courses of study. A popular delivery system to meet this need is based in academic service learning, which has its roots in social cognitive theory.
In the field of mass communications, hands-on instructional opportunities often consist of internships, campaigns classes, or student-run agencies. From a global perspective, these experiences mimic real world conditions when the students are provided opportunities for “real work with real clients.” The arrangement delivers students an experience complete with the challenges, responsibilities, and successes associated with working in the field. Described in the literature by various derivatives of academic service learning, experiential learning or integrative learning (Bush 2009; Bush-Bacellis, 1998; Maben, 2010; Maben & Whitson, 2014; Ranta, 2014a), the student-run agency concept permits aspiring communicators the opportunity to run their own firms within the confines of a university setting and under the supervision of one or more faculty members. As a part of this research, the strategic communications metric can assist in designing future curricula.

Agencies, Service Learning, and Social Cognitive Theory

In 1986, Albert Bandura put forth the idea of social cognitive theory as a way to provide insight into the processes underlying learning and instruction. Using various terms including imitative learning, modeling, and self-efficacy, the researcher and those who follow his work, have found learning is accomplished via a complex collection of behaviors, which stimulate recognition, rehearsal, and imitation. Bandura’s theory lends itself well to the immersive study of strategic communications competency and the student-run agency. Accepted methods of imparting knowledge (training) include imitative learning. Accordingly, the goal of a successful student agency/internship experience should be preparing students for real world experience through informed instruction and imitation.

Social cognitive theory emphasizes four conditions which must be present for learning to take place: an environment where the learner has some control over decisions; a psychology or collection of personal traits that allow for a sense of well being (with innate knowledge); an overall cognitive ability to effect change; and finally, a mastery of skills necessary to effect change, (O’Rorke, 2006).

When compared to the classroom actions of student-run agencies, the work accomplished within delivers upon these conditions. Students are allowed to have control over decisions. Specific skills and traits are taught and cultivated as part of the agency, and there is a consistent expectation for beneficial change on behalf of a client via an exclusive, focused skill set. In this case, to remain relevant, the skill set should be defined in terms of a strategic communications pedagogy.

Public Relations, Advertising, Integrated Communications and Strategic Communications: What is the Difference

In an update to their 2007 publication defining strategic communications, Holtzhausen and Zerfass (2015) stated that their earlier paper “brought about an identity crisis” (p. 3) in the public relations scholarly community. The conflict being, that historically, strategic communications was perceived as the express mission of the public relations field. Holtzhausen and Zerfass continue, stating “the intent of developing the study of strategic communications was meant to explore what different communities of practice can learn from each other,” with the overall goal to “break down the silos we have erected around ourselves.” (p. 3). As a way to further explain the need for strategic communications, Holtzhausen and Zerfass cite the blending of communications missions between traditional activities (advertising, marketing, and public relations); changes in technology (convergence/integration); increased numbers of channels that
organizations can use to communicate directly to stakeholders; and the increased attention toward purposeful communications. Adding to this change in mission is the rise of a subset of integrated communications (integrated marketing communications or IMC). This blending of two disciplines (advertising and public relations), for the purposes of marketing to customers, has resulted in IMC being identified as a stand-alone discipline studied in business curricula across the country (Shimp, 2010). For the purposes of this research, IMC was considered a subset of integrated communications as integrated communications is much more versatile in its ability to support communications efforts than IMC alone.

Supporting this outlook, Wang and Nelson (2006) found a combined approach of both public relations and advertising together was more effective than either approach on its own. Similarly, in his study on integrating public relations with advertising, Moody (2012) makes the distinction that while advertising and public relations are distinct and separate disciplines, each has a fundamental function, which benefits the communications process, arguing that public relations’ greatest strengths involve building relationships, influencing attitude/behavior, and fostering greater understanding and trust. Furthermore, as a brand builder, public relations is stronger in building understanding of a product, less expensive than advertising, and allows for greater depth of message.

Continuing the comparison, Moody (2012) states advertising provides more message creativity, is more established to attract attention, offers better control of the message, and is perhaps even more persuasive than public relations. So in an integrated communications world, while public relations and advertising offer greater strength when combined, the two disciplines maintain separate identities and skill traits that are not duplicated. This raises some interesting questions when considering the growth of strategic communications.

The rise of new media (social media, streaming video, blogs, online news sites, mobile-specific content) and the blurring of lines defining news versus entertainment as well as the co-mingling of advertising, marketing, and public relations practices contributes to the need for a more structured, multi-level approach, which enhances understanding rather than confusing recipients of the messages. This trend is compounded by the rise of social media and the ready availability of instant communications across a worldwide network. Web-based promotions, for example, should be supported by traditional advertising and underpinned with solid media relations efforts (Shimp, 2010). In addition, solid efforts at corporate social responsibility or issues management or even crisis management should be supported by image advertising and incorporated into marketing efforts as part of any market analysis or informational effort. The rise of the Internet has created a dramatic shift in transparency metrics and anyone with an Internet connection can now become an analyst, a voice of opposition or, hopefully, a raving fan and advocate of a company’s position. In Tindall and Holtzhausen (2011), “The challenge (to the field) is coordinating and integrating the communication activities of organizations and in creating a multidisciplinary but unified body of knowledge that better serves communicative entities in a society consisting of fragmented audiences and message delivery platforms” (p. 75).

The Case for Strategic Communications

In their 2005 study of strategic communications, Argenti, Howell, and Beck provide a compelling summary of the need for integration not only within the specific disciplines but also across an organization. Featuring Dell, Inc., FedEx, Textron, Cendant, and other leading companies, the authors state, “…those senior executives who think that communications can be delegated to the head of the corporate communications function are mistaken,” (p. 88). In fact, in
many companies, the CEO acts, in effect, as the senior communications officer of the company. When asked how much time he spends communicating, Dell’s Kevin Rollins said, ‘Can you go above 100%?’” (p. 88). This paradigm shift in the practice has created a corresponding demand for trained practitioners to execute these functions in coordination — a ready-made opportunity for new graduates who are appropriately trained. Consequently, this progress in a growing, changing field has created a corresponding demand for trained practitioners to execute these functions in coordination — a ready-made opportunity for new graduates who are appropriately trained. Consequently, this progress in a growing, changing field has created a corresponding demand for trained practitioners to execute these functions in coordination — a ready-made opportunity for new graduates who are appropriately trained.

In what might be seen as a minor indictment to education, Griffin and Pasadeos (1998) uncovered disconnects between education and professional expectations. Reflecting that sentiment in academia, Larsen and Len-Rios (2006) defined an integrated curriculum as combining advertising, public relations, and marketing concepts in undergraduate programs. Hallahan et al. (2007) go further, distinguishing strategic communications as different from integrated communications, “…because its focus is how an organization communicates across organizational endeavors” (p. 7). In the same citation, strategic communications is seen as more purposeful and focused on how an organization presents (brands) itself across “…the intentional activities of its leaders, employees, and communication practitioners” (p. 7). In a slightly different take on the same subject, Grunig (2006) used the term “strategic management role of public relations” to explain the importance of public relations being more than a tactical exercise.

The embrace of strategic communications has also expanded to a global level. Corporations in Europe, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and North America are using “strategic communications” to describe their communications activities (Tindall & Holtzhausen, 2011). Similarly, multiple consulting groups; the National Investor Relations Institute (National Investor Relations Institute, 2006); many not-for-profits; the American Bar Association (American Bar Association, 2006); various health communications organizations (Health Communication Partnerships, 2006; Piotrow & Kincaid, 2001); the U.S. government (McCaffrey, 1999; Office of the Undersecretary of Defense, 2004); the United Nations (United Nations, 1997); and the Public Relations Society of America (Public Relations Society of America, 2005) embrace a strategic communications approach.

From a comprehensive perspective, strategic communications is an effective solution to four phenomena as discussed in Hallahan et. al (2007).

Table 1
Justifications for the Adoption of Strategic Communications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Justification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional distinctions becoming blurred</td>
<td>The distinctions between disciplines are becoming blurred and many traditional functions are being recombined, leveraged for strategic purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology and media economics are driving change</td>
<td>Internet and social media are making it increasingly difficult to differentiate between advertising vs. publicity, sales promotion, or e-commerce.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Organizations using an expanding variety of methods to influence behavior

Audience experiences are increasingly becoming a sum of the people’s experiences and it is becoming much harder to isolate any specific method as an influencer.

Strategic communications is a way for organizations to recognize that communications is a fundamental goal of an entire organization.

Historical distinctions of different communications methods are considered insufficient to achieve strategically important goals.

(Hallahan, et al., 2007)

At Some Level It’s Still About Skills and Tactics

Todd (2009) recorded the perceptions of PRSSA faculty and professional advisers when reviewing assessment of students’ learning and faculty performance. Todd concluded faculty are not teaching the skills students needed in industry, stating that the emphasis in curriculum is to provide “…practical experience in new media, internships, preparing students for their first job and ‘hands-on experience’” (p. 71). Todd’s assessment echoes one from further back in history where Lee (1947) states “Courses should be regarded as what they are — a means of conditioning and preparing likely students to enter upon a series of experiences which may bring them to usefulness in the public relations field” (p. 91). Making the specific case for strategic communications, Todd’s 2009 and 2014 studies further stated that employers found students in general lacking in writing skills, critical thinking skills, and problem-solving skills as well as comprehension of business practices. To correct this shortfall, Todd offered curriculum recommendations including: teaching PR principles; research and evaluation skills, an internship, writing and production, strategic planning, campaigns courses, management course, case studies, and law and ethics.

Todd (2009) also asked future employers what knowledge they expected new graduates to have and those results are included: knowledge of global politics, a comprehension of PR theories, relationship building, a concept of transparency, research skills, problem solving, strategic thinking, planning skills, program management, and counseling.

In addition, as Hallahan et al. (2007) point out in their study, strategic planning is being taught currently in undergraduate programs using a management by objective approach (Argenti, Howell, & Beck, 2005; Austin & Pinkleton, 2001; Caywood, 1997; Dozier & Ehling, 1992; Ferguson, 1999; Moffitt, 1999; Smith, 2005; Wilson & Ogden, 2004). Consequently, pressures may well be felt by organizations to integrate, and a likely place for this to happen is in the student-run agency/client-agency relationship.

Integration Resistance

But not all academia is in agreement with the communications integration concept. Larsen and Len-Rios (2006) found that established communications programs were less integrated than younger programs. They also discovered student-agency advisers with strong interest in strategic communications gravitated more toward communications curriculum integration. Those in an integrated curriculum expected more integration and those in a less integrated program expected the level of integration to stay the same. When public relations is integrated into a cross-disciplinary program, there is a perceived loss of power to public relations.

Similarly, studies by Laurie and Mortimer (2011) and Kitchen, Schultz, Kim, Han, and Li (2004) suggest integration is driven by the client as much as by the firm delivering the service.
Moreover, there are distinctive differences between the agency concepts in the U.S. and Europe. American-based agencies seem more eager to embrace an integrated model as a way to design agencies — embracing the concept that integration is the roadmap moving forward, whereas European agencies saw IMC as a tactical breakdown with the emphasis on message transmission and creation rather than organizational structure.

Despite its detractors, there seems to be a need for convergence and strategic communications in most programs. These include internships, student-run agencies (Benigni, Cheng, & Cameron, 2004, and Ranta, 2014a) and other programs where members are expected to understand and execute strategic communications upon graduation if not before. This finding leaves open for discussion how one accurately measures the transition from traditional communications planning to strategic communications.

Methodology

*Operationalization of Strategic Communications*

Therefore, to take up the challenge of defining strategic communications, a measure was designed for determining what faculty, currently teaching in mass communications areas, considered strategic communications. This measure was developed through analysis of current studies as well as original focus group work. The process involved the creation of a Mean Value of Importance (MVOI). Educators, ranking on a four-point scale, determined this value. MVOI was used to discern how important the dependent variables (loosely arranged into the categories of applied communications, specialty communications and communication skills and traits) were to the practice of the strategic communications discipline. In addition to defining strategic communications, these variables were also used by respondents to describe three other specific communications disciplines: integrated communications, public relations, and advertising. Dependent variables were initially adapted from measures composed by Todd (2009). However, upon further investigation, informed by work from Hallahan et al. (2007), and preliminary focus group research, additional items were added. More specifically, the three communication category variables break out to the following:

Applied Communications Variables (11): business management, strategic planning, marketing principles, branding communication, media relations, stakeholder relations, shareholder relations, campaign planning, event management, crisis communications and media buying.

Specialty Communications Variables (15): technical communications, patent/IP communications, political communications, regulatory compliance, interpersonal communications, corporate social responsibility, not-for-profit communications, new media digital communications, video production, website development, social media campaigns, public speaking, written communications, digital analytics, and SEO maximization.

Skills and Traits Variables (8): Skilled in qualitative research, skilled in quantitative research, values constructive criticism/feedback, demonstrates familiarity with advertising principles, demonstrates familiarity with public relations principles, displays collaborative leadership, demonstrates endurance/persistence, and demonstrates proactive determination. In addition, a focus group used to inform creation of this survey was composed of faculty attending an IMC seminar at a southeastern college.

*The Focus Group*
As a way to pre-test the MVOI metrics and to find relevant stratcomm topics, members were recruited from an IMC conference by the conference organizer. A total of five faculty participated. Included in the group were participating faculty who teach business communications, media production, marketing, integrated marketing communications, professional communications, journalism, and corporate communications. The focus group was moderated by an impartial, sixth faculty member to eliminate researcher bias.

Survey Design

Survey design, data collection, and analysis as well as the aforementioned focus group, were completed in accordance with the procedures as outlined in the researcher’s university Institutional Review Board. All results were kept confidential. The survey instrument was tested via a brief pilot study prior to release. The goal for an estimated completion time of the quantitative survey was 15-20 minutes.

To ensure maximum completion rates of the survey, one $100 gift card and six additional $50 gift cards were offered as incentives (Goritz, 2004, 2006). All seven cards were distributed as part of a random drawing among those who completed the survey and opted-in by providing a valid email address at the end of the survey (Ragas & Culp, 2014; Todd 2009).

Operationalization and MVOIs

There were a total of 136 dependent variables explored in this survey. Specific variables were selected based on Hallahan et al. (2007), organic knowledge from the researcher, and focus group input. Operationalization was accomplished using a Mean Value of Importance (MVOI) and a metric was designed to help query educators, particularly those in capstone courses and student-run agencies, to develop a benchmark for weighing each variable in designing a curriculum. The instrument asked respondents to decide/rank how important each item was to the practice of strategic communications, integrated communication, public relations, and advertising. There was also ample opportunity, through free response questions, to recommend additional MVOIs.

1. The instrument asked respondents to decide, out of 11 applied communications variables, how important each item was to the practice of strategic communications, integrated communication, public relations, and advertising.
2. The instrument asked respondents to decide, out of 15 specialized communications variables, how important was each item to the practice of strategic communications, integrated communication, public relations, and advertising.
3. The instrument asked respondents to decide, out of eight skills and traits variables, how important was each item to the practice of strategic communications, integrated communication, public relations, and advertising.
4. Finally the instrument asked the respondents, via open responses, to name any missing, essential applied communication, type of communication, skill or trait they thought were important for the practice of strategic communications, integrated communication, public relations, and advertising.

More About the Mean Value of Importance (MVOI)

The MVOI was designed to confirm the strength of agreement of respondents to the variables listed under Applied Communications, Specialty Communications, and
Communications Skills and Traits. The scale associated with the measurement used a four-point “forced choice” Likert-type scale of perceived importance (Bertram 2007 and Vogt 1999). The scale was anchored using the following terms: 1 = Not Important at All; 2 = Of Little Importance; 3 = Average Importance and 4 = Essential. The higher the value of the mean per question, the more important that variable was to its respective discipline.

The Mean Values of Importance, (MVOI), could then be compared to determine how important each variable was to its respective discipline and whether there was a significant difference between the mean values of each discipline. Specific variables were drawn from literature, focus group information, and personal experience.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The total number of respondents to the survey was N = 247 faculty members. Total usable responses were N = 212. Each case represented an individual who taught strategic communications, integrated communications, public relations, or advertising. No specific number per discipline was recorded as many faculty taught in multiple areas. The mean age of respondents was 53 years. Overall age range of respondents was 23-83 with 16 cases not reporting. The mean number of total years teaching was 15. The range of years teaching among the respondents was 0 to 39 years with seven cases not reporting. The mean number of years of teaching and/or practicing integrated communications was 17 with total values ranging from 0 to 50 with nine cases not reporting. The mean number of total years teaching and or practicing strategic communications was 15 with total values ranging from 0 to 50 with 12 cases not reporting.

Assumptions

This research included introductory questions addressing assumptions of the growth of strategic communications in the professional field and in the educational field. These assumptions were important to inform further research. Questions for the assumption section were posed using a 3-point scale (1= Disagree, 2= Neutral and 3 = Agree) Table 2 details the specific means and responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are increasing demands for students to be trained in strategic communications.</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are increasing demands for communications professionals to embrace strategic communications.</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated strategic communications is the next evolution of professional communications.</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are clear differences between integrated communications and strategic communications.</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the continuous variables all showed a mean that indicated some level of agreement with the growth of strategic communications, one of the most telling of the findings was the ambivalence present in the statement “There are clear differences between integrated
communications and strategic communications.” This finding was of particular importance in the analysis. A similar finding is also discussed from the perspectives obtained in part two of the survey targeting student-agency advisers. Approximately 127 of the 212 respondents indicated some past or present relationship with advising student-run agencies. When these insights were mined to measure pressures to teach strategic communications, certain insights were revealed.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My student-run agency is actively trying to make my students more</td>
<td>86.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attractive to employers by building strategic communications skills.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative to client pressures, my student-run agency has been</td>
<td>65.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>encouraged to become more strategic.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Values 0-100 (Strongly disagree 0-19, Disagree 20-39, Neither Disagree nor Agree 40-59, Agree 60-79 and Strongly Agree 80-100)

Exploratory Focus Group Results

As a way to inform the research and shape the questionnaire provided to our quantitative sample, a focus group was conducted. Many of the findings were incorporated into the research instrument as described earlier. In addition, free response questions were added to the survey to help resolve any confusion in defining strategic communications and integrated communications. Also notable from the focus group data was contradictory information differentiating between strategic communications and integrated communications. This contradictory focus group information foreshadowed similar findings in the quantitative surveys. Consider the following two statements:

Respondent 1: “Integration (integrated communications) has to do with brand building, elite form brand building. Strategic is different. Strategic falls under the umbrella of brand building. Not the same. Strategic communications contains multiple contexts.”

Respondent 2: “Strategic communications ties to outcome, which ties to elements, which ties to objectives and tactics that ties to goal. Brand leads to a strategy that leads to tactics. But before all of that, your outcome ties to your goal. (You) don’t start strategically. (You) need a big picture that informs the entire process. What are their goals, what do they want to accomplish and then what are the tactics?”

Means Testing/MVOI Tables

In combining means in the survey analysis, it was important to maintain internal consistency of the measures. This was evaluated using Cronbach’s Alpha. Range of correlations for each group of variables and the corresponding dimensions was .65 -.85. A total Cronbach’s Alpha score for all of the MVOIs was .96. MVOIs were tested using single-tail paired t-tests for differences between the mean response ratings for different variables. The t-test methodology was selected as a way to interpret differences in the Mean Value of Importance (MVOI). All MVOI values were scored by respondents using a 4-point, forced, Likert-type scale with 1 = Not Important at all, 2 = Of little importance, 3 = Average importance or 4 = Essential.
The formula used in the calculations was \[ t = \frac{x_1 - x_2}{s/\sqrt{N}} \]

where \( x_1 \) and \( x_2 \) are the respective paired variable means, \( s \) is the paired standard deviation and \( N \) is the number of survey responses. The following tables include the Mean Value of Importance (MVOI) for each dependent variable when compared against strategic communications in the research instrument.

Tables are divided by communication types (applied communications, specialty communications, and communication skills and traits). Note bold scores indicate a significant differentiation from strategic communications MVOI values using a paired sample t-test.

Table values are: (1 = Not Important At All, 2 = Of Little Importance, 3 = Average Importance or 4 = Essential). *BOLD Type = Significance in 1-tailed, paired sample t-test \( p< .05 \) t-value and p-value listed below each mean when compared to Strategic Communications.

### Table 4
*Matrix of All Dependent Variable Means (MVOIs) in Applied Communications.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MVOI</th>
<th>Strategic Comms. (N = 212)</th>
<th>Integrated Comms. (N = 212)</th>
<th>Public Relations (N = 210)</th>
<th>Advertising (N = 210)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business Management</td>
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<td>3.40</td>
<td><strong>3.49</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>3.31</strong>*</td>
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<td><strong>3.76</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>3.83</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>3.76</strong>*</td>
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<td><strong>3.48</strong>*</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>3.78</strong>*</td>
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<td><strong>3.89</strong>*</td>
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<td><strong>3.86</strong>*</td>
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<td><strong>3.85</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>3.04</strong>*</td>
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<td><strong>3.70</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>2.90</strong>*</td>
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<td>3.19</td>
<td><strong>3.67</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>3.09</strong>*</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>3.36</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>3.90</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>2.89</strong>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Buying</td>
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<td>2.96</td>
<td><strong>3.75</strong>*</td>
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Table 5
Matrix of All Dependent Variable Means (MVOIs) in Specialty Communications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MVOI</th>
<th>Strategic Comms. (N = 212)</th>
<th>Integrated Comms. (N = 212)</th>
<th>Public Relations (N = 210)</th>
<th>Advertising (N = 210)</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>2.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intellectual Property</td>
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<td>2.52*</td>
<td>2.78*</td>
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<td>Political Communications</td>
<td>3.18</td>
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<td>2.83*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regulatory Compliance Communications</td>
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<td>2.92*</td>
<td>3.25*</td>
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<td>Interpersonal Communications</td>
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<td>3.66*</td>
<td>3.23*</td>
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<td>3.76*</td>
<td>3.25*</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Media Communications</td>
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<td>3.76</td>
<td>3.87*</td>
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</tr>
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<td>3.30*</td>
<td>3.29*</td>
<td>3.60*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3.51*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Media Production</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>3.80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Speaking</td>
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<td>3.30*</td>
<td>3.72*</td>
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<td>Written Communications</td>
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<td>3.75*</td>
<td>3.89*</td>
<td>3.67*</td>
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<td>Digital Analytics</td>
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<td>3.56</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.69*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not-for-profit Communications</td>
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<td>3.17*</td>
<td>3.57*</td>
<td>3.13*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Search Engine Optimization</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>3.47*</td>
<td>3.35</td>
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</table>

Table 6
Matrix of All Dependent Variable Means (MVOIs) in Comm. Skills & Traits.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MVOI</th>
<th>Strategic Comms. (N = 212)</th>
<th>Integrated Comms. (N = 212)</th>
<th>Public Relations (N = 210)</th>
<th>Advertising (N = 210)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>3.53*</td>
<td>3.65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Receive Criticism</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.60*</td>
<td>3.79*</td>
<td>3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Leadership</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.58*</td>
<td>3.76*</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.61*</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>3.71</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proactive Determination</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.58*</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising Principles</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>3.69*</td>
<td>3.39*</td>
<td>3.93*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR Principles</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.66*</td>
<td>3.90*</td>
<td>3.36*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusions**

Based on the results of the tests conducted for this study, strategic communications is a blend of applied communications, specialty communications, and skills and traits. All but one of the variables used in this research, (intellectual property), registered with a mean value score of above 3 on the four-point MVOI scale, indicating the developed scale is a legitimate measurement of strategic communications. Cronbach’s Alpha testing of all of the variables indicated internal consistency across all values.

For purposes of future research, the scale for measuring strategic communications within the realm of applied communications variables should include business management, strategic planning, marketing planning, branding, media relations, stakeholder relations, shareholder relations, campaign planning, event management, crisis communications, and media buying.

Similarly, as it pertains to types of specialty communications, the scale for measuring strategic communications should include technical communication, political communication, regulatory compliance communications, interpersonal communications, corporate social responsibility communications, new media communications, video production, website design/production, social media communications, public speaking skills, written communications skills, command of digital analytics, not-for-profit communications, and search engine optimization.

Finally, in terms of communications skills and traits, the scale for measuring strategic communications should include the abilities to conduct and understand both qualitative and quantitative research, the ability to receive criticism, the ability to perform collaborative leadership, the ability to demonstrate persistence in the face of adversity, possessing proactive determination, familiarity with advertising principles, and familiarity with public relations principles.
Insights for Adopting Strategic Communications

By adopting the MVOI scale and reviewing different variables under the three categories offered here — applied communications, specialty communications, and communications skills and traits — it becomes easier to envision what strategic communications is and how it can be taught. Furthermore, by assigning values of importance to each variable under the specific communications disciplines — strategic communications, integrated communications, public relations, and advertising — it is also easier to refine where to look when seeking best practices for each variable. Reviewing the mean values of importance overall, insights uncovered post hoc include:

1. The discipline with the most similarity to strategic communications is public relations. (SC 118.76, PR 121.97). The discipline with the least similarity to strategic communications is integrated communications. (SC 118.76, IC 114.29).
2. For applied communications, the discipline with the most similarity to strategic communications is public relations. (SC 38.98, PR 40.24). The discipline with the least similarity to strategic communications is integrated communications. (SC 38.98, IC 35.92).
3. For specialty communications, the discipline with the most similarity to strategic communications is public relations. (SC 50.52, PR 52.37). The discipline with the least similarity to strategic communications is integrated communications. (SC 50.52, IC 49.48).
4. For communications skills and traits, the disciplines with the most similarities to strategic communications are public relations and advertising. (SC 29.26, PR 29.36, Ad 29.35). The discipline with the least similarity to strategic communications is integrated communications. (SC 29.26, IC 28.89).

The largest MVOI and the associated discipline for each value in the Applied Communications Category are: Strategic Planning--3.88/Strategic Communications; Crisis Communication--3.90/Public Relations; Media Relations--3.86/Public Relations; Campaign Planning--3.85/Public Relations; Stakeholder Communication--3.85/Public Relations; Shareholder Communications--3.70/Public Relations; Event Management--3.67/Public Relations; Business Management--3.49/Public Relations; Branding--3.89/Advertising; Marketing Planning--3.80/Advertising; Media Buying-- 3.75/Advertising.

The largest MVOI and the associated discipline for each in the Specialty Communications Category are: Written Communications--3.89/Public Relations; New Media--3.87/Public Relations; Social Media--3.80/Public Relations; Social Responsibility--3.76/Public Relations; Corporate Public Speaking--3.72/Public Speaking; Interpersonal Communications--3.66/Public Relations; Video Production--3.60/Advertising; Not-for-profit Communications--3.57/Public Relations; Digital Analytics--3.56/Integrated Communications; Website Design--3.51/Advertising; Search Engine Optimization--3.47/Integrated Communications; Political Communication--3.35 Public Relations; Regulatory Compliance--3.25 Public Relations; Technical Communication--3.18/Public Relations. Intellectual Property--2.59/Strategic Communications

The largest MVOI and the associated discipline for each in the Communications Skills and Traits Category are: Public Relations Principles--3.90/Public Relations; Advertising Principles--3.89/Advertising; Positively Receive Criticism--3.79/Public Relations; Collaborative Leadership--3.76/Public Relations; Persistence--3.71/Public Relations; Proactive Determination--3.69/Public Relations; Quantitative Research--3.65/Strategic Communications; Qualitative Research--3.62/Advertising.
So where does this leave us? Strategic communications is an emerging, comprehensive discipline that requires cultivation of best practices from all disciplines. This metric is useful for identifying where those best practices reside. It stands to reason that if an applied communications practice or skill is valued most highly in a specific discipline, then that discipline is where the best practice resides. For example, looking at the MVOI valuations, if the highest MVOI value for qualitative research resides in advertising (value = 3.62), then strategic communications scholars and practitioners should look to the advertising discipline as the source of best practices and incorporate those lessons into their programs.

Limitations of the Research—The Instrument
A total of 136 variables in a forced response format using a forced, 4-point Likert scale were included in the initial survey. This large amount of variables led to some respondent fatigue and also forced the abandonment of other variables that could have been asked but were not. Respondent fatigue was also a concern in terms of time taken to complete the questionnaire. In pretesting, the survey took between 10-20 minutes to complete. Therefore data from those completing the survey in four minutes or less were deleted from the pool of respondents.

The Sample, Professional Practitioner Perspectives Wanted
This database was thoroughly vetted and provides a clear representation of faculty across the United States who are currently involved in teaching one or more of the four disciplines of strategic communications, integrated communications, public relations, and advertising, (n = 580 with 212 cases reporting). It is, however, missing strong representation from professional practitioners currently active in the practice of strategic communications and the other disciplines. Further research in this area would benefit from an added data set of professional practitioners. This could be easily achieved in a follow-on study using a slightly modified instrument and a database of professionals who currently work in the industry as representative practitioners in all of the four disciplines.

How Old is Too Old?
Age/experience was a factor in the sample selection. As stated previously, when there were multiple points of contact for a specific institution, preference was shown to those with titles like dean, director, or adviser. Those individuals were thought to be most familiar with strategic communications as part of a larger discussion and would have formed some opinions as to the differences between the four disciplines studied in this research. A route for future research could be to intentionally seek out those faculty with less institutional experience.

Addition/Purification of Variables
As part of the research instrument, respondents were given an opportunity to discuss what other aspects of the four disciplines should be included in further efforts to define strategic communications. A review of the input provided some interesting variables that should be included in the next iteration of this research. Variables that should definitely be investigated were selected based on the frequency of their appearance in the free response answers. Following is a list of variables with the accompanying frequency of recommendation: Creativity/14; Analytical/Critical Thinking Skills/11; Proactivity/9; Graphic Arts/Visual Design/9; Design Literacy/8; Strategic Development/7; Ethics/7; Entrepreneurship/6; Teambuilding/Teamliness/6; Copyediting/Copywriting/5; Marketing/5.
Related to the question of which MVOI variables should be included in any follow-on research, it seems appropriate to also add some more variance in the scale. While a 4-point forced “likert-type” scale was used initially for this research, it might be interesting to pilot a larger 5- or 7-point scale using the identified collection of variables. Within limits, the more response opportunities respondents have, the greater the variance between principles is expected. In addition to fine-tuning the variance with a broader Likert scale and all aforementioned options, (exploring practitioner opinions, enlisting the help of Delphi panels, and mining the student-run agency data collected in this survey), there are several areas of future research.

One option would be to expand this study internationally as there are some additional schools of thought in other countries as to what the term strategic communications means to their opinion leaders and educators (Tindall & Holtzhausen, 2011). A literature review of parallel thinking in the areas of convergence and digital migration indicate that the silos of public relations, advertising, marketing, and even integrated communications are being subsumed by the need for strategic communications capabilities and digital entrepreneurship in terms of storytelling. Collaborating with some of those scholars might also help inform the academy of not only what should be taught in terms of content but what should be taught in terms of organic capabilities for the next generation of communicators.

Finally, the entire communications industry has been affected by the incorporation of social media as not only a tactical tool for energizing traditional word-of-mouth referrals, but also has become the solution for real time analytic data. And, when that data, along with other tracking applications, is combined into what is known as “big data,” the entire paradigm of marketing and communications research shifts from inferential statistics to census data collection. In order to capitalize on these transitions, strategic communications needs to evolve into a comprehensive approach toward communications from the big picture strategic perspective all the way down to the granular tactical orientation.

As stated at the beginning of this research, more study of how to pilot strategic communications curricula within the realm of student-run agencies is strongly recommended. The number of student-run agencies is on the rise, the focus on the pragmatic aspects of an undergraduate education is becoming increasingly scrutinized, and the need for cross-platform competence will not go away. Therefore if mass communications instruction at the undergraduate level is to remain relevant, it is incumbent upon educators to learn how to incorporate the significant elements of strategic communications education into the highly successful integrative learning approach to better equip the next generation of communicators.
References


The Post-Blackfish World: An analysis of SeaWorld’s strategic communication efforts

Leslie Rasmussen
Xavier University

Melody Fisher
Mississippi State University

Abstract

The controversial documentary Blackfish explored SeaWorld’s treatment of orca whales, and tells the story of Tilikum, an orca who killed three people while captive. The documentary sent SeaWorld into a tailspin. The case dissects SeaWorld’s strategic communication efforts by applying public relations theories, and presents communication lessons for navigating crises.
Introduction

The documentary *Blackfish* was perhaps the most controversial film to debut at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival. The film documented SeaWorld’s origins, the capture and treatment of its killer whales, and tells the story of Tilikum, a killer whale who killed three people while in captivity. In 2010 Tilikum and SeaWorld made national news when the orca killed trainer Dawn Brancheau during a show at the SeaWorld Orlando park. SeaWorld claimed Tilikum did not attack Brancheau; rather, he saw her ponytail as a novelty and grabbed it. CNN Films and Magnolia Pictures later released the documentary in July 2013. While SeaWorld has claimed *Blackfish* is merely propaganda, it cannot deny the visceral reaction viewers had to the story, nor the post-*Blackfish* tailspin that followed.

Prior to the *Blackfish* release in Los Angeles and New York, SeaWorld sent a letter pleading its case and denouncing *Blackfish* to film critics. This preemptive strike would set the stage for SeaWorld to call attention to the film that poignantly convicted it of wrongdoing. After Brancheau’s death, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) investigated SeaWorld and ultimately barred trainers from entering the pool with orca whales. OSHA deemed the trainer-whale interactions “lethally dangerous” (McDonald, 2014). SeaWorld appealed the decision, but later dropped it in August 2014. In the same month, the organization posted lackluster second-quarter profits and its stock dropped 49 percent. In December 2014 it announced that CEO James Atchison would resign and the company projected profits may be down 16 percent for the year. In March 2015 SeaWorld announced Atchison’s replacement with Joel Manby, a former CEO and author of “Love Works,” which emphasizes the importance of faith and integrity in leadership.

Background

SeaWorld San Diego opened in 1964 with two aquariums, 45 employees, and several dolphins and sea lions. SeaWorld eventually acquired several killer whales from the debunked Seattle Marine Aquarium, including Namu, the first killer whale held in captivity. In 1989 Anheuser-Busch purchased the three SeaWorld parks and three other sister-theme parks, though later sold it to Blackstone Group in 2009. In 1992, SeaWorld acquired four whales from Sealand of the Pacific, which closed after four killer whales were involved in a trainer death. Tilikum, the orca believed to have drowned the Sealand of the Pacific trainer, was sent to SeaWorld Orlando. Tilikum was featured in *Blackfish* and is the whale responsible for the 2010 death of senior trainer Dawn Brancheau. He is also the largest and most successful sire in captivity.

Over the years, SeaWorld has received criticism for holding killer whales, dolphins, and other animals in captivity. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the largest animal rights organization, launched a campaign against SeaWorld in 2011, following the death of Brancheau. PETA, along with former SeaWorld trainers and marine-mammal experts, filed a lawsuit under the 13th Amendment claiming that killer whales are held as slaves. While the court ruled in favor of SeaWorld, it has not eluded lawsuits over the years. Most recently it was entrenched in years-long battle with OSHA. In 2013 the U.S. Court of Appeals maintained OSHA’s ruling to prohibit trainers from entering pools with killer whales. The organization seemingly accepted the decision and declined to take the case to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Following the release of *Blackfish* several high profile celebrities backed out of participation in the Bands, Brews & BBQ events, a signature event. Country star Willie Nelson told CNN, “I don’t agree with the way they treat their animals” (Sciaretto, 2013), and declined to participate in the event. Later that year, SeaWorld announced it would debut a float featuring two large orcas.
in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade. The announcement prompted celebrities like Jason Biggs and Alec Baldwin to denounce the organization on social media and in the news media. Macy’s also received public backlash for allowing the SeaWorld float. Macy’s released a statement claiming it, “has never taken on, promoted or otherwise engaged in social commentary, political debate, or other forms of advocacy, no matter how worthy. Its mission has always been about entertaining millions of families and spectators.” On Thanksgiving day, a 12-year-old parade goer jumped a barricade when the SeaWorld float passed. The protester held a sign stating, “Boycott SeaWorld” (Effron, 2013), which was viewed on national television. Oddly, another young parade goer did the same thing the following year in 2014.

Social media has proven to be a vehicle for activating and motivating publics. SeaWorld was the target of a number of online protests, petitions, and social media bashing. Many hashtags and catchphrases took social media by storm; for example, #empty the tanks was trending on Twitter as people wrote messages urging governing bodies and SeaWorld to take action. SeaWorld was also dubbed “SeaWorld of Hurt” online. Social media users actively engaged on social media, many scrutinizing the organization. In 2014, 11-time World Surf Champ Kelly Slater used social media to voice his disdain for SeaWorld and his care and concern for the protection of killer whales. Slater later went on to serve a spokesperson for PETA at a SeaWorld stakeholder’s meeting. In 2015 SeaWorld attempted to speak directly to social media users and increase transparency by allowing users to ask questions online using the hashtag #AskSeaWorld. Social media users bombarded SeaWorld with hard hitting questions and played on the mistreatment of animals. For example, Twitter user @KellisKupcakes wrote, “@SeaWorld why do you provide more area for us to park our cars than you give these animals to live? #AskSeaWorld. Twitter user @RunItsGrodzilla wrote, “Hey @SeaWorld- why don’t any of your Shamu stuffed animals have rake marks or collapsed dorsal fins? #AskSeaWorld #EmptyTheTanks (Lynch, 2015). Although it is impossible to know, SeaWorld’s responses appeared to be bots, as they were very formal, linked to videos, and were often used to answer multiple questions. Social media allows organizations to have a human voice, and open two-way communication with its publics. However, it appeared SeaWorld’s attempt at achieving this was poorly executed. Many online petitions also surfaced; for example, several change.org petitions emerged ranging from asking SeaWorld to end its breeding program to releasing orcas. Another online petition was encouraged the government of Dubai to prohibit SeaWorld from opening a location there and garnered nearly 150,000 signatures. Many social media groups aimed at stopping SeaWorld surfaced, including the following Facebook groups: Stop SeaWorld, Boycott SeaWorld!, Occupy SeaWorld, Pro Cove Anti-SeaWorld, and Protest SeaWorld. With so much momentum, the online environment has become increasingly difficult for SeaWorld to navigate.

When SeaWorld CEO Jim Atchison resigned in December of 2015, the organization appeared to enter an overhaul phase, though Atchinson remains on the board as vice chairman. SeaWorld reported a 28 percent profit loss, which resulted from falling park attendance. According to a NPR (2014) report, attendance at parks fell 5.6 percent. The board of directors also added former co-CEO of the public relations powerhouse Ogilvy North America of Ogilvy & Mather, Ellen Tauscher to its board.

SeaWorld’s core problem stems from the damaged image caused by the issues addressed in Blackfish and its subsequent and steady decline in profits, stock, and long standing position as a premier entertainment destination. The company also faced litigation and regulation challenges. The involvement of these external factors can predict SeaWorld’s communication strategies in its time of crisis as noted in the contingency theory. In effort to demonstrate the
many stances that actually take place, researchers suggest that the strategic and conflictual relationships between an organization and its publics be placed on a continuum anchored by pure advocacy and pure accommodation (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997). Researchers later identified eighty-six factors and eleven categories that contribute to the selection of strategies organizations employ in crisis situations (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999). These factors limit the degree of accommodation a public relations practitioner can adopt when dealing with conflict. One external factor influencing SeaWorld’s response was government regulation, which can cause a strongly advocating position.

Research

To determine SeaWorld’s strategies and tactics, the authors qualitatively reviewed news stories, opinion pieces and transcripts found using the LexisNexis search engine. The authors also reviewed official SeaWorld and Blackfish websites, as well as several respective advocate web and blog sites. The monitored period is between January 19, 2013, the date Blackfish debuted at the Sundance, through present date. The topsy search engine was used to find social media posts in 2013 and 2014. The research findings indicate SeaWorld officials explicitly examined the documentary in effort to prepare its response. Their initial response underscored and bolstered SeaWorld’s standing practices toward animals.

In a written response to CNN, Jacobs attached empirical findings from biologists, as well as bibliographies of multiple studies conducted at the park. In addition to this statement, SeaWorld dissected the documentary script and created its own shot list comparing scenes from the film with their rebuttal (SeaWorld, 2013). The document, “69 reasons you shouldn’t believe Blackfish,” reveals SeaWorld’s plan to attack and refute Blackfish. In addition, the potential for staunch regulation impacted its decision to take a strong advocating position, rather than engaging in any accommodative actions. Within the first six months of the film’s release, SeaWorld’s executed a reactive strategy, determined to aggressively counter the documentary.

Strategies and Tactics

SeaWorld’s campaign to combat the fallout from Blackfish involved four overarching strategies:

- **Inoculate target audiences by dispelling Blackfish claims**

  In an attempt to inoculate its audiences against negative attention, SeaWorld executed several public relations tactics before the film was released in theatres to two target audiences - media outlets and film critics. The company utilized electronic media sources to communicate its message. Roughly one week prior to the documentary’s premier in theatres, SeaWorld Vice President of Communications Fred Jacobs, advised by communications firm 42West, emailed a detailed critique of the film to about 50 critics (Batte, 2013). In this communique SeaWorld specifically refutes eight Blackfish assertions, calling them “egregious and untrue” (2013). The bulleted list primarily addresses circumstances surrounding the death of Dawn Brancheau and the treatment of Tilikum the killer whale, but notes the entire film is “shamefully dishonest and deliberately misleading” (2013).

  In concert with the email sent to critics, SeaWorld sent a statement to ABC News:

  To promote its bias that killer whales should not be maintained in a zoological setting, the film paints a distorted picture that withholds key facts about SeaWorld from viewers –
among them, that SeaWorld is one of the world’s most respected zoological institutions, SeaWorld rescues, rehabilitates and returns to the wild hundreds of wild animals every year, and that SeaWorld commits millions of dollars annually to conservation and scientific research. Perhaps most important, the film fails to mention SeaWorld’s commitment to the safety of its team members and guests and to the care and welfare of its animals, as demonstrated by the company’s continual refinement and improvement to its killer whale facilities, equipment and procedures both before and after the death of Dawn Brancheau (2013).

While the missives can be deemed as reactive to the documentary’s content, they were proactive to audience reception. SeaWorld’s challenge was to maintain audience’s positive and neutral perceptions of the park. They also wanted audiences to be skeptical of Blackfish claims while viewing the documentary.

- Directly address Blackfish content on social media and the Web

In addition to communicating directly to specific audiences, SeaWorld offered mediated transparency to the general audience by posting its response to Blackfish on several websites. The company has a varied presence on social media, with pages on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, all accessible though the seaworld.com website. The first Facebook post after Blackfish’s release was dated October 25, 2013, see figure 1.

![Figure 1 - SeaWorld Facebook post](image1)

In this post, SeaWorld directly addresses and refutes the film, while offering a link to the official statement found on SeaWorld’s website. This post garnered more than 500 comments and was shared more than 180 times. In a more defensive stance, the company directly responds to commenters who criticize the company’s treatment of animals, see figure 2.

![Figure 2](image2)
SeaWorld joined Twitter in 2009 as a platform to share pictures, rare facts and upcoming events about the park. The company has a major presence on Twitter, tweeting several times a day. Recently, SeaWorld’s Twitter presence has increased due to the prompting of several Blackfish advocates. More than 50,000 tweets with the hashtag #blackfish have been posted since the film’s Sundance debut, and as with its Facebook page, SeaWorld responds directly to each tweet that promotes the documentary. See figure 3.

Figure 3. Screenshot of SeaWorld tweet targeted at a Blackfish viewer

Whereas SeaWorld’s Facebook and Twitter pages promote two-way communication, its YouTube page does not. Many of the series videos’ comment function is disabled, restricting viewer response to posts, essentially shutting down the conversation with viewers. Beginning January 20, 2014, the company posted “The truth is in our parks and people,” a series of 27 short videos on its YouTube page dismissing Blackfish’s claims. These videos show actual clips from the documentary followed by interviews from SeaWorld experts who discredit the film. In one film short, SeaWorld trainer Holly Byrd explains that her image was misappropriated with that of an interviewee, a former disgruntled SeaWorld employee (SeaWorld, 2014).

In addition to social media presence, SeaWorld created a website that addresses Blackfish. Seaworldcares.com underscores the company’s dedication to the rescue, care, conservation, research and education of animals. The site also includes third party testimony supporting SeaWorld’s claims. Media, moms, former trainers, and student statements are found in separate tabs on the site recounting various pleasant experiences and treatment as SeaWorld guests and employees. Some do not mention Blackfish, but many do. Another tab labeled “The Facts,” includes frequently asked questions about SeaWorld’s treatment of animals as based on Blackfish claims. The site also houses the document, “69 reasons you shouldn’t believe Blackfish” (SeaWorld, 2013). There, visitors can access the 32-page pdf file dispelling the several Blackfish assertions.

- Showcase care of killer whales

A little more than a year after Blackfish appeared at Sundance and strained SeaWorld’s finances, business relationships and visitor relations, the company executed its first attempt at corrective action. The Blue World Project was announced in August, 2014 as a program to showcase special attention to orcas. The project’s purpose is twofold: to build and display a larger, more engaging killer whale environment, and to donate $10 million to killer whale research. SeaWorld attempts to build credibility for the project by appointing an advisory board composed of nationally renowned zoologists, psychologists and conservationists. This
team will “focus on the creation of an environment that maximizes the health and wellbeing of the animals” (SeaWorld, 2014).

The Blue World Project was initially announced at a press conference held at SeaWorld San Diego. The program consisted of lively, upbeat remarks by SeaWorld and San Diego officials. The media event, held outdoors, was opened by San Diego park president, John Riley who recognized several elected officials in attendance and introduced SeaWorld President and CEO Jim Atchison to the podium. Atchison presented the new project to the audience with an exciting tone, referring to it as “revolutionary” and “remarkable.” As a visual of solidarity, Atchison invites staff member and elected officials to the stage to reveal the illustrated backdrop of the program. After this photo opportunity, San Diego City Council president Todd Gloria gave a convincing pitch on the importance of SeaWorld to the local economy. Lastly, to add credibility to the project, Vice President of Veterinary Services Dr. Chris Gold, reiterated staff members “passion for the job” and their advocacy for animals.

In addition to the press conference, the project was publicized through a news release and the seaworld.com website. The news release conveyed the same enthusiasm as did the conference while detailing the program’s components and listing current members of the advisory panel. The website served as a visual for the project. With vivid, blue images, the illustrations create a majestic model of the new tanks, and show activity among guests, animals and staff members. At the time of the announcement, SeaWorld had not yet received approval from the California Coastal Commission. This was perhaps a move to place public pressure on the Commission to approve the expansion permits. SeaWorld won its bid to move forward with the Blue World Project in October 2015, but in a surprising turn of events, the California Coastal Commission also banned SeaWorld from breeding or transporting orcas in California. The organization also limited the amount of orcas to 15 at the San Diego park.

- Reposition SeaWorld as a global conservation leader

In each rebuttal to Blackfish claims, SeaWorld included information about its history of conservation. For each negative tweet or Facebook post directed towards SeaWorld, the company responded with information about its longstanding commitment to conservation. Negative commenters receive the link to the SeaWorld Cares webpage http://ask.seaworldcares.com. This particular page encourages visitors to pose questions via twitter, and provides a catalog of frequently asked questions and answers, grouped by topic. Conservation is one of those topics. This tab links to a page entitled, “Our Focus,” where the organization’s mission of conservation is outlined and includes information on the conservation fund. Visitors have the option to join a mailing list, donate to the fund, and apply for grant opportunities.

In response to CNN’s airing of Blackfish, SeaWorld VP for Zoological operations wrote an editorial that appeared in The San Diego Union Tribune and on the CNN website. Blackfish film ignores SeaWorld’s benefits to conservation, research,” underscores the corporation’s established commitment to animal care and research. Additionally, the proposed Blue World Project is punctuated by a $10 million commitment to killer whale research and conservation.

Evaluation

Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2015) describe an intentional crisis as those initiated by “individuals with questionable motives” (p. 11). While Blackfish director Gabriela Cowperthwaite may not have had malicious intent, it is clear the documentary sparked a crisis
for SeaWorld. What began as a film documenting the death of a SeaWorld trainer quickly became an expose’ into SeaWorld practices and treatment of animals. Ulmer, et al suggest that attention be given to both the threat and the opportunity associated with the crisis (p.32). SeaWorld’s palpable public relations response to Blackfish can be categorized as overwhelmingly threat focused, giving limited attention to opportunity. All strategies executed were in direct response to Blackfish.

SeaWorld’s overall goal was to dispel Blackfish’s claims through the use of new and traditional forms of media. The initial statement acknowledging Blackfish’s perceived effect implied the company would respond strategically (Barnes, 2013). This ominous statement served as a foreshadowing of more statements citing the documentary as its sole threat, and began its attempt to inoculate audiences from Blackfish’s accusations.

The letter dispersed to critics via email and a statement sent to ABC actually gave Blackfish more publicity and longevity in theatres. The film grossed more than two million dollars and remained in theatres 14 weeks (boxofficemojo.com, 2015). Documentaries typically do not fare well in theatres, but Blackfish’s showing proves that SeaWorld’s attention to the film inadvertently publicized it.

SeaWorld increased its presence on social media as the film became more popular with audiences and critics alike. SeaWorld possibly thought it necessary to directly respond to these audiences, but its social media presence resulted in more outcry from animal rights activists - individual and group.

Introducing plans for the Blue World Project, which would double the current orca habitat at the San Diego park seems to contradict and challenges previous messages about the care of orcas. The plans include a tank 50-feet in depth with 1.5 acres of surface area, and a fast water current to allow orcas to swim across moving water. The proposed $100 million was announced months before the California Coastal Commission would hear SeaWorld’s proposal and decide whether to grant the necessary permits. As previously noted, the California Coastal Commission did approve the plans, but in a stunning twist, it banned SeaWorld from breeding killer whales in the state, established a cap on the number of killer whales in the San Diego park, and prohibited the transportation of orcas in and out of California. During a November 2015 Investor Day, CEO Joel Manby explained that the organization would fight the California Coastal Commission’s decision, but hinted that the organization may abandon the Blue World Project (Daniels, 2015), noting, “There are a lot of factors, and I think we have to see how it all plays out.” From a purely business perspective, SeaWorld would invest $100 million to improve the living conditions for the orcas, but given the new restrictions over breeding and transportation of whales, the Blue World Project would eventually be emptied. Failing to move forward with the Blue World Project will directly challenge its efforts to place emphasis on its care and treatment of its orcas, while moving forward with the project poses a clear financial burden. The Blue World Project appears to be a cornerstone in SeaWorld’s attempt to combat the controversy surrounding the treatment of its orcas, yet it now poses a serious threat to the organization’s image and financial state.

Analysis

A review of SeaWorld’s response to the Blackfish release revealed a series of organizational decisions that were poorly executed, or were not executed in a timely manner. SeaWorld was aware Blackfish was going to be released and failed to adequately prepare. Preemptive crisis communication is key to managing and recovering from a crisis. Unfortunately, SeaWorld failed
to prepare for the worst case scenario prior to the Blackfish release. The fact that Blackfish was released in 2013, yet is still a major subject of controversy for SeaWorld in 2015, speaks volumes about the strategic communication efforts by the organization. In many ways, SeaWorld’s Blackfish crisis situation has become a prime example of what not to do.

**Strategy 1: Inoculate target audiences by dispelling Blackfish claims**

This strategy was unsuccessful as it was received poorly by both target audiences. SeaWorld’s initial statement was necessary as it acknowledged the documentary would portray the company negatively while bolstering the company’s image. Standard statements like this are typically the sole response organizations release during emerging crises, but SeaWorld went further. In addition to releasing the initial statement to a general audience, SeaWorld also targeted film critics. The letter released via email to 50 critics translated the company’s desperation and had a snowball effect. Not only did the critics respond unfavorably to this communiciqué, but news outlets and bloggers also criticized SeaWorld’s crisis communication tactics (Batt, 2013; Boylan, 2013; Cieply, 2013; Schelling, 2015).

Effective inoculation provides a counterargument to a threat which then creates resistance (Burgoon, Pfau, & Birk, 1995). While SeaWorld offered several counterarguments, its audiences did not resist the emotional and persuasive appeals of Blackfish. The approach of providing audiences a set of “facts” and allowing them to draw their own conclusions is a significant gamble, and one that has resulted in significant loss for SeaWorld.

**Strategy 2: Directly address Blackfish content on social media and the Web**

This strategy based on two-way communication demonstrates SeaWorld’s intention to be transparent with its audiences. Two-way communication typically is an element of an accommodative stance (Cancel, et.al, 1999). SeaWorld’s willingness to use social media as a channel to communicate to its audiences can be viewed as accommodating, but the message they sent was pure advocacy. Social media is a great channel to inexpensively send messages to a mass audience while receiving instantaneous feedback. However, SeaWorld’s use of social media can be perceived as combative and defensive. SeaWorld attached a document entitled, “69 reasons you shouldn’t believe Blackfish” to several of its Facebook and Twitter replies. The document, formatted as a film script, refuted sixty-nine scenes from the film. Complete with timestamps and scene descriptions, the document explicitly details the film from the opening scene to the ending statement.

SeaWorld’s file attachment on social media was circulated to thousands of its followers, thereby exposing more audiences (supporters and opponents) to the conflict. This tactic also brought more attention to the film rather than thwart audience interest. The public’s response to this strategy supports Schwarz’s (2012) findings that publics engage in attributing responsibility to organizations in crisis situations, and therefore evaluate them negatively. Based social media comments, publics viewed SeaWorld as the cause of its own negative attention, and did not need to actively seek a platform to express their frustrations with the theme park. SeaWorld allowed for these comments on its own mediated setting. This strategy too, posed and proved to be a significant risk of extending negative exposure. In creating a separate website that included information about Blackfish, SeaWorld again publically acknowledges and brings attention to the film. This channel, however, does not offer the opportunity for two-way communication, and contributes to the company’s pure advocacy stance.
Strategy 3: Showcase care of killer whales

While the Blue World Project aims to educate public about the orcas and their care while in captivity, the presentation of the project has been somewhat misleading. A close look at the plan shows that the tank will be an addition to the current Shamu tank. In essence, the project is being framed as a new habitat, though it is actually an addition to the current tank. While the surface area may be large, the depth and environment is not inclusive of the entire project. Other criticisms have also emerged regarding the Blue World Project.

Strategy 4: Reposition SeaWorld as a global conservation leader

SeaWorld undoubtedly expends finances and resources to the conservation of animals and the environment; however, a lackluster initial response from the organization failed to capitalize on its role in global conservation. Instead of drawing attention to Blackfish, SeaWorld may have benefited by launching a campaign with a focus on its good works within the conservation community. As a result, many of its efforts to remind the public of its work have been poorly received. While the VP for zoological relations’ editorial did garner national media attention and emphasized that SeaWorld’s operations are underscored by conservation and research, it was clouded by the already existing backlash. The organization’s website aimed at educating publics about its efforts was also a little too late. Simply firing tweets that includes a link to the page to social media users was not enough to change minds and reposition the organization. As part of the Blue World Project, SeaWorld also committed $10 million to killer whale research and conservation; however, the public outcry overshadowed the deed. There is no doubt the organization will continue its struggle to overcome the post-Blackfish fallout and its attempt to reposition itself as a global conservation leader.

Conclusion

The SeaWorld case is vast, with many twists and turns along the way. A commonly accepted assentation in crisis communication is the quicker the response, the more likely you are to recover. Unfortunately, SeaWorld spun its wheels a little too long, even as organization executives were aware of Blackfish’s production and impending release date. The organization failed to capitalize on the production period and develop its own careful, strategic response. The SeaWorld Blackfish situation appears as a case example for what to avoid in strategic communication.
References


SeaWorld (2013, October 25) VP of zoological operations at SeaWorld San Diego writes of the untruths of Blackfish and what the film chooses to ignore: more than 50 years of providing the finest care to our animals [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/SeaWorld

SeaWorld (2013, November 3) I urge you to read two recent stories about the rescue and care of whales and dolphins, done by SeaWorld and hundreds of hardworking volunteers. I can send more to you, if you’d like. Also, here’s the link to our conservation fund.


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Negotiating the National Brand: 
Social Media Power in a National Crisis

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Abstract

This study analyzes activist empowerment and social media engagement in a protest effort. In-depth interviews with Taksim Square activists show that social media empowerment is tied to social networks, rather than the global visibility of the social media sphere, making network power and communicative competence critical for social media power.
In 2013, civil unrest erupted in Turkey when a peaceful demonstration against urban development in Istanbul's Taksim Gezi Park was met with violence from police. As Turkish media downplayed the Taksim demonstrations (CNN-Turk infamously aired a penguin documentary rather than cover the developments), protestors (both in and outside of Turkey) took to social media to build awareness for the cause. Despite efforts by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to block its usage, social media provided protestors and other activists a global stage to direct the conversation about the protests and connect disparate groups of Turkish citizens across the world.

As a case of social media usage, the Taksim Square protests demonstrate the power of social media in granting marginalized publics a voice, a phenomenon that has also been noted in the Arab Spring protests between 2010 and 2012 and continues to characterize the social media landscape today. And yet, research on social media empowerment—and its implications for public relations—has been “sparse” (as has been pointed out by Men [2011, p. 435]).

In particular, activists’ efforts to raise awareness about government abuse in Taksim through sites like Twitter and Facebook raise questions about social media empowerment, and public involvement in the construction of Turkey’s global image, often termed brand identity. In fact, while much has been written on nation branding, little empirical work has been conducted on the influence of activists and social media on a nation’s brand, especially not from the lens of social media activists, themselves. Through in-depth interviews with 12 Taksim activists in Turkey and the United States, this study explored sense of empowerment and the uses ad gratifications of social media for activists.

Findings suggest that social media power is a function of one’s sense of empowerment through information and expertise, social capital, and communicative competence. Furthermore, findings suggest that social media fulfill activists’ informational, social, and self-actualization needs. Furthermore, findings demonstrate that social media provide a sense of presence for those geographically disconnected to protest efforts. Overall, our study suggests that social media activism may be just as strong an influence on nation branding as other government-directed efforts—reinforcing the need to move from a “mass-mediated country image” (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015; p. 108) approach to one that favors the view that a nation’s brand should be co-created between a government and its publics.

**Literature Review**

The prevailing promise of social media is built on the assumption that power is invariably seized by and distributed to social media publics because of the higher levels of access, opportunities for connection, and visibility of social media networks, especially heavyweights like Twitter and Facebook. However, this connection between social media empowerment and social media usage is assumed more than it is investigated. In fact, scholars commonly contend that social media empower otherwise marginalized publics (Saffer, Sommerfeldt, & Taylor, 2013; Saxton & Waters, 2014; Yang & Lim, 2009), but few have analyzed the factors of that power from a public perspective or its effects on an organization (Men, 2011). The lack of empirical insights into one’s sense of empowerment on social media has been underdeveloped in public relations research. In the following section, we establish the context for social media empowerment, including the uses and gratifications of social media in a protest effort, as well as the potential factors that contribute to publics’ empowerment on social media.

*Social Media Uses and Gratifications*
Social media are media "designed to facilitate the dissemination of content through social interaction between individuals, groups, and organizations using Internet and Web-based technologies to enable the transformation of broadcast monologues (one to many) into social dialogues (many to many)" (Botha & Mills, 2012, p. 85). Social media use is often explored empirically using uses and gratifications theory (U&G)—which prioritizes choice in media consumption and analyzes media usage from a means to an end orientation (Pai & Arnott, 2013). U&G theory proposes that "cognitive and affective needs motivate people’s choices when consuming media" (Pai & Arnott, 2013, p. 1040). Needs are "the combined product of psychological dispositions, sociological factors, and environmental conditions" that motivate media use, and "gratifications are the perceived fulfillment of a need through an activity such as media use" (Wang, et al., 2012, p. 1830). Social media use represents a reciprocal causality, through which "media use is affected by individuals’ beliefs and attitudes, which in turn, are reinforced by the media use" (Wang, et al., 2012, p. 1830).

Scholars have examined a plethora of needs social media fulfill, including social, emotional, cognitive, and habitual needs (Wang, et al., 2012). Naturally, social needs are predominant. Social media remove geographic boundaries between individuals and facilitate "rich interaction" toward strengthening interaction with "family, friends, and the world" (Wang, et al., 2012, p. 1830). Smith and Gallicano (2015) found that individuals seek social approbation and use social media to facilitate extant relationships. Pai and Arnott (2013) considered social needs fulfillment as an effort to achieve belonging within a social group.

Research also considers the way social media fulfills needs to express and construct personal identity, which may be broadly categorized as self-actualization. Social media provide a platform for self-esteem and self-expression in which users can strategically manage self-presentation and build a personal profile online (Leung, 2013; Pai & Arnott, 2013; Smith & Gallicano, 2015; Zuñiga, et al., 2012). Leung (2013) considered these narcissistic tendencies, arguing that users seek recognition through exhibition, vanity, or self-absorption, but individuals may also seek self-actualization online through altruism (Pai & Arnott, 2013) and civic responsibility (Zuñiga, et al., 2012). Overall, then, self-actualization comprises efforts to achieve a personal sense of fulfillment in social media activity.

Cognitive needs are another area of focus in U&G research on social media. Individuals use social media for information seeking purposes (Smith & Gallicano, 2015; Wang, et al., 2012). Information seeking is predominant in social media as individuals look to strengthen personal "information, knowledge, and understanding" through social media activities (Wang, et al., 2012, p. 1830). Smith and Gallicano (2015) highlighted information consumption as a dominant activity among social media users and Austin, et al. (2012) argued that social media enable individuals to be content participants and contributors.

Another need identified by U&G research on social media is the fulfillment of a pleasurable or entertaining experience. Some consider this broadly as emotional need fulfillment (Wang, et al., 2012), while others refer to it as hedonism or entertainment (Pai & Arnott, 2013). The fulfillment of personal experience needs is a driving force for the habitual use of social media that renders social media activity a regular part of one’s day (Smith & Gallicano, 2015).

**Uses and Gratifications in Social Media Activism**

The influence of social media on social movements, particularly on Arab Spring, has been well-established in both news and academic publications. However, just how much
influence social media usage has had is hard to determine (Olorunnisola & Martin, 2013). Research has shown that digital social media has allowed for “new modes of communication, forms of collective identity and solidarity, and grassroots mobilization to resist forms of domination and in particular the colonization of public sphere and public opinion” (Carty, 2010, cited in Olorunnisola & Martin, 2013, p. 278). To get a better understanding of just how social media enables mobilization, a uses and gratifications approach to examining activism online may be appropriate. Though social media-facilitated activism has not been a significant focus of U&G research, studies have shown that social media serve two principle functions: to raise awareness and to accrue and mobilize resources.

First, social media are commonly used to publicize a social movement, protest, or other dissident social activity. Information dissemination is a primary use of social media in a social movement (Luo & Jiang, 2014; Sommerfeldt, Kent, & Taylor, 2012). Social media enable marginalized voices to “reach transnational audiences and to circumvent traditional top-down political hierarchies…increasing the capacity of dissidents to frame their movements and mobilize citizens in local and diaspora domains” (Olorunnisola & Martin, 2013, p.278). Principally, activists use social media to legitimize “the oppositional discourses that contest or contradict the power of deep-pocketed target organizations” to control the conversation and information flow and reconstruct discourse around “tensors that are conducive to create a state of dissensus” (Luo & Jiang, 2014, pp. 7, 21). This oppositional discourse can create a boomerang effect in which international allies respond and “place external pressure on the government” (Olorunnisola & Martin, 2013, p. 278).

Activists also use social media to accrue and mobilize resources, may be tangible (i.e. material resources such as money, space or other means for publicity) or intangible (i.e. the human assets and social networks that support a social movement) (Sommerfeldt, 2011). Though social media are used to fulfill both tangible and intangible resource needs, the diversity of network connections available online renders coalition and relationship building central their use (Sommerfeldt, et al., 2012; Luo & Jiang, 2014). This access to and use of social resources “plays an important part in successful instrumental action” (Stefanone, et al., 2012, p 453). Social media provide increased opportunity to tap into opinion leaders and activate local communities by connecting around “the feeling of powerlessness and the mobilization of similar minds” (Luo & Jiang, 2014, p. 23). Social media are particularly effective for building support for a social movement because studies have shown social media usage correlates with civic engagement through the way it facilitates discussion between citizens (Bennet, Wells, & Freelon, 2011; Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005).

Despite the benefits of social media to a social movement, scholars still question its role—whether social media enable protest efforts or simply serve as an appendage to other mobilization efforts (Olorunnisola & Martin, 2013, p. 279). The lack of studies exploring online activism from a uses and gratifications approach additionally render the need for further consideration into social media’s role in a social movement. Therefore, following research question is needed to advance insights on this matter:

**RQ 1: How do activists consider social media in their protest efforts?**

The following section explores the second subject area of the current study, sense of influence on social media.

*Social Media Power*
Power is a particularly relevant area of research in social media because research has shown that one of the primary motivations for online communication is to “have a specific effect on a target audience…to change sentiments and influence people” (Campbell, et al., 2011, p. 89). Power has been defined as “one’s capacity for influencing or achieving a desired end result” (Smith & Place, 2013) and is characterized by “competence, or the skill and ability to perform effectively, and control, or the authority and autonomy to act” (Men, 2011, p. 435). The capacity for power also includes access to critical information and resources to effect change (Pfeffer, 1992; Kanter, 2003). Power can come in several forms, including one’s title or authority, expertise, charisma, or capacity to coerce or reward (French & Raven, 1968).

Whereas accounts of individuals enacting power on social media have been well publicized, the influence of social media on sense of empowerment has been under-explored. Feelings, cognitions, and emotions are particularly critical to understanding power because when individuals feel “psychologically empowered, they feel more confident in…exerting influence” (Men, 2011, p. 436). Furthermore, Spreitzer (1995) has argued that power is a “motivational construct” manifested through cognition, meaning, and self-determination (p. 1444). We hypothesize that social media power may be a product of a number of personal, social, and media-specific factors, which are outlined below.

The first factor of power is competence, or feelings of control or self-efficacy. Luo and Jiang (2014) studied employee empowerment and found that “employee activists acquired power through self-knowledge, education, and seeking advice” (p. 22), which enabled them to pursue change in their organizations. Competence, then, represents confidence in one’s ability to perform or effect change through knowledge or expertise. Power through competence is a central component of Bandura’s (1977) concept of self-efficacy, which postulates that belief in one’s ability to complete a task is central to motivation (Chiles & Zorn, 1995). According to Bandura, self-efficacy empowers individuals through enactive attainment (or relevant personal experience), vicarious experience (or confidence from another’s successful actions), and autonomy (or sense of control) (Chiles & Zorn, 1995).

One area of competence specifically related to social media is ability to construct persuasive arguments and communicate effectively online. French and Raven (1968) refer to this type of power as informational and persuasive reasoning. In field of sociolinguistics, this concept is referred to as “communicative competence”. Generally attributed to Hymes (1972, cited in Teachman & Gibson, 2014), communicative competence comprises one’s knowledge and use of language in specific, concrete situations (Teachman & Gibson, 2014). Hymes argued that “effective communication is produced through the integration of linguistic competence with pragmatic knowledge, and the ability to perform communicatively within specific speech communities to accomplish a purpose (Teachman & Gibson, 2014, p. 4). Communicative competence includes such factors as grammatical competence (lexical knowledge), sociolinguistic competence (the cultural rules of discourse), strategic competence (knowledge of communication strategies), and discourse competence (or cohesion and coherence) (Teachman & Gibson, 2014).

Another potential factor of power on social media is one’s access to social networks and online audiences. The availability of social support, including emotional and material resources, is commonly considered a driver of social media use (Stefanone, et al., 2012). This support through social networks and connections is also referred to as social capital, or “the resources embedded in one’s social networks,” which can be “accessed or mobilized through ties in the network” (Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012, p. 320). There are two forms of social capital:
bonding and bridging capital. Bonding capital is the resources from one’s strong tie connections, including immediate family and close friends; bridging capital is the resources from otherwise disparate social groups and network diversity (Stefanone, et al. 2012). Though the strongest support in a social movement may come from close friends and relatives (bonding capital), support from those who share a common interest with protestors (bridging capital) may be particularly salient for online activism.

In fact, the capacity of social capital to empower may be found in the consideration of one’s own social network. Barker, et al. (2015) used the term “social capital affinity” to refer to this reflective consideration. Social capital affinity is “the sense of community and likeness felt for people online within one’s social network” whose “opinions may be of interest” and whose “presence may enhance the online experience by providing a loose sense of camaraderie” (p. 1605).

In summary, we argue that social media power is a product of competence (including feelings of control, self-efficacy, and communicative competence) and social capital. In fact, insight on social media power is sparse and in need of further development, as other factors outside of competence and social capital likely influence one’s sense of empowerment on social media. Accordingly, the following research question guides this study:

**RQ 2: How do activists consider their power on social media?**

*Research Context: Taksim Protests and Turkey’s Brand Identity*

What makes social media power critical for public relations and strategic communication research is its effect on intended targets or subjects of opposition. In particular, social media activism has undeniable influence on a nation’s reputation and identity. Recently, the term nation-branding has been used to describe a government’s efforts to “market” a nation through traditional branding activities that include national logos, slogans, and other efforts to create a favorable image (Kaneva, 2011). For a nation, its brand identity is “the dominant associations it mobilizes in audiences” (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011, p. 603), and nation-branding is the process by which a government “invokes profitable associations...that help attract tourists and capital investment while driving the sales of national products and boosting a country’s international image” (p. 604).

Nation branding is a planned and purposive form of government strategic communication that has been criticized as a “monologic” communication process that stands to publicize potentially false representations of a nation as a unified and non-diverse entity (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011). Perhaps the greatest threat to a nation’s brand is the counter-noise from a nation’s dissidents, which is especially visible on publicly accessible social media sites. A nation’s efforts to publicize a positive brand image can be usurped by the negative images portrayed by dissidents, because a nation’s image is created through the images portrayed in media (Uysal, et al., 2012).

Still, what some might consider a threat, branding scholars consider an opportunity, because a nation’s brand is best developed by “enlisting citizen participation in the creation of a brand identity, and then using the fact of this participation to enjoin citizens to ‘live’ (and thus promulgate) the brand (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011, p. 600). In other words, the influence of social media means a nation’s brand is unavoidably co-created and negotiated.

Nation branding is particularly relevant in the case of a national crisis played out on social media, like the Taksim Gezi Park protests in Turkey in 2013. Similar to Arab Spring in which social media were used to spread awareness, mobilize citizens, and gather support from the
international community (Uysal, et al., 2012), protesters in Turkey used Twitter, Facebook, and other SNS to publicize their discontent. Ironically, Turkish government leaders sought to shut down the same sites that leaders, themselves, had used to build their national brand with the international community (Uysal, et al. 2012).

**Method**

The purpose of this study was to understand the factors that influence one’s sense of power on social media. Qualitative methodology was most appropriate for this endeavor because of its emphasis on achieving depth of meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Specifically, this study employed in-depth interviews with twelve individuals involved in the Taksim Square protests.

**Sampling and Data Collection**

This study involved purposive convenience sampling techniques. Sampling was purposive in that we recruited participants who had used social media to communicate about the Taksim Square demonstrations. It was convenient in that we recruited participants from accessible networks. In the end, participants were from two distinct groups: individuals in Turkey who had participated in the on-the-ground protests, and individuals in the United States who participated in protests online. Interviewees were between the ages of 18 and 30, and comprised working professionals, students, and college graduates.

Following IRB approval, researchers conducted 12 interviews lasting between 45 and 75 minutes with each participant. Interviews were conducted between June and December, 2013, during the eight of protest efforts. Interviews were open-ended and loosely structured based on an interview guide discussing social media use and sense of empowerment. Assurances of participant confidentiality and informed consent created an open environment for sharing opinions. Sample questions included: “How influential do you feel you were on social media during the Taksim protests?” and “How did you seek power influence through social media during the Taksim protests?” We considered data collection complete when new ideas appeared to be exhausted, consistent with qualitative research standards that consider data saturation more important than sample size and repetition (McCracken, 1993, p. 71).

**Data Analysis**

Verbatim transcripts were reviewed using a mixed method approach. First, we further analyzed social media empowerment using a grounded theory approach in which codes were developed directly from the data. Researchers used the constant comparative method in which each subsequent transcript was analyzed for added depth from the previous (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We then used a structured analysis to analyze the grounded codes based on the principles of social media uses and gratifications, including cognitive, social, entertainment, and self-actualization needs. Outliers were noted, and are included in the findings section, below.

We sought inter-coder reliability in data analysis by discussing findings and sharing coding themes before, during, and after completion of the interviews. Furthermore, we reviewed core categories and codes, and then discussed the analysis to come to an agreement. We also built the study around Kvale’s concepts of validity (1995) by developing a flexible interview guide that would allow respondents to discuss concepts in their own way and by establishing claims through communicative discourse.

**Findings**
Interviews with Taksim Gezi Park activists reveal that the social media played a considerable role in gaining support and favorability for the protest efforts, as well as mobilizing citizens both in and outside of Turkey. Additionally, social media usage in the protest efforts was driven by, among other things, a need for connection and sense of presence among geographically dispersed Turkish citizens. Taksim activists considered their social media power a product of their communicative competence and social capital affinity. Activists also considered their own stake and personal relevance to the social movement as a factor of their empowerment.

**RQ 1: Social Media Uses and Taksim**

The principle uses of social media during the Taksim protests were for information and social connection. Specifically, social media provided a platform for activists for information consumption and distribution, social connection and mobilization, and, for self-expression. Additionally, respondents who were geographically separated from protest efforts used social media to maintain a sense of connection and presence to activities they could not participate in.

**Information Consumption and Distribution**

Activists reported using social media for both information retrieval and distribution, especially early on when the protests received only limited attention from Turkish media. Activists outside of Turkey were even more reliant on social media for information needs. Interviewees described their use of social media for information on Twitter and Facebook as an active and continuous process, as many reported checking updates regularly and cross-checking the veracity of information. Activists on the ground used social media for even more nuanced informational purposes, including to gather information about protest locations, protestor needs, and even to warn other protestors about dangerous situations. Representative interview responses are listed below:

- “When we were protesting, we were often hit with pepper gas, and we needed medicine, so we would always share information like, ‘Okay, this person here has these supplies if you are in need. If you are hurt, go here.’” Respondent 2
- “We were not able to control things in social media we were just following the things and what was going. I was about to die, thinking what was going on? I needed to know!” Respondent 5
- “My parents weren’t users of social media... but they opened up Twitter as soon as the protest started. All of my relatives did, including my grandmother, and I think it’s taken on a bigger role. They’ve never tweeted in their lives but they have access to information from a variety of sources so they have the chance to cross-examine information so to see if it’s actually true.” Respondent 2
- After a couple of hours [following the violence] news became so messy. Social media became so noisy. In order to learn something you needed to look deeper because 60% of what people were saying were lies. So you needed to dig deep to follow something.” Respondent 6.
- “You get a more personal sense of how [people] think [on Twitter] because you get these sudden reactions to events. Sometimes they don’t think enough before they post...they’re not staged. Twitter is more spontaneous.” Respondent 8.
- “I would just look at what my Turkish friends were saying and I tried to see things from different perspectives.” Respondent 11
“It can be hard to find reliable information...Twitter was a good way to get information and bring it all together. The newspapers were not showing much of the information because they’re connected to the news channel who is controlled by the government. We had to use twitter to share information or else we would not get the information.”

Respondent 4.

**Social Connection and mobilization**

Activists utilized social media primarily for social, even interpersonal, purposes. More than communicate to an unidentifiable mass audience, respondents reported sending and seeking messages specifically from people who they knew. Social media filled needs gathering resources for, and distributing resources to, support protest efforts. Social connection was specifically evident in crowdsourcing for joining protest efforts as respondents reported that their social connections were a significant influence on their involvement in the Taksim protests, both on the ground and online. As such, social media created a bandwagoning effect where activist activities were often a result of peer influence. It was also evident that social media were used to organize protests. Interview responses that denote the social themes in social media activism efforts are listed below.

“Twitter made us feel like we are not alone. We knew that there were other protests going on in other cities. We were not fighting alone. There were 2,000 other people fighting”

Respondent 4

“I was an online protestor even though I was not there. I wasn’t putting something new on the table, but I was sharing the news from other people like my friends saying that there are a couple of police here, they are attacking us here, some people are wounded, so they need help”

Respondent, 5

“I was pretty distant from Istanbul but my friends were attending those protests so what I tried to do was help them navigate their way to escape from the police attack. So I was informing them about police attacks in specific regions and telling them not to go there to be careful about police”

Respondent, 7

“I wanted to put together a protest as students in the U.S. so I Googled all the Turkish students associations in the U.S. and I tracked down groups on Facebook. I had to friend those people so I could send them messages. We did protests in New York and San Francisco, and connected through live online feeds...I was hoping for long term connectivity with other people that wouldn’t be destructive, but constructive.”

Respondent, 12

“A lot of my friends were in the protest so that pulled me in. I have some friends that were involved with the protest and I found out through their twitter posts. Of course I wanted to communicate with them. They were in Istanbul and got tear-gassed pretty badly down there. I also began to see posters on social media and they were so graphic. Then there were protest in front of my wife’s apartment and she was telling me about the things going on. That’s what got me into the protest”

Respondent 3

**Self-Expression**

For many respondents, social media served as a platform to express shock and disgust about the government’s reaction to protests and to air grievances about the questionable state of democracy in Turkey that led to the violence in Taksim. Some interviewees shared concerns that they thought the Turkish people were uninformed about the reasons behind the Taksim
protests, and they made it their goal to raise awareness about the issues behind the social movement. Furthermore, when respondents discussed the intended effect of communicating their complaints and concerns about Turkey on social media, they often considered their potential influence on peers and fellow Turkish citizens. Specifically, many they hoped their communication efforts would incite friends to join the protests. Representative responses are listed below.

“I wrote some tweets that I stated my opinion. I am not that creative in communicating in that form of message. It does not bother me if I do not get retweeted. It is more about making your individual stance. It is very important to state my stance.” Respondent 4.

“I was [using social media] hoping to be helpful and help my people out there to raise their voices.” Respondent 7

“I used social media to let people know there is actually something going on in Turkey. That was frustrating. I was getting no reaction from people, even friends. I was looking to friends to step up. I told them they needed to care. I asked, ‘If you’re my friends let me tell you what is going on, decide yourself, but be considerate about it.’ I wanted them to say it out loud and say it together. Physically GO protest!” Respondent 12.

Part of respondents’ social media use for self-expression included their sense of effect on events, and the way their social media messages might influence Turkey’s image and reputation. For example, Respondent 1 was one of many interviewees who explained that social media involvement in the protests was designed to counter the prevailing reputation of Turkey as a progressive and democratic country—an image that Respondent 1 said was not necessarily valid. He added that publicity of the protests shows not only the disconnect between Turkey’s government and the country’s purported image of democracy, but also the progressive culture of the nation’s youth. Respondent 2 similarly hoped that the imagery from the protests would help shed light on the false impressions of democracy in Turkey, and raise awareness about the need for change. Additionally, because the Taksim Square demonstrations were in response to the urban development of a park, some respondents said their purpose was to reinforce the image of Turkey as one of the most “biodiverse countries” in Europe. Respondent 4 summarized social media efforts to counter the government’s nation-branding efforts:

“I got involved in the protest because it was important to enforce a change in the government. We are shifting towards a dictatorship and the prime minister is controlling everything in the government...The protests have switched to the social media and it is focused on the corruption in the government. We are trying to educate people here about the news and in true time people will change their opinion about the government. We hope that people will vote the prime minister out of office during elections.

Though many reported sending messages in support of the protests, many shared their reservations about using a public medium like Twitter or Facebook to share their oppositional opinions. This was especially the case for those who were receiving support for their education. Though many doubted that the government could actually connect them to their online grievances, there were still constant undertones that respondents were no willing to risk losing funding or being arrested. Respondent 11 said, “If I show passion for these [protests] it might put me in hot water more than anything” and respondent 3 said, “My father in law warned me that people who are using social media from the united states...that there was an intelligence agency in turkey that was going to come here and find those people. He told me to stop because they aware going to come after me.” For this reason, interviewees like Respondent 10 said they are “generally anonymous” online.
Sense of presence to events

For activists who were geographically separated from protests in Taksim, social media provided a connection to the events, people and issues in their home country. For these dispersed activists, social media provided a sense of presence with the events and people they were too far away to experience, helping them also fulfill a sense of personal responsibility to the issues underlying protest efforts. Activists’ sense of presence was best described by Respondent 9 who called it “an opportunity to share in the spirit” of the protests. Others discussed their cognizance of the way social media facilitated a connection to the protests, and a sense of the effect of their commentary. Sense of presence through social media was often evidenced by the number of respondents who opened a Twitter or Facebook account to participate in the protest efforts. Representative responses include the following:

“I think the strongest contribution of social media is that me being a student here it is almost 11,000 km from Turkey, from Taksim square, but still being able to connect with them. I was not there physically but it was kind of satisfying for me, I was satisfied with it because that was the best thing I could do and social media provided me with that chance to do the best thing that I could do.” Respondent 5

“I am not close to Istanbul but I have a lot of family members and friends there so knowing that my friends are under threat and sometimes in trouble, it makes me feel upset about it and I feel like I can’t do anything for them because I am far away, but I am trying to be helpful in different ways. It is good to stay connected because here, as international students, we are going through some tough processes. I don’t want to stay isolated… while I was using social network I was being part of the protests even though I was not physically there. It felt good.” Respondent 7.

“I go [online] and I read all of the people’s commentaries, and you know I do my own writing. It gives me access to people’s perspectives to get a sense of what people are thinking and what is happening in Turkey.” Respondent 8.

“One night I was in the protests and went home at 4 am, I couldn’t sleep because I wanted to know what was happening, and on the news no one was talking about anything. I opened twitter and there was a stream of someone using their phone video…I was at home not able to sleep because of the protests but I was able to watch things happen over the Internet by someone I don’t know. It was really interesting moment for me.” Respondent 9.

RQ2: Social Media Power and Taksim

Activists in the current study discussed their sense of social media power as a product of three primary factors: social connections and reach, knowledge and information, and communicative competence in using social media for protest efforts. Additionally, respondents cited their own sense of being on the right side of the issue as a significant concept of their own empowerment.

Social Connections and Reach

First and foremost in interviewees’ consideration of their social media power was the reach potential of their messages through such publicly accessible and visible sites like Twitter and Facebook. Most activists in this study cited the potential to make a difference through their personal social networks and the potential for influence through the strength in numbers available in social media. Widespread visibility of social media messages was a lesser
consideration of social media power, as respondents doubted that their messages would reach anyone outside of their social networks due to the large number of messages posted in social media about the Taksim protests. Respondents’ consideration of their own social capital was, perhaps, most empowering for respondents. Examples of social media activism from one’s social network were also empowering for respondents. Representative comments from interviews are listed below:

“[The government] will most probably have seen the large amount of information that was shared…the number of people that contributed to those events. It would have created some question marks in their minds…that’s the power. It is not all me it, it is all together…as a kind of online collaboration move that will be the impact of power to have.” Respondent 4

“I don’t think many people still saw [my Facebook posts] during that time—the feed was crazy. People would tweet 20 per minute…Others like celebrities and artists, they had influence. They had followers so they had a huge impact. Thousands of more followers more than me.” Respondent 8

“I am really impressed with Facebook and twitter and social media because that’s how it’s being spread actually. Because people are so connected in social media, they share the information and they gather several people without it being any organized event. We could just Tweet and Facebook each other, and they would just meet up. And there was really no leader in this event, no senior person who led the demonstration. It was social media that brought the people together. The event spread all through Turkey from city to city without being organized by a single person, or group, or anything else.” Respondent 10.

“I think it would be fair to say that I hold a fair deal [of power], because my friends are from different backgrounds, and I think that especially with the perspectives that I’m offering, it would be very unique to those people. That might be the only perspective about these certain issues or cultures that they might even see on their news feed. So I think me being sole speaker for an issue might actually give me a little bit more influence.” Respondent 11.

“I don’t think I can make any difference because social media is too crowded you have to spend so much time to make yourself heard there for example, people at some point become famous for fifteen minutes on social media but their voices are unheard later so that’s basically it.” Respondent 6

Knowledge, Information, and “Rightness”

Another significant consideration of social media power was respondents’ knowledge and expertise about the Taksim protests, including personal experiences on the ground, or experiences gleaned from individuals in one’s social network. Expertise on the topic was particularly empowering as a proof of credibility for the social media commentary that respondents posted. Several also cited the progressive knowledge of the “young population” and the level of education of protestors as factors of empowerment. In fact, many respondents expressed their power in terms of being correct or on the right side of the argument in the protest efforts. Those who did also expressed a responsibility to correct the wrongs in Turkey using social media to enact that power. Finally, the credibility and validity of information respondents posted on social media was also empowering. Responses that reflect this power through knowledge are listed below:
“I believe that my cause is right. Basically so, if I just fight in equal terms I would win… it’s like saying that God is on my side” Respondent 1.

“Social media is a big weapon. It’s the information. It’s huge. You have 20,000 cops versus regular people with cell phones…Through the touch of a button, the information is already there. Then they send it. They use their phones constantly…I think they’ve realized they couldn’t stop the young generation sharing things and their thoughts. I think we brought this new law which they enforced yesterday. We created that. The younger generation did a great job. They showed their power through social media.” Respondent 2

“Social media and other web tools give us power in terms of having more and more larger access to a larger amount of information. So then the problem is not having access or having information but how to use them…Social media gives me power but that power is like potential energy, it is not instant energy. It is just information there, and a large amount of information, it’s just potential power. I can turn into Kinetic energy if I want to learn about it and if I want to reflect on it.” Respondent 5

“I think having valid information strengthens your hand, especially if you are in a hot situation and you need to escape or you need to help others who are in need of help. So social media was really powerful in that way.” Respondent 6

“I am proud of my people who got involved without being really defensive and aggressive cause they were defending their rights and it was a totally democratic protest until police started attacking them. I am really proud of them that they raised their voice. It’s a human right, we all deserve to live in a democratic society and we all deserve to share our thoughts even though it is against the majority. We deserve to be respected and not discriminated against our opinions.” Respondent 7

Communicative Competence

Another significant consideration of social media power was respondents’ sense of communicative ability on social media. Interviewees often attributed their power (and others’ power) to the ability to be persuasive in their social media messages, and express discontent in a socially acceptable way. Many were highly cognizant of the method and tone of their protest efforts both on social media and on the ground. Persuasive appeal was central to activist power. Representative responses are included below:

“There was a photographer who was photographing events in Taksim Square and sharing the photos he took on Facebook. I think it was influential but not because of the social media, it was because he was a good photographer. I think the real reason he was so influential was because he was a good photographer.” Respondent 6

“I think competency is everything because if you were a bad communicator before the protests started and you are using Facebook and Twitter to communicate something during the course of a protest, then I don’t think anyone would necessarily listen to you. You have to establish that competency in communicating things and being knowledgeable about the things around you.” Respondent 2

“If you are arguing that you are using your democratic rights, you should do it in a democratic way. It is not about being nice. It is not about being political. It is about being democratic in return for democracy.” Respondent 5

“Making difference involves different factors. The first is the reception you get and people who are listening to you and to what you are saying. The other one is, if you have something of a big impact or the value of your information. Even if you have followers in
small numbers, if you have an impactful image, it would make people do something about it.” Respondent 9

Additionally, sense of competence in using social media was also a significant factor of social media power. Respondents often attributed the power of their social media activities to how technologically savvy they (or fellow protestors) were. In fact, respondents often discussed power in their ability to maneuver around government attempts to shut down social media distribution of protest information. Being able to use relevant messaging and link to other social media users was also cited. From a broader standpoint, respondents also considered the government’s inability to control media, despite their efforts, as a factor of their social media empowerment. Responses that reflect this media savviness and technological expertise are listed below.

“Social media only gives me enough power to share my ideas and to gain control. I try to make my stuff stand out from others, in a good way. You know, fresh perspective, stuff that people can think about.” Respondent 11

“The new generation is the Facebook generation. And they have so much information you cannot stop them from sharing it. The government has become really strict about Facebook usage. If you post something negative on there you can get jail time... like five years and fined. They got scared of the younger generation and what they can do. They are more tech savvy.” Respondent 2

“I think if you present the content in a very digestible way...If you put the link and maybe one or two sentences, or if you do have paragraphs, space them out very well, I think if you format it, it gives you influence.” Respondent 11

Discussion

The purpose of this study was build a theory of social media empowerment through an in-depth analysis of social media usage by activists engaged in a protest effort. Responses from Taksim Square protestors may be specific to the demonstrations in Turkey, but the findings are highly applicable to social media activism more broadly. This study demonstrates that relying on the potential of social media to provide visibility and access to a large global audience to explain one’s sense of empowerment on social media may be limiting and unrepresentative of the complex interactions of factors that may influence social media empowerment. In short, social media publics may not feel empowered simply because they have access to a global audience online. Rather, empowerment appears to be a product of more interpersonal and intrapersonal psychological factors, including online social connections, access to information, and communicative competence. As such, this study contributes to the development of theory from the sense of social media empowerment among Taksim Square protestors. The study’s findings also add insights to the need fulfillment of social media use in a social movement or other protest activity.

Social Media Empowerment

This study suggests that social media empowerment is a product of intrapersonal and interpersonal considerations. Perhaps the most significant contribution of this study to social media empowerment is the influence of intrapersonal factors, namely those that fall under the heading of communicative competence. Largely explored as a sociolinguistic phenomenon, communicative competence comprises one’s sense of confidence in communicating (Teachman & Gibson, 2014). When applied to social media power, communicative competence is a product
of an individual’s confidence in the ability to use social media to express a message that will be received appropriately by the intended audience, which, as this study demonstrates, may be within one’s own social network. Empowerment through communicative competence, then, is a function of one’s ability to effectively manage social media and communicate in a relevant and persuasive way. Using appropriate messages and references to culturally relevant symbols may be critical to this effort.

From an interpersonal perspective, empowerment is also gained through social connections, further confirming the influence of social capital on social media power. In the current study, both forms of social capital were evident—bonding and bridging capital, though the former appeared to be slightly more influential on sense of empowerment than the latter. Taksim activists regularly relied on their immediate social connections, including family and close friends (bonding capital), to define their power. To a lesser extent, bridging capital was evident through respondents’ connections with the Turkish community around the shared sense of purpose in bringing about change in Turkey.

This study’s findings also suggest that power is a function of one’s own knowledge and expertise means that power is also contextual. In other words, just because an individual has access to a social network or even competence in using social media, that does not mean that individual will feel empowered. Expertise in the issue or knowledge domain is critical.

Of course, the above-cited variables only represent a few of the potential influences on one’s sense of empowerment. Future research should explore social media power more broadly, examining other empowerment situations as well as the extent to which communicative competence, expertise, and social capital define a user’s sense of empowerment.

**Social Media Uses and Gratifications in Activism**

This study also contributes to the understanding of the uses and gratifications of activism carried out through social media. Though U&G literature is well-established, and has been applied to social media in various contexts, the reciprocal needs discovery and fulfillment of social media use in a social movement have been under-explored. This study confirms previous U&G studies that social media fulfills social, cognitive, entertainment, and self-actualization needs (Pai & Arnott, 2013; Smith & Gallicano, 2015; Wang, et al., 2012). In the context of a social media-facilitated protest effort, these needs take on specific characteristics. Findings in this study suggest that social needs involve the sense of belonging and connection to fellow protestors and others affected by demonstrations. Cognitive needs take the form of staying informed about protest developments. Self-actualization needs comprise efforts to communicate oneself persuasively and competently to one’s social network.

This study’s findings also suggest that sense of presence is a gratification sought in social media activism, and perhaps in general social media usage. Smith and Gallicano (2015) recently defined sense of presence as one’s cognizance and awareness in a social media experience. In the current study, sense of presence specifically related to one’s need to feel present with fellow activists in a protest effort. Social media enabled respondents to achieve that connection through the ability to send and receive images and messages about protest efforts in real time, including live streaming and real-time interactions.

**Practical Applications: Nation Branding and the Negotiated Brand**

This study’s findings have practical implications for the strategic practice of nation-branding. Namely, findings reveal the dangers of building a national brand from a top-down, monologic perspective. Nation-branding, as with any branding effort, requires active
participation of the brand’s constituents, in this case citizens. In his monumental work on customer-based brand equity, Keller (2008) established that highest brand relationship exists when a customer becomes a brand advocate. This brand advocacy is achieved when a company (in this case a nation) partners with its customers to build a brand that is explicitly co-created. In this way, co-created nation-branding requires “enlisting citizen participation in the creation of a brand identity, and then using the fact of this participation to enjoin citizens to ‘live’ (and thus promulgate) the brand” (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011, p. 600). The highly interactive nature of social media renders nation-branding a participatory effort.

Turkish government officials’ efforts to block social media during the Taksim protests may appear, on the outside, to make sense for branding. Activist messaging, which is highly viral, represents counter noise to the planned imagery and messaging leaders want to convey. However, managing counter noise may be a futile effort, as was demonstrated in the Taksim protests, and working with citizens to co-create the brand ensures a more authentic brand, and one that will more easily resonate among social media publics.

In short, if a nation’s brand identity is “the dominant associations it mobilizes in audiences” (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011, p. 603), then nation-branding is necessarily a dialogic process whereby government communicators elicit the public discourse and personal experiences of those who are living the brand (Uysal, et al., 2012, p. 342). As such, government communicators should seek national imagery from the “bottom up” by eliciting involvement from social media publics on their own terms. These messages, coupled with a nation’s own strategic messaging (including logos and slogans), will establish an authentic brand that may resonate effectively with global publics and the international community, as a whole.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has its limitations. Due to the purposive sampling method, all participants were young, educated, and highly involved in the Turkey’s political issues. Many reported that they used social media in response to their extant involvement in the Taksim Square demonstrations. It is possible that individuals who only casually communicated about Taksim, or who were not educated, may have provided additional, nuanced responses. At the same time, however, findings also confirm broad themes of social media usage and sense of empowerment, providing support for the validity of the findings in this study. Research with other less-educated or knowledgeable publics might yield other nuanced results.

This study’s focus on social media empowerment overlapped with considerations of power in on-the-ground demonstrations, and more broadly, on respondents’ involvement in the issues of their home country, raise questions about social media empowerment not explored in this research study, but that are appropriate for future consideration. First is the potential assumption that a social movement might be carried out predominantly online. Olorunnisola and Martín (2013) argue that even though the Internet offers quick information and easy access, activism is “essentially the same” because face-to-face communication and personal social interactions may remain the most effective way to initiate ‘on-the-ground’ social movement activities (p. 279). Yet, more than one participant in the current study suggested that protest efforts were planned and carried out solely through social media.

The contradiction between this study’s findings and scholar assumptions about the need for physical interaction prior to a protest bears further examination in research, including analyzing the differences in the processes of organizing online and offline, which concepts are
strictly online rather than offline, and which concepts are most potent in influencing the organization of a protest or other activist effort.

In conclusion, the need to understand social media facilitated power is significant. This study suggests that power may be more contextual, than it is based on the visibility of social media sites. Furthermore, specific variables identified in this study, including social media’s fulfillment of self-actualization and sense of presence needs, and the role of communicative competence in realizing sense of empowerment on social media represent promising new areas for developing a public-focused concept of social media use in public relations.
References


Conceptualizing and Measuring Relationship Quality as Public Diplomacy Outcomes: Application of the Relationship Assessment of Diplomatic Interaction Outcome (RADIO) Scale

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Abstract

In response to calls for a tool to measure public diplomacy outcomes, the Relationship Assessment of Diplomatic Interaction Outcome (RADIO) scale was developed based on the Organization-Public Relationship Assessment (OPRA) scale in public relations. Its purpose is to measure the perceived relationship quality between a country and its foreign publics. The scale classifies relationship types into experiential (those with the direct experiences of having traveled to a foreign country) and reputational (those without such experiences). Two macro-dimensions, interactional bilateralism and power mutuality, and two micro-dimensions, trust and empathy, are measured for both relationship types. Two micro-dimensions, relational continuation and relational satisfaction, are proposed for experiential relationships. Two micro-dimensions, relational attentiveness and relational curiosity, are proposed for reputational relationships. Based on the questionnaires completed by over 500 respondents in the United States and India, the theoretical implications and the practical applications of the RADIO scale are discussed.
Introduction

In spite of calls for the development of a measurement tool for public diplomacy outcomes, there have been obstacles causing the lack of scholarly attention in this matter (Banks, 2011). First, there are numerous external factors, such as changes in political leadership and advancements in media technologies, which could make an impact on public diplomacy outcomes. For example, when Barack Obama became President of the United States in 2008, European citizens had reported more favorability toward the United States. Second, internal factors, such as the lack of resources and the self-interests of the funding agencies, have also prohibited the investment on the development of a measurement tool. Third, although different public diplomacy efforts are planned for different time frames (e.g., Golan, 2013), there has been a focus on measuring outputs as the short-term effects of public diplomacy. For instance, Wang and Chang (2004) measured the media coverage of the Chinese president’s visit to the United States as an indicator of strategic public diplomacy. Measurements of outputs capture the temporary changes in beliefs, attitudes and behaviors, but fail to measure the long-term aspect of relational public diplomacy.

Without the availability of a measurement scale, countries would not be able to justify their investment of resources into public diplomacy efforts and to ensure the effective allocation of resources into programs which would achieve the desired outcomes. Organizations which measure their public relations efforts have been found to be performing better than those which do not (Paine, 2011). But Ryan (2014) suggested that the most important things, such as trust, just cannot be measured. Meanwhile, graduate students from the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, who conducted surveys and focus groups with public diplomacy professionals and academics, were commended by Matt Armstrong, Governor of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), for “attempting to quantify the unquantifiable” (Armstrong, 2010, para. 11). The accurate measurement of public diplomacy effectiveness remains a holy grail, but it is crucial to develop short-, medium- and long-term metrics to ensure that public diplomacy efforts are meeting their goals (Wallin, 2012; 2014). In 2012, Tara Sonenshine, the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs in the United States, reasserted the importance of measuring the aggregate impact of public diplomacy in influencing public opinion (Sonenshine, 2012).

In view of numerous calls for the development of a tool for measuring public diplomacy effectiveness, this study introduces the Relationship Assessment of Diplomatic Interaction Outcome (RADIO) scale to measure the perceived relationship quality between a country and its foreign publics as public diplomacy outcomes. The RADIO scale is unique in several aspects. First, it is developed based on the Organization-Public Relationship Assessment (OPRA) scale in public relations (e.g., Huang, 1997; Hon & Grunig, 1999), emphasizing the concept of relationships as the outcome of public diplomacy. Unlike the concept of image, the concept of relationships is characterized by the dimensions of mutuality and reciprocity between a country and its foreign publics. Because the relational aspect of mutuality and reciprocity consists of both first-hand experiences and information-based perceptions, developing dimensions using the relational approach would better capture the long-term outcomes of public diplomacy. Second, the RADIO scale takes into account the importance of considering the variety of factors which make up the relationships between a country and its foreign publics. Based on Grunig and Hung-Baesecke’s (2015) classification of relationship types, different sets of dimensions are proposed for foreign publics whose experiences and perceptions are characterized differently. Such classifications would help countries strategically classify and prioritize foreign publics to ensure
effective resource allocation into the planning of programs. Third, in addition to measuring the micro-dimensions of a person’s perceived relationship quality with a foreign country, it also measures the macro-dimensions of a person’s perceptions about the relationship quality between his or her home country and a foreign country.

**The Relational Approach to Public Diplomacy**

Linked to the concept of *soft power*, public diplomacy is defined as a country’s efforts to achieve its foreign policy goals through *attraction* rather than *coercion* (Nye, 2004). Both one-way and two-way communication efforts are made to cultivate national image, promote mutual understanding and advocate national interests (Zhang & Swartz, 2009). Unlike traditional diplomacy, which is conducted between governments, public diplomacy positions a country in the international context by strategically building relationships with foreign publics to accomplish diplomatic goals (Servaes, 2012). On one hand, it promotes a greater level of openness in civil society by involving foreign publics in public affairs to advance mutual understanding between two countries (Yun & Toth, 2009). On the other hand, through strategic relationship building, it also seeks to influence the public opinion of foreign publics (Malone, 1988).

The different approaches through which public diplomacy are conducted have shared similarities with public relations. Golan and Yang (2015) defined public diplomacy as “the management of communication among diplomatic actors, including nations and non-state actors, which have specific informational or motivational objectives toward reaching the foreign publics through various channels of communication to promote national interests” (p. 2). Like public relations practitioners, public diplomacy practitioners play the role of managing communication between countries and their foreign publics (L’Etang, 2009). Signitzer and Coombs (1992) suggested that the tough-minded approach used in public diplomacy to influence attitudes is similar to the one-way asymmetrical approach in public relations. The tender-minded approach to promote mutual understanding in public diplomacy is similar to the two-way symmetrical approach in public relations. There has been an increasing focus on the relational approach to public diplomacy, emphasizing relationship cultivation with foreign publics as the key approach to *attract* foreign publics.

The concept of *relationships* is central to public relations and the relational approach to public diplomacy. In public relations, relationships could be defined as “the degree to which the organization and its publics trust each other, agree on one has the rightful power to influence, experience satisfaction with each other, and commit oneself to one another” (Huang, 1998, p. 12) or “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” (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999, p. 160). Good relationships with key publics provide long-term benefits to organizations because they prevent crises, and thus, litigation costs (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; Huang, 2001a). Unlike the concept of *image cultivation*, which is a one-way effort to manage publics’ impression on organizations (e.g., Heath, 1994), *relationship building* is a two-way effort which promotes mutual understanding by reflecting the needs and desires of both the organization and its key publics (Grunig, 1993).

Like public diplomacy, public relations had long been challenged by the difficulty to justify its values in contributing to organizational goals because of the lack of tools to measure long-term impact and the inability to turn the nonmonetary value of quality relationships into a monetary value (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). The Organization-Public Relationship
Assessment (OPRA) scale was developed to overcome this challenge (Huang, 1997; 2001b). It consists of six dimensions (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Control mutuality refers to the degree to which the parties agree on who has the rightful power to influence the other. Trust refers to the extent to which a party is willing to open itself to the other because the organization is fair and just, will do what it says it will do and has the ability to do what it says it will do. Relational satisfaction is defined as the degree of favorability a party has toward the other because positive expectations are reinforced as the benefits of the relationship outweigh the costs. Relational commitment is defined as the degree to which a party feels like it is worth investing energy into maintaining and promoting the relationship. Exchange relationship is defined as a party’s willingness to provide benefits to another party because it expects something in return. On the contrary, communal relationship refers to one’s willingness to provide benefits to the other without expecting anything in return. The OPRA scale has been used and refined to measure organization-public relationship quality over the years, such as its mediating effects on generating supportive behaviors (e.g., Kang & Yang, 2010).

Unlike the concept of relationships in measuring organization-public relationship quality in public relations, the concept of relationships in measuring country-public relationship quality in public diplomacy comprises a greater variety of first-hand experiences and second-hand information. A country is a higher and bigger entity; an individual’s relationship with it would consist of institutional-level political and economic interactions and non-institutional-level interpersonal and cultural interactions (Kim & Ni, 2011). Thus, the development of a measurement tool ought to take into consideration the interplay between governmental and non-governmental interactions in contributing to public diplomacy outcomes. To address the limitation of the lack of a scale to measure public diplomacy outcomes, Lee and Jun (2013) applied the OPRA scale to measure the extent to which South Korean college students’ relationship with the U.S. embassy predicted their attitudes, and thus, behavioral intentions, toward the United States. Nevertheless, it was limited by the applicability of the OPRA’s scale only for measuring organization-public relationships. Thus, it was recommended that a more sophisticated tool be developed to measure the relationships between countries and their foreign publics. The tool would ideally take into consideration the differences between organization-public relationships and country-public relationships.

Public Diplomacy Efforts as Antecedents of Relationships

Considered a long-term effort of public diplomacy (e.g., Golan, 2013), the concept of relationships in relational public diplomacy differentiates from the changing of beliefs, attitudes and behaviors with the assumption of perceived mutuality achieved by the understanding and adjusting in words and behaviors by the country and its key publics. Golan’s (2015) integrated approach to public diplomacy highlights three levels of public diplomacy efforts. First, the mediated level, highlighting countries’ efforts to influence media coverage, is influential to foreign publics who are not exposed to the public diplomacy programs of a country. Second, the nation branding level refers to countries’ management of foreign publics’ perceptions or impressions through nation branding campaigns. Third, the relational level highlights the formation of public relationships through cooperation and personal engagements via programs like cultural and educational exchanges. The relational level is especially crucial when countries fail to manage foreign publics’ perceptions through the first two levels. According to Grunig (1993), a symbiotic relationship would result from the management of perceptions, but
ultimately, a behavioral relationship, characterized by the joint product of mutual understanding and the adjustments of interests and behaviors, should be the goal of effective communication.

The concept of *soft power* has several dimensions. When Nye (1990) first introduced the concept, he identified culture, political values and foreign policies as the three dimensions of international relations which work together to shape an international climate for the formation of public opinion. To conceptualize the antecedents to the formation of soft power, Kim and Ni (2011) introduced a positive model with two types of antecedents: institutional/governmental antecedents and non-institutional/non-governmental antecedents. Institutional/governmental antecedents consist of the *political interactions* and the *economic interactions* which take place between the governments of two countries. Non-institutional/non-governmental antecedents consist of the *cultural interactions* and the *interpersonal interactions* which take place between a country and its foreign publics, such as the cultural and interpersonal exchanges. To address the increasingly prominent role of transnational corporations as a non-state actor in public diplomacy, *corporate interactions*, defined as the interactions between a transnational corporation and a foreign citizen through employment, purchases of products and services or engagement in corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, were also introduced (Tam, 2015). It is believed that as a result of these public diplomacy-related efforts, foreign publics would develop favorable sentiments toward a country and would transmit the same sentiments to others in their home countries (Scott-Smith, 2008, as cited in Golan, 2015; Vibber & Kim, 2015).

**Communicative Behaviors as Consequences of Relationships**

Sociological public diplomacy prioritizes people-to-people interactions over the mediated messages or nation branding campaigns from countries. According to Vibber and Kim (2015), the digital age has given rise to networked individualism, making individuals an influential source of information. As a consequence, *megaphoning* results from the foreign publics’ communicative actions about a foreign country (Kim & Rhee, 2011). Foreign publics share information with their own networks after which members of their networks would share the messages with their networks, resulting in a chain megaphoning effect. Vibber’s (2014) study with international students in the U.S. found that international students are the ambassadors whose communicative actions about the host country also influence their friends and families in their home countries. The communicative actions of these international students, who have had first-hand experiences with a host country, could create a contagious flow of megaphoning effects amongst those who have not had the same first-hand experiences with the country. The communicative activism, which originates from those with first-hand experiences with a country, is given more weight than the information which comes from the country (Vibber & Kim, 2015).

The concept of relationship quality is found to have associations with other concepts, such as attitudes and behavioral intentions (e.g., Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002; Jun & Lee, 2013). The consequences of organization-public relations are “the outputs that have the effects of changing the environment and of achieving, maintaining or changing goal states both inside and outside the organization” (Ledingham, 2003, p. 94). In the digital age, as information flows in multiple directions, relationships are “the links through which soft information can flow and the value of network ties in its ability to enforce agreements that could not be sustained without the information and sanctioning power provided by other network members” (Lippert & Spagnolo, 2011, p. 202). Information in one’s existing networks is considered more credible than information from other sources (Chu & Kim, 2011).
In public relations research, the concept of relationship quality has been found to be associated with positive word-of-mouth communication and identification with the organization (Hong & Yang, 2009; 2011). Customers with strong identification with an organization are more likely to act as ambassadors to promote its products and services to others (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Fombrun & van Riel, 2003). For example, they are more likely to retweet messages from brands with which they have good relationships (Kim, Sung, & Kang, 2014). Kim and Rhee’s (2011) study on voluntary communicative actions by employees also found that employees are more likely to share positive information about their employers with others if they have positive relationships with them. They differentiated megaphoning effects from word-of-mouth communication and defined it as “positive or negative external communicative behaviors about their organization” and “the likelihood of employees’ voluntary and selective information forwarding or sharing about organizational strengths and weaknesses” (p. 246). Whereas product success is related to the word-of-mouth communication an organization can successfully generate (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004), the megaphoning effects resulting from foreign publics’ voluntary and selective information transmission about a country could cause the strengthening or weakening of a country’s soft power.

**Development of the RADIO Scale**

The RADIO scale was developed based on Kim and Ni’s (2011) conceptualizations of the dimensions of soft power, Grunig and Hung-Baesecke’s (2015) relationship classification and Huang’s (2001) and Hon and Grunig’s (1999) OPRA scale. It has three goals. First, it seeks to provide some guidance to countries in terms of effective resource allocation. Therefore, it takes into consideration what makes up a relationship between a country and its foreign publics, resulting in the classification of two types of relationships. Second, also considering the antecedents of public diplomacy which give birth to the relationships, dimensions are assigned to each type of relationships and are given conceptual definitions. Third, the dimensions within the RADIO scale are operationalized through the development of survey items to be administered to foreign publics for their evaluations of perceived relationship quality with countries.

**The Classification of Relationships: Experiential vs. Reputational**

In public relations research, organizations are advised to strategically segment and prioritize their publics so as to be strategic in the investments of their limited resources to form relationships with the most important publics (Kim, Ni, & Sha, 2008). Because countries are confronted with the same constraint of limited resources, they also ought to be strategic in their investments of resources into public diplomacy programs. Golan’s (2015) integrated model portrays two important dimensions which characterize a foreign citizen’s relationship with a country: perceptions and experiences. According to Grunig and Hung-Baesecke (2015), there are different types of relationships. First-order relationships, known as experiential relationships, are held by individuals who have had direct experiences with an organization. On the other hand, second-order relationships, known as reputational relationships, are developed based on what individuals hear about the organization. The classification is similar to Grunig’s (1993) earlier classification of symbiotic and behavioral relationships. In the context of public diplomacy, symbiotic or reputational relationships are constructed by communication efforts. The communication efforts could be facilitated by the country, such as mediated public diplomacy efforts through the media or nation branding campaigns. But they could also be information that an individual receives from other sources. On the contrary, behavioral or experiential
relationships emphasize foreign publics’ experiences of a country’s behaviors or actions rather than communication efforts. For example, international students are considered to have held an experiential relationship with the host countries in which they study. Their relationships with the host countries are more likely to be affected by their direct experiences in the countries rather than what the countries convey in their campaigns or what the media presents.

As such, in country-public relationships, all foreign citizens are either in a reputational or an experiential relationship with foreign countries. The classification of foreign citizens into the two types of relationships characterize the causes of their relationships with a country, consisting of information-based perceptions and/or direct experiences. Thus, based on Grunig and Hung-Baesecke’s (2015) relationship classification, for the purpose of the strategic classification of foreign publics for resource allocation, the RADIO scale also classifies foreign publics into two types. Experiential relationship holders are those who have the direct experience of having lived or traveled to a foreign country. Reputational relationship holders are those without such direct experiences whose relationships with a foreign country are based on second-hand information from different sources.

**Macro-level Dimensions: Interactional Bilateralism and Power Mutuality**

Soft power can be conceptualized as possessing five dimensions (Kim & Ni, 2011). First, it seeks to attract foreign publics’ favorability for the purpose of influencing international public opinion. Second, it seeks to advance cultural attractiveness through the export of cultural products. Third, it seeks to enhance political attractiveness by increasing people’s satisfaction with the country’s political systems. Fourth, it seeks to increase educational attractiveness by attracting more international students into the country. Fifth, countries could enhance their communality through their responsiveness to international issues and social problems. Attracting foreign publics through public diplomacy is not entirely exclusive from traditional diplomacy. Relationships are characterized by multiple properties, including exchanges, transactions, communications, and other interconnected activities (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997). Taking into consideration the possible properties for the formation of country-public relationships, two macro-level dimensions are proposed for both experiential and reputational relationship holders.

The word diplomacy refers to a process of interactions between two nation states. To be engaged in diplomacy is to interact with another country. Relationships with another country could be affected by the frequency of interactions (Schultz, 2001). Nation states with close relationships would have more interactions. However, their interactions may only surround certain issues. Geographical distance could also be a factor limiting the interactions between countries (Batten, 2003). Thus, the frequency of interactions could be a crucial indicator of how close two nation states are (Bau, 1990). Therefore, the RADIO scale proposes to measure interactional bilateralism as a macro-level dimension defined as an individual’s perceived degree of frequent mutually beneficial interactions on political, economic and cultural exchanges between his or her home country and a foreign country.

The mutuality aspect of relationships involves control and reciprocity. Control mutuality in the OPRA scale originates from its definition as the extent to which the parties agree on which of them has the rightful power to make decisions on relational goals and behavioral routines (Stafford & Canary, 1991). It could also be understood as whether an organization listens to the concerns of its publics (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Because relationships between two parties involve transactions which may not necessarily lead to mutual benefits, programs which seek to achieve mutual understanding are more successful in building quality relationships (Ledingham, 2003).
When a country maximizes its own benefits at the expense of another country and blocks others from gaining access to its governance, it may lose its legitimacy. Hence, the RADIO scale proposes *power mutuality* as a macro-level dimension to measure an individual’s perceived degree of shared power in influencing each other in the relationship between his or her home country and a foreign country.

**Micro-level Dimensions: Trust and Empathy**

Trust is a significant dimension in public diplomacy because it enhances a country’s credibility in conveying its intended image to foreign publics (Ki, 2015). It affects whether an individual recognizes the competence and credibility of a foreign country in terms of its messages and its goodwill in being engaged in international relationships. When trust exists in a relationship, the messages from the organization become more persuasive (Heath, Seshadri, & Lee, 1998). The OPRA scale defines trust as the extent to which publics perceive that an organization treats them fairly, can be relied on to do what it says it will do, and has the competence to do what it says it will do (Hon & Grunig, 1999). It consists of integrity, dependability and competence. The RADIO scale proposes trust as a micro-level dimension to be defined as the extent to which an individual feels confident about a country, its citizens, social institutions, procedures, cultures and economic products.

In intercultural communication, empathy is concerned with putting oneself into the shoes of people of another culture (Percy, 2015). When operating overseas, transnational corporations are advised to be aware of their unconscious reference to their own values when dealing with other cultures (Doole & Lowe, 2008). Empathy is about understanding another culture’s emotions and experiences and sharing the feelings of connections, such as sympathy, compassion, tenderness, care, and forgiveness with each other (Fincham, Paleari, & Regalia, 2002). Nurturing empathy is one of the important goals for training intercultural teachers (Colon-Muniz, SooHoo, & Brignoni, 2012). The RADIO scale proposes empathy as a micro-level dimension defined as the extent to which an individual has feelings of empathy toward a foreign country in terms of its positions, interests, perspectives, conditions and stances on international issues.

**Micro-level Dimensions for Experiential Relationships: Relational Satisfaction and Relational Continuation**

Experiential relationship holders, possessing first-hand direct experiences with a foreign country, are influential ambassadors for long-term public diplomacy efforts (Golan, 2015; Vibber & Kim, 2015). Thus, the extent to which they feel satisfied with the relationship is an important indicator of their relationship quality. The OPRA scale defines satisfaction as whether an individual perceives the relationship to be satisfactory and beneficial for both parties (Hon & Grunig, 1999). In a satisfying relationship, the distribution of rewards would be equitable and would outweigh the costs (Stafford & Canary, 1991). Because both parties have expectations for each other, satisfaction would be achieved if expectations are met (Wood, 1996). Because expectations, feelings of happiness and satisfaction and a sense of mutual benefits are crucial for a satisfactory relationship, the RADIO scale defines relational satisfaction as the extent to which an individual feels favorable toward a foreign country because of positive expectations about the country, its citizens, its social institutions, its cultures, its economic products and services, and believes that such expectations should be reinforced.

Maintaining a relationship requires the investments of time and resources. Thus, they would only maintain it when they feel that it is worth maintaining. A committed relationship is one in
which a party believes that it is worth making the efforts to maintain the relationship with another party to ensure that it will endure (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The OPRA scale defines commitment as whether an individual is committed to doing business with an organization (Hon & Grunig, 1999). According to Huang (2008), it has two components. Affective commitment refers to an affective or emotional orientation to an entity whereas continuance commitment refers to whether one feels committed to maintaining the relationship after weighing the costs and rewards. To highlight the relationship continuance aspect of commitment, the RADIO scale defines relational continuance as the extent to which an individual feels that his or her relationship with a foreign country, in terms of interacting with its citizens, its social institutions, its cultures and its economic products and services, is worth maintaining and promoting and that such experiences should be repeated.

Micro-level Dimensions for Reputational Relationships: Relational Attentiveness and Relational Curiosity

Different from experiential relationship holders, reputational relationship holders have only had indirect secondary experiences with a foreign country, most of which would be knowledge acquired from other sources. But knowledge is significant to reducing uncertainty and increasing the trust and openness between two entities (Heath, Seshadri, & Lee, 1998). Curiosity is a desire to know, to see, or to experience through the exploratory behavior of the active acquisition of new information (Litman, 2005). An advertisement is successful if viewers portray awareness and interest after exposure (Smith & Swinyard, 1988). To motivate viewers to develop interests in the products, viewers must be aware of the knowledge gap between what they already know and what they need to know (Menon & Soman, 2002). The mass media plays a crucial role in persuasion by triggering people’s curiosity to pursue more information about products (Maloney, 1962). They become aware of the needs for more information. Thus, the RADIO scale proposes relational attentiveness as a micro-level dimension to reputational relationship holders’ needs for more information about a foreign country. It is defined as the extent to which individuals pay attention to news or information about a foreign country from the mass media or other sources. Relational attentiveness signifies a type of symbolic engagement for individuals to develop awareness, attitudes and behavioral intentions toward a foreign country (Kang & Yang, 2010).

In addition to the desire to know about a foreign country by acquiring more information, reputational relationship holders may also pursue to experience the country. Trial purchases could result from the curiosity generated from exposure to advertisements (Smith & Swinyard, 1988). To differentiate it from the information seeking behavior characterized by relational attentiveness, the RADIO scale defines relational curiosity as the extent to which an individual feels like he or she would like to pursue or experience a foreign country, its unique culture and its products and services. It refers to a person’s interest and desire to experience or engage with a foreign country behaviorally in the near future by visiting the country, meeting the people and making purchases from the country, or experiencing the culture.

Table 1 below summarizes the dimensions of the RADIO scale and presents the items used to measure the dimensions.

Table 1.
Definitions of the dimensions of the RADIO scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
### Macro-level dimensions

| Interactional Bilateralism | The perceived degree of frequent mutually beneficial interactions on political, economic and cultural exchanges between an individual’s home country and a foreign country. | • The interactions that my home country has with this country have been mutually beneficial.  
• This country maintains political interactions with my home country for mutually beneficial purposes.  
• This country maintains economic interactions with my home country for mutually beneficial purposes.  
• This country maintains frequent cultural interactions with my home country for mutually beneficial purposes. |

| Power Mutuality | The perceived degree of shared power between an individual’s home country and a foreign country in influencing each other. | • This country and my home country are attentive to what each other says.  
• This country thinks that the opinions of my country and its citizens are legitimate.  
• This country does not listen to what my country and its citizens have to say. (Reverse)  
• This country tries to overpower my country when it makes decisions which affect my country. (Reverse)  
• When the government of this country makes decisions which may affect my country, they take into consideration the opinions of my country and its citizens. |

### Micro-level dimensions

| Trust | The extent to which an individual feels confident about a country, its citizens, social institutions, procedures, cultures and economic products in terms of its integrity, dependability, competence. | • This country treats foreigners like me fairly and justly.  
• Whenever this country makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about foreigners like me.  
• This country can be relied on to keep its promises.  
• I trust this country. |
### Empathy
The extent to which an individual has feelings of empathy toward a foreign country in terms of its positions, interests, perspectives, conditions and stances on international issues.

- When this country faces a problem, I have no feelings about it. (Reverse)
- When this country is in trouble, I do not care much about it. (Reverse)
- I generally support this country's stance on international issues.
- When this country is condemned by another country, I tend to be on its side.

### Micro-level dimensions (experiential relationships only)

#### Relational Satisfaction
The extent to which an individual feels favorable toward a foreign country because of positive expectations about the country, its citizens, its social institutions, its cultures, its economic products and services, and believes that such expectations should be reinforced.

- I am happy with this country.
- Foreigners like me benefit from our relationships with this country.
- I am pleased with the relationship this country has established with foreigners like me.
- I am happy with the relationship between this country and my home country.
- Most citizens in my home country are happy with the relationship between this country and my home country.

#### Relational Continuance
The extent to which an individual feels that his or her relationship with a foreign country, in terms of interacting with its citizens, its social institutions, its cultures and its economic products and services, is worth maintaining and promoting and that such experiences should be repeated.

- I feel that this country is trying to maintain long-term commitment to foreigners like me.
- I can see that this country wants to maintain a relationship with foreigners like me.
- Most people in my home country think that it is important to stay close to this country.
- I would like to see my home country become a stronger ally of this country.

### Micro-level dimensions (reputational relationships only)

#### Relational Attentiveness
The extent to which an individual pays attention to news or information about a foreign country from the mass media or other sources.

- Foreigners like me do not pay attention to news about this country. (Reverse)
- I am curious about what people say about this country.
- I enjoy learning about other people’s experiences in this country.
- I am curious about this country.
Relational Curiosity

The extent to which an individual feels that he or she would like to pursue or experience a foreign country by visiting the country, meeting its citizens, making purchases from the country or experiencing its culture.

- I would like to visit this country in the future.
- I would like to consume the different cultural products (e.g. movies, music, food, fashion, etc.) from this country.
- I would like to meet more people from this country.
- I would like myself or my children to study in this country.

Methodology

To test the reliability and validity of the RADIO scale, a questionnaire was administered to respondents in the U.S. and India on Amazon M-Turk between March 3 and March 8, 2015. Respondents were given a small remuneration for their participation. Amazon M-Turk has been described to be an inexpensive and efficient way of obtaining data (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). The respondents were asked to respond to the items for five different countries: Australia, China, India (U.S. sample only), South Korea, Mexico and U.S.A. (Indian sample only). But due to the small sample sizes for experiential relationships for some of the countries, only two countries were evaluated for the U.S. sample and three were evaluated for the Indian sample. Table 2 below summarizes the sample sizes.

Table 2. Sample sizes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>U.S.-China</th>
<th>U.S.-Mexico</th>
<th>India-Australia</th>
<th>India-China</th>
<th>India-U.S.A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiential</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA-China (experiential)</td>
<td>.951</td>
<td>.912</td>
<td>.860</td>
<td>.901</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA-China (reputational)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td>.957</td>
<td>.917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA-Mexico (experiential)</td>
<td>.813</td>
<td>.798</td>
<td>.817</td>
<td>.677</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
USA-Mexico (reputational) | N/A | N/A | .817 | .832
---|---|---|---|---
India-Australia (experiential) | .966 | .911 | .932 | .886 | .953 | .965 | N/A | N/A
India-Australia (reputational) | N/A | N/A | .926 | .957
India-China (experiential) | .962 | .903 | .865 | .922 | .875 | .918 | N/A | N/A
India-China (reputational) | N/A | N/A | .927 | .943
India-USA (experiential) | .824 | .430 | .611 | .466 | .743 | .825 | N/A | N/A
India-USA (reputational) | N/A | N/A | .929 | .960

**Results**

To examine how each dimension contributes to *perceived relationship quality* as the composite variable measured in the RADIO scale, Tables 4 and 5 below show the factor loadings for the dimensions for experiential relationships and reputational relationships respectively.

Table 4. *Factor loadings for RADIO dimensions for experiential relationships.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>U.S.-China</th>
<th>U.S.-Mexico</th>
<th>India-Australia</th>
<th>India-China</th>
<th>India-U.S.A.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactional bilateralism</td>
<td>.839</td>
<td>.680</td>
<td>.887</td>
<td>.967</td>
<td>.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Mutuality</td>
<td>.983</td>
<td>.818</td>
<td>.801</td>
<td>.994</td>
<td>.896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>.974</td>
<td>.978</td>
<td>.802</td>
<td>.955</td>
<td>.876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>.938</td>
<td>.887</td>
<td>.863</td>
<td>.908</td>
<td>.808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Satisfaction</td>
<td>.986</td>
<td>.933</td>
<td>.496</td>
<td>.832</td>
<td>.921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Continuation</td>
<td>.955</td>
<td>.971</td>
<td>.452</td>
<td>.841</td>
<td>.952</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 *Factor loadings for RADIO dimensions for reputational relationships.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>U.S.-China</th>
<th>U.S.-Mexico</th>
<th>India-Australia</th>
<th>India-China</th>
<th>India-U.S.A.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactional bilateralism</td>
<td>.897</td>
<td>.722</td>
<td>.930</td>
<td>.918</td>
<td>.870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Mutuality</td>
<td>.919</td>
<td>.872</td>
<td>.978</td>
<td>.966</td>
<td>.947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>.975</td>
<td>.859</td>
<td>.966</td>
<td>.963</td>
<td>.823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>.973</td>
<td>.984</td>
<td>.967</td>
<td>.953</td>
<td>.769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Attentiveness</td>
<td>.795</td>
<td>.569</td>
<td>.918</td>
<td>.875</td>
<td>.832</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To verify that the factor structure fits the hypothesized model, Table 6 below shows the results from the confirmatory factor analysis.

Table 6. Results from the confirmatory factor analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>DF</th>
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To test the utility of the RADIO scale in examining perceived relationship quality, Tables 7 below summarizes the averages of each dimension for the relationships evaluated.

Tables 7. Averages for each RADIO dimension for the relationships evaluated.

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<th></th>
<th>Interactional Bilateralism</th>
<th>Power Mutuality</th>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>Empathy</th>
<th>Relational Satisfaction</th>
<th>Relational Continuation</th>
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**Discussion**

While the confirmatory factor analysis has portrayed a reasonable fit for the scale, more studies could be conducted to further refine the scale. Theoretically, the RADIO scale has several implications. First, when developing a measurement scale for public diplomacy, we ought to consider the many varieties of experiences and information that one could have with and about the country. The scale specifies components, such as political institutions, economic developments, stances on international issues, its people, its cultures (e.g., movies, music, fashion and food) and its transnational corporations. Unlike an organization, a country is a much bigger entity for which the scale should comprise both broad items about the country in general and specific items about its components. Second, it is necessary to further identify the possible associations between knowledge about the country and relationship quality and what types of knowledge would lead to more positive relationships. If an individual does not have strong direct experiences with a foreign country, his or her relationship would be more influenced by commonly-shared stereotyped impressions. On the contrary, certain experiences or knowledge could lead to more individualized impressions about the country, resulting in more positive relationships. Thus, the confluence between individualized impressions and stereotyped impressions about each country should be explored. Third, relationships in public diplomacy are not immune from relationships in traditional diplomacy. When the macro-level dimensions receive a low average, the micro-level dimensions would also score a low average. Despite this, generally, experiential relationship holders have reported more positive relationship quality than reputational relationship holders.

According to Table 7, which summarizes the results from the study, experiential relationships have reported more positive relationship quality. As ambassadors for the countries which they have visited in terms of communicative actions, countries should explore communication efforts to encourage them to continue the relationship, such as encouraging them to revisit or further exploring other things about the country including its cultures and products and services. However, compared to Mexico, China does not perform as well in its reputational relationships with U.S. respondents. A worth-noting finding is that the same applies to India’s respondents’ experiential relationships with China. Compared to Australia and the U.S., China does not perform as well. But for reputational relationship holders, China stands out for relational attentiveness, but not relational curiosity. In other words, respondents in both the U.S. and India are paying attention to news and other information about the country. As such, using the RADIO scale, by associating the RADIO scale with other antecedents and possible consequences, China could explore the causes and the consequences of the relational attentiveness. It is possible that people are paying more attention because they are exposed to more sources of information about the country. At the same time, it could also investigate
strategies to enhance foreign publics’ curiosity to experience the country behaviorally. All in all, the dimensions in the scale should be used by countries as a guidance as to what makes up a relationship between a country and its foreign publics. If a country scores low in a particular dimension, they should look into programs to making improvements in that dimension.

Conclusion

As an attempt to measure perceived relationship quality as the outcomes of public diplomacy, the RADIO scale has two initial goals. First, it seeks to address the limitation of the lack of conceptualization on how to go about developing an evaluation system for public diplomacy outcomes (Banks, 2011; Vibber, 2014). It utilizes and extends the OPRA scale and adds additional dimensions to investigate the dimensions characterizing the perceived relationship quality between a country and its foreign publics. Using country rather than an organization as a unit of analysis, it takes into consideration the different interactions or experiences an individual could have in association with a country, such as its cultures, its people, its social institutions and its transnational corporations. Second, the scale could ideally be used as a benchmark for countries to evaluate their long-term relational public diplomacy efforts. Relational public diplomacy emphasizes perceived mutuality and could be characterized by a combination of first-hand experiences and second-hand information. This study suggests the classification of relationship holders for countries to better understand how their relationships with different types of foreign publics would differ. The RADIO scale could provide countries with a better understanding of the different types of relationships they have with foreign publics and the different dimensions which comprise perceived relationship quality.

Limitations

This study also has several limitations. First, relationships are currently classified into two types, experiential and reputational, based on whether an individual has the direct experience of traveling to a foreign country. It is possible that factors, such as repeated visits to the same country, the duration of the visit and the frequency of interactions with people from the country, could be used to further extend the classification into more relationship types. Second, the sample sizes for the experiential relationships are relatively small compared to the sample sizes of the reputational relationships. Also, the reliability statistics of some of the dimensions are low. Thus, the scale should be re-tested in future studies to refine the dimensions and the items. Also, some dimensions, such as empathy, are newly added dimensions for which new items were developed. It is ideal if qualitative studies could be conducted to further understand the dimension prior to developing the items. We also recommend that structural models be built and tested to examine the relationships between the RADIO scale and other variables, such as awareness about the country. We propose that the RADIO scale could be used to predict foreign publics’ opinion on international issues. It would be worth examining whether relationship quality would predict foreign publics’ stances on issues on which they have limited knowledge.
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The Rise of Hot-Issue Nationalist Publics
Implications of Online Communicative Behaviors for Public Diplomacy

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La Trobe University, Australia

Yeunjae Lee
Purdue University

Abstract
Different to patriotism, nationalism is a sentiment shared by members of a nation who feel that their country is superior and should dominate other countries. Based on the situational theory of problem solving (STOPS), this study examines how nationalism is conveyed and sustained as a result of nationalist publics’ communicative behaviors about an international issue which receives extensive coverage in the media. Using the case of a territorial dispute between the Chinese and Japanese governments, a correlation was found between the amount of media coverage and the frequency of online discussions on the issue. This study also introduces the concept of international problem personalization effects to portray the ways in which individuals interpret the international issue as affecting them personally. Implications for public diplomacy are discussed as to how affected countries and entities could minimize the impact of nationalist sentiments by understanding the situational motivations behind the communicative actions of nationalist publics.
Introduction

Albert Einstein once said: “Nationalism is an infantile disease. It is measles of mankind.” (Viereck, 1929). Craig Pearce, a public relations practitioner, argued that nationalism was detrimental to the public relations practice of mutually beneficial relationship building because it was “opposed to the notions of diversity, multiculturalism and sharing of power” (Pearce, 2010, para. 1). As an ideology shared amongst members of a nation, also known as an imagined community, which is socially constructed by individuals who have not interacted with one another before (e.g., Anderson, 2006), the violation of nationalist principles could trigger feelings of anger, motivating groups to be formed and mobilized to cope with the causes of such violation (e.g., Birkland, 1998; Gellner, 2008).

Unlike other issues, issues which trigger the rise of nationalist sentiments are characterized by the complexity of the causes, the processes and the consequences of nationalism. First, nationalist sentiments could be triggered by international issues or disputes which do not necessarily affect individuals individually in their everyday lives but collectively in their imagined communities (e.g., Ackland & O’Neil, 2011; Anderson, 2006). Second, nationalism is acquired over a long-term socialization process, causing it to be deeply rooted in individuals, but the characteristics of nationalism could vary from one nation to another (e.g., Druckman, 1994). Third, in spite of the rapid development of globalization, it does not overrule nationalist sentiments (Rieff, 2006). Nationalism gives births to nations in which members share commonality (Anderson, 2006; Gellner, 2008). Thus, nationalism is characterized by its being collectively held, experienced and sustained over time.

The collective nature of nationalism points to the need of investigating how it is sustained over time in terms of being collectively held and experienced for a nation to be upheld. In this respect, the communication of nationalism serves as a pathway through which nationalist sentiments are expressed. According to Birkland (1998), the agenda setting influences of focusing events, which are attention-grabbing events, are a major cause of group mobilization which allows issues to be presented and contested in the public agenda. Wang (2005; 2006) has identified associations between focusing events and the triggering of nationalist sentiments, influencing consumers’ purchase decisions for products from a particular country to which they are against. In public relations research, focusing events are known as hot issues which affect the majority of the population and receive extensive media coverage (Aldoory & Grunig, 2012). In spite of this, hot-issue publics which arise at times of extensive media coverage also dissipate when the issue no longer receives media coverage.

Because nations are invented and sustained over time through nationalism (e.g., Gellner, 2008), this study explores the role of hot issues in triggering group mobilization to express nationalist sentiments. It investigates the characteristics of nationalism, the nature of hot issues in giving rise to nationalist publics and the expression of nationalist sentiments in response to the hot issues. It also explores the major actors who are affected by such nationalist sentiments, including foreign governments, foreign organizations and foreign people and the impact of nationalism on the practice of public diplomacy.

Literature Review

Nationalism

In spite of the seemingly detrimental impact of nationalism on international relations (i.e., relationships between two governments) and public diplomacy (i.e., relationships between a country and its foreign publics), nationalism is necessary for members of a community to relate
to one another on some common grounds. Anderson (2006) defines a nation as an imagined community which is, in fact, limited but sovereign. Because most members of the same nation have never met, have never heard of and have never spoken with other fellow members, their sharing of common consciousness about their being in the same nation is purely imagined. Nations and nationalism do not exist naturally; nations are invented by the existence and expression of nationalism (Gellner, 2008). Members of a nation uphold a structure characterized by the relationships amongst members of a nation.

According to Gellner (2008), the causal relationship between nations and nationalism goes in one direction: nations are the effects rather than the causes of nationalism. However, such nationalism is only pervasive under three social conditions: homogeneity, literacy and anonymity. These conditions would uphold a structure which allows nationalism to be sustained to maintain a nation over time. Nationalism is distinctive as a result of its being a collective experience; the collective experience is often characterized by distinguishing one’s own nation from another. The collective analysis of 120 items conducted by Kosterman and Feshbach (1989) resulted in the definitions and differentiations of related concepts. First, patriotism is concerned with one’s strong feelings of loyalty and attachment to his or her nation without feeling hostile against other nations. Second, nationalism refers to one’s feelings about his or her own nation’s being superior over other nations. Third, internationalism is defined as one’s feelings of concern and empathy for other nations. Even when an individual favors his or her own nation over other nations, such favorability is not necessarily associated with negative feelings toward other nations (Balabanis, Diamantopoulos, Mueller, & Melewar, 2001). Despite this, nationalism suggests the otherwise; a strong nationalist would feel that his or her nation should dominate other nations because of its superiority.

Nationalism is developed over time and becomes reinforced during the process of socialization. Druckman (1994) suggests that nationalists are competitive and would have prejudice against other nations and people of other nations. The process of socialization leads individuals to develop persistent nationalist values which are associated with deeply rooted needs, such as the needs for a sense of belonging to one’s own nation and the feelings of self-enhancement. But such nationalist sentiments, also coupled with the emotional attachments to an individual’s own nation, would reduce his or her desires to seek information about other nations. As a result, negative attitudes toward other nations grow as the emotional attachments to his or her own country grow. Thus, nationalists would put their own nations in a binary opposite from another nation.

Although nationalism is persistent and deeply rooted, it could be categorized into different types and could be subject to change in accordance with changing social conditions. After China’s Tiananmen crackdown in 1989, Chinese nationalism has become more state-centric as the state has led Chinese citizens to raise concerns over the rise of Western conspiracy in preventing China from becoming more powerful (Wang, 2013). This type of top-down nationalism leads citizens to subordinate their own interests to the interests of the state as they willingly allow the state to speak for the nation and its citizens as members of a nation. Unlike bottom-up nationalism, which is led by citizens to pursue individual participation in the government’s decision-making processes, China’s top-down state-led approach to nationalism is characterized and reinforced through the formation of negative attitudes toward other countries. It builds consciousness amongst members of a nation by instilling in them an emotional and passionate sense of national pride and dignity (Pye, 1993). Individuals who express their national pride and dignity become part of a group to construct and reinforce the imagined nation with
others with whom they have never interacted (Anderson, 2006). One of the ways of expressing such nationalist sentiments is through consumer nationalism, known as consumers’ expression of their nationalist sentiments or national identity by favoring or rejecting products from corporations of certain national origins (Wang 2005; 2006). Thus, consumption choices are a type of national advocacy through which nationalist sentiments are expressed.

The development of globalization, accelerated by the advancements in communication technologies, has broken down some barriers between nations but remains challenged by nationalism. It does not lead to immunity from being affected by nationalism (e.g., Rieff, 2006). There is an independent relationship between globalization and nationalism that nationalism could increase the susceptibility of transnational corporations to possible crises overseas (Wang, 2005). Starbucks’ branch at the Forbidden City in China led to the triggering of nationalist sentiments against the American brand in the historical and cultural site (Han & Zhang, 2009). When the French government expressed disagreement with China about the issue of Tibet, a consumer boycott campaign was launched in China against the French-owned supermarket Carrefour (Nyiri, 2009). Thus, Gellner (2008) argues that “nationalist sentiment is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfillment” (p. 1). Nationalist sentiments are triggered as national identities are threatened or violated. Hence, it would be worthwhile to explore why and how nationalist sentiments are triggered, how nationalist publics construct meanings about certain incidents and collectively create and reinforce their imagined nations.

The Rise of Hot-Issue Nationalist Publics

Whereas nationalism is formed and becomes persistent over time, nationalist sentiments are triggered under certain conditions. When focusing events attract extensive media coverage, the rise of nationalist sentiments leads to the mobilization of groups which then attempt to either expand or contain the issues (e.g., Birkland, 1998). According to Wang (2005), two conditions in a nation could cause the rise of consumer nationalism against transnational corporations: the level of nationalism in the foreign markets in which they operate and the susceptibility of their brands. Because of their associations with their countries of origin, transnational corporations could be more susceptible to nationalist crises as a result of these two conditions. Toyota in China was involved in a nationalist crisis when it launched an advertisement of two Chinese stone lions’ saluting to a Toyota Prado (Nyiri, 2009). The advertisement was considered derogatory by Chinese citizens because of the history between China and Japan. Therefore, nationalist sentiments are formed and triggered under many conditions and would result in nationalist publics’ behaviors for problem solving, such as through their purchase decisions for products from certain countries for whom they do not have negative feelings (e.g., Wang & Wang, 2007).

Nationalist sentiments are triggered by external events, such as focusing events or hot issues. Despite the agenda setting influences of such events (e.g., Birkland, 1998) in leading nationalist publics to think about and assign salience to issues which are widely reported, the reasons behind which nationalist publics are formed are more complex than being an effect of mass media alone. First, it must be considered that nationalist publics are different from the general public. Calhoun (1997) suggested that the discourse of nations and nationalism is linked to the formation of political publics who self-organize themselves into publics in the public sphere. According to Grunig (1997), the concept of publics is linked to the concept of public opinion which is a psychological and sociological construct associated with perceptions,
cognitions, attitudes and behaviors. Publics are to be differentiated from the general public because their psychological and sociological characteristics would motivate them to act or not to act in a problematic situation. In the context of nationalism, nationalist publics are to be differentiated from the general public because they are characterized by certain psychological and sociological characteristics which would lead to the invocation of nationalist sentiments when focusing events take place.

Thus, instead of attributing the invocation of nationalist sentiments to the effects of the mass media, the intersection between focusing events as a situational factor and the social and psychological origins of nationalist publics should be considered. When constructing the situational theory of publics (STP), Grunig (2003) suggested a shift from studying communication as what organizations do to change people’s perceptions to what people do to solve problems. Thus, publics are those who are engaged in communication to solve problematic life situations. They are defined as individuals who feel that they are affected by a problem (i.e., problem recognition), believe that the problem is important to them (i.e., involvement recognition), and are confident that they have the efficacy to resolve the problem (i.e., constraint recognition). Thus, nationalist publics are differentiated from the general public for confronting a common problem which triggers their nationalist sentiments.

The concept of publics is important because the characteristics that they possess could trigger communicative actions for or against an issue or an entity. In the case of consumer nationalism, they could be engaged in consumer boycotts against corporations from certain countries (Wang & Wang, 2007). Thus, organizations or entities are advised to understand their publics by segmenting their environment into important segments with whom they strategically invest their limited resources to build relationships (Kim, Ni, & Sha, 2008). These segments, known as publics or strategic constituencies, are formed when individuals face a common problem, recognize the existence of the problem and organize to do something about the problem (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). They rise for the purpose of problem solving (i.e., the situational theory of problem solving, Kim & Grunig, 2011) as a result of some problematic consequences on them. In the context of nationalism, an event, such as a comment made by a celebrity, a decision made by a foreign government or an advertisement launched by a transnational corporation, could lead to problematic consequences on nationalist publics. Hence, entities are advised to understand their publics so as to incorporate their concerns into their decision making processes to prevent crises from arising (i.e., the behavioral, strategic management paradigm of public relations, Kim & Ni, 2010).

Understanding publics is the first step to segmenting them so as to strategically assign resources into building relationships with them. For this reason, there are different typologies of segmenting publics. Publics should be segmented based on the factors which motivate them to form. The situational theory of publics (STP) and the situational theory of problem solving (STOPS) segment publics based on their problem recognition, involvement recognition (known as the level of involvement in STP) and constraint recognition (Grunig, 1997; Kim & Grunig, 2011). In STOPS, these three variables form a composite variable called the situational motivation in problem solving. Together with referent criterion, which is defined as “any knowledge or subjective judgmental system that influences the way in which one approaches problem solving”, such as their prior experiences, the situational motivation in problem solving would predict individuals’ communicative actions in problem solving, i.e. the extent to which they would be engaged in information acquisition, information selection and information transmission about the problem (Kim & Grunig, 2011, p. 131).
When confronting a nationalist issue, nationalist publics are characterized by both their motivation for engaging in resolving the issue and their communicative actions as a consequence of their motivation. When publics are confronting with one single issue at a time, they could be classified using the single-issue typology (Grunig, 1997). First, nonpublics are those who are not affected by the issue, so they would not be motivated to be engaged in problem solving. Second, latent publics are affected by the issue but are unaware of it. Third, aware publics are affected by the issue and are aware of it, but feel that they do not have the efficacy to resolve the issue. Forth, active publics are affected by the issue, recognize its existence and feel that they could resolve the issue. Lastly, activist publics are former active publics who have organized themselves into resolving the issue together, such as through the media. Thus, when a nationalist issue arises, active publics could turn into activist publics to express their nationalist sentiments together. The mobilization of activist publics could also transform latent and aware publics into active and activist publics to escalate the issue through communicative actions (i.e., publics-initiated public relations problems, Kim & Ni, 2013).

Publics are “a group of people who encounter a problematic situation, recognize its existence, and organize to resolve it” (Grunig, 2003, p. 94), but the extent to which they are active in communicative actions to resolve it could also be dependent on other factors. In addition to the above typology of publics, the across-issue typology classifies publics into all-issue publics, apathetic publics, single-issue publics, and hot-issue publics. First, all-issue publics refer to those who are active on all the problems surrounding an issue. Second, apathetic publics are those who are not attentive to any of the problems about the issue. Third, single-issue publics are active only on a small portion of the problem which only affects a small percentage of the population. Lastly, hot-issue publics are those who are “active only on a single problem that involves everyone in the population and has received extensive media coverage” (Grunig, 2003, p. 97). Unlike the single-issue typology, the across-issue typology considers the variety of possible problems within an issue and how publics could change their focus over time. For example, Kim, Kim, Tam and Kim (2015) found that previous hot-issue publics could turn into chronic active publics under certain conditions even when media coverage dissipates. Likewise, nationalist publics could turn into hot-issue publics as a consequence of media coverage. However, some could remain aware of the issue and remain aware publics afterwards (Aldoory & Grunig, 2012).

Because the activation of nationalist sentiments is central to the reinforcement of nationalism and the maintenance of a nation, the issues which cause its invocation could shed light into the confluence between nationalism and nations through the expression of nationalist sentiments. Of these, focusing events or hot issues are often a major cause of group mobilization (Birkland, 1998; Wang, 2005). Hot-issue publics are active or activist publics who are organized due to media coverage; yet they subside as the issue begins to subside (Aldoory & Grunig, 2012). Aldoory and Grunig (2012) conducted 90 qualitative interviews and found that hot-issue publics tended to remain aware publics after the issue receives less attention. They are media-dependent but tend to dissipate quickly as the issue is no longer hot in the media agenda. The crucial significance of hot-issue publics is their ability to evolve into organized groups. Because of their dependence on the media, hot-issue publics do not only comprise existing active or activist publics. The negative media coverage of an issue could also increase the attention of non-active publics who were previously aware or latent publics (Kim, Ni, Kim, & Kim, 2012). Latent publics remain latent only until a hot-issue arises when they also become active (Aldoory & Grunig, 2012).
Because of its being a long-term persistent product of socialization, nationalism pre-exists and continues to exist over the course of a nationalist issue. It is part of individuals’ collective identities which are activated and portrayed when an issue threatening them becomes prevalent in the media. Thus, a hot-issue public which arises as a consequence of a nationalism-triggering event could comprise previously latent, aware, active and activist publics who have come together individually or collectively resolve the issue as active or activist publics. Hot-issue publics are found to have possessed certain characteristics. First, whether hot-issue publics remain aware publics after the dissipation of media coverage depends on the issue (Aldoory & Grunig, 2012). Previously aware publics who become hot-issue publics over the course of its receiving heavy media coverage would remain aware publics, but their problem recognition and involvement recognition would change. Also, hot-issue publics are better at articulating their cognitions at a time closer to the event. Thus, hot-issue publics have a relatively short lifespan.

The concept of hot issues has emphasized the significant role of the media, but it is possible that such hot issues are further discussed and become more significant as a result of interpersonal communication. Hot issues could be hot not due to media coverage, but interpersonal communication (e.g., Grunig, 2009).

Nationalist publics could vary in their involvement recognition, constraint recognition and referent criterion with regards to whether they feel motivated to resolve a nationalist issue, but they are characterized by a certain level of problem recognition which leads them to perceive an issue which threatens their nations and triggers their nationalist sentiments to be problematic. STOPs describes how and when people become active in their communicative behaviors when confronting a certain issue. Unlike other types of publics, hot-issue publics often have higher constraint recognition and hold transitory attitudes about the issue (Kim, Ni, Kim, & Kim, 2012). They are more intellectual and have high problem recognition but may not necessarily have high involvement recognition. In other words, they feel affected by the issue and recognize it as affecting them. Yet, they could perceive the issue as being low in importance. Their political interests and engagement could amplify their situational motivation in problem solving, but their perceptions of the issue’s being a perceptual problem, i.e. a discrepancy between what they observe and what they expect, rather than a cognitive problem, i.e. the perceptual problem lacks a solution, could indicate to them that there is nothing they could do about it.

Because the formation of nationalism is a long-term process to which individuals are exposed and socialized into over a period of time, referent criterion could be an influential variable in predicting their problem-solving behaviors. Referent criterion is cognition using which individuals could search applicable and available knowledge within their existing cognitions and through other sources (Kim, Ni, Kim, & Kim, 2012). It is the guidelines for making decisions on how to go about solving the problems. For instance, nationalist publics in China would be engaged in consumer boycotts and online communicative behaviors to resolve nationalist issues (Nyiri, 2009; Wang, 2005; 2006; Wang & Wang, 2007). In response to Toyota’s advertisement of two Chinese stone lions’ saluting to a Toyota Prado, nationalist publics in China responded by re-creating an advertisement of two Chinese stone lions’ destroying a Toyota Prado with their paws (Nyiri, 2009). Similarly, as a result of a publics-initiated public relations problem led by a journalist, Starbucks had to close its store at the Tiananmen Square (Han & Zhang, 2009). Over the years, nationalist publics acquire knowledge and experiences in dealing with nationalist issues. Because hot-issue publics’ political interests and engagement could amplify their motivations for problem solving, it is advised that future research should explore the composition of and the different levels of support demonstrated by hot-issue publics in terms of
their being either advocates or antagonists towards the issue (Kim, Ni, Kim, & Kim, 2012).

Communicative Behaviors and Public Diplomacy

The situational motivation to problem solving gives rise to the communicative action in problem solving (CAPS) in terms of publics’ engagement in communicative behaviors to resolve the issue (Ni & Kim, 2009). Hot-issue publics, motivated by the extensive media coverage of a focusing event, would experience an increased level of problem recognition, which may or may not lead to subsequent problem-solving behaviors. According to Kim and Grunig (2011), the communicative behaviors of information acquisition, information selection and information transmission could be characterized by their levels of activeness as a problem-solving problem. Based on the assumption that communication is what publics do purposefully to resolve a problem in a problematic life situation (Grunig, 1997), they posited that “The more one commits to problem resolution, the more one becomes acquisitive of information pertaining to the problem, selective in dealing with information, and transmissive in giving it to others.” (Kim & Grunig, 2011, p. 125). As such, nationalist publics with high situational motivation to problem solving would also be active in their communicative actions for problem solving in terms of actively acquiring information about the issue, being selective in the information they acquire and actively forwarding the information to others.

The communicative behaviors of nationalist publics are significant on several grounds. First, nationalist issues allow nationalist publics to be mobilized into groups to reassert their collective nationalist identities. Ackland and O’Neil (2011) found that people go online to reassert their collective identities in an environmental movement by exchanging practical and symbolic resources, such as hyperlinks, through their networks. In other words, their nationalist sentiments are expressed and sustained through group dynamics. Second, Kim and Rhee (2011) defines megaphoning as individuals’ voluntary forwarding of information and suggests that negative megaphoning effects are more salient during crises or scandals. Megaphoning behaviors are associated with relationship quality. Thus, individuals could be engaged in positive or negative megaphoning as a result of the problems they experience with an organization.

Public diplomacy, known as a government’s efforts to engage with foreign citizens, could be defined as “a government’s process of communication with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nations’ ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and policies” (Tuch, 1990, p. 3). It is essentially what governments do to communicate with foreign publics so as to create a favorable international environment to form favorable international public opinion to achieve their foreign policy goals (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992). According to Signitzer and Coombs (1992), public diplomacy shares similarities with public relations that the approaches to practicing public diplomacy are similar to the four models of communication within public relations, i.e. press agentry, public information, one-way assymetrical and two-way symmetrical. As public relations is understood as a strategic communication process which builds mutually beneficially between an organization and its publics (Corbett, 2012), public diplomacy is also understood as a government’s effort to build mutually beneficial relationships with other nations (Wilcox, Ault, & Agee, 1992). As nationalism is inherently threatening to public relations as a process of power sharing to build mutually beneficial relationships (e.g., Pearce, 2010), nationalism is equally threatening to public diplomacy through which a government seeks to build relationships with its foreign publics. As a result of nationalism in China, Chinese citizens would make purchase decisions as an expression of their national identities (Dong & Tan, 2009). As nationalist publics are reluctant to look for
information about the nations towards which they have negative feelings (e.g., Druckman, 1994), when transnational corporations are associated with a country of origin for which their foreign customers have negative feelings, they become susceptible to the damage of corporate reputation and financial losses when focusing events lead to the rise of nationalist publics (Wang, 2005). The process of agenda building facilitates reciprocal influence among people to make the issue salient on both the media and public agendas (Kiousis, Popescu, & Mitrook, 2007).

Public diplomacy research has identified the significance of megaphoning behaviors (Vibber, 2014; Vibber & Kim, 2015). Vibber (2014) found that international students, who study in the U.S., are more likely to be engaged in positive megaphoning behaviors when they have positive relationship quality with their host country. On the contrary, they are engaged in negative behaviors when their relationships with their host country are negative. Their megaphoning behaviors could also affect the relationship quality between their friends and families in their home country and their host country. Vibber and Kim (2015) suggested that megaphoning by international students could create chain effects of megaphoning behaviors which could ultimately be influential to a country’s public diplomacy efforts. As STOPS argues that those who are more vocal in expressing their public opinion have a higher potential to change public opinion and motivate others to be engaged in communicative behaviors about the issue, the chain effects of megaphoning behaviors could also shift the focus of the agenda to advocate policy changes (Birkland, 1998; Kim, Shen, & Morgan, 2011). As the issue becomes more widely discussed, problem chain recognition effects could occur to transfer the salience of one issue to other related issues (Kim, Shen, & Morgan, 2011).

Although the rise of hot-issue publics implies the powerful effects of the media in leading to the rise of nationalist publics, the subsequent behaviors of nationalist publics in response to the media coverage demonstrate how nations and nationalism are maintained and evolve. Aldoory and Grunig (2012) and Kim, Ni, Kim, and Kim (2012) suggested further research on how publics discussed the issues and became advocates or adversaries towards the issue. As such, this study seeks to study the communicative behaviors of hot-issue nationalist publics who confront a nationalist issue which threatens their collective nationalist identities. For this reason, we break down the phrase and define the phrase in Figure 1. We conceptualize hot-issue nationalist publics by attributing their nationalist sentiments as the cause that triggers their reactions to a hot nationalist issue and motivates their subsequent communicative actions to resolve the issue. They recognize a nationalist issue to be problematic in terms of threatening their national identities and decide to do something to resolve the issue.

**Hot-Issue Nationalist Publics**

- **Hot-Issue:** An issue which receives extensive media coverage and affects the majority of the population.
- **Nationalist:** A deeply rooted sentiment which is commonly shared by members of an imagined community who see their own nation as being superior.
- **Publics:** Individuals who arise because they are affected by an issue, recognize it as affecting them and decide to do something to resolve the issue.
Figure 1. Conceptualization of hot-issue nationalist publics

Methods

To study how hot-issue nationalist publics are engaged in communicative actions for problem solving, we selected a case which has been a persistent international dispute over the years. According to Yin (2014), case studies are conducted to investigate a present-day case to study the cases and the circumstances surrounding the case using multiple sources. For this reason, we selected an international issue which frequently becomes a hot issue on the media agenda and triggers the expression of nationalist sentiments.

The Dispute over the Sovereignty of the Senkaku Islands (also known as the Diaoyu Islands)

The sovereignty of the resource-rich Senkaku Islands has been a dispute between the Chinese and Japanese governments. According to Lee (2002), China discovered the islands in 1372 and has referred to the islands as its territory since 1534. In response to the Japanese claim of its sovereignty in 1895, China made references to the Japanese historical texts and government documents to argue that the islands were not mentioned until 1884. The Japanese government included the Senkaku Islands in the Okinawa Prefecture in 1894. When Japan won the Sino-Japanese war in 1895, the application for claiming the sovereignty of the islands was accepted in the Japanese cabinet. China further claimed that the name of the islands did not occur in the Atlas and Dictionary of Place Names in Japanese Territory until 1939. Apart from China and Japan, Taiwan also claimed the sovereignty of the islands.

The sovereignty of the islands has been an international dispute for a long time. In September 2012, the Japanese government announced its plans to nationalize the islands, resulting in Chinese citizens’ responding by looting Japanese cars, setting Japanese factories on fire and calling for boycotts against Japanese products (Johnson & Shanker, 2012). They also sang the Chinese national anthem and waved flags outside the Japanese Embassy in China (AFP, 2012). Protesters also marched to and shouted at the Japanese restaurants to claim the sovereignty of the islands. The Sichuan Kanghui International Tour Company also stopped accepting bookings for trips to Japan. In January 2013, there was media commentary that the clash was intensifying and was sliding towards war (“The Senkaku and Diaoyu Islands,” 2013).

The Chinese government’s tolerance of the protest was considered to be consistent with the Chinese government’s use of mass protests to achieve its goals in foreign policy (Johnson & Shanker, 2012). China’s commerce vice-minister, Jiang Zhengwei, pointed out that Japan’s nationalization affected the trade ties of the two countries and that Chinese consumers had the right to voice their concerns over Japan’s violation of Chinese territory (AFP, 2012). The authoritarian newspapers of the Chinese government expressed sympathy to the protesters and described the protests as being rational. As a result of the protests, Toyota recorded a 50% slump in sales figures in China (Collins, 2012). Toyota also suspended its plants (“Toyota to suspend production,” 2012). Japanese companies are less likely to promote their association with their countries of origin in their advertisements than ever before (Ishii, 2009). In light of the protests, the Japanese fashion chain, Uniqlo, posted a note outside of its shop in Shanghai, saying that “We support the claim that the Senkaku islands are inherently China’s territory” (Koh, 2012).

Even though boycotts and protests were criticized for negative affecting the Chinese employees in Japanese corporations and foreign investments by a few, people who disapproved of these nationalist acts were coined as traitors (Nyiri, 2009).
Media Coverage and Online Discussion

While the dispute frequently receives media coverage time and again, the issue received consistent heavy coverage over the period during and after the Japan’s announcement of the nationalization. Thus, this study selected a period of 12 months to analyze the extent to which the nationalist issue was reported and discussed in the media and on online discussion forums. Because China’s online environment is controlled that unfavorable posts are removed and people are hired to post on online discussion forums (Mackinnon, 2006), this study selected Hong Kong for the analysis where the media and the online environment are not subject to control by China.

Several steps were taken for data collection and analysis. First, media coverage about the issue was collected by downloading all the news articles published on the issue of Senkaku Islands between March 1, 2012 and February 28, 2013 from the Wisenews database. All the 19 newspapers in Hong Kong were included in the study. Falling into the category of popular newspapers was Oriental Daily, Apple Daily, Hong Kong Daily News, the Sun and Sing Pao, resulting in a total count of 5,175 articles published. Second, the middle-class elite newspapers, including Ming Pao, Sing Tao, the South China Morning Post, Hong Kong Economic Journal and Hong Kong Economic Times, published a total of 3,372 news articles. Free dailies, including Headline Daily, Metro Daily, AM730, the Standard, Sharp Daily and Sky Post, published a total of 1,376 newspapers on the issue. The three pro-China newspapers, Hong Kong Commercial Daily, Ta Kung Po and Wen Wei Po, published 3,639 news articles about the issue. In total, 13,561 news articles about the Senkaku Islands were published over the 12-month period. The number of news articles published on each day by each newspaper was entered into an Excel spreadsheet for analysis.

In addition to media coverage, we entered the keyword into the search engine of the Hong Kong Discussion Forum (www.discuss.com.hk) which had a total of 2,704,885 members as of April 21st, 2013. Ninety-one treads were found about the topic of Senkaku Islands; a total of 3,279 discussion posts were found on the forums. The posts were then copied and pasted to an Excel spreadsheet for analysis. The number of posts published each day over the 12-month period was also recorded.

For analysis, the number of media coverage and the number of discussion posts published each day was first analyzed on an Excel Spreadsheet with point charts. Then, the numbers were copied into the Statistic Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 20) to run correlation analysis. After that, the content of the discussion posts was studied and analyzed as a supplemental source for the case study.

Findings

First, we wished to identify a possible correlation between media coverage and discussion posts to explore the extent to which media coverage drives or responds to online communicative behaviors. An association was identified \( r = .546, n = 365, p < .001 \). When breaking down the newspapers into the four categories, correlations were found between media coverage and discussion posts in all categories. Table 1 shows the results.

Table 1.
Correlation results for the four categories of newspapers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of newspapers</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Popular newspapers</td>
<td>( r = .591, n = 365, p &lt; .001 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle-class elite newspapers</td>
<td>( r = .816, n = 365, p &lt; .001 )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Second, to further understand the relationship, we generated figures on an Excel spreadsheet to visualize the changes in the amount of media coverage and discussion posts about the issue. A peak was identified in both in September 2012 amidst violent acts by Chinese publics took place and speculations about a war between China and Japan. Figures 2, 3 and 4 showed the changes by month, by week and by day respectively.

Figure 2. The amount of media coverage and discussion posts by month.

Figure 3. The amount of media coverage and discussion posts by week.
Figure 4. The amount of media coverage and discussion posts by day.

To understand nationalist’ publics communicative behaviors for problem solving, it was found on the discussion posts that in addition to discussing the sovereignty of the islands, they also discussed the following topics: boycotting Japanese products, boycotting Japanese restaurants, boycotting the Japanese language, the sovereignty of other islands other than the Senkaku Islands, the safety of traveling to Japan, the safety of working in Japan, the safety of working in a Japanese corporation and also the issue of the implementation of the national education in Hong Kong which was another hot issue at the time.

Discussion

Even though correlations were identified between media coverage and online discussions, the correlations only portrayed associations but not causations. Figures 2, 3 and 4 showed that there are times when the numbers of both reached a high point, but the figures also showed that online discussions had sometimes peaked before the media coverage. Thus, it is possible that interpersonal communication over the digital sphere had led to more media coverage rather than the other way around. After all, the media should report issues in which the public has an interest. Thus, the direction of influence may not be from the media end to the public end, but the other way around. As Aldoory and Grunig (2012) suggested that whether publics remained concerned about an issue after the dissipation of media coverage depended on the issue, it is possible that such a direction of influence specifically applies to this type of nationalist issues only.

This study has several noteworthy findings. First of all, media coverage about this international dispute provides an opportunity for nationalist publics to sustain and discuss their nationalist sentiments. The effects of the mass media activated nationalism by providing new information for nationalist publics to discuss and express their nationalist sentiments. However, the effects of the mass media were limited until publics took a step further to be engaged in communicative actions for problem solving. The mass media increased their problem recognition and their situational motivation for problem solving, but in the present case, individuals appeared to have sought to personalize the issue by relating it to themselves. Thus, we propose a new concept named international problem personalization effects (IPPE). Publics increased their involvement recognition (i.e. the level of importance they assigned to the issue) by reinterpreting the dispute as affecting them personally. For example, those who planned to travel to Japan or had associations with Japan had expressed their concerns over how the issue affected them personally. They would still relate the issue to their personal experiences. Thus, IPPE serves as a reminder to consider the interactions amongst multiple events (i.e. international and personal) in predicting publics’ problem-solving behaviors.

While active publics who found an issue to be problematic to them would fend off
information with which they disagree (i.e., the situational theory of problem solving, Kim & Grunig, 2011), nationalist publics are characterized by their sharing the same nationalist sentiments and have had similar patterns of behaviors in resolving the issue. In this issue, in particular, referent criterion could play a significant role in providing decision guidelines as to how publics should go about resolving the issue, including consumer boycotts. There are several worth-noting aspects. First, the patterns of problem-solving behaviors could go from online to offline. The publics discussed the possible of being engaged in offline behaviors to resolve the issue or to prevent the issue from affecting them, such as refusing to learn Japanese or boycotting Japanese products. Second, as a result of this, it would be wise for a foreign government or its transnational corporations to be prepared to be affected by such nationalist crises. In other words, it would be beneficial to chart the entities who are affected during the rise of a nationalist crisis during which publics would be engaged in the attribution of responsibility (e.g., Coombs, 2007) and problem-solving behaviors.

This study found that when a hot issue arises with extensive media coverage, activist and active publics would be engaged in communicative behaviors actively whereas latent and aware publics would be engaged in communicative behaviors passively. Through the information transmission (i.e., information forwarding and information sharing) behaviors of active and activist publics, latent and aware publics’ problem recognition and involvement recognition could also increase, causing the triggering of nationalist publics. As the situational motivation of latent and aware publics increase, they may be turned into active and activist publics to be actively engaged in communicative behaviors. Table 2 shows a classification of nationalist publics on hot issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situational Motivation to Problem Solving</th>
<th>Activist Publics</th>
<th>Active Publics</th>
<th>Aware Publics</th>
<th>Latent Publics</th>
<th>Non-Publics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals who try to resolve the issue collectively.</td>
<td>Individuals who recognize the issue as affecting them and try to resolve the issue.</td>
<td>Individuals who are affected by the issue and recognize that it is affecting them.</td>
<td>Individuals who are affected by the issue, but are unaware of it.</td>
<td>Individuals who are not affected by the issue.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicative Actions for Problem Solving (CAPS)</th>
<th>Active information acquisition, selection and transmission.</th>
<th>Active information acquisition, selection and transmission.</th>
<th>Active information acquisition.</th>
<th>No communicative actions.</th>
<th>No communicative actions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Possible Offline Actions | Actions are taken. | Actions are being planned and proposed. | No offline actions. | No offline actions. | No offline actions. |

Table 2. Classification of nationalist publics on hot issues.

Public diplomacy is conducted to build relationships between a government and foreign citizens, and nationalism is an adversary to public diplomacy. Whereas governments are supposed to listen to and respond to foreign public opinion through public diplomacy (i.e., bottom-up), international issues which cause the rise of nationalist crises are usually a characteristic of traditional diplomacy between governments (i.e., top-down), i.e. these issues arise because a government makes decisions which are offensive to its foreign publics. Figure 5 shows that when an international dispute takes place, nationalist publics would be worried about how people and organizations of the foreign country treat them, resulting on impact on themselves personally. When active and activist publics recognize a hot issue, the issue is
defined as they increase involvement recognition associated with the issue by highlighting its personal influence (i.e., international problem personalization effect). The discussion of the international issue as a personal issue increases the problem recognition of aware and latent publics who are not previously connected with the issue. At the same time, it sustains their national sentiments.

Problem recognition / Involvement recognition

National Issue  Organizational Issue  Personal Issue

National sentiments activated

Figure 5. International problem personalization effects.

Hot-issue publics may remain aware publics after the issue subsides (e.g., Aldoory & Grunig, 2012) and would have different cognitions (i.e. problem recognition, involvement recognition, constraint recognition and level of involvement) (e.g., Kim, Ni, Kim, & Kim, 2012). But such changes in cognitions could mean the increase or decrease of nationalist sentiments and the expansion of referent criterion as to how the issues could be dealt with to be resolved. For public diplomacy, while the purpose would be to de-create publics by decreasing their situational motivation to problem solving, Figure 6 shows the ideal model of public diplomacy which is that a government would respond to foreign public opinion through relationship building to make decisions accordingly.

Figure 6. Model of public diplomacy for managing international issues through co-orientation

Conclusion and Limitations

This study has identified the confluence between media coverage and online discussions on a nationalist issue. Nationalism, formed over time, is detrimental to public diplomacy and could lead individuals to fend off information about another nation. We found correlations between media coverage and online discussion posts and proposed a new concept called international problem personalization effects (IPPE) to characterize the effects that an international issue could have when individuals interpret an international issue as affecting them personally. We argued that international disputes could be major events that lead to the maintenance of nationalism through collective discussions and transmission of information. However, this study is limited in two aspects. First, a Hong Kong sample was used; because it was a British colony until 1997, it was possible that the Hong Kong population was not as nationalist as the Chinese population. Second, the online discussions were not content-analyzed because of the lack of an existing
coding scheme. Further research should develop a coding scheme to identify how nationalist publics’ expression of opinion portrayed the extent of their problem recognition, involvement recognition, constraint recognition and referent criterion.
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The Concept of Online Representation of a Nation (ORN) – a New Model for Measurement, Evaluation and Ranking of Nation-Brands

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Abstract

Building on previous work by Simon Anholt, Keith Dinnie, Ying Fan and other scholars, this paper develops a new concept of Online Representation of a Nation (ORN) and proposes a conceptual framework and a methodology for measurement, evaluation and ranking of nation brands based on their ORN.

The paper explicates new concept of Online Representation of a Nation (ORN) in detail based on and following the blueprint suggested by Chaffee (1991). ORN is conceptualized as a dynamic sum of all online information related to a nation brand available online at any given moment in time. Explication includes: justification, empirical description, primitive terms, underlying assumptions, variables, unit definition, operationalization and measurement.

This new concept of ORN is then integrated with the conceptual framework of the formation of nation's image (Dinnie 2008) and the conceptual model of the key perspectives on a nation brand (Fan 2008). As a result of this integration, a new conceptual model is developed and proposed as a framework and foundation for the approach to measure, evaluate and rank nation-brands based on their online representation (the above concept of ORN). In this new expanded conceptual model, ORN is represents a center piece that interconnects and rearranges the different key perspectives (Fan 2008) of a nation brand, resulting in a new, expanded, more complex model. The proposed new model is envisioned as a framework for future exploration, analysis, understanding and evaluation of nation brands, nations' images and their public diplomacy efforts, activities, policies and initiatives based on their respective ORNs.

Further, the paper develops an approach to measurement of ORN based on Anholt's (2007) theory of Competitive Identity (CI) of a nation. More specifically, the author proposes that ORN be measured along Anholt's 6 dimensions of Competitive Identity (CI) of a nation using a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches and techniques of manual and automated content analyses of purposively selected samples of online information. This proposed measurement methodology is suggested as a new approach for ranking of nation brands, as well as a method for analysis and evaluation of nations' various public diplomacy efforts, activities, policies and initiatives. The proposed conceptual framework and measurement methodology present a wide avenue and a promising direction for future research with significant potential to benefit both, practitioners and academics working in the area of public diplomacy and nation branding.
Introduction

The development of interactive communication technologies is rapidly changing the modern world and how it functions. Unlike traditional media, the new medium – the Internet, is not just a communication channel, but the environment into which human communication and interactions are moving. Each and every such interaction leaves a tangible trace within this medium, thus, forever changing this communication/interaction environment itself, as well as the parties involved in these interactions.

Under these circumstances, the concept of a brand acquires a new momentum and a special importance, especially for nations; since, as a consequence of globalization and real time nature of news and information generation and availability, brought about by the Internet and online communication technologies, countries have become increasingly aware of their image internally and internationally (Anholt, 2002; Olins, 2002). In response to this awareness, some countries have adopted advertising and marketing practices to manage their country image based on the approach that looks at countries as brands and adopts branding methods developed within the marketing field (Olins, 1999; Outhavongs, 2007). This approach is known as nation branding.

One of the most respected authorities on the subject – Simon Anholt, who is considered a pioneer in this area and is widely credited with creating the term Nation brand, emphasizes that the concept of a brand has a strong connection to reputation and image of a country which are becoming increasingly important in a world where everything is interconnected. “One of the consequences of globalization is that all countries, regions and sectors are competing for the same talent, investors, consumers, students, capital, tourists, sportive events, etc. In a world of hyper competition the image of countries can make very big difference to what they do” (Anholt, 2008).

As the importance and penetration of the Internet grows exponentially, a country’s representation on the Internet acquires increased significance in a variety of ways. This paper will explicate the concept of Online Representation of a Brand and integrate this concept into the existing model of formation of country’s overall image. It will also define the directions for future research of the effects that it is having on the countries/nations’ reputation and global competitiveness.

Literature Review

Brand Theory

In the last few decades, brand theory was developed within the marketing field and provided the basic framework for research on brands and branding. The most common definitions of a brand fall into two main categories: definitions that focus on the visual manifestation of a brand, and somewhat deeper definitions that look beyond just manifestations and try to capture the essence of what a brand is (Dinnie, 2008). An often-cited definition is the one by Doyle (1992), who suggests that “a successful brand is a name, symbol, design, or some combination, which identifies the ‘product’ of a particular organization as having a sustainable differential advantage”. The American Marketing Association (AMA) offers a similar definition. On the other hand, Macrae, Parkinson and Sheerman (1995) offer the definition that also incorporates consumer perspective: “a unique combination of characteristics and added values, both functional and non-functional, which have taken on a relevant meaning that is inextricably linked to the brand, awareness of which might be conscious or intuitive” (Dinnie, 2008). Lynch and Chernatony (2004) suggest that brands are clusters of functional and emotional values that promise a unique and welcome experience between a buyer and a seller.
Brand Identity, Personality and Image
The key elements of branding theory (among several others) are: brand identity, brand personality and brand image. These concepts have been extensively written about throughout the literature mostly as related to products, services and corporations.

Brand Identity
Roll (2006) suggested five factors that are most important in determining and developing a brand identity. These are: brand vision, brand scope, brand positioning, brand personality and brand essence. Dinnie (2008) argues that the first four are directly transferable to nation brands, while the fifth – the essence, “which is the heart and soul of a brand”, needs careful consideration, given numerous complex factors of which a nation consists.

Another approach to the definition of brand identity was offered by Lehu (2006), who suggested twelve determining components of brand identity: name, heritage, codes of expression (logo, colors, fonts), positioning, status, personality, everyday behavior, beliefs, values, projected image, attitudes of brand’s consumers towards it, and attitude of brand towards its consumers. Among Lehu’s above twelve components of brand identity, special attention should be paid to the “projected image” of a brand. Some scholars have argued that while eleven other factors belong to the brand and, therefore, should be manageable by the brand owners, the projected image – being perception-based, is a property of the consumer and, therefore, beyond control of brand owners (Nadan, 2005). Anholt (2007, 2008, 2010) shares this view and has emphasized it in numerous speeches and publications.

Brand Personality
A common direction in branding research is based on a notion of brand personality, which is often used interchangeably with the concept of brand identity. However, this concept is somewhat different and it could be considered as one of the dimensions of brand identity. It was developed by transferring the personality concept from individual psychology to the marketing context. This approach is based on the assumption that brands can develop personalities similar in their characteristics to individuals (Aaker, 1997). In this widely cited work, Aaker describes brand personality as the “set of human characteristics associated with a brand” and proposes to measure brand personality on a 42 item Brand Personality Scale (BPS) that assesses a brand across five key dimensions of brand personality: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness.

Another similar approach is modification and adaptation of the framework of the Five-Factor Model of personality traits which is frequently referred to as FFM or the Big Five. FFM is a hierarchy of five personality dimensions that are found to be characteristic and readily identifiable: Extraversion (E), Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C), Neuroticism (N), and Openness to Experience (O) (Outhavongs, 2007).

The practice of looking at brands from personality perspective has also become quite widespread in every day life, as well as in the media – one often encounters references to brands using adjectives normally used in relationship to humans, for example: young brands, old brands, strong brands, healthy brands, gay brands, sexy brands, tasteless brands, macho brands, honest brands, respectable brands, joyful brands, etc.

Brand Image
Brand image is one of the most important concepts that have been developed within brand
theory. Its definition is usually perception-based and is related to the concept of brand identity or personality, for example: “the totality of consumer perceptions about the brand, or how they see it, which may not coincide with the brand identity. Companies have to work hard on the consumer experience to make sure that what customers see and think is what they want them to” (Temporal, 2002). American Marketing Association (AMA) defines brand image similarly: as a “perception of a brand in the minds of persons. The brand image is a mirror reflection (though perhaps inaccurate) of the brand personality or product being. It is what people believe about a brand — their thoughts, feelings, expectations”. Another similar definition of brand image is suggested by Business Dictionary (www.businessdictionary.com): “Impression in the consumers' mind of a brand's total personality (real and imaginary qualities and shortcomings).” In other words, brand image is defined as the audiences’ perception of the brand identity (or personality), which they form along the key dimensions that determine brand identity. However, not all of these dimensions are of equal importance for different brand audiences. Different audiences place different emphasis and importance on different individual components of the brand identity.

Thus, since brand image is a reflection of the brand identity in the audiences’ mind, brands cannot have just one brand image, but many – essentially, every member of the audience has a different image of a brand, based on his/her perceptions (Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2008; Fan 2008; Tempral 2002). These images may be very similar, or vastly different. Differences to a large extent depend on which of the brand identity dimensions are most important to the given member of particular audience/stakeholders. For example: what is most important to consumers may be different from what is important to investors, or employees, etc. At the same time, there may also be differences within the segments of audiences: for example, if we take an automotive brand as an example, for some consumers, price, cost of ownership and gas mileage may be most important, while for others it will be prestige and luxury, whereas price and other related costs may not carry equal weight. Perhaps, safety and reliability will be important for everybody to somewhat large extent.

Furthermore, the factors that play a decisive role in the formation of a brand image are different across products and product categories. For example, what is an important dimension for formation of the image of a clothing manufacturer’s brand is likely to be different from that of a manufacturer of other products. The same would apply to services. Along with many other characteristics of a brand, brand image is thought to play a very important role in purchase or investment decision-making by brand audiences. Thus, brand image serves as one of the main factors for determining brand equity and valuation and, therefore, it becomes one of the decisive factors that lead to the success or failure of a brand.

**Nation Brands and Nation Branding**

In the last 15 to 20 years, the approach of treating nations as brands was developed as many scholars and practitioners made attempts to adapt and apply brand theory and related concepts to nations/countries (Anholt, 2004; Dinnie, 2008; Olins, 1999; Outhavong, 2007; Van Ham, 2001). This approach has become known as nation branding. With the rapid process of globalization and the resulting exponential growth in global competition, nations increasingly find themselves facing numerous challenges in both international and domestic markets. Under such circumstances, nations turn to branding techniques as a way to acquire competitive advantage in order to attract tourism, investments and talent, boost exports, maintain stability, improve economy, enter partnerships, achieve
international credibility, acquire respect and confidence, etc. (Anholt, 2008; Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Cromwell & Kyriacou, 2009).

Nation brand image becomes especially important for transitional and new countries, such as Central and Eastern European states and countries of Central Asia and Africa, since these countries often have damaged brand images, or as in case of newly formed countries – may not have a recognizable brand image at all. These countries need either to re-brand themselves or build an entirely new brand (Vaknin, 2009).

Many scholars, as well as branding, marketing and communication practitioners share the view that image and reputation have become critical parts of states’ strategic equity, and a powerful nation brand can provide the country with a competitive advantage in the global marketplace (Kotler and Gertner, 2002, Olins, 1999, Van Ham, 2001). Fan (2008) makes a very important observation: “A nation brand exists with or without any conscious efforts in nation branding, as every country has a current image to its international audience, be it strong or weak, clear or vague” (p. 5). Olins (2002) also suggests that nations have always branded themselves through the variety of means, such as: national symbols, flags, anthems, names, currency, etc. Thus, the practice of branding a nation is not new, however until recently it has not been referred to as such and it’s the corresponding terminology that is new.

In his comprehensive book about nation branding, Dinnie (2008) identifies the origins of nation branding in the interaction and eventual merger of two concepts: National Identity and Country-of-Origin. The former resides within the broader academic discipline of political geography, international relations, political science, cultural anthropology, social psychology, political philosophy, international law, sociology and history; while the later originates from such components of marketing discipline as: consumer behavior, advertising and promotional management, brand management, export marketing, etc. This interaction and merger of the above two important concepts took place within the context of economic globalization, move towards information society, homogenization of the markets and segmentation of audiences/consumers. At the same time, these processes also brought about a simultaneous trend towards increased sense of national identity.

All of this in conjunction led to the emergence of nation branding discipline as various countries started to adopt brand management approaches and techniques in order to become more competitive in the global marketplace. Perhaps, the key moment for the completion of the above merging of the two concepts was the publication of the special 2002 issue of Journal of Brand Management (JBM) devoted to nation branding and featuring articles by leading scholars and consultants in the field.

There is a substantial body of literature on nation brands, but large proportion of the work from various researchers and professionals in the field tends to be descriptive (Outhavong, 2007; Dinnie, 2008; Fan 2008; Lee 2009). Perhaps, the nature of nation brands itself leads to the abundance of case studies and observations devoted to particular countries, but most of the work in this area does not provide definitive and valid measures capable of differentiating and isolating specific variables that would relate to the concept of nation brand in general. Most of these articles, coming from practitioners and academics, tend to be “descriptive case studies instead of prescriptive methods for analyzing nation brands” (Outhavong, 2007) and as such are often too narrow in their focus on specific countries. Outhavongs rightfully suggests that nation brands should be approached from a macro view with broader-reaching implications.

To make matters worse, there still is no operationally sound and generally accepted definition of a nation brand (Fan, 2009). The term is often used loosely with the general
assumption that a nation brand is any attribute associated with a country that affects that country’s brand image. The problem here is that there is no clear definition of a nation brand and what attributes make up a nation brand (Outhavongs, 2007). Dinnie (2008) suggests the following definition: “the unique multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences”. On the other hand, Fan (2006, 2009) suggested the following definitions: “A nation brand can be defined as the total sum of all mental associations about a nation in the mind of international stakeholders,” while “Nation branding is a process by which a nation’s images can be created, monitored, evaluated and proactively managed in order to improve or enhance the country’s reputation among a target international audience.”

Above-cited scholars and practitioners seem to be in agreement that the basic branding concepts (identity, image, reputation, equity, etc.) and approaches can be applied to nations without considerable modification, by integrating them with the notion and components of national identity. Here, it needs to be pointed out, that some researchers use the term national character, rather than national identity.

As in general branding discipline, most common approach to nation brands and branding has been a continuation of the similar line of work in marketing by the adoption of personality-based approach (Pitt et al., 2005), both in terms of brand personality (Aaker, 1997), as well as different human personality traits. Dinnie (2008) also discusses the phenomenon of “personification” of nation brands, which may occur when the nation brand becomes bound to its political leader (Castro – Cuba, Ceaucescu – Romania, Putin – Russia, Mandela – South Africa, Chaves – Venezuela, etc.).

Thus, existing empirical research in national character/identity to a considerable degree is related to and draws upon the field of personality psychology. As marketing research merged with personality psychology to form the direction of studies in brand personality, the tendency to equate/relate country attributes to human personality traits has grown stronger (Outhavongs, 2007; Pitt et al., 2005).

However useful and insightful this approach may be, it seems to be an oversimplification, since because of its such key components as: land, historic territory, or homeland; culture, religion, common myths and historical memories; government, economics, international alliances, legislation, common legal rights and duties for all members; and a common economy with territorial mobility for all members, etc., a nation brand is certainly more complex than human personality (Anholt, 2002; Dinnie, 2008; Fan, 2008, 2009; Lee, 2009; Outhavongs, 2007).

Globalization and Identity

As Castelis (2006) points out, the issue of identity and its relation to the State is one of the most important issues that the process of globalization has brought to focus. Common view and argument is that globalization requires a global, cosmopolitan identity and culture, and that globalization will overcome local and historical identities, supersede some ideologies, and produce an undifferentiated universal identity and culture (Castelis 2006). However, along with this perceived homogenization of identity, in the last 20 or so years, globalization has also brought about the strengthening of various specific “local” identities (religious, national, ethnic, geographic, and gender, among others). This is seen as a natural resistance and protest to globalization (Coposescu, 2009), leading to the emergence of social and cultural forces which resist the expansion of transnational structures and organizations. As the process of globalization
accelerates, these forces also gain strength and influence. Globalization does not mean just a process of increase of interdependences between nations and the formation of a single, structurally homogenous, world system, but a process of intensification and deepening of differences and a process of construction/re-construction, hence negotiation, of identities.

In the context of globalization, it is clear that the autonomy, and consequently the constructed and expressed identity, is being continuously attacked through commercial, financial, communication, and migration strategic networks. Through these strategic networks, globalization alters, breaks down, and threatens the identity of communities, individuals, their forms of organization, and their identity patterns (Sanchez, 2010). In such a context, on the one hand, individuals search for strategies for conserving and defending their actual identities by reviving their past patterns of identity (such as family lineage, professional/occupational associations, fundamentalist religious movements, ethnic movements). On the other hand, in an emergent virtual world which continues to evolve, individuals, communities and nations search for strategies towards and for reconstruction or construction of new identities and new forms of structuring identities, which often are perceived as uncertain and confusing (Coposescu 2009, Whalley, 2008).

**Nation Brand Identity and Image**

The national identity/character origin of nation branding suggests that, with somewhat minor adjustments and modifications, the two key concepts of brand theory – brand identity and brand image should be well applicable and easily transferable to nation brands. In order to do so, Dinnie (2008) suggests defining identity and image simply: identity is what something truly is, while image is how this something is perceived.

In order to properly perform this application, we must first analyze what are the main components and numerous contributing factors (as pointed out by above-cited scholars) that determine the nation brand identity and need to be considered and included as elements of the above concepts/constructs. Dinnie (2008) writes that it is impossible to include every component of national identity in the constructs of a nation brand identity. In his opinion, the later should be built upon only on a limited number of select components of national identity. He suggests that most common of such components are: history, language, territory, political regime/policies, architecture, sport, literature, art, religion, education, icons, landscape, music, food/drink and folklore.

Paraphrasing Albert and Whetten’s (1985) definition of organizational identity, Fan (2008) employs a very similar, although somewhat deeper approach suggesting that national identity is:

“The collective understanding by a nation’s people of the features presumed to be central and relatively permanent, and that distinguish the nation from other nations. National identity embodies the characteristics of a nation that its people perceive to be central, distinctive, and enduring (CED) in a nation when past, present and future is taken into account.” (Fan, 2008, p. 3)

Fan continues to suggest that the essence of national identity is mostly “irrational psychological bond that binds fellow nationals together” (ibid) and represents a link between each individual and the nation as a collective self (Triandafyllidou, 1998).

Perhaps, it would also be beneficial to include in the list of nation brand identity components Aaker’s dimensions of brand personality (1997), as well as elements of Eyzenck’s and various other measures of human personality traits, after adapting these indexes to nation
brands. However, Dinnie (2008) emphasizes that it is important to understand that, in addition to the suggested “core” dimensions/facets of national identity, there are many more and their full selection should be done in case of each particular nation differently, based on characteristics and their hierarchy which are unique to the given nation. It is important to pay close attention to Fan’s suggestion (2008, p. 4) that: “contrary to commonly held assumptions, the concept of national identity based on widely agreed associations about the nation may never exist – this is because the nation is not a unitary entity in which all members think, feel, and act in the same way. Instead, each individual engages in many different ways in making sense of the nation and national identities (Thompson, 2001)”.

As to the nation brand image, the approach to conceptualizing it has been in terms of perceptions of various internal and external nation brand stakeholders and their interactions and communications within the context of increased segmentation and categorization of these stakeholders (Dinnie, 2008; Fan, 2008). Dinnie (2008) refers to this as “communicators/vectors of nation brand identity”, which he understands as: branded exports, diasporas, sporting achievements, cultural artifacts, marketing communications, personalities, tourism experience, foreign policy, etc. Again, for Dinnie, this list is far from exhaustive and is likely to vary by each particular country/nation. Fan (2008) expresses the same concept using the term positioning/nation branding.

Anholt (2008) on the other hand, classifies the aspects that have an impact on the formation of the image of a country into the following six distinct “vectors of identity” which he places in the form of a hexagon (see Appendix 2):

- Governance (the way a country is run or perceived to be run)
- Culture (cultural heritage and popular culture)
- People (people’s perception of the people)
- Brands and products that come from the country (Germany and Japan were able to build strong brands after a ‘black period in history’ through these more neutral channels that had a spill over effect to other aspects like culture and people)
- Tourism (some countries like Jamaica only have a ‘tourist image’)
- Business to business (sectors which are communicating directly with a specialized audience, for example the higher education sector)” (Anholt, 2007)

It is through these communicators/vectors or positioning/nation branding that the image of a nation brand is formed by each of the stakeholders. Dinnie refers to these stakeholders as nation brand image audiences, which consist of domestic consumers/firms, external consumers/firms, investors, government, media, etc. Fan refers to them as simply “others”.

Dinnie and Fan both offer almost identical conceptual models:

- Nation Brand Identity (key components) \(\rightarrow\) Communicators/Vectors of Nation Brand Identity \(\rightarrow\) Nation Brand Image (audiences’) (Dinnie, 2008, Appendix 1)
- (Self) Identity \(\rightarrow\) Positioning /Nation branding \(\rightarrow\) Image (held by other) (Fan, 2008)

Both Dinnie and Fan present the formation of nation image as a complex process in which images of the nation held by different audiences/stakeholders (Fan calls these images – “perspectives” of nation image) interact with each other, while self perception, “i.e. how a nation
sees or believes itself”, plays a dominant role.

At the same time, Fan looks at a nation as a complex organization. He then applies Albert and Whetten’s (1985) organization identity theory and the concept of organization image in the context of nation image and develops a conceptual framework for the analysis of nation image. Drawing upon Brown et al.’s original framework (2006) of four central “viewpoints” of organization image, Fan adds two new viewpoints and presents a total of six viewpoints, or as he calls them - “key perspectives” on nation image in a unified model, which he summarizes in a table of 6 key perspectives that according to him are factors in the formation of nation image (Appendix 3, 4). These key perspectives are:

1. Self perception / Identity: How does Nation A see itself?
2. Perception of significant other(s): How does Nation A see Nation B?
3. Construed image: What does Nation A believe Nation B thinks of it?
4. Actual image – Reputation: How is Nation A actually perceived by Nation B?
5. Currently projected image: How is Nation A promoting itself to Nation B?
6. Desired future image / Positioning: How does Nation A want to be perceived by Nation B? (Fan, 2008)

Here, it should also be emphasized that the language factor is extremely important for the formation of a brand image in general and especially in case of nation brands, since brand image is likely to be different in different languages. What a brand image is in English is different from what it is in Russian, or French, or Chinese, etc. Brand can have a strong image in one language environment and nonexistent in the other. In different languages, brands are perceived to have different attributes, characteristics, personalities, etc. This would be especially true in case of nations/countries: nation image is different for different stakeholders in general, and especially so if these stakeholders communicate and function in different languages, since they will be forming their corresponding images based on different information.

To analyze complex relationships between six perspectives on nation image within his model, Fan suggests adopting gap analysis, in order to find discrepancies between them (Appendix 4). Fan states that “to identify and analyze the gaps” and hopefully to reduce these gaps is precisely the task of nation branding. The smaller are the gaps between different perspectives of nation image, the more robust and harmonious is the nation brand.

If the suggested six perspectives of nation image within this model could be measured and compared, it would facilitate understanding of the complex relationships and gaps between these different perspectives and how they affect the formation of a nation image. This understanding would then allow the development, implementation, monitoring and correction of communication campaigns and interventions for narrowing (and ideally, closing) the existing gaps between different perspectives of the nation image and overall improvement of the image of the nation held by various stakeholders.

**Measurement and Rating Nation Brands**

One of the key issues in nation branding is the measurement of nation brands. This becomes especially important when comparing nations to one another, or evaluating nation brand equity and/or nation branding efforts. The review of literature indicates that this is a relatively new area of research and, although different organizations and agencies offer a great variety of rankings of countries in accordance to various sets of dimensions, so far there are only two established metrics that attempt to measure and rank nation brand images: Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index (NBI) and East West Global Index 200.
According to professor David Gertner of Pace University in New York, who himself is currently developing his own nation branding index, given the increasing importance, attention, and interest towards nation and place branding, more attempts to create metrics for ranking nation brands are likely to be made in the future. However, in his opinion, these metrics may appear to be inconsistent with one another, since even though they may claim to measure the same idea – how attractive or well regarded a nation is – due to differences in methodologies they may actually be measuring different things (Frost, 2008). The above two existing metrics can serve as support for Gertner’s opinion:

**Anholt-gfk poper Nation Brands Index (NBI)** is an online poll of consumer attitudes toward 50 most prominent countries plus up to six additional countries that subscribe to it on a year to year basis, NBI measures nation brands along the earlier mentioned Anholt’s 6 distinct vectors,dimensions of nation identity: country’s exports, governance, culture and heritage, people, tourism, and investment and immigration (GfK, 2010), which Anholt has mapped on a hexagram (Anholt, 2008; Appendix 2). The survey asks questions like: “If money were no object, would you like to visit this country on vacation?” or “If you were going to be falsely arrested for a crime you didn’t commit, in which country would you prefer this to happen?” or “Does this country make an important contribution to reducing global warming?” (Frost, 2008). The survey respondents are citizens of 20 countries around the world and about 1,000 online interviews are conducted with people age 18+ in each survey country, and each of the 50 nations in the NBI is evaluated by up to 10,000 people (GfK, 2010).

According to Anholt, subscribing countries find NBI’s detailed country reports more useful for comparisons of their country with their main competitors. “The NBI’s individual country reports run to around 50 pages of detailed analysis, market by market, covering each aspect of their image, from the viewpoint of hundreds of different population groups,” he said (cited from Frost, 2008).

**2.6.2 East West Nation Brand Perception Indexes, namely Global Index 200** is a system of ranking nation brands of 192 UN member states and 8 territories, based on automated textual analysis of international media. The index tracks 38 major media sources, plus major regional publications that are translated into English and some digitized input from broadcast channels (East West Communications, 2009). East West produces both annual and quarterly indexes, with the former aiming to capture the long-term perceptions about countries, especially over time, while the later is reflective of relatively short-term events or decisions that make news. East West also offers customized reports to its clients (Frost, 2008).

Ohio-based Perception Metrics conducted automated textual analysis for East West Communications using its proprietary technology and methodology. According to East West president Thomas Cromwell, “even with English-only sources, the number of articles surveyed for the index is huge, and there are millions of mentions. English is so dominant in the world that it is fairly safe to say that major stories are likely to appear in English-language media, sooner or later.” Brad Snyder of Perception Metrics says: “the East West Index measures tone as a ratio of positive and negative messages grammatically connected to a country reference. The index score is then calculated by a complex algorithm that factors tone and the volume of country mentions” (Frost, 2008). The brand value is identified by its index score, which is based on determining the tonality (positive and negative) of mentions of countries and territories in news articles, over a given period (quarterly and annually). The tone, of coverage is determined by an algorithm that
detectsgrammaticalassociationsoftermswiththenamesoftheanalyzedplaces,basedonalexiconof16,000wordsandphrases(EastWestCommunications,2009).

Thus,both—theNBIandEastWestGlobal200indexes,attempttoerranknationsbyhowfavorablytheyareperceivedaroundtheworld,buttNBImeasureconsumperceptions,whileEastWestGlobal200—mediacoverage/perceptions.Therefore,itisnaturalthattherenoatotalagreementinthetworankingsand,perhaps,theyshouldbergardedassupplementalratherthancompetingwithoneanother.
Theabovediscussionpromptsadifferentapproachtomeasuringbrandimageingeneral,andtheimageofanationbrandinparticular.

TheConceptofOnlineRepresentationofaBrand—Explication

Justification

Asdiscussedabove,brandimageisformedbybrandaudiencememberalongthedimensionsthataremostimportanttothemasrelatedtotheproduct,serviceand/orcategorythataparticularbrandrepresentsandbelongsto.Thisimageisformedonthebasisofavarietyofcontributionufactors,suchas:familiarity/previousexperience,mediacommunication,corporatecommunication,peerexchanges/wordofmouth,andmanyothers.AsInternetpenetrationgrowsandconsumersareincreasinglyusingtheonlinemotogainformationformakinginformeddecisionsregardingvariousaspectsoftheirlives,theyarealsoturningtotheInternetforresearchandinformationexchangeaboutcompanies,productsandservices.Asareesult,theInternetandonlinencommunicationsarebecomingincreasinglyimportantintheformationofbrandimagesamongbrandaudiences.


Thisalsomeansthathowbrandisrepresentedonlinehasadirecteffectonthethebrand imageheldbybrandaudiences.Thissleadstothecentralizationofanewconcept—Online RepresentationofaBrand(ORB),whichisexplicatedfollowingChaffee’s(1991)blueprint.

EmpiricalDescription

TheabovediscussionleadstothecentralizationofanOnlineRepresentationofa
Brand (ORB) as a sum of all online information related (containing references) to the brand that is available online, in other words – dynamic set of all relevant online information, which represents the brand online. Here, first of all, it is important to identify the relationship and draw a distinction between the concepts of a brand image and ORB:

Brand Image is set of perceptions, which is located in the minds and is a property of the audiences. It is a function of the key brand identity dimensions, and varies across audience segments, while remaining relatively homogenous within these segments. The reason for this is that members of these audience segments share the same perceptions of what are the most important dimensions of a given brand. However, these perceptions are different from what is important to members of other segments. For example, the key dimensions for consumers of a brand are probably mostly the same for most of them, as are those that are important for, say, investors, or employees. However, the dimensions that are important for consumers are likely to be different from dimensions important to investors, as well as employees.

On the other hand, an Online Representation of a Brand (ORB), being defined as a set of online information, is located within the medium, is a property of a brand (and it is the same for all audience segments). Because the information available online at any moment is concrete, finite and “objective” across all audience segments in the sense that it is the same for everybody, therefore, ORB has no cross-sectional variance (across audiences). But because brand-related information available online constantly changes as new information is created with every interaction and communication, ORB is dynamic – it has permanent process variance. Here, the importance of language needs to be emphasized once again: ORB is different in different languages – what it is in English, is different from what it is in Russian, or French, or Chinese, etc. A brand can have a strong ORB in one language and be very weak or even nonexistent in the other, while its different dimensions are likely to be represented differently in different languages.

Importance

Online information and communication play an increasingly important role in the lives of consumers and other brand audiences, and have considerable effect on their decisions and perceptions related to brands and the products and services that these brands represent. At the same time, many of these decisions and perceptions themselves become reflected and represented on the Internet, and, therefore, become part of the Online Representation of a Brand (ORB). Thus, ORB should have effect on brand performance and should be an important factor for the overall success of a brand.

Ideally, if properly operationalized, various measures of ORB could be used to explain variance in different brand-related concepts and possibly predict brand performance. ORB should also be indicative of the brand perceptions/images held by various audiences, since it contributes to the formation of these perceptions and, at the same time, reflects them. In order to properly conceptualize, formally define and operationalize the proposed concept of online image of a brand, and to suggest how to measure it, some further explanations need to be made.

Primitive Terms

In order to be able to speak about Online Representation of a Brand (ORB), we need to accept the existence of: a) a brand and b) online information related to it. The unit of observation is a brand; the concept varies across brands at any time, and for each brand – across time, but not
across audiences. Online information in its very basic form is a sequence of electronically stored “0”-s and “1”-s. These sequences may have different formats and be in different forms, such as: text, pictures, audio, video, animation, and all sorts of their combinations that may form web pages, websites, blogs, social network profiles, discussions and other communication, personal communications, discussion forums, consumer reviews, tax filings, public records, etc., and can be exchanged over the Internet.

**Underlying Assumptions**

**Assumption 1:** information has a meaning – so called, “container metaphor”: content is inherent in a text (Krippendorff, 2004), which may or may not be neutral. Therefore, information has valence – it can be positive, neutral or negative, depending on the emotional, cognitive, moral, etc. charge/load of its meaning. At the same time, this valence can also have a level of arousal, or intensity, which can be mapped on different scales, for example, a 5-point semantic differential: very negative, somewhat negative, neutral, somewhat positive, very positive (ibid).

**Assumption 2:** (digital) information is quantifiable; therefore, it is also measurable in terms of quantity/strength. The simplest measurement of information would be in terms of its “physical” characteristics, such as: bits, bytes, GigaBytes, TerraBytes, etc. At the same time, as mentioned above, information is also quantifiable in terms of its meaning: topics/themes, emotional load, valence, intensity, etc., as well as in terms of its such characteristics as accessibility, salience, prominence, etc.

**Variables and Unit Definition**

In order to quantify online information, we need to define what the main variables are. Based on the above assumptions, two types of variables are identified:

“**Physical/digital” variables**, such as: amount/volume (bytes), format (file type), form (text, images, etc.), linkage to and from (cross-references), ease of access (how easy it is to find and access it), time and location parameters (when it was created and where it is physically located), popularity/frequency of access (how often it has been accessed/viewed/downloaded), visibility/salience, electronic parameters (such as: server speed), and, perhaps, more.

“**Metaphysical/content” variables**, such as: topic/theme (what it is about), valence (negative, neutral, positive), arousal/strength (how negative or positive), emotional (joyful, sad, angry, disgusting, scary, etc.), source/author/owner (who created it), moral (contained values and judgments), cognitive (what kind of knowledge), associative (what it is related to and/or relevant for), mood (sentimental, upbeat, dull, etc.), accuracy, etc.

**Unit Definition – What is one?** What is regarded as a unit of online information will depend on the level at which information is being analyzed: it can be one bit, a byte, or a word, a paragraph, page of text, or one image, a video, etc. or a combination of these: a webpage, or a website, or everything under one domain, or everything that is linked by some association, be that physical or metaphysical – for example, relationship/association/linkage to a particular brand.

**Operationalization and Measurement**

Defined above as a subset of information (linked by some associations (containing references) to the brand) out of the totality of all online information (physically present online), the Online Representation of a Brand (ORB) could hypothetically be measured as a whole, in terms of the above “physical” and “metaphysical” variables: how much and what kinds of
Both in terms of digital and content characteristics – does it consist of, such as: overall strength/volume, topics/themes, valence, emotionality, mood, etc.

At the same time, ORB could also be measured in terms of the specific dimensions and attributes that are most important to different brand audiences/stakeholders: how much and what kinds of information does an OR of a given brand contain along these dimensions and as related to these attributes.

Obviously, practical considerations will make it impossible to measure the Online Representation of a Brand (ORB) as a whole in its entirety (quality and strength of all brand-related information – its online presence), since this will require the measurement of every single piece of information in the ORB. However, using specially designed sampling and coding criteria, procedures and algorithms, perhaps, it will be possible to measure with reasonable accuracy specific subsets (samples) of information within the overall Online Representation of a Brand using content analysis (both qualitative and quantitative, as well as manual and automated), in order to determine how the online image of a brand relates to the identity of a given brand as well as its images held by different stakeholders.

**Online Representation of a Nation Brand (ORNB)**

The next step is application of this concept to nation brands and their images: Online
Representation of a Nation Brand (ORNB) is a collection of all information related (containing references) to a nation that is available online at any given moment in time. Again, it is important to emphasize that other conceptualizations of nation brand image and its key perspectives are all perception-based and, therefore, property of the consumers, specific to them and located in their minds. These perceptions are likely to be different across audience segments, but relatively homogenous within them. On the other hand, the concept of Online Representation of a Nation Brand (ORNB) is information-based and, thus, it is independent of the consumers, is a property of a nation brand and is located within the medium.

Thus, this new concept allows to expand Fan’s model (2008, Appendix 4) by adding ORNB to it (Pic. 1) and relating it to the “key perspectives” of nation brand image suggested by Fan. In this expanded model (Pic 1.), ORNB is a central uniting component, since it interacts with all of the nation-image perspectives. It affects and is affected by each and every one of these perspectives. At the same time, it remains universal across the board and the same for everybody at any given moment in time (online image has no cross-sectional variance; while on the other hand, it is dynamic – changes with every interaction and, thus, has permanent process variance).

Each of the perspectives of the nation image is present in the Online Representation of a Nation Brand and contributes information to it. Thus, ORNB could be used to measure specific aspects of each of the perspectives, as well as relationships between these different perspectives. At the same time, the available online information about the nation (ORNB) also has effect in the opposite direction, since it itself affects each of these perspectives.

These linkages and relationships between the online image of the nation and Fan’s key perspectives of nation image need to be examined along with the specific role that the online image of the nation plays in these linkages and relationships – whether it has direct or indirect effects and is a mediator or moderator for each of the links between these perspectives. Thus, the proposed diagram suggests an expansion and further development of Fan’s model presented in the Appendix 4 and, I believe, opens up a wide avenue for multiple lines of research in several directions.

**ORNB Measurement**

The measurement instrument for the new concept of ORNB is suggested to be based on content analysis and is envisioned as some type of synthesis of two established measures of nation brands (East-West Global 200 and Gfk/Anholt NBI). It will measure the strength and valence of online informational representation of nations along the six dimensions of Competitive Identity: Tourism and Infrastructure, Exports and Brands, Governance and Policies, Investment and Immigration, Culture and Heritage, People and Personalities.

Given the new Big Data reality and the vast amount of data that is being generated on the Internet, the suggested quantitative content and sentiment analysis should be an automated software-driven tool, based on one or several proprietary technologies (such as Crimson Hexagon, Perception Metrics, and the like) and should include categorization along the dimensions of CI and calculation of the coefficient of imbalance (C), which measures the degree to which favorable statements/units outnumber unfavorable ones within these categories (Janis and Fadner, 1965). This will allow measurement of the online representation of a nation brand (ORNB) in terms of: its general strength (amount of information), relative strength (percentage per dimension/category) and valence/tonality/sentiment (proportion of positive, neutral and negative items) for each of the six dimensions. The results will then be mapped on Anholt’s CI.
hexagon relative to the predefined reference points: the image when all dimension categories are equal in size and fully positive (outer hexagon), or equally and fully neutral (inner hexagon), or fully negative in which case the image will be reduced just to a single point in the center of the hexagram.

By looking/analyzing different subsets of information – purposive samples that would control for different variables and thus correspond to different categories/dimensions of CI and/or different perspectives on nation image, this methodology is envisioned to measure, identify and monitor the state and trends of the nation image in general, as well as its specific dimensions and/or different perspectives. This approach will allow accumulation of specific data related to a country/nation, which can be analyzed using a variety of statistical tests (descriptives, Chi-square, t-test, etc.) and allow:

- to map online image of a country on Anholt’s hexagram along his six dimensions of competitive identity
- to identify specific areas of weakness and concern in the online image of a country and gain insight and understanding of the main problems and key issues of its nation brand
- to compare and identify gaps between different perspectives of the image of a given nation brand
- to compare the state of the nation brand image and its different perspectives at different time points and to make conclusions about the effects of specific events and developments
- to facilitate the design, fine-tuning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of results and effectiveness of major public diplomacy and communication efforts and interventions.

Conclusion

Based on the existing theoretical framework (Anholt, 2002; Dinnie, 2008; Fan, 2008), the study suggests a new conceptual model which will further develop and expand the existing model of formation of nation brand image, by suggesting a new concept of Online Representation of a Nation Brand (ORNB). The study could gradually lead to the development of an approach to accumulate data and analytics that will help identify problem areas and provide support for designing, implementing and evaluation of major public diplomacy initiatives and communication efforts and interventions, as well as serve as a tool to monitor progress of these activities and efforts. Thus, the suggested approach and methodology should become an invaluable management tool for keepers of a nation brand.
References
Branding”, http://bura.brunel.ac.uk/handle/2438/1872, accessed 8 May 2014
APPENDIX 1

Conceptual model of the nation brand

Dinnie (2008)

APPENDIX 2

The Nation Brand Hexagon
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### APPENDIX 3
Key Perspectives in Nation Image
(Fan, 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key perspective</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Typical question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Self perception Identity</td>
<td>Mental associations about the nation held by its people</td>
<td>Who we are as a nation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Perception of significant other(s)</td>
<td>Perceptions that a nation has of other nations, Reference point, world view</td>
<td>How do we see the outside world?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Construed image</td>
<td>Perceptions that a nation’s people believe that other nations hold about their nation</td>
<td>What do we believe our image in the world? “Mirror on the wall”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Actual image Reputation, stereotype</td>
<td>Real perceptions about a nation held by other nations</td>
<td>How is our nation actually being perceived by others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Currently projected image</td>
<td>Image currently being created and communicated to the world that might not reflect reality of the nation</td>
<td>How is our nation currently promoting itself to the outside world?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Desired future image (Gioia, et al, 2000) Positioning</td>
<td>Visionary perception that a nation would like other nations to hold about it in the future</td>
<td>What do we want to be perceived by the outside world?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 4
The Relationships between Key Perspectives in Nation Image
(Fan, 2008)

Gap analysis
Gap 1: Self perception v External perception (1v4)
Gap 2: Conjured image v Actual image (3v4)
Gap 3: Projected image v Actual image (5v4)
Gap 4: Current image v Future image (6v6)
Romanian Governmental Public Relations:  
Its Uses in Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding

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Abstract

This paper explored branding as part of national image management. More specifically, this paper sought to explore Romanian governmental public relations efforts in creating and managing its national image(s). This work focused on the Romanian government international public relations efforts as public diplomacy activities, as well as on integrated marketing communication actions initiated by the Romanian government, and how they contributed to the development of Romania’s brand image(s). The case study is built on a comprehensive text analysis of Romanian government documents and Romanian Ministries of Foreign Affairs’ and Tourism’s databases. A discussion of challenges and opportunities in creating Romania’s national brand image(s) by the Romanian government is presented.
Introduction

When I first came to the United States, I was adopted by a group of culturally inquisitive young adults who, I quickly found, were a rather distinctive group of movie enthusiasts. Learning that I was born in a historic region of Romania, Transylvania, they took me to watch a must-see movie, they said. It was about an immortal, blood thirsty dark knight, who lived in a medieval castle in a place named Transylvania, and who, my new friends claimed, could have been my neighbor all along. Little did I know that I was going to watch a movie that would stay with me forever, not because it was that good, rather because it got it so wrong. The movie’s main character, “Count Dracula” was based on one of Romania’s most beloved national heroes, a 15th-century prince Vlad Țepeș (Vlad the Impaler), who protected the country from international conquerors and famously impaled those who crossed him. Later, as I got my first job in the United States, one colleague, upon learning where I was born, asked me “so, do you have sun in Romania, or is it always dark and cold?” It became clear to me that my country of origin had a major image problem, as its national brand was dominated by a movie, which was so inaccurate, that I dismissed it as a regrettable pastiche. But I was alone.

So, what would you say, if I were to ask you “what would be the first thing that comes to mind if you hear the name Romania?” Would it be Count Dracula? Communism? Ceausescu? Would you know that Transylvania is a real place in Romania? Or, would you be able to place Romania on the world map?

Romania has a strategic geopolitical location on the Balkan Peninsula between Central and Eastern Europe and shares borders with five countries including Republic of Moldavia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, and the Black Sea. It is the 12th largest country in Europe with a population of about 22.5 million, majority of whom belong to the Orthodox Church and a minority who is either Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish.

The 1989 Romanian Revolution brought enthusiasm and euphoria to a nation that produced sports stars such as tennis player Ilie Nastase and gymnast Nadia Comaneci. The Revolution also brought a long awaited opportunity to join the international community and become an equal partner on the global arena. Today, Romanian society is a mix of Westernized values and Romanian traditions. The modernization of communications infrastructure and the capitalization of the economy have allowed access to information at all levels of society. Political parties are predominantly pro-Western, and Romania has actively pursued strengthening relations with the West in general, and with the U.S. and the European Union in particular. Romania was the first country to enroll in the NATO Partnership for Peace program, joined NATO in 2004, and acceded to the European Union in 2007. Romania’s economy is becoming stronger, making the country increasingly attractive for investments.

However, more than 25 year after the anti-communism revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe, Romania still struggles to consolidate its brand image among international audiences. While all countries in Central Europe have unique histories and cultures, they shared a common process of transition as they moved from centrally planned, government-controlled systems to free market economies. Along with other former communist countries, Romania underwent transformations at all levels of society and experienced significant political, economic, cultural, and social changes. For countries that experienced such transformational periods, it is important to develop unique country brands that can contribute to their success, as “country brands can serve as a sort of umbrella under which further sub-brands can be developed (Szondi, 2007, p. 9).
Similar to other Central and Eastern European countries, Romania has been using public relations to create a unique image, a country brand. This paper sought to explore Romanian governmental public relations efforts in creating and managing its national image(s). More specifically, this work focused on the Romanian government international public relations efforts as public diplomacy activities, as well as on integrated marketing communication actions initiated by the Romanian government, and how they contributed to the development of Romania’s brand image(s). A discussion of challenges and opportunities in creating Romania’s national brand image(s) by the Romanian government is presented. The case study is built on a comprehensive text analysis of Romanian government documents and Romanian Ministries of Foreign Affairs’ and Tourism’s databases.

**Literature review**

Since its introduction in 1996, the concept of nation branding (Anholt, 1996) has become one of the most popular catchphrases (Szondi, 2010), was nominated as 2005 most notable ideas by *The New York Times Magazine* (Kaneva, 2011), and “much in vogue the recent decade” (Rasmussen & Merkelsen, 2012, p. 816). A common view of nation branding is that it is “image-driven, with the aim of creating positive country images” (Szondi, 2009, p. 301). With citizen-level diplomacy conducted through the lens of image-building, nation branding has become an established stream of research in public diplomacy. Conceptually however, national image is at the intersection of several fields, as it has become the “centerpiece in the conduct of international relations and communication” (Wang, 2006, p. 9), and international public relations (Kunczik, 1997). The concepts of image and communication have been pivotal to public relations and have garnered much attention in public diplomacy. For example, Wang (2006) noted “an inherent goal of public diplomacy is to communicate and cultivate on behalf of nation-state a desired image and reputation and to build a common ground and understanding among nations and peoples” (p. 32). However, counter to the established research streams based on relational approach and engagement in public relations (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000) and relationship management and mutuality in public diplomacy (Fitzpatrick, 2007), branding has been largely viewed as “one-way communication where the communicator has control over the message, which tends to be simple and concise and leaves little space for dialogue and interaction” (Szondi, 2009, p. 301-302).

Theoretical convergences between public relations and public diplomacy have prompted scholars to argue that “public diplomacy can be seen as a part of the successful expansion of core public relations practices” (Rasmussen & Merkelsen, 2012, p. 810). Although part of public diplomacy research, branding has garnered the attention of only few public relations scholars (Vanc & Fitzpatrick, 2016). Vanc and Fitzpatrick (2016) found that of the 120 works in public diplomacy written by public relations scholars during 1990-2014, only 6 pertained to branding. However, 14 pertained to international public relations by states, 10 to national image, 3 to country reputation and 3 to nation-building. In the majority of these works public relations scholars focused on the government as the main actor in conducting international public relations aimed at improving a country’s image or engaging in brand or reputation management. For example, Nobili (2005) explored the role of European capital of culture events on city branding and positioning efforts. White (2012) investigated the inverse effects of the country-of-origin effect on national image. Chen (2012) examined the effects of international mega events on branding national images, and Rasmussen and Merkelsen (2012, 2014) examined a) how nation branding practices affect the security function of public diplomacy (Rasmussen & Merkelsen,
2012), and b) the risk of nation branding as crisis response as the Danish government turned the cartoon crisis into a struggle with globalization (Rasmussen & Merkelsen, 2014).

In a series of studies, Szondi (2007, 2009, 2010) discussed the role and challenges of country branding in transition countries (Szondi, 2007), examined branding as part of a transitional perspective on national reputation management (Szondi, 2009), and argued for a public relations approach to nation branding (Szondi, 2010). While exploring the concept of nation branding and its definitions, Szondi (2010) noted that nation branding is often conceptualized as national image management with image promotion as its central function. The author concluded that nation branding scholars have a tendency “to attribute too much importance to image and usually make the assumption that there is a single and uniform ‘image’ that can be developed and promoted everywhere to everybody” (Szondi, 2010, p.335).

Wang (2006, 2008, 2013) is another public relations scholar who took a broad approach to branding, image, and public diplomacy. The author explored the role of sub-national actors in nation branding (Wang, 2006), the role of branding in shaping China’s global imagination (Wang, 2013), and the power and limits of branding in national image communication in global society (Wang, 2008). In examining the meaning and significance of branding to national image management, Wang (2008) noted that “strategic branding encompasses three main sets of activities – brand definition, brand communication, and brand management” (p. 12). Brand definition pertains to the establishment of the identity, “imagery or personification [that] can only be amplified but not fabricated,” and “its communication must be rooted in the nation’s history, culture and policy” (Wang, 2008, p. 17). Brand communication represents the voice of a brand. The author noted the difficulty of effective brand communication given the wide variety of communication tools, outreach platforms, and communicative actions often within an integrated marketing communication approach. Brand management in national image management involves an array of actors including government agencies, civic organizations, businesses, which often have divergent and competing interests. Wang (2008) noted that brand management “is about focus and coordination among the various brands of an organization” (p. 12), and that, “in national image management, sophisticated brand communication practices are critical to gaining audience attention and forging public engagement and relationships” (p. 19).

This work furthers Wang’s (2008) assertion that in the post-Cold-War era characterized by new alliances among nation-states in a more competitive global arena, nation states are in continuous need to “effectively stake out their identity, pro-actively manage their image and achieve better communication and understanding in the global community” (p. 15). Wang (2008) contended that, “the concept and practice of branding is not only relevant, but also important to nation-states’ image communication and management” (p. 15). In the light of the Romania’s image fallacy, this work sought to explore how the Romanian’s government has engaged in international public relations efforts as public diplomacy activities and how public diplomacy actions initiated by the Romanian government contributed to the development the country brand.

This work is built on the conceptual framework of brand definition, brand communication, and brand management proposed by Wang (2008), and international public relations proposed by Wilcox, Ault, Agee, and Cameron (2001). International public relations is, “the planned and organized effort of a company, institution or government to establish mutually beneficial relations with the publics of other nations” (Wilcox, Ault, & Cameron, 2001). Applying brand communication to national image, Wang (2008) said that “in national image management, sophisticated brand communication practices are critical to gaining audience attention and forging public engagement and relationships” (p. 19). Such practices include visual
symbols and integrated marketing communication, which “should go beyond the mass media and consider a wide array of communication options to share information and meaning with overseas publics” (Keller 2001, Wang, 2008, p. 19).

The case of Romanian brand metamorphosis

After the fall of communism, Romania began a long process of reform carrying a terrible legacy and great handicap (Ratesh, 1993). With an “energy-hungry, inefficient, and neglected industry” and a “total absence of private enterprise” (Ratesh, 1993, p. 391), Romania embarked on a long waving path to a capitalist economy and democratic society.

Defining Romania’s brand image(s)

Romania has an image problem (Dolea & Tarus, 2009; Moisescu, 2011; Popescu & Profiroiu 2013, Secor, 2015), as its name is associated among other with Dracula, Ceausescu, communism, stray dogs, and street children Dolea and Tarus (2009), or poverty, sanitation, and infant mortality (Secor, 2015).

Twenty years after the anti-communist revolution, two popular country rankings Anholt/GfK Roper and FutureBrands gave Romania rather unfavorable positions. For example, the National Brands Index ranked Romania 37 of a total of 50 nations, (last position among European Union Member States) (Anholt/GfK Roper, 2009, p. 13). And, FutureBrand’s Country Brand Index (based on 29 criteria), ranked Romania 76 (out of 78 countries analyzed) in 2008, 83 (out of 102) in 2009, and 92 (out of 110) in 2010 (Popescu & Profiroiu, 2013), and 100 (out of 112) in 2012 (Patrut, 2014). Romania ranked in the top half for national environment (19th), history (44th), high technology (45th), purchasing power (45th) and living standard (47th).

Moisescu (2011) found that Romania’s country brand image is mainly affected by its people, products, governance, politics, tourism, culture, investment potential and attractiveness, and living conditions. While Popescu and Profiroiu (2013) found that Romania’s image as tourism destination is influenced by three major criteria people, tourism, and image. 1) Romania’s image is influenced by Romanians’ behavior inside and outside the country, 2) Romania’s tourism brand has low awareness abroad, which is the result of poor promotion due to a small number of communication channels, and 3) Romania’s tourism services are contingent on diversity, accessibility, and quality/price ratio. The authors also noted a degree of ignorance among participants regarding Romania’s visual brand identity.

Romania’s brand communication

Public diplomacy: In Romania, the government institution charged with public diplomacy activities is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). As noted in a 2013 Government Decision (GD no 8/2013), MFA’s among the main objectives are to defend and promote Romania abroad, initiate and support international activities toward building international cooperation, promote Romania’s national interests abroad, and organize direct and control activities of diplomatic missions and consular offices (GD 8/2013:1-2). The Ministry’s main focus is to contribute “to promoting Romania’s image in the world by organizing and funding at national and international level the public communication actions, public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy [...] in accordance with the priorities and objectives of Romania’s foreign policy” (Popescu & Corbos, 2013, p. 144). Among public diplomacy activities financed through the national budget are congresses, conferences, forums and international meetings, campaigns and internal communication events, events for promoting the country’s image abroad, campaigns and
events for promoting the culture, celebration of important events, and participation in international festivals.

According to the Government Decision no. 8/2013, one of MFA’s goals is to strengthen Romania’s image. As result of its involvement in the cultural diplomacy plan, efforts are two-fold. Internally, MFA has successfully negotiated “114 active agreements and 30 programs concerning culture, education, science and media” (Popescu & Corbos, 2013, p. 143). Externally, MFA’s efforts are visible through the cultural departments of diplomatic missions, and a network of Romanian cultural institutes and foreign universities. For example, in 2015, Romanian lectures were operating in 44 universities from Europe, North America, South Asia, and Caucaz (MFA, 2015a).

As part of MFA, the Romanian Cultural Institute (RCI) has the mission to promote national culture and civilization in the country and abroad. The Institute has branches in 18 countries around the world (RCI, 2014a) and according to the 2014 annual report, it had a 2014 budget of 29 million Lei (approx. $721,000) (Law of National Budget no. 356/2013). In 2014 The Institute implemented 889 projects (12% increase from 2013) in collaboration with 900 partners, that resulted in 1,800 events with participation of 1,800 Romanian personalities. Activities focused on topics such literature, music, cinematography, theater, visual arts, dance, architecture/creativity/traditional art, and other strategic projects with focus on public diplomacy and culture (RCI, 2014a).

RCI works in collaboration with other Romanian institutions such as, the Ministry of International Relations, National Book Center, the National Center of Internal Programs, the National Center of Diaspora and Romanian Language, and the National Center of Communication and IT. These collaborations have resulted in more visibility for Romania abroad at music, film and other cultural international events. For example, Ministry of International Relations (MIR) seeks to increase visibility for Romanian culture around the world and strengthen cultural relations between Romania and other countries especially where RCI is not represented. The RCI 2014 annual report notes, larger long-term projects are also designed trough the Service of International Partnering in collaboration with public and private institutions, Ministry of External Affairs and Romania’s diplomatic missions. The following is an example of such undertaking. In 2007, RCI joined the European Union National Institutes for Culture (with 90 clusters around the world and 33 members in 27 countries), which allowed RCI to function where it does not have official branches. This way, through its cultural attachés in Romanian diplomatic missions Romania expanded its membership intro EUNIC Global and participates in EUNIC activities in SUA and 15 additional countries in the world. In 2010-2011 Romania was the president of the global EUNIC network and in October 2014 hosted a major EUNIC event, “Cultural Dialogue Europe-China” (IRC, 2014a).

Overall, Romania’s Foreign Service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has 146 diplomatic missions which also organize public diplomacy activities that aim to promote Romania abroad and increase its visibility especially during holidays such Romania’s National Day, Remembrance Day, and Europe Day. Other Institutional partners are, the Romanian Cultural Institute (ICR), the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the Institute of the Romanian Language, the Romanian Academy, the National Authority for Scientific Research, the National Authority for Sport and Youth, the Agency For Loans and Study Scholarships, and the National Centre of Cinematography. Among civil society partners are, Policy Centre for Roma and Minorities, Romanian-Swiss Multimedia Institute, Black Sea NGO Forum, and Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation Foundation.
Another fruitful collaboration is between RCI and the National Center of Communication and IT. The Office’s activities include domestic and international communication. According to the 2014 annual report, the Center published press releases every 3/4 weeks with a total of 160 information clusters (e.g. “the Night of European Literature in Bucharest,” “Positive Romania,” “My City,” “the Shelf with Ideas,” “Modernism,” etc.), without including RCI’s activities abroad, which were also communicated both internally and abroad as needed (e.g. the XVII Edition of the European Film Festival, the Cultural Dialogue Europa-China, etc.). The Center also continued its partnerships with various journalists, nongovernment organizations and other institutions domestically or abroad, and with publications such as Radio Romania Cultural and TVR International (public television targeting Diaspora communities) as well as various websites (e.g. TVR, www.modernism.ro, www.agentiadearte.ro, www.artactmagazine.ro, www.romaniapozitiva.ro, http://www.orasulm.eu/, www.raftulcuidei.ro, www.societatesicultura.ro, www.accente.ro), also producing audio and video press releases. Among the promotional materials, the Office used banners, posters, flyers, and invitations as well as giveaways at events (diplomas, pins, pens, USBs, bags, bookmarks, etc.).

Online presence and social media is another focus for the Center. The Office maintains RCI’s website (www.icr.ro), a weekly electronic newsletter including domestic and international events with almost 10,000 subscribers, and a two-fold daily press review, one for general information and another focused on culture (www.romania culturala.ro). Social media includes Facebook pages for the Romanian Cultural Institute (www.facebook.com/ICRBucuresti with 13,000 followers, increase from 9,766 in Jan. 2014), the European Film Festival (https://www.facebook.com/ffeRomania with 10,000 followers, increase from 7,372 in Jan. 2014), National Book Center (www.facebook.com/CENNAC.ro with 4,749 followers, increase from 4,383 in Jan. 2014). The Center also maintains the Romanian Cultural Institute Twitter account (twitter.com/ICRBucuresti with 1,601 followers, increase from 1,080 in Jan. 2014). The Center continues to maintain all social media created for RCI with regular posts, livestreaming, virtual events, as well as Yahoo Groups and postings on RCI’s YouTube channel. RCI’s online library (www.e-icr.ro) maintains an updated catalogue and provides active correspondence with institutes and private publics interested in buying books and magazines edited by RCI.

Tourism and regional development: Romania’s concern for regional development started to extend in early 1990 with the help of several nongovernmental organizations that followed the Western Europe’s trend (Butnaru & Minut, 2012). In 1998, Romania established the national policies of regional development (Law no. 151/1998) with the main focus on diminishing the existent regional unbalances. As noted by Butnaru and Minut (2012), the policies regarding regional development in Romania, were focused specifically at tourism, “as a strategic sector for the assurance of a dynamic economic growth of regions with an important tourism potential” (p. 480). Romania’s Regional Operational Programme (ROP 207-2013) charged with the implementation of the national strategy and regional development policies, capitalized on existing tourist resources, and “the development of the main types of tourism, with the identification of market niches, creation of new workplaces, increase of the revenues from tourist activities, and also creation of income sources in isolated, extremely beautiful areas” (Butnaru and Minut, 2012, p. 483).

The implications of the programs were evident at local levels in the eight regions created for the implementation of the regional development policies. For example, the project “Circuit of North Transylvania medieval fairs” generated great impact regarding the “reintegration in the tourist circuit of a cultural and architectural patrimony of national value, optimum correlation
and capitalisation of cultural, historical and architectural regional resources, increase of the number of tourists in the region, creation of a regional tourist brand, urban revitalisation, local economic development, and tourism lasting promotion” (Butnaru & Minut, 2012, p. 489).

Other tourism and regional development programs included the modernization extension of a tourist complex in the Danube Delta, the rehabilitation of the old historical center of a city in the Western part of Romania, and the rehabilitation and extension of a tourist town in the heart of Transylvania near a fortress known as the Dracula Castle in the Transylvanian village of Bran where Vlad Tepes is said to have slept once.

The Dracula Project: In early 2000s, the Romanian Minister of Tourism has embarked on a difficult journey to propose Dracula Park, “an American-style theme park around the legacy of a novel by Irish-born Bram Stoker, based on German accounts of Transylvanian folklore” (Secor, 2003, p. 1). The proposed park would include a replica of a medieval village, a chairlift to transport tourists to and from the park, hotels, casinos, amusement parks, and a cinema showing all 250 Dracula films. But the Minister’s plan came to a halt when a group of intellectuals signed a petition denouncing the project, “why bring people to Romania to show them vampires?” they asked (Secor, 2003, p. 2). The initial location of the park, near a perfectly preserved fortified medieval citadel, where Vlad Tepes may have been born was also banned citing environmental concerns. The vision died and with it the city hall’s hope that the park would bring tourists and jobs. The proposed alternate location of the project was a park near the capital, where Vlad Tepes is thought to be buried.

The Dracula project was proposed in 2001 by the then minister of tourism, and more than 15 years later, the construction of the themed park remained in a project stage with two sides engaged in continuous debate on its success an contributions to Romania’s economic growth, tourism promotion, and brand development. The two debating sides include the state and local government officials, who are engaged in a continuous positive campaign to promote the benefits of a Dracula’s park on one side, and the locals and environmental groups, who continue to maintain a negative attitude on the benefits of such themed park, on the other side.

Romania’s image and integrated marketing communication: The following section is an analysis of Romania’s branding efforts starting with early 1990s, and includes a series of advertisement and social media undertakings meant to improve Romania’s brand image.

1995 – Eternal and fascinating Romania was among the first branding actions initiated by the Romanian Government in collaboration with Group Saintonge Edition. This was not a campaign, rather an album of photographs that would present a positive image of “a unique country with immutable values, many still undiscovered” (Popescu & Corbos, 2010, p. 882). With a budget of a $5.97 million, the aim was to print 97,000 copies and distribute them in 96 countries worldwide. Overall, the initiative fell short of its goal, but received media visibility, mostly due to an embezzlement scandal. In 1998, only 10,000 copies were printed, of which less than half, 4,200 arrived in the country with an excessive price per album, $600 Euros.

2000, 2007- Made in Romania was initiated by the Association for Promoting Products and Services Romania. The campaign sought to promote and support the Romanian products due to “decline in domestic production and loss of important milestones of the national economy” (http://www.fir.ro/). The only criterion for using the uniquely designed logo was that any creation, product, or service had to have 50% domestic production. Made in Romania went bankrupt due to the relatively small number of local producers attracted by the program as a result of a lack of information and promotion, as well as the large fee for membership (100 million Lei).
The 2007 campaign was initiated by the dairy, meat, and wine producers without the support of the government. However, around the same time, the chamber of Commerce launched a similar campaign using the same slogan, but in Romanian (Nicola, 2013, p. 84).

2003 – Why don’t you come over? Was an online reactive campaign initiated as a response to the British newspaper, *The Guardian*. *The Guardian*’s campaign *Don’t come to Britain!* based on fabricated figures aimed to discourage possible Romanians and Bulgarians who sought work in the UK. In response to *The Guardian*, the Romanian newspaper *Gândul* and GMP Advertising launched the campaign *Why Don’t You Come Over?*, as an invitation for the British to come to Romania. While the British were invited to submit reasons why living in UK is not nice, Romanians had to find arguments to support that living in Romania is wonderful (Patrus, 2014). *Gândul* launched a Facebook application “Like and share up to London!” (https://www.facebook.com/Whydontyoucomeover). Designed as a positive campaign, “We may not like Britain, but you will love Romania. Why don’t you come over?” progressed in a second stage of the campaign, where British were invited to find a couch offered by Romanians to spend few days in Romania and Romanian employers could offer available jobs to British. The website featured active sections such as “fellow Romanians, let give the Brits a helping hand,” “Pitch a job,” and “Submit your cozy couch” (http://whydontyoucomeover.gandul.info/). The participation of regular Romanian in the campaign (creating funny posters and messages) led to “record figures: over 1,500,000 impressions on Facebook, 49,000 on Twitter, more than 17,000 impressions on blogs and in comments, over 60,000 comments in the Romanian press online” (Patrut, 2014).

2004 – *Romania, Simply Surprising* [in some documents the name appears “Always Surprising”] sought to promote the country as a tourism destination among US and European Union publics. The campaign was created by the advertising agency Ogilvy & Mather with the main goal to create a website (www.romaniatravel.com) and several promotional commercials. The campaign cost was $1.7 million and sought to target potential tourists, age 20-55, average income, informed, interested in culture, history and interested in new experiences. The three month campaign (June-August) consisted of one daily promotional commercial on four TV channels: Euronews, Eurosport, Discovery, CNN, and BBC. The campaign was cancelled in 2007 by Richard Batchelor, head of the international consultants team of World Tourism Organization because the slogan “Simply Surprising” does not communicate the essence of Romania to the potential visitors” (Popescu & Corbos, 2010, p. 884).

2004 – *Romania-an attractive destination for foreign investors* was initiated by the Romanian Agency for Foreign Investment and sought to promote Romania as a viable option for investing (Nicola, 2013). The project “included regular consultations with the authorities, to create, annually, a portfolio of priority investments, the creation of the ARIS website, (with versions in English, but also in German, Turkish, Spanish, French, Danish, Italian and Russian), the creation and dissemination of a newsletter (reaching 5000 people in 30 countries), organizing press conferences with foreign investors already in Romania, the creation and dissemination of “Romania’s Investment Guidebook”” (Nicola 2013, p. 85). The project was accompanied by a promotional campaign “Romania, Your Business Partner” which was “centered on “10 reasons why it is worth to invest in Romania” (Nicola, 2013, p. 85).

2005 – *Branding Romania* sought to be a comprehensive country brand campaign. The campaign was initiated by the Agency for Governmental Strategies in 2005, the blueprint was completed in December 2006, and was approved by government decision in early 2007 along with a budget of 2 million Euros. The Agency put forth a call for proposals for all interested in
participating, but on the day of the auction there were no submissions, and by the end of 2007 only 200,000 Euros were spent in the research stage, to determine how Romanians were perceived abroad. The results were ambiguous (Popescu & Corbos, 2010).

2005 – Imagine Romania was an attempt by a union of several youth organization named The Initiative Group for Promoting Romania’s Country Image and sought to shape the Romanian nation brand. The project was envisioned to start by collecting data through a series of seminars and workshops to debate the image of Romania. While the second stage aimed to propose a series of actions to propose the country. The effect was minimal (Nicola, 2013).

2006 - Romania, Fabulouspirit sought to position Romania as a new member of the European Union, unique from other member states. The campaign was initiated by the Ministry of External Affairs and aimed to communicate the success stories in engineering, sports, art, and nature. The campaign was meant to be positive, pro-active, “as opposed to responding, in defense, to accusations coming from outside” (Nicola, 2013, p. 84). However, the project was abandoned after only a week, and garnered much controversy around the slogan (Popescu & Corbos, 2010).

2007 – RomaniaIT was another failed campaign that sought to promote Romania with the slogan “Creative talent. Technical excellence.” The initiative was criticized from the beginning mainly because of the logo, which featured an image of the Infinity Column created by a renowned Romanian sculptor.

2007 – A fresh look at Romania was a campaign “started by the Ministry of European Integration and funded by Coca-Cola and Unilever” (Popescu & Corbos, 2010, p. 886). According to Popescu and Corbos (2010), the campaign was conducted in March-April 2007 in “The Economist” magazine and “Financial Times” and it cost 100,000 Euros. The articles however, were not at all appealing, were hard to read, with too much text, and no pictures.

2008 – Romanians in Europe was a reactive campaign aimed at improving Romanians image in Italy and Spain. The campaign was launched after cases of murder, theft, prostitution and fraud and it cost 7.5 million Euros. Popescu and Corbos (2010) noted that this “was the first coherent governmental action after 1990. For the first time in 18 years, the Romanian Government started an integrated communication campaign which used both PR and marketing elements” (p. 888).

2009 – Romania, Land of Choice was an attempt at tourism brand and was similar to the 2004 “Always Surprising” campaign. The campaign included a series of advertising spots broadcasted on CNN and Eurosport during August-December 2009. The advertising campaign sought to position Romania as a tourism destination. The ads featured three well-known Romanian sport personalities: gymnast Nadia Comăneci, tennis player Ilie Năstase, and soccer player Gheorghe Hagi. As noted by Nicola (2013), “they humorously talk about Romania as the country where women are allowed to marry four men, where people ride zebras and fish grows in trees. The punch-line was “You really don't know anything about Romania, do you?”” (p. 84). But shortly after the campaign was launched, the Romanian Ministry of Tourism “was involved in a scandal related to the slogan, because it was already registered at the State Office for Inventions and Brands by a private individual” (Popescu & Corbos, 2010, p. 889). The campaign “cost 1,5 million Euros and again failed to build a consensus inside the country” (Sepi, 2013, p. 8).

2010 – Explore the Carpathian Garden was the slogan of the Romania’s tourism brand launched at the World Exhibition in Shanghai, July 2010. The campaign was initiated by the Romanian Ministry of Tourism. But by the end of July, the Ministry of Tourism, was responding
to media reports, as the Spanish agency that won the contract was accused that the campaign’s logo was similar to a transport company, triggering questions of its authenticity.

**Romania and brand and management**

After the ascension in the European Union, the Romanian government has put in place two major strategies for tourism development including, the Sustainable Development Strategy 2007-2030, and the National Tourism Master Plan 2007-2026 (Bulin, 2015).

The Sustainable Development Strategy 2007-2030, places a special focus on Regional Development with main priorities on sustainable development and tourism promotion. The main objectives of the Regional Development plan are to capitalize on the cultural heritage and natural resources for tourism, and to improve the quality of tourism specific infrastructure. The project proposes specific strategies and actions to achieve these objectives, among which “defining and promoting the national tourism brand” (Bulin, 2015, p. 80).

The National Tourism Master Plan 2007-2026 was developed in partnership with the World Tourism Organization (Bulin, 2015, p. 80). Among other, the Master Plan aims to increase investments in Romanian tourism, conserve natural resources and national heritage, and improve the quality of life. The Master Plan proposes short-term and medium-term objectives and focuses on all Romanian tourism regions among which, the historical region of Transylvania, Black Sea, and the Danube Delta.

In February 2011, the Minister of Regional Development and Tourism launched the “National Marketing Tourism Plan” for the period 2011-2015, with the main objective to increase the number of international tourists (Popescu 2012). Based on the recommendations for best strategic communication actions for the Romanian brand, in 2011, the Minister launched two parallel radio and television campaigns, one domestic and one international, that aimed to promote Romanian tourism.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The purpose of this work was to explore Romanian governmental public relations efforts in creating and managing its national image(s). This work focused on the Romanian government international public relations efforts as public diplomacy activities, as well as on integrated marketing communication actions initiated by the Romanian government, and how they contributed to the development of Romania’s brand image(s).

Overall this work found that the Romanian government embarked on numerous programs, among which, most successful were those carried through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in partnership with the Romanian Cultural Institute. The most unsuccessful campaigns were the reactive advertising campaigns that attempted to create and promote a picture-perfect image for Romania. The findings here concur with those of Dolea and Tarus (2009) who noted that during 1996-2006 Romania was engaged in countering negative effects “resulting from the association with communism, poverty and the lack of democratic values” (p. 85-86). However, this work found that even after Romania’s induction in the European Union in 2007, the Romanian government was still engaged in reactive campaigns aimed to restore its reputation.

One interesting fact this study found pertains to the Dracula Park. For a country that seems concerned with its international image, Romania is missing the opportunity to “capitalize on Bran Stoker’s popular vampire story” and “forge indelible tie between Romania and Dracula,” while at the same time “promote tourism and income for tourism” (Sepi, 2013, p. 5-6). However, even though Romania does not have yet a Dracula Park, Sepi (2013) noted that “the
best-known tourist attractions in Romania were Bucharest, Dracula’s Castle, the Danube Delta and the monasteries of Bucovina” (p.12), which shows that Romania’s tourism industry could only benefit from Dracula Park.

This work also found that since the fall of communism, Romania has constantly sought to find its identity and promote its brand image(s) abroad. Patrut (2014) noted that investing in the country brand can represent a strategic priority for a country as it consolidates its image and international reputation. Findings concur with Patrut (2014) that although Romania started to invest in this long-term process in 1996, the promotional actions have lacked coordination and efficiency. The Romanian government engaged in countless international cultural events and as well as numerous advertising campaigns, and even though the country ranking improved over years, few seats up each year, Romania consistently founds itself at the bottom of the lists. In fact, the country continued to rank last in European rankings (Profiroiu at al., 2011, p. 279). In addition, Popsecu (2012) noted that, Romania does not have a developed brand, and international publics know very little about it. Future Brand Country Brand Index for example, uses almost 30 criteria for brand evaluation, and interestingly, for specific attributes, Romania finds itself among top of the ranking. These are nature and environmental protection (ranked #19), history (#44), IT and technology (#45), standard of living (#47) out of 110 countries in 2010. However, one of the criteria Romania consistently received low scores, was the state of the infrastructure, with a lack of a highway system that slows the growth of tourism (Popescu, 2012).

The successful public relations activities conducted by the Romanian government abroad through its institutes and embassies were mostly eclipsed by the numerous failed advertising efforts with media attention focused on other reasons than those specified in the campaigns. In addition, most of the government activities focused on tourism and culture and did not consider other ways in which Romania engages internationally. For example, Wang (2008) noted that “in national image management, there are countless points of contact overseas publics may have with a certain country, from products and people, to organizations and government policies” (p. 17). These points of contact, which become information-bearing experiences “are potential communication and outreach platforms (as well as image sources), the sheer scope and scale of which makes the task of communication management daunting, if not impossible” (Wang, 2008, p. 17).

Romania showed continuous concern with creating an impeccable image, which according to the Future Brand Country Brand Index does not correspond to its domestic realities that generate a different type of a reality. Sepi (2013) for example, noted that Romania was more focused on “saying” rather than “doing,” which “led to a pattern of tardy, on-the-defensive communications which overshadowed and all but replaced well-structured and proactive attempts at building dialogue, understanding and trust” (p. 4).

Wang (2008) noted the difficulty of national image management, as “multiple parties (e.g. from government agencies to civic organizations to business) with divergent and oftentimes competing interests (e.g. various regions in a country may have different goals in the promotion of the national image) are involved and affected (Wang, 2008, p.18). However, the Romanian government has already put in place plans that are projected to run until 2030. The plans proposed though the Minister of Tourism focus mainly on the tourism industry, which contradicts the views in the branding literature, that a country’s image is built on a number of criteria from products and people, to organizations and government policies. It would be interesting to see the success of such long-term plans that focus on only few of the criteria considered by the country brand ranking institution.
The comprehensive analysis of Romanian government public relations activities conducted through its embassies as public diplomacy activities and integrated marketing communication campaigns show that the success achieved through public diplomacy was somewhat diminished by the failed advertising campaigns. The sheer amount of advertising campaigns, each with a different brand, logo, and slogan may have created a disservice to the country, which sought to achieve a clear, stable, distinct image. In fact, in retrospect, during a period when Romania sought to build credibility as member of the European Union, it may have achieved the opposite, as the series of failed advertising campaigns may have instilled a sentiment of unreliability. Future studies could explore the progression of the Romanian government plans and future attempts to achieve the international image that it aspires. Furthermore, as the country capitalizes on the international recognition of one of its national heroes and starts the construction of the Dracula Park, it would be interesting to explore its success among both domestic and international tourists.
References


An examination of Nestle’ India’s Maggi Noodle Ban Crisis: A Study in Sentiment Analysis to Map Organizational Crisis Response

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Abstract

This study examined the dominant sentiments expressed by the Indian public on Twitter when Nestle India recalled Maggi Noodles, a popular brand of instant snack in India, over safety concerns. As part of this study, a total of 816 tweets, posted between June and November, were coded. Additionally, this study also examined emojis and emoticons to examine the public’s emotions. The Integrated Crisis Mapping model was used as a framework to examine the public sentiments. Previous research on emotional responses to crises have focused primarily on negative emotions; however, findings from the current study suggest that positive emotions as well as neutral statements of fact played a significant role in the process of coping and crisis resolution. The practical implications of these findings for public relations professionals are that they should consider the emotional state of the affected publics when outlining a crisis communication strategy. At the theoretical level, changes are suggested to the ICM model.
Emotions influence the decisions individuals make; yet, the complex interplay of emotions, cognition, and decision-making has received limited systematic attention in empirical research (Schwarz, 2000). It is only recently that scholars in the field of crisis communication have begun to investigate the influence of emotions on cognitive and behavioral crisis responses (Choi & Lin, 2009; Coombs, Fediuk, & Holladay, 2007; Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007). It is perceived that an examination of the public’s emotional responses in the context of an organizational crisis will provide an understanding of how publics use emotions to appraise a crisis situation and engage with it. PR professionals can use these insights to regain the public’s trust and support in the successful resolution of the crisis.

It is within this context; this study examined the emotional responses of the Indian public on Twitter to the news of Nestle India’s recall of its iconic brand of instant noodles, Maggi. In many homes, Maggi noodles were considered more than a snack. It was a ritual over which family members and friends bonded. Over the three decades since Swiss-based organization Nestle had introduced the product in India, consumers had acculturated the noodles to reflect their personal sensibilities (BBC, 2015). When the product celebrated its silver jubilee in 2012, more than 30,000 people submitted fond memories of cooking with Maggi (Afaqs! News Bureau, 2012). At the time of the ban, Maggi was one of India’s most-trusted food brands (BBC, 2015) and accounted for about one-fifth of Nestle India’s revenues.

The following paragraph provides a brief timeline of the Maggi recall crisis to provide context to the Maggi recall crisis. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) banned the sale of Maggi Noodles on June 5, 2015 after the agency determined the noodles contained impermissible amounts of Mono Sodium Glutamate (MSG) and lead (Frizell, June 3, 2015). And while the Indian government continued with the ban on the sale of Maggi, on July 2, 2015, the UK Food Standards Agency declared Indian-made Maggi fit for consumption (Business Standard, Aug. 13, 2015). Following an uproar on an unfair ban on the sale of Maggi noodles, the Bombay High Court set aside the ban on August 13, 2015 while ordering Nestle India to conduct fresh safety test before re-launching the product (Khan, 2015). On November 18, 2015, a new Indian brand of Instant noodles called Patanjali Noodles was launched by the yoga guru Baba Ramdev to capitalize on the ban of Maggi Noodles. The introduction of a new Indian brand was surrounded by conspiracy theories.

Nestle India suffered major setbacks as a result of the ban. Its quarterly profit dropped 60 percent (The Economic Times, July, 31, 2015). The Indian government filed a US $97 million class action suit with the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (The Economic Times, Aug. 12, 2015). Twitter, one of the most immediate of social media outlets, erupted with the public’s emotional responses to the ban. In India, Twitter, accounts for only 17 percent of the total social network users. According to a report by market research firm eMarketer, India had an estimated 18.1 million Twitter users in 2014. The growth in 2015 was expected to be at 30.4 percent. Verghese (2011) notes that social media had not spread as quickly in India as in other nations because of the platforms’ reliance on English. India has 21 other official languages. The lack of connectivity and infrastructure have contributed to the relatively slow social media growth in India. In 2011, some areas of the country had a reach of only 8 percent and only 5 percent of the nation’s mobile subscribers could access the Internet via mobile devices other than a computer. When the news of Maggi noodles recall spread, this small but vocal Indian public took to the twitterverse to express their opinion about the ban, which ranged from criticism of both the organization’s and the government’s handling of the recall to sadness over the recall (Varandani, 2015).
Since organizational crisis often cause high levels of anger and outcry in the public sphere; especially social media, where it is amplified many folds, crisis response strategies directed at social media audiences should aim to provide public with information that help it to cope with the situation. An organizational crisis has been defined as a situation that can potentially escalate in intensity, fall under close government or media scrutiny, jeopardize the positive public image of an organization, or interfere with normal business operations including hurting the bottom line (Fink, 1986).

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to identify the dominant emotions expressed by the Indian public during the Maggi recall crisis and identify consumers’ coping strategies. It is rationalized that Twitter’s ability to provide unfiltered access to public emotions might aid public relations practitioners to accurately and immediately gauge public sentiment and devise crisis response strategies to regain and restore trust and faith in the organization.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study uses the Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) model to identify stakeholders’ emotions in a crisis and their coping strategies (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007; Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2012). The ICM model has not been tested for product harm or product recall crisis, a type of crisis, which is observed in the food, toy, automotive, and drug industry fairly frequently, to name a few.

**Literature Review**

**Crisis and Emotions**

Several scholars have underscored the importance of emotions in managing an organizational crisis (Carlson & Dacey, 2013; Liu, Austin, & Jin, 2011). Research on emotional responses to crises has focused primarily on negative emotions, such as anger, sadness and anxiety, due to these emotions’ relative intensity and documented impact on stakeholder behavior (Folkman, Moskowitz, Ozer, & Park, 1997). Choi and Lin (2009) found that anger experienced during a crisis influenced both perceived reputation of an organization and intention to boycott the organization’s product. Yet, research in social psychology (Folkman & Moscowitz, 2000; Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003) emphasize that positive emotions occur alongside negative emotions and play a meaningful role in the process of coping with stressful situations.

Positive emotions seem to have the effect of making the public more engaged in a crisis (Dillard & Peck, 2001). Although they have received far less attention in crisis research, positive emotions play an important role in mitigating the negative impact of a crisis (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). Positive emotions, however, are believed to be less intense and less enduring than negative emotions (Folkman et al., 1997). The most common positive emotions in crisis response are gratitude, interest or attention, vigilance and love (Fredrickson et al., 2003). Positive emotions make publics more moderate in their appraisal of the crisis.

Coombs (2004) suggests that emotional responses to a crisis are closely related to the type of crisis because those characteristics help public assess responsibility. In a later study, Coombs and Holladay (2005) found additional support for emotional response to a crisis based on the crisis type. Crises with strong perceptions of organizational responsibility generate negative emotions while those that suggest less organization culpability were viewed more positively. Together, these studies suggest emotions shape public’s decision-making processes and the publics’ response or action to the crisis.
Crisis and Coping

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) posit that when individuals are faced with a crisis situation, they respond through primary and secondary appraisal, and coping. Primary appraisal involves the perception of the threat, secondary appraisal involves determining a response or action to the threat, and coping is the implementation of the response to the threat. Although these steps appear to be linear, the process is cyclical and may be repeated until a satisfactory response is achieved. Lazarus and Folkman (1985) developed a scale “Ways of Coping” in which they delineated two distinct methods of coping: problem-based coping and emotion-based coping. Problem-based coping was defined as doing something about the source of the stressful situation; emotion-based coping was defined as managing the emotional distress. Although most crises are likely to elicit both methods of coping, individuals use problem-based coping when they feel something can be done about the situation, and they employ emotion-based coping when they determine that they will have to endure the stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1985).

Crisis and Social Media

Research on crisis in social media suggests that social media followers become active participants in the crisis resolution process. Veil, Buehner, and Palenchar (2011) noted that during a crisis, social media allow an organization’s constituents “to become a part of the actual crisis communication response.” Similarly, Coombs and Holladay (2014) found that during a crisis, an organization’s stakeholders often act as crisis managers and recommend crisis mitigating strategies, which may provide opportunities for practitioners to evaluate the effectiveness of their own crisis communication efforts. Schultz et al. (2011) claimed that crisis-related messages disseminated via Twitter often lead “to less negative crisis reactions than blogs and newspaper articles,” thereby supporting the argument that the “medium matters more than the [actual] message” in determining stakeholder reactions and perceptions of the organization (p. 25).

It has been observed during a crisis, publics often share their evaluations of the organization’s crisis response (Schultz, Utz, & Göritz, 2011). In another study that analyzed tweets from university sports fans during a sports-related crisis, Brown and Billings (2013) found that highly socialized fans expressed their connection with their teams by defending or supporting their team on Twitter. In a study that examined food safety concerns in China, Mou (2014) found Twitter proved successful in sharing information at the grassroots level. However, while the public used Twitter predominantly to express negative feelings and opinions; the reporters and government authorities used it to update the public. It appears, therefore, that while the public might use the Twittersphere to express both positive and negative emotions, the valence of the emotions might be dependent on how well the public is socialized with the organization. Nonetheless, it has been determined that the frequency of public tweets decline over time as users make sense of risk and crisis (Binder, 2012). Binder also observed that Twitter’s character constraints increased the use of links and hypertexts from traditional news sources to discuss the crisis.

Twittersphere and emoticons

Emoticons, the equivalent of non-verbal cues to the online medium, have become a key feature of text-based communication in social media (Park et al., 2013). Whereas in face-to-face communication, non-verbal cues such as facial expression and body language help people to better communicate complex emotions such as anger, sarcasm, doubt, and humor; in text-based communication, these emotions are conveyed using emoticons. In the absence of which,
misunderstanding and confusion may ensue. The growth in online communication has lead to the use of conventions where emotions are conveyed pictorially using alphanumeric characters and punctuations. These symbolic pictorial representations are called emoticons (Walther & D’addario, 2001). Emoticons, like nonverbal cues, help people interpret the nuance of meaning, the attitude of a conversational partner, and the level of emotion not captured by language elements alone (Lo, 2008).

Ganster et al (2012), for example, noted that pictograms, such as smiles, and emoticons provide ubiquitous and necessary non-verbal cues, which can impact readers’ mood, message evaluation and perception. Smilies, however, shape the users’ mood more than emoticons; part of the reason, researcher concluded, is that the smiley more closely resembled the human face, and the smiley, across cultures is widely understood to convey happiness and positivity.

Mostafa (2013) studied more than 3,500 tweets to determine the users’ attitudes about 16 global brands. Mostafa noted that the interplay of words, jargon, symbols, and emoticons make the messages more complicated to interpret as Tweets do not follow the traditional structure of modern, text-based sentences. Mostafa used sentiment analysis to parse users’ feelings and concluded that users’ emotions and non-verbal communication can help organizations maintain a presence with users on social media.

Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) delved into the emotional aspects of tweets. In their study of German-language based, politically focused messages, the researchers examined whether tweets laden with emotion would be retweeted more often and more quickly than those devoid of feeling. Using computer-based sentiment analysis, the study examined 1.6 million tweets, examining their content for spelling, intensifiers (e.g. very happy) and emoticons to determine the messages’ polarity (positive or negative) and strength. The study concluded that emotionally charged messages increased followers’ attention and physiological arousal. Further, positive tweets were more likely to be retweeted quickly. The study also found that influential tweeters (e.g., those with large followings) are more likely to post emotionally charged messages, which in turn, increased the speed with which they are re-tweeted by others.

Based on the review of the literature, the following research questions are posited in relation to the Maggi noodle crisis:

Research Questions
RQ1: What is the extent of public’s engagement in the crisis as evidenced by the links and multimedia components that they post in their tweets?
RQ2: What primary emotions did public display on Twitter?
RQ3. What secondary emotions did public display during the crisis?
RQ4: What coping mechanisms did the public use to cope with the Maggi recall crisis?
RQ5: What corrective measures were suggested by the public?

Research Methodology
This study used quantitative content analysis to examine the tweets related to the Maggi noodle ban crisis. The start date was chosen as June 5, 2015, the day the FSSAI banned Maggi Noodles and the end date was November 9, 2015, when Nestle India announced that the production and sale of Maggi Noodle had begun. The unit of analysis in this study is the individual tweet written by Indian consumers. The tweets were collected using the hashtag #MaggiBan; other hashtags did not yield as many results in Twitter’s advanced search engine. Screenshots of the Twitter feeds were used to capture the messages in their entirety and preserved their content.
Systematic random sampling was used to select tweets from the pool of captured tweets. The sample began with the first tweet posted on June 5 and then every third tweet was selected. If, however, the tweet was published by a news agency, government agency or any entity other than an “average person,” it was skipped, and the researchers examined the following third tweet. Retweets were not coded.

Two coders trained in quantitative content analysis, analyzed each tweet using a coding protocol. They coded the tweets for multiple elements: social media handle, publication date, source of tweets, emoticons, multimedia elements, links, emotions first and/or second emotion, public’s coping strategy and public suggested action. Twenty-one emoticons were coded, including happy, sad, confused, broken heart, surprise, angry, worried, crying, laughing, drooling, thumbs down, thumbs up, as adapted from adapted from Choi & Lin (2009). Please refer to the coding protocol for the operationalization and examples of each type of emotion. “Multimedia Elements” was coded for: Cartoon, Caricature, Photo, Video, Other, and None. The “Links” were coded as being present (Yes) or absent (No).

Next, coders examined the tweets for the presence of the public’s coping strategies, which included rational thinking, positive thinking, cognitive avoidance/mental disengagement, denial, seeking emotional support, seeking instrumental support, emotional venting, acceptance or resignation, turning to religion, behavioral disengagement, active coping and planning (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). The public’s suggested actions, were coded as punitive (punishment, legal action, fine, firing of negligent or culpable individual or party); compensation and replacement, remediation or corrective measures, apology, other and none.

Results

The first research question examined the extent of public engagement in the crisis. Engagement was operationalized as the effort the public made to add additional content to their Tweets such as links, emoticons and multimedia elements. The results showed 16.4% of the public appeared to be engaged in the conversation regarding the recall of Maggi noodles. Links were the most commonly used elements observed in the tweets at 23.9 % (M= 1.81; SD=0.392), followed by multimedia components at 16.4 % (M= 5.53; SD= 1.105), followed by Emoticons at 6.1% (M= 13.53; SD= 2.128).

The second research question examined the dominant emotions experienced by the public. Results indicate that the most commonly expressed emotion was neutral or a matter-of-fact statement at 23.4% (n=191). The other dominant emotions that were observed were humor at 13.9% (n=109); Sarcasm 9.1% (n=74); criticism 9.8% (n=80); happiness 10.2% (n=83); confusion 8.5% (69); mistrust 4.9% (n=40); sadness 2.3% (n= 19). Please refer to the Table 2 for the frequency of the appearance of other emotions.

The third research question examined the second emotion that the public expressed in managing the stress or the inconvenience experienced from the ban of Maggi noodles. Only 14% of the tweets expressed a second emotion. The most frequently communicated emotion was, not surprisingly, criticism/denunciation at 3.1% (n= 25); confusion 1.8% (n=15); Happiness 1.3%
(n=11); Sarcasm 1.2% (n=10); Sadness 1.0% (n=8); and Humor 1.0% (n=8). Please refer to Table 3 for the frequency of other emotions.

Please insert Table 3 about here

The fourth research question examined the coping strategies that the public used to manage the stress of dealing with Maggi Noodle ban. More than half the public, 53.6% (n=437), used emotional venting as a coping mechanism. Almost a quarter of the public, 22.8% (n=186), used rational thinking to deal with the emotional stress. Instrumental support 12% (n=98) and emotional support 3.9% (n=32), positive interpretation 2.7% (n=22) and active coping 1.7% (n=14) were the other dominant emotions. Please refer to the Table 4 for the frequency of appearance of other coping strategies.

Please insert Table 4 about here

The fifth research question examined the corrective strategies as suggested by the public as a means to deal with the uncertainty and the confusion of the crisis. Only 8.6% tweets recommended corrective strategies. The most commonly suggested crisis resolution strategy that was suggested by the public was remediation strategy at 4.3% (n=35); followed by punitive 1.3% (n=11). The other strategies that were suggested by the public were less than 1% and are, therefore, not included in the result.

Please insert Table 5 about here

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify dominant emotions expressed by the affected public during a crisis. This study used the Integrated Crisis Mapping model to examine the emotions that the public express on the social medium Twitter in order to map their emotions to their coping strategies. Following are some key findings from this study:

Emoticons help in understanding complex emotions during a crisis

To the researchers’ knowledge, this study is the first study to examine emoticons and emoji’s in the context of organizational crisis. In verbal communications, facial expressions, body language and intonation help in better understanding complex emotions such as humor, fear and sarcasm. In text-based communication, however, these cues are not present and their absence can result in misunderstanding. Emoticons thus take the place of non-verbal cues and help in understanding complex emotions in the absence of facial gestures and body language. It is therefore important to examine embedded emoticons and emojis in the context of organizational crisis communication on Twitter. Emoticons are typically used in positive and light context, and as a result tweets containing extremely angry or anxious sentiment rarely contain emoticons (Park et al., 2013). This would explain why only a very few of the tweets had emoticons.

Publics are more likely to use emotions-focused coping than problem-based coping during a crisis.

The results of this study suggest the public used emotion-focused coping pre-dominantly. The public perceived having to endure the loss of their favorite instant noodle for a short time, and the
best method to deal with that loss would be to undergo the emotional distress for that duration. Since the public perceived that the distress would only be for a short period, it did not believe that it needed to take concrete action to manage the stress.

Although most crises are likely to elicit both methods of coping, public in this personal crisis situation used emotion-focused problem solving because they determined they could endure the stress. They perceived that they could not do anything about the situation and hence did not employ problem-focused coping.

*Engagement of social media users during a crisis is dependent on the key attributes of the crisis.*

Twitter is a highly interactive social medium, yet a very small percentage of users, 16.1%, used multimedia elements, and 23.9% used links to share additional information about the crisis to have a meaningful conversation about the Maggi recall issue. In the Maggi recall crisis, Nestle India suffered a major financial and reputational setback. In the case of the customers, the ban was viewed as a personal inconvenience. Jin, Pang and Cameron (2007) suggest that public’s emotions are driven by the assessment of the controllability and the predictability of the crisis. In this crisis, the affected stakeholders were aware that the Maggi brand instant noodles contained excessive amount of lead and MSG. The parent company Nestle India was responsible for the increased levels of lead and MSG. Yet the consumers’ response was not one of anger, anxiety or fear as the ICM model suggests. Therefore, it is essential to consider the attributes of the crisis, in predicting public’s emotions and management. In the case of Maggi noodles, the very loyal customer base was a key attribute in predicting the consumer response. Another attribute of the crisis was the socio-economic environment in which the organization was functioning. A crisis attribute is defined as a characteristic that is very specific or unique to the crisis situation.

*Limitations of the Study*

One of the limitations of this study is that the tweets are not representative of a cross-section of the Indian diaspora. Twitter in India is still a growing social media channel and is still plagued by the lack of infrastructure and the very low penetration in rural areas. Furthermore, the language barrier prevents people from posting tweets. Additionally, tweets on Maggi’s official site should have coded to see how the organization responded to the emotional chatter in the Twitterverse.
References


### Table 1
Level of Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emoticon</td>
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<td>13.53</td>
<td>2.128</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multimedia</td>
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<td>5.53</td>
<td>1.105</td>
<td>0.071</td>
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<tr>
<td>Links</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>0.392</td>
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### Table 2
Primary Emotions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarcasm</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confusion</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistrust</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sympathy</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>17</td>
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</table>
Table 3  
Second Emotions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confusion</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarcasm</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.0</td>
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Table 4  
Coping Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Venting</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>53.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rational Thinking</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental Support</td>
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<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Support</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Re-interpretation</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Coping</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance and Resignation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

Public Suggested Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remediation</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punitive</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Code Sheet

I. Social Media Id. - ______________________________________

II. Coder Id. - _________________________________________

III. Date Posted-_____________________________________

IV. Source of the Tweet___________________________________________
   1. Company Spokesperson 2. Opinion Leader 3. Member of the Public
   4. Government Official 5. Other (Please specify) _________

V. Emoticon
   14. None


VII. Links: 1. Yes 2. No

VIII. First emotion displayed by public: __________________________

IX. Second emotion displayed by public:

X Public’s Coping Strategy
   11. Active Coping 12. Planning

XI. Public suggested action:
   1. Punitive (punishment, legal action, fine, firing of negligent or culpable individual or party) 2. Compensation
   3. Replacement 4. Remediation (Solving or correcting a problem) 5. Apology 6. Other 7. None
Coding protocols/instructions:

I. **Social Media Id.** Copy and paste the twitter handle of the account holder

II. **Coder Id.** Enter “1” the first name of the first coder and “2” for the first name of the second coder.

III. **Date posted:** It should be in the format of mm/dd/yy

IV. **Source of the Tweet:** Refer to the code sheet for the source of the Tweet and input the correct number

V. **Emoticons:** Hover over the emoticons to see their description and enter the correct option

VI. **Multimedia:** Refer to the code sheet and input the correct number for each multimedia element

VII. **Link:** Copy and paste the link, if present

VIII. **First Emotion**

1. **Surprise:**

2. **Anger:** For e.g., #MaggiRecalled due to flouted norms. #Nestle boss mocks #India, we need to teach them a lesson. #MaggiBan #MaggiMess #2MinuteMuddle

3. **Fear/Fright:** For e.g., It’s time we raised questions abt the quality of our testing labs and the quality of our reports; Apparently the #maggiban is reversed but I am still not going anywhere near it.

4. **Anxiety/Worry:** Don’t Worry eat Maggi. Ban called off. Your 2 min fix is back.

5. **Frustration:** (The feeling of anger/annoyance caused by the inability to do anything about the uproar surrounding the ban of Maggi).

6. **Mistrust:** (The feeling that the government or the regulatory agency is not completely honest/truthful/forthcoming about the cause/reason of the Maggi ban).

7. **Relief:** (The relaxed feeling that the public experiences when sale of Maggi contaminated with MSG stops) For e.g., Homes will never be the same without the smell of Maggi noodles! But children will certainly be much healthier!

8. **Uncertainty:** (Public does not know how long the ban will last)

9. **Confusion:** (Lack of understanding of what is happening/ a situation where many things are happening in an disorderly or uncontrolled manner) For e.g., So much chaos on #MaggiBan and # tobacco #alcoholism sales touches zenith

10. **Sympathy:** (The public feels sorry about Nestle India’s trouble and misfortune)

11. **Support:** (To agree with or approve the ban of Maggi)

12. **Contempt/Disgust:** (Disapproving/disapproval of the conversation/discussion about Maggi ban; the feeling that the discussion about Maggi ban is not worthwhile or a waste of time and does not deserve any respect. annoyance and anger that the public feels toward Maggi Ban because it is not fair, appropriate, or exaggerated etc.)

   For e.g., Enough yaar..is it bcuz it's an Indian brand? Sop exaggerating #MaggiBan ..go and fight for banning poisonous Cool Drinks & other health mix.

13. **Alarm/Panic:**
14. Loss: *(Failure to keep or to continue to have Maggi; the experience of having Maggi taken from one or destroyed)*
15. Sadness: *(affected with grief or unhappiness)* For e.g., I know only one thing in cooking and now it's ban #MaggiBan
16. Happiness:
17. Matter-of-fact:
18. Humor: For e.g., People will no longer be able to call themselves expert in cooking after the ban; The latest drug of choice for lead deficiency is Maggi with a half life of 2 mins :P; So, I will be this bullet producing iron woman soon!!! I have been savouring it a while now #maggiban
19. Sarcasm: For e.g., Govt. should consider banning Lays, lot of polluted air found inside packets; Nestle to diversify into writing instruments. Maggi Lead Pencils. So students can finish their exams in 2 minutes #Maggi #MaggiBan
20. Chastise/Denunciation: *(To publicly criticize someone harshly for doing something wrong such as supporting the company)* For e.g., This People are completely Insane they have concern for company more than then the Fellow Indians. @TimesNow #MaggiRecalled #MaggiBan #Maggi
21. None/missing or indeterminate:
22. Other: Irony: *(a situation that is strange or funny because things happen in a way that seems to be the opposite of what one would expect)* For e.g., Kids demonstrating against Maggi is the most funniest thing. #MaggiBan

2. **Second Emotion:** Same as above

3. **Public’s Coping Strategy**

1. Rational Thinking: Deliberate attempts to prevent subjective emotions from directing behavior;
2. Positive Thinking/Positive Re-interpretation: Attempts to mentally re-construe a source of stress in order to make it more tolerable; look for something good in what’s happening; try to see it in a different light to make it seem more positive
3. Cognitive Avoidance/Mental Disengagement: Attempts to create mental distance between oneself and the stressor; Distracting [oneself] by doing other things
4. Denial: A feeling/statement that refuses to accept that the Maggi ban is for real
5. Seek Emotional Support: Seek moral support, sympathy, comfort or understanding
6. Seek Instrumental Support: Seek advice, assistance or information on the reason for the ban on Maggi
7. Emotional Venting: Express one’s emotions
8. Acceptance/Resignation: Learn to live with it; get used to the idea, accept the reality
9. Turning to Religion: Put trust in God; pray more than usual, seek God’s help
10. Behavioral Disengagement: Helplessness; give up the attempt to get what one wants
11. Active coping: Involves initiating or taking direct action to improve or fix the situation
12. Planning: Devising action strategies and tactics to best handle the situation

XI. **Public Suggested Action:**

1. Punitive (punishment, legal action, fine, firing of negligent or culpable individual or party)
2. Compensation
3. Replacement
4. Remediation or Corrective measures: such as banning other products, which, are considered harmful such as tobacco, etc.
5. Apology
6. Other
7. None
Reputational Interdependence and Communication Strategies in a Spillover Crisis

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Lindsay Dillingham
Lipscomb University

Alyssa G. Sloan
King University

Abstract

This study identifies a distinct exigency—a spillover crisis—which occurs when events in an external organization create concern, uncertainty, or perceptions of harm for another organization. Through a case analysis, we demonstrate how outcomes of a spillover crisis can be actively managed.
In 2008, Barnett and Hoffman edited a special issue of *Corporate Reputation Review* on reputational interdependence. They opened the issue with a succinct summary of the phenomena: “The company you keep affects the company you keep” (p. 1). That is, the reputations and actions of other organizations affect the reputation and legitimacy of an organization in the same or a similar industry. The special issue demonstrated the importance of reputational interdependence as an area of inquiry and documented several challenges, and some benefits, of reputational spillover in a variety of industries. Barnett and Hoffman (2008) suggested the means of managing reputational interdependence at the time could be generalized as fitting within three broad themes: (1) *Keeping up with the Jones’s*, whereby organizations operate in an arms race of social performance to attain a more positive reputation compared to their competitors; (2) *Teaming up with the Jones’s*, whereby organizations join together in trade organizations to set standards and improve the collective reputation of an industry; and (3) *Fencing out the Jones’s*, whereby organizations, either independently or as part of an exclusive industry subgroup, attempt to set themselves apart from other organizations in the industry that cannot compete at this new higher level. Barnett and Hoffman (2008) also suggested more research was needed.

One area of future research they highlighted was the extent to which negative and positive spillovers differ and whether outcomes can be actively managed. They stated that the mechanisms that lead to one outcome or another were still unclear. This study answers Barnett and Hoffman’s (2008) call for research by bridging the literature on reputational interdependence with crisis response strategies to examine a distinct exigency – what we are calling a spillover crisis. For an event to be classified as a spillover crisis it must meet two criteria. First, it must fall within the parameters of Coombs’ (2011) widely accepted definition of crisis, “the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization’s performance and generate negative outcomes” (p. 2). Second, the potential consequences faced by the organization must have resulted from events occurring within a related but external organization. Stated simply, spillover crises occur when events in an external organization create concern, uncertainty, or perceptions of harm for another organization. Like Coombs’ definition of crises, we suggest spillover crises exist initially as a threat to stakeholder expectancies and organizational performance. However, if spillover crises are handled effectively, organizations can not only limit negative outcomes but also generate positive outcomes when presented as a better alternative to stakeholders than the organization responsible for the original crisis.

To examine the distinct exigency of a spillover crisis, we turn to the 2009 peanut product *Salmonella* outbreak caused by Peanut Corporation of America (PCA). The PCA crisis resulted in at least 714 illnesses and contributed to nine deaths (Wittenberger & Dohlman, 2010). While jarred peanut butters sold in grocery stores were not part of the over 3,900 peanut products recalled by more than 200 companies that purchased peanut ingredients from PCA, jarred peanut butter sales still plummeted following the recall (Wittenberger & Dohlman, 2010). However, some companies fared better than others. This study examines the communication strategies of the top three jarred peanut butter brands in the midst of the spillover crisis to explain why some brands were able to actively manage the spillover crisis better than others.

We proceed by first outlining the literature on organizational legitimacy, reputational interdependence, and crisis response strategies. Then, we examine the 2009 peanut product recall and the communication strategies used by the top three jarred peanut butter brands during the recall. In the analysis, we identify and discuss the strategies used and their ability to limit negative outcomes in the midst of the spillover crisis. Finally, we offer implications for practice.
and future research on spillover crises.

**Literature Review**

**Organizational Legitimacy**

Organizational legitimacy is defined as “an organization’s right to exist and conduct operations” (Metzler, 2001, p. 322), bestowed by stakeholders who perceive the organization to be in line with socially and politically appropriate practices (Finet, 1993). Although organizations receive autonomous benefits from being perceived as legitimate, organizational legitimacy is attained through a largely social process. Thus, legitimacy is “possessed objectively, yet created subjectively” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Organizational legitimacy is threatened during crisis when an organization’s action or inaction is viewed as contrary to the expected social norms for that organization or similar organizations (Massey, 2001). Sturges (1994) contends that not only will violations of organizational legitimacy threaten stakeholder perceptions during crisis; those negative perceptions can endure past the crisis and threaten the long-term legitimacy of an organization.

Suchman (1995) proposed a strategic approach to legitimacy whereby organizations “instrumentally manipulate and deploy evocative symbols in order to garner societal support” (p. 572). Boyd (2000) extended this work to provide an argument for what he terms actional legitimacy whereby legitimacy exists in the specific strategic actions of an organization. He sees legitimacy as “the foundation of all effective communication with publics—without it, any organizational messages or actions will be looked upon with skepticism” (p. 157). Actional legitimacy is not bestowed upon an organization through a social process but is, instead, a demonstration of responsiveness that actively seeks to (re)build legitimacy. Actional legitimacy uses strategic communication to “reduce the gap between public expectations and public perceptions” (Veil, Sellnow, & Petrun, 2012, p. 326). Issue and crisis management activities could constitute actional legitimacy if the actions are visible or communicated to stakeholders.

Legitimacy is not the same as reputation nor is actional legitimacy the same as reputation management. Definitions of reputation largely rest on relative comparisons among organizations on various attributes, and legitimacy is found in social acceptance resulting from adherence to regulative, normative, or cognitive norms that qualify one to exist (Deephouse & Carter, 2005). Suffering from an imperfect reputation is less dire than suffering from an organizational legitimacy crisis because, according to Sellnow, Veil, and Anthony (2013), being less well regarded than other organizations does not necessarily threaten continued existence. Organizations with poor reputations can still be successful if there are other benefits such as price or convenience. Therefore, communication strategies are often employed both to salvage legitimacy and rebuild reputation post crisis.

**Reputational Interdependence**

Frombrun (1996) described corporate reputation as the overall assessment of an organization relative to its peers by its stakeholders over time. This evaluation can be based on stakeholders’ direct experience with an organization or any communication that provides information about the organization (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). King, Lenox, and Barnett (2002) theorized that the organizations in an industry share a sort of “reputation commons” in that the reputation of one organization is positively related to that of its rival and may be harmed by the acts of a rival. In effect, one organization’s crisis can soil the reputation of an entire industry.

Winn, MacDonald, and Zeitsma (2008) define industry reputation as “the collective
judgments of an industry by stakeholders and the general public, where that judgment is based on assessments of the economic, social and environmental impacts attributed to that industry over time” (p. 36). They suggest that the reputation of an industry can be affected by actions and events caused by other industry members or outsiders. For example, when an organization is in crisis, similar organizations in the same industry can suffer from negative reputational spillover effects due to brand confusion and industry distrust.

When organizations in an industry are faced with a spillover crisis they must decide whether to join together to protect the industry or to communicate individually to enhance competitive advantages. Winn et al. (2008) refer to collective reputation management as “all activities and behavior undertaken by members of a collective to deliberately alter judgments about the reputation of the collective” (p. 37). Conversely, they define competitive reputation management as “activities undertaken by a single firm to enhance its own reputation and competitive position vis-à-vis other members of the industry” (p. 37). When all organizations are “tarred with the same brush,” prompting a legitimacy challenge for the industry as a whole, Barnett (2007) suggests the incentives to engage in collective reputation management activities outweigh both the costs to and incentives for individual organizations to compete for reputation.

Trade associations are likely to be the ‘first,’ but not necessarily the ‘primary’ means for an industry to repair its reputation and legitimacy in a spillover crisis (Barnette, 2006). In addition, collective action is more likely to occur when supported by industry leaders that are in a position to influence other organizations (Hoffman & Ocasio, 2001). And, while trade associations can be “critical to recovery from crises that face entire industries” (Barnett, 2006, p. 1756), the associations can also become counterproductive – leading to losses of legitimacy through their actions or because their self-promotion efforts are seen as delegitimizing (Suchman, 1995). Abrahamson and Hegeman (1994) suggest that while strategic conformity reduces corporate risk, it can also decrease opportunities.

Winn et al. (2008), found that in the face of persistent challenges, collective strategies start to fail and organizations begin to diverge in their views of the situation. At this time competitive strategies resurface and organizations utilize their differential strategic capabilities and learning capacities. Winn et al. (2008) suggest “it is at this point that the opportunity-reducing effect of the collective strategy becomes burdensome” (p. 51) and organizations begin to “experiment and innovate to repair industry and firm legitimacy” (p. 52).

The necessity of organizational legitimacy and the simultaneous likelihood of a decline in reputation during crisis have driven much of the work on appropriate crisis response strategies. Coombs’ (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which suggests crisis response strategies based on attribution of responsibility, is particularly relevant to this study. SCCT was derived from attribution theory, the assumption that people want to know and understand why an event happened (Weiner, 1985). Brown and White (2011) suggested that “psychologically, people want to place responsibility for events on someone or something because it helps them make sense of the situation” (p. 77). According to SCCT, individuals attribute crisis responsibility or blame to organizations based on initial crisis responsibility, prior relational reputation, and the organization’s crisis history (Coombs, 2007).

Crisis Response Strategies

Crisis response strategies have three objectives relative to protecting reputations: (1) shape attributions of the crisis, (2) change perceptions of the organization in crisis and (3) reduce the negative affect generated by the crisis (Coombs, 1995). In what is arguably the most
advanced work on crisis response to date, Coombs (2007; 2011) and Holladay (1996; 2001; 2002) offer SCCT as an encompassing strategic response guide. SCCT defines three crisis types and corresponding response strategies and has spurred an intense refocus on crisis communication research (see Choi & Lin, 2009; Kim & Liu, 2012; Schwarz, 2008; Sisco, 2012). What is most relevant to the present study, however, is one of the premises central to SCCT’s development. SCCT hinges on assessing the level of responsibility an organization had in creating a crisis and then selecting a crisis response that is commiserate with the level of causal responsibility (see Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

SCCT research has identified three crisis clusters based upon attributions of crisis responsibility: (1) the victim cluster has very weak attributions of crisis responsibility (natural disasters, workplace violence, product tampering and rumor) and the organization is viewed as a victim of the event; (2) the accidental cluster has minimal attributions of crisis responsibility (technical-error accident, technical-error product harm and challenge) and the event is considered unintentional or uncontrollable by the organization and (3) the intentional cluster has very strong attributions of crisis responsibility (human-error accident, human-error product harm and organizational misdeed) and the event is considered purposeful (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Crisis responsibility is intensified if an organization has poor relational history with stakeholders or has experienced similar crises in the past.

The crisis response postures advanced by SCCT (deny, diminish, rebuild) are aligned with the responsibility clusters in a range from least accommodating to most accommodating based on the level of responsibility attributed (more responsibility = more stakeholder accommodation). Bolstering strategies can also be used as supplemental to some of the primary response strategies to bolster the reputation of the organization in crisis. Regardless of the crisis type, Coombs (2007) suggests there is an ethical imperative in crisis response: instructing and adjusting information designed to protect stakeholder health and wellbeing must be provided before reputation management response strategies are utilized.

We broach the topic of SCCT and its fundamental suggestion – to use crisis responsibility level to guide crisis response (Coombs & Holladay, 2002) – to demonstrate the acute paradox underlying the phenomenon of spillover crises. Spillover crises can have very real ramifications for organizations that had no responsibility in creating the crisis. We suggest the paradox inherent in spillover crises blurs the relationship among responsibility, threat, and accommodation and leaves many unanswered questions. How can an organization respond to a high reputational threat, which is common in cases of spillover crisis, when there is limited or no responsibility? At what point along the defensive to accommodative continuum does an organization suffering from negative reputational spillover effects place its response? In considering the literature on organizational interdependence, at what point should organizations abandon collective reputation management strategies via trade associations? Winn et al. (2008), found that in the face of persistent challenges, collective strategies start to fail and organizations begin to “experiment and innovate to repair industry and firm legitimacy” (p. 52). However, research has yet to examine whether these “experiments” have successful outcomes. This study examines the communication strategies of the top three jarred peanut butter brands in the midst of the 2009 peanut product recall to determine what strategies lead to what outcomes and explain why some brands were able to actively manage the spillover crisis better than others.

Methods
We used a robust case study approach (Sellnow, Littlefield, Vidoloff, & Webb, 2009) to analyze multiple data points. The purpose of case study research is to investigate a "contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2002, p. 13). Through a process of triangulation, case studies use multiple data points or evidence to develop converging lines of inquiry to answer questions within an interdependent system (Yin, 2002).

First, to identify a timeline and outline the PCA crisis summary, we analyzed network television coverage of the peanut product recall. The Digital Content Analysis Lab, housed within a college of communication at a southeastern university, perpetually records 20 U.S. network and cable television channels. The system provides video streams and program transcripts of half-hour blocks of broadcasted content for all digital captures, resulting in 480 hours of broadcast data each day. This content is accessible through a search engine archive known as COMMTV, which can be used to identify, track, and analyze specific media content related to news events. We used this database to collect video artifacts and transcripts using the keywords “peanut” and “Salmonella” as they were most likely to isolate news coverage pertinent to the peanut product recall. Any single finding of these keywords or combination of the terms enabled the television tracking system to isolate and capture thirty-minute video segments for analysis, resulting in 165 video segments with matching transcripts on ABC, CBS, CNN, CNN Headline News, CW, FOX, FOX News, and MSNBC. Based on this analysis, the news coverage timeline of the crisis lasted about two months, from January 8 when the first recall was announced to mid PCA filed bankruptcy.

Second, to identify how the crisis specifically affected jarred peanut butter brands, we initiated a Google News search for news coverage including “peanut” and “recall” and “Jiff”, or “Skippy” or “Peter Pan” from June 2008 to June 2010 to make sure we included news coverage that may have referenced the brands from before PCA was named as the culprit to after the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued its final report in February, 2010. The search was set to hide duplicate articles; 24 unique articles were identified. The first article mentioning jarred peanut butter brands was on January 16, 2009, over a week after PCA initiated the first recall. The last article was dated February 4, 2010 and covered the USDA’s report.

Third, we examined the 2009 annual reports from each of the parent organizations of the brands (Smucker’s/Jif, Unilever/Skippy, ConAgra/Peter Pan) for any mention of the recall and its affect on the brands. We also contacted each of the brands through their media relations pages on their respective parent organization websites to request access to any press releases, advertisements, or promotions issued in the midst of the recall. We were directed to the press releases Smucker’s, Unilever, and ConAgra posted to their websites in 2009 specific to the recall. Smucker’s posted one press release on January 19. Unilever posted one on February 17. ConAgra updated information on their website on January 10 and posted three releases on January 16, 17, and 28. ConAgra and Smucker’s also ran advertisements and issued coupons during the recall. Unilever did not run an advertising campaign for Skippy during the recall.

Finally, to make sure we included relevant information from research reports already published on the crisis, we conducted a search for peer-reviewed journal articles on the Ebscohost database, which searches multiple databases including Business Source Complete, Communication & Mass Media Complete, and others. Because the peanut product contamination was ultimately attributed to PCA, we searched for the term “Peanut Corporation” anywhere in the text. We identified 8 journal articles examining the following topics: unethical decision making in the PCA crisis (Martin & Johnson, 2010; Oaks & Smith, 2013); the role of third-party
communication in the PCA crisis (Millner, Veil, & Sellnow, 2011); the need to improve food safety and regulation (Stearns 2010; Steinzor, 2010); how to increase risk visibility in a multi-tier supply chain network (Tse & Tan, 2011); how to create consumer-focused food recall messages (Kaptan & Fischhoff, 2010); and how newspapers framed the PCA crisis (Haigh, 2012).

**PCA Crisis Case Summary**

In November, 2008, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), working with state and local partners, began an epidemiological assessment of a cluster of *Salmonella* cases reported from 12 different states. The reports were loosely connected to peanut food items, and media sources began warning viewers to be wary of all peanut products. On January 7, 2009, the FDA launched an institutional food service investigation. Recalls started January 10 when a five-pound King Nut container tested positive for *Salmonella*. PCA, the manufacturer and distributor of King Nut, was responsible for processing approximately 2% of the industry’s peanut products and byproducts (Chapman & Newkirk, 2009). According to Wittenberger and Dohlman (2009), PCA “produced blanched, split, granulated, and roasted peanuts. Peanut meal, peanut butter, and peanut paste were also produced” (p. 17). Its Blakely, Georgia, plant was the primary manufacturing location. As an upstream supplier (Martin & Johnson, 2010), PCA primarily sold its product as a raw ingredient for use in making other commercial peanut products. On January 13, PCA voluntarily recalled all of the peanut products produced at its Blakely plant “on or after July 1, 2008, because of possible *Salmonella* contamination” (AP, 2009, para. 13). PCA hired Burson-Marsteller to assist with communicating recall information (PR Week, 2009). On January 28, PCA extended its product recall by recalling all ingredients made after January 1, 2007. On February 5, government officials and a salmonellosis victim’s mother testified before a Senate committee about the outbreak. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) raided the Blakely plant on February 9. PCA filed for Chapter 7 bankruptcy on February 13, shielding the company from liability lawsuits (CNN, 2009). By mid-March, FDA investigators reported that PCA’s peanut products were used in more than 3,900 food items, leading to 714 salmonellosis cases and 9 deaths in 43 states (Marler Clark, 2009).

**Negative Spillover Effects and Crisis Response Strategies**

Sales declined significantly across the peanut industry in January – February, 2009. Headlines referred to the “ongoing peanut butter recall.” Peter Pan, which was the number three peanut butter brand in 2009, experienced its own *Salmonella* contamination just two years prior to the PCA crisis. Seeking to preempt any questions about the brand’s connection to PCA’s recall, Peter Pan’s distributor, ConAgra, posted information on ConAgra’s and Peter Pan’s product websites on January 10, 2009 (Lee, 2009). The Peter Pan website included a section called *Safety and Quality* with facts about the 2007 recall and what steps were taken by ConAgra to improve food safety after the recall. A pop-up message also stated that Peter Pan was not part of the current recall. Still, initial articles referred to Peter Pan’s past crisis.

The first article in connection with the PCA crisis that mentioned Peter Pan was published on January 15 in *The Wall Street Journal*. Titled “Peanut-Butter Probe Focuses on Georgia Plant,” the article used one-third of the space to conclude:

*This is the second high-profile salmonella contamination involving peanut butter. In February 2007, ConAgra Food Inc., Omaha, Neb., recalled its Peter Pan Peanut Butter and Great Value Peanut Butter brands after more than 625 people in 47 states were sickened. The outbreak was traced to ConAgra’s Sylvester, Ga., peanut butter plant.*
where a leaky roof and faulty sprinkler system allowed the growth of low levels of dormant Salmonella that were likely present from raw peanuts or peanut dust. ConAgra promised to upgrade its facility, and the peanut butter returned to store shelves in August 2007. (Jargon & Zhang, 2009, para. 4)

The next day, on January 16, ConAgra posted its first press release:

To our loyal customers: ConAgra Foods products that contain any peanut- or peanut-based ingredients are not associated with the federal government’s ongoing salmonella investigation. Neither ConAgra Foods nor any of its suppliers purchase any ingredients from the Peanut Corporation of America, which is linked to this salmonella investigation. (ConAgra, 2009a, para. 1)

The following day, January 17, ConAgra sent a press release through Business Wire that specified Peter Pan was not involved in the PCA crisis:

ConAgra Foods, Inc., today announced that none of its products that contain any peanut- or peanut-based ingredients are associated with the federal government’s ongoing salmonella investigation. This includes all of the products the company makes under its branded product lines, including Peter Pan Peanut Butter, as well as the products made for its food service and store brand customers. Neither ConAgra Foods nor any of its suppliers purchase any ingredients from the Peanut Corporation of America, which is linked to this salmonella investigation. (ConAgra, 2009b, para. 1)

Also on January 17, the FDA and CDC held a joint teleconference that stated “major national name brand jars of peanut butter” were not linked to the recall. This statement was couched between an urging for consumers to postpone eating peanut butter products and that the investigation was ongoing:

In terms of food products which contain peanut butter but have not yet been recalled, we urge consumers to postpone eating these products until further information becomes available about whether that product may be affected. We have been advised by manufacturers that product specific information may be available within the next few days. As of now there is no indication that the major national name brand jars of peanut butter sold in retail stores are linked to the PCA recall. As the investigation continues over the weekend and in to the week, FDA will be able to update the advice based on new sampling and distribution information. (FDA, 2009, p. 5)

To try to clarify that not all peanut products were involved in the recall, the American Peanut Council, the trade organization that represents peanut manufacturers, announced it was working with Ogilvy PR Worldwide and Argyle Communications “to educate consumers about which peanut products were recalled and which ones remain safe” (Lee, 2009, para. 2). The council posted a list of products that were not recalled on its Web site and reported that the FDA website would maintain the list of recalled products.

However, it wasn’t until after Smucker’s, the distributor of top peanut butter brand Jif, issued a news release on January 19 that the specific jarred peanut butter brands were listed as safe in the news coverage. Smucker’s PR Newswire release stated:

No products made by The J. M. Smucker Company are included in the Food and Drug Administration recall of foodservice peanut butter and peanut butter products. Our
peanut butter products and brands are safe for consumption, including Smucker's®, Jif®, Smucker's Uncrustables®, Adams®, Laura Scudder's®, Eagle Brand® and Pillsbury® brands. The J. M. Smucker Company does not purchase peanuts or any ingredients from Peanut Corporation of America. We are confident that our comprehensive product safety and quality assurance policies and procedures, which include testing for the presence of Salmonella, ensure the safety of all our products, including our peanut butter and our products containing peanut butter. (Smucker’s, 2009a)

Smucker’s also created a pop-up message on all its branded websites with a similar message:

A Special Thank You to Our Consumers:
The J.M. Smucker Company appreciates the trust consumers place in our Jif® peanut butter brand and peanut butter products. We respect this trust and are fully committed to ensuring that each jar of Jif® that you open will be both safe and delicious. Please be assured that our Jif®, Smucker’s®, Adams® and Laura Scudder’s® grocery products are not involved in the PCA recalls.

The next day, on January 20, Forbes cited the press releases from ConAgra and Smucker’s:

Peter Pan peanut butter maker ConAgra Foods said Saturday it was not involved in the investigation and neither the Omaha, Neb.-based company nor its suppliers use ingredients from Peanut Corp. of America. Orville, Ohio-based J.M. Smucker, which makes jams and jellies and whose brands include Jif peanut butter, assured customers on Monday that none of its products are involved in the national recall and that it does not buy peanuts or any ingredients from Peanut Corp. of America. (Marcus, 2009, para. 10).

On January 28, ConAgra issued a third press release, which included the following statement from Gary Rodkin, ConAgra Foods CEO:

Peter Pan is safe to enjoy. We are extremely confident in our safety protocols, including stringent quality testing, for Peter Pan peanut butter and all of our other products. We appreciate the continued loyalty and trust consumers have shown for Peter Pan as they shop for value and wholesome goodness for their families. (ConAgra, 2009c, para. 2)

By the end of January, according to figures compiled by The Nielsen Company, jarred peanut butter sales had dropped 22 percent from the same period the previous year (AP, 2009). American Peanut Council President Patrick Archer stated in an interview that “The vast majority of peanut products, or products containing peanuts, are safe. If consumers have any doubt, they should check with the manufacturer” (AP, 2009, para. 19). Consumer’s did check with manufacturers. Maribeth Badertscher, director of corporate communications at Smucker’s, reported in late January that they had already fielded over 40,000 calls from customers.

To address customer concerns, Smucker’s ran advertisements in 100 different markets the end of January and beginning of February stating that “Jif Peanut Butter, like all the products from The J.M. Smucker Company, is safe to enjoy” (Patton, 2009, para. 2). The half-page ads in newspapers, including the New York Times, featured coupons ranging from 35-cents to a dollar off a jar of Jif (Howard, 2009; Martin & Robbins, 2009). ConAgra followed suit, running advertisements in 50 newspapers including a 50-cents-off coupon for its Peter Pan brand (Martin & Robbins, 2009). Stephanie Childs, director of communications at ConAgra, suggested “Consumers have been confused by the media and are uncertain about what products are safe.”
Smucker’s Badertscher agreed and said “We’re doing what we can to make sure consumers know our products are safe” (AP, 2009, para. 8-10).

Following the FBI raid of PCA’s Blakely plant on February 9, the media described the unsanitary conditions that were found at PCA and once again brought up Peter Pan’s crisis history. However, one article suggested that in the wake of the crisis, Peter Pan “re-invented itself where it comes to food safety and systems protocols” (Gibb, 2009, para. 10). According to the article by Gibb (2009), ConAgra spent $33 million to “eradicate water leaks, airflows that could carry contaminants, and other threats” (para. 11). Other changes included sampling jars coming off the production line every 20 minutes and training employees to follow a rigid set of 80 rules for food safety. Thus, the corrective actions taken by ConAgra and posted on the Peter Pan website did eventually get reported in the news.

Unilever, distributor of the number two peanut butter brand Skippy in 2009, did not launch an advertising campaign during the recall and posted only one news release on February 17. The first line of the release stated that Skippy was not affected by the recalls. However, in the same release, Unilever provided information on the Slim-Fast bars that were recalled:

Skippy peanut butter is not affected by the Peanut Corporation of America (PCA) recalls. Specifically, neither Skippy brand peanut butter nor any of the ingredients contained in the peanut butter are sourced from PCA. Slim-Fast ® is recalling three Slim-Fast bar products because they may contain peanuts that are being recalled by Peanut Corporation of America (PCA). The PCA recall was ordered by the Texas Department of State Health Services on February 12, 2009, as a result of unsanitary conditions at the PCA Plainview, Texas, facility, which could have compromised the peanuts. (Unilver, 2009a, para. 1-3)

The fact Unilever didn’t advertise during the crisis was not considered unique by industry standards. On the contrary, Smucker’s and ConAgra’s campaigns were unique. The New York Times reported peanut butter sales were down 25% by the first week of February, and quoted Gene Grabowski, senior vice president for Levick Strategic Communications, as saying it was unusual for companies to place ads saying that their products were not contaminated. “Typically, companies worry that such ads might draw more attention to the outbreak and inadvertently link their products to it” (Martin & Robbins, 2009, para. 28). Grabowski went on to say “That’s a marketing tactic that you want to hold back until you absolutely need it” (para. 28).

While exact sales figures for the peanut butter market share leader, Jif, were not published during the recall, the USDA’s final report suggested the entire peanut industry average sales loss was 24% (Wittenberger & Dohlman, 2010). Peanut sales took the biggest hit in January and February 2009, but largely recovered by April 2009 due to a strong peanut crop that increased supply and production and helped to quickly get products back on the shelves. Jiff, in particular, fared much better than the industry in sales volume. The industry saw a 7% volume decline by the end of 2009, but Jif only experienced a 2% decline according to its annual report (Smucker’s, 2009). Most likely due to its prior crisis, Peter Pan sales fell a whopping 45% in the months after the recall (Mallove, 2010). Interestingly, Skippy, which had no crisis history at the time and followed the norm of not advertising in the midst of an industry crisis, watched sales plummet by 54% in the months after the recall (Mallove, 2010).

Analysis

This study identifies the 2009 PCA peanut product Salmonella contamination as a spillover crisis. PCA was responsible for processing approximately 2% of the industry’s peanut
products and byproducts (Chapman & Newkirk, 2009), and yet, the massive recall and clear disregard for public safety by PCA created concern, uncertainty, and perceptions of harm for the other 98% of the peanut industry. The peanut industry was “tarred with the same brush” as PCA and suffered negative reputational spillover effects.

Reputational Interdependence

While some research on reputational interdependence suggests trade associations can be “critical to recovery from crises that face entire industries” (Barnett, 2006, p. 1756), the associations can also decrease opportunities for individual brands (Abrahamson & Hegeman, 1994). In the case at hand, the American Peanut Council chose as one of its primary strategies to create a list of all peanut products NOT recalled and post the list to its website. We suggest this strategy was counterproductive, particularly for top jarred peanut butter brands attempting to salvage legitimacy and rebuild reputation in the spillover crisis. By placing iconic peanut butter brands like Jif, Skippy, and Peter Pan on the same list as every other minor peanut product represented by the American Peanut Council, the trade association made lesser brands appear as peers to the leading brands and created a “reputation commons” below the legitimate stature of the leading peanut butter brands. Hoffman and Ocasio (2011) suggested that collective action is more likely to occur when supported by industry leaders. In this case, the number one and number three peanut butter brands, Jif and Peter Pan, chose not to rely on the actions of the trade association, and instead, to take advantage of their own strategic capabilities to repair legitimacy.

Barnett and Hoffman (2008) suggested the means of managing reputational interdependence could be generalized as fitting within the three broad themes of (1) Keeping up with the Jones’s, (2) Teaming up with the Jones’s, and (3) Fencing out the Jones’s. As the industry leader since 1981 (Boyle, 2016), Jif had the money and ability to launch a two-week newspaper advertising campaign in 100 markets across the country in the midst of the recall (Patton, 2009, para. 2). Peter Pan decided to try to keep up with the Jones’s by launching its own newspaper advertising campaign in 50 markets a week later (Martin & Robbins, 2009). Running advertisements in the midst of an industry recall is not standard protocol according to industry giants. The concern is that ads run during a crisis like the PCA recall could draw more attention to the outbreak and inadvertently link a brand’s product to the recall (Martin & Robbins, 2009). However, in this case, the entire industry was linked to the recall. Therefore, Jif and Peter Pan engaged crisis management strategies to salvage legitimacy and maintain corporate reputation.

Crisis Response Strategies

The jarred peanut butter brands we examined (Jif, Peter Pan, Skippy) were not responsible for the crisis. However, rumors and brand confusion could have made the public assume all peanut products were contaminated. According to SCCT, the deny posture should be used for rumor and challenge crises. All three brands used denial and scapegoat (blaming PCA) in their statements. SCCT also suggests that mixing deny crisis response strategies with diminish or rebuild strategies will erode the effectiveness of the overall response (Coombs, 2007). Counter to the theory, Jif and Peter Pan also used the rebuild strategy of compensation (providing major product discounts) as well as the bolstering strategies of ingratiation (thanking consumers) and reminder (referring to stringent testing) in their crisis response. Because of its crisis history, Peter Pan’s attribution of responsibility and reputation threat were amplified. Early coverage of the PCA recall referenced the Peter Pan recall, and Peter Pan did suffer a significant drop in sales (45%). However, later media coverage, after the advertising
campaign, referenced the $33 million Peter Pan spent to improve food safety. And, because the website had a section dedicated to the corrective actions taken by Peter Pan following the 2007 crisis, after getting the pop-up message saying Peter Pan was not part of the PCA recall, consumers could read the detailed safety policies and procedures now being used by Peter Pan.

Interestingly, Skippy sales fell 9% more than Peter Pan’s sales. Skippy did not have a crisis history. The brand followed the industry standard to allow the trade association to communicate about the peanut crisis and did not mix denial with rebuilding response strategies. However, in comparison to the other two brands, Skippy seemed reticent to communicate at all. Skippy was not only unwilling or unable financially to “keep up with the Jones’s” by running advertisements and offering deep discounts, the brand waited well over a month after the other top two brands issued press releases and over two weeks after Jif and Peter Pan ran their respective campaigns before even providing an official statement. At the time Skippy was distributed by Unilever, which distributed other brands that were involved in the recall. The impact of the Skippy sales loss was not noted in Unilever’s 2009 annual report (Unilever, 2009b). In fact, the brand wasn’t even mentioned in the report. In 2013, Unilever sold Skippy to Hormel Foods (Hormel, 2013).

Conclusions and Implications

Barnett and Hoffman’s (2008) special issue on reputation interdependence asked whether positive and negative spillover outcomes can be actively managed. At the time, the mechanisms that lead to one outcome or another were still unclear. This study demonstrates that organizations, or at least industry leaders, do indeed have the ability to actively manage the outcome of spillover crises. Based on the analysis of this study, we suggest that when negative effects of a spillover crisis occur organizations should follow these five crisis response strategies: 1) Disassociation – distance the organization from industry trade associations if those associations are also communicating for the organization(s) in crisis; 2) Denial – deny any involvement in the crisis and name (blame) the organization in crisis; 3) Ingratiation – thank consumers for their trust and loyalty; 4) Reminding – remind stakeholders of the organization’s positive attributes; and 5) Compensation – offer special promotions to entice consumers back into the industry via the organization’s quality brand. Just as the SCCT strategies have been tested and retested, we offer these spillover crisis strategies for future empirical testing to determine if the strategies hold up beyond the case presented here.

While all three peanut butter brands took a financial hit in January and February due to the PCA recall, Jif actually managed to increase sales 3% by the end of 2009 (Boyle, 2016). Peter Pan still remains number three in market share, below Jif and Skippy. However, having just weathered its own Salmonella crisis a few years before PCA’s crisis, the outcome for Peter Pan could have been much worse. The lesson learned from Peter Pan is how important it is to provide crisis recovery updates. We know from the extensive research on SCCT that crisis history increases the attribution of responsibility in a crisis. However, we suggest that by engaging in the response strategies identified in this study, Peter Pan was able to limit damage to legitimacy.
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A Systematic Review of 40 Years of Public Relations Evaluation and Measurement Research: Looking into the Past, the Present, and the Future

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Abstract
This study explores the state of the art of evaluation and measurement research by systematically reviewing 324 scholarly contributions, published from 1975 to 2015 within the 12 most important journals. The review sculpts a better understanding of what has been researched, how the research is interrelated, and what still needs to be investigated.
Introduction

For more than 40 years, intensive discussions have taken place among practitioners working in the broad field of communication and public relations (PR) on how to demonstrate the value of communication for businesses and organizations: How does communication contribute to organizational success? How can its impact and effectiveness be measured?

The evaluation and measurement of communication in the organization context have also been a perennial topic for scholars since the early beginnings of academic research in the field (Likely & Watson, 2013, p. 156; Stacks & Michaelson, 2014). As long ago as 1987, Pavlik (p. 65) stated that “measuring the effectiveness of PR has proved almost as elusive as finding the Holy Grail.” As McElreath (1993, p. 302) reported, the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of public relations is an issue that “stands out from all the others, as it has for decades.” Ten years later, McCoy and Hargie (2003, p. 304) noticed, “probably the most common buzzwords in public relations in the last ten years have been evaluation and accountability.” Indeed, throughout the academic research, questions related to measurement and evaluation have been listed among the top research priorities of public relations scholarship (e.g., Synott & McKie, 1997, p. 271; Watson, 2008, p. 111). However, despite extensive discussion, neither scholars nor practitioners have achieved consensus on how to explain convincingly how communication adds value to an organization and how to measure this contribution (Likely & Watson, 2013; Wright, Gaunt, Leggetter, Daniels, & Zerfass, 2009).

As measurement and evaluation research has been a lasting topic for academics, with dedicated conferences, websites, articles, and books, there is a considerable body of literature (Watson, 2006). In light of today’s extensive scholarly contributions, the American practitioner Walter Lindenmann (2005, p. 8) lamented: “[…] the time has come to stop ‘reinventing the wheel,’ to take a serious look at what already exists and has already been accomplished, and build from there.” In a similar way, Macnamara (2014a, p. 24) suggested, “[…] that scholars need to examine their research in terms of impact and reflectively and reflexively consider what more can be done to connect theory to practice.”

Until this day, however, no standardized analysis of the large body of academic literature within the evaluation and measurement domain has been conducted. The few existing literature reviews emphasized professional topics employing historical narrative approaches; consequently, they were not devoted to systematically gathering the state of the art of evaluation and measurement research. Given the lack of a systematic analysis, there is a strong need for consolidation and synthesis of the existing scholarly work.

To close this gap, this research reports the findings of a large-scale project reviewing the academic literature, guided by the following prime research question: What is the status quo of the academic discussion within measurement and evaluation research published in peer-reviewed journals? By systematically examining and synthesizing the research carried out over a 40-year period, this project aims to sculpt a better understanding of (a) what has been researched in the past, (b) how the research is interrelated, and (c) what still needs to be investigated in the future. This paper will provide a comprehensive picture of the state of the art of evaluation and measurement research and derive a research agenda to stimulate future inquiries.

Conceptual framework: Mapping evaluation and measurement research

The academic debate about the measurement and evaluation of communication has a considerable history: while the first practices of PR measurement date back to the late eighteenth century, scholarly research and theorization began in the 1960s and made substantial progress
throughout the 1970s (Likely & Watson, 2013, p. 144; Macnamara, 2014a, p. 8). A conference in 1977 at the University of Maryland chaired by James E. Grunig is considered to be the initial starting point of the US American debate, followed by the first scholarly special issue in *Public Relations Review* in 1977 (Watson, 2012, p. 394). In the 1980s, the academic journal discussion blossomed, stimulating a strong interest both in academia and in practice in the 1990s, which eventually resulted in the founding of proliferating practice initiatives (Watson, 2012, p. 395).

In Europe, the first fundamental consideration of PR measurement and evaluation can be traced back to 1996, when the Swedish Public Relations Association (SPRA) developed the first model of “return on communication,” which conceptualized the creation of non-financial value through communication (SPRA, 1996). In the same year, a pan-European summit was held in Germany to discuss measurement and evaluation among German public relations counseling firms and consultancies (Lindenmann, 2005, pp. 5–6). It took, however, until the turn of the century for the research area to gain wider recognition in Europe (Zerfass, 2010, p. 948).

Looking back at 40 years of scholarly research and practice debate, a large number of articles, books, guidelines, white papers, and conference reports have been published by scholars, PR and communication associations, and practitioners (Lindenmann, 2005, p. 3). In view of the long and chequered history of PR measurement and evaluation research, a few scholars have recently attempted to outline the development and key findings of the research field from a historical perspective (namely Lindenmann, 2005; Gregory & Watson, 2008; Watson, 2012; Likely & Watson, 2013; Macnamara, 2014a). These publications thoroughly summarized the historical development of evaluation and measurement research using a narrative approach and hence provide a sound starting point for briefly mapping the debate. They also made reference to the most cited scholarly works, which have made important contributions to the research field and may nowadays be considered as popular standard works (namely Watson & Noble, 2007; van Ruler, Tkalac Verčič, & Verčič, 2008; Zerfass, 2008, 2010; Stacks & Michaelson, 2014).

To pursue the previously delineated research interest, at the outset, a conceptual framework will be developed on the basis of the aforementioned publications for the purpose of providing a broad overview of evaluation and measurement research. This brief conception of what has been discussed so far will serve as a starting point for deriving specific research questions and as a foundation for organizing the following systematic review (Torraco, 2005, p. 360).

**Terminology**

To discuss the evaluation and measurement of communication, scholars have introduced a plethora of terms, which have however remained largely unspecified (Macnamara, 2014a, p. 9). The key terms used in previous works include evaluation and measurement, effectiveness, value, and intangibles. According to a semantic network analysis of titles within public relations scholarship from 1975 to 2011, the terms “evaluation” and “value” were among the distinctive keywords in the 1970s and 1980s, whereas the term “effect” was among the most salient keywords in the 2000s (Kim, Choi, Reber, & Kim, 2014, pp. 117–118). Since then, the term “value” has become embedded in the language of public relations practice, as the Delphi study by Watson (2008) illustrated (Gregory & Watson, 2008, p. 341). The “value” of communication carries the two connotations “financial/tangible” and “non-financial/intangible,” as opposed to the meaning of values as underlying cultural expectations or norms and beliefs (Stacks & Michaelson, 2014, p. 255). The popularity of the terms value and intangibles illustrates the widespread use of business language, deriving from the trend towards value-based management and stakeholder value, as Gregory and Watson observed (2008, p. 341). Intangible assets have been an especially hot topic
in the management and accounting literature (Grunig, 2006, p. 167), and the adoption of business terminology can be interpreted as a tendency to demonstrate alignment with management (Gregory & Watson, 2008, p. 340; Likely & Watson, 2013, p. 156).

Theoretical contributions and conceptual approaches

The research on the evaluation and measurement of PR has been traced back to early mass communications theory, with its psychology antecedents and influences (Gregory & Watson, 2008, p. 345; Watson & Noble, 2007, p. 29). Watson (2012, p. 396) lamented the fact that, despite extensive discussion over 40 years, little theory of public relations measurement and evaluation has been developed or widely accepted. According to Likely and Watson (2013, pp. 148, 156), the theoretical framework derived from the excellence study published by James Grunig and colleagues in 1992 has made an important contribution to evaluation and measurement theory building and has enduring validity and relevance. Grunig and colleagues (1992) postulated that PR creates tangible and intangible values by developing beneficial long-term relationships with strategic publics, thus aiding the operations of organizations. Hon and Grunig (1999) suggested estimating the intangible value of public relations by developing non-financial indicators that measure the nature and quality of such stakeholder relationships. The broad trend of evaluation and measurement research has been directed towards this theoretical approach to relationship measurement (Gregory & Watson, 2008, p. 345; Likely & Watson, 2013, p. 148).

Since the turn of the century, European scholars and practitioners have developed another theoretical approach to evaluation and measurement, picking up the practice debate starting in the late 1990s and underpinning it theoretically (Likely & Watson, 2013, p. 152). The German “communication controlling” approach, suggested by Ansgar Zerfass, has been mentioned by the international scientific community as an “encouraging effort” (Likely & Watson, 2013, p. 157). “Communication controlling” is conceptualized as a complementary supporting function to communication management aimed at ensuring process transparency and providing appropriate methods and metrics for measuring communication effects and demonstrating impact (Zerfass, 2010). Operational communication controlling assures the rationality of communication activities at the level of messages and programs, which is the classic domain of retrospective, summative evaluation research (Zerfass, 2010, p. 956). Strategic communication controlling focuses on the process of value creation at the level of the function and the organization and thereby establishes a link between business and communication objectives (Likely & Watson, 2013, pp. 156–157; Zerfass, 2008, p. 150). While offering a more holistic perspective on the value of communication than the aforementioned approach, with its rare focus on relationship quality, the suggested explanation suffers from the lack of a clear conceptualization and measurement approach concerning how communication indirectly and implicitly adds value.

To sum up, no distinctive or widely agreed evaluation and measurement theory exists and scholars have referred to theories such as the excellence theory or the concept of communication controlling, which differ considerably regarding the explanation of value creation. What remains unclear, however, is whether other theories have been suggested over the course of time and whether differing perspectives have been combined in a fruitful manner by previous research.

Evaluation and measurement models

In spite of the paucity of theoretical contributions, a number of models and concepts of PR research and evaluation have been offered over time (Watson & Noble, 2007, pp. 81–95). An important thought was contributed by Lindenmann’s (1993) PR effectiveness yardstick, which
differed from other models because it included the setting of measurable objectives as a starting point and then measuring effectiveness against the set objectives. The model depicts three stages, labeled outputs, outtakes, and outcomes. Although largely educational in nature, the yardstick established the terminology of these three stages of evaluation, which are nowadays almost universally used (Gregory & Watson, 2008, p. 339; Watson, 2012, p. 395; Watson & Noble, 2007, p. 88). Critically viewed, the extant models can be characterized by a narrow focus on summative measurement at the end of a single program and a missing conceptualization of how communication contributes to business results (Gregory & Watson, 2008, p. 339; Likely & Watson, 2013, p. 156; Watson, 2012, p. 396).

Against the background of the German communication controlling approach, scholars have recently proposed the use of generic value link models to depict the value creation process (Zerfass, 2010, p. 948). The use of value link models originated from management research and became popular with Kaplan and Norton’s (1996) business book introducing the balanced scorecard (BSC), which proposed greater integration between the organizational functions and the sharing of key performance indicators (KPI) (Watson, 2012, p. 396). A widely known practice example is a model developed by the German Public Relations Society (DPRG) and the International Controller Association (ICV): it depicts the traditional levels of communication effects (input, output, outcome, outflow), adds generic value links, and names typical key performance indicators (DPRG & ICV, 2011, pp. 11, 13; Zerfass, 2010, p. 957). However, although there is a relatively strong consensus regarding the multiple effect levels of measurement, conflicting views remain in relation to the conceptual and analytical scope of evaluation models.

**Methodological approaches and metrics**

Evaluation and measurement methodologies originally evolved from the earlier psychological and social science research, focusing on the measurement of attitudes and opinion polling (Gregory & Watson, 2008). To date, scholars have offered a multitude of reliable and valid social science methods, both for quantitative and for qualitative measurement research (Stacks & Michaelson, 2014). In practice, however, the adoption of evaluation methodology has been much slower than its scholarly development, resulting in an ongoing and almost singular focus on output measurement methods (Gregory & Watson, 2008, p. 345; Zerfass, 2010, p. 956). The overall focus on output measurement is detrimental to the outcome measurement (e.g., changes in attitudes or behavior), which requires advanced qualitative methods such as longitudinal interview-based studies, ethnography, or ethnomethodology, as noted by Macnamara (2014a, p. 24).

In light of the recent importing of management concepts into PR research, Zerfass (2008, p. 139) lamented the insufficiency of the methods currently used for evaluation, as they fail to depict the link between the communication activities and the so-called bottom line. Zerfass thus called for a linking of the established evaluation methods and the well-known management methods, such as scorecards (Zerfass, 2010, p. 960). Examples of new methodological approaches, as indicated by scholars, include market mix modeling, valuation methods for intangibles, and overarching reporting approaches such as integrated reporting. However, it remains unclear which state the discussion of evaluation and measurement methodology has reached to date and whether the recently suggested methods have been discussed in more detail among scholars.

The search for simple measurement methods parallels the search for a measurement metric that can be used for most public relations evaluation (Gregory & Watson, 2008, p. 345). Work to date has searched primarily for quantitative metrics (Macnamara, 2014a, p. 24). This trend can be exemplified by the great popularity of financial metrics such as advertising value equivalents
(AVE) or return on investment (ROI), which have both been issues of intensive controversial debate. The AVE metric has been used to put a value on media coverage, which Watson (2012, p. 394) criticized as signifying “the craft nature of PR”. In a similar line, Watson and Zerfass (2011, p. 11) warned against using the return on investment concept because of its failure to express the value of PR to an organization. According to them, it is not possible to calculate the ROI generated by communication activities in financial terms due to the complexity of communication processes and the difficulty in isolating communication effects from other factors. Overall, the scholarly discussion of measurement metrics has seen much controversial debate concerning quantitative metrics and their ability to express the value of communication.

Paradigms and contributing disciplines

In line with the disagreement on acceptable evaluation models and underlying theories, conflicting viewpoints among the academic literature have been acknowledged (Macnamara, 2014a, p. 23). Such conflicting perspectives largely derive from different underlying paradigms, both across PR scholarship and across disciplines. Previous researchers have most commonly distinguished between the dominating functionalist (that is, managerial, or strategic) and non-functionalist approaches (Edwards, 2011, pp. 11–12). Within evaluation and measurement research, scholars have marginally discussed competing paradigmatic orientations. Gregory and Watson (2008, p. 346) noticed that the broad trend has been directed towards the tradition of the strategic management paradigm typical of the functionalist research of excellence theory, which conceptualizes public relations as relationship management (e.g., Hon & Grunig, 1999). Consistent with this finding, Macnamara (2014a, p. 23) bemoaned that, to date, other perspectives, such as sociocultural or critical PR, have not engaged in the discussion of evaluation. In his view, critical PR scholars could bring new insights related to the societal implications of PR effects, which have largely been ignored in the functionalist organization-centric literature.

Furthermore, scholars have included numerous references to related scientific disciplines from which concepts have been imported into evaluation and measurement research. As discussed earlier, PR scholars have borrowed methodological approaches from early psychology and mass communication theory or introduced controlling concepts and financial return calculations from management and accounting theory (Watson, 2012, p. 396). There is evidence that very similar debates are dealt with in related disciplines, above all in the related fields of marketing and advertising research (Stacks & Michaelson, 2014, p. 6).

In terms of scientific communities, different national communities – apart from the dominating Anglo-American community – are participating in the international debate on PR evaluation and measurement, for instance those from Austria, Germany, and Sweden. Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether the academics engaging in the evaluation and measurement debate have recognized contributions from related fields and whether an effort has been made to foster interdisciplinary research or collaboration across geographical boundaries. Overall, there is a fundamental lack of knowledge regarding different implicitly or explicitly existing viewpoints in evaluation and measurement research – if existent, apart from the dominating managerial paradigm – and whether the major paradigmatic perspectives have changed over the course of time.

Research gap and research questions

The previously presented overview of the measurement and evaluation research has yielded a rough insight into the state of knowledge and has briefly exposed areas in which further investigation might be worthwhile. In general, the academic knowledge base is considerably
complex and appears to be fragmented, and although substantial progress has been made over the course of 40 years of research, there are some important lacunae (Watson & Noble, 2007, p. 7).

The previous scholarly assessments regarding the status quo of evaluation and measurement research certainly facilitate a step forward in grasping an overall conception of the research field. However, while these assessments may be justified, without a more systematic analysis, they remain a subjective view on the topic from the authors’ perspectives: even though the publications considered for the previous conceptual framework can be regarded as thematic expert reviews, they explored and supported a particular argument and did not follow a systematic method for reviewing the body of literature (Briner & Denyer, 2012, p. 334). In fact, the existing reviews have emphasized specific professional topics employing historical narrative approaches; accordingly, they have not been devoted to providing a balanced and exhaustive account of the current state of evaluation and measurement research (Briner & Denyer, 2012, p. 333).

Given the absence of a systematic review of the academic literature concerning evaluation and measurement, the primary question guiding this study attempts to explore the current state of knowledge and picture the major topical trends: What is the status quo of the academic discussion within measurement and evaluation research published in peer-reviewed journals? To answer this question, a variety of aspects were investigated: Who are the authors contributing to the debate? What are the topical trends over the course of 40 years? Which major theories are mentioned and applied? Which prime methods are applied in empirical studies? Which underlying paradigms do the authors represent and which disciplinary scientific communities contribute to the research?

Methodological design: A systematic review of the debate within academic journals

Responding to the call for a reflective and systematic consolidation of the existing scholarly work within evaluation and measurement research (Macnamara, 2014a, p. 24; Zerfass, 2010, p. 962), this research project employs a systematic review design to investigate the research question at stake. This endeavor bears great importance as it attempts to move beyond offering observations based on an implicitly subjective review and rather aims to provide a systematically deduced basis for critical reflection on the research efforts so far.

Systematic reviews are a specific methodology to locate, analyze, and synthesize comprehensively the existing research discussing a particular question and to draw reasonably clear conclusions about what is and what is not known (Victor, 2008, p. 1). The major strength of a systematic review is its capacity to generate a solid picture of the current state of knowledge in an explicit and methodical way and to overcome the important limitations that are often inherent in traditional reviews (Briner & Denyer, 2012, p. 361; Littell, Corcoran, & Pillai, 2008, p. 10). Traditional literature reviews are usually narrative and offer singular descriptive accounts of the contributions made by selected writers in the field; consequently, they rarely offer a comprehensive or balanced review of the literature (Briner & Denyer, 2012, p. 334). By contrast, a systematic review is a self-contained research project in itself that utilizes explicit and transparent methods to search for and analyze the relevant literature (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009, p. 671).

Since the mid-1990s, the use of systematic review approaches has spread from medicine to other disciplines and is nowadays widely used in fields such as health sciences, social policy, or education research (Littell et al., 2008, p. 3; Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003, p. 209). The systematic review method has only recently been adapted to the communication discipline: Walker (2010) conducted a systematic review of the corporate reputation literature, while Verčič, Verčič, and Sriramesh (2015) undertook a systematic review of the body of knowledge on the nexus between PR, information and communication technology, and digital, social, and mobile media.
In light of the previous prolific applications of systematic reviews in health communication research and lately PR research, the systematic review method promises to be a particularly innovative methodological approach to the present research interest.

Despite the relative infancy of systematic reviews, a reasonable consensus has emerged regarding its desirable process, which is parallel to primary research (Popay et al., 2006, p. 9; Tranfield et al., 2003, p. 214). The procedure has been well documented and there is broad agreement about the key stages involved: the identification of the review scope, review questions, and key words; the search for and selection of evidence; quality assessment of the evidence; data extraction; and data analysis and synthesis (Victor, 2008, p. 3).

Selection of journals to be reviewed

First, the review scope was defined to include the most important academic journals dedicated to the broader domain of PR and communication research. With regard to the objective of this research project, the inclusion criteria for the selection of journals to be used as a sampling base for the systematic review of evaluation and measurement research were defined as follows: (1) academic in nature, (2) based on a peer-review process, (3) particularly dedicated to the broad field of PR and communication research, and (4) written in the English language. Due to the lack of an extensive, official listing of the range of academic journals in the broader field of communication, the selection of appropriate journals had to follow an iterative process. As a basis, a comprehensive typology of academic PR and communication journals proposed by the German research association DGPuK (n.d.) was used and compared with a typology suggested by Nekmat, Gower, and Ye (2014), and then further adapted with regard to previous investigations of PR journals. In the end, the following 12 academic journals dedicated to PR and communication research were selected to be reviewed: Public Relations Review (PRR), Journal of Public Relations Research (JPRR), Journal of Communication Management (JCM), Journal of Business Communication (JBC), Journal of Business Ethics (JBE), Management Communication Quarterly (MCQ), Corporate Communications: An International Journal (CCIJ), Corporate Reputation Review (CRR), Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal (APPRJ), PRism, International Journal of Strategic Communication (IJSC), and Public Relations Inquiry (PRI).

The use of scientific PR journals as a starting point for a longitudinal investigation of the status quo of a particular research area has a long tradition in PR research. It is widely accepted across disciplines that academic journals represent the scholarly achievements of a discipline and play an important role in dictating how a research field moves forward, as the peer-review procedures of journals perform a gatekeeping function (Kim, Hayes, Avant, & Reid, 2014, p. 297). Leading journals are often considered to be “nerves of a discipline” (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1988, p. 12) and perform an agenda-setting or opinion-leading function (Macnamara, 2012, p. 386). Therefore, the self-reflection of journal publishing allows a discipline to observe the popularity of certain research issues and key trends in a field (Jelen, 2008, p. 46; Kim et al., 2014, p. 297).

As a matter of course, owing to the journals’ different histories, target groups, inception years, and publication cycles, differences were expected among the journals in relation to the research questions underlying this project. In particular, the editorial and peer reviewers’ orientations of the selected journals were expected to pose a major limitation to the representativeness of the findings, as problematized by previous scholars investigating PR journals (e.g., Botan & Taylor, 2004, p. 650; Kim et al., 2014, p. 297; Sallot, Lyon, Acosta-Alzuru, & Jones, 2003, p. 53). To take this inherent limitation into account, differences among the 12 journals were anticipated by differentiating the subsequent data analysis by journals where appropriate and
interpreting the findings against the background of the journals.

Data collection

Following the selection of the journals, a systematic search strategy was developed and five search terms were derived from the conceptual framework to identify applicable scholarly contributions (namely evaluat*, measur*, effect*, value*, and intangible*). A full-text electronic search was performed on the 12 selected journals using the identified search terms via the journals’ archives on the website or the EBSCOhost search database. In terms of time span, the present review aimed to cover the entire academic debate on evaluation and measurement from the beginnings of scholarly journal publishing in 1975 to 2015. Overall, a total of 8,491 journal articles were located. Following this step, the titles, abstracts, and key words of the 8,491 articles were scanned electronically and manually for relevance to ascertain that they were related to the research interest at stake. Thereupon, the remaining 723 articles were selected, downloaded, and manually examined to apply the previously defined exclusion criteria (e.g., editorials, book reviews, academic announcements, etc.) and to remove duplicates. After this step, the full text of the remaining 560 articles was examined to exclude articles that did not make a substantial contribution to the present research interest (e.g., a focus on interpersonal communication processes, mere passing reference, etc.). In the end, a total of 324 scholarly contributions on the topic of evaluation and measurement were identified as relevant and applicable to the search criteria.

Data extraction and analysis

Following the data collection, resulting in a 324-article data set, a systematic approach to data extraction was utilized. For this purpose, a data extraction form was derived from the conceptual framework to guide the subsequent data analysis structurally (Torraco, 2005, p. 359). To ensure its usability, the form was pretested using 37 articles. The final data extraction form consisted of 50 vertical Microsoft© Excel© columns, structured according to a broad set of categories and leaving room for additional remarks and comments. The form contained (1) general information about the sampled articles, (2) specific information including the key topics, terminology, theories, models, methods, and findings, (3) abstract information, such as the paradigmatic orientation and disciplinary perspective, (4) suggestive information regarding future inquiry and practice implications, and finally (5) the reviewer’s own notes and remarks.

Upon finalizing the form, open coding was used for extracting (1) general information; (2) specific information; (4) suggestive information as stated by the author; and (5) own notes and remarks. For extracting further (2) specific information and (3) abstract information, manifestations and concrete forms were developed in an inductive manner with regard to previous works, resulting in “look-up tables” to maintain consistency and reliability. A distinction between an author’s statement and the reviewer’s interpretation of his descriptions was deemed necessary, since previous works had problematized that PR scholars “actually were talking about the same things even though they tended to talk about them differently” (Sisco, Collins, & Zoch, 2011, p. 149). To overcome the inconsistent use of general research terminology, the data extraction relied on a combination of first-order and second-order analysis (Popay et al., 2006, p. 18).

The data analysis was conducted using Microsoft© Excel©, which was sufficient for the sum, percentage, and ranking calculations required. The present review consisted of a critical analysis and thereupon a synthesis, resulting in the development of a research agenda to stimulate future investigations. The analysis was intended to present descriptively the state of the art of
evaluation and measurement research, differentiated by time period, journal of publication, and topical theme cluster. The synthesis was aimed at systematizing, linking, and reconfiguring themes, with the goal of generating new perspectives on the prevailing body of literature. Such new perspectives, in turn, offered a basis for deriving explicit directions for future research, resulting in an exhaustive research agenda intending to stimulating further inquiry.

**Findings: Overview of the past research and the current state of knowledge**

The analysis of the 324-article data set revealed an enduring publication trend and a significant increase in publications, particularly during the last decade, supporting earlier notions that evaluation and measurement research is indeed among the top research priorities of current scholarship (Watson, 2008). From the total of 324 scholarly articles taken from the 12 major PR and communication journals selected for this research, 25 (8%) were published between 1975 and 1985, indicating that scholars have been interested in evaluation and measurement from the outset of the academic discussion. It should be noted that almost half of those articles (n=12) were published in the PRR special winter edition on evaluation in 1977 following the first dedicated conference. The time period from 1986 to 1995 saw 18 journal publications (5%), of which five were published in the second PRR special edition on evaluation in 1990. Roughly one-third of the sampled articles (n=103, 32%) were published between 1996 and 2005. Evaluation and measurement research has gradually increased since 1996, a time that marks the launch of the three journals the JCM (since 1996), the CCIJ (since 1996), and the CRR (since 1997). More than half (n=178, 55%) of the articles under review were published after 2005.

Figure 1 illustrates the sampled articles differentiated by publication venue and publication year as well as indicating the inception year of each of the 12 journals under review, because this information aids in determining the yearly trends of evaluation and measurement research for each journal. Of the 12 journals reviewed, the journals from the classical PR domain – that is, the PRR, JPRR, and JCM – were the most pervasive publishers of evaluation and measurement research, followed by the internationally orientated CCIJ, and CRR, which is dedicated to reputation research. The oldest journal, the PRR, contributed 80 articles (25%), of which half were published within the last decade under review, from 2006 to 2015. The JPRR (n=42) and the UK-based JCM (n=41) each accounted for 13 percent of the articles in this study.
Authorship

The analysis of the authorship of the sampled articles revealed a wide regional dispersal of contributing individual scholars and universities, indicating the popularity of PR evaluation and measurement among academics from across the world. Of the 324 reviewed articles, 76 percent (n=246) of the articles were composed by lead authors from the Anglo-American countries, which reveals that evaluation and measurement research has to date been disproportionately led by the Anglo-American scientific community. This finding was expected, as previous studies had reported the dominance of North American scholarship within PR research and its agenda-setting effect on research elsewhere (e.g., Jelen, 2008; Kim et al., 2014; Macnamara, 2012). Jelen (2008, p. 42) traced the causes of the prevalence of the American viewpoint to the economic development of the PR industry and the history of the PR discipline, which emerged in the United States and expanded rapidly to other countries. Scholars from Europe accounted for roughly 15 percent of the reviewed articles, while five percent of the articles were published by scholars from Asian countries. Overall, the data revealed that the scholarly endeavors started to gain geographical diversity after 1996, when the first European scholars published their works in the newly launched journals CCIJ and JCM. With the turn of the century and the launch of the two regional journals APPRJ and PRism, researchers from Australia and New Zealand and some Asian scholars increasingly gained a voice in the discussion. The analysis of the 12 journals under review revealed that the PRR, JP瑒, MCQ, and JBC were largely dominated by North American contributors, while the CRR, IJSC, JBE, and CCIJ accounted for the greatest diversity among the authors. This finding confirmed previous studies that indicated a language barrier presenting an obstacle to authors from non-English-speaking countries (Jelen, 2008, pp. 50–51).

Topics

An examination of the questions and topics discussed over 40 years revealed seven common clusters. Evaluation and measurement researchers most frequently explored how to
measure relationships (21%) and reputation (21%). Strikingly, the assessment of the overall value of communication (8%) and the measurement of other intangible values (7%) were the least-studied topics, ranking after investigations into measurement methods (16%), evaluation practice (16%), and the analysis of communication effectiveness (11%).

The historical analysis indicated a shifting focus from inquiries into professional topics such as applied method research and evaluation practice to the measurement of relationships and reputation with the turn of the century. The end of the 1990s demarcates the beginning of research into immaterial values. With the launch of the CRR, the first investigations into how to measure reputation’s contribution to performance (e.g., Deephouse, 1997) and how to measure reputation reliably (Caruana & Chircop, 2000) were undertaken. On the relationship front, research began to flourish after 1997, with Broom, Casey, and Ritchey’s (1997) review of the measurable properties of relationships and Bruning and Ledingham’s (2000) contributions on the quality measurement of organization–public relationships. The early 2000s were characterized by an upswing of both reputation and relationship research, dominating the debate in the following years. Recent years have seen an emerging trend towards exploring the value created through communication, ranging from intangible capital approaches (de Beer, 2014; Gamerschlag & Moeller, 2011; Taylor, 2011) to measuring and reporting non-financial values (Elmer, 2001; Veltri & Nardo, 2015) and linking multiple effect levels to overall effectiveness (Huang, 2012).

During the increasing process of thematic differentiation, the analysis of the topical agenda of the 12 journals under review indicated a state of fragmentation. While the JBC and MCQ were primarily dedicated to methodological research and inquiries into effectiveness, the JPRR, CRR, and JBE published proportionally more contributions on the topics of intangibles and value creation. As expected, the CRR was the leading publisher of reputation research, while relationship research was dominantly issued in the traditional PR journals PRR, JPRR, and JCM and in PRism. Interestingly, the CCIJ contributed the largest amount of articles on value creation, followed by the PRR. Research into evaluation practice was most published by the PRR and JCM.

Theories and concepts

The analysis revealed that the ratio of empirical and conceptual or theoretical contributions in the 324-article data set was unequal. Empirical investigations (n=176, 54%) comprised the major portion of the articles under review, while only ten percent of the sampled articles were classified as conceptual (n=22, 7%) and theoretical (n=9, 3%) contributions. This finding was expected, as previous introspective investigations into PR research had already revealed a paucity of theory-driven and conceptual contributions (e.g., Ferguson, 1984; Sallot et al., 2003). Interestingly, empirical research was the dominant approach across all the topical clusters except for value creation research. The ratio of empirical and conceptual or commentary contributions shifted over the course of 40 years: while the share was rather evenly balanced during the first two decades of research, since 2006, empirical research has comprised the largest portion of evaluation and measurement journal articles by far, indicating the fixation on empirical inquiries and the comparatively small portion of conceptual works.

Overall, the majority of articles (59%, n=192) under review referred to at least one or more theories to outline a particular research topic from a theoretical angle. Through open coding and synopses of identical theoretical frameworks, a total of 109 different theories were identified that were used at least once. It has to be noted that the depth of discussion differed significantly, with some articles dedicating an entire chapter to theoretical discussions and others only briefly outlining a theory in a few paragraphs. Nevertheless, the multitude of theories mentioned,
stemming from different disciplines including communication and media science, management and marketing research, social psychology and sociology, or organization research, pointed to the existence of theoretical diversity within evaluation and measurement research.

With regard to the frequency of mentions, however, of the 192 articles substantiating their argumentation on a single or complementary theoretical foundation, the theories applied most frequently by the authors pertained to PR theories (n=92, 47%), including, for instance, excellence theory, relationship theory, or situational crisis communication theory. Management and/or marketing theories (e.g., stakeholder theory, reputation theory, signaling theory) were applied by 24 percent of the articles (n=46), followed closely by the application of communication theories such as information theory or cognitive dissonance (n=42, 22%). In contrast, other theories were only applied in seven percent (n=14) of the 194 articles. The results indicated that evaluation and measurement embraced quite a large share of managerial thinking and theories from the field of social sciences to a much lower extent.

Alarmingly, 22 percent of the articles (n=71) within the 324-article data set built upon neither a theory nor a concept or model to substantiate their argumentation; the remaining 19 percent (n=61) of the authors argued at least on the basis of a conceptual framework or model, even though they did not cite a theory. While the articles examining communication outcomes largely investigated a particular research question from a theoretical angle, more than 40 percent of the contributions to method research and evaluation practice referred neither to a theoretical framework nor to a concept or model to substantiate their arguments.

The results indicated a fragmentation into subfields of research, with each subfield applying distinct theoretical frameworks to the respective topic under investigation. Relationship scholars proportionally most frequently engaged in theoretical discussions and often cited relationship theory, followed by the excellence theory, the situational theory of publics, or symmetrical communication theory. In contrast, theories stemming from the management disciplines were the preferred theoretical basis among reputation scholars: most articles referred to reputation management theory following Fombrun (1996) as well as signaling theory, the resource-based theory of the firm, or contractual theory. A comparative paucity of theoretical frameworks was noted for research on intangibles: here, no theory was mentioned more than once and those referred to (e.g., impression management, organizational culture theories, legitimacy theory) stemmed from different disciplines, indicating the absence of an agreed-upon theory.

The field of value creation research was found to be rather theory-driven, with most theories originating from the business management literature: the resource-based theory of the firm was the preferred theoretical foundation, alongside accounts of stakeholder theory and value co-creation theories, which suggest that value creation increasingly takes place in networks through collaboration with stakeholders (e.g., de Beer, 2014). Furthermore, concepts of social capital were employed multiple times, twice as a complementary framework to the fully functioning society theory originally suggested by Heath (2006). Only a very few scholars based their investigation on the corpus of excellence theory, revealing that this growing line of research has rarely applied traditional PR theories for the purpose of explaining value creation.

In contrast, scholars engaging in effectiveness research, and inquiries into methods and evaluation practice referred more often to PR theories, above all, the corpus of excellence theory. While the high frequency of excellence theory application was expected (Sallot et al., 2003; Ye & Ki, 2012), it was interesting that Coombs’s crisis communication theory was employed across several topical clusters, indicating its applicability to a variety of research questions. Overall, however, no guiding theory was identified across clusters, and each cluster was characterized by
competing theoretical approaches, implying the non-existence of a coherent theoretical body of knowledge within evaluation and measurement research.

The analysis of theoretical trends over the course of 40 years revealed an overall increase in theory application and theoretical diversity, while remaining insufficient to date. In spite of a pleasant diversity of viewpoints, the results disclosed that scholars largely adhered to one theoretical perspective or discipline, instead of combining different approaches. There was evidence of some theoretical frameworks – namely reputation theory, relationship theory, and crisis theory – emerging as a foundation for multiple research efforts. In fact, a few scholars recently began to connect relationship and reputation theory (e.g., Simic Brønn, 2007; Yang & Grunig, 2005), yet such efforts to integrate separate strands of research remained rare among the articles under review. Equally scarce were contributions proposing new theoretical approaches.

**Methodological approaches**

Apart from a paucity of theory-driven and conceptual works and a dominance of empirical research, the results suggested that quantitative research (n=147, 46%) was conducted much more frequently than qualitative research (n=49, 15%). This study coded analytical as opposed to empirical works (n_{emp}=217) separately and found that analyses of literature, essays, and critical analyses accounted for 33 percent (n=107) of the articles under review. Of the 217 empirical contributions, only 20 articles (6%) employed a multi-method approach by combining quantitative and qualitative methods, hence gaining both profound data through in-depth analysis and a broad overview of particular topics. The findings were consistent with the results of previous studies that found quantitative methods to be the dominant methodology embraced by PR scholars (Meadows & Meadows, 2014; Morton & Lin, 1995; Ye & Ki, 2012).

Of the articles employing quantitative approaches (n=147), surveys (n=94, 64%) were the methodological preference in the examined studies, followed by the more rigorous methodology of experiments (n=32, 22%). Secondary data analyses (n=9, 6%) and content analyses were employed rather rarely (n=8, 5%), with a combination of multiple quantitative methods ranking last. Interestingly, most applications of secondary data analysis were conducted by scholars investigating the reputation construct, for instance by linking data from existing reputation rankings to data on financial firm performance (e.g., Agnihotri, 2014). Of the 49 articles embracing qualitative data-gathering procedures, interviews were the preferred method (n=24, 49%), followed by case studies that combined different qualitative methods (n=9, 18%). Comparatively, very few qualitative studies utilized focus groups, qualitative surveys, the Delphi study methodology, secondary data analyses, network analysis, or a combination of qualitative methods.

Overall, the results revealed a lack of methodological variation, considering the fact that quantitative surveys (43%) and experiments (15%) and qualitative interviews (11%) altogether comprised more than two-thirds of the empirical studies within the data set. This finding was expected but counterintuitive in light of the complexity of such constructs as reputation or relationships, which both rather call for the use of qualitative and interpretative social science methods to gain a greater understanding of the phenomena, as Jelen (2008, p. 54) has already pointed out. In fact, scholars engaging in reputation and relationship research predominantly employed quantitative methods to investigate the construct. In contrast, value creation research was largely based upon on analytical contributions, making up 65 percent of the articles within this cluster; the few empirical studies used both quantitative and qualitative methods.

The 12 journals under review differed regarding the ratio of quantitative and qualitative studies. In general, quantitative methods were the preferred method across the PRR, JPRR, CRR,
IJSC, and CCIJ, with purely qualitative methods accounting for less than 30 percent of the published articles in comparison with quantitative approaches. For the JBC, MCQ, and JCM, the ratio among quantitative and qualitative approaches was rather balanced, while qualitative approaches outnumbered quantitative studies in the APPRJ and PRism, although only marginally.

In terms of the communication effects studied, differentiated according to the popular input–output–outcome–outflow effect levels promoted by Lindenmann (1993), the study found that more than half of the articles (n=175, 54%) focused on the outcome level, which encompasses attitudinal, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes including, for instance, trust, image, or culture. As illustrated in figure 2, the input level was entirely understudied (e.g., quality of communication messages), while the output level (n=21) and the outflow level (n=22) both accounted for only seven percent of the articles analyzed. Scholars discussing the output level frequently referred to reach, exposure, or awareness effects, while the outflow level contained, for instance, conceptualizations of the link between communication capital and firm performance.

What was surprising was not the fixation on the outcome level, which was expected due to previous investigations that had reported the preoccupation with the measurement of outcomes (Jelen, 2008, p. 41), but rather the concentration on only one effect level. Only 30 percent of the reviewed articles attempted to link multiple levels of communication effects (the columns colored black in figure 2). Most of those articles (n=43, 13%) established a link between the output and the outcome and/or outflow level, hence studying, for instance, how a crisis response influences awareness and whether this results in less credibility or even leads to decreases in sales; many of these articles belonged to the topical cluster of effectiveness. Ranking next, nine percent of the articles (n=29) linked communication outcomes, such as reputation or brand value, to financial data on the outflow level, which was most common for articles contributed to the CRR.

From a historical point of view, there has been a noticeable shift in the public relations research focus over time from the output level investigating the effectiveness of a specific message or campaign to studies investigating how communication activities lead to beneficial outcomes, such as favorable relationships and a positive reputation, and how these outcomes can be linked to the overall firm value. As anticipated, during the first two decades of evaluation research (1975–
1995), scholars typically used simple output measures to draw conclusions about the effects of a PR message, without necessarily linking PR effectiveness to overall organizational effectiveness. However, there were indeed some first notions of the outflow level, for instance Lerbinge’s (1975) contribution on goodwill. From the mid-1990s onwards, despite the remaining fixation on output research, scholars increasingly began to analyze the impact of communication on the organization and link multiple effect levels. The beginning of the twentieth century marked the boom of research at the outcome level and the shifting focus on linking communication outcomes and outflow metrics. Despite an increasing holistic view on different communication effect levels, scholars have thus far largely ignored the input level, including such functions of communication as monitoring, preventing crises, listening, or coaching.

Paradigmatic and disciplinary perspectives on evaluation and measurement research

The vast majority of the sampled articles were identified as representing a functionalistic paradigm (78%), thus originating from managerial, instrumental, and/or strategic thinking. From this perspective, scholars have discussed communication as a means or instrument to achieve organizational or managerial goals, with evaluation and measurement research contributing to the process of demonstrating goal achievement, typically seen in increased effectiveness and economic growth. This result was expected since previous studies and discussions on PR scholarship have problematized the prevalence of the functional path within the field (e.g., Botan & Taylor, 2004; Jelen, 2008). Another 17 percent of the articles were classified as representing the relational paradigm, which, according to Botan and Taylor (2004, p. 648) and Sisco et al. (2011, p. 149), has evolved as the dominant paradigm within relationship research. The scholars following this perspective understood PR as a tool to build favorable relationships and thereby assist organizational goal achievement, resulting in reduced costs and increased revenues.

In sharp contrast, the non-functional paradigms identified in the 324-article data set altogether comprised only five percent (n=16) of the articles. Overall, the scholarly contributions representing non-functionalist paradigms derived ideas from socio-cultural and socio-constructionist thinking, reflective thinking, the rhetoric paradigm, and lastly the critical paradigm. Completely absent were feminist thoughts or postmodern ideas. The great majority of the non-functional works employed a normative or interpretative approach and broadened the view of how communication adds value beyond the organizational level to embrace the societal level, attempting to develop alternative explanations for value creation. Most of the works were conceptual or theory-driven pieces. Temporally regarded, the data indicated that there was an increasing paradigmatic diversity – albeit ever so small – starting with the turn of the century and growing slowly in recent years. Interestingly, the majority of contributions were not authored by American scholars, revealing that new paradigmatic perspectives were particularly contributed by researchers domiciled in Australia, New Zealand, and Europe.

In terms of the disciplinary diversity, half of the articles (n=159, 49%) chose an interdisciplinary approach to analyze the question at stake. Only one-third of the authors explored a specific topic exclusively from the perspective of the PR discipline (n=104, 32%), followed by fewer contributions solely arguing from the viewpoint of the management discipline (n=40, 12%), of which the majority was issued in the CRR and JBE. Very few articles were classified as adopting a pure marketing perspective (n=13, 4%), frequently published in the CCIIJ and JCM, or stemming from the organization science discipline (n=9, 3%), mostly found in the MCQ and JBC.

Overall, the results supported the expected strong impact of business thinking on evaluation and measurement research, which was in line with the prevalence of the functionalist paradigm.
reported above. While relationship and effectiveness research turned out to have originated predominantly in the PR discipline, with strong accounts of research from the social sciences, reputation and value creation research were largely driven by interdisciplinary approaches combining PR thinking with the management disciplines or pure management literature.

![Diagram showing disciplinary perspectives during 40 years of measurement research, n=324](image)

The historical analysis of the scientific disciplines involved in the debate revealed an overall trend towards more interdisciplinary research efforts, reflecting the previous analysis of theoretical trends. Figure 3 provides evidence for the notion that the mid-1990s marked the starting point of management thinking’s increasing influence on the debate. While management thinking prevailed around the turn of the century (roughly 60%), within the past ten years under review, the proportions of social science thinking and business thinking were equally balanced. This finding could be interpreted as coinciding with the recent launch of new journals dedicated to PR research from an interdisciplinary social science perspective, such as PRism and the IJSC.

**Synthesis: A new perspective on the academic discussion**

The present review demonstrated substantial progress in the field of evaluation and measurement research over the course of 40 years. Particularly during recent years, the findings suggested growing topical diversity and the emergence of new theoretical and methodological approaches. Overall, the analysis revealed interesting patterns of scholarly research into evaluation and measurement, which were collated and synthesized, resulting in seven major observations.

1. **From self-referential PR evaluation to modern evaluation research**

   The analysis of topical trends and effect levels studied over the course of time suggested a transition from traditional evaluation research towards a more comprehensive modern understanding. The first twenty years of scholarship could be termed as the era of traditional PR evaluation research, characterized by internal cohesion of the PR discipline, a considerable
influence of practitioners on the debate, applied methods research, and the focus on professional topics. In the mid-1990s, a noticeable shift occurred towards outcome-focused research considering how communication activities lead to beneficial effects on stakeholder attitudes. The transition towards a more comprehensive understanding of evaluation and measurement coincided with the entry of management knowledge and organization research into the domain of traditional PR scholarship and the subsequent launch of new journals (CRR, CCIJ). The findings indicated a widening of classical PR scholarship to include interdisciplinary thinking and embrace all the communications of an organization, along with a noticeable fragmentation between different research strands. A characteristic of the modern understanding of evaluation and measurement is a more holistic approach to the study of diverse effect levels and the conceptualization of communication effectiveness as the value contribution to the overall organizational success.

(2) The isolated focus on a single outcome and its equation with overall value

Apart from the aforementioned fixation on the outcome level, further analysis revealed that most scholars adopted a one-dimensional focus on a unique outcome. From an isolated perspective, scholars for instance tended to prioritize a beneficial relationship over other communication outcomes. Conversely, the results implied that scholars have scarcely studied holistically the aggregate of communication outcomes, ranging from relationships to reputation, brand, image, identity, culture, commitment, engagement, and so forth. Instead, the study found the major research strands to be largely unconnected; contradicting views were identified regarding whether the major value contribution of communication was seen as a positive reputation, quality relationship, or high brand equity, for example. Many scholars either implicitly or explicitly equated communication outcomes with the overall value created through communication, resulting in a too simplified perspective on the value creation process.

(3) Towards a more holistic view: Communication creates capital

In recent years, a growing – yet small – number of scholars have started to explore how communication adds value to the organization from a more holistic perspective: how communication creates social capital or intangible capital, respectively. Curiously, research at the interface of communication and capital creation was contributed rarely by PR scholars, but rather by scholars socialized outside the PR discipline, who referred to a range of alternative theories. The research on capital creation contained discussions of social capital, borrowing from sociological and political thinking, and intangible capital, originating from business frameworks. Across the included evidence, discussions of social capital were united by a focus on the societal dimension of communication, explaining how communication contributes to the building of social capital, understood as the social relations between an organization and societal groups. In contrast, discussions on intangible capital adopted a more integrative and less normative approach, acknowledging different forms of capital, such as human, structural, or intellectual capital. Overall, the review of the 324-article data set suggested that theory development towards a more holistic view on immaterial values appeared to be well underway. However, the answers to the questions of how communication contributes to the creation of intangible values and how the created intangibles can be measured were still inadequate. While the emerging body of work on social capital and intangible capital has brought new insights to measurement and evaluation, research still lacks comprehensive conceptualizations of how communication adds value to organizations and society and valid methodological efforts to measure value creation.
(4) The underestimated value contributions of communication

Evaluation and measurement research has remained widely silent on the important aspect of indirect value-adding processes at the input level. These include, amongst others, monitoring and listening to stakeholders, identifying strategic trends and innovation capabilities, and building the communicative competences of employees, with the ultimate goals of ensuring legitimacy and risk prevention. Although scholars have occasionally acknowledged the defensive function of a favorable reputation or quality relationships as a "buffering shield" to avoid potential risks (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2006; Decker, 2012), the value lying in this preventive function of communication has not yet been explored in detail. A common finding across articles was a tendency to focus on the "messaging/building function" and ignore the "listening/monitoring function" of communication, which serves as the prerequisite for the abovementioned preventive function of communication. Recently, Macnamara (2014b) elaborated on the concept of organizational listening, regretting that the listening function has received little research attention and has mainly been understood in instrumental ways to guide strategic planning. Overall, the findings indicated that much research has thus far considered building intangible values as the ultimate goal of communication. Thereby, scholars have predominantly focused on how communication contributes to organizational revenue generation while failing to acknowledge the potential of cost reduction resulting from a communicative defense against public complaints or activist pressure, for example (Huang, 2012). Across the sampled articles, the lack of a theoretical model for measuring these hidden cost savings was apparent (Huang, 2012).

(5) The growing intra- and interdisciplinary fragmentation of scholarship

The previous observations indicated that the major discussion strands within evaluation and measurement research have remained largely unconnected. Generally, different research approaches were observed between scholars socialized within the PR domain and scholars adopting business-related frameworks. The journal-specific analysis found considerable topical and methodological differences among the journals from the traditional PR discipline (PRR, JPRR, JCM, IJSC, PRI, APPRJ, PRism, and CCIJ), journals with a stronger business focus (CRR and JBE) and journals with a stronger communication focus (JBC and MCQ). The review supported the notion that the field of evaluation and measurement research was breaking up into subfields, with the subfields producing their own journals (specifically CRR) with quite distinguishable research interests and a rather closed set of authors, as also reported by Duehring (2015, p. 12). Interestingly, the fragmentation of evaluation and measurement scholarship was also observed in terms of the geographic distribution of authors, that is, scientific communities. Until the 1990s, contributions authored by North American scholars were the sole sources of academic work and the first contributions from outside the United States were authored by Canadian, Australian, and British scholars. The findings suggested considerable convergence across the Anglo-American scientific communities, which led previous inquiries to speculate about a Western ethnocentric, managerial, and rationalist bias (Jelen, 2008). They further implied a strong influence of Anglo-American thinking on the emerging body of works from Asian authors, along with a tendency of Asian scholars to be domiciled at US universities and a rise of joint American-Asian authorship.

(6) The largely unnoticed connections between research strands

In spite of the observed disconnectedness of the research strands and the contradictory relevance ascribed to particular communication outcomes, the literature considered in this study, either explicitly or implicitly, converged on one aspect: a relational perspective. While explicit
investigations into the relational aspects of communication prevailed within scholarly research from the PR discipline, multiple evidence strands suggested that scholars from the business and marketing disciplines, as well as scholars referring back to sociological concepts or organization research, also sought to understand relationship value in the organizational context. Hence, to counteract the observed fragmentation and disconnectedness between academic subfields, a fruitful avenue might be to start joint research efforts from the nexus of a relational perspective.

(7) Towards a holistic theory and measurement of value-creating communication

To date, evaluation and measurement research lacks a comprehensive explanation of how communication contributes value in the organization context, which offers the potential to integrate the variety of seminal ideas and concepts developed throughout the long-standing debate among scholars from multiple disciplinary backgrounds. What became apparent from the included evidence is that exploring communication value requires an interdisciplinary, multidimensional, and multi-indexed approach: communication value should be conceptualized holistically as incorporating not only direct value contributions to revenue generation through building intangible capital and enabling operations but also indirect value contributions to cost reduction through preventing risks, joint problem solving, or anticipating future innovation potentials.

The review unfolded plentiful promising approaches to explain the value of communication, which have thus far received only limited attention from other scholars or disciplines. To name just a few, endeavors concerning co-creation theory, network theory, or social capital concepts are advocated, along with the theoretical enhancement of relationship and reputation theory. Interdisciplinary efforts are urgently needed to link the theoretical frameworks from the business discipline to be compatible with economic reasoning, the sociological perspectives modeling the social embedding of organizations, and the communication theories modeling communication processes.

Research agenda: A road map for future inquiries

Moving into the fifth decade of evaluation and measurement research, numerous challenges remain to be addressed by scholars attempting to develop a better understanding of and produce new knowledge on the topic. Above all, there remains an urgent need for more developed theory and better conceptualizations of abstract constructs, more sophisticated operationalization, based on valid indicators, and more methodological variance and rigorousness.

In terms of theory development, among the most pressing challenges that researchers currently face is the development of a conclusive, holistic theory of value creation through communication. Alternative theories, such as feminist theory, critical theory, cultural theory, ethical theory, or postmodern perspectives, might offer useful perspectives to evaluation and measurement research and contribute to developing a holistic explanation of value creation that is capable of modeling the role of organizational communication in society. Furthermore, a great deal of attention needs to be devoted to proposing new theories or concepts for explicating the currently under-researched indirect and hidden value-adding contributions of communication. Finally, the existing communication effect models need to be refined to depict the entire value creation process from communication effects to organizational value creation at the outflow level.

With regard to operationalization, scholarly endeavors developing more sophisticated measurement approaches to demonstrate the overall value of communication are urgently needed. The major challenge here is to separate causes from effects and consider adequately the influence of a range of mediating factors on communication processes and overarching organizational outcomes.
To measure communication value holistically, valid and reliable indexes are required that incorporate financial and non-financial, quantitative and qualitative, and process and results measures (Fleisher & Mahaffy, 1997). Future research would benefit from employing more sophisticated measurement systems, drawing on factor analysis, structural equation modeling, regression techniques, time-series analysis, or path analysis.

To counteract the observed predominance of quantitative methods and above all quite simplistic survey designs, future inquiries are advocated to employ more multi-method designs, drawing on multiple sources of sampling data, and more dynamic and process-oriented methodologies. A greater focus on in-depth qualitative research as well as exploratory research is a desirable future direction, along with the use of more rigorous and robust research methodologies, such as experimental designs. Network analysis offers a promising additional tool for measuring relationships, which might enhance the current understanding of how relationship networks are formed and how value is co-created in networks.

**Discussion: Placing the findings in a broader academic context**

The present review of evaluation and measurement research yielded a surprising accordance with the findings of the previous inquiries into the state of the art of PR scholarship through journal analysis. The comparisons made throughout the analysis supported the previous results concerning, for instance, the Anglo-American-centered authorship (Jelen, 2008), the paucity of theory-driven contributions (Meadows & Meadows, 2014; Sallot et al., 2003; Sisco et al., 2011), the prevalence of quantitative methodologies (Ye & Ki, 2012), or the dominance of excellence theory and functional-managerial thinking (Jelen, 2008; Macnamara, 2012).

In contrast, when comparing the review’s results with the first broad conception of evaluation and measurement research as laid out in the conceptual framework, a gap between the analyzed journal discourse and the larger discussion carried out beyond academic journals became apparent. Regarding theory development, the review provided supporting evidence for the previous notion that no distinctive or widely agreed theoretical framework existed within the field. The excellence theory was indeed found to have enduring relevance, however exceptionally for scholarship from the PR discipline. Although the results demonstrated that scholarly research applied rigorous social science methods and occasionally cited new valuation methods, they confirmed the current insufficiency of methods that depict the link between communication effects and organizational success. Further accordance between the conceptual framework and the journal discussion related to the dominance of the functionalist paradigm and a marginal portion of non-functionalist approaches to evaluation and measurement research. In addition, the aforementioned considerable influence of management research on the debate was confirmed by the present review and interpreted in view of the observed fragmentation of the field.

In spite of these convergences, considerable differences between the discussion in academic journals and the broader evaluation and measurement debate were detected in terms of topical diversity. While the conceptual framework yielded the impression that the debate was mostly centered on evaluation practice, the search for practicable measurement methods, feasible effect models, and simple metrics, the review suggested that the relevance of professional topics diminished over the course of time and that scholars instead engaged in discussions on communication outcomes and overall communication value. Against this background, the theory applications extended far beyond the excellence theory to encompass a variety of theoretical frameworks from the communication discipline, management and marketing research, organization science, and the social sciences. Curiously, the theoretical approach to “communication controlling”
proposed by German scholars – and praised as an encouraging effort by Likely and Watson (2013, p. 157) – received mainly unremarkable mentions across the included evidence. Contrary to the initial assumptions, the scorecard approaches to depicting the value-adding contribution of communication have not been given significant attention in the journal discussion. Likewise, reporting methods and intangible asset valuation approaches have only received a few mentions (de Beer, 2014).

Limitations

In view of the differences between the first broad overview of the debate and the analyzed journal discussion, the observed gaps most likely arose both from the restricted scope and potential bias of the conceptual framework and from the inherent limitations produced by the choice of journals. On the one hand, the publications consulted to map the debate were largely authored by scholars or practitioners socialized in the PR discipline, who predominantly approached the debate through a PR lens only. Additionally, the literature was marked by a strong focus on the historical development and current state of evaluation practice, with scarce consideration of academic research. On the other hand, the choice and selection of journals to serve as a sampling base posed an inherent limitation to the present review.

While the review was comprehensive in its time frame, volume, and thematic coverage, it did not provide a complete, historically representative picture of the field. By limiting the sample to peer-reviewed scholarly works published in the 12 selected journals, the full range of perspectives on measurement and evaluation as published in other publication venues (e.g., textbooks), other languages, and other disciplines, the study was limited as a matter of course. Perhaps most critically, the findings derived from the 324-article data set were to a certain extent determined by inherent journal biases: as previous scholars have reported, journals have been subject to bias, such as popular paradigms and methodology, resulting in the successive publication of mainstream research and the non-disclosure of research exploring new or contradictory theoretical and methodological terrain (Kim et al., 2014, p. 312; Walker, 2010, p. 378).

Regarding the sampling process, another limitation emerged from the identified search terms: despite a systematic search strategy employing five carefully chosen search terms, publications using different terminology (e.g., synonyms for value such as asset, goodwill, benefit, etc.) may not have been included. Although the sampling process was based on a rigorous and careful analysis of article titles and abstracts in each journal, basic prudence demands recognition of and apology for the possible omission of papers that were mistakenly overlooked.

To counteract the inherent limitations emerging from the journal analysis, future research should extend the review focus beyond journals and beyond English-speaking publications to include other sources relevant to the evaluation and measurement debate. Scholars are invited to follow the review procedure undertaken and use the same data extraction form so that the findings remain comparable. Future research could consider conducting meta-analyses of existing quantitative studies (e.g., reputation research, crisis communication research). Moreover, citation and network analysis of the authors contributing to the research would provide an interesting picture of the geographical distribution and connectedness of scientific networks and their publishing productivity.

Interpretation

The large topical differences between the journals can most likely be explained by the differences in editorial preferences, which are already apparent when considering the titles of the journals under review. The emphasis on applied method research and inquiries into evaluation
practice could represent a bias for professional topics by editors, as previous scholars have already speculated (Morton & Lin, 1995, p. 348), or reflect the influence of the PR industry on the academic research agenda. The trend towards greater empiricism and quantification could be attributed to the preferences of journal editors who have greater respect for quantitative than for interpretative approaches (Jelen, 2008, p. 42). However, this trend could similarly reflect the methodological impact that positivist management science has had on the field (Kim et al., 2014, p. 310). However, whether the observed paradigmatic or methodological preferences of the journals were intended or not remains a question for future research to pose to editors and reviewers.

In fact, remaining largely under-researched until now are the diverse factors influencing the research agenda of academia, including the gatekeeping function of journals and specific publication procedures. Future research hence might focus on a multitude of questions concerning self-reflective, cross-border science research of PR scholarship, for example, the influences that editorial staff and peer reviewers exert on the topical agenda of research. Another question worth exploring is whether the current journal-publishing processes preclude scholars from non-English-speaking countries from publishing their work in international journals. In-depth interviews with editors and peer reviewers appear to be a promising methodological approach.

**Conclusion: Looking back and looking forward**

The evaluation and measurement of communication in the organization context have proven to be a perennial topic for scholars since the early beginnings of academic research into communication effects. Forty years of debate presented an ideal opportunity to look back to determine what scholars have explored in the past and to look forward to determine the possible directions of future inquiries. The systematic review reported in this paper provides the first exhaustive review of research in the evaluation and measurement domain published within PR and communication journals over a period of forty years. While acknowledging the limitations of the present study, the findings concerning the current state of the art within evaluation and measurement research are nevertheless significant. The analysis provides evidence that measuring communication effects is no longer “as elusive as finding the Holy Grail,” as John Pavlik suggested in 1987 (p. 65). However, numerous measurement challenges remain to be addressed by academia. Hereupon, the suggested research agenda offers solid guidance for future scholarly inquiries into how to move forwards, hence contributing to the advancement of knowledge within the field.

It will certainly take more interdisciplinary and integrative academic endeavors for scholars to be able to demonstrate and measure adequately how the entirety of communication effects is linked to the overall organizational success. An increased exchange of knowledge between academia and industry appears to be vital to the continuing progress of evaluation and measurement research and practice (Watson, 2006). Industry bodies and education facilities could take a lead role in this area and foster a wider distribution of knowledge, thereby fortifying the professionalization of evaluation and measurement practice (Xavier, Mehta, & Gregory, 2006). Hopefully, scholars from different disciplinary and geographic backgrounds will build on the existing knowledge and jointly shape the future evaluation and measurement debate.
References


Does the Social Media Engagement Era Render the Two-Way Symmetrical Communication Model as More Relevant than Ever?

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Abstract

The two-way symmetrical model of communication developed by James Grunig in 1984 stood virtually unchallenged in public relations literature until the early 1990s, when other scholars started to argue that the model was unrealistic—that large organizations, particularly, would never abdicate their power to their various stakeholders. From that time until the early 2000s, the symmetrical model received more and more criticism until it eventually dropped in favor and largely fell out of public relations conversation, replaced increasingly by terms such as dialogue and engagement. It is almost as if the advent of the social media era enticed scholars and practitioners alike to move on and cast aside the symmetrical model as “old-school” and irrelevant.

The authors of this paper argue that, ironically, at the same time the symmetrical model has lost appeal, there now is more need for the model than there ever was, perhaps even more than when the model was conceived. Social media have given much more influence to publics, who now demand more transparency and more engagement from the large organizations that serve them, provide products for them, or otherwise affect them. A review of the public relations literature directly links the concepts, if not the actual terms, of transparency and engagement back to the very philosophies underlying the two-symmetrical model. Today’s demands for this two-way, rough-and-tumble interchange between organizations and their publics should give us reason to, at least, reassess the two-way symmetrical model within the modern communication environment, rather than to simply keep it cast aside as no longer necessary.

The purpose of this paper, then, is to reexamine the model of two-way symmetrical communication as it relates to social media dynamics between organizations and publics. The study examines some literature surrounding the topic and then includes a survey of more than 300 public relations practitioners, part of a broader survey conducted in 2015. This survey helps give more observation and insight into the current state of the model of symmetrical communication.
Introduction

Public relations practitioners and scholars often talk a good story about relationships — but do we really live it? The very term *public relations* connotes the need for relationships and relationship building. A relationship, by definition, must be a two-way exchange between two or more individuals, or it does not—it cannot—exist. For organizations that comprise a broader society and have obligations to that society (and this is virtually all entities), satisfactory relationships enable them to function and flourish in an atmosphere of trust and support. Therefore, relationships *should* be something we continue to talk about in the public relations industry.

Over the years, the term *public relations* has been misused and mostly fallen out of favor, replaced by terms like *communication*, *strategic communication*, and others that seem more acceptable, even within the industry. But the nature of *communication* also mandates two-way interaction, despite the fact that in the past century mass media and other large institutions coopted that requisite by suggesting one-way messaging is sufficient. With more than a century of media bombardment, society appears to have bought into the concept: send us mediated messages and we will respond how you want us to; that’s communication!

Of course, public relations literature is full of references to relationship building that must be two-way. At least as early as the mid-20th century, Cutlip and Center (1952) and subsequent authors over eight editions have defined the essence of public relations as relationship building that offers *mutual benefits*—or benefits on both sides of the equation—between organizations and their publics. Bruning and Ledingham (1999) and then Ledingham (2005) again promoted the importance of relationships between organizations and publics. Kruckeberg and his colleagues argued the need for relationship building between various organizations to strengthen their community—certainly a process that necessitates mutual, two-way interaction (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988; Stark & Kruckeberg, 2001; Valentini, Kruckeberg, & Starck, 2012).

The reality, however, is that public relations has evolved mostly as a mass communication function focusing on one-way messaging. This emphasis on messaging, on content meant to inform or persuade but not really to exchange ideas and meaning, has dominated the field for a few decades (Falconi, 2006; Hutton, 2001). As Macnamara (2006) stated, “Public relations has taken a fork in the road that has led to craft; to technicianship” (p. 8). This technician focus revolves mostly around producing content, sending out information, and organizing creative products that, for public relations firms, particularly, produce quick revenue.

It would seem that the era of social media would have offered myriad opportunities for public relations to finally embrace two-way communication. Like relationship building and communication, the term *engagement* presupposes real two-way interaction (Yang & Coffey, 2014). Even though digital platforms are still mediated, they harbor vessels for sharing and for rapid response that enables relationship building. And yet, as Macnamara (2006) explained, “A large part of the PR industry has not yet engaged in any substantial way with … concepts such as Web 2.0. Of those that have, the primary focus is how to produce Web sites, produce blogs, produce podcasts. Yet … more focus on process ” (p. 7). Of course, that was ten years ago; now public relations people would argue that *engagement* has become the calling card for social media—and certainly engagement has to be two-way and definitely it builds relationships.

The question with this latest buzzword is whether it really is occurring as public relations people claim? We can talk about engagement on social media, and even pretend it is evidenced through x-number of likes, shares, or comments; but is that really engagement? It can be argued that true engagement fails until, at minimum, a follower *comments* on a post and the organization
responds, thus enacting a circle of dialogue that leads to some positive result. Even if a post elicits conversation and sharing among followers but the organization itself refuses to rejoin the conversation, how can it be construed as two-way communication between the organization and its publics? Finally, does this superficial level of engagement between followers and not the entity really lead to lasting relationships?

So, if relationships truly are supposed to be the lifeblood of public relations, then perhaps it is time to dust off one of the most significant relationship models in public relations scholarship. More than three decades ago, James Grunig proposed four models of public relations that culminated with two-way symmetrical communication. The model presupposes that organizations and publics in the same environment will interact together through mutual respect to ultimately generate the most effective, most ethical outcome. To get there, the theory goes, it is equally feasible that the entity will see the need to adjust toward what is appropriate as its publics. Such give-and-take should morph into some sort of relationship wherein both parties desire mutually beneficial outcomes—or at least livable compromise (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

The Grunig model of two-way symmetrical public relations stood virtually untested for almost a decade (J. Grunig, 1992; J. Grunig, 2006). It served as the basis for many studies by graduate students and others who applied it in various organizations and in many nations. However, as happens with most theories, the model began to face critique from other scholars, and over time the criticism swelled (Murphy, 1996; Holtzhausen, 2007; Holtzhausen, Petersen, & Tindall, 2003; Stoker, 2014).

By the beginning of the 21st century, the symmetrical model served as little more than an afterthought in most research projects. It was replaced by terms like dialogue, interaction and engagement in scholarship at the same time one-way messaging marched along as the predominant force in the field. Ironically, with social media, even terms like content marketing have popped into the vernacular of public relations—an industry that for decades attempted to distinguish itself from marketing but which today seems to embrace its role in the so-called marketing mix. So, in this world of social media, what has happened to relationship building? Perhaps more importantly, what has happened to symmetry?

This paper argues that the need for public relations people to see themselves as relationship builders is still strong, and that such relationships are no longer controlled or manipulated by organizations. Social media have so radically changed the balance of power that organizations must now foster relationships of credibility and trust among those very publics they used to dominate. Therefore, social media could have rendered the model of two-way symmetrical public relations as more relevant than it ever has been, and perhaps even more than when it was created. To test this proposition, we pulled data from a broader study on strategic communication to look at how practitioners see their roles related to Grunig’s models.

**Literature Review**

It is difficult to argue that for more than a decade, the four models of public relations (J. Grunig and Hunt, 1984) stood as one of the most oft-cited public relations theories in the world. The models—press agentry, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical—were proposed as an evolution from one-way, largely hyperbolic promotions of the early 1900s to the simple, more-or-less fact-based information programs of mid-century and then into the more sophisticated research-founded communications of the late 20th century. The two-way communication modes were distinguished as asymmetrical, or those generally intended to manipulate publics into doing what an organization wanted them to do, and symmetrical, which
asserted that organizations and their publics operate in a co-equal, respectful context, continually communicating to carve out mutually beneficial relationships or, at the least, some type of compromise on issues of mutual concern (J. Grunig, 2006).

The model of symmetry stood virtually unchallenged for seven years. Then, Murphy (1991) argued that the model was not realistic, that large governments or transnational corporations had no reason to abdicate their power over publics to engage in give-and-take dialogue. Murphy stated that a *mixed-motive* model would be a more appropriate worldview for forging relationships because both organizations and publics come to an interaction with their own vested interests and they are not likely to give up those interests. Grunig (1992) countered that the model was normative, or couched as *what ought to be*, and so it still was important for public relations practitioners to emulate in their interactions with stakeholders.

Still, that first dispute by Murphy (1991) festered into an undercurrent of critique that has remained through the early stages of the Internet and into today’s social mediated world. Holtzhausen (2007), for example, proposed that symmetry collapses when activists confront organizations with no desire for compromise, much less relationships. Stoker (2014) argued it is not *advisable to manage* relationships — that trying to do so constitutes attempts to manipulate publics. Such an argument seems strange in this case, given that a thorough reading of Grunig’s works shows that the symmetrical model was clearly intended to counter this very organizational manipulation that Stoker criticized.

The emergence of social media has opened up entirely new avenues of influence for active individuals, groups, and even the formerly disenfranchised. As a result, the traditional bases of power have changed. These elements of society are using their new platforms to fight against powerful entities they see as harmful. A growing number of instructive cases—Internet opposition to Nestle over the extraction of palm oil for their *KitKat* bars; a Reddit-led global voting scheme during Greenpeace’s initiative to personalize a whale icon to help stop illegal whaling; and the recent Volkswagen scandal and Target boycott, to name a few—indicate the increased power of publics to match governments and corporations. Social media also have forced powerful organizations to be more transparent. And, of course, this is not just about opposition. Through social media platforms, incomprehensible amounts of conversation are occurring every day, on all manner of topics, including those that affect large organizations but are no longer initiated by them. Effective organizational communicators have come to realize the need to join these discussions.

Communicators have adopted the term *engagement* to describe their interactions with publics online (Yang & Coffey, 2014). Conversation between organizations and the various forces in their environment has become more or less mandatory, and the more relationships can be cultivated the better it is for long-term organizational success. In the Arthur Page study on *The Authentic Enterprise*, CEOs of major corporations recognized the recent shift in power from organizations to stakeholders and the importance of engagement with these publics. Many of these CEOs claim that their communicators are continually engaged in the social media sphere (Arthur Page Society, 2007).

Like relationship building and communication, the term *engagement* is defined to embrace real two-way interaction (Yang & Coffey, 2014). In war, an enemy is not engaged until it is physically encountered and starts shooting back; similarly, friends are not truly engaged with each other without genuine interaction and some mutual commitment to keep the friendship going. In the realm of stakeholder cultivation, “engagement includes communicating with, involving and developing relationships with stakeholders” (Missonier & Loufrani-Fedida, 2014,
p. 1108). It should naturally follow, then, that in social media communication, engagement is some type of genuine interaction that helps to develop relationships between organizations and their stakeholders.

Unfortunately, too many studies indicate this two-way interaction is not happening. Three articles in the most recent issue of the Public Relations Journal revealed this problem. Articles by Place, Smith, and Lee (2016) and by Lewis and Nichols (2016) echoed the common claim that social media are excellent tools for engaging publics in two-way communication. However, Place, Smith and Lee also noted that much of the conversation is going on around the organizations and that the organizations themselves are posting mostly one-way, informational messages. Agozzino and Fleck (2016) also studied the ten leading non-profit entities and found that, while they do use Facebook and other platforms to disseminate information and to entice followers to participate in certain events or to donate funds, the organizations foster minimal actual engagement through their efforts.

If there is a gap, then, between the online engagement and relationship building that is reported and the actual reality of online engagement, how is this gap to be bridged? How can the public relations field move beyond mere words to real action? Perhaps the answer lies in bringing back the past to examine present shortcomings. A natural theory to bring back for reexamination as to its status in the present would be the model of two-way symmetrical communication.

For this paper, the authors did just that—in light of these changes in societal communication and public relations practice, we regurgitated the two-way symmetrical model for reexamination. Our study carved out data from a survey of 307 members of the Public Relations Society of America, conducted this past year by Christopher Wilson and other researchers. Responses to specific questions in the survey that we believed had some correlation with the topic in this article were examined according to our three research questions:

RQ1 - To what extent do public relations practitioners perceive that their organization or client is effectively using social media?
RQ2 – To what extent do public relations practitioners perceive that their organization or client uses two-way symmetrical practices on social media?
RQ3 - To what extent are public relations practitioners' perceptions of social media effectiveness related to their perceptions of the use of two-way symmetrical practices on social media?

Method

As explained in the introduction and at the end of the previous section, the data for this study were pulled from a broader cross-sectional survey of Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) members. The researchers worked with the PRSA National Research Committee to secure approval for the questionnaire and to produce a random sample of 5,642 members’ email addresses. Potential respondents were offered an incentive to participate in the survey. Those who participated in the survey could choose to enter their names and email addresses in a random drawing for one of three $100 Amazon Gift Cards after completing the questionnaire.

The questionnaire from which the data were pulled for this study included measures of public relations practitioners’ perceptions of the effectiveness of their organization’s or client’s use of social media as well as their perceptions of the organization’s or client’s two-way symmetrical practices on social media. It also included questions to gather demographic information about the participants.
Because sample included a random selection of PRSA members, the questionnaire included a screening question to determine the percentage of time the respondent spent with social media as part of his or her job. This question was adopted from the social media trend analysis studies by Wright and Hinson (2015). The responses of those who selected the “none” category ($n = 5$) were excluded from the analysis. Additional, demographic questions captured information about the respondents’ gender, age, and race/ethnicity. These questions also asked about the type of organization that employed the respondent, current job responsibilities, and years of professional public relations or communications experience.

Respondents’ perceptions of the effectiveness of their organization’s or client’s use of social media were measured using Werder and Holtzhausen’s (2009) four-item perceived strategy effectiveness scale. This scale was developed to assess the perceived effect of public relations strategies in accomplishing organizational and target public goals. This measure was adopted because it reflected the two-way focus of social media. Scale items were adapted to address social media strategy specifically. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with four statements about their organization's or client's social media success using a five-point Likert-type scale anchored by “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree.” Werder and Holtzhausen reported Cronbach’s alphas for this scale ranging from .90 to .96. Cronbach’s alpha for perceived social media strategy effectiveness in the current study was .87. See Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>$\alpha$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Generally, my organization’s use of social media results in a favorable outcome for my organization.</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Generally, my organization’s use of social media results in a favorable outcome for its target publics.</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My organization is typically successful in achieving its goals because of its use of social media.</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My organization is typically successful in achieving the goals of its target publics because of its use of social media.</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Five indicators were used to measure respondents’ perceptions of the organization’s or client’s use of two-way symmetrical practices on social media using five-point Likert-type scales anchored by “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree.” The authors developed the indicators from previous research on the two-way symmetrical model of public relations (J. Grunig, 1992; J. Grunig, 2006), organization public relationships (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999; Ledingham, 2005), community building (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988; Stark & Kruckeberg, 2001; Valentini, Kruckeberg, & Starck, 2012) and social media engagement (Lewis & Nichols, 2016; Place, Smith, & Lee, 2016). See Table 2.
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My organization is actively engaged in conversations with its publics on social media.</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My organization uses social media to build long-term relationships with its publics.</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My organization builds a sense of belonging, or community, among its key publics on social media.</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My organization enables its key publics to participate in the creation of content on social media channels.</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My organization uses social media to monitor its internal and external environments for opportunities and threats that may influence its current and future plans.</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

The survey produced a total of 301 usable questionnaires. This represents a response rate of 5.3%. There were 74 (24.2%) male respondents and 223 (72.9%) female respondents. A large majority of the respondents were Caucasian (N = 258, or 84.3%). Regarding the type of organization for which the respondents’ worked, 67 (21.9%) were at a public relations agency, 49 (16%) were at a for-profit corporation, 91 (29.7%) were at a nonprofit organization, and 39 (12.7%) were at a government agency. In terms of the participants’ current job responsibilities, more than half focused on public relations (N = 186, or 60.8%). The average age (in years) of the respondents was 43.1 (SD = 13.2), and ages ranged from 27 to 71. The average number of direct reports was 17.27 (SD = 53.29). Finally, respondents’ average experience (in years) was 16.8 (SD = 11.6). In addition, over two-thirds of participants reported spending more than 11% of their work time on social media (N = 236, or 77.1%).

RQ1 - To what extent do public relations practitioners perceive that their organization or client is effectively using social media?

Descriptive statistics were used to examine the extent to which public relations professionals perceive that their organizations or clients are effectively using social media. As reported in Table 1, the data revealed that all four indicators were above the midpoint of the five-point scale. Specifically, the mean scores for two indicators were above a four on the five-point scale. These two indicators included favorable outcomes from using social media for the organization (M = 4.24, SD = .68) and for the organization’s publics (M = 4.08, SD = .76). The other two indicators were below a four on the five-point scale. These indicators were about achieving organizational goals (M = 3.59, SD = .84) and goals of the organization’s publics (M = 3.58, SD = .84) through social media. These results demonstrate that PRSA members perceive that social media is moderately effective at helping organizations and publics achieve favorable outcomes and achieve their goals. It is particularly interesting to note that PRSA members’ perceptions seem to indicate the existence of a symmetrical relationship between organizations and publics via social media as organization outcomes were rated similarly to outcomes for organizational publics.
RQ2 – To what extent do public relations practitioners perceive that their organization or client uses two-way symmetrical practices on social media?

Descriptive statistics were used to understand the extent to which public relations professionals perceive that their organizations or clients use two-way symmetrical practices on social media. As reported in Table 2, the data revealed that all five indicators were above the midpoint of the five-point scale, indicating moderately positive perceptions of the use of two-way symmetrical practices. However, the means scores were all below a four on the five-point scale signaling that perceptions of the actual use of two-way symmetrical practices are not ideal and there is room for improvement. The indicator with the highest mean score was “using social media to monitor internal and external environments that may influence an organization’s current and future plans” ($M = 3.92, SD = .97$). The indicator with the lowest mean score was “organization is actively engaged in conversations with its publics on social media” ($M = 3.70, SD = .98$).

RQ3 - To what extent are public relations practitioners perceptions of social media effectiveness related to their perceptions of the use of two-way symmetrical practices on social media?

Pearson correlations were used to examine the relationships among respondents’ perceptions of social media effectiveness and of two-way symmetrical practices. As reported in Table 3, the correlations among all of the social media effectiveness and two-way symmetrical practice indicators were significant and positive. The indicators for perceived social media effectiveness had strong correlations ranging from .52 to .83. It is interesting to note that perceptions that an organization’s use of social media results in a favorable outcome for its organization has a strong positive relationship with perceptions that an organization’s use of social media results in a favorable outcome for its publics ($r = .76, p < .01$). Moreover, perceptions that an organization is typically successful in achieving its goals because of its use of social media has a strong positive relationship with perceptions that an organization is typically successful in achieving the goals of its target publics because of its use of social media ($r = .86, p < .01$). These were the two strongest correlations in the study. Both findings indicate that practitioners see social media as a way for organizations and publics to mutually accomplish their goals and achieve favorable outcomes.

Not surprisingly, most of the indicators for perceived use of two-way symmetrical practices also were highly correlated ranging from .31 to .69. One indicator, the use of social media to monitor organizational environments, was the only indicator that consistently had a correlations below .50 with the other two-way symmetrical practice indicators.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Pearson Correlations of Practitioners’ Perceptions of Social Media Effectiveness and Use of Two-Way Symmetrical Practices on Social Media</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Items</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. My organization is actively engaged in conversations with its publics on social media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My organization uses social media to build long-term relationships with its publics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * represents a significant correlation at the .05 level.
3. My organization builds a sense of belonging, or community, among its key publics on social media.  
4. My organization enables its key publics to participate in the creation of content on its social media channels. 
5. My organization uses social media to monitor its internal and external environments for opportunities and threats that may influence its current and future plans. 
6. Generally, my organization's use of social media results in a favorable outcome for my organization. 
7. Generally, my organization's use of social media results in a favorable outcome for its target publics. 
8. My organization is typically successful in achieving its goals because of its use of social media. 
9. My organization is typically successful in achieving the goals of its target publics because of its use of social media. 

** Additional findings: 
As reported in Table 3, Pearson correlations between the main variables of interest demonstrate that PRSA members’ perceptions of their organization’s or client’s use of two-way symmetrical practices on social media are positively related to their perceptions of social media effectiveness. Generally, these findings illustrate that PR practitioners’ perceptions that their organization is actively engaged in conversations with its publics on social media had moderate positive correlations with practitioners’ perceptions of social media effectiveness for both organizations and publics. In other words, as practitioners increasingly perceive that the organization is engaging in conversations with publics on social media, their perceptions that social media results in a favorable outcome for the organization and its publics also increases. Additionally, as perceptions of organizational engagement in conversations go up, perceptions that an organization can meet its and its publics’ goals also go up.

As reported in Table 3, using social media to build long-term relationships and building a sense of belonging, or community also have moderate positive relationships with the social
media effectiveness items. As perceptions of building long-term relationships and building a sense of belonging increase so do perceptions that the organization and its publics meet their goals and have favorable results. In fact, the highest correlations between the variables of interest were observed between the items “My organization uses social media to build long-term relationships with its publics” and “My organization is typically successful in achieving its goals because of its use of social media” (r = .47, p < .01). The long-term relationship building item was also highly correlated with “My organization is typically successful in achieving the goals of its target publics because of its use of social media” (r = .47, p < .01). This relationship indicates that the more an organization is perceived to build long-term relationships with its key publics the greater will be perceptions that both the organization and its publics will achieve their goals. In general, the data seem to demonstrate that, two-way symmetrical practices on social media produce perceptions of beneficial outcomes for both the organization and its publics.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to test the proposition that the rise of social media has rendered the model of two-way symmetrical public relations more relevant than before. The results of the study support this proposition. Public relations practitioners’ perceptions indicate the existence of a symmetrical relationship between organizations and publics via social media as organization outcomes were rated similarly to outcomes for organizational publics. Additionally, public relations practitioners observed that their organization or client is doing fairly well at implementing two-way symmetrical practices on social media. Furthermore, the data reveal that two-way symmetrical practices on social media, such as long-term relationship building and engaging in conversations with publics, are moderately correlated with perceptions of social media effectiveness, include favorable outcomes and goal achievement of organizations and publics.

In summary, it was interesting that the highest correlations in the study matched these three residual findings about perceptions of the organization’s use of social media: (1) that it produces favorable results for both the organization and its publics, (2) that it helps both the organization and its publics achieve their goals, and (3) that perceptions of both of these mutually beneficial outcomes increase when an organization is focused on relationship building and dialog through social media. This sounds like win-win thinking to these authors.

If readers or observers of public relations trace well the history of Grunig’s (1982) model, it was the symmetrical part—not the two-way aspect of the model—that has faded in public relations literature. While terms like dialogue and interaction still generally equate to the need for two-way communication and relationship building, and while this need for interaction is accepted among scholars and practitioners alike, it is only actual practice in the industry that may not truly achieve the principles of two-way symmetry. And it is the concept of symmetry, of equal respect and mutual influence between organizations and publics to achieve outcomes that benefit more than just organizations, which often is still missing. The playing field has been leveled, whether or not communicators and executives like it. Yet, some organizations still seem afraid to relinquish their facades of control and truly engage with stakeholders to create the mutual benefits that public relations has long espoused. We believe it is time to reintroduce two-way symmetrical communications to achieve these goals.

J. Grunig (2006) recently argued that “although there is a great deal of naysaying in the public relations literature about the symmetrical idea, there is so much logical, empirical, and ethical support for it after 20 years of research and theoretical development that its value seems
axiomatic to me” (pp. 156-57). After several studies of the symmetrical model in Taiwan, Huang (2007) added, “… a symmetrical worldview not only exists, but … its influence can be applied to different cultures, is universal, and upholds moral and ethical expectations” (p. 252).
References


Placing Native Ads on Social Media: Examining the Relationship between Social Media Characteristics and Effectiveness of Native Ad

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Yan Huang
Penn State University

Abstract

Native ads, which are paid ads that are so cohesive with the page content or blend well with the newsfeed are ubiquitous on both news media and social media nowadays. A survey \((N = 320)\) was conducted to examine the relationship between social media characteristics and native ads effectiveness. Results revealed network features such as perceived intimacy, architecture features such as professionalism and anonymity positively predicted stakeholders’ attitude toward native ads, and trust and satisfaction toward the ad sponsor. Results also showed that network size is a positive predictor of trust toward ad sponsor.
Introduction

According to Interactive Advertising Bureau (2013), native ads are “paid ads that are so cohesive with the page content, assimilated into the design, and consistent with the platform behavior that the viewer simply feels that they belong”. In January 2013, Atlantic published a news story titled “David Miscavige leads scientology to milestone year”. Based on readers’ reactions in the comments, it seems that they did not realize that this was a native ad. In fact, one could differentiate between a regular news story and a native ad story by relying on a simple cue – on the bottom of the news story, one line says, “sponsored content presented by The Church of Scientology”.

Besides news websites, native ads can be spotted on various social media platforms. For example, Facebook inserts native ads directly into the news feed so that when people check their friends’ activities, they may see sponsored posts as well. When searching for products on Pinterest, one may encounter a range of pins with “buy” buttons. On Instagram, users can frequently find sponsored pictures in their news feeds. These ads blending with users’ social media contents could be considered as another form of native ad, in addition to the sponsored editorial content on the news websites.

Previous studies on native ads have primarily examined whether people could recognize native ads placed on the news websites (Carlson, 2015; Wojdynski & Evans, 2015), however, the effects of placing native ads on social media platforms have rarely been studied. It is widely accepted that ad effectiveness could be influenced by the context (De Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Anckaert, 2002; MacKenzie, & Lutz, 1989). Hence, it is reasonable to believe that the features of a social medium platform may also influence stakeholders’ perceptions of the native ads appear on that platform. Since different social media platforms exhibit different characteristics serving social media users from various demographic backgrounds, it would be of practical interest to explore the impact of the social media characteristics on stakeholders’ perceptions toward the native ads and the ad sponsors.

Literature Review

User experience of social media is determined by two sets of factors. One set pertains to the architecture features of the platform including publicness, anonymity and professionalism. Another set pertains to the social network on the platform established by users themselves. Such characteristics include network size, homophily and intimacy.

Architecture Features

Publicness. Publicness refers to the extent to which social media users’ profiles and activities can be viewed by anyone without any boundary (Baym & boyd, 2012). Compared with anonymous social media, Facebook has a higher level of publicness. The reason is that each post on Facebook is identifiable since Facebook adopts a real name registration process (Dwyer, Hiltz & Passerini, 2007). On the other hand, anonymous social media like Whisper has relatively lower level of publicness in that posts on Whisper are not identifiable and users are protected with mock IDs (Black, Mezzina & Thompson, 2016). A platform’s level of publicness could significantly influence users’ privacy concern such that they may be not willing to disclose personal information on a platform with high level of publicness (Bateman, Pike, & Butler, 2011). When it comes to online advertising, privacy concern often affects stakeholders’ attitude toward the ads because these ads may prime them to think that the data they generated on the site are used for commercial purposes (Ying, Korneliussen, & Grønhaug, 2009). As a result, native
ads placed on social media platforms with high level of publicness may lead stakeholders to have negative attitudes toward the native ad.

Anonymity. Anonymity is the degree to which information posted on the platform is not identifiable. Social media platforms with the anonymity characteristic include the popular anonymous social media applications such as Whisper and Yik Yak. Previous studies on social media anonymity have been focusing on the content of the anonymous posts (Black, Mezzina, & Thompson, 2016; Correa, Silva, Mondal Benevenuto & Gummadi, 2015). Previous study showed that increased level of visual anonymity did not necessarily trigger more personal information disclosure. In fact, increased level of visual anonymity may increase people’s privacy concerns because they are unsure about their audiences (Qian & Scott, 2007). Previous study also documented the negative association between privacy concern and advertising effectiveness – the higher people’s privacy concern, the lower the advertising effectiveness (Akpojivi & Bevan-Dye, 2015). Thus, native ads placed on anonymous social media may lead stakeholders to have negative attitudes toward the ad in that their level of privacy concern may arise.

Professionalism. Professionalism refers to the degree to which the information shared on the social media platforms are career oriented. Examples of professional social media include job-seeking platforms like LinkedIn or academic sharing community like Research Gate. Besides these professional services platforms, organization’s official social media accounts like their official Facebook page and Twitter page also exhibit the professionalism characteristic. Public Relations scholars have examined the impact of both the contents generated by the organization’s official social media account as well as the effects of user generated content on these accounts on corporate social responsibility and organization-public relationship (Haigh, Brubaker & Whiteside, 2012; Haigh & Wigley, 2015). Non-professional social media platforms such as Yik Yak and Whisper tend to present entertainment-oriented contents. In contrast, professional social media tend to present professional oriented information such as job advices and networking suggestions. For example, people use LinkedIn to seek job opportunities or to network with professionals. If a person is seeking user experience research related jobs on LinkedIn and s/he constantly sees native ads promoting user experience research positions, s/he may have a positive attitude toward the ad. On the other hand, if s/he constantly sees native ads featuring online degrees, s/he may have a negative attitude toward the ad.

Network Characteristics

Network Size. Network size has been conceptualized as the extent to which people are considered as popular or extroverted on social media (Utz, 2010). Individuals with a large number of connections on social media platforms are perceived as popular and having an extroverted personality (Utz, 2010). In this study, network size refers to the number of connections an individual has on his or her social network. Studies on computer-mediated communication frequently examined the impact of network size on people’s perceptions of individuals’ attractiveness, popularity, and political participation (Campbell & Kwak, 2011; Tong, Heide, Langwell & Walther, 2008; Utz, 2010). Few studies have examined the impact of network size on people’s perception of native ads. If an individual has a large network size, chances are s/he may have a lot of information presented on his/her newsfeed everyday. Thus, the individual is likely suffering social media fatigue, which refers to a user’s tendency to back away from social media participation when s/he becomes overwhelmed with information (Bright,
The appearance of native ads on a crowded newsfeed may increase one’s social media fatigue thereby increasing one’s negative attitude toward the native ad.

**Perceived Intimacy.** Perceived intimacy is an essential aspect of the social network tie in that it motivates people to seek warm, close, and validating experience. As a defining characteristic of close relationships, intimacy is regarded as a personal and subjective sense of connectedness resulted from an interpersonal, reciprocal process of self-disclosure between relational partners (Greene et al., 2006). In this study, perceived intimacy is defined as the degree to which users perceive s/he has a large number of close friends. Compared with LinkedIn, Facebook has a higher level of perceived intimacy in that connections on one’s Facebook page are usually friends and families (Stutzman & Kramer-Duffield, 2010). On LinkedIn, one could have more than 500 connections and such connection may not only be limited to colleagues and friends. Connection may include current and past colleagues, organization leaders, headhunters and so on (Staddon, 2009). Perceive intimacy on social media have often been examined in terms of self-disclosure behavior (Park, Jin & Annie Jin, 2011; Rau, Gao & Ding, 2008). In this study, we are interested in examining whether a social network’s intimacy level would influence one’s attitude toward the native ads. If native ads are placed on social media platforms with high intimacy, people may think the ad is too intrusive. Subsequently, they may generate negative attitudes toward the native ad and the ad sponsor.

**Homophily.** Homophily has been well studied in the field of sociology. According to McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001), people’s personal networks are homogenous regarding many socio-demographic, behavioral and intrapersonal characteristics. Homophily is the principle that a contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people (McPherson et al., 2001). In this study, homophily is defined as a type of network characteristic that people share the same backgrounds and interest are grouped together. For instance, Pinterest may be considered as a platform with high level of homophily in that the principle of Pinterest is to bring people with the same interests together (Walker, 2013). Bisgin, Agarwal and Xu (2012) found that the influence of interest-based homophily is not a very strong leading factor for constructing new ties. If a native ad is placed on a social medium with high level of homophily, people may perceive the ad as intrusive in that it disrupts the coherence of the topic presented on the newsfeed. Hence, people may generate negative attitudes toward the native ad, which may bring harm to the trust and satisfaction toward the ad sponsor as well.

**Research Question**

Traditional advertising studies examining stakeholders’ attitude toward the ad have found that differences in attitudes across professions may be attributable to the importance, heterogeneity, and assessability of quality levels (Hite & Fraser, 1988). Result also showed that exposure to professional advertising produces attitude changes in favor of increased advertising by professionals. Stakeholders are more favorably disposed toward such advertising than are professionals (Hite & Fraser, 1988). Ledingham and Bruning (1998) posited that trust, satisfaction, commitment, control mutuality, exchange relationship, and communal relationship are six dimensions of organization public relationship. Besides examining the effects of social media characteristics on stakeholders’ attitude toward native ads, this study would also like to examine the effects of social media characteristics on stakeholders’ trust as well as satisfaction toward the ad sponsor. Thus, the following research questions are raised:

RQ1: How do social media characteristics influence stakeholders’ attitudes toward native ads?
RQ2: How do social media characteristics influence stakeholders’ trusts toward the ad sponsor?
RQ3: How do social media characteristics influence stakeholders’ satisfactions toward the ad sponsor?

Method

Study Design and Sample

An online survey was conducted to examine how the characteristics of the social network that a user forms on a social media platform and the architecture features of the platform influence the native ad effectiveness placed on social media. A total of 320 participants ($M_{age} = 32.41; SD = 11.01; 45\%$ males) who lived in the U.S. and identified themselves as social media power users were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk. In the final sample, 79.1\% identified themselves as Caucasians; 7.5\% as African Americans; 7.5\% as Asian Americans; 1.3\% as Native Americans; 0.3\% as Pacific Islanders; and 4.4\% as others. For education, 9.1\% of the participants received less than college education; 34.4\% received some college education; 11.6\% received a 2-year college degree; 34.7\% received a 4-year college degree; 10.3\% received a graduate or professional degree. Overall, our sample approximates the distribution of the U.S. general population.

Procedure

Invitations to the study were distributed to those who lived in the U.S. on Amazon Mechanical Turk. Participants were informed that the study was interested in their daily experiences on social media and they would receive 50 cents as compensation for their participation. Once participants indicated their agreement to take part in the study, they were provided with a link, which directed them to the questionnaire hosted on Qualtrics. In order to proceed, participants answered a filter question asking if they were users of any kind of social media including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Google+, Whisper, Instagram, Vine, Yik Yak, and Tinder. Those who never used any social media were removed from the study. During the survey, participants indicated their perceptions of the social media platform that they most frequently used. Then they were instructed to recall one of the experiences where they saw an advertisement that appeared and was intermingled with their social media feeds on that particular site. Finally, they rated their attitudes toward the ad and perceptions of the ad sponsor.

Dependent Measures

Attitude toward the native ads. Attitude toward the native ads was measured in terms of attitude toward the ad and perceptions of the ad sponsor. Ad attitude was assessed with six semantic differential items (Bezjian-Avery, Calder, & Dawniacobucci, 1998). Specifically, participants were asked to indicate on a 7-point scale if they considered the native ad as “not persuasive/persuasive”, “unappealing/appealing”, “bad/good”, “unattractive/attractive”, “unconvincing/convincing”, “overall disliking/overall liking” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .94; M = 2.67, SD = 1.47$).

Trust toward the ad sponsor. Trust toward the ad sponsor was assessed in terms of perceived trust toward and satisfaction with the company. Trust was measured with six items adapted from Hon and Grunig (1999) on a 7-point Likert scale. Specifically, participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with statements such as “This company that places the ad
treats people like me fairly and justly”, “This company that places the ad can be relied on to keep its promises”, “This company that places the ad has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do” (Cronbach’s α = .91; M = 3.08, SD = 1.29).

*Satisfaction toward the ad sponsor.* Satisfaction toward the ad sponsor was measured with seven items adapted from Hon and Grunig (1999) on a 7-point Likert scale. Participants were asked to what extent they agree that “Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship the company that places the ad has established with people like me”, “The company that places the ad satisfies the needs of people like me”, “Most people like me are happy in their interactions with the company that places the ad” (Cronbach’s α = .95; M = 2.87, SD = 1.39).

*Independent Measures*

*Network Size.* Network size was measured by asking participants how many friends they have on the social media platform adapted from Cambell and Kwak (2011) (M = 670.56).

*Network Homophily.* Network homophily was measured with four items from McCroskey, Richmond and Daly (1975). Participants were asked the degree to which their friends on the social media platform are similar to themselves in “social class”, “economic situation”, “social status”, and “background” on a 7-point Liker scale (Cronbach’s α = .87; M = 4.64, SD = 1.17).

*Perceived Intimacy.* Perceived intimacy was measured with six items adapted from Miller and Lefcourt (1982). Participants were asked with questions such as, “How close do you feel to your friends on the platform most of the time?”, “How affectionate do you feel towards your friends on the platform?”, and “How much do you like to spend time with your friends on the platform?” on a 7-point Likert scale (Cronbach’s α = .92; M = 4.36, SD = 1.40).

*Professionalism.* Professionalism was measured by asking participants the degree to which they perceive the social medium as a platform for professionals (M = 4.00, SD = 1.73).

*Publicness.* Publicness was assessed by asking participants how much they perceive the user-generated content on the platform as easily accessible to the public (M = 6.12, SD = 1.27).

*Anonymity.* Anonymity was measured by asking participants the extent to which they considered the social medium as an anonymous platform (M = 2.39, SD = 1.75).

*Control variables*

Participants’ age, gender, race, and social media usage were included as control variables. To measure social media usage, participants were asked to indicate their frequency of using social media from 1 (extremely infrequently) to 7 (extremely frequent) (M = 6.17, SD = 1.26).

*Results*

*Attitude toward the Native Ad*

The hierarchical regression analysis indicated that demographic information such as gender, age, race, and the social media usage explained a significant portion of the variance in attitude toward the native ad ($R^2 = .039, F(4, 307) = 3.14, p < .05$, adjusted $R^2 = .027$). Social network characteristics on the platform including network size, homophily, and perceived network intimacy provided a significant incremental increase in variance explained, $R^2$ change = .092, incremental $F(3, 304) = 10.72, p < .001$. In addition, the architecture features of the platform including professionalism, publicness, and anonymity explained another significant portion of variance in ad attitude, $R^2$ change = .176, incremental $F(3, 301) = 25.47, p < .001$. The whole model explained a total of 30.7% variance in attitude toward the native ad. In the final model,
race, perceived intimacy, professionalism, and anonymity were significant predictors of attitude toward the native ad.

As shown in Table 1, non-Caucasians were more likely to hold favorable attitudes toward the advertisement compared to Caucasians. Perceived intimacy was a positive predictor for ad attitude. On the other words, participants who felt more intimate with their friends on social media platforms were more likely to hold favorable attitude toward the native ad. In addition, both professionalism and anonymity positively predicted ad attitude. Participants held more favorable attitude toward the native ad when they perceived the social media as more professional and anonymous.

**Trust toward the Ad Sponsor**

The hierarchical regression test showed that demographic information including gender, age, race, and social media usage explained a significant portion of the variance in trust toward the ad sponsor \( R^2 = .064, F (4, 307) = 5.24, p < .001, \) adjusted \( R^2 = .052 \). Social network characteristics including network size, homophily, and perceived network intimacy provided a significant incremental increase in variance explained, \( R^2 \) change = .084, incremental \( F (3, 304) = 10.04, p < .001 \). In addition, the architecture features of the platform including professionalism, publicness, and anonymity explained another significant portion of variance in trust toward the ad sponsor, \( R^2 \) change = .104, incremental \( F (3, 301) = 13.94, p < .001 \). The whole model explained a total of 30.7% variance in trust toward the ad sponsor. In the final model, age, race, network size, perceived intimacy, professionalism, and anonymity were significant predictors of trust toward ad sponsor.

As shown in Table 2, age was a negative predictor of trust toward ad sponsor. Younger participants held greater trust toward the ad sponsor compared with older participants. In addition, non-Caucasians perceived greater trust toward the ad sponsor compared with Caucasians. Moreover, participants who had more friends on the social media perceived greater trust toward the ad sponsor. Similarly, those who perceived greater intimacy with their friends in the social network were more likely to trust the ad sponsor. Additionally, participants trusted the ad sponsor more when they perceived the social media platforms as more professional and anonymous.

**Satisfaction toward the Ad Sponsor**

The hierarchical regression test showed that demographics including gender, age, race, the usage of the social media platform explained a marginally significant portion of the variance in satisfaction with the ad sponsor \( R^2 = .028, F (4, 307) = 2.21, p = .07, \) adjusted \( R^2 = .015 \). Social network characteristics including network size, homophily, and perceived network intimacy provided a significant incremental increase in variance explained, \( R^2 \) change = .095, incremental \( F (3, 304) = 11.04, p < .001 \). In addition, the architecture features including professionalism, publicness, and anonymity explained another significant portion of variance in satisfaction with the ad sponsor, \( R^2 \) change = .15, incremental \( F (3, 301) = 20.68, p < .001 \). The whole model explained a total of 30.7% variance in satisfaction with the ad sponsor. In the final model, race, perceived intimacy, professionalism and anonymity were significant predictors of satisfaction with the ad sponsor.

As shown in Table 3, non-Caucasians felt more satisfied with the ad sponsor compared with Caucasian participants. In addition, those who felt more intimate with their social media friends felt more satisfied with the ad sponsor when they saw a native ad on their social media feeds.
Moreover, participants perceived greater satisfaction with the ad sponsor when they perceived the social media platform as more professional and anonymous.

**Discussion**

This study aimed to examine the role of social media characteristics on the effectiveness of native ads. Results showed that for network features such as intimacy, architecture features such as professionalism and anonymity, and demographic information such as race are significant positive predictors for stakeholders’ attitude toward the native ads, trust toward the ad sponsor and satisfaction toward the ad sponsor. In addition, network size is found as a significant positive predictor of trust toward the ad sponsor. Age is another significant and negative predictor of trust toward the ad sponsor.

The results of our study implied that if native ads are placed on a social medium with high level of intimacy, stakeholders tend to form a good attitude toward the native ad. This is probably because on intimate social media platforms, stakeholders tend to have close relationships with their connections. Their attitude toward their connections may transfer to their attitude toward the native ads. In other words, if stakeholders had a positive attitude toward their connections on their social network, they may have a positive attitude toward the native ads displayed on their social media feeds and vice versa. Our study also found that the more stakeholders perceive the social media platform as professional and anonymous, the better attitude they may have toward the native ads. It is probably because native ads on professional social media tend to match with people’s needs. For example, when one is actively seeking for jobs, those native ads featuring related jobs may gain positive attitudes from the job seekers. For native ads placed on anonymous social media, people may have a high level of tolerance toward these ads since information on anonymous social media are not identifiable, thus, they may not pay much attention to these native ads.

Our study also implied that if native ads are placed on a social medium characterized with a large network size, stakeholders tend to have more trust toward the ad sponsor. This is likely due to the fact that social media platforms with large network size are usually popular social media platforms (i.e. Facebook). Stakeholders may believe that companies like Facebook has a high corporate credibility so that ad sponsors who placed native ads on Facebook are also trustworthy. It is also found that the more stakeholders perceive the professionalism and anonymity features of the social media, the higher their satisfaction toward the ad sponsor. This is likely due to the fact that social media platforms with high level of professionalism and anonymity tend to provide good customer services to their stakeholders; thus, they tend to have high satisfaction toward the ad sponsor.

This innovative exploratory study has some practical implications in that it contributes to the body of native ads research by testing the effectiveness of native ads under the context of social media. Meanwhile, our study identified a few contextual factors on social media platforms that may boost the persuasive impact of social media. Moreover, our study provides a roadmap to Public Relations practitioners and advertisers that social media platforms that bear certain features such as anonymity and professionalism may enhance the effectiveness of native ad so that such types of social media may be considered as appropriate and efficient platforms for displaying native ads.

One major limitation of this study is the classification of social media characteristics. To the best of our knowledge, few studies have grouped social media based on their own characteristics. Future study could try to classify social media into different types based on their
own features. Another limitation of our study is that it did not consider the content of the native ad and specific ad sponsor. Thus, future study could examine the effects of specific native ads on stakeholders’ perceptions of specific ad sponsors. Another possible direction is to explore the relevancy of the native ad content on stakeholders’ perceptions toward native ads and sponsors.
Table 1. Hierarchical regression on attitude toward the native ad

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Model 1</th>
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<th>Model 2</th>
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Note: ***, p < .001; **, p < .01; *, p < .05; +, p < .10; Gender: male was coded as 1 and female was coded as 2. Race was dummy coded: 0 as non-Caucasians and 1 as Caucasians.
Table 2. Hierarchical regression on trust toward the ad sponsor

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Note: ***, p < .001; **, p < .01; *, p < .05; +, p < .10; Gender: male was coded as 1 and female was coded as 2. Race was dummy coded: 0 as non-Caucasians and 1 as Caucasians.
Table 3. *Hierarchical regression on satisfaction toward the ad sponsor*

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<th>Control variables</th>
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R²(%) 2.8

Network Characteristics

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<td>.10†</td>
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<td>.15*</td>
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Inc.R² (%) 9.5

Architecture Features

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N 320

*Note:***, p < .001; **, p < .01; *, p < .05; †, p < .10; Gender: male was coded as 1 and female was coded as 2. Race was dummy coded: 0 as non-Caucasians and 1 as Caucasians.*
References


Staddon, J. (2009, November). Finding hidden connections on linkedIn an argument for more pragmatic social network privacy. In Proceedings of the 2nd ACM workshop on Security and artificial intelligence (pp. 11-14). ACM.


Impact of a Brand Crisis on Nation Branding:
An Analysis of Tweets about VW’s Emissions Crisis

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Abstract
On September 18, 2015, the U.S. Environmental Standards Agency (EPA) filed a Notice of Violation of the Clean Air Act to the Volkswagen Group regarding software used to intentionally deceive the EPA’s emissions tests.

The VW crisis may impact Germany’s nation brand, as predicted by recent country-of-origin literature. The country-of-origin effect occurs when the reputation of a country impacts consumer perceptions of products produced by that country, but the direction of effects can also go the other way. German products are generally considered to be of high quality, but the VW scandal highlights a serious company misdeed and product flaw, which may impact the world’s perception of the German nation brand.

Social media is an efficient way for organizations to release information and respond quickly during a crisis. Not only are organizations posting on social media sites, but consumers are increasingly turning to social media sites, such as Twitter, during crises to share information and opinions. In the present study, a content analysis was performed to examine the international conversation on Twitter through the analysis of tweets that included at least one of the following hashtags: #VW, #VWGate, #DieselGate, #VWscandal or #Volkswagenscandal.
Introduction

Communication during and after a crisis shapes public opinion about both the crisis and the organization (Russ, 1991). Crisis communication, a sub-section of public relations, is intended to defend an entity from reputational demotion. Strategic communication managers utilize crisis communication tactics in order to maintain and, if needed, restore relationships with the organization’s publics. Public perception after a crisis has the ability to severely impact an organization financially, thus causing crisis communication to be essential in minimizing the negative impact on the organization. Effective crisis communication also has the potential to increase positive perceptions of the organization (Coombs, 2007).

On September 18, 2015, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) filed a Notice of Violation of the Clean Air Act to the Volkswagen (VW) Group regarding software used to intentionally deceive the EPA’s emissions tests (Environmental Protection Agency [EPA], 2015a). This software, referred to as a defeat device when used improperly, is an auxiliary emission control device (AECD). According to the Code of Federal Regulations by the EPA (2013), these devices reduce the effectiveness of the emission control system based on situational factors.

After being confronted with tests conducted by the California Air Resources Board, VW admitted to the use of this software. In essence, the device had two settings: “dyno” and “road.” After detecting that emissions tests are being conducted, it adjusts accordingly. However, when the car is not being tested, the “road” calibration dulls the effectiveness of two emission-treatment systems: nitrogen oxide traps and selective catalytic reduction (Mays, 2015). The result is the emission of nitrogen oxide levels that are up to 40 times the amount permitted by the EPA (EPA, 2015b; Linkov, 2015).

The software was found in EA 189 engines and affects approximately 11 million vehicles worldwide. Consequently, Martin Winterkorn resigned as CEO and now faces criminal prosecution in Germany for his alleged role in the fraud. Additionally, at the end of September, VW announced the recall of 1.2 million UK cars. The company also announced potential job cuts and the freezing of all unnecessary expenditures. VW has set aside $6.5 billion euros ($7.3 billion U.S.) to cover the recalls and other damage-control efforts (Thompson & Kottasova, 2015; Mays, 2015). The scandal spurred an international conversation on social media about the company’s transgressions.

Currently, country-of-origin literature typically examines the relationship between country of origin and product by evaluating the impact of the country of origin on the product (i.e., in most cases, purchase intention) (Magnusson, Krishnan, Westjohn, & Zdravkovic, 2014). However, in crisis situations, country of origin is considered as a situational factor that impacts evaluation of the crisis (Xu & Wu, 2015).

As a consequence of Germany’s nation brand relying heavily on its exports, the “Made in Germany” label has the potential to be undermined by the crisis. This study sought to examine the relationship between Germany’s nation brand and the Volkswagen’s emissions crisis through the examination of the crisis via the social media platform Twitter.

A content analysis of tweets was performed in order to give a more comprehensive understanding of the situation from the consumer’s perspective. In addition, the data collected from Twitter combined with the response strategies posited by situational crisis communication theory can be used to formulate suggested messaging strategies for the Volkswagen Group. Theoretical and practical implications resulting from the research are discussed. This research contributes to the existing literature by supporting the suggestion of an upcoming and under-
researched direction of product and country of origin relationships. That is, instead of examining the country of origin and brand relationship unidirectionally, the current study supports the need to examine the relationship in a bidirectional manner.

**Literature review**

*Country of Origin*

A product’s country of origin is an element that factors into product evaluation (Hong & Wyer, 1989). Further, the literature shows that a country’s nation brand and reputation impact consumer perceptions of products that are produced by that country (Chang, 2004). In the event of a crisis, country-of-origin is considered in the evaluation of the crisis (Xu & Wu, 2015). When consumers had favorable perceptions of a country, Xu and Wu (2015) found they were more likely to receive more positive post-crisis reactions. In this case, Germany has a favorable image that renders the country as an innovative leader in the motor vehicle industry. Country of origin also serves as a heuristic cue that shapes attitudes when consumers are unable or unwilling to elaborate on the message (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994). Thus, for individuals who are less impacted by the crisis (i.e. those who are not affected by the crisis), the German image will factor into the evaluation of the crisis.

Germany has a reputation of producing high-quality products (Keegan & Schlegelmilch, 2001). “In the case of Germany, the development of its national brand identity is an integral part of the growth and development of its exports, the ‘Made in Germany’ label that has a world-class reputation” (Joseph, 2014, p. 4). Perceptions of a country can be developed through personal experience with that country, or through exposure to organized communication campaigns (Yi, Chen, Mathur, & Maheswaran, 2014). Germany has executed communication campaigns that have positioned the country as a “Partner for Innovation” and “The Land of Ideas” (Joseph, 2014). The aforementioned campaigns contribute to Germany’s overall nation brand. That is, the overall nation brand of Germany relies heavily on its exports. More specifically, Germany has a reputation tied to its role in the automotive industry.

The overwhelming majority of the current country-of-origin literature examines the relationship between the brand and country of origin by observing the impact of a country of origin’s reputation on the brand; however, a new stream of literature suggests the need to examine the direction of the relationship (Magnusson et al., 2014).

Magnusson et al. (2014) concluded that a brand transgressions impact a country’s micro-image in addition to impacting the perception of other brands with a shared country of origin. Specifically, since Germany has a developed and stable country image and reputation, the brand transgressions were more likely to impact other brands from that country (Magnusson et al. 2014). Further, the study conducted by Magnusson et al. (2014) suggested a gap in current country-of-origin literature by discovering that the relationship is not unidirectional.

The present will explore the conversation on Twitter in order to observe the relationship of a country of origin and a company experiencing a crisis.

*Situational Crisis Communication Theory*

Benson (1988) identified a set number of crisis types and response strategies to correlate to the type of crisis. Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) furthered theory by identifying a link between the crisis type and the most effective response strategy (Coombs, 2008). The theoretical foundation for SCCT stems from attribution theory and neo-institutional theory. Attribution theory explains how the public assigns responsibility for the consequences of
events. Further, neo-institutional theory posits that the public expects organizations to comply with societal norms, and a deviation from these expectations would result in conflict with stakeholders (Coombs, 2008).

**Crisis Types**

Situational crisis communication theory first categorizes crises by type based on organizational responsibility. Originally, SCCT defined crises with a grid using personal control and external control as determining factors (Coombs, Hazleton, Holladay & Chandler, 1995). Further research by Coombs and Holladay (2001) identified little variance in the variables and the SCCT moved to a continuum. The following 13 crisis types are divided into three clusters depending on the organization’s level of responsibility. Level of organization responsibility is an indicator of the potential financial and reputational damage. Thus, level of responsibility serves as an indicator of which crisis response strategy should be implemented to aid with crisis management.

**Preventable cluster.** Crises that fall into the preventable cluster have high attributions of responsibility. This group is comprised of incidents related to human error and organizational misdeed. Within this category, crises are avoidable and damages have occurred because of the actions of members in the organization.

**Victim cluster.** Natural disasters, rumors, and product tampering all fall into the victim cluster of crises. In these situations, organizations are not responsible but will implement crisis communication management in order to lessen the damages (Coombs, 2008).

**Accidental cluster.** In the accidental cluster, organizations take a moderate level of responsibility. While the incident may have occurred because of the organization, it was unintentional and unavoidable. Organizations hold a very low level of responsibility in the victim cluster.

Since the defeat devices were intentionally programmed to bypass the emissions tests, the crisis falls into the preventable cluster.

**Threat Intensifiers**

Crisis history, relationship history, and severity of the crisis act as moderating variables that impact and have the potential to intensify the organization’s reputation damage (Coombs, 2008). Crisis history has the opportunity to intensify the reputational damage because if a similar situation has occurred with the same company in the past, the public holds the organization accountable for a greater level of responsibility.

Relationship history gives stakeholders a perception that the organization will act the same as it has in the past. Thus, if an organization practices good crisis communication, stakeholders will trust that the situation will be handled fairly and responsibly. Finally, severity refers to the amount of damage the crisis causes. When there is a loss of lives, the organization takes on a greater level of responsibility (Coombs, 2008).

Any negative occurrence of the aforementioned moves a crisis into the next cluster (Coombs, 2008). That is, an accidental crisis would be treated as a preventable crisis if the crisis previously occurred with the same organization.

In the case of VW, not only does the crisis fall into the preventable category (which is designated for crises with the highest level of organizational responsibility), but the organization also has a history of being associated with Adolf Hitler (Glancey, 2014). According to the BBC,
Volkswagen’s iconic beetle was “developed from an idea of Adolf Hitler’s,” (Glancey, 2014, paragraph 4).

Crisis Communication and Social Media

According to Coombs (2007), the internet plays a critical role in crisis communication. Organizations embrace social media as an efficient way to release information and respond quickly during a crisis (Kim & Liu, 2012). Additionally, consumers are increasingly turning to social media sites, such as Twitter, during crises to share information and opinions (Jin, Liu & Austin, 2014). According to Sinnappan, Farrell, and Stewart (2010), there are two main reasons for the popularity of Twitter in a crisis situation. First, the platform increases the flow of information through its design which consists of sharing brief messages in rapid succession. Second, the crowdsourcing nature of Twitter allows users to share and consume information. By following hashtags for a crisis event, a user can collect information from a wide variety of sources (e.g. the organization itself, news organizations, VW car owners, etc.).

Network Analysis on Twitter

Network analysis has been applied to understand relationships among users of social media platforms. Some of the basic terms in network analysis include vertices and edges. Units that comprise a network are referred to as vertices (when graphed, vertices are referred to as nodes). The connections between vertices are called edges (Kumar, Morstatter & Liu, 2014). In the case of Twitter analysis, users are the vertices of the network and tweets, retweets and mentions are the edges of the network. In order to determine important users within the network, centrality is measured. For the purposes of this paper, three degrees of centrality will be discussed: indegree centrality, outdegree centrality, and betweenness centrality.

Indegree centrality is a measure of the amount of edges entering a node. In contrast, outdegree centrality measures the amount of edges that exit a node (Kumar, Morstatter & Liu, 2014, p. 38). In regard to network analysis on Twitter, the indegree would measure the amount of times a user was retweeted or mentioned. These users would be considered facilitators of the conversation. A Twitter user’s outdegree would refer to the number of times a user tweeted or retweeted. According to Newman (2009), the centrality measures could suggest influence, access to information, and prestige.

Finally, the betweenness centrality of vertices is measured by the user’s ability to bridge subnetworks within the total network. Those with a high betweenness centrality “may have considerable influence within a network by virtue of their control over information passing between others,” (Newman, 2009, Ch. 7.7).

In recent literature, network analysis has been useful in the examination of conversations on Twitter post-crisis. Getchell and Sellnow (2015) used network analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of communication from official accounts on the local and national level. Performing a network analysis showed a lack in density, which indicated a lack in communication between local and federal emergency management. Bruns and Burgess (2012) used a network analysis to evaluate the post-crisis conversation following the floods in southeast Queensland, which allowed for the identification of influencers in the dissemination of information.

Other studies have focused on timely events in the news. Dubois and Gaffney (2014) examined influential participants in online Twitter communities for two of Canada’s largest political parties. They found that by using indegree and eigenvector centrality, which are two
measure of centrality, they were able to identify the political elite of media organizations, journalists, and politicians. In contrast, an analysis of the quality of messages and interactions produced a different set of influencers that included political commentators and bloggers. Feng (2015) explored Twitter conversation about the #RaceTogether campaign launched by Starbucks and identified five types of central users that effectively engaged other Twitter users including conversation starters, influencers, active engages, network builders and information bridges. Feng also explored the factors that contribute to a Twitter user being influential in the network (a high betweenness centrality score) and found that the relationship between the numbers of followers a user has, the number of people the user follows, and the number of tweets the user creates and the variable of betweenness centrality is relatively weak while the rank for in-degree links and out-degree links are both significantly related to the betweenness centrality score.

According to Bruns (2012) “the application of social network analysis to the study of interactions in online social networks can provide are detailed, site-specific, insights into the processes of communication between the users of these networking sites,” (p.1329). Thus, using a network analysis to examine post-crisis conversations on Twitter allows for greater insight into who the influencers are in the conversation.

Presentation of Study

Given the aforementioned literature, the present study seeks to evaluate the conversation on Twitter regarding the crisis faced by VW through a content analysis of tweets. Concepts such as the relationship between a brand in crisis and its country of origin will be explored. Additionally, the study will examine the network to identify influential users engaged in the conversation.

Research Questions

RQ 1: To what extent did Twitter users connect the VW scandal to the German reputation, brand, economy, or political structure?

RQ 2: What were the most popular themes of the tweets that related to the German reputation, brand, economy, or political structure? Are these themes significantly different based on location?

RQ 3: What type of Twitter users (media, journalist, corporate, professional, or regular user) are most likely to be the conversation starters, the most engaged, and the most central users in the network?

Method

A content analysis was performed on tweets referencing VW’s emissions crisis in order to explore the research questions posed. “Content analysis is an empirically grounded method, exploratory in process and predictive or inferential in intent,” (Krippendorff, 2012, p. 1). This method is appropriate for the present study because it allows for the gathering of empirical statistics that provide information about the conversation on Twitter. Additionally, the method permits a detailed examination of not only what was being said regarding the crisis but also on who was the source of the information (e.g. journalist, company, etc.).

“As a research technique, content analysis provides new insights, increases a researcher’s understanding of particular phenomena, or informs practical actions,” (Krippendorff, 2012, p. 24). In the case of this study, examining the conversation on Twitter allows for the research to provide insight on public perception and reaction. The results can inform the practical actions of rebuilding the VW brand in addition to informing other brands.
Ultimately, this method of research was the most suitable and efficient in capturing a
glimpse of the international reaction in the beginning stages of the crisis.

Data Collection
After the initial news of the crisis, several hashtags emerged regarding the emissions
crisis including #vwsandal and #dieselgate, among others. Initially, trending hashtags related to
the crisis were searched for and compiled using Twitter’s advanced search function. The
hashtags collected were then evaluated for volume of tweets using DiscoverText’s Sifter
estimates. In the Sifter estimate process, rule texts (i.e. hashtags) were used to identify the scope
of the data, and dates were narrowed down to a 10-day period. The data was limited to a 10-day
period in order to apply for a historical data grant from Texifter.

The most relevant hashtags were determined based on the volume of results and were
subsequently selected for evaluation. The rule text that produced the highest volume of responses
included: #VW, #VWGate, #DieselGate, #vwsandal, and #volkswagenescandal. The process was
repeated, running an estimate for every 10-day period from the initial filing of the EPA Notice of
Violation to the current time period (i.e. September 18 to mid-December). The 10-day period
that emerged as the timeframe that produced the most volume of tweets was September 22 to
October 1.

The data were obtained through a grant provided by Texifter. To apply for the data grant,
a Sifter estimate was created in order to determine which hashtags and 10-day period produced
the most relevant results. A review of Sifter was then posted to the researcher’s personal Twitter
account, which included a link to the Sifter estimate website. Two winners were selected per
week from October 23 to December 31 and the data regarding the VW crisis was granted on the
sixth week of drawings. The data grant from Texifter provided access to 207,723 tweets and
access to an enterprise account with DiscoverText, which was used for analytics. The entire data
set included a total of 207,723 tweets that were drawn from the 10-day period using Texifter’s
software.

Filtering
The data was filtered to eliminate tweets that utilized a language other than English. Additionally, 2,995 spam tweets that were irrelevant to the topic were eliminated. The final
sample included tweets selected based on the criteria of inclusion of the hashtags #VW,
#VWGate, #DieselGate, #vwsandal or #volkswagenescandal and use of the English language
during the period of September 22-October 1, 2015. The final sample contained 110,882 tweets.

Within DiscoverText’s dashboard where the data was housed, the tweets were filtered to
narrow the data down to tweets that only referenced the VW scandal in conjunction with
Germany’s reputation, brand, economy, or political structure. Based on the inclusion criteria at
this initial stage of filtering, only tweets containing “German” or “Germany” continued to the
next round.

During the second round of filtering, two coders manually filtered to exclude any use of
“German” or “Germany” in a manner which didn’t connect the scandal to the company’s country
of origin. For example, if “German” was used as an adjective (e.g. German media outlets
reported...), the tweet would be excluded from the sample. This filtering resulted in 1,711 tweets
for inclusion in the study.

Coding
After filtering the data set based on the inclusion criteria, two coders manually coded the data set into the following categories: Germany’s reputation, the Made in Germany/German Engineering brands, Germany’s economy, the German government’s role, German automakers and the auto industry, German values and characteristics, Germany’s history, and other. Coder 1 (the author) determined the categories based on a preliminary examination of the sample.

While many of the operational definitions for the categories were straightforward, it is important to note the variance in the operational definitions of Germany’s reputation and German values and characteristics. The operational definition of Germany’s reputation for this study included general references to the impact on Germany’s overall reputation in addition to more specific references to what Germany’s reputation is as a country. On the other hand, the German values and characteristics was operationally defined as any reference to more specific values and characteristics on an individual level. For example, being an eco-friendly country would be coded as Germany’s reputation and having integrity would fall under German values and characteristics. Coder 1 coded the entire data set and after discussing the operational definitions, Coder 2 coded the entire data set. The intercoder reliability was then calculated using Krippendorff’s alpha (α). See Appendix B for coding examples.

Results

Intercoder Reliability

According to Neuendorf (2002), achieving an intercoder reliability level that is acceptable is important for two reasons. First, an acceptable level of intercoder reliability validates the coding scheme. In other words, the results become meaningful when they are not limited to the observations of one individual. Second, having multiple coders gives a practical advantage of splitting the data. However, in this study, the entire data set was coded for themes by both coders. In any case, intercoder reliability is “a necessary criterion for valid and useful research when human coding is employed,” (Neuendorf, 2002, p.142). A widely-used reliability measure is Krippendorff’s alpha (α). Krippendorff’s alpha (α) “is a reliability coefficient developed to measure the agreement among observers, coders, judges, raters, or measuring instruments drawing distinctions among typically unstructured phenomena or assign computable values to them,” (Krippendorff, 2007, p.1).

Krippendorff’s alpha (α) equation:  
\[\alpha = 1 - \frac{D_o}{D_e}\]

In the above equation, \(D_o\) signifies the observed disagreement and \(D_e\) signifies the expected disagreement based on the probability. According to Krippendorff (2012), researchers should achieve \(\alpha \geq .800\) in order to draw conclusions. However, in cases where tentative conclusions are acceptable, researchers may “consider variables with reliabilities between \(\alpha = .667\) and \(\alpha = .800\),” (Krippendorff, 2012, p. 325). Table 1 shows the Krippendorff’s alpha for each category. Only two of the categories (“Other” and “German values/characteristics) received lower than .80 alphas. In the case of German values/characteristics, disagreements between coders most often stemmed from the overlapping concepts of values/characteristics and reputation. That is, values and characteristics are two components that factor into the formation of a reputation. Despite the less than optimal alphas for those two categories, the
remaining were above .80, with four even breeching .90. The overall Krippendorff’s alpha was .889 among the two coders.

Table 1: Krippendorff’s alpha Intercoder Reliability

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<th>Alpha Value</th>
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<td>267</td>
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<td>683</td>
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<td>0.951</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>1711</strong></td>
<td><strong>3422</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.889</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>

Crisis and Nation Brand Connection

The first research question sought to identify to what extent users connected the VW scandal to the German reputation, brand, economy, or political structure. Of the 110,882 English tweets from the September 22-October 1, 2015 time period that used the hashtags #VW, #DieselGate, #VWGate, #volkswagenscandal, and #VWscandal, 5,065 included the words “Germany” or “German” within the text of the tweet. These tweets were reviewed to filter tweets for analysis that referenced the impact of the scandal on reputation of Germany or the German auto industry as well as tweets that referenced the impact on the German economy or political involvement. This filtering resulted in 1,711 tweets (i.e. 1.54% of the total sample).

Tweets containing the keywords “German” or “Germany” were removed from the sample usually utilized the keywords “German” or “Germany” as adjectives for media, ministers, etc. For example, tweets using the phrase “German media outlets reported” would be excluded from the sample. Although 1.54% represents a small proportion of the total sample of VW tweets, some of the tweets in the total sample may have not referenced the scandal directly (i.e. using #VW to discuss their car).

Themes and Geographical Information

The second research question sought to identify the most popular themes of the tweets related to the German reputation, brand, economy, or political structure. Additionally, the second research question examines whether the themes significantly differ based on location of the user.

Examining hashtags with the highest occurrence provides some insight into the themes of the tweets. Although many of the most used hashtags reflect the criteria for inclusion (i.e. VW,
VWgate, dieselgate, VolkswagenScandal, and vwscandal) other relevant hashtags such as Volkswagen, German, and Germany also appeared. The remaining hashtags revealed that Volkswagen’s scandal was linked to other brands, such as Siemens and BMW, and countries, such as Greece, the UK, and France. See Table 2 for the most used hashtags from the sample. Overall, the most popular tweet in terms of retweets compared Volkswagen to Donald Trump (See Figure 1).

Table 2: Most Frequently Occurring Hashtags

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
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<td>VW</td>
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<td>VWGate</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dieselgate</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VolkswagenScandal</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volkswagen</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siemens</td>
<td>75</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
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<tr>
<td>emissions</td>
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<td>vwscandal</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMW</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>economy</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merkel</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scandal</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sample of 1,711 tweets were coded into the following categories: Made in Germany/German Engineering brands, references to Germany’s history, German values and characteristics, Germany’s reputation, German automakers/auto industry, the impact on the German economy, the role of German government and other.

The highest percentages of tweets fall into the categories of Germany’s reputation ($n = 446; 26\%$) and Made in Germany/German Engineering brands ($n = 388; 22\%$). The occurrence of the remainder of the categories is as follows: German economy ($n = 338; 20\%$), German government’s role ($n = 185; 11\%$), German automakers/auto industry ($n = 131; 8\%$), German values and characteristics ($n = 108; 6\%$), Germany’s history ($n = 87; 5\%$) and other ($n = 36; 2\%$) (See Figure 2). See Appendix B for coding examples.

Figure 2: Themes
In order to determine if there was a relationship between location and theme, the tweets were classified based on the user’s geographical location. Of the 1,711 tweets analyzed, all but 642 (37.5%) could be classified geographically. Tweets with geographical information were coded as either being from Germany or from a user outside of Germany. A total of 127 were identified as being from Germany (7.4%) and 942 came from outside the country (55.0%). (See Table 3).

Table 3: User’s Geographical Location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Germany</td>
<td>942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1711</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, a Chi-square test of the variables content of the tweet (i.e. the theme) and location (i.e. Germany, outside Germany, or unknown) found a significant relationship between content and location $X^2 (7, N= 1,711) = 28.06, p< .05$. Comparing actual values to expected values found higher than expected amount of tweets about the German auto industry for users in both Germany and outside Germany as well as higher than expected amount of tweets about the Made in Germany or German Engineering brands among German users. Furthermore, there were fewer tweets among those outside Germany about German history and German values/characteristics and more tweets in these same two categories among those from an unknown location.

Table 4: Chi-square Test of Variables Theme and Location
Network Analysis

The third research question sought to identify which type of Twitter users (i.e. media, journalist, corporate, professional, or regular user) were the most likely to be the conversation starters, the most engaged, and the most central users in the network.

The conversation starters in the network were determined based on the users’ indegree centralities. Those with the highest indegree centrality were users who received the most mentions about and retweets of their post about the crisis. Users who received 10 or more mentions and/or retweets were evaluated to determine which type of user they were. Of the total 29 users with the highest indegree centrality scores, 35% were professionals, 19% were journalists, 19% were media organizations, 15% were companies and 12% were other (See Table 5). Those that fell into the other category either could not be defined. The user with the highest indegree centrality was a journalist with a total of 128 mentions or retweets.

Table 5: Users by Indegree Centrality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to identify which type of users were the most engaged in the network, the users’ outdegree centralities were calculated. The outdegree centrality reflects how many tweets each user had in the sample (including retweets). Users who had 4 or more tweets in the sample were evaluated to determine what type of user they were. Of the users with the highest outdegree centrality, 54% were regular users, 23% were professionals, 8% were journalists, 8% were media organizations and 7% were other (see Table 6).

Table 6: Users by Outdegree Centrality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular User</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally, users' betweenness centrality was evaluated in order to determine which users were the most central to the network. That is, users with the highest betweenness centrality have the ability to bridge various subnetworks within the overall network. Of the top ten users, who had a betweenness centrality of 8.5 or higher, 30% were journalists, 20% were professionals, 20% were regular users, 20% were other and 10% were media organizations. The user with the highest betweenness centrality had a centrality of 84 (see Table 7).

Table 7: Users by Betweenness Centrality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular User</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gephi, a tool used for the graphing and visualization of large networks, was used to graph both the total network and the giant component. In essence, the giant component is the most connected subnetwork of the total network (Bollobás, 2001). According to Bastian, Heymann & Jacomy (2009) “visualizations are useful to leverage the perceptual abilities of humans to find features in network structure and data,” (p. 1). See Figure 3 for the total network and Figure 4 for the giant component. Note, the larger the node, the higher the centrality measures the user will have. This gives insight into the influential members of the network. Through the visualization, the users who bridge subnetworks can also be identified.

Figure 3: Total Network
Figure 4: Giant Component of the Network
Discussion & Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to elicit a more thorough understanding of the relationship between a brand experiencing a crisis and its country of origin. Though the percentage is low, the results indicate a presence of Germany’s nation brand in the discussion of the Volkswagen crisis. Additionally, the themes identified include: Germany’s reputation, the Made in Germany/German Engineering brands, Germany’s economy, the German government’s role, German automakers and the auto industry, German values and characteristics, and Germany’s history (with some being categorized as “other”). The findings also indicated a significant relationship between theme and location. Finally, the study showed that professionals had the highest indegree, regular users had the highest outdegree, and journalists had the highest betweenness centrality.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While the research did produce valuable results, the study has several limitations. First, the data was restricted to a 10-day period in order to apply for a data grant (i.e. for financial efficiency). The ramification of choosing to research a crisis as it is unfolding is that the data has the potential to change as more information becomes available to the public. That is, if the same research study was conducted after VW started implementing crisis communication strategies, the study could potentially produce different results. Additionally, limiting the data to a 10-day period narrowed the sample size significantly. Thus, if the initial sample covered a greater time period, the final sample would have been larger (after filtering for inclusion criteria).

Another limitation is the use of one social media platform. Although conducting a cross-platform study was outside the scope of an inexperienced researcher, comparing data across platforms would lead to a greater understanding of the entire conversation.

Finally, the most impactful limitation was the use of negative rule text for inclusion criteria. That is, using the rule text: “#VWGate,” “#DieselGate,” “#vwsandal,” and “#volkswagenescandal” limited the data to only individuals who were discussing the scandal in a negative manner. In an attempt to be inclusive of both positive and negative comments, the rule text “#VW” was included. However, this opened up the initial data pool to individuals who used the hashtag in a context unrelated to the scandal, which ultimately led to the exclusion of those tweets.

Future research evaluating crisis communication on Twitter should consider gathering data from multiple time periods in order to compare results. This would be particularly useful as a campaign evaluation tool. In this instance, the researcher would gather data for an organization within the immediate time following the crisis. After implementing crisis communication tactics in order to minimize the damage and rebuild the brand’s image, new data should be collected in order to monitor if the overall themes change.

Practical and Theoretical Implications

Though the research has its limitations, practical and theoretical implications can be derived from the results. First, strategic communication managers could utilize the results in order to inform campaigns aimed at rebuilding the brand. For instance, strategic communication managers for Volkswagen could use the themes to tailor messages to address the concerns of various publics. Additionally, since the themes varied based on location, marketers could use this insight to understand how the rebuilding strategy should vary from domestic to international campaigns. Finally, the results regarding the network analysis give insight into the influential
publics. Strategic communication managers should take this information into account when developing campaigns to rebuild the brand. Based on the literature reviewed and the results of the study, the crisis falls into the preventable cluster, a deal strategy should be implemented, and the campaign targeting Germans should address the German auto industry and the Made in Germany/German Engineering brands. Additionally, professionals should be considered a primary target audience for the rebuilding strategy because since they are the conversation starters, they should be treated as influencers in the network.

In addition to the aforementioned practical implications, the theoretical implications stem from the results regarding the first research question. Although the percentage was low, the mere presence of Germany’s nation brand in the conversation about VW’s emissions crisis suggests support for the need to continue the more recent nation branding literature. That is, instead of examining the relationship between a country of origin and a brand as unidirectional from country to brand, the relationship should be examined bidirectionally. More specifically, in cases where the brand is: a) prominently linked to its country of origin and b) is experiencing a crisis, research should be conducted to assess the brand-to-country direction of the relationship.

Conclusion

The overarching goal of this study was to gain a more thorough comprehension of the conversation about the VW emissions scandal on Twitter. Through an analysis of 1,711 tweets, the themes that emerged provide insight for both practical and theoretical purposes. While the study did have various limitations, it certainly suggests the need for further research.

Further research examining the post-crisis conversation on Twitter in cases where the brand is uniquely linked to its country of origin has the unique ability to provide valuable insight for practical applications in addition to contributing to the ever-growing body of knowledge in academia.
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A tale of two sources in native advertising: Examining the effects of source credibility and priming on content, organizations, and media evaluations

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Yan Huang
Ruobing Li
Denise Bortree
Fan Yang
Anli Xiao
Ruoxu Wang
Penn State University

Abstract
The current study employed an experimental design to test how native advertising impacts the perceptions of brands as well as media outlets. In addition, it also explores whether education about native advertising increases ad recognition and improves the perception of media outlets, companies, and ad content.
Native advertising, defined as “a form of paid media where the ad experience follows the natural form and function of the user experience in which it is placed” (Sharethrough, n.d.), has been praised by supporters as an exciting new way to offer useful content to users (IAB, 2013, December 4), and has been condemned by opponents as a deceptive means of coopting media credibility for promotional purposes (Wasserman, 2013, January 30). Recently, the controversy has caught the attention of the U.S. government, and in December 2015 the Federal Trade Commission issued guidelines for native advertising that included requirements for disclosures, labeling content, and other content (Barr, 2015, December 22).

In the public relations field, native advertising has been hailed as the next big trend (Dvorkin, 2013, July 22), accounting for $7.9 billion in ad sales in 2015 (Business Insider, 2015, May 20). Native advertising leverages the skills of public relations to produce engaging, persuasive long-form content while providing the control of advertising placement. This form of communication has been highly contested and debated in academic circles. Speaking on a panel at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication conference in San Francisco in August 2015, Steve Rubel, Chief Content Strategist for Edelman, said that native advertising has been broadly adopted as a highly successful public relations strategy. However, a presentation at the International Public Relations Research Conference in Miami a year earlier suggested that native advertising and content marketing will erode the relationship that public relations builds with its publics (Hallahan, 2014). How audiences perceive native ads, and whether company credibility and relationship quality is impacted by this type of advertising needs to be examined.

A study conducted by YouGov for Reuters Institute suggested that companies are not the only organizations who may suffer damage to their credibility from audience perceptions of native advertising (Reuters Institute, 2015). Media outlets that offer these services may, too, erode relationships with readers when they publish native advertising. Many news organizations continue to offer services to support native advertising development. Recently the New York Times hired a team of writers to provide native advertising content (Wegert, 2015, March 27). In October 2015 BuzzFeed announced that it will create an in-house native advertising video production service that specifically caters to the upcoming political season (Chariton, 2015, October 12). Research by the content marketing site Contently found that the public would expect BuzzFeed to offer native advertising, but it does not expect native advertising to be published by the New York Times (Lazauskas, 2015, September 8). Any damage to a media source’s credibility may differ based on its current standing and reputation. The impact of native advertising on media credibility has not been studied in the public relations literature.

Some claim that native advertising’s effectiveness is bolstered by an audience’s inability to identify native advertising as promotional rather than editorial content (Sass, 2015, December 31). In a recently published study, only eight percent of participants correctly identified a native advertising piece as sponsored content. But, those who did, reported more negative attitudes toward the content source, lower intention to share the content with others, and lower perceived credibility of the story (Wojdynski & Evans, 2015). This suggests that benefits of native advertising may be connected to the confusion on the part of the audience. If native advertising provides useful content and provides value to the reader as claimed by native ad proponents (IAB, 2013, December 4), then recognition of its status as a form of advertising should allow readers to make more informed choices about consuming the content and responding to it.
One possible solution to reduce confusion about native advertising is to offer media education, raising the awareness of the public about the nature and purpose of the content. Strategists have suggested that greater education of audiences about native advertising will reduce skepticism and increase trust in sponsored content (Wegert, 2015, February 12); however, this claim has not been tested.

The study presented here has two key objectives. First, it explores whether education about native advertising increases ad recognition and improves the perception of media outlets, companies, and ad content. Second, it explores the impact of native advertising exposure on perceived credibility and relationship quality between audiences and sources (media outlets and companies). Further, it explores whether high credibility media outlets and companies are impacted differently from low credibility sources.

Findings from the study make a theoretical contribution by examining how theories related to credibility and relationship management predict the impact of native advertising on audiences. The study also offers practical insights to the public relations field by exploring whether education about native advertising raises readers’ recognition and improves their perceptions of content and sources.

### Literature Review

**Native Advertising**

Forms of advertising has been constantly evolving. From the traditional display ads, and classified ads in print media, to the commonly seen banners or pop-up ads on the Internet, advertisers and public relation practitioners have experimented with various ways to maximize the effectiveness of content delivery (Wojdynski, 2016; Eastin, Daugherty, & Burns, 2011). Recently, the concept of native advertising has gained increasing attention. Following the form of infomercials on TV (Anderson, & Abbott, 1985; Singh, Balasubramanian, & Chakraborty, 2000), and advertorials in newspapers and magazines (Cameron, Ju-Pak, & Kim, 1996; McAllister, 1996), native advertising can be defined as a “means of presenting consumers with a commercial persuasive message that resembles the non-third-party content provided by the same publisher,” which can be categorized into three categories, including sponsored content, sponsored hyperlink listings, and sponsored social media posts. (Wojdynski, 2016). Specifically, **sponsored content** features certain forms of content that are similar and consistent with the publishers’ own content, and can be consumed by the readers like other non-sponsored content. On the other hand, **sponsored hyperlink listings** do not provide original content created for the advertisement, rather they offer off-site links that forward users to advertising content on other sites. Different from the other two, **sponsored social media posts** feature advertising content presented in a form that resembles users’ other social media feeds from friends. In the current study, we specifically focus on the first type of native advertising – **sponsored content** – due to its wide adoption among many news media including the ones that are highly reputable and credible, such as New York Times and Wall Street Journal (Wojdynski, 2016).

**Sponsored Content**

While previous literature has repeatedly documented that viewers selectively avoid, filter, and even counter-argue with advertising on various media (e.g., Schemer, 2012; Warshaw, 1978), users of native advertising are much more receptive to the content because of their lack of awareness that the content is sponsored advertising rather than editorial (Admin, 2015). This confusion on the part of users raises a number of ethical problems and concerns such as the lack
of transparency and deception (FTC, 2013). Scholars have argued that these problems are mainly associated with two aspects of native advertising: obscurity of persuasive intent and ambiguity of the content source (Wojdynski, 2016).

In order to help users to identify native advertising and persuasive intent, the FTC (2013; 2015) proposed that clear labeling and disclosure statements should be used to distinguish sponsored content from editorial content. The Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) (2013) also suggested that any paid native advertising should “use language that conveys that the advertising has been paid for... even if that unit does not contain traditional promotional advertising messages...Be large and visible enough for a consumer to notice it in the context of a given page and/or relative to the device that the ad is being viewed on” (p. 16).

Such guidance seems to be an effective solution. For example, in an online experiment, Edelman & Gilchrist (2012) discovered that online ads with a clearer label such as “paid advertisement” were much more likely to lead to viewers’ advertising recognition than labels like “sponsored link.” However, it is not as simple as adding a disclosure statement on every native advertisement. In a recent content analysis of 28 native advertisements between January and March of 2014, Wojdynski and Evans (2014) found that not every ad clearly discloses its paid nature by including IAB suggested language such as “sponsored content,” “recommended by,” “sponsored content by,” “ads related to,” and “suggested post.” Moreover, studies have revealed that the mere presence of a disclosure statement does not necessarily guarantee viewers’ attention and advertising recognition (Kim, Pasadeos, & Barban, 2001). Such concern was also supported by Wojdynski and Evans (2015) where they found only 7% participants in study 1, and 18.3% of participants in study 2 recognized that the article was a paid advertising.

These findings together imply that simply adding disclosure statements to a native ad might not be effective enough to enhance recognition of sponsored content. Reviewing previous research on the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) (Friestad & Wright 1994) offers another viable solution to enhance recognition of persuasive message through increasing users’ persuasion knowledge, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

**Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM)**

PKM suggests that individuals’ responses to persuasive attempts are influenced by their prior persuasion knowledge. Specifically, KPM conceptualizes persuasion knowledge into three different categories, persuasion knowledge, agent knowledge, and topic knowledge, which consists of preliminary understanding of persuasion and one’s own coping skills and goals, beliefs about persuasion agents’ goals and tactics, and beliefs about the topic of persuasive messages (Wojdynski, 2016). According to KPM, the persuasion target (e.g., consumers) employs their persuasion knowledge to identify persuasion attempts and cope with persuasion episodes (e.g., advertising content) that are promoted by persuasion agent (e.g., companies or media published advertisement) (Friestad & Wright 1994). Specifically, once there is a stimulus (e.g., sales pitch or product promotion), individuals’ persuasion knowledge will be activated and enable “consumers to recognize, analyze, interpret, evaluate, and remember persuasion attempts and to select and execute coping tactics believed to be effective and appropriate.” (Friestad & Wright 1994, p. 3).

PKM further implies that individuals tend to process persuasive message more critically and negatively. Previous studies have consistently documented that users are more likely to be resistant toward persuasive attempts (Quinn & Wood, 2004) and negatively evaluate persuasive messages, products, and advertisers (van Reijmersdal, Neijens, & Smit, 2010; Brusse, Fransen,
& Smit, 2015; Wojdynski & Evans, 2015; Wojdynski, 2016). However, one prerequisite for employing persuasion knowledge is successful recognition of persuasive attempts. It becomes difficult to achieve this in the case of native advertising because of the form’s seamless integration of sponsored content with other non-paid content (e.g., Wojdynski & Evans, 2015). In this case, updating consumers’ knowledge about such covert marketing technique has been found effective in enhancing users’ awareness. For example, Nelson, Wood, and Paek (2009) found that users who learned about Video News Releases (VNRs) practices were more likely to perceive that VNRs are commercialized news than participants who did not learn such information. Such effects became even stronger when the participants who read about VNR also saw a VNR label on screen. This line of research (Nelson, Wood, & Paek, 2009; Evans & Park, 2015) essentially suggests that PKM as a form of media literacy is very important in persuasive message processing. Increasing persuasion knowledge by familiarizing consumers with general native advertising practices can be an effective way to enhance their recognition of such covert marketing attempts, thereby enabling users to correctly evaluate and process native advertising content.

However, unlike in a lab setting, in a real-world situation, users might not have resources or motivations to purposefully learn about certain persuasion practice; instead, their persuasion knowledge is often accumulated from daily experience, conversations with friends and family, observing persuasion agents, or quick commentary in the media (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Therefore, in order to replicate our daily experience, the current study proposes to test the effect of a quick and unintended exposure to the information about native advertising practice on ad recognition. A short and unintended exposure can be operationalized as a process of priming. **Priming Native Advertising Information**

Priming occurs when a preceding stimulus or event exerts influence on how people react to the subsequent stimulus (Roskos-Ewoldsen, & Fazio, 1992). Based on memory-based models of information processing, people usually form attitudes based on the most salient, hence most accessible, considerations and beliefs in their mind (Hastie & Park, 1986). By making certain issues or attributes salient, previous stimuli that people are exposed to can therefore determine the standard that people use to interpret or evaluate the subsequent stimuli (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Yi, 1990).

Priming has been studied in different areas, including advertising, public relations, political communication, media violence, among others. Scholars in these areas have found that the effects of priming lie in both cognitive and affective aspects. Once primed, people’s interpretation and evaluation of certain information will be influenced (e.g., Berger, Meredith, & Wheeler, 2008; Yi, 1990). Yi (1990) found that the context of advertisements can influence an audience’s perceptions and evaluation of the ad. In an experiment, he showed participants an automobile advertisement presenting a full-size vehicle, followed by either an article emphasizing safety of air travel or another article about an oil entrepreneur. As a result, participants exposed to the article emphasizing safety tended to associate the advertised full-size vehicle with safety and hence formed positive attitudes and greater purchase intention toward the car and brand. Whereas their counterparts who viewed the article about an oil entrepreneur were more likely to associate the vehicle size with poor fuel economy, resulting in negative attitudes and lower purchase intention toward the car and brand. Similarly, when source likability was primed and accessible at the moment of message evaluation, more participants expressed agreement with the message delivered by the source than did when the source likability was less accessible (Roskos-Ewoldsen, & Fazio, 1992).
Based on the above literature, it is reasonable to speculate that when a description of native advertising is primed, this concept will be more accessible in participants’ mind when they are exposed to subsequent news articles, and hence they are more likely to interpret the article as a persuasive message; therefore, the current study proposes:

H1: Participants who are primed with native advertising information will be more likely to a) recognize a native advertising article as an advertisement and b) perceive the article as having greater persuasive intent than participants who are not primed with native advertising information.

Moreover, according to PKM and previous discussions, users tend to be more critical and resistant when they evaluate persuasive messages. If they identify an article as an advertisement, they tend to perceive the content differently. Therefore, this study hypothesizes the following.

H2: Participants who are primed with native advertising information will be more likely to negatively evaluate the content than participants who are not primed with native advertising information.

In sum, priming can help users better recognize advertising and identify persuasive intent, which can potentially address the issue of obscuring persuasive intent in native advertising. However, it is still unclear how readers will attribute the source of native advertising because of shared media platforms and high levels of resemblance between advertising content and regular editorial content. This aspect becomes equally meaningful because previous research has consistently revealed the important role played by sources in influencing message processing and related persuasive outcomes. With two perceivable sources in native advertising, being companies that sponsor the content and media outlets that publish the content, how will users’ prior perceptions toward these sources influence their subsequent content evaluation as well as future source evaluation?

Source Credibility in Native Advertising

As one of the four key elements (i.e., source, message, channel, and receiver) of the communication process, source refers to where the message originates (Berlo, 1960). Persuasion literature has consistently shown the profound influence of source attributes on recipients’ attitudes after message exposure (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Wilson & Sherrell, 1993). In the framework of the dual-processing models (Chaiken, 1980; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), source attributes are believed to be important peripheral cues that may sway individuals’ evaluation of the persuasive message when they are not involved in a comprehensive and thorough way in information processing.

Among the source attributes, credibility is one of the most frequently examined. It can be broadly defined as the global evaluation of the extent to which the message source is believable (Wilson & Sherrell, 1993). Source credibility is typically considered as a construct containing two dimensions: competency and trustworthiness (Flanagin & Metzger, 2007). Competency refers to the degree to which a message source’s knowledge and expertise is offered as valid information. On the other hand, trustworthiness is related to the honesty and morality of a source in providing objective and unbiased information. Following Aristotle’s conceptualization of ethos, McCroskey and Teven (1999) argued that goodwill should be the third dimension of source credibility. It highlights the benevolent intentions of the source towards message receivers.

A series of past research has consistently corroborated the positive effect of source credibility on persuasion outcomes (Pompetakpan, 2004). A high-credibility source is generally
superior over a low-credibility source in eliciting desirable attitudinal changes. For example, an experiment found that online information published by a high-credible source (i.e., *New York Times*) received more favorable evaluation compared to those published by a low-credible source (i.e., a personal homepage) (Greer, 2003). Such persuasive effects of a credible source is particularly robust in a context of native advertising, which has been operationalized and delivered by different forms of source.

On one hand, source has been operationalized as endorsers in the field of advertising. For example, Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell (2002) found that the credibility of an endorser was positively related to consumers’ attitudes toward the endorsed advertisement. On the other hand, source of an advertisement was also commonly operationalized as the media outlet that publishes the advertisement. An advertisement tends to be more persuasive when it is published by a highly credible media source outlet than being distributed by a less credible media source. An experiment, for instance, found that consumers held more favorable ad evaluations, brand attitudes, as well as greater purchase intention when the advertisement was presented on a well established online magazine compared to a barely known magazine (Choi & Rifon, 2002). In addition, a recent study examining viral advertising messages has identified two different sources: the advertiser (e.g., company) as the message creator and a sender as the message distributor.

Similarly in the context of native advertising, there are two perceivable sources: advertiser (i.e., corporate or marketer) and the media outlet (i.e., media agency that published the content). Source credibility thereby can be operationalized as either corporate credibility or media source credibility. In previous studies, corporate credibility has been defined as the degree to which consumers (and other constituents) believe in a company’s trustworthiness and expertise in designing and delivering products and services that can satisfy customer needs (Fombrun, 1996; Keller, 1998). As one of the major components of corporate reputation, scholars have argued that corporate credibility can effectively influence attitudinal and behavioral responses toward advertising content as well as brand (Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000). For example, an early study supported the positive influence of advertiser credibility on attitudes toward both advertiser and advertisement (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Therefore, in the context of native advertising, the current study proposes,

H4: Higher levels of corporate credibility will lead to more positive evaluation of a) advertising content, b) company, and c) media outlet.

On the other hand, media source credibility can be defined as the degree to which users believe in a media source’s trustworthiness and expertise in providing correct information without bias (Go, Jung, Wu, 2014; Greer, 2003; Sundar, 1999; Hass, 1981). As discussed earlier, a credible media source can also positively influence how users perceive and process information. For example, studies have found that people perceived information from a credible website sponsor as having better quality than that of the information from a low-credibility sponsor (Flanagin & Metzger, 2003). A more recent study also consistently showed that the same article published by a credible source (e.g., Chicago Tribune) is perceived as more credible and having better quality than being published by a less credible source (e.g., National Equirer) (Go, Jung, Wu, 2014). When an advertisement is published by a credible media source, the media source can often be perceived as a kind of endorser. This allows an opportunity to translate the positive perception toward the media source into the advertisement and related entities. Therefore, the current study expects to find the following.
H5: Higher levels of media source credibility will lead to more positive evaluation of a) advertising content, b) company, and c) media outlet.

Each source’s credibility can influence advertising perception and processing; however, they might operate independently. Specifically, scholars suggested that corporate credibility tends to be more influential in affecting brand evaluation and purchase intention, whereas media source credibility tends to be more influential in advertising content evaluation (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999; Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000). On the other hand, in Cho, Huh, and Faber’s study (2014) examining the effects of sender trust and advertiser trust on viral advertising perceptions, their findings suggested that a credible sender or message distributor is more influential in a way that the influence of the advertiser becomes non-significant if a viral ad is sent by a credible sender. With these two lines of contradictory findings, the interaction mechanism between two types of sources is unclear. Moreover, the earlier discussion has proposed that priming of native advertising practice could lead to better recognition of advertising and persuasive intent, which can subsequently elicit resistance and negative perceptions toward advertising content as well as related entities. Therefore, together it is meaningful to explore the following research question.

RQ1: What are the interaction effects among native advertising priming, corporate credibility, and media source credibility on users’ evaluation of a) advertising content, b) company, and c) media outlet?

Method

Research Design and Procedure

To test the hypotheses, a 2 (priming: presence vs. absence) × 2 (media credibility: high vs. low) × 2 (corporate credibility: high vs. low) factorial between-subjects design experiment was conducted. Participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk.

As a cover story, participants were told that the study was interested in their opinions about a travel article, which was, in fact, a native advertisement of a hotel brand. Participants who were all from U.S. were randomly assigned to one of the eight experimental conditions after they accessed the study link through Amazon Mechanical Turk. The whole experiment was administered on Qualtrics.

Priming manipulation happened right after the participants completed informed consent form. In order to make the priming process less intentional, participants were told that this procedure was to test if their browsers were compatible with the survey system. Half of the participants were randomly assigned to read a short description of native advertising (i.e., priming condition), while the other half read a paragraph about the solar system (i.e., control condition). Each was followed by a question asking about the main topic of the description. Then participants were told that they passed the system test and were promoted to the formal study accordingly.

At this stage, they were asked to read an article entitled “The five best vacation spots you may not know about”, where media credibility and corporate credibility manipulations were administrated. Specifically, media credibility was manipulated by varying the name of the news agency. Thus, for the high-credibility condition, we showed a simulated webpage of The New York Times with the selected article, whereas for low-credibility condition, we showed a simulated BuzzFeed webpage with the same story. Corporate credibility, on the other hand, was manipulated by differentiating the company sponsor of the article, where Marriott being the high-credibility corporate sponsor and Super 8 being the low-credibility sponsor.
The two corporations were selected based on pre-test data pertaining to people’s perceived credibility of 10 leading hotel chains in the U.S. (e.g., Holiday Inn, Hilton, Hotel 6) that were also collected from Amazon Mechanical Turk. Based on the pre-test results, Marriott was chosen as the corporate with the highest credibility and Super 8 was perceived to be of lowest credibility. The two media outlets were chosen because prior research had found significant differences in perceptions of native advertising expectations because of the high credibility of the New York Times and the relatively lower credibility of BuzzFeed (Lazauskas, 2015, September 8).

After participants read the article, they were asked to indicate to what extent they perceive the article to be an advertisement. In addition, several questions regarding their perceived quality of the article and their evaluations on both the media source and the sponsor company were also asked, as well as their perceived persuasive intention of the article. And finally, participants’ demographic information was collected, and then a random code was generated by Qualtrics. After participants submitted the code on Amazon Mechanical Turk, they received one dollar of compensation.

**Participants**

A total of 500 Amazon Mechanical Turkers participated in the study. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 72 years ($M = 35.56, SD = 11.88$), with 71.8% identifying themselves as Caucasian, 10.2% as African American, 9.2% as Asian, 5.8% as Hispanic/Latino, and 3% as Other. The majority of participants were female ($N = 264, 52.8\%$).

**Stimulus Materials**

An article from HomeAway (https://www.homeaway.com/info/travelers/travel-ideas/best-of/family-vacations/best-vacation-spots) on travel destinations was downloaded from the website and modified for the study. Four website pages were created with the same article as the main content. Two website pages mimicked the design of The New York Times website and the other two employed the website design of BuzzFeed. Each of the news outlet sites listed one of two disclosure statement, either “Sponsored by Marriott” or “Sponsored by Super 8”. All website pages were converted into JPEG images and inserted in Qualtrics.

**Measurements**

All variables were measured using 7-point Likert-scale ranging from 1, “strongly disagree” to 7, “strongly agree” unless stated otherwise.

Content evaluation was measured with 15 items adopted from Sundar and Nass (2001). Participants were asked to rate on a series of adjectives in three broad categories: perceived quality (e.g., clear, comprehensive, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .86$), perceived credibility (e.g., accurate, fair, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$), and liking (e.g., lively, enjoyable, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$) of the article they just read.

Advertisement recognition was measured with a single item “Was the article you just read an advertisement?” Participants answered this question on a scale ranging from 1 (No) to 7 (Absolutely).

Perceived persuasive intention was measured with four items (Reinhard, Messner, & Sporer, 2006, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .73$). An example item is “The article has a strong interest in changing my attitude toward a brand.”

Company evaluation was comprised of 5 components: competence and good will adopted from McCroskey and Trevens (1999)’s source credibility scale, as well as trust, satisfaction, and
commitment adopted from OPR scale (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Competence (e.g., unintelligent/intelligent, Cronbach’s α = .96) and good will (e.g., self-centered/ not self-centered, Cronbach’s α = .94) were measured with six and four items on a semantic differential scale respectively. Trust (e.g., This organization treats people like me fairly and justly, Cronbach’s α = .93), satisfaction (e.g., I am happy with this organization, Cronbach’s α = .95), and commitment (e.g., I feel that this organization is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to people like me, Cronbach’s α = .90) were measured on a 7-point Likert scale.

Media source evaluation was measured with the same 5 components as company evaluation. The measurements showed similar reliability (competence: Cronbach’s α = .96; good will: Cronbach’s α = .92; trust: Cronbach’s α = .92; satisfaction: Cronbach’s α = .94; commitment: Cronbach’s α = .90).

In addition, participants’ demographic information was also measured, including gender, ethnicity, age, education level, and family income.

Results

Manipulation Checks

Three Chi-Square tests were employed to test the effectiveness of the experiment treatment. Results revealed that participants in the priming condition (93.7%) were more likely to indicate that they had viewed a brief introduction of native advertising compared to those in the non-priming condition (11.7%), χ² (1, N = 500) = 338.64, p < .001, Cramer’s V = .82. Moreover, participants who viewed the article with a high-credibility media source were more likely to agree that the article was published on the New York Times (89.1%) rather than Buzzfeed compared to their counterparts who viewed the article with a low-credibility media source (8.3%), χ² (1, N = 500) = 326.58, p < .001, Cramer’s V = .81. In addition, participants who were exposed to the article sponsored by a high-credibility company were more likely to suggest that Marriott rather than Super 8 promoted the article (71.8%) compared to their counterparts who were in the low-credibility-company condition (4.8%), χ² (1, N = 500) = 304.84, p < .001, Cramer’s V = .78. Therefore, all the experimental manipulations were effective.

Hypothesis Testing

H1 predicted that participants who were primed with native advertising practice would be more likely to (a) recognize the article as an advertisement and (b) perceive greater persuasive intent than those who viewed the article without priming. Consistent with the prediction, a significant main effect for priming on ad recognition was found, F(1, 492) = 12.00, p < .01, η² = .02. In particular, participants who were primed about native advertising were more likely to recognize the article as an ad (M = 5.30, SE = .10) compared to those in the non-priming condition (M = 4.79, SE = .10). Therefore, H1a was supported.

Additionally, results revealed a marginally significant main effect for priming on perceived persuasive intent, F(1, 492) = 3.60, p = .06, η² = .01. In particular, participants who were primed about native advertising perceived greater persuasive intent when viewing the article (M = 3.88, SE = .07) compared to those who viewed the article without priming (M = 3.68, SE = .08). Therefore, H1b received support from the study data.

This main effect, however, should be interpreted in the context of a marginally significant three-way interaction effect between priming, media credibility, and corporate credibility, F(1, 492) = 3.70, p = .06, η² = .01. As Figure 1 indicated, when participants were not primed about native advertising, a more credible company sponsor triggered greater perceived persuasive
intent when the article was published on a low-credibility media outlet; the difference in persuasive intent did not vary much depending on the credibility of the company sponsor if the article was published on a high-credibility media outlet. When participants were primed, for an article sponsored by a low-credibility company, they perceived less persuasive intent if the media outlet was more credible; the pattern was reversed for an article promoted by a high-credibility company (See Table 1 for cell means).

H2 proposed that participants who were primed with native advertising practice would evaluate the native advertising content more negatively than participants who viewed the content without priming. Results indicated a significant main effect for priming on perceived content credibility, $F(1, 492) = 9.59, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .02$. Specifically, participants who were primed with the idea of native advertising perceived the article as less credible ($M = 4.69, SE = .06$) compared to those who did not receive the priming message ($M = 4.98, SE = .07$). However, priming did not significantly affect perceived content quality, $F(1, 492) = 1.91, p > .05$, and liking of the native advertising content, $F(1, 492) = 0.14, p > .05$. Therefore, H2 received partial support.

H3 suggested that a higher level of corporate credibility would trigger (a) more positive evaluation of the native advertising content, more favorable relational outcomes with and perceptions of (b) the company sponsor, and (c) the media outlet. Yet, results showed that the main effect for corporate credibility was non-significant on perceived content credibility, $F(1, 492) = .08, p > .05$, content quality, $F(1, 492) = .38, p > .05$, and liking of the content, $F(1, 492) = 1.12, p > .05$; neither on trust towards the company, $F(1, 492) = 1.34, p > .05$, satisfaction with the company, $F(1, 492) = 1.80, p > .05$, commitment to the company, $F(1, 492) = 0.74, p > .05$, and perceived goodwill of the company, $F(1, 492) = 0.01, p > .05$. Perceived credibility of the media source in terms of competency, $F(1, 492) = 1.44, p > .05$, and goodwill, $F(1, 492) = 0.00, p > .05$, was not significantly affected by corporate credibility, either. Moreover, corporate credibility did not significantly influence the relational outcomes with the media outlet in terms of trust, $F(1, 492) = 0.73, p > .05$, satisfaction, $F(1, 492) = 0.00, p > .05$, and commitment, $F(1, 492) = 0.16, p > .05$. However, results revealed a significant main effect for corporate credibility on perceived company competency, $F(1, 492) = 4.74, p < .05, \eta^2_p = .03$. Specifically, the company sponsor was perceived as more competent if its credibility was high ($M = 5.57, SE = .07, p < .05$) compared to a low-credibility company ($M = 5.34, SE = .07$). Therefore, H3a and H3c were not supported, whereas H3b was partially supported.

H4 predicted that a higher level of media source credibility would result in (a) more positive evaluation of the native advertising content, more favorable relational outcomes with and perceptions of (b) the company sponsor, and (c) the media outlet. However, results showed that the main effect for media source credibility was non-significant on perceived content credibility, $F(1, 492) = 0.29, p > .05$, content quality, $F(1, 492) = 0.44, p > .05$, and liking of the content, $F(1, 492) = 0.24, p > .05$; neither on trust towards the company, $F(1, 492) = 0.90, p > .05$, satisfaction with the company, $F(1, 492) = 0.55, p > .05$, commitment to the company, $F(1, 492) = 0.26, p > .05$, perceived competency of the company, $F(1, 492) = 1.99, p > .05$, and perceived goodwill of the company, $F(1, 492) = 2.86, p > .05$. Perceived credibility of the media source in terms of goodwill, $F(1, 492) = 0.00, p > .05$, was not significantly affected by media credibility, either. In addition, media source credibility did not show a significant main effect on the relational outcomes with the media outlet in terms of trust, $F(1, 492) = 0.37, p > .05$, satisfaction, $F(1, 492) = 0.44, p > .05$, and commitment, $F(1, 492) = 0.38, p > .05$. Nevertheless, results showed a significant main effect for media credibility on perceived media competency, $F(1, 492) = 17.04, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .03$. Specifically, the media outlet was perceived as more
competent if its credibility was high \((M = 5.60, SE = .08, p < .001)\) compared to a low-credibility media outlet \((M = 5.12, SE = .08)\). Therefore, H4a and H4c were not supported, whereas H4b was partially supported.

RQ1 asked if there were any interaction effects among native advertising priming, corporate credibility, and media source credibility on (a) evaluation of the native advertising content, perceptions of and relational outcomes with (b) the company sponsor, and (c) the media outlet. Analyses revealed a significant three-way interaction effect among priming, media credibility, and company credibility on perceived content credibility, \(F(1, 492) = 9.21, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .02\). As Figure 2 showed, when participants were primed about native advertising, they perceived the article published by a media outlet with low credibility as more credible if a more credible company sponsored it; however, the trend is reversed for an article published by a media outlet with high credibility. When the idea of native advertising was not primed, credibility of the media source did not make a big difference when a low-credibility company sponsored the article; but when the sponsor was highly credible, the article was perceived as more credible when a more credible media outlet published it (See Table 1 for cell means).

Similarly, results indicated significant three-way interaction effects on trust towards the media source, \(F(1, 492) = 8.11, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .02\), satisfaction with the media source, \(F(1, 492) = 8.08, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .02\), commitment to the media source, \(F(1, 492) = 8.70, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .02\), and perceived goodwill of the media source, \(F(1, 492) = 7.22, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .01\). The patterns of these three-way interaction effects were rather consistent and similar to the three-way interaction effect on perceived content credibility (See Table 1 for cell means).

Figure 1. Three-way interaction of priming, media credibility and corporate credibility on perceived persuasive intent

Figure 2. Three-way interaction of priming, media credibility and corporate credibility on perceived content credibility
Discussion

Utilizing PKM (Friestad & Wright 1994), the current study confirmed the positive effects of persuasion knowledge on users’ capability to recognize native advertising and related persuasive intent. By using the same native advertising article for all four conditions, the results supported the influence of priming, corporate credibility, and media source credibility on users’ content perceptions, company evaluations, and media outlet evaluations. The main effects of each factor as well as the interaction effects together help improve our understanding of how audiences use their persuasion knowledge and source perceptions in evaluating native advertising content and content providers from both a theoretical and practical perspective.

As expected, the current study revealed that native advertising knowledge obtained through a brief priming process has a significant main effect on users’ ad processing. Specifically, participants primed with a definition of native advertising are more likely to recognize the content as an advertisement and identify its persuasive intent. Considering the controversy surrounding native advertising disclosure, and the fact that prior studies have found only seven percent of readers recognize native ads (Wojdynski & Evans, 2015), this finding is important. When audiences understand the definition of a native advertisement, they are more likely to recognize it and identify its persuasive intent.

Participants who were aware that they were reading a native ad reported a lower content quality judgment, particularly in terms of perceived credibility of the content. The supported main effect is also theoretically consistent with PKM and previous findings (Friestad & Wright 1994). It demonstrates the importance of persuasion knowledge and media literacy in coping with native advertising.

More importantly, a three-way interaction effect showed that participants who were not primed about native advertising practice identified greater persuasive intent when the advertisement is sponsored by a high-credibility company (Marriott Hotels) but published on a media outlet with low credibility (BuzzFeed). On the other hand, participants who were primed with a definition of native advertising tended to perceive persuasive intent for all combinations except for the article sponsored by a low-credibility company (Super 8 Hotels) but posted on a highly credible media agent (New York Times). This finding confirms that the ethical concern associated with native advertising, which is the effectiveness of native advertising is connected to users’ unawareness of its advertising nature. Users, by default, rarely perceive persuasive intent except when there is a miss-match between the credibility of the company and the media outlet that might trigger their suspicion, which could lead to greater identification of persuasive intent. However, via priming, users learned about the existence of native advertising, which made them much more skeptical, as they tended to see persuasive intent in three of four combinations between media and company.

On one hand, the finding suggests that advertisers and media source have a responsibility to make sure users are aware of the promotional intent embedded in the content. Providing them with more knowledge about native advertising can be an effective way, and it can be completed via a simple priming process before users’ exposure to native advertising content. On the other hand, consistent with Nelson, Wood, & Paek (2009), increased knowledge about native advertising might make users over-skeptical, which could harm regular content consumption and lead to a distrust toward media in general. This subsequently implies the importance of disclosure statements that can clearly distinguish advertising content from regular editorial content, which might avoid the over generalization of the distrust. Together, a combination of
user knowledge and clear disclosure labelling as a joint effort from media, companies, and users could be a solution to the ethical concerns associated with native advertising.

The current study also examined interaction effects among native advertising priming, corporate credibility, and media source credibility on evaluation of content and perceptions of and relational outcomes with companies as well as media outlets. A series of three-way interactions emerged, and all of them followed a consistent pattern. Without priming, users tend to have more positive evaluations toward the content and media outlet if an article is sponsored by a high-credibility company and is published on a high-credibility media rather than the article being published in a low-credibility media outlet. Difference made by the credibility of the media outlet disappears if the article is from a low-credibility company. In contrast, with priming of native advertising, the article sponsored by a high-credibility company being published on a low-credibility media or the article sponsored by a low-credibility company being published on a high-credibility media will be more likely to elicit positive evaluations toward the content and media outlet than the other two combinations (i.e., when company credibility matches media credibility).

Initially, such results seemed to be contradictory and unreasonable; however, a closer examination led to a couple of interesting suggestions that are also consistent with our findings regarding ad recognition and persuasive intent. As discussed early, when users do not receive priming about native advertising, individuals may not be aware that the article they are reading is, in fact, an advertisement. Therefore, they followed the congruency rule where they expect that a high credibility company should only appear on a high credibility media, but for a low credibility company, users are more lenient, and expect such company will make media appearance as much as possible regardless of the reputation of the media outlets. Therefore, when they see an article from a high credibility company posted on a high-credibility media, they evaluate the content as more credible, have a higher level of trust, satisfaction, and commitment to the media, and perceive the media source as more benevolent. However, once individuals realized that the sponsored content might be a form of advertisement, they will not respond in a usual way. Rather, they are more likely to get into a conscious persuasion coping mode. In this case, media sources are seen as persuaders rather than neutral content distributors. According to Eagly, Wood, and Chaiken (1978), based on their knowledge about persuaders, message receivers tend to attribute persuader’s behaviors and statements to different factors, and are more conscious about the traditional persuasive strategies. Individuals predict that a persuader will communicate information that matches its presumed role and perspective (e.g., a car salesman is more likely to say good things about a car), which has been conceptualized as knowledge bias (Eagly, Wood, & Chaiken, 1978; Perloff, 2007). When such knowledge bias is violated, where individuals find that their expectations were wrong, they tend to conclude that the persuader is more credible (Eagly, Wood, & Chaiken, 1978). Therefore, it is very plausible that the primed participants who are ready to read a persuasive message also expect that there should be a match between the credibility of media source and company. However, the expectation based on such knowledge bias is disconfirmed when they see a mismatch between media and company. Under such circumstance, individuals tend to find other reasons for which a high-credibility media outlet is willing to publish something from a low-credibility company or a low-credibility media outlet presents an article for a high-credibility company. Unable to find other causes, individuals might reasonably infer that the article must have valuable content and the media source must be trustworthy, benevolent, and worth their commitment.
Such an account, along with the limited support for the main effects of corporate credibility (H3) and media source credibility (H4), again emphasizes the important role played by successful ad recognition. Most previous studies simply examined interaction between advertisers and distributors (e.g., Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999; Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000; Cho, Huh, & Faber, 2014) and found inconsistent findings regarding how these two types of sources interact and influence advertisement processing. The current study suggests that the interaction effect between these two types of sources, company and media, seems to work as a function of priming of native advertising, which could completely change how individuals process the content and evaluate the media source. The ad recognition enabled by the priming process could turn on certain advertising content processing routes (heuristic vs. elaboration) and utilize certain evaluation strategies (congruency vs. expectancy-violation), which then leads to different content perceptions and relational outcomes.

Moreover, the current study found that the experimental manipulations of priming, media credibility, and corporate credibility did not significantly alter audiences’ perceptions of and relational outcomes with the company sponsor. This is actually reasonable. For users, regardless of their knowledge about native advertising, they tend to perceive companies’ media appearances (either in form of sponsoring an article or a traditional advertisement) as a type of marketing technique. However, individuals do not always associate news media with such marketing operations because journalism has been perceived to “have a clear separation between editorial staffs and advertising staffs” (Wojdynski, 2016). Therefore, by knowing native advertising is a joint effort between news media and company with a persuasive purpose could significantly influence how individuals’ perceive the media source but not necessarily the company. It is thus imperative for news media to understand the potential risk associated with their native advertising practices.

Practical Implications
The findings of the current study are meaningful for public relations practitioners working on native advertising. While the audiences’ inability to identify the native advertisements has raised serious ethical concerns among researchers and practitioners, our study provides a possible solution. The findings suggest that policies requiring advertisers to briefly inform audiences’ about the practice of native advertising prior to their ad exposure can effectively increase the chance that they will recognize the nature of the content and its persuasive intent. Offering similar procedures of media education will increase the public’s awareness of this new form of advertisements and facilitate informed consumer decisions.

Additionally, the study findings present caveats for the news organizations that are placing or plan to implement native advertisements. The study demonstrates that sponsored content is more likely to influence the public’s perceptions of and relations with the media outlet than those with the content sponsors. This influence is determined simultaneously by the current reputation of the news media and the corporate sponsor as well as audiences’ awareness of the promotional nature of the content. Therefore, news organizations should carefully consider their own standing in the mind of the public, content sponsors’ reputation, and audiences’ literacy when placing native advertisements. Otherwise, this practice may endanger their relationships with the public.

Limitation and Future Directions
One limitation of this study lies in the external validity, which is a common problem that most experimental studies suffer from. Even though the study showed that priming participants by exposing them to a description of native advertising could influence their ad recognition and their perceptions related to the article, exactly replicating such a priming procedure in the real world is less controllable. Besides, the participants were all recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk, and they may not be able to represent the whole general population.

In addition, the whole experiment was conducted online and participants viewed the web page and finished the questionnaire without any monitoring; thus, researchers could not be sure all participants viewed the entire message and completed the questionnaire carefully. Future study should consider conducting the experiment in a controlled environment to make sure all the participants are fully engaged and complete the questionnaire.

Another limitation of the study is that a single media message was used as the main content. In considering the variety of advertising topics, other types of content should also be tested to provide researchers and practitioners with a more comprehensive understanding of native advertising.
References


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### Table 1

*Summary of cell means for the three-way interaction effects*

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Communication evaluation and measurement: 
Skills, practices and utilization in European organizations

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Abstract

This study explores the state-of-the-art of measurement and performance management in communication departments across Europe based on a survey. Research questions focus on three major challenges of reliable measurement: prerequisites (measurement skills of communication professionals), implementation (measurement practices implemented by communication departments) and utilization (exploitation of those insights for managing future activities).
Introduction

With the rapid expansion of the communication industry over the past decades, rising budgets and an increasing number of communication channels, communication practitioners are gradually being pressured to give detailed account of how communication activities benefit organizational goals (Watson, 2012, p. 394). In today’s competitive business environment, management demands “hard facts” instead of decisions to invest in communication based on intuition or experience (Yin, Krishnan, & Ean, 2012, p. 42).

Measurement and evaluation enables communication practitioners to demonstrate the value of their activities for their organizations (Stacks & Michaelson, 2014; Watson & Noble, 2014). The great variety of goals and instruments makes it difficult to verify the contribution of communication to value creation and to assess the success of particular communication activities. This is, however, absolutely essential if communication managers are striving to achieve sustained influence and to be part of the dominant coalition within their organization. In converse, the inability to prove the impact of communication is often regarded as a major barrier to further professionalization (Zerfass, Verčič, Verhoeven, Moreno, & Tench, 2012, p. 38).

A review of empirical studies into the practice of evaluation and measurement suggests that professionals lack the expertise to conduct valid and reliable evaluation and measurement, along with constraints of small budgets and sparse time (Wright, Gaunt, Leggetter, Daniels, & Zerfass, 2009). Another key finding was that organizations have largely adopted methods for evaluating communication success on the level of specific media and channels, while scarcely measuring effects on stakeholders and on organizational goals (Gregory & Watson, 2008, p. 345; Zerfass, Tench, Verčič, Verhoeven, & Moreno, 2010, p. 98).

Overall, previous findings indicate that the challenge to conduct reliable measurement is three-fold: firstly, communication professionals have to understand and develop skills how to conduct evaluation; secondly, they have to evaluate whether communication activities have reached those goals in practice; and finally, they have to use those insights to advance and manage their future activities.

To date, however, little is known about how advanced the knowledge of practitioners is, which practices of measurement are applied in communication departments, and how organizations use measurement insights to support and improve communication management activities. The present study addresses this gap by exploring the current state-of-the-art of measurement and performance management in communication departments across Europe. It is based on a quantitative survey of 1,601 professionals working in communication departments of companies, non-profit and governmental organizations from 40 European countries. The study aims to provide answers to three research questions asking about prerequisites, implementation and benefits of communication measurement and compares practices across organizational types.

Literature review

Empirical studies into the practice of evaluation and measurement of communication in organizational contexts have a considerable history, starting with first inquiries in the United States in the early 1980s (Volk, 2016; Likely & Watson, 2013). In fact, questions related to evaluation have been listed among the top research priorities of public relations scholarship throughout academic research (Watson, 2008, p. 111). To date, insights into measurement practices are available for the United States (e.g., Lindenmann, 1990; Hon, 1997; Wright, 1998), Australia (e.g., Walker, 1994; Xavier, Mehta, & Gregory, 2006), Europe (e.g., Baskin, Hahn, Seaman, & Reines, 2010; Zerfass et al., 2010; Matilla & Marca, 2012), and recently Asia (e.g.,
Huang, 2012; Macnamara, Lwin, Adi, & Zerfass, 2015). In terms of methodological approaches, scholars have utilized both quantitative methods such as survey designs (e.g., Piekos & Einsiedel, 1990; Invernizzi & Ronteni, 2009; Baskin et al., 2010) and qualitative methods such as interviews (e.g., Hon, 1997; Place, 2015) to gain a deeper understanding of how professionals actually conduct evaluation and measurement. Few scholars have relied on secondary data analysis to examine the state of the art within evaluation practice, for instance through analyzing entries for industry awards (e.g., Bissland, 1990; Gregory, 2001; Pieczka, 2000; Xavier, Johnston, Patel, Watson, & Simmons, 2005) or evaluation reports (e.g., O’Neil, 2013).

What has been largely neglected so far by previous empirical studies, are questions concerning the necessary prerequisites for conducting reliable evaluation, the different effect levels where communication impact must be measured, and the benefits of using measurement insights to plan future communication activities.

**Measurement skills of communication professionals**

The understanding of communication processes and the ability to conduct scientifically rigorous and valid measurement is crucial for communication professionals, who aim to document how communication adds value to their organization. In fact, measurement skills have been named among the most important skills for future leaders by communication professionals surveyed in the Global Study of Leadership in Public Relations and Communication Management (Berger & Meng, 2014, p. 298). However, studies investigating the evaluation skills required by communication professionals to reliably prove communication impact are rare. Most research is focused on the measurement methods in use or the communication instruments evaluated, generally suggesting that practitioners do not fully utilize the diversity of methods available (e.g., Gregory, 2001; Walker, 1994; Watson, 1997). Surprisingly, little is known about the personal measurement competencies of communication professionals who are responsible for managing communication and evaluating communication impact in organizations (Kiesenbauer & Zerfass, 2015).

Early research into evaluation practices has been conducted in the tradition of role research, suggesting a separation of managerial and technical aspects of the practitioners’ role (e.g., Dozier, 1984; Austin, Pinkleton, & Dixon, 2000; Tench, Zerfass, Verhoeven, Verčič, Moreno, & Okay, 2013, p. 14). Conducting evaluation and measuring communication success has typically been listed as a core skill of practitioners taking over a managerial role, along with planning and managing strategic communication activities. On the other hand, technical tasks have often included operational skills such as writing press releases or producing PR materials, but were unlikely to encompass any type of evaluation activity (Dozier, 1984; Austin et al., 2000). As early as in the 1980s, Dozier forecasted that public relations practice would increasingly be depending on scientific evaluation techniques and professionals needed the skill to conduct what he termed "true" evaluation (Dozier, 1985).

Competencies required to perform reliable evaluation can be categorized into different categories: methods of social science research, methods to analyze processes, and value-oriented methods. The competency to utilize basic empirical social research methods includes for instance the ability to perform content analysis, develop surveys, run focus groups or conduct pre/post tests (Pavlik, 1987). Nowadays many of these methods can be conducted online, and additional knowledge is needed to interpret Internet statistics, social media analytics and big data (Gandomi & Haider, 2015). Process analyses require the skill to use methods for compiling and interpreting data, deconstructing and analyzing budgets, or analyzing processes and workflows. Finally,
professionals may link communication to organizational goals with value-oriented methods, which require skills like constructing scorecards or calculating reputation value or brand value.

Wright et al. (2009) conducted a Global Survey of Communications Measurement, based on 520 respondents from multiple countries. A key finding was that professionals lacked the expertise to conduct valid and reliable evaluation and measurement, along with constraints of small budgets and sparse time (Wright et al., 2009, p. 23). Alarming, the overwhelming majority of respondents viewed measuring ROI (return on investment) on communication as an achievable goal, pointing towards the well-documented misconception in practice that it is possible to calculate the financial ROI attributable to communication (Wright et al., 2009, p. 2; Watson & Zerfass, 2011). A few other surveys of communication professionals provide supporting evidence for a widespread paucity of knowledge on how to utilize evaluation methods correctly (e.g., Watson & Simmons, 2004; Laborde & Pompper, 2006; Baskin et al., 2010). The inability to document communication impact reliably has been problematized as a major obstacle to the practice of measurement and evaluation, but also as a barrier to the continuing professionalization of the field (e.g., Bissland, 1990; Laborde & Pompper, 2006) and the institutionalization of the communication function (e.g., Invernizzi & Romenti, 2009).

Overall, past empirical studies of communication professionals indicate a lack of expertise to reliably measure the value of communication (Gregory & Watson, 2008, p. 346). Given the scarcity of empirical insights into the state-of-the-art of measurement competencies in communication departments across Europe today, the first research question is:

**RQ1:** How pronounced are the measurement skills of communication professionals?

**Implementation of measurement practices and methods**

The second challenge for communication professionals is to evaluate whether their activities have reached previously defined goals. Many researchers and practitioners argue that the impact of communication has to be analyzed along the typical phases of communication processes – starting with the communication activities by an organization, passing different phases of media and stakeholder effects, and ending with the potential impact on the focal organization and its goals (Watson & Noble, 2014). Lindenmann (1993, 2003) has introduced a popular approach to public relations evaluation, speaking of PR outputs, PR outtakes, PR outcomes and business outcomes. Other authors have modified this approach and used more differentiated logics or different terminology (AMEC, 2011; PRIA, 2014; Macnamara, 2015).

However, many studies across the world have shown that professionals often neglect the necessity of tracking communication processes from their initiation to their potential economic impact. Instead, organizations have largely adopted methods for evaluating communication results on the level of media and channels/platforms, while scarcely measuring effects on stakeholders and on organizational goals (Gregory & Watson, 2008, p. 345; Likely & Watson, 2013, p. 156).

To research how professionals are doing today, this study uses a theoretical framework developed by academics, management accountants and communication associations in Germany (Zerfass, 2010; DPRG/ICV 2011; Watson & Noble, 2014, pp. 170-181). The so-called **DPRG/ICV framework** conceptualizes evaluation and measurement activities in four clusters: inputs, outputs, outcomes and outflows. While all are important, demonstrating business value of communication activities is more transparent if done at the outcome and outflow levels, e.g. by describing the impact on reputation, brands, sales, relationship qualities etc. As visualized in figure 1, the framework distinguishes several starting points of measurement:
• **Input (What expenditures are being made for communication?):** The resources employed include staff employment and the financial costs of communication. Both of these can be measured using cost categories. In this regard, measurement can build on established methods of accountancy, but it must adapt them to the requirements of strategic communication. For example, a levy of costs drawn on specific stakeholders, communication channels, and corporate messages is desirable.

• **Internal output (What is being achieved by the company itself?):** This comprises process efficiency, which can be recorded using budget adherence, operating times and error rates, and the quality of internal workflows and activities provided by communication departments. In this context, the satisfaction of (internal) clients is an important measure. However, the focus still remains on the organization itself and the initiation of communication processes. To gain insights on this level, measurement must once again fall back on accountancy but it must also employ its own empirical data.

• **External output (What means of contact are being developed?):** This step refers to the range and contents of messages that are available to stakeholders or recipients. Indicators such as the number of clippings or favorable media coverage, visits to corporate websites or “share of voice” on social media platforms, or intranet use may be collected. While these indicators are necessary conditions for the success of communication processes with stakeholders, they do not prove who has read an article or used a website, so relationship quality cannot be measured on this level. Nevertheless, the task of communication measurement is to provide social science research methods such as content analyses and online analyses for demonstrating communicative output.

• **Direct outcome (How are stakeholders’ perception and knowledge changed?):** As far as perception, utilization, and knowledge are concerned, the changes affecting the stakeholders themselves are involved. Awareness, online session length, number of readers per issue, recall, understanding of key messages and recognition are typical parameters through which the success of communication and the generation of information in communicative interactions can be shown. Here, just as at the next level, opinion polls and observations are used.

Figure 1.
The DPRG/ICV-Framework for Communication Controlling
(Source: Zerfaß, 2010, p. 958; see also DPRG/ICV, 2011, p. 13)
• **Indirect outcome (How strongly are opinions and intentions being influenced?)**: This phase relates to the exertion of influence as the actual goal of all communication activities. Changes of opinions, attitudes, and emotions, as well as behavioral dispositions or actions of stakeholders can be depicted through several indicators. Some of the most popular ones are brand image, changes in reputation, employee commitment, and willingness to buy.

• **Outflow (Which business or organizational goals have been achieved?)**: As a consequence of communication processes, strategic and/or financial objectives of corporate performance and/or intangible resources can be influenced. This may be tracked by indicators such as turnover, project closings, cost reduction, or reputation and brand values. However, the link between communication strategies and organizational goals can only be represented by value links that need to be developed in a corporate-specific manner. For this purpose, communication professionals have to employ and adopt appropriate management systems such as the scorecard or strategy maps (Zerfass, 2008; Pfannenberg, 2010; Kaplan & Norton, 1996; Fleisher & Mahaffy, 1997).

Based on this framework, the second research question explores the current state of implementation of measurement activities:

RQ2: Which measurement practices and methods are implemented by communication departments along the phases of communication input, output, outcome and outflow?

*Use of measurement insights*
Finally, the third challenge for practitioners relates to using previously gained measurement insights in a meaningful and strategic manner. Scholars have discussed different purposes for which measurement data may be utilized. Particularly in the early beginnings of research, evaluation has largely been considered as the final step within the PR management process: analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation (Smith, 2013). In this line of thinking, evaluation was commonly understood as a summative activity, assessing the final output or outcome of a specific communication message or campaign (Watson & Noble, 2007, p. 21). Within this form of retrospective measurement, measurement insights are typically used to evaluate the success of communication activities or reflect upon the goals and directions of communication strategies.

The future-oriented dimension of evaluation was less frequently discussed in the early years of research, although a few scholars and practitioners had already acknowledged the relevance of formative evaluative research to inform planning processes (e.g., Stamm, 1977; Lesly, 1986; Broom & Dozier, 1990). Lerbinger (1977) mentioned the need of establishing monitoring or scanning systems to track critical changes in the environment and adjust strategies to environmental trends. In a similar line, Noble (1999) argued that evaluation should not be reduced to a backward-looking summative activity, but rather conceived as a proactive, forward-looking and formative activity at the beginning that provides ongoing feedback to enhance communication management. Hence, when strategically integrated and purposefully used, insights generated through formative evaluation (monitoring, listening, etc.) can support planning upcoming communication activities, adjusting strategies, or leading communication teams and agencies (see for example Macnamara, 2014).

Ultimately, measurement insights may be utilized for documenting success and explaining the value of communication to top executives and (internal) clients. Bissland (1990) emphasized that evaluation is crucial for demonstrating accountability and achieving professional status within the organization. The ability to provide management with solid measurement data from communication activities minimizes the risks of budget cuts or reduced influence within the organization (Yin et al., 2012, pp. 42-43; Zerfass, 2010, p. 948).

In order to gain excellence, practitioners need to use measurement insights for managing strategic communication, e.g. to revise or plan future activities. However, to date, empirical research has seldom explored how measurement insights are integrated in communication practice. Based on this thought, the third research question is phrased:

**RQ3:** How are measurement data and insights utilized in communication management?

**Methods**

The present study explores the current state-of-the-art of evaluation and measurement practice in communication departments across Europe. The goal is to provide answers to the three research questions posed above, focusing on prerequisites (RQ1), implementation (RQ2), and benefits (RQ3) of communication measurement.

A quantitative methodology was applied to perform this research. A population of 1,601 professionals from 40 European countries working on different hierarchical levels in communication departments of companies, non-profits and governmental organizations were surveyed as part of a larger transnational online survey (Zerfass, Verčič, Verhoeven, Moreno, & Tench, 2015). A pre-test with 51 practitioners in 18 European countries was held before the English language survey was launched in March 2015 and was online for four weeks. A personal invitation was sent to more than 30,000 professionals throughout Europe via e-mail based on a
database provided by the European Association of Communication Directors (EACD) and additional invitations were distributed through national branch associations and networks.

Roughly six out of ten respondents worked in communication departments in companies, of which 35.2 per cent were employed in joint stock companies and 24.6 per cent in private companies. Another 24.5 per cent of the communication professionals worked for governmental organizations, for instance in the public sector or political organizations. The remaining 15.6 per cent of the respondents were employed as communication staff in non-profit organizations. 42.8 per cent of the respondents held a position as head of communication. 27.7 per cent of the respondents interviewed were responsible for a single communication discipline or were unit leaders and 22.5 per cent were team members.

The demographics showed that 61.1 per cent of the surveyed professionals were female and roughly two thirds (68.3%) were aged between 30 to 49 years. Six out of ten professionals had more than ten years of experience in communication management, while 25.5 per cent had between six and ten years of experience and a minority (14.7%) less than five years. A vast majority (95.2%) of the respondents had an academic degree ranging from a professional bachelor to a doctorate, with most of these respondents holding a master degree (61.1%).

The IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis. Results have been tested statistically with ANOVA/Scheffe post-hoc tests and Chi-square tests. Results are classified as significant (p ≤ 0.05)* or highly significant (p ≤ 0.01)** in this article.

Findings

Communication professionals working in communication departments across Europe report moderate measurement skills, but they do not employ adequate methods to measure the entire communication process from input to outflow, and they do seldom use the insights for advancing and managing their activities.

Measurement skills of communication professionals (RQ1)

Overall, results show that practitioners display rather moderate capabilities when it comes to their personal skills of evaluating and measuring communication effects. On a 5-point Likert scale (1 low experience – 5 high experience), the highest level of experience reported was for compiling and interpreting data (M=3.50, SD=1.04), which is a prerequisite for process analyses. Following close upon, professionals have moderate experiences for developing and managing surveys (M=3.41, SD=1.06), performing content analyses (M=3.40, SD=1.12), and running Internet and social media analytics (M=3.33, SD=1.11), which altogether belong to the set of basic social science research methods. Professionals report a slightly lower competency level when it comes to the experience with process-oriented methods, i.e. for deconstructing and analyzing budgets (M=3.22, SD=1.23) or analyzing processes and workflows (M=3.19, SD=1.16). On the flip side, the weaker areas of the respondents’ competencies were knowledge about running focus groups (M=2.78, SD=1.27) and more sophisticated value-oriented methods such as constructing communication scorecards (M=2.78, SD=1.25), and calculating reputation value or brand value (M=2.64, SD=1.21). All fall below the mean scores for capabilities, providing supportive evidence for the previous notion that professionals indeed lack the expertise to utilize robust valuation methods to document the value-adding contribution of communication.

As illustrated in table 1, highly significant differences were found regarding the skills of communication practitioners working in different types of organizations. Across the sample, professionals employed in companies generally report higher capabilities than their counterparts
working in non-profit or governmental organizations. The only exception is the capability to run Internet and social media analytics, which is rated highest by professionals working in non-profit organizations (M=3.43, SD=1.09).

Table 1.
Evaluation skills of communication professionals in different types of organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Joint stock companies</th>
<th>Private companies</th>
<th>Governmental organizations</th>
<th>Non-profit organizations</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compiling and interpreting data</td>
<td>3.53 1.0 6</td>
<td>3.5 1.0 4</td>
<td>3.47 1.04</td>
<td>3.38 1.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing and managing surveys</td>
<td>3.44 1.0 5</td>
<td>3.4 1.0 5</td>
<td>3.34 1.10</td>
<td>3.36 1.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performing content analyses</td>
<td>3.45 1.1 0</td>
<td>3.3 1.1 6</td>
<td>3.45 1.12</td>
<td>3.27 1.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Running internet and social media analytics</td>
<td>3.27 1.1 2</td>
<td>3.4 1.1 0</td>
<td>3.29 1.07</td>
<td>3.43 1.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deconstructing and analyzing budgets **</td>
<td>3.41 1.2 0</td>
<td>3.3 1.2 7</td>
<td>2.87 1.24</td>
<td>3.09 1.22</td>
<td>16.32</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analyzing processes and workflows</td>
<td>3.27 1.1 2</td>
<td>3.2 1.1 5</td>
<td>3.07 1.18</td>
<td>3.08 1.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constructing communication scorecards **</td>
<td>3.05 1.2 5</td>
<td>2.7 1.2 9</td>
<td>2.52 1.18</td>
<td>2.53 1.30</td>
<td>16.78</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Running focus groups</td>
<td>2.86 1.2 7</td>
<td>2.6 1.2 9</td>
<td>2.80 1.29</td>
<td>2.69 1.28</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calculating reputation value / brand value **</td>
<td>2.78 1.2 1</td>
<td>2.7 1.2 6</td>
<td>2.42 1.20</td>
<td>2.49 1.19</td>
<td>8.398</td>
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</table>

Note. n = 1,430 communication professionals working in communication departments in Europe.
Q: How would you rate your personal capabilities in the following areas? A: 1 low experience – 5 high experience (5-point Likert scale). Mean values for each statement. ** Highly significant differences. ANOVA/Scheffé post-hoc test, p ≤ 0.01.

For deconstructing and analyzing budgets, respondents working in communication departments of joint stock companies (M=3.41, SD=1.20) or private companies (M=3.37, SD=1.21) are highly significantly more experienced than their peers working in non-profit organizations (M=3.09, SD=1.22) or governmental organizations (M=2.87, SD=1.24; F=16.324, p ≤ 0.01).
Highly significant differences were also detected with regard to the use of value-oriented methods. Professionals working in joint stock companies report average experience with constructing communication scorecards (M=3.05 SD=1.25), while professionals from private companies estimate their capability below the scale center (M=2.79, SD=1.21), followed by professionals from non-profit organizations (M=2.53, SD=1.30) or governmental organizations (M=2.52, SD=1.18; F=16.789, p ≤ 0.01). Experiences with calculating reputation value or brand value were particularly weak, which is an alarming finding regarding the crucial need for measuring communication effects at the outcome and the outflow level. Again, professionals working in companies assess their personal capability highly significant higher (M=2.78, SD=1.21; M=2.76, SD=1.20) than their counterparts in non-profit organizations (M=2.49, SD=1.19) or governmental organizations (M=2.42, SD=1.20; F=8.398, p ≤ 0.01).

Overall, the results of this study emphasize that respondents do not possess high experiences and capabilities to conduct robust measurement in practice. Communication professionals particularly lack the ability to utilize valuation methods for reporting how communication contributes to organizational goals at the outcome and outflow level. For that reason it may be hard to defend, explain and legitimize investment into communication to top decision-makers.

Implementation of measurement practices (RQ2)

The implementation of measurement methods was analyzed in accordance with the theoretical framework described above, differentiating the levels of input, internal output, external output, direct outcome, indirect outcome, and outflow. Europe-wide, most communication departments focus on output measures, above all media clippings, but neglect both costs (input) and impact on organizational targets or resources (outflow).

At the initiation of communication processes (input), the surveyed organizations frequently measure financial costs for projects (M=3.90, SD=1.25), based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 never – 5 always). In contrast, personnel costs at the project level are less often collected (M=3.19, SD=1.39), pointing towards clear deficits in cost accounting.

When evaluating communication processes (output), attention is first focused on media exposure or on the reach of company-owned communication platforms: Across Europe, direct output measures like clippings and media responses (M=4.33, SD=1.04) are most prevalent in strategic communication, followed by measures of Internet or intranet usage (M=3.92, SD=1.24). At the level of internal output measures, the satisfaction of (internal) clients is evaluated more often (M=3.60, SD=1.23) than the process quality of internal workflows (M=3.05, SD=1.27).

For assessing direct communication outcome, the surveyed communication departments focus their attention on the success of communication with stakeholders through analyzing their understanding of key messages (M=3.43, SD=1.27). Indicators for exerting influence on stakeholder attitudes and stimulating behavior change – as the actual goal of any communication (indirect outcome) – are comparatively less frequently employed by communication departments (M=3.28, SD=1.19).

Measures that indicate the impact of communication at the outflow level are scarcely utilized by European communication departments. In fact, methods to evaluate the impact of communication on financial/strategic targets (i.e. with scorecards or strategy maps) (M=2.98, SD=1.40) or on intangible/tangible resources (i.e. economic brand value) (M=2.90, SD=1.31) are ranked last.
Figure 2.
Focus of measurement and evaluation in communication departments

Note. n_{min} = 1,496 communication professionals working in communication departments in Europe. Q: Which items are monitored or measured by your organization to assess the effectiveness of communication management / public relations? A: 1 never – 5 always (5-point Likert scale). Mean values for each statement.
This finding is extremely interesting and contradictory, considering that the major value-adding contribution of communication to organizational objectives is typically described as building immaterial assets like brands, reputation, and organizational culture. The fact that implications for corporate goals, including the creation of intangible assets (outflow), are only tracked by a minor part of the respondents is decisive and alarming. Figure 2 illustrates that communication measurement is still heavily based on monitoring outputs, while the impact on organizational goals at the top of the pyramid receives less attention in practice.

Different types of organizations differ significantly regarding the implementation of evaluation measures, as visualized in Table 2. In line with the previous observations, the overall implementation of communication effectiveness measures is higher in companies than in non-profit or governmental organizations. Considerable scale point differences between the mean values were detected for evaluating communication impact at the outflow level. Governmental organizations least frequently measured the impact of communication on intangible/tangible resources (M=2.57, SD=1.28), while joint stock companies showed an average implementation rate (M=3.22, SD=1.28; F=23.788, p ≤ 0.01). Another noticeable difference was identified for calculating personnel costs for projects at the input level, which governmental organizations do much less often (2.88, SD=1.38) than for instance private companies (M=3.39, SD=1.35; F=8.923, p ≤ 0.01).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Focus of communication measurement in different types of organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clippings and media response **</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joint stock companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial costs for projects **</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfaction of (internal) clients **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding of key messages **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personnel costs for projects **</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internet/Intranet use **</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stakeholder attitudes and behavior change *</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.41</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Process quality (internal workflow) **</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact on financial/strategic targets (i.e. with scorecards, strategy maps) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on intangible/tangible resources (i.e. economic brand value) **</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** \( n_{\text{min}} = 1,496 \) communication professionals working in communication departments in Europe. Q: Which items are monitored or measured by your organization to assess the effectiveness of communication management / public relations? A: 1 never – 5 always (5-point Likert scale). ** Highly significant differences. ANOVA/Scheffe post-hoc test, \( p \leq 0.01 \). * Highly significant differences. ANOVA/Scheffe post-hoc test, \( p \leq 0.05 \).

As apparent in table 2, governmental organizations have a lower implementation rate of effect measures along all phases. This might be caused by the fact that leaders in the public sector exert less pressure to prove the success of communication activities, and that cultures of continuous improvement and management audits are less prevalent in this field. However, the overall trend towards more transparency will probably force governmental organizations to document communication effectiveness in a more advanced way in the future.

The overall results show that communication departments care less about the resources used to initiate communication processes, the stakeholders addressed by communication activities, and most importantly, any results this has for the achievement of organizational goals. The finding that measuring output is still the main activity in any type of organization across Europe in 2015 becomes even more remarkable, since obviously not much has changed in comparison to previous studies reporting a similar focus on only a small part of the overall process (e.g., Zerfass et al., 2010, Wright et al., 2009). What is needed, instead, however is a more balanced view and the generation of measurement insights at every level of the communication process.

**Use of measurement insights (RQ3)**

On another note, results show that measurement and evaluation activities are mostly used in a traditional way without leveraging the power of data for managing communication. Across European organizations, communication departments most often use measurement insights for the reflective purpose of evaluating the success of their activities (\( M=3.82, SD=1.13 \)), based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 never – 5 always). However, insights are also frequently utilized in a prospective manner for planning upcoming communication activities (\( M=3.72, SD=1.16 \)) or for
reflecting goals and directions of communication strategies (M=3.56, SD=1.17). A result worth reflecting is the low use of measuring data for leading communication teams or steering agencies and service providers (M=3.17, SD=1.26), suggesting that the value of formative evaluation for managing communication still seems to be overseen.

Surprisingly, the need to explain actions through figures in large organizations is often neglected, as only a limited part of communication departments use measurement insights to explain the value of communication to top executives and internal clients (M=3.60, SD=1.19).

Last but not least, the study shows significant differences across different types of organizations regarding the integration of measurement insights into strategic communication management. Overall, joint stock companies showed the highest response rates, while governmental organizations underperformed. Interestingly, the study found no organizational differences regarding the inclusion of evaluation data for proving accountability and explaining the value of communication to management.

Table 3 demonstrates that organizations particularly differ significantly when it comes to using measurement insights for retrospective evaluation. Governmental organizations least often integrate insights to evaluate the success of communication activities (M=3.61, SD=1.24; F=8.216, p ≤ 0.01). Also, they least frequently utilized measurement data to reflect goals and directions of communication strategies (M=3.35, SD=1.22; F=16.487, p ≤ 0.01). Ultimately, significant differences between organization types were also identified for using measurement insights for leading communication teams and steering agencies/service providers. Joint stock companies most often used such insights strategically (M=3.45, SD=1.18), while governmental organizations again ranked last (M=2.91, SD=1.30; F=21.089, p ≤ 0.01).

At large, the present study demonstrates that the value of data for managing strategic communication seems to be overseen by many communication departments today. The premature use of measurement insights for prospective purposes such as strategy adjustment is alarming, as linking business strategy and communication strategy continues to be the most important issue for communication management in Europe (Zerfass et al., 2015, pp. 38-43).

Table 3.
Use of measurement insights differentiated by types of organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Joint stock companies</th>
<th>Private companies</th>
<th>Governmental organizations</th>
<th>Non-profit organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M  SD</td>
<td>M  SD</td>
<td>M  SD</td>
<td>M  SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating the success of communication activities **</td>
<td>3.9 1.0</td>
<td>3.8 1.0</td>
<td>3.61 1.24</td>
<td>3.83 1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning upcoming communication activities</td>
<td>3.8 1.1</td>
<td>3.7 1.1</td>
<td>3.61 1.22</td>
<td>3.68 1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1  0</td>
<td>3  4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Explaining the value of communication to top executives and (internal) clients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting goals and directions of communication strategies **</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading communication teams and steering agencies/service providers **</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. n = 1,601 communication professionals working in communication departments in Europe. 
Q: How are insights from communication measurement used in your organization? A: 1 never – 5 always (5-point Likert scale). Mean values for each statement. ** Highly significant differences. ANOVA/Scheffe post-hoc test, p ≤ 0.01.

Conclusion

This research sheds light on the current state-of-the-art of evaluation and measurement practices in communication departments in Europe and contributes to studies that explore the profession through cross-national empirical research. Overall results indicate that the practitioners interviewed in the sample do not possess the experiences and skills required to conduct robust evaluation. While respondents report moderate capabilities when it comes to using social science research methods, their knowledge of valuation methods to document the impact of communication on organizational targets is scarce. Communication professionals working in joint stock and private companies display higher experiences with value-oriented methods than professional employed in non-profit or governmental organizations, but nevertheless, overall knowledge appears far from having reached a satisfying standard. This finding is in line with previous empirical investigations into the profession, which have suggested that the lack of expertise poses a major obstacle to evaluation and measurement practices.

This study proposes that a key requirement for successful evaluation is to advance the personal measurement skills of communicators. Practitioners could benefit from additional education on social science research techniques, training on how to develop organization-specific measurement models and define adequate performance measures, and an improved theoretical knowledge on communication effects (see also Laborde & Pompper, 2006; Xavier et al., 2005). Another key issue is for practitioners to acquire profound knowledge in utilizing more sophisticated valuation methods. More efforts are needed to educate communication staff in finance, operations and management, in order to better comprehend business opportunities, provide strategic advice to management, and link communication strategies to organizational objectives (e.g., Zerfass et al., 2012, pp. 86-95; Yeo & Sriramesh, 2009).
Results further demonstrate that communication departments in the sample do not employ adequate methods to measure communication processes. Measuring output through media-related measures is still the main activity in any type of organization across Europe. Findings suggest that although most organizations evaluate some part of the communication process, data for different activities are only seldom linked to overall organizational financial targets or intangible resources. The study shows that value-based communication is still not feasible in most European companies, and that a systematic application and linking of well-known management concepts and evaluation methods remains a critical challenge in practice.

This study proposes that the significant focus on output measurement to the detriment of outcome and outflow measurement can partially be interpreted in light of the moderate measurement skills reported by professionals: they apparently do not have sophisticated knowledge how to utilize valuation methods for measuring communication impact. Future research should explore additional barriers that hinder successful evaluation practices, i.e. whether practitioners possibly do not know that they should conduct evaluation at the outflow level or whether they believe communication impact at the output level is equivalent to organizational success.

Finally, communication departments in the sample often do not use insights from measurement for advancing and managing future communication activities. Evaluation is most frequently conducted for retrospective purposes and less often in a prospective manner, i.e. to lead communication teams or steer agencies/service providers. The study proposes that a key challenge for successful evaluation is to strategically integrate measurement data into communication management and comprehend evaluation as an ongoing future-oriented activity. A challenging issue for the profession is to meaningfully utilize insights generated through strategic monitoring and environmental listening, in order to adjust communication strategies and anticipate critical issues in the environment.

Taken together, the lack of measurement expertise of communication staff on the one hand, and the low implementation level of valuation methods on the other, may be a major part of an explanation on why documenting the value of communication has remained such an important issue for communication management over so many years. One solution to this problem is a simple one: to be able to demonstrate business value, you have to measure what you do (Watson, 2012).

This is only possible by first defining value links visualizing how communication effects contribute to organizational goals along the entire communication process (Zerfass, 2010). Such value links must depict and link communication effects from the initiation of communication processes to the impact on financial targets and intangible resources, and be specific for every organization. Secondly, communication departments must measure the entirety of communication effects, from the input (costs) to the outflow (material/immaterial) level. A combination of scorecards and traditional evaluation methods on the operational level (media monitoring, polls, process analyses, cost accounting) can be utilized to assess the performance of communication departments.

While acknowledging this study's limitations concerning above all the sample of respondents, the high convergence with previous findings suggests that the present research project draws a realistic big picture of the current state of the art in evaluation and measurement in Europe. Future research into the theoretical foundations of communication processes and effect models is advocated, particularly at the edge of communication theory and business administration (accounting, auditing). The challenge is to adequately conceptualize how the
entirety of communication effects are linked to overall organizational success from an interdisciplinary and integrative perspective. Comparative, cross-cultural research into evaluation and measurement practices of the profession is needed to gain a deeper understanding of the current barriers to successful evaluation and identify both best practices and future challenges.

Overall, an increased exchange of knowledge between academy and industry appears vital for the continuing progress of evaluation and measurement research and practice (Watson, 2006). High priority should be given to jointly developing a consistent and comprehensive explanation of how communication adds value, particularly since current reporting and accounting practices still lack regulative standards on how to report the value of intangible assets. Industry bodies and education facilities could take a lead role in this area and foster a wider distribution of knowledge as well as of exemplars of innovative measurement approaches, thereby fortifying the professionalization of evaluation and measurement practice as well as gaining wider recognition from other management functions (Xavier et al., 2006).

Acknowledgements

The study was supported by the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA), the European Association of Communication Directors (EACD) and PRIME Research International, a global leader in strategic communication research.
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